Introducing the Issues

_Salome_ is now one of Oscar Wilde’s most highly regarded plays – no longer only in continental Europe, but also in English-speaking countries. As is well known, it was originally written in French and published in 1893:


¹ This is an extremely rare book. As most readers will have great difficulty locating a copy, I cite Wilde’s French from Robert Ross’s first collected edition of the _Works_, London: Methuen, 1908, reproduced under the title _The First Collected Edition of the Works of Oscar Wilde, 1908-1922_, in 15 vols, London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1969. _Salomé_ is part of vol.13 (though of vol.2 in the 1908 version). I use the form _Salome_ instead of the French _Salomé_ wherever the texts cited allow me to
It is also common knowledge that an unsatisfactory translation of the play into English by Wilde's beloved 'Bosie', Lord Alfred Douglas, appeared in 1894:

_Salome - A Tragedy in One Act: Translated from the French of Oscar Wilde: Picture by Aubrey Beardsley_, London: Elkin Mathews & John Lane; Boston: Copeland and Day, 1894 – Mason no.350.²

The 1894 text does not bear Douglas's name, but does include an acknowledgement: 'To my friend Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas the translator of my play'. What until now has not been realised, however, is that this translation has been persistently confused with a later, drastically overhauled version – virtually a new translation – first published in 1906 and almost certainly prepared by Robert Ross, Wilde's life-long friend, and his literary executor after his death in 1900.³ This later version has been repeatedly mistaken for Douglas's original translation. Thus many – indeed most – judgements formed about what is held to be Douglas's translation are in fact based on Ross's amended version, which has often been re-printed by later publishers, and presented to an unknowing public, as though it was Douglas's. Vice versa, those who concern themselves with Douglas's version are unaware of the existence of Ross's.

This confusion has major implications, prompting a number of important questions. How could it be that Ross's amended version has been mistaken for Douglas's? Or, why have people thought that there was only one early translation of _Salome_ when in fact there are two? Just what did Ross do? Which of the two versions is the more authoritative? These and other matters will here be addressed in what, because of the many as yet unresolved intricacies surrounding these matters, is a somewhat provisional report.

Since my concern is with the two translated versions in relation to each other and to Wilde's French original, many significant matters concerning _Sa-
The Two Earliest English Translations of Oscar Wilde’s Salomé

Salomé will reluctantly be omitted from this account.4 However, by way of introduction to the subject of our investigation, we must first face two questions: how Wilde came to write his text in French, and how it came about that Douglas did translate it, but with the strange result that his name was not published on the title page, though his role as translator was acknowledged in a dedication.

As to why Wilde wrote the play in French, I am persuaded by Powell’s argument5 that Wilde, despite his own protestations to the contrary, did write the play (substantially in 1891) in the hope that the renowned French actress Sarah Bernhardt would act the part of Salome for her London season and, yet more importantly, in an effort to make the play acceptable to the Censor, who would normally forbid the performance of a play in English if it dramatised Scripture, but not one written in French. Disappointingly to Wilde, and while Bernhardt and others were rehearsing the French Salomé in June 1892, the Censor prohibited the play regardless. Although this meant that the play could not be performed in England, Wilde was not prevented from publishing it, and hence the French version appeared simultaneously in Paris and London in 1893. For the preparation of an English version, Wilde commissioned Douglas as translator.

Everyone agrees that Wilde was disappointed with what Douglas originally produced. There is disagreement, however, as to what happened subsequently. Some recent commentators have veered towards the view that the English version that was published in 1894 may be considered fairly close to what Wilde had hoped to see all along. Thus we find Joseph Donohue writing with obvious approval: ‘Peter Raby concludes that Wilde revised Douglas’s draft “to the point where it became his own once more”.’6 Isobel Murray, the editor of a recent substantial anthology of Wilde’s major works, shows herself well aware of disapproval of Douglas’s translation, though she does not realise that many have mistaken Ross’s amended version for Douglas’s. She says: ‘It is a measure of what has been judged the unsatisfactoriness of the following text [she prints that of

5. Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s, Chapter 3.
1894], originally Lord Alfred Douglas's translation of *Salome* from Wilde's French, that Wilde's son, Vyvyan Holland, his biographer, Richard Ellmann, and critic Rodney Shewan [she overlooks R.A. Walker's translation of Ross's version] have each found it necessary to re-translate the play.' Despite Murray's acknowledgement of the negative views of others, one nevertheless gains the distinct impression here, from some of the phrasing ('what has been judged' ... 'have each found it necessary') that she does not find Douglas's translation particularly bad. This impression is reinforced when she refers to 'the evidence of a number of Wilde's letters that he found the translation unsatisfactory but accepted it with some (probably extensive) alterations'.

I see nothing to justify any optimistic feeling that Wilde's revision may have been sufficiently extensive to make it 'his own once more', to use Raby's phrase. To quote an observation made by Donohue, there is no doubt about Wilde's 'introducing some changes into Douglas's version, the exact nature and extent of which are unknown but which were evidently sufficient to preclude crediting Douglas in more than an informal way.' As nothing is known about the exact nature and extent of Wilde's changes, we must be wary of claiming, on the basis of very little (and inevitably indirect) evidence, that they were major, leave alone that Wilde was happy with the text as published. The fact that

9. Donohue, p.122. Douglas was credited informally: his name did not appear on the title page, but only in an acknowledgement. See note 2. Douglas himself was not at all happy with the fact that Wilde changed his text, and in *The Autobiography of Lord Alfred Douglas*, London: Martin Secker, 1929, claims that he advised Wilde that if the latter altered his translation 'it would no longer be my translation, and that in that case it would not be advisable for my name to appear as translator' (p.160). He asserts that Wilde made only 'a few alterations'; even so, he apparently judged these sufficiently substantial to conclude: 'I do not regard the present translation, which is usually attributed to me, and which is dedicated to me as the translator, as mine at all'. Ross clearly believed that the translation published in 1894 was by Douglas: see below, note 15.
Douglas's name was made a matter of acknowledgement rather than that it appeared on the title page probably indicates that a compromise was reached — in effect acknowledging that Douglas was the translator, but an imperfect one — rather than that it guarantees anything very substantial about the extent of Wilde's interference.

As Ellmann points out, Wilde was inclined to send back Douglas's manuscript to him because it was so inadequate:

But when the danger of losing Wilde became real, Douglas wilted [i.e. decided to avoid a complete termination of the relationship]. He asked someone, almost certainly Robbie Ross, to intercede, and Ross pointed out to Wilde that to return the manuscript like a schoolboy's exercises would scar Douglas's life. Douglas did not know much French, and Wilde should not have expected so much from him. He also assured Wilde that, whatever Douglas said or did, he was utterly devoted to his lover. Wilde had no desire to be the first to check or discourage Douglas's beginnings in literature, as he said long afterwards, and had the less right to do so since he encouraged them. 'So I took the translation and you back.'

Surely a correct interpretation of 'So I took the translation and you back' must be: 'So, reluctantly, rather than insisting that your deficient translation could only be published after I had sufficiently revised it, I decided that I was not ready to lose you, and would rather accept both your defects and those of your translation'. In other words, the probability is that Wilde knowingly published a translation that he knew to be very inadequate.

A further reason for believing that Wilde was not content with the published translation is that an examination of the internal evidence — a comparison of his own French text as published in 1893 and that of the 1894 translation — leads us to the conclusion that under normal circumstances he would not have wanted to publish Douglas's work. The lengthy Appendix at the end of this study, and my analysis of many textual examples in the body of my essay, will, I hope, support this contention.

