Individual and Family Therapy

INTEGRATION OF INDIVIDUAL AND INTERPERSONAL FACTORS

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From *Individual and Family Therapy* Fred Sander M.D.

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INTEGRATION OF INDIVIDUAL AND INTERPERSONAL FACTORS

In the first chapter we revisited *Hamlet* and introduced the central paradigmatic question raised by the emergence of the family therapy movement. Can a disturbed individual be viewed as a symptom of a family disorder? What is the interrelation of the identified patient and his or her surrounding dysfunctional family? We noted that from a general systems point of view abnormal behavior, depending on the level of analysis, may be explained in terms of disturbances in genetic and biochemical factors, psychological forces, dysfunctional familial patterning, and at times cultural disparities. In the end the mental health sciences subsume nothing less than the interdependence of these points of view or "approaches to the mind."

We turn in this chapter to Oscar Wilde's one-act play *Salome*, which shocked the literary world at the same time as Freud was beginning to shock the scientific world with his discoveries. The play, written in 1891, representative of the fin de siecle literature of the 1890s, was to have starred Sarah Bernhardt. It could not be produced in England because of a law against the dramatic portrayal of Biblical characters, and after Richard Strauss wrote his highly controversial, sensual adaptation of this decadent play, censors in Vienna also forbade its production and the Kaiser cancelled a Berlin production. The first operatic performance of this study in perversity finally

took place in Dresden the same year that Freud (1905) published his account of the polymorphous perverse sexuality of children in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*.

The American premiere of the opera in 1907, while receiving a highly favorable review by the *New York Times*, nonetheless was so offensive in content that it was not seen again at the Metropolitan for twenty-seven years! As the *Times* reported the event:

> When Mme. Fremstad (playing the lead) began to sing to the head before her, the horror of the thing started a party of men and women from the front row and from Boxes 27 and 29 in the Golden Horseshoe. Two parties tumbled precipitously into the corridors and called for their carriages. But in the galleries men and women left their seats to stand so they might look down upon the prima donna as she kissed the dead lips of the head of John the Baptist. Then they sank back in their chairs and shuddered! [1/23/07]

I have chosen *Salome* for this concluding chapter because of the striking similarity to the familial structure of *Hamlet*. To my knowledge this similarity has not, at least in the psychological literature, previously been noted. It allows us to view, from both psychoanalytic and family systems frameworks, a plav in which we see a female version of *Hamlet*. Faced, as Hamlet was, with the *actualization* of childhood oedipal wishes, Salome moves toward a homosexual resolution by turning against the father representative and back toward her mother.

BRIEF PLOT SUMMARY

Both Oscar Wilde's play and Strauss's opera, which is an almost verbatim rendering of the play, rewrites the biblical story of Salome. Wilde once said in keeping with his view of the primacy of the artistic endeavor that the artist's only duty to history was to rewrite it. In this short, dramatic rewriting of history, Salome enters the stage, having just left a royal banquet from which she escapes the lecherous stares of her stepfather, King Herod. She asks the palace guards to let her speak with John the Baptist, the religious prophet and follower of Christ. He is a prisoner of Herod held in an underground cistern. We then learn that it is the same cistern that once held Salome's father, the previous king and older brother of Herod. After his brother was in the prison for twelve years, Herod finally had him killed.[1]

John, ghostlike, comes out of the cistern, condemns and rebuffs Salome's seductive advances toward him, while also condemning the incestuous marriage of Herod and Salome's mother, Herodias. Cursing Salome as a daughter of adultery and of Sodom, John returns to his prison. Herod, whose wife repeatedly rebukes him for his attention to Salome, leaves the banquet in search of his beautiful stepdaughter. The tension mounts as Herod repeatedly pleads with Salome to dance for him, even offering her her mother's throne, even half his kingdom. She finally agrees to dance after extracting Herod's fateful oath to fulfill any wish of hers. After the dance she demands the head

