In a letter, Laforgue himself acknowledged Flaubert’s *Hérodias* as the model for *Salomé*. The title immediately signals the distortion, for the parody’s heroine is not Herodias but her daughter, a minor figure of Flaubert’s work here drawn into the foreground. Although, as with *Lohengrin*, this reminds us of the status of the parody as a “second generation,” the filial relation is not quite the same. The title of *Lohengrin* identifies him as “fils du Parsifal,” and the plot follows Wagner’s *Lohengrin*; *Salomé*, on the other hand, follows the plot of the “mother” story, *Hérodias*, but recasts the daughter in the role of heroine. (Salomé herself hardly figures at all in Flaubert’s novella, in which she appears only for the short scene of the dance and utters only the few fatal words dictated by her mother.) This fundamental tension, between the recognizable plot of *Hérodias* and the substitute heroine, Salomé, creates a constant disjunction that keeps the parody ever present in the reader’s mind. It plays with an irony of the Salomé tradition itself, the frequent conflation of mother and daughter, as in Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade* and the many paintings so entitled which picture her in the posture belonging to Salomé—receiving the Baptist’s head on a platter. Whereas usually Herodias takes on the attributes of Salomé, in Laforgue we have the reverse, an unadulterated Salomé in a story that belongs largely to Flaubert’s Herodias.

The Salomé figure is especially appropriate to Laforgue’s target: “déesse de la Décadence,” “métaphore de la Décadence,” Salomé was one of the most prominent images of Decadent art. She ap-
Salomé appears in works by Flaubert, Mallarmé, Huysmans, Laforgue, Gustave Moreau, and Odilon Redon, to name only the major ones; she is a symbol of the *femme fatale*, the blood-thirsty, castrating woman, killer of prophets, temptation and lubricity personified. Laforgue parodies the themes, attitudes, obsessions, and stylistic features of Decadence by means of one of its emblematic stories. He plays on Salomé's ubiquity and parodies the entire genre, integrating into his narrative elements from a variety of Salomé sources besides Flaubert, notably Moreau's paintings on the theme ("Salomé dansant devant Hérode" and "L'Apparition") and Huysmans' elaborate description of them in *A Rebours*. In addition, Laforgue transforms the Salomé figure according to the heroine of another of Flaubert's Oriental novels: daughter of the tetrarch, guardian of the Blanches Esotériques, and their values, high priestess of the night sky, incarnation of the moon and its cult of purity, atrophy, sterility, and artifice, a bard whose ravings are supposed to enchant, an allegedly committed virgin whose "initiation" brings death to her lover and to herself, Salomé is a parodic Salammbô.

Integrating *Salammbô* into the complex of Salomé models plays on the close relation between them during the period. *Salammbô* was considered not only a sister novel to *Hérodias* but also a precursor of Decadence. Huysmans placed it in des Esseintes' library and coupled it in his hero's affections with *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, that other model for Decadence. He directly compares Salomé to Salammbô in chapter 5: contemplating Moreau's "Salomé (dansant devant Hérode)," des Esseintes likens her to Salammbô by her headdress: "en la mitrant d'un certain diadème en forme de tour phénicienne tel qu'en porte la Salammbô." However, the presence of Salammbô in Laforgue's story does not merely support the Salomé motif but actually qualifies the character of the heroine herself. The destructive *femme fatale* of the nineteenth-century Salomé tradition is also, like Salammbô, a bard and priestess tormented by desire, dissatisfied with her science, and whose sexual sacrilege will bring about her downfall.