And a final reason for rejecting the optimism of those who think that the 1894 translation was one that Wilde had in any significant sense made 'his own' is to be found in the attitude Ross displayed towards it. Ross's revised translation of 1906 was altogether different from the 1894 original. There may or may not be some connection between the appearance of Ross's text and the fact that in May 1905 the play was performed in England for the first time, by the New State Club in the Bijou Theatre, Archer Street, London; this production was

followed by another on 20 June 1906 by the Literary Theatre Society at the National Sporting Club (also in London). But, in any case, the 1906 translation, published several years after Wilde’s death, offered a pervasively altered text, and the evidence shows that it was intended to be more accurate. It appears that Ross revised Douglas’s 1894 text because he knew Wilde had been unhappy with it and would have approved of his literary executor’s effort to publish a text that did greater justice to the French original of 1893. Ross improved the translation yet further in a later version, published in 1912.\(^{11}\)

**How Ross Proceeded to Present his Amended Version**

I shall discuss the textual revisions later, but first I want to say something about the general way in which Ross presented the amended version of 1906. In offering a new translation to the public he acted as a literary executor who felt strongly involved in his role as the guardian of Wilde’s literary heritage. He held *Salome* in particularly high esteem, writing in the preface to his 1912 version: ‘*Salomé* is more characteristic and typical of Wilde’s imperfect genius, with the possible exception of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, than anything else he ever wrote’ (p.xiii).

There is no absolute certainty, of course, that Ross revised the translation himself, but it is very likely that he did. The passage I quoted above from Ehlmann’s *Oscar Wilde* includes Ross’s opinion that Douglas did not know much French. Elsewhere, we read: “Douglas’s translation omits a great deal of the text,” Ross told Frank Harris, “and is actually wrong as a rendering of the text in many places.”\(^{12}\) Wilde himself had admonished Douglas about ‘the schoolboy faults of your attempted translation of *Salome’.*\(^{13}\) All this, in addition to Ross’s love of the play, his deep loyalty to Wilde, and his memory of the troubles Douglas had caused, as a commissioned translator, lead one to conclude that Ross felt that he himself could and should, acting as Wilde’s life-long friend and literary executor, produce a better, more accurate translation than the one published in 1894. We must remember, too, that Ross was very much a ‘hands-on’ editor. It is well known that he published *De Profundis* (London: Methuen,

\(^{11}\) *Salome: A Tragedy in One Act Translated from the French of Oscar Wilde*, London: John Lane, Bodley Head; New York: John Lane Co., 1912. The many new readings in this text will be discussed in a later paper.

\(^{12}\) H. Montgomery Hyde, ed., *Oscar Wilde: Plays, Prose and Poems*, London: Black Cat, 1989, p.260. I have not been able to verify the accuracy of the quotation, but see no reason to question it.

1905) in a heavily expurgated form, and Ian Small, the General Editor for the Oxford English Texts edition of Wilde, has informed me that in his view the changes which I have discovered in the 1906-7 text (which he had been unaware of) have parallels with other works, particularly some of the changes made by Ross to The Importance of Being Earnest.\textsuperscript{14}

Assuming, then, that Ross acted both as literary executor and reviser in publishing his new version in 1906, we must ask why he published that edition without any announcement that the translation was different from the 1894 version. The reasons can only be speculated upon, but it seems to me that the answer may be found in Ross’s assessment of Douglas’s character, and likely actions, if the latter found out that the 1894 translation had been altered without his knowledge. That 1894 translation, which was here and there revised by Wilde, did not, by itself, meet with Douglas’s approval; in fact, he was reluctant to acknowledge the translation as his (see above, note 9). Further changes might well have incensed him. Moreover, Ross had in 1905 published De Profundis, and had reason to fear Douglas’s feelings about that. It is unlikely that copyright considerations played a part, as Douglas does not appear to have ‘owned’ the 1894 translation, and the 1908 publication of Salome in Wilde’s French contains a brief introductory note by Ross which includes the comment: ‘The right of English translation is the property of Mr. John Lane’.

Anyhow, Ross evidently did not want to draw attention to the revisions in the ‘Englished’ versions published from 1906 on. But this does not mean that he did not try to cover his tracks in case someone did discover the alterations. And he used subtle methods to do so. In the 1894 text, Douglas’s name did not appear on the title page, but in a dedication: ‘To my friend Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas the translator of my play’. This dedication was simply omitted from the 1906 publication, which has the title page ‘Salome: A Tragedy in One Act Translated from the French of Oscar Wilde’, and does not mention Douglas anywhere. This omission had the advantage that, whatever readers thought of the translation offered, noone could claim that Douglas was its translator, or for that matter that anyone else was. It in effect made the translation seem anonymous. However, it is reasonable to assume, and seems to be borne out by subsequent developments, that in general those who saw this translation believed it to be Douglas’s, as they were offered no evidence to the contrary.

Thus was initiated, in 1906, a process whereby a new translation was offered in such a way that noone could know that it was new – or that it was not

\textsuperscript{14} Personal message via e-mail. Small also believes that Ross may have been the author of the 1906-7 changes.
by Douglas – even though the 1894 dedication in which Douglas was mentioned as the translator had disappeared. The volumes that appeared in 1907 and 1912, too, likewise omitted the 1894 dedication without indicating that there was a new translation. However, the 1907 and 1912 publications contained prefaces, signed by Ross, which did refer to Douglas as a translator. But Ross chose his words very carefully. In 1907 he wrote ‘When “Salome” was translated into English by Lord Alfred Douglas ... ’ (p.xv), leaving open both the possibility that the present (1907) translation was still by that person, or that it was not. This latter scenario – that Douglas was not the translator at this point – perhaps loomed as a yet more distinct possibility in the note to the 1912 publication, for which the translation had been revised even more extensively. This time, Ross said: ‘In 1894 Messrs. Mathews and Lane issued an English translation of Salomé by Lord Alfred Douglas’ (p.xvi). Even this wording, though, did not rule out the possibility that the 1912 translation was identical to that published in 1894.15

All in all, Ross’s presentation of what I assume to be his own work as a translator seems designed to provide some hints (to those prepared to see them) that Douglas’s version was no longer used, but he made it possible for people to believe that it was – and so they did. In one curious instance in 1910, Ross seems to have encouraged the belief that Douglas’s translation was still being offered. In volume vi – Salome, A Florentine Tragedy, Vera – of the ‘Authorised Edition’, published in Boston by John Luce & Co., which Mason (no.457) calls the ‘Ross edition’, Salome is included with the half-title ‘Salomé: translated from the French of Oscar Wilde by Lord Alfred Douglas’. One suspects that this phrase may have influenced later publishers who used similar expressions to designate that the translation which they printed was Douglas’s while what they were publishing was, in fact, Ross’s revised version.

15. Ross does not say that the 1894 publication was dedicated to Douglas as translator, but that ‘a translation’ (hinting that by now there was no longer just one) was done by him.
Discovering the Confusion

As a result of the actions I have just described, Ross created a strange situation. He succeeded in keeping his role as a revising translator unknown, but he was more successful than he probably intended ultimately to be: future generations continued to think that his amended version was Douglas’s translation, unrevised. It is difficult to believe that Ross foresaw that other publishers would republish his revised translation as though it was Douglas’s original one of 1894. Yet this is precisely what has happened. I also think that Ross probably did not imagine that in a number of instances people would continue to use the 1894 text without awareness of the fact that a later, more accurate, one existed. Yet this, too, is precisely what has happened. An undeniably positive consequence of Ross’s steps was that, certainly, a very large number of people did come to know his amended version of 1906, even though they assumed it to be Douglas’s work. Ironically, Ross’s 1912 version — which offered the best of the early translations associated directly with Wilde’s existence — has sunk into virtual oblivion.

