

Salomé

Eugénio de Castro

I.

Slender, curved over the strands
Of green withes that support her,
Salomé scatters food to the fish,
Which in the pond are jewel-lightning.
Diamond arrows, in luminous fury,
All run feverish to the fall of crumbs:
They are gleaming battles
Of precious stones...

How the daughter of Herodias shines,
In her garden, among the red flowers!
All over her runs a sweat of gems,
A murmuring of colors...
Her extravagant tunic, resplendent
is an end of triumph: coal-colors in the depths
fight fiercely.

Bright charges of gold dragons on wings.
And on the vines, on the llamas, on the gold,
The sun beats so lively that the slight princess,
Bending more, thinks she sees treasure,
Flaring, burning in the depth of the pool...

The girl leaves the garden: the heat suffocates,
No more can she suffer the sun's burning arrows...
With a branch of jasmine she strikes at butterflies
That land on her mouth...
Her, climbing the stairs in the weak light
filtered through a veil; her, stopping
By the cages where there are, sleeping,
Like prisoner-kings, the Nubian lions...
The lions rise, irate, hearing steps,
But seeing Salomé, their fury calms
And, in slow movements,
They give roars of love!
Exposed fauces,
The dragons appear defenders of the tunic...
Nonetheless, Salomé, divinely beautiful,
By the grate extends her silver hands,
Which the lions smell, in languid delirium,
Thinking they are lilies.

The girl ascends...
Sylph-like and slender,
In a musical gesture that spreads a thousand perfumes,
She caresses the mane of her favorite lion,
And the other lions bellow of love and of jealousy.

An ibis flies in the sky... and, rising, brilliant,
Above the lakes where Nile-flowers swim,
The singing fountains,
Acclaim Salomé, who enters the courtyard.

II.

The dance-lesson concludes,
Black hair released, where sequins sing,
And almost nude, Salomé rests,
Broken by fatigue, between soft cushions...
Beside the girl, Flavia, the dancer,
Called from Rome to give lessons,
Tells her, shaking, in the light of the adamantine moon,
Her boxwood saplings, where cabochons burn:

“Nobody beats you, flower, in the voluptuous
dances!

Now haughty, now languid, now restless,
Drawing supple gestures from air, like roses,
You are ship, serpent, and butterfly!
Full of grace and fragrance,
Your movements are lascivious like waves;
No one beats you, flower, when, dancing, you
intoxicate:

Not even Julia, empress of Rome!

Your name will shine brighter than the sun in the
sky!

In short, O Salomé, who captivates hearts,
Hearing of your fame, the kings of the north and
south
Will come to kiss your feet in a long train!”

Quiet yourself, Flavia...

In the distance, on the avenue,
Sing peacocks, in the light of the melancholy moon,
And Salomé, closing eyelids of silk,
Falls to sleep, thinking on her glory...

The girl dreams...

In a censer,
Burns myrrh, and in its sapphire smoke,
Passes the ghost of Cinyras's daughter,
Who, like this, talks in a rocking rhythm:

“Like Athens to her most noble daughters
Gold cicadas in my hair I placed;
In a milk sea, silver isles,
My breasts are filled of a breath so sweet...”

“Like the nymphs of Diana in the nocturnal
Forests, like this, my fingers descending
In my hair; and they were my boots
Sonorous like mournful cytharas”

“I lived with my father and some eunuchs
Where the myrtle sprouted, and the rosemary;
When we ate, in the shadow of the trellises,
Flowers fell in cups of golden wine.”

“When I was of age, I saw I was a slave
Of Love, that came in baubles with my breasts:
I wanted kisses!... but the boys that caught sight of
me
Could not best my father... I thought them ugly...”

“And then I loved my father, and in such a way
That a certain night—I had never done this!—
I lay myself wanton in his bed,
Without him imagining who I was!”

“Evil fate to incest compelled me!
My father, giving me kisses, deflowering me,
So as a bush I later found myself,
Called Myrrha, since I gave it my name.”

Quiet yourself, tearful, crystalline voice...

Sweetly, by the open window,
Enter fragrances... and the pale moon, of amber,
Strikes, in full, the girl that rests...

But behold, in the room

The slaves enter, to sob, sorrowful,
And one of them exclaims a lament:
 “The lion you loved most has died!”

Salomé, shadowed,
Closes her shaking hands, tears her rich clothes,
Releases a moan that shines like a bare sword,
And, tortured by pain, falls to the ground, senseless.

III.