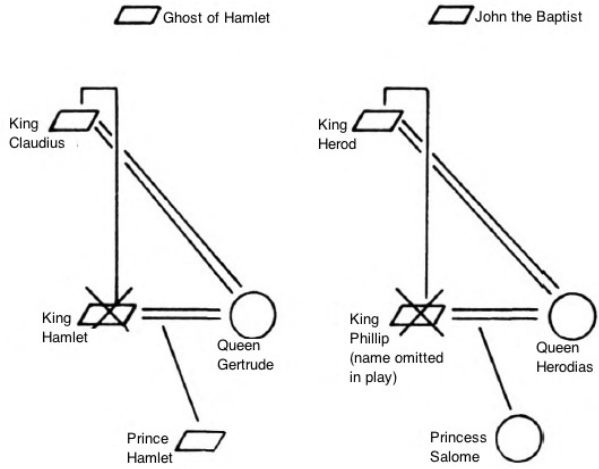
of John. She is thus reconciled to her mother who had wanted to have John silenced. At the same time she kills and possesses the man who had rejected her. The drama ends as she kisses the dead head, and Herod, in horror, gives his order, "Kill that woman!"

SIMILARITIES TO HAMLET: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The few psychoanalytic studies of Salome that have appeared illustrate Bergmann's recent caveat (1973) regarding psychoanalytic studies of biography and literature. Such studies usually illuminate more about the state of contemporary psychoanalytic theory than about the work or person being studied. Coriat's very brief paper (1914) on Salome emphasizes the role of sadism in her personality and reflects the interest of psychoanalysis of that period in the psychosexual stages of development that Freud had just previously elaborated. Plokker (1940) discussed Salome as representing a woman with a masculinity complex pervaded by an oral fixation. Salome wishes to bite off the penis as a type of revenge against the man. He feels the play's power rests in the expression of this common unconscious fantasy. Bergler (1954), writing in commemoration of the centenary of Wilde's birth, discusses the writing of *Salome* as a turning point in Wilde's life. The paper, which is rather unconvincing, reflects the interest of the psychoanalytic theory of the day in the role of the mother- child relationship. He argues that Wilde had sought refuge from the cruel giantess image of his mother in his

1886 marriage to a nonentity of a wife. In *Salome* (1891) Wilde's view of the cruelty of women found its fullest expression and paralleled, according to Bergler, his flight into a reckless homosexual life. The subsequent ruinous libel trial with the paranoid Marquess of Queensbury brought about Wilde's imprisonment and ultimate downfall. In fact, Wilde was serving his prison sentence in 1896 when *Salome* was first produced in Paris.

None of these writers noted the interesting parallel structure to Hamlet's family, reproduced in the following diagram:



The parallels between the plays are further reinforced in the opening scenes as we note the similarities between the Ghost and John the Baptist.

Both plays open outside the respective castle (Hamlet) and palace (Salome) with the conversations of the guards as they come in contact with the speechless Ghost of Hamlet and the disembodied, ghostlike voice of John. In each play the guards try to protect Hamlet and Salome from their fateful meetings with these representations of their dead fathers.

> *Marcellus*: You shall not go, my Lord. [I. iv. 88]
>
> *The Young Syrian*: Do not stay here Princess, I beseech you. [p. 401]

Both John and the Ghost rise as if (or from) the dead. John's identity with Salome's father is obvious, as they occupied the same tomblike prison. Displacement to John of her feelings toward her father is thus facilitated. Salome's desire to speak with this representation of her dead father finds parallel in Hamlet's eagerness to speak with his dead father. Both the Ghost and John condemn the similar incestuous and adulterous marriages while recommending quite different solutions to Hamlet's and Salome's questions.

> *Hamlet*: What should we do? [I. iv. 61]
>
> *Ghost*: Revenge (my) foul and unnatural murder. [I. v. 30]
> Ay that incestuous, that adulterous beast, [I. v. 49]
>
> Salome: Speak again! Speak again and tell me what I must do. [p. 402]
>
> John: Daughter of Sodom, come not near me! But cover thy face with a veil . . . and get thee to the desert and seek out the Son of Man. [p. 402] Daughter of adultery, there is but one who can save thee . . . Go seek Him . . . ask of Him the remission of thy sins. [p. 405]

Where the Ghost calls Hamlet to revenge, John, speaking from the cradle of Christianity, tells Salome to seek out redemption and Christ. There are further details that reflect similar themes, for just as we learn that Fortinbras's father, also a king, had been killed by King Hamlet, the Young Syrian's father, also a king, had been killed by Herod. The similarities border on the uncanny.