The key facts are that there are two (or actually three) early versions, of which only the first is Douglas’s, and that Douglas has been credited not only with the 1894 translation which was indeed his, but also with Ross’s radically different 1906 version. Publishers have, even explicitly, published the 1906 version as though it was Douglas’s 1894 translation, and have thus created all kinds of confusion.

As the 1906 version was anonymous and nothing was said about revision, it is understandable enough that publishers and others assumed that it (and the 1907 publication which contained the identical text) was Douglas’s work. Since, moreover, publishers like Penguin and Collins have printed the 1906–7 text explicitly as though it were Douglas’s translation, it is not surprising if for long those of us who came to know the play through such editions have in good faith assumed that we were confronted (as readers or spectators) with Douglas’s text.

It was by pure chance that I discovered late in 2000, whilst teaching the play as part of a new course, that the Penguin text, which I had taken to offer Douglas’s translation, in fact presented Ross’s. The 1954 Penguin Plays" boasts

16. The Penguin text from which I quote throughout is (unless otherwise noted) Oscar Wilde, *Plays*, Harmondsworth, 1954. *Salomé* (the form preferred by Penguin), together with *A Woman of No Importance and An Ideal Husband*, had previously been published by Penguin in one volume in 1948. The 1954 *Plays* was reprinted in 1986, in exactly the same form, under the title *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*, and as such is still in print. Meanwhile, in 2000 a new Penguin volume has appeared, edited by Richard Allen Cave, with the same title, but with the addition of *A Florentine Tragedy* and extensive editorial material. The version of *Salomé* included in Cave’s edition, a subject to which I shall return later, is virtually identical to that printed before,
inside the front cover: ‘Salomé, which was written in French, is here reprinted in the English translation made by Lord Alfred Douglas.’ That sounds unequivocal. Furthermore, on p.315 the play is announced as ‘Salomé – IN THE TRANSLATION OF LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS’. This, again, would seem to leave no room for doubt as to just which text the Penguin anthology includes. Indeed, p.5 tells us that the English translation of Salome, ‘made by Lord Alfred Douglas’, appeared in 1894.

However, I began to feel doubt – or at least a sense of disquiet – when I turned from the Penguin Plays to the volume published by Dover in 1967. It interested me to study the famous Beardsley illustrations that Penguin does not offer but which are a strong feature of the Dover text. I noticed that p.4 of the Dover edition informs us that it is ‘AN UNABRIDGED REPUBLICATION OF THE FIRST EDITION OF THE WORK ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN 1894 BY ELKIN MATHEWS & JOHN LANE’. The text of the play in this Dover edition, therefore, could be expected to be identical to that published by Penguin, and indeed seemed if anything likely to be more authoritative, as it is reproduced from a copy of the 1894 text.

However, I was struck by the fact that the very first stage direction in the Dover reprint says ‘The moon is shining very brightly’ – a curious sentence that I did not remember from the Penguin edition. Turning back to the Penguin text, I found that indeed that sentence appears there as a simple ‘Moonlight’ (p.319). My first inclination was to think that this might be a rather cosmetic though oddly unauthoritative change on the part of the Penguin people. My disquiet grew as I discovered that the second speech in the Penguin text, by the Page of Herodias, included ‘You would fancy she was looking for dead things’, while the Dover text starts this sentence with ‘One might fancy ...’ And, to select just one more example, at the end of p.319 the Penguin text has ‘The Tetrarch has a sombre look’, while the Dover text has ‘aspect’ instead of ‘look’.

As I noticed more and more changes, I began to see that they could not be the result of intervention by in-house Penguin editors, but had been done by someone with true intelligence and literary ability. I formed the impression that the reviser perhaps had good reasons for interfering, and that the way to settle the question which of the two texts had greater authority was to compare both of them with Wilde’s own 1893 version in French. This process revealed that

though the text has been re-set and the pagination is different. I have chosen the 1954 Plays as a point of reference, in preference to Cave’s edition, because at present far more readers will have access to the 1954 Plays, and because it is that edition which has played a vital part, for about half a century, in disseminating Salomé in translation.
the changes printed in the Penguin text were highly authoritative, in the sense that it was, I found, much closer to Wilde’s French than the 1894 text reproduced by Dover. Given this fact, there seemed to be a good possibility that the Penguin version was one established by Robert Ross, as a reviser of Douglas’s text. Ross was, I reasoned, the logical person to feel authorised to improve Douglas’s translation. I knew that no revision of Douglas’s text had appeared before Wilde’s death.

The assumption that the text had been revised by Ross of course meant rejecting Penguin’s claim that its version of the text was Douglas’s 1894 translation, but it soon became obvious that this claim did, in fact, have to be discarded. For, with the help of Stuart Mason’s Bibliography of Oscar Wilde I was able to find out not only what I needed to about the existence of the earliest English versions of Salome, but also that Mason – uniquely, as it turned out – had observed in 1914 that both the 1907 and 1912 versions contained revisions.” Commenting on the 1907 English Salome, Mason says, ‘The English translation is founded on the text of the edition of 1894 with revisions’ (no.355), and about the 1912 text he notes: ‘The text of the play is founded on Lord Alfred Douglas’s translation, first published in 1894, but shows considerable revision throughout’ (no.527). It would have been even more correct to say that the 1906 text ‘shows considerable revision’, and the 1912 volume ‘yet more considerable revision’, but the fact remains that Mason has been, until now, the last person to have shown himself aware of the fact that the text in these three instances was not identical. It is interesting, too, that he does not appear to regard the revisions as Douglas’s own work.

Once I had identified the 1906-7 text as the one from which Penguin’s derives, and had observed that it might be Ross’s and in any case was much superior to and vastly different from Douglas’s, it became both possible and necessary to write this article, primarily to lay bare how the 1894 and 1906 texts have been totally confused, and to describe the major differences between them in order to create clarity, but also to point out how these texts may be more effectively and accurately used in the future.

17. Mason does not appear to have noticed that the 1906 text already contained the revisions which he noticed in the 1907 printing. However, I have found Mason’s guidance far superior to that of his successors; E.H. Mikhail’s Oscar Wilde: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism, London: Macmillan, 1978, for example, provided little help. Mikhail, p.21, talks about ‘the’ 1894 English translation of Salome without awareness of the revisions noted by Mason in the 1906 and 1912 texts; he does not list the 1912 text, and so on. From my perspective, Ian Small’s praise of Mikhail’s book (Oscar Wilde Revalued, p.209) is puzzling.
The Nature and Extent of the Confusion

The Penguin edition of Wilde's *Plays* has been hugely influential—many people know Wilde's major plays primarily from reading this Penguin anthology. These readers at present are offered not Douglas's 1894 translation of *Salome*, as the Penguin edition claims they are, but Ross's very different revision of 1906.

