



Salome;: A tragedy in one act

Oscar Wilde

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Few works in English literature have so peculiar a history as Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*. Written originally in French in 1892 and ridiculed on its publication, translated into English by Lord Alfred Douglas ("Bosie" himself) and again heaped with scorn, it has survived for 75 years, served as the text (in abridged form) for Richard Strauss' world-famous opera, and emerged as an acknowledged masterwork of the Aesthetic movement of *fin de siècle* England.

The illustrations that Aubrey Beardsley prepared for the first English edition have no less strange a story. Beardsley liked neither the play nor its author. Yet, it inspired some of his finest work. It is an open question as to how suited the drawings actually are to the text that Wilde wrote. Yet, the two, the play and the Beardsley illustrations, have nevertheless become so identified with each other as to be inseparable. This edition reprints the first edition (1894) text, with "A Note on 'Salome'" by Robert Ross. The Beardsley drawings it superbly reproduces (mostly from a rare early portfolio) include not only the 10 full-page illustrations, the front and back cover designs, the title and List of Illustrations page decorations, and the *cul de lampe* from the original edition, but also three drawings that were not used, an alternate cover sketch, and the drawing entitled "*J'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan*," which Beardsley did earlier for *The Studio*. Furthermore, all of the illustrations are reproduced in their original state, not as expurgated in the first and most subsequent editions.

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