There is no evidence that Wilde was consciously changing the Salome story to resemble the beginning of Hamlet, but the resemblance deserves some note. The resemblance is in sharper focus as we note the degree to which Wilde rewrote the original story. The historical version differs from Wilde's adaptation in the following significant ways.

1. Salome's father, whose name was Philip, was not a ruler, but a wealthy half brother of Herod, and he was not imprisoned or killed, but lived in Rome.

2. It was because he was not a ruler that Herodias left him to become Herod's wife and queen, thus committing the adultery that John the Baptist condemned.

3. It was for this reason that Herodias wanted John killed and asked for his head through her daughter, who in the biblical version innocently asked her mother what she should ask of her stepfather after the dance.

4. Salome was not killed, but in fact, ended up marrying another man

named Philip.

In rewriting this story, Oscar Wilde has changed the plot to resemble a female Hamlet figure who moves toward a homosexual resolution.

THE HOMOSEXUAL RESOLUTION OF THE OEDIPAL CONFLICT

In the earlier review of Freud's writings on marriage and the family (see chapter 5), I noted his early observations on the neurosogenic impact of severe marital discord on a child's oedipal development. The disharmony between parents creates an opportunity for a child to side with the parent of the opposite sex, thereby attempting fulfillment of his oedipal wishes, or siding with the parent of the same sex, thereby denying or repressing the oedipal rivalry with that parent. Extended into adult life, the choice of someone of the same sex as a love object constitutes the regressive homosexual resolution of the oedipal conflict.

For the female the regression reestablishes her primary attachment to the mother, while for the male the regression is often an identification with this first love object. Both are set in motion by the castration or Oedipus complex while more determined by earlier preoedipal fixations. These alternatives have come to be called the positive and negative sides of the oedipal conflict. The following diagram showing these alternatives for the boy and girl cites the mythological figures often associated with them. I have

placed the name of Salome in the fourth box as there has not been a legendary figure that has become associated with the girl's negative oedipal conflict.

	Positive Oedipus	Negative Oedipus (Homosexual)
Boy	Oedipus	Orestes
Girl	Electra	Salome

In the open conflict between Herod and Herodias, Salome flees the incestuous tie to the stepfather while attempting briefly to enact it with a direct substitute for her father, John the Baptist. The blatant transparency of the oedipal relation, as we read the play today, makes one wonder if Wilde, as so many modern writers, was not writing under the influence of Freudian ideas. Such "contamination" is however not possible as Freud's first published discussion of the Oedipus complex in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) came nine years after Wilde wrote his *Salome*.

When Herod repeatedly asks Salome to dance for him, as her mother protests vehemently, Salome seems to give in while asking the fateful oath of Herod. After the dance she claims as her prize the head of John the Baptist, to her mother's triumphant delight and Herod's mortification. She thus, for the

moment, is reconciled with her mother and is perversely and unconsciously united with her dead father.

Bergmann (1976) has recently called attention to the phenomena of "love that follows upon murder in works of art" that has particular relevance to the subsequent discussion of preoedipal ambivalence. As he notes, once the murderous impulse has been enacted, the love toward the object finds expression. The request for his head also however, threatens Herod's authority as his subjects have begun to worship this disciple of Christ. Thus her reconciliation with her mother and father is indeed brief as Herod then has her killed.

THE PREOEDIPAL FACTORS: AMBIVALENCE AND THE ROLE OF SPLITTING

In the previous section we discussed the oedipal conflict of Salome as it was intensified by the murder of her father and the later seductive approaches of her stepfather. The homosexual resolution of the Oedipus complex inevitably has its roots in the preoedipal relation to the mother. In males the preoedipal relationship is usually dealt with by identification with the maternal object. In the female the conflictual preoedipal relationship is handled by a wish to return to a blissful preambivalent tie to her. If the mother-infant relationship has been pathological the child often turns to the father in search of such nurturance.

This tendency is enacted in Salome's approaches to John the Baptist whom we have already shown to be a direct substitute for her father. She, however, does not seek genital sexual gratification but rather a more primitive contact with the maternal body (i.e., the "good" idealized breast). And when John rejects these advances, the "body" she had idealized immediately turns into the "bad" persecutory object.