The recent publication of an updated, edited version of this volume offers an intriguing instance of further confusion of Douglas's and Ross's versions. Published in 2000, under the title which had been used since 1986, *viz. The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*, the new version of the anthology has been edited by Richard Allen Cave. One of the most interesting matters to inspect has been Cave's handling of the text of *Salome*. My curiosity was aroused by a statement on p.xxvii: 'The original Penguin text of *Salomé* has been collated with and corrected edition of the published by Lane in 1894'. Let statement do, that the text, which is indirectly on text, has indeed Douglas's 1894 assumption that to be followed. collation would revision of Cave's

However, He has, in fact, text in the light of 1894 translation, consulted some version or other—it is impossible to determine which—of Ross's 1906-7 text, and the text in the new Penguin anthology is almost the same as in the old.¹⁸ My point here is not so much that Cave has misled us (though that is certainly an effect of his procedure) but that, like so many people before him, he has himself been misled into thinking that when he saw Ross's work he saw

¹⁸. At times Cave even preserves the mistakes of the older Penguin. Thus on p.77 he has 'the beatings of the wings of the angel of death'. The earlier Penguin also printed 'beatings' (p.327), but Ross's 1906-7 form—and for that matter that of the 1894 translation—is 'beating' (singular).
Douglas’s. The result is that, unknowingly, he presents (continuing Penguin’s practice of some 50 years) Ross’s work as though it is Douglas’s. If he actually had consulted the 1894 text he no doubt would not have made this mistake: he might have offered either Ross’s text or Douglas’s, but he would have known which one he was choosing. It is very easy to keep the two texts apart if one has seen them, as substantive differences are apparent from the very beginning.

But the Penguin anthology, in its various guises, is not the only edition to contain a reprint of Ross’s English version which is mistakenly described as Douglas’s. The more ‘official’ edition, so to speak, which many scholars have used when referring to Salome in English (partly because Ross’s Collected Works offers only Wilde’s French version) has been the Collins Complete Works, the cover of the most recent edition of which informs us: ‘Continuously in print since 1948, the Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde has long been established as the most comprehensive and authoritative single-volume collection of Wilde’s works available’, adding that it contains the plays and other works ‘in their most authoritative texts’.

On the face of such a statement, one would expect the Collins volume to include Douglas’s 1894 translation of Salome, rather than any later text. Indeed, the 1948 edition presents the play as ‘Translated from the French of Oscar Wilde by Lord Alfred Douglas’, and we are still told the same in the current Centenary Edition. Given this fact, it is not surprising that countless readers have assumed that the Collins text of Salome offers them Douglas’s translation. However, as in the case of the Penguin anthology, it is not Douglas’s text which we are given, but Ross’s 1906-7 version.

I have extensively and thoroughly compared the Collins text both with Ross’s 1906-7 version and the Penguin text, and have observed that the Collins version follows its original yet more literally than does Penguin. However, the fact remains that the English version which appears in the Collins Salome is not Douglas’s but Ross’s. It is interesting to consider how the Collins text, in relation to the question of translation, is handled by one recent scholar, and a very good one at that: Kerry Powell, in his Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s. Powell (p.47) quotes the following passage from Wilde’s original French version of Salome:

Hérode: Ah! regardez la lune! Elle est devenue rouge. Elle est devenue rouge comme du sang. Ah! le prophète l’a bien prédit. Il a prédit que la lune deviendrait rouge comme du sang. N’est-ce pas qu’il prédit cela? Vous l’avez tous entendu. La lune est devenue rouge comme du sang. Ne le voyez-vous pas? Hérodias: Je le vois bien, et les étoiles tombent comme des figues vertes, n’es-ce pas? Et le soleil devient noir comme un sac de poil ...

Powell then (note 71, p.170) offers his reasons for quoting the French text, from Ross’s *Collected Works*. He mentions that ‘Wilde himself conceived of *Salomé* as his “French” play’, and that ‘it is not clear how much of the English translation belongs to Lord Alfred Douglas and how much to Wilde, so that for a variety of reasons the French text seems to exert a superior claim.’ He next provides what he calls ‘[t]he English version of the [French] passage above’ (i.e. the one I have just quoted) as follows:

Hérode: Ah! look at the moon! She has become red. She has become red as blood. Ah! the prophet prophesied truly. He prophesied that the moon would become red as blood. Did he not prophesy it? All of you heard him. And now the moon has become red as blood. Do ye not see it?

Hérodias: Oh, yes, I see it well, and the stars are falling like ripe figs, are they not? And the sun is becoming black like sackcloth of hair ...

Powell goes on to explain that he is quoting from p.569 of ‘*Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Collins, 1966)’. As that is his source, one expects his text to be close to that of the Penguin version, and such is indeed the case: there is absolutely no difference. But what that also means is that the English passage which Powell offers us is not, as he assumes, to be found in the 1894 translation by Douglas, but in Ross’s 1906–7 text. Comparison with that text (1907, pp.64–5) shows that, for sure, the passage there is identical.

Naturally, it is not helpful and correct to discuss a passage as though it were Douglas’s when in fact that passage is derived from Ross’s revised version, though I am expressing no criticism of Powell for not knowing that he is confusing the two texts: anyone working from the Collins volume is bound to think that the text supplied there is Douglas’s 1894 translation. However, the fact remains that Powell is confused: he is making comments about a text as though it is one thing (the original translation) while in fact it is another (a revision of that text). Does this matter? It certainly does. For, in this particular instance, the Ross version of the passage, which Powell has put before us, contains a very strange error to which I think he should have drawn attention in any case (especially as he has just quoted from Wilde’s French), but of which he would almost

certainly have become aware if he had compared Ross’s version with Douglas’s, which, unusually, does not contain the wrongheaded translation. Douglas had originally produced the following:

_Herod_: Ah! look at the moon! She has become red. She has become red as blood. Ah! the prophet prophesied truly. He prophesied that the moon would become as blood. Did he not prophesy it? All of ye heard him prophesying it. And now the moon has become as blood. Do ye not see it?
_Herodias_: Oh yes, I see it well, and the stars are falling like unripe figs, are they not? and the sun is becoming black like sackcloth of hair ... (Douglas, p.53)

What is truly surprising here is that, unusually and crucially, Ross mistranslates ‘commes des figues vertes’, while Douglas had previously translated that correctly.

Readers confronted with Ross’s 1906-7 text, as readers of Powell are, here hit a significant error. Anyone who looks at Wilde’s French and then at the Ross version is bound to feel that _vertes_ should not be translated as _ripe_. Of course, a reader who thinks that _ripe_ is part of the 1894 text and who does not know that there are _two_ versions to be considered might simply dismiss the mistake as a Douglas blunder. But if we know both texts we can see that it is not Douglas who is wrong here.

Why is Douglas right, in offering us the phrase _like unripe figs_? It is not just a matter of _vertes_ more readily suggesting _unripe_ than _ripe_, as obviously it does. We can, in fact, virtually _prove_ that Wilde’s _vertes_ is unlikely to mean _ripe_ by considering his source.

Two recent editors of the play, Isobel Murray and Peter Raby,²¹ both demonstrate their awareness that Douglas’s 1894 translation is greatly influenced by the Bible, although they do not seem to realise that Douglas’s English is far

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more Biblical than Wilde’s French and Ross’s English in the 1906-7 text—which they do not appear to have consulted. Murray says that Salome is ‘of course heavily indebted to the Bible… but only the most striking echoes are here drawn attention to’ (p.614). To Murray’s credit, she does refer us to the relevant place, Revelation 6:12-13, and 15-16, which she claims ‘Iokanaan quotes’. Raby, less satisfactorily, says about the phrase like unripe figs: ‘Wilde imitates apocalyptic language—as, for instance, that of the Revelation of St John the Divine 6:13’ (p.330). I have no doubt that, although it is rather exaggerated to say that ‘Iokanaan quotes’ the passage from Revelation, both Wilde and Douglas are quite specifically borrowing from it, not least in the case of like unripe figs. I quote verses 12 and 13 from the Authorised Version (the so-called ‘King-James Bible’) of 1611, which Wilde and Douglas used:

12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;
13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

I have no doubt that Douglas, who seems to have known the Authorised Version very well, was aware that Wilde was working from it in writing these speeches by Herod and Herodias in French; and I think I can show that Douglas consulted Wilde’s source (i.e. the passage in Revelation as found in the Authorised Version) directly for himself.