In the cage of the lion that died, John the Baptist,
Bellowing like a lion, passes nights and days...
His augural voice, inflamed, saddens
And depresses without end the soul of Herodias.

Tanned like bronze, long-haired,
With feverish, mad eyes, full of curses,
His sonorous cries
Cause trembles of fear in the other lions!

All fear to pass before him,
And if someone passes, they flee, in ancient madness;
Only Salomé, the peaceful little princess,
She approaches the cage, without fear...
And John, who, with the others, is fierce,
Is to her a docile little lamb;
Hardly seeing her, softening his coarse voice,

Changing his eyes of iron to a sweet gaze of ermine.

Salomé loves John

Still more than she loved the lion that died,
She passes hours without end, full of commotion,
Hearing him expound on Jesus and the heavens...
Later, in the morning, she brings food,
Sensuous delicacies, worthy of great kings,
She gives him flowers to smell and wine to drink,
—and even gives him one of her glittering rings...

The austere Precursor, the son of Elizabeth,
Who walked naked in the sun, chewing roots,
Loves, as one lost, the delicate ring,
Whose stone gilds his unhappy nights.

IV.

On his birthday,
Herod, to still his saddened heart,
Convened the nearby sovereigns
And gave them a feast to humble Solomon,
The precious tableware shines in the flaming sun,
In an inundation of spikenard and camelia;
From the slaves there came an undulating rhythm
The drums of the Hebrews...

There sang, in the middle of the room, an aromatic
fountain,
Burning gemstones without number across the stoles,
And of Arabian incense a mad fog
Rose between the exhalation of languid violins...
An enormous fish was brought in, an astonishing fish,
Which in its scales had all the colors of the sky;
And old Herod told the moving story
Of the ring which a certain king threw into the Aegean
Sea.

His eyes shine under a crown of verbena,
A thousand stews pass, swimming in flavorful sauces,
And in beautiful plates of gold the swift slaves
Bring noble peacocks of starry feathers.
Three large boars and two entire deer
Produce mute astonishment; the heat suffocates...

In musical cups boil treacherous wines,
And from lyres rises a clear melody...
Each woman exhibits her breasts without mystery,
The columbine on the fountain glows, silvery,
And Lysanias, Tetrarch of Abilene,
Recites Greek verses of Tiberius...
Herodias smiles with her jocund smile,
Of a palpable lust, the burning tide;
Suddenly, all is silent:
In the back, dancing, appears the beautiful Salomé.

A lunar veil, light as a perfume,
Surrounds her, revealing her dark nakedness,
Blind from her rings, the precious fire,
And in each hand she carries a pale lily.

And the girl then advances, to the sound of drums...

Like a lost sleepwalker
In enchanting, mystical gardens,
One would say she dances asleep...
One would say she dances, fainting
To the scent of the circled flowers...
One would say she dances and is dreaming...
One would say she dances and is kissing all...

Foot before foot, fearful, one would say
That between two precipices she is passing
And that a hidden hand, stubborn and cold
Is trying to make her slip...

Mouths of air are born that are kissing her
And she avoids these, mad, anxious, uncertain
Fainting, gasping, begging...

The drums are quiet and Salomé rests.

A thousand applauses break in a frisson of flame,
The languid women give her precious jewels,
Herodias blooms, and the old Herod cries out:

“Salomé! Salomé I will give you what you will!”

What did she ask for? A jar of essences?
A dress? A ring? A veil? A turquoise?
Herodias then says softly to the princess:

“Ask him, my daughter, for the head of John!”

The princess is appalled:

“What do you mean, kill him?
Plunge him into frozen sleep?
Oh! No... I will take him, my mother, free him,
Dress him like a king, seat him on a throne!”

But Herodias says:

“Ask for his head
If you want a glory like no one has had
Even though his death now saddens you
This fragile sadness will pass shortly...
The heat of the feast will dry your tears,
—This loneliness is a flighty scent of violets!—
And the world will know, daughter, that your
 charms
Make the heads of prophets roll on the ground!

This death will give you a pair of radiant wings
To your name; to you will come the splendors of
victory!

If you want your glory to exceed the most brilliant
Water the roots of your glory with hot blood!”

They sing of Salomé in the profile of a coin,
Gilded by ambition, her eyes of amethyst,
And, beside the Tetrarch, her confident voice:
“Give me the head of John the Baptist!”

The Tetrarch trembles, hearing this:

“I would prefer to give you
All of my tableware, all of my treasure...”

But shortly, at his gesture, a black slave left
Carrying a sword and a great plate of gold...