Although (and perhaps even because) its parodic relation to *Hérodias* was understood from the beginning, *Salomé*, of all the *Moralités*, has suffered the most from unfavorable critical opinion.
It is taken to be less subtle, less sophisticated, less interesting, and by all accounts less delightful than the other stories. F. Ruchon judges its humor “facile et un peu lassant à la fin”; W. Ramsey denounces it as a witty but disappointing imitation of Hérodias “verging dangerously on that of the class yearbook.” But to see Salomé as merely a burlesque version of Hérodias is incorrect and misses the point of the parody. As M. Praz observes, Flaubert’s story cannot explain Laforgue’s, too many aspects of which remain unmotivated and unintelligible, most especially the character of his remarkable heroine. Salomé does betray its status as Laforgue’s first effort, and he himself expressed misgivings about its heaviness: it contains many of the rather tiresome aspects of his early “cosmic” poems, such as the vocabulary of philosophical pessimism, Buddhism, and mysticism, underwater and lunar imagery, and an extreme sense of the artificial and contrived. However, this did not prevent him from adding to the revised version a long and ponderous passage, the Aquarium section of part two, containing precisely these features. He clearly wished not only to include them, but to emphasize them. Indeed, such language, imagery, and thematic material are commonplaces of Decadent art, including Laforgue’s own; the peculiarities of Salomé thus are frequently sources and signals of the parody.

Laforgue modifies Salomé from a destructive woman to a mystical bard, and insists on the difference, by a crucial alteration to the legend. The central episode of the traditional story, the essential aspect of the whole genre, never takes place: Salomé does not dance, but rather talks. More precisely, consistent with her Salammbo model, she chants, though Salomé’s is not a hymn to the goddess Tanit but an incomprehensible and unbearably tedious improvisation on nothingness. This change in the character of her art reflects the fundamental change in the Salomé figure itself: a pseudo-philosopher devoted to the mystical Unconscious, this Decadent heroine is also a Decadent poet, and Laforgue’s story a conspicuous self-parody. Ultimately, it reverses the implications of the legend: she is a femme fatale, but her plans backfire and she destroys herself. Salomé embodies especially well the characteristic ambivalence of parody described in chapter 1: a work that is itself
one of the supreme examples of Decadence sends the whole Decadent edifice hurtling to the ground, like the heroine herself who tumbles over the cliff at the end. Laforgue’s story smashes Decadence upon the rocks of the real world and counsels, instead, a less extreme version of the pure poet.

The Epigraph

Salomé begins with a peculiar Vietnamese proverb:

Naître, c'est sortir; mourir, c'est rentrer.

—Proverbes du royaume d’Annam recueillis par le père Jourdain, des Missions Etrangères. 15

A proverb figuratively expresses a familiar truth common to a given culture and proven by usage. It carries the authority of tradition and has connotations of universality. Used as an epigraph, it applies a general formula to a specific work and thus establishes by implication the universality of the work itself. Since a proverb crosses historical boundaries, the realm of influence of a proverb-epigraph, unlike that of an epigraph taken from a single literary source, includes not only the story to which it directly applies but also the world of the reader. This last feature makes it particularly appropriate to parody, which constantly seeks to relate itself to the reader by alerting him to its methods, signalling the medium, calling attention to the parodist’s status as a reader, and so on. The universal pretentions of the proverb-epigraph suggest that the parody likewise may have general significance for the reader, whatever the distance implied by its setting, its comicality and exaggeration, or its status as a formal work of art. Laforgue’s choice from an alien culture is especially appropriate to Salomé, for it underscores the contemporaneity and relevance of this most exotic and Oriental of stories.

The text of the epigraph describes the process of life, the “sortir” of birth and the “rentrer” of death, thereby identifying at the outset the “moralté” of the parody. Salomé goes out of herself, is born through her relations with the Baptist, but makes the fatal mistake of trying to go back, and dies for it. Destroying the evidence of her transgression by having the Baptist beheaded does not suffice to
keep an inexorable truth from realizing itself. Salomé did not have the common wisdom of the epigraph, but the reader is armed with it beforehand and may use it to interpret her story. The epigraph also reflects the theme of cyclical revolution that runs throughout the tale: not only the cycle of life, but also the revolution being celebrated when the story opens and completed by Salomé’s fall at the end.