We can observe specific resemblances between the Authorised Version and Douglas’s text which can hardly be accidental, such as the Biblical ‘the sun became black as sackcloth of hair’ and Douglas’s ‘the sun is becoming black like sackcloth of hair’: but, yet more tellingly, it is only in the Bible and in Douglas’s version that we find the idea that the moon becomes as blood: Ross’s red as blood is not Biblical, but a translation of Wilde’s rouge comme du sang. Wilde and Ross use the same phrase three times. Douglas uses ‘red as blood’ once, and then twice adopts the Biblical ‘as blood’. In other words, Douglas is working directly from the Authorised Version, and here his ‘as blood’ is derived from it, as a direct echo—not from Wilde’s French (which by contrast Ross translates literally).

My contention is not only that Douglas worked directly from the Bible in some of his phrasing here, but also that he could infer from the Bible that what Wilde meant, when calling the figs vertes, was that they were unripe (in the Bible the figs are ‘untimely’ because shaken off prematurely). Thus, in my view, the case for Douglas’s unripe, as a better translation of vertes than Ross’s ripe, is quite clinching.
If Powell had actually seen Douglas's translation rather than Ross's, which he quotes, he would have been forced to conclude that there was a specific choice to be made, between *ripe* and *unripe*, and that the reader who knows about both English versions is in a better position to arrive at a judgement about it than someone who relies only on the Ross version, which in this exceptional case is mistaken, as a translation of Wilde's French. At the same time, if Powell had known both versions and had been aware that in general Ross's translation is more accurate than Douglas's, he would undoubtedly have commented on that fact. He would also have come to realise that someone quoting Ross's version, as he does, need hardly be concerned about the question how much of that 'belongs to Lord Alfred Douglas and how much to Wilde', as that question is relevant to Douglas's version but hardly to Ross's, which on the whole translates Wilde's French quite accurately.

Despite the fact that, very occasionally, Ross makes an error, we are much wiser to rely on his English text than on Douglas's. Those who show themselves ignorant of Ross's text and use Douglas's version instead are, when they read the latter, often far removed from Wilde's French. Thus they are at a disadvantage when commenting on points in Douglas's translation as if it were a dependable rendering of Wilde's original. This problem becomes even more acute if editors - like Murray and Raby, who both base their English text of *Salome* on Douglas's - offer us Douglas's version as though that is the best early translation available and there is no sound alternative.

On the face of it, what these two editors do seems reasonable. They know of Douglas as Wilde's earliest translator so, unaware of Ross's version, they turn to the 1894 text and place their face in that as the earliest printing of Douglas's rendering. If Murray and Raby had studied other early editions of *Salome* in English, they would have come across Ross's 1906-7 text, and would either have decided to offer us that text as superior, or, if they had still opted for Douglas's, would have introduced that to us in very different terms.

As matters stand, these recent editors of the play appear to have no knowledge of the fact that there are two quite different early versions of *Salome* in English. They make available to us the less accurate translation of the two, and comment on points in that as though it is the only early translation in existence. There is no evidence, anywhere in their editions, that they have compared the 1894 text with Wilde's French in order to determine for themselves just how accurate or inaccurate Douglas's version is. This, it seems to me, is a serious failing by itself, but if they had known that there are two early translations they would perchance have realised that both need to be compared with Wilde's French original if we are to decide which of the two texts provides the more authorita-
tive version. Furthermore, they do not realise that for many years numerous people have been confronted with, and have based judgements on, a text which they thought was Douglas's but which in fact was Ross's.

All these problems, for editors acting as though the 1894 text is the only early translation to consider, could have been avoided without a great deal of effort, and this is also true of Cave's quandary. Any scholarly editor of an early translation of *Salome* into English might be expected to have done two things: (1) to have consulted the authoritative bibliography prepared by Stuart Mason in which it is made quite plain that, after the 1894 translation had appeared, revisions were made for the 1906 text, and further revisions for the version which appeared in 1912; and (2) to have studied a number of the early printings and editions of *Salome* in English. Although I have no wish to single them out for special treatment, I do note that Murray, Raby, and Cave — all three of them recent editors producing important annotated editions — do not appear to have taken these steps.

Editors are, of course, only a small group of scholars. In general, those who are not editors and have unknowingly based their work on Ross's revised 1906-7 text 22 — directly or indirectly — can reasonably be excused for their confusion. We have seen that Ross did not actually signpost the revisions while he was alive. Matters have been made especially bewildering by the fact that what Mason calls the 'Ross edition' issued for America in 1910 included the statement 'Salome: translated from the French of Oscar Wilde by Lord Alfred Douglas', and that several subsequent publications of Ross's version of *Salome* (e.g. volumes published by Penguin and Collins) have contained a similarly perplexing phrase. It is now high time for Douglas's work and Ross's to be kept apart, and for the characteristics of each version to be understood.

**Comparing the Douglas and Ross Versions with Wilde's French Original**

One of the striking features of Douglas's translation of Wilde's French version is that he attempts to make his English more Biblical than Wilde's French. Thus we see, in Douglas's English, frequent use of 'thou' where Wilde has 'vous' (as distinct from 'tu'), and of Biblical expressions (taken from the Authorised Version) that are not sanctioned by Wilde's original. In many cases Ross corrects Douglas's error, but in other instances he does not. One instance of a Biblical phrase which is not justified is 'Get thee behind me', which Douglas introduces

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22. Few appear to have commented on Ross's 1912 version.
(p.21) and Ross retains; this is spoken by Jokanaan in his second speech on p.327 of the Penguin text,23 and is of course a direct echo of Christ’s words to Peter in Matthew 16:23, ‘Get thee behind me ...’ Wilde himself, however, makes Jokanaan say ‘Arrière! Arrière!’ (p.27), which simply means ‘Back! Back!’ (as Jokanaan does not want Salome to come any closer). Indeed, a little earlier Jokanaan had already said, in Wilde’s French, ‘Arrière! Fille de Babylone! N’approchez pas de l’élue du Seigneur’ (p.26), which Douglas (p.20) and Ross (p.326, JOKANAAN (3)) both translate correctly as ‘Back! daughter of Babylon! Come not near the chosen of the Lord’.

An illegitimate Biblical statement which Ross does correct is Douglas’s ‘I am well pleased with my daughter. She has done well’ (p.66), which contains an adaptation of the Biblical ‘Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased’ (Luke 3:22), as Raby notes (p.331). Wilde himself, however, has ‘j’approuve ce que ma fille a fait’ (p.80), which does not necessarily allude to Luke at all, and which Ross quite rightly translates with ‘I approve of what my daughter has done’ (p.347, HERODIAS). In an instance like this, I feel that an editor like Raby should indicate that the Biblical phrase used by Douglas is not to be thought of as in any sense Wilde’s.

There are many cases of such ‘phony’ Biblical phrasing in Douglas’s translation. Wilde presents the statement ‘Dieu est terrible’ (p.44), which Douglas cannot refrain from translating as ‘Verily, God is terrible’ (p.35). Obviously ‘Verily’ is unjustified, though certainly very Biblical, and Ross is right to omit it (p.333, FIRST JEW (2)). The editors Isobel Murray and Peter Raby, who both

23. References of this nature will henceforth be indicated as follows: ‘p.327, JOKANAAN (2)’. A speech straddling two pages is for this purpose treated as though each incomplete part were a separate speech on each page. Ross’s version, as presented in the Penguin 1954 edition, will be our central point of reference. It would become very awkward to use such a reference system for the other two texts (Wilde’s and Douglas’s) as well. However, in my comparative analysis, here, of examples from all three texts, I have provided page references to all three. Almost all of the instances quoted are also listed in the Appendix.
base their comments on Douglas’s text, do not show themselves aware that in many cases Douglas’s Biblical English is not to be found in Wilde’s French, nor do they demonstrate awareness of Ross’s more correct translation. Thus Murray says that ‘only the more striking echoes [from the Authorised Version] are here drawn attention to: there are many more’ (p.614). But we should note that even the ‘striking instances’ which Murray does mention need to be treated with caution. One of the phrases which she lists as Biblical is ‘like the rose’, which occurs in Douglas’s translation of the very first speech by Jokanaan (p.6). This phrase is, indeed, Biblical. But does Douglas derive it from Wilde?