> *Salome*: I am amorous of thy body, Jokanaan! Thy body is white like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows that lie on the mountains of Judea, and come down into the valleys. The roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia are not so white as thy body. Neither the roses of the garden of the Queen of Arabia, the garden of spices of the Queen of Arabia, nor the feet of the dawn when they light on the leaves, nor the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea ... There is nothing in the world so white as thy body. Suffer me to touch thy body.
>
> *Jokanaan*: Back! daughter of Babylon! By woman came evil into the world. Speak not to me. I will not listen to thee. I listen but to the voice of the Lord God.
>
> *Salome*: Thy body is hideous. It is like the body of a leper. It is like a plastered wall where vipers have crawled; like a plastered wall where the scorpions have made their nest. It is like a whitened sepulchre full of loathsome things. It is horrible, thy body is horrible. It is thy hair that I am enamoured of, Jokanaan. Thy hair is like clusters of grapes, like the clusters of black grapes that hang from the vine-trees of Edom in the land of the Edomites. Thy hair is like the cedars of Lebanon, like the great cedars of Lebanon that give their shade to the lions and to the robbers who would hide them by day. The long black nights, when the moon hides her face, when the stars are afraid, are not so black as thy hair. The silence that dwells in the forest is not so black. There is nothing in the world that is so black as thy hair. . . Suffer me to touch thy hair.

Jokanaan: Back, daughter of Sodom! Touch me not. Profane not the temple of the Lord God.

Salome: Thy hair is horrible. It is covered with mire and dust. It is like a knot of serpents coiled around thy neck. I love not thy hair . . . It is thy mouth that I desire, Jokanaan. Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut in twain with a knife of ivory. The pomegranate flowers that blossom in the gardens of Tyre, and are redder than roses, are not so red. The red blasts of trumpets that herald the approach of kings, and make afraid the enemy, are not so red. Thy mouth is redder than the feet of the doves who inhabit the temples and are fed by the priests. It is redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion, and seen gilded tigers. Thy mouth is like a branch of coral that fishers have found in the twilight of the sea, the coral that they keep for the kings!. . . It is like the vermilion that the Moabites find in the mines of Moab, the vermilion that the kings take from them. It is like the bow of the King of the Persians, that is painted with vermilion, and is tipped with coral. There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth . . . Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

Jokanaan: Never! daughter of Babylon! Daughter of Sodom! Never.

Salome: I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. I will kiss thy mouth, [pp. 403-404]

There have been some recent "hair-splitting" debates as to the precise definition of splitting, most recently by Robbins (1976). In the just-qd passages we see a richly elaborated example of a precursor of splitting in an infant's first object relationship. In the infant's ambivalent attitude to the breast, the libido is directed toward an idealized breast and aggression toward the persecutory one.

The portrayal of Herodias is of a rather jealous, angry, cold, unmaternal woman, in keeping with the image Wilde seems to have had of women as

unfaithful, ravenous, and power hungry. Behind the image of Salome's sexuality and acclaimed beauty, we see her yearning for reunion with a life-giving good mother. Her beauty, which is acclaimed in the opening line of the play, is immediately contrasted with her identification with death.

> *The Young Syrian*: How beautiful is the Princess Salome tonight!
>
> *Page of Herodias*: Look at the moon. How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. One might fancy she was looking for dead things, [pp. 392-393]

Indeed, she is looking for her dead father whom she may have wished to have nurtured her and protected her from the cruel mother. Her desperate, unsatisfied thirst causes her to kill the object of her desire, which then brings about her own destruction. One of the earliest hallmarks of the mother-infant relationship is the smile response and the role of mirroring behavior in the earliest differentiation of the child from its mother. Repeatedly in the play the dangers of looking too much at a love object are emphasized. Usually it is couched in sexual terms; the Syrian looks too much at Salome, Salome looks too much at John, and Herod looks too much at Salome. This looking is latently expressive of preoedipal longing, and at the end of the play its full import is expressed in Herod's despair when Salome asks for the head of John:

> *Herod*: No, no, thou wouldst not have that. Thou sayest that but to trouble me, because I have looked at thee and ceased not this night. Thy beauty has

> troubled me. Thy beauty has grievously troubled me and I have looked at thee over much. Nay, but I will look at thee no more. *One should not look at anything. Neither at things nor at people should one look. Only in mirrors is it well to look for mirrors do but show us masks.* [p. 423, italics mine]

Herod, in his despair, turns away from the faces of others, preferring the masks of his narcissistic reflection. Also when Salome gets the head she has longed for, through massive denial of his death, she begins to kiss and bite it as she notes his unresponsive eyes.