The Story

The story generally follows the four parts of Hérodiade: the opening scene at the palace that introduces the tetrarch; the visit to the subterranean rooms of the building and the cell where the Baptist is imprisoned; the anniversary banquet, the dance of Salomé, and the decapitation of Iaokanann; and finally, the removal of the head. Like Hérodiade and Salammbô, Salomé opens with a description of the court on an anniversary holiday:

Il faisait ce jour-là deux mille canicules qu’une simple révolution rythmique des Mandarins du Palais avait porté le premier Tétrarque, infime proconsul romain, sur ce trône, dès lors héréditaire par sélection surveillée, des Îles Blanches Esotériques, dès lors perdues pour l’histoire, gardé toutefois cet unique titre de Tétrarque, qui sonnait aussi inviolablement que Monarque, outre les sept symbolismes d’état attachés à la désinence teta contre celle de monos. (179)

Unlike the tetrarch’s birthday festivities in Hérodiade, or the victory feast in Salammbô, Salomé’s celebration commemorates a literal palace revolution, in which the lowly Roman governor ascended the throne as the first tetrarch. The theme of revolution introduced in the epigraph is thus restated prominently in the very first sentence. But Laforgue includes an initial parodic irony: “rythmique” suggests that the revolution will recur regularly, perhaps even at two-thousand year intervals, and hence does not augur well for the present regime; the “jours caniculaires” are indeed traditionally unlucky. Accordingly, the civilization born of a revolution will die at the hands of another one, Salomé’s fatal tumble and the Baptist’s implied ascension at the end.

That Salomé is supposed to inherit the throne, however, is clear from “héréditaire par sélection surveillée”: Laforgue’s play on the
nineteenth-century concept of heredity and Darwinian natural selection blatantly relates the civilization of the Isles to the late nineteenth century, thus signalling the modernizing principle of the parody. The July setting ("canicules") and the theme of revolution suggest what will shortly be made explicit, the anachronistic likeness of the celebration to the anniversary (since 1880) of another famous revolution, as in *Hamlet*, the French national holiday. Laforgue later attaches the epithet "de juillet" to the sun (181) and the exotic fish in the pond (191), calls the holiday specifically a "fête nationale" (187, 239), and gives it the stock attributes ("pétards et orphéons, pavоisement et limonades," 187) of its late-nineteenth-century French counterpart, the fourteenth of July.

The final clause, justifying the title of tetrarch by its etymology, would seem ludicrously irrelevant except for the remarkable fact that it is not quite right: "tetrarch" is not an appropriate name for the new monarch and, with Salomé's disastrous end, the story will prove that the term—and the office—are less "inviolable" than they seem. Furthermore, whatever the significance of the number seven to this dynasty of mystical Decadent tetrarchs, the fact remains that "tetra" means four and thus clashes with the "sept sym­bolismes d'état" with which it (as against "monos") is supposedly associated. Such an inaccurate analysis, placed so conspicuously in the first sentence, provokes the humor of gratuitousness and warns the reader not to take the narrative at face value. The comical misuse of "tetra" reflects and calls attention to the methods of the parody itself which deliberately misinterprets another work and uses it for its own purposes. The parodist himself practices this kind of faulty, and suspect, philology. In exposing its own processes, the story declares itself a parody, and ensures that the reader will take it as one.

The *Iles Blanches Esotériques* are, as their ludicrous name implies, a Decadent's paradise, a closed, isolated, sterile, hermetic world that Salomé, in her role of "cariatide des îles" (227) must literally uphold. They are separated from the rest of the world ("archipel de cloîtres de nature," 197) and, as we are told here, have been lost to history for the past two thousand years, a detail signalling the return to history that is the parody, which revives the origi-
nal story. They are governed by the tetrarch and the Mandarinat of the palace: le Grand Maître des Bibliothèques, l’Arbitre des Élégances, le Conservateur des Symboles, le Répétiteur des Gynécées et des Sélections, le Pope des Neiges, l’Administrateur de la Mort, and l’Ordonnateur-des-mille-riens. These titles are all suggestive of Decadent themes and play on the Oriental forms of Salammbô (“l’Annonciateur-des-lunes,” “l’Ordonnateur-des-œuvres”) and on set expressions, such as elegantiae arbiter and “ordonnateur des pompes funèbres.”