Douglas is re-shaping Isaiah 35:1, ‘The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose’. Douglas’s text has: ‘When he cometh the solitary places shall be glad. They shall blossom like the rose’ (p.6). Murray might have noted that Douglas’s ‘solitary places’, too, is clearly a Biblical echo. But these phrases are not authentically Wildean. Wilde has: ‘Quand il viendra la terre déserte se réjouira. Elle fleurira comme le lis’ (p.10). Here ‘la terre déserte se réjouira’ clearly does echo the passage from Isaiah, but not in the way that Douglas suggests, for Wilde is translating ‘the desert shall rejoice’ – not ‘the solitary place shall be glad’. Even more interestingly, Wilde does not speak of the desert as blossoming ‘like the rose’, but deliberately introduces the French equivalent of ‘like the lily’, the English phrase which we find translated in Ross’s text, though Ross does preserve Douglas’s ‘solitary places’ (see p.321, THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN (1)).

Here, then, we have a clear instance of a Biblical phrase which Wilde alters into something quite different, and which Douglas changes back again to a Biblical phrase in his English translation; after which Ross, no less emphatically, translates Wilde’s French correctly. Editors who are not aware of these permutations and who solely focus on Douglas’s English do not really help us much by pointing out that ‘like the rose’ is Biblical when that is not, after all, a phrase which Douglas should have used. Technically, Douglas’s phrase is an error: it does have the authority of the Bible, but not that of Oscar Wilde, whose work he is supposedly translating.

Several of Douglas’s Biblical – or at least archaic – phrases are not so much incorrect as stylistically inappropriate, in that they provide a far more stilted and artificial effect than does Wilde’s French (deliberately contrived though that is, too). Douglas’s oft-repeated use of ‘Suffer me’ (as on p.22) for Wilde’s ‘Laisse-moi’ (p.28) is a conspicuous case in point, and Ross rightly prefers ‘Let me’
(p.27, SALOMÉ (3)). Ross equally correctly translates Wilde’s ‘demain’ (p. 21) as ‘to-morrow’ (p.325, SALOMÉ (2)), but Douglas cannot resist using the archaic ‘on the morrow’ (p. 16), which once again unnecessarily and unjustifiably pulls Wilde’s work into the Biblical sphere (cf. e.g. Joshua 5:12: ‘And the manna ceased on the morrow ...’).

But most frequently – and this phenomenon is abundantly pervasive, as the Appendix shows – Douglas’s Biblical flavour is achieved by using ‘thou’ or ‘thee’ where Wilde has ‘vous’. It is instructive to compare the just-mentioned speech by Salome as an example, in all three versions:

Vous ferez cela pour moi,
Narroboth. Vous savez bien que vous ferez cela pour moi. Et demain quand je passerai dans ma litière sur le pont des acheteurs d’idoles je vous regarderai à travers les voiles de mousseline, je vous regarderai, Narroboth, je vous sourirai, peut-être. Regardez-moi, Narroboth. Regardez-moi. Ah! vous savez bien que vous allez faire ce que je vous demande. Vous le savez bien, n’est-ce pas? ... Moi, je sais bien. (Wilde, pp.21-2)

Thou wilt do this thing for me, Narroboth. Thou knowest that thou wilt do this thing for me. And on the morrow when I shall pass in my litter by the bridge of the idol-buyers, I will look at thee through the muslin veils, I will look at thee, Narroboth, it may be I will smile at thee. Look at me, Narroboth, look at me. Ah! thou knowest that thou wilt do what I ask of thee. Thou knowest it.... I know that thou wilt do this thing. (Douglas, p.16)

You will do this thing for me, Narroboth. You know that you will do this thing for me. And to-morrow when I pass in my litter by the bridge of the idol-buyers, I will look at you through the muslin veils, I will look at you, Narroboth, it may be I will smile at you. Look at me, Narroboth, look at me. Ah!

24. The use of the verb ‘suffer’ in the sense of ‘let’, ‘tolerate’, ‘permit’ is very frequent in the Bible, as in Matthew 3:15, ‘Suffer it to be so now ...’
you know that you will do what I ask of you. You know it well.... I know that you will do this thing. (Ross, p.325)

In a case like this, and many similar ones, the purpose of Ross’s revision is not to correct errors of meaning, but a general shortcoming in style: to remove the totally unjustified archaism with which Douglas had cluttered the passage. There is nothing in Wilde’s use of ‘vous’ which should prompt one to believe that he has ‘thou’ in mind as an appropriate English equivalent.

Admittedly, Ross’s practice as a translator is open to question too: as a rule, he translates Wilde’s ‘vous’ as ‘you’, and his ‘tu’ as ‘thou’, as in the long speech which, at the end of the play, Salome addresses to Jokanaan’s decapitated head. I am inclined to think that Wilde, correctly enough, uses ‘tu’ here (and elsewhere when Salome speaks to Jokanaan) to suggest that she feels on intimate, personal terms with him, as well as his social superior, but in English, even about a century ago, ‘thou’ could no longer really carry such connotations, and the word as used by Ross must instead have seemed Biblical and solemn to contemporary readers and spectators. Perhaps it would have been wiser for Ross, as a translator, at all times to use ‘you’ and to ignore a distinction which Wilde, in his French, could make but which had disappeared from English, where in fact ‘thou’ had become the more formal pronoun. Even so, Ross is at least aiming to be consistent and precise in his practice as a translator, and, given also that Wilde uses ‘vous’ far more often than ‘tu’, we should prefer Ross’s habitual and correct use of ‘you’ for ‘vous’ (as distinct from the less welcome ‘thou’ for ‘tu’) to Douglas’s abundant, unwarranted and indiscriminate use of ‘thou’.

The archaic element in Douglas’s translation, it should be noted, is not confined to his adoption of phrases and linguistic features which either are from the Authorised Version or fit in with its idiom. It is a more general phenomenon. As the Authorised Version was published in 1611, its language, for all its distinctiveness, is that of the English Renaissance, and at times Douglas imitates other Renaissance writings. Thus we have a ‘Shakespearean’ touch in his use of ‘my lord’ (p.38) for Wilde’s ‘Seigneur’ (p.46; used to address Herod); Ross appropriately translates this as ‘Sire’ (p.334, FIRST NAZARENE (2)). Douglas also goes to amazing lengths to use, as part of his ‘archaic’ tone, circumlocutory or prolix expressions. For example, where Ross quite simply offers ‘They are like fifty moons’ (p.344, HEROD (2)) for Wilde’s ‘On dirait cinquante lunes’ (p.73), Douglas insists on writing ‘They are even as half a hundred moons’ (p.60). Similarly, Ross has ‘he who carries them in his hand can make women sterile’ (p.345,

25. See *thou* (pronoun and verb) in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for an indication of the basic differences between *thou* and *you* as they have historically developed.
HEROD (1)) where Wilde writes ‘quand on les porte dans la main on peut rendre less femmes stériles’ (p.75), but Douglas, instead of ‘can make women sterile’, presents ‘can turn the fruitful woman into a woman that is barren’ (p.61). There is a virtuoso element in such artifice, and an interesting emotional effect, but Douglas produces something quite other than what Wilde wrote.