> *Salome*: But wherefore dost thou not look at me, Jokannen? Thine eyes that were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn are shut now. Wherefore are they shut? Open thine eyes. Lift up thine eyelids, Jokannen. Wherefore dost thou not look at me?

> Ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me Jokannen? With the cloak of thine hands and with the cloak of thy blasphemies thou didst hide thy face. Thou didst put upon thine eyes the covering of him who would see his God. Well, thou hast seen thy God, Jokannen, but me, me thou didst never see. If thou hadst seen me thou hadst loved me. I saw thee and I loved thee. [pp. 427-428]

Thus to be seen, to be recognized, is to be loved. Despairing of such object love, Herod seeks resolution in turning in upon himself and Salome in destruction of the love object. Actually in the killing of the love object, Salome enacts a wish to finally possess that which she could not have, the love of her father and mother. She longs, as she was described in the first scene, for death where she can be reunited with the lost objects of her past.

THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX SEEN TRANSACTION ALLY

The Oedipus complex, which remains a cornerstone of the psychoanalytic theory of neurosis, has generally been descriptive of each person's developmental struggle with his or her parents viewed generally from within or intrapsychically and taking place in childhood. While psychoanalysis has a keen appreciation of the role of life experiences upon the developing ego, the descriptions and theories nonetheless tend to emphasize the internalized facets of the personality, especially in its early formation and functioning. This is so because the primary data of psychoanalysis remains the productions of the individual patient on the couch. The more unconscious and instinctual elements of the personality, laid down, repressed, to be sure in the earliest years, continue to exert themselves in character structure, symptoms, reenactments, and transformations in later life. When reenacted in the transference neurosis of a psychoanalytic treatment, these internal forces can be moderated.

Quite often the interpersonal dramas of families remain the unfolding and interweaving of parts of each member's internalized past life. In *Salome* we know little of Herod's or Herodias' lives except that, just as Claudius and Gertrude, they have committed adultery, incest, and murder. They have *enacted* the oedipal crime with its attendant tragic consequences. When internal conflict is thus averted or superseded by perverse or psychopathic

acts, the interpersonal ramifications are multiple and amplified.

In*Salome* the most recent elaboration of the multiple unfoldings is in the present dramatic interaction of Herod, Herodias, and Salome. The usurpation of the throne did not put to rest the conflicts and desires of Herod and Herodias. The ambivalence between husband and wife quickly involve them with Salome in another oedipal triangle leading them to ruin. Herod antagonizes his wife by his attraction to his stepdaughter. Herodias drives Herod further toward his stepdaughter by her self-fulfilling accusations and criticisms of Herod. Herodias thus plays a part in losing the man she had gained at such cost. In lusting after his stepdaughter, Herod offends both his wife and stepdaughter, who later vent their rage at his authority in asking for the head of John the Baptist. Salome unsuccessfully tries to escape the triangle and finally allows herself to be the instrument of the constellation when she agrees to dance for her stepfather, bringing the tension to its climax.

What is critical here is the way in which each person is inextricably bound to the triangle. It is a major contribution of the family therapy movement to have noted how the participants of a disturbed family are collusively bound in such pathological triangles, from which there seems to be no exit and in which repetitive interactional patterns predominate. The following portion of the play will illustrate this here-and-now aspect of the

oedipal constellation. The text of the play is here presented with my comments in parentheses.

Midway through the one-act play Herod slips on the blood of the Young Syrian who, enamored of Salome, had committed suicide as he watched Salome try to seduce John. Unsettled, recalling that he had driven the Young Syrian's father, also a king, from his kingdom and made the Syrian captain of his guard, Herod hallucinates the Angel of Death. Herodias tries to reassure him.

> *Herodias*: I tell you there is nothing. You are ill. Let us go within. (She tries to get Herod back into the palace and away from Salome.)
>
> *Herod*: I am not ill. It's your daughter who is sick to death. Never have I seen her so pale. (Herod rebuffs his wife and attends to his stepdaughter.)
>
> *Herodias*: I have told you not to look at her. (She again charges her husband with incestuous glances; in most of these communications the content message is thus expressed as a command, conveying an attitude of authority toward Herod.)
>
> *Herod*: Pour me forth wine. Salome come drink a little wine with me. I have here wine that is exquisite. Caesar himself sent it to me. Dip into it thy little red lips, that I may drain the cup. (Herod defies his wife's command and openly tries to woo Salome.)
>
> *Salome*: I am not thirsty, Tetrarch. (She declines his offer.)
>
> *Herod*: You hear how she answers me, this daughter of yours. (He, rather than reply directly to Salome's refusal, blames his wife.)