The inhabitants of the Isles exaggerate the stock characteristics of the Decadent. “Pâles, épilés, les doigts chargés de bagues, sacerdotalement empêtrés dans leurs coruscants brocards lamés” (195), they worship in the lunar, Lohengrinian “Basilique Blanche” and sing their hymn of praise to the Decadent god, Ennui: Laforgue converts the “Te Deum laudamus” to a “Taedium laudamus” (193), the familiar joke applied literally to the Decadent taedium vitae. The most energy that they ever mustered up was almost to carry out a stoning on an overly zealous Iaokanann. They are beardless, eat no meat, hold annual ceremonies in honor of the cult of the snow, and profess a philosophy of atrophy, elitism, and reclusion: “Les mandarins pensaient qu’il fallait atrophier, neutraliser les sources de concurrence sociale, s’enfermer par cénacles d’initiés vivotant en paix entre eux dans les murailles de la Chine, etc., etc.” (221). The “etc., etc.” directly signals the parody and keeps us from accepting the narrative as a transcription of reality by reminding us that it consists of clichés, so familiar a programme that we may complete it on our own. And in drawing attention to the parodist’s role in the narrative, it leads us to question the reliability of the account. He leaves things out, and thus leaves his story open to suspicion.

As at the start of Hérodias, the tetrarch appears on the terrace, leans against the railing, and reviews in his mind the events that have preceded the narrative. Laforgue modifies the setting in all its details to fit his target. The monolithic palace, a “titanique masse funèbre veineée de blême,” reflecting “mystiquement” the rays of the July sun (181), embodies the morbidity, mysticism, and anemia of its Decadent inhabitants. It is an elaborate affair, with inner courtyards, galleries, cellars, a hanging garden, and an observatory
whose tower projects two hundred meters into the sky. The famous balustrade of Flaubert's story is here made of decorative faience, suitable to the aestheticism of the Isles, as are the city walls covered with yellow enamel flowers (183). The story opens not at dawn but at a silent, "stagnant" high noon (181), consistent with the lethargic, atrophic atmosphere of the place and the Decadent ideals it embodies.

The tetrarch's name, Emeraude Archetypas, parodies the conventional Hérode-Antipas: the simple addition of an "m" sound changes "Hérode" into a favorite Decadent image, the jewel, notably one known for its purity, and a new prefix for "Antipas" produces "Archetypas," the model and type of his kind, the crown jewel of Decadence, as it were. He is a disillusioned aesthete, a fatalist, a dilettante, an aging dandy wearing elegant gloves, Ennui personified: like Baudelaire's monster, he slowly and sulkily smokes his midday houka and gazes at the sea, that Laforguian symbol of the Unconscious and mystical bliss. The sacred fish pond of Salammbô, so important to the novel's theme of violation, here becomes merely a Hamletic mirror for the tetrarch meditating on his wasted life. Nothing ever came of the omen that marked his birth, a lightning bolt that flashed alpha and omega across the sky; the second coming has been long in coming, and meanwhile he has spent many a high noon, like this one, thinking about this "tirelire mystique" (189) in which he had placed such hope. His scepticism and relativism console him to some extent, in a self-parodic Laforguian formula ("et puis, alpha, omega, c'est bien élastique," 189), but solve nothing. Despite daily pilgrimages to the family necropolis, he cannot seem to resign himself enthusiastically to nothingness, as he had done so devotedly in the ascetic days of his youth.