Not surprisingly, Douglas’s preference for verbosity is often accompanied by, or perhaps leads to, error. The well in which Jokanaan spends his time attracts the comment ‘It must be very unhealthy’ in Ross’s accurate translation (p.321, THE CAPPADOCIAN (8)) of Wilde’s ‘cela doit être tres malsain’ (p.12). Douglas turns this into ‘That must be a poisonous place in which to dwell’ (p.8). This conveys the general idea, but is ultimately fanciful and incorrect. Needless, unsupported and thus inaccurate additions are a very frequent feature of Douglas’s text, and Ross scrupulously removes them, as when he translates Wilde’s ‘il s’est tué lui-même’ (p.37) as ‘he killed himself’ (p.330, SECOND SOLDIER (3)) instead of preserving Douglas’s ‘with his own hand he slew himself’ (p.29); or when Wilde’s ‘Mais je ne le ferai plus’ (p.70), referring to Herod’s gazing at Salome, leads Douglas to present ‘Nay, but I will look at thee no more. One should not look at anything’ (p.58), for which Ross appropriately substitutes ‘But I will look at you no more’ (p.343, HEROD (1)).

Another example of Douglas’s proximity combined with inaccuracy occurs when he translates Wilde’s ‘je paie bien les danseuses, moi. Toi, je te paierai bien’ (p.66) with ‘I pay a royal price to those who dance for my pleasure. I will pay thee royally’ (pp.54-5), whereas Ross offers the more straightforward ‘I pay the dancers well. I will pay thee royally’ (p.341, HEROD (2)). Here Douglas’s ‘who dance for my pleasure’ is nowhere to be found in the original, and although Ross unnecessarily keeps the idea of ‘royal’ payment, his translation is at least closer to Wilde’s text.

Douglas also has a tendency to embellish his translation by offering paraphrases which are not so much incorrect or wordy as too interpretative, e.g. when instead of Ross’s correct ‘I have never been hard to you’ (p.342, HEROD (5)) for Wilde’s ‘Je n’ai jamais été dur envers vous’ (p.69) Douglas produces ‘I have ever been kind toward thee’ (p.57), or when Wilde’s ‘Ah! l’épouse incestueuse qui parle’ (p.80) is turned by Douglas into ‘Ah! There speaks my brother’s wife’ (p.66) instead of Ross’s ‘Ah! There speaks the incestuous wife’ (p.347, HEROD (2)). In fact, in this second instance one could argue that Douglas is less than accurate.

Quite often he is markedly inaccurate. In considering examples under previous headings, we have already come across several instances where this is so, but I should now like to concentrate on some examples where the errors perhaps
exist in their own right rather than as a by-product of other tendencies which we have examined. To start at the beginning of the play, it is not easy to see why in the first stage direction Wilde’s ‘Clair de lune’ (p.5; correctly translated by Ross, p.319, as ‘Moonlight’) becomes, in Douglas’s rendering, ‘The moon is shining very brightly’ (p.1). Certainly the moon is important in the play, but when in the next speech the Page of Herodias draws attention to the moon there is nothing to indicate that its light is particularly intense. It is unlikely that Douglas did not know the meaning of ‘Clair de lune’; more likely he is being perverse, for reasons which we cannot in this instance retrieve. It is just possible that Wilde sanctioned (or even chose) the phrase as a result of the rehearsals during 1892, but it is surely safer to regard his own French version as authoritative: hence ‘Moonlight’ must be considered the more accurate reading.

Many of Douglas’s errors seem to be the product of drastic distortion rather than anything else. Thus when Salome first appears and speaks in the Penguin text (p.322) she wonders (in Ross’s words) why the Tetrarch looks at her all the while, saying ‘I know not what it means’, and then adds: ‘In truth, yes, I know it’. This last sentence translates Wilde’s ‘Àu fait, si, je le sais’ (p.14). In both of these versions, the effect is wonderfully subtle and suggestive. Douglas, however, makes up something like his own scenario with ‘Of a truth I know it too well’ (p.10). At times it is difficult to know whether Douglas is deliberately distorting Wilde’s sense or really does not understand that. Thus Wilde’s ‘Ta voix m’enivre’ (p.26) is translated by Ross, correctly enough, as ‘Thy voice is wine to me’ (p.326 (SALOMÈ (6))); enivre= ‘intoxicate’). Oddly, Douglas has ‘Thy voice is as music to mine ear’ (p.20). Interestingly, though, there is one statement by Salome, elsewhere, which Douglas may have felt justified his less than literal choice. In her lengthy speech to the head of Jokanaan, Salome says, in Wilde’s original: ‘quand je te regardais j’entendais une musique étrange’ (p.79), which Douglas accurately translates as ‘when I looked on thee I heard a strange music’ (p.65), a rendering preserved by
Ross (p.347, SALOMÉ (1)). So Douglas, in his wayward but not ungifted fashion, may have felt that it was appropriate to anticipate this later statement. Even so, the result remains that he deprives the play of a statement which Wilde himself makes, here, about the nature of Jokanaan’s voice (as distinct from his appearance).

Whatever the reasons, actual inaccuracies are not at all infrequent in Douglas’s version; thus we may compare, for example, early on: ‘il semble que’ (Wilde, p.9) – ‘I am afraid that’ (Douglas, p.5) – ‘it seems’ (Ross, p.320, THE NUBIAN (1)); or ‘cet immonde palais’ (Wilde, p.27) – ‘this palace’ (Douglas, p.21) – ‘this foul palace’ (Ross; p.327, JOKANAAN (3)). This last error results from omission on Douglas’s part and, although he is often wordy and adds words to Wilde’s text in his translation, he at other times just as markedly omits words, phrases, or sentences that he should include. Thus we find: ‘Je ne veux pas te regardez. Je ne te regarderai pas’ (Wilde, p.33) – ‘I will not look at thee’ (Douglas, p.26) – ‘I do not wish to look at thee. I will not look at thee’ (Ross; p.329, JOKANAAN (4)). Possibly Douglas felt, here, that Wilde’s two sentences conveyed the same sense, so that in his translation one sentence would do; but Ross shows that Wilde’s sentences are certainly not identical in meaning. The most telling omission in Douglas’s translation – really absolutely vital, and very damaging to the play – occurs at the end of Salome’s long speech to the dead Jokanaan just before Herod says that she is monstrous:

Si tu m’avais regardee, tu m’aurais aimee. Je sais bien que tu m’aurais aimee, et le mystere de l’amour est plus grand que le mystere de la mort. Il ne faut regarder que l’amour. (Wilde, p.80)

If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me. Well I know that thou wouldst have loved me, and the mystery of Love is greater than the mystery of Death. (Douglas, pp.65–6)

If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me. Well I know that thou wouldst have loved me, and the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death. Love only should one consider. (Ross, p.347)

Ross follows Douglas’s translation, but significantly – and in a memorable turn of phrase – he turns into remarkable English that final sentence which he found in Wilde and which Douglas inexplicably omits. Even this one difference alone would almost make one prefer Ross’s text.

But surely it is obvious by now that Ross’s text is as a rule greatly superior to Douglas’s in the many places where the two diverge. In the 1912 version, which I will deal with extensively in another paper, Ross takes his process of revision
yet further, and with yet greater success. But even the 1906-7 text, unknowingly adopted by Collins and Penguin, is preferable to Douglas's, which is used in the recent Oxford editions by Murray and Raby. Which must prompt us to consider what steps should now be taken.