Herodias: She does right. Why are you always gazing at her? (She is pleased with her daughter and reproaches her husband again.)

Herod: Bring me ripe fruits. Salome, come and eat fruits with me. I love to see in a fruit the mark of thy little teeth. Bite but a little of this fruit that I may eat what is left. (In response Herod continues the pattern of provocation.)

Salome: I am not hungry, Tetrarch. (She declines again.)

Herod: You see how you have brought up this daughter of yours. (He again blames his wife for her daughter's response, continuing the triangling process.)

Herodias: My daughter and I come of a royal race. As for thee, thy father was a camel driver! He was a thief and robber to boot! (Herodias reverts to insults, identifying herself with her daughter.)

Herod: Thou liest!

Herodias: Thou knowest well that it is true.

Herod: Salome, come and sit next to me. I will give thee the throne of thy mother. (Again Herod uses Salome to get back at his wife, in fact, offers her throne to rest upon.)

Salome: I am not tired, Tetrarch. [p. 409]

This repetitive sequence is here interrupted by John's voice from below forecasting doom. Moments later the cycle resumes, this time with Herod asking that Salome dance for him. She repeatedly refuses until she extracts from him the fateful oath to give her "whatever she shall ask."

The rising interpersonal (and presumably intrapsychic) tension thus

moves toward a runaway resolution. Salome may have whatever her heart desires. No simple matter of asking the child in the consultation room his three wishes to catch a glimpse of the id. Salome shall have John's head. In this brief replay of the oedipal entanglement of Salome, Herod, and Herodias, we are reminded again of the emphasis or point of view of family therapy. The family is "a system" in which each person's activity or inactivity, thoughts and feelings, and part or role, affects to varying degrees the activity, thoughts, and feelings of the others.

While the novel is often also quite dramatic, it differs from drama in giving us more of a picture of the motivations and private thoughts of the characters. For this reason the novel lends itself more readily to psychoanalytic study, where the drama is more frequently suitable to illustrate the interpersonal concepts of family therapy.

Salome illustrates again the family therapy emphasis upon the importance of examining the here-and-now interaction as a clue to a clinical situation or problem. The interaction was all too clear. The earlier psychoanalytic examination of her use of displacement and splitting in the interaction with John the Baptist, whom she had never before met, led us to *infer* a desire to be reunited with her dead father and with the further aim of establishing with him a preoedipal tie to an ambivalently experienced maternal object.

The intensity of that wish for reunion with the mother is thus added to the constellation of interpersonal forces that bring the oedipal crisis to a tragic conclusion.

It is the appreciation and understanding of the confluence of such past developmental and present interpersonal forces that hold promise for a psychoanalytically oriented family therapy that integrates the insights of both psychoanalysis and family therapy[2] while helping those patients with whom classical psychoanalysis is not possible.

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Notes

1 This rather important detail of the murder is curiously omitted from the opera libretto.

2 A sociopolitical interpretation that underscores the intrapsychic and interpersonal family dynamics has been put forth by Marcus (1974). She sees in Salome an early representation of modern woman's quest for equality and her rebellion against patriarchal authority.

In the lecherous advances toward his stepdaughter Herod reflects the patriarchal abuse of women in its most decadent form. Salome and her mother turn against this callous treatment. Seen as a threat to the established authorities, Salome is crushed to death by a symbol of the State's authority, the shield of Herod's soldiers. Marcus goes on to see her death as paralleling Christ's martyrdom.

This is an intriguing interpretation, which touches upon the present upheaval in the changing roles of women. All our traditional institutions, such as religions, political structures, and the family are being shaken by these changes, which while clearly liberating are also contributing to the present instability of the modern family. It is this factor in addition to other structural changes in the family over the past 100 years that has contributed to society's attempt to manage this instability through the mental health professions, more specifically through the emergence of family therapy (see chapter 2).