The tetrarch's reflections are inspired by a near-catastrophe of the preceding day: the arrival of the Princes du Nord, countrymen of the radical socialist Iaokanann who is imprisoned in the basement of the palace. This version of the Baptist's name immediately evokes Flaubert's Hérodias, but Laforgue transforms him into a nineteenth-century socialist revolutionary, an engagé intellectual with gold-rimmed spectacles and an unkempt beard, his nose al-
ways buried in a pile of papers and pamphlets. He has been thrown into prison not for having disapproved of the tetrarch’s adulterous and incestuous marriage to Herodias, but for having tried too enthusiastically to inspire a revolutionary consciousness in the lethargic inhabitants of the Isles. Significantly, Laforgue’s Baptist, prophesying the coming of the people’s revolution rather than the Messiah, had failed, according to the old adage, even in his own country (“déjà si peu prophète en son pays,” 187). In this he resembles that former ascetic and résigné, the tetrarch, with his faith in allusions to the Book of Revelation. The likeness between them is supported by the importance of revolution to both: we are, after all, celebrating the anniversary of the revolution that brought the “infime proconsul romain” to power. Their history does not bode well for the third prophet in the story, Salomé.

In a manner typical of Laforguian parody, Salomé formally enters the story in one of the tetrarch’s offhand, apparently trivial reflections—that in the light of the arrival of Iaokanann’s countrymen, the Princes du Nord, he had done well not to have him beheaded: “Heureux encore! et cela grâce aux inexplicables intercessions de sa fille Salomé, de n’avoir pas dérangé le bourreau de sa traditionnelle sinécure honoraire, en l’envoyant vers Iaokanann avec le Kriss sacré!” (187). In a remarkable violation of the legend, Salomé has parodically interceded with her father to spare the Baptist’s life. The reason for her “inexplicables intercessions” goes unstated, and remains so until the end, but already this detail focuses attention on her relations with Iaokanann. It also explains her resistance to marriage (189) and hints at her motive for the beheading, likewise suppressed: her secret sexual relations with him. The “Précurseur” of tradition becomes here “l’Initiateur” (241), and Salomé will make him pay with his head.

The Princes du Nord are ridiculous bourgeois figures in military garb, “sanglés, pommadés, gantés” (191), who profess an imperial state philosophy (“l’autorité armée, religion suprême, sentinelle des repos, du pain et de la concurrence internationale,” 219ff.) and mouth maxims about progress: “Et tout honnête homme, d’ailleurs, professe / Le perfectionnement de l’Espèce” (221). Ugly, tasteless, and inarticulate, they recite meaningless “salamalecs ga-
lants" (195) and wear a parodic symbol of honor, the "Toison de Fer" necklace whose "nullité artistique" (213) stands out glaringly among the exquisite aesthetic treasures of the Isles. They believe in a military ideal, detest declassed ideologues like Iaokanann, and express their self-satisfaction in banal clichés: "se félicitant eux-mêmes du bon vent qui... à pareil glorieux jour... en ces îles" (191). By letting their words trail off and not filling in the holes, Laforgue conveys the emptiness of their thoughts and the utter conventionality of their speech, and alerts us, as before, to the parodist's role in the narrative. But in making us complete the Princes' utterances ourselves, the text also establishes a relation between us. Like us, the Princes see the curious world of the Isles for the first time and are asked to interpret it ("Ce fut donc l'aquarium—mais est-ce que ces princes étrangers comprirent?" 207), along with the crucial recitation of Salomé in part three. They provide another model of the reader besides the parodist, and specifically a negative one: everything goes by them completely.

The tour of the palace in part two passes through Salomé's exotic apartments and produces a few first tantalizing glimpses of her. The Princes du Nord and their hosts arrive at the observatory "ah! juste à temps pour voir disparaître une jeune fille mélodieusement emmousselée d'arachnéenne jonquille à pois noirs, qui se laissa glisser, par un jeu de poulies, dans le vide, vers d'autres étages!" (195). Nearly identical words mark their visit to the next stage, the hanging garden, where they notice her disappearing around a bend in the path, this time escorted by greyhounds and mastiffs, like her mother goddess, the chaste lunar Diana (197). The phrase returns as they arrive at Iaokanann's cell, in time to see her slip out the door (211). This disappearing figure motif is inspired by a structurally similar feature of Flaubert's narrative: Salomé repeatedly eludes Herod, who glimpses her several times before he finds out, at the moment of the dance, who she is. Long before her seductive dance, she has aroused his desire and thus guaranteed the fulfillment of her request.