What Should Happen Next?

The most urgent need is for clarity and essential information. It is one thing to offer, as Murray and Raby do, a text based on Douglas's 1894 translation, but another thing altogether to make no mention of the fact that there is another text, first printed in 1906, that presents a translation markedly closer to Wilde's original. As that text contains revisions made by — or at the very least sanctioned by — Wilde's literary executor, who had been a highly appreciated, loyal friend for many years and was very familiar with Wilde's literary work, readers must be informed about its existence, even if they are not offered it.

All in all, I deal further contend that, if only one associated with which in any imprimatur, Ross's, it in 1912 version, which extensive dispaper, Ross's at least provide translation than to say that Collins and us a good printing would go a good than this, and an editor presents translation closely Wilde, i.e. one sense has his that text should be preferably as he left Short of that final is in need of cussion in a later 1906-7 text would a more accurate Douglas's. That is publishers such as Penguin have done service by not Douglas's text,

26. In the Appendix, I list 1912 readings only when the Douglas 1894 and Ross 1906-7 texts diverge, and when, as well, the 1912 text differs from the 1906-7 version (sometimes returning to what Douglas had initially, sometimes taking the process of revision yet further than before). These examples will give an idea of the quality of the 1912 text, but a very limited one: very often, Ross had agreed with (or at least preserved) Douglas's words in his 1906-7 text, but in 1912 produced new and better variants which there is no space to discuss in this article.
despite their belief that that is exactly what they were doing. Those who are interested in what Wilde says in his French version but cannot read that and want to consult an English translation which Wilde might have found at least tolerably acceptable would find the 1912 text the best, but will find Ross's 1906-7 version (the one presented by Collins and Penguin) much better than Douglas's 1894 translation. Short of printing the 1912 text, as ideally they should, publishers at present offering the 1906-7 text might consider adopting, in a future reprint, one or two of 1912's superior readings. For example, on p.326 of the Penguin text JOKANAAN (1) includes: 'Though she will never repent, but will stick fast in her abominations; bid her come, for the fan of the Lord is in His hand'. The punctuation used here ruins the syntax of the sentence, and is not in keeping with Wilde's French; but the 1912 text does bring out Wilde's sense, by re-punctuating: 'Though she will never repent, but will stick fast in her abominations, bid her come; for the fan of the Lord is in His hand'.

There are good reasons for using an early translation, associated closely with Wilde, rather than a later one which is not. Both Douglas's text and Ross's two versions are authentic documents of their period, although Douglas's language is unnecessarily and misleadingly archaic. Both men were at various times intensely involved with Wilde and his artistic and intellectual world, but we must be acutely conscious of Wilde's extreme disappointment with Douglas's translation when he first saw it, and should not assume that he revised it extensively and to his satisfaction. On the contrary, all the evidence - and most prominently a comparison between Wilde's French and Douglas's English - suggests that the text as printed in 1894 cannot have been one with which Wilde was happy. It is true, of course, that Douglas's 1894 text must, here and there, contain some English words which are Wilde's. But it is quite possible that Ross, who was very much part of the scene when the wrangling concerning Douglas's poor translation occurred, was aware of the revisions made by Wilde, and retained those when he came to do his own job as a reviser of Douglas's

27. Obviously the best way to get to know the 1906 and 1907 texts is to consult them directly. They are, however, extremely rare, and - as they should be - are zealously protected by libraries that own them. Photocopying is potentially injurious to the books. Readers relying on the Collins and Penguin editions will find the Collins text highly accurate. Although, like the Penguin anthology, it introduces several cosmetic changes in accidentals (e.g. less intensive use of capitals in stage directions, etc.), its substantives are as far as my collation shows correct. The Penguin edition is also of a high standard, as a version of Ross's 1906-7 text, but includes the following substantive errors: p.327, JOKANAAN (2), 'beatings' for 1907's 'beating'; p.333, A THIRD JEW: 'He is what is good' for 1907's 'He is in what is good'; p.335, FIRST NAZARENE: 'Yes, sire' for 1907's 'Yea, sire'; p.341, HEROD (3): 'bring you' for 1907's 'bring thee'. Cave's 2000 edition corrects only the last of these errors.
work. Indeed, it is significant that Ross revised, and thus partly preserved, Douglas's translation rather than rejected it and started anew. Therefore, an argument to the effect that Douglas's translation should be preferred because it is sure to contain authentically Wildean phrasing loses its force when we consider that the same may just as well be true of Ross's. Moreover, we know that Douglas was reluctant to change his translation so as to bring it more into line with Wilde's wishes, while clearly that is not true of Ross, who in his role as a silent reviser must have been inspired by a desire to do justice to Wilde's intentions.

In practice, it looks as though Ross saw himself as implementing what he thought his deceased friend would want him to do: to present a much-improved version of Douglas's text, in effect just such an amended version as Wilde might have produced if Douglas had not forced him either to publish a very imperfect translation or to terminate the relationship by publishing a much-amended version which Douglas would not accept. Wilde found the relationship more important than the improved translation, and Ross was left to try and produce such a translation on his own: not a new translation, but an improved version which, while retaining features of the original, became a very different work of art.

All in all, then, we should have faith in Ross's work, and act on that faith. Even so, the ideal modern edition would contain both Douglas's 1894 text, and those produced by Ross in 1906 and 1912. It would, moreover, print Wilde's original French version as

28. Douglas's unwillingness to be faithful to Wilde's text (in part discussed in note 9 above) is only obvious from his translation, and is well documented otherwise. In a letter to the publisher, John Lane, quoted by Ellmann (p.380), he complains, with reference to Wilde's desire for a more accurate rendering: 'I cannot consent to have my work altered and edited, and thus to become a mere machine for doing the rough work of translation' (my italics). To him, apparently, a translation was more meritorious if it was something like an independent creation, and thus did not do justice to what the author had written. As he saw the outcome, to have his name mentioned in a dedication was a tribute to his originality, while its appearance on the title page would have meant that he had not been creative (Ellmann, pp.380-1); all of which goes to show that Wilde, no doubt reluctantly, consented to the publication of an inaccurate translation.
well; and it would provide full and accurate information on all four texts and their interrelationship.

In a more prosaic world, it is to be hoped that the next impression of Cave's Penguin text will declare that the text has not been based on Douglas's 1894 translation, but on the revision that Ross published in 1906. A similar correction is necessary in the case of the *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, and any publisher of *Salome* in an English translation should from here on state accurately just what translation the public is being offered. All editions should do so, even those which provide virtually no other annotation. If there is any room for comment, however, it should be made plain that the edition chosen has certain basic characteristics — for example that the Ross translation of 1906 is more accurate than Douglas's of 1894, even though neither is perfect.

And it surely is not unrealistic to hope for the appearance, within the near future, of an edition based on Ross's 1912 text, with notes pointing out where it deviates from Wilde's original, and what the correct translation should be instead. I do not think that many such notes would be necessary, and this procedure would at last offer us a text which is both of high quality as a translation and produced by someone well acquainted with Wilde and his work: the person whom Wilde himself for such reasons chose as his literary executor.

**Acknowledgements**

I gratefully acknowledge help received, in response to queries, from Angie Kingston (who is preparing a PhD on Wilde at the University of Adelaide), Ian Small (General Editor of the Oxford English Texts edition of Wilde), and Elizabeth Close (Senior Lecturer in French at Flinders University). Although I have learned from these scholars, I alone am responsible for whatever the failings of this paper may turn out to be.