In Laforgue's version, however, which abandons the theme of Herod's desire altogether, the recurring motif parodically calls attention to Salomé's bizarre dress ("emmousselinée d'arachnéenne
Salomé
jonquille à pois noirs”), which, unlike other aspects of her attire, does not belong to her traditional iconography. The color yellow is everywhere associated with Salomé in the story: she is metonymically a “petite vocératrice jaune à pois funèbres”; the decor of her apartments (“oh! si jaunes!” 193), the color of the moon with which she is associated (205), and the stage itself in part three (215) all reflect her penchant for yellow. But the insistence on “jonquille” in the thrice-stated description of her dress suggests another sense contained in the word, communicated by its synonym, the metaphorically more obvious “narcisse.” This detail is important: the repressed term not only suits Salomé’s narcissistic character but also hints at the precise motive for the beheading. Her relations with Iaokanann take her out of herself, a privilege formerly reserved for the stars (“Salomé ne sortait guère d’elle-même qu’aux étoiles,” 239). And only at the end do we learn that in fact it was the stars that gave her the idea for her sexual adventure, those sexually suggestive nebulas with their “évolutions giratoires” (241). Salomé aspires beyond her Decadent association with the chaste moon to the stars, but the aspiration entails a sacrilege. She violates the narcissistic code of the Isles and thus must dispose of the evidence. This loner, this “fuyeuse de fêtes nationales” (239), actually makes a most fatal contact. The symbolism of her dress suggests her motive in asking for the Baptist’s head, itself the symbol of her only transgression, her one sortie out of herself.

Beginning at the top with the observatory, the tour works downward through the garden, menagerie, and aquarium, to the cellars. Each part comically provides relevant information about the parodic heroine. The observatory, with its fresco-painted mobile dome and gigantic equatorial telescope, reflects her otherworldly astronomical interests. In the “Salle des Parfums,” she dabbles in the occult world of chemical compounds, a mad scientist somewhat like the Edison of Villier’s Eve future or, as we shall see specifically later, Poe’s doctor in “The Truth about Mr. Valdemar.” She concocts special potions, the purity of which is marked by a persistent “sans” in a long list full of ludicrous verbal play: “des épilatoires sans sulfure d’arsenic, des laits sans sublimé corrosif, . . . des teintures vraiment végétales sans nitrate d’argent, hyposulfite de soude,
sulfate de cuivre, sulfure de sodium, cyanure de potassium, acetate de plomb (est-ce possible!)” (197). The hanging gardens, reached by an endless, humid corridor and a door turned green with fungus and moss, prefigure the Unconscious world of the Aquarium. They have the same stillness, silence (197), and claustral (199) character; the “garulements distingués” of two Oriental bulbuls prepare the “garulement mystique” (233) of Salomé herself later on. The menagerie is equally bizarre, with sleeping fauves, swaying elephants, elongated giraffes, snakes incessantly shedding their skins, and groups of monkeys in curious **tableaux vivants**.

But it is the Aquarium that most completely embodies the Decadent Unconscious:26 labyrinthine, silent, claustral, humid, and womb-like, it represents the “béatitude aveugle et silencieuse” (205) to which the Decadents of the Isles aspire, the Buddhist nirvana, perfect tranquillity, stillness, and satisfaction, unlike the tormented, restless existence of men, perpetually unfulfilled. The Aquarium contains caves, corridors, plains of fine sand disturbed only by the flapping tail of a fish; colonies of sea horses in a single tree on a desolate plain; hairy nuclei, a cemetery of mollusks, beds of truffles in orange velvet, and plantations of asparagus “confites et tuméfiées dans l’alcool du Silence” (203); fields of sponges, bulbous onions, corals, worms, and so on, “toute une flore foetale et claustrale et vibratile agitant l’éternel rêve d’arriver à se chuchoter un jour de mutuelles félicitations sur cet état de choses” (205).27 And at the center of the underwater labyrinth, on a plateau, sits an octopus, a parodic “minotaure gras et glabre de toute une région” (205). But Laforgue treats the Aquarium with considerable irony, interrupting the narrative and attributing to the submarine flora and fauna some highly comical qualities. The coupling crabs, with their “after-dinner good humor,” obviously enjoy themselves: “s’empêtrent en couples avec de petits yeux rigoleurs de pince-sans-re” (201). A passing fish provides the only reading matter for eyes half-buried in the sand: “et dont c’est même tout le journal” (203). King crabs capsize and skirmish to give themselves a rub-down: “mais sans doute d’elles-mêmes ainsi pour s’étiriller” (203).

Bits of tripe float about and settle down elsewhere: “et, ma foi, s’y refaisant une existence” (203).
The Pope des Neiges interprets the “antique leçon” of the Aquarium for the Princes and the reader—beatitude, silence, stillness, blindness, total satisfaction, narcissism:

Ni jour, ni nuit, Messieurs, ni hiver, ni printemps, ni été, ni automne, et autres girouettes. Aimer, rêver, sans changer de place, au frais des imperturbables cécités. O monde de satisfaits, vous êtes dans la béatitude aveugle et silencieuse, et nous, nous desséchons de fringales supra-terrestres. Et pourquoi les antennes de nos sens, à nous, ne sont-elles pas bornées par l’Aveugle et l’Opaque et le Silence, et flairent-elles au delà de ce qui est de chez nous? Et que ne savons-nous aussi nous incruster dans notre petit coin pour y cuver l’ivre-mort de notre petit Moi? (205)

The still creatures of the Aquarium in their mystical state of torpor are models of ideal existence. The underwater world expresses a pantheistic beatitude, as for Flaubert’s Saint Antoine, but here that of the Unconscious self. It is precisely this narcissistic ideal that Salomé betrays in aspiring “au-delà de ce qui est chez [elle],” to the stars and to sexuality.

The most eventful moment of the visit occurs, as in Hérodias, in the basement of the palace at Iaokanann’s cell, where the failed prophet has an appropriately parodic vision:

Et soudain, on le vit se hausser sur ses pieds nus, les mains tendues à une apparition à qui il hoqueta les plus doux diminutifs de sa langue maternelle. On se retourna.—ah! juste pour voir disparaître dans un tintement de clés, sous le blafard de cet in-pace, une jeune forme décidément emmousselée d’arachnéenne jonquille à pois noirs. (211)

“Apparition” makes the object clear: Laforgue parodies Moreau’s painting by setting the scene before the beheading and reversing the roles. The familiar “juste pour voir . . .” identifies the apparition as Salomé, and Iaokanann adopts the celebrated pose (on tiptoe, barefoot, hands extended toward the apparition) that Salomé has in the painting. Whereas there Salomé is startled by her vision of the Baptist’s head, which haunts and punishes her for her part in the execution, here Iaokanann is haunted by the vision—or glimpse—of Salomé. This parody of a Salomé work reflects the larger story, itself a parody, and conspicuously broadens the target from Flaubert to the whole late nineteenth-century Salomé genre and the Decadence embodied in it.
Moreover, Laforgue uses this parody-within-the-parody to reinforce the thematic inversions of his story. First, as her chant in the next section makes clear, Salomé herself is a prophet, having inherited the role from her father, although her message of atrophy and Unconscious *laisser-aller* is the direct antithesis of Iaokanann's socialist ideas of class revolution. Second, she takes revenge on her lover (as according to the painting the Baptist took revenge on her), but for a rather different kind of execution. Iaokanann's childlike outburst of tender words in his "langue maternelle" (we know that he can speak the language of the Isles, 185) suggests that Salomé the *femme fatale* has conquered him, but for yet another parodic reason: to satisfy her sexual curiosity.

The banquet scene of part three consists of a series of parodies leading to that of the dance. Laforgue transforms the palatial hall of all the Salomé representations into a tent ("un bariole vélarium", 215), and if one is tempted to relate this to the tent in the dance scene of *Hérodiad* or the banquet scene of *Salammbô*, the parodist makes his intentions clear: Salomé's is, rather, a circus tent, as "bariolé" suggests, with a succession of acts preceding the feature performance. Laforgue emphasizes the parodic nature of the theater by describing the stage explicitly as "une scène d'Alcazar" (215), a typical nineteenth-century café-concert, whose moorish style and name comically fit the Salomé context and parodically recall Moreau's interiors as described in *A Rebours.*

The performances are those of the circus ("la folle frise de cirque," 217): mountebanks, jugglers, and virtuosos, doing songs, dances, and pantomimes. A dancer dressed in the scaly costume of a serpent, and singing "Biblis, ma soeur Biblis, tu t'es changée en source, toi!" (217) provides a parody of Ovid's story of incestuous love, which plays on the Decadent taste for this, and further reflects on the story, itself a parody of legend with an equally parodic dancer. Clowns turn the handle of barrel organs, "avec des airs de Messies qui ne se laisseront pas influencer et iront jusqu'au bout de leur apostolat," a burlesque preview of the proselytizing of that "petite Messie à matrice" later in the show, Salomé herself. Trapeze artists "aux ellipses sidérales," prefigure the parabolic arc traced by Iaokanann's head at the end as it falls into the sea, and Salomé's final tumble as she
follows it. And three clowns act out the sense of Decadent metaphysics:

Et trois autres clowns jouèrent l'idée, la Volonté, l'Inconscient. L'Idée bavardait sur tout, la Volonté donnait de la tête contre les décors, et l'Inconscient faisait de grands gestes mystérieux comme un qui en sait au fond plus long qu'il n'en peut dire encore. Cette trinité avait d'ailleurs un seul et même refrain:

O Chanaan
Du bon néant!

Néant, la Mecque
Des bibliothèques!

Elle obtint un succès de fou rire. (217-19)

Laforgue here mocks Schopenhauerian and Hartmannian ideas by portraying the three terms of their philosophy as clowns in a pantomime, each playing out its own character. The parody is also a self-parody, with the parodist participating in the very Decadence that he mocks: Laforgue's own verses (the refrain) and persona (the clown) are part of the circus act. And in the self-reflexive manner of parody, it prescribes the reception proper to it: “un succès de fou rire.”

As the moment of Salomé's appearance approaches, Laforgue provides another parodic dance, which this time closely—and hilariously—resembles the legendary dance of Salomé; a young ice skater “valsa sur les pointes comme une ballerine” (219) and leaves the stage skating on his hands, his fingernails becoming metaphorically the runners of the skates (“patinant sur les ongles d'acier de ses mains,” 219). This inverted Salomé recalls Flaubert’s Hérodias, in which Salomé finishes her dance by bounding across the stage on her hands. But Laforgue's skater specifically etches a gothic cathedral on the ice, and with this detail the scene also evokes the celebrated representation that allegedly inspired Flaubert in the first place: the portal of the Rouen cathedral depicting Salomé as an acrobat, dancing on her hands. The parody returns to the source of its alleged source, the “Salomé” behind Hérodias, and thus reminds the reader of its own structure, as well as its own potential for reusage in another, future work.
Consistent with the café-concert atmosphere, Laforgue’s heroine is a cabaret chanteuse, a chansonnière who hams it up for the audience and accordingly gets her legendary reward. Dressed in a chiffon sheath she slowly descends the staircase, signals to the guests to take their seats, blows a kiss on her fingertips to her father, and, moving to center stage to be admired by all, totters on her toes, the only movement at all resembling a dance that she will make. For her number, rather, she adopts a pose parodically adapted from Moreau’s Salomé paintings, in which she balances on her toes and holds her arms outstretched: “délicatement campée sur le pied droit, la hanche remontée, l’autre jambe infléchie en retard à la Niobide” (227). From her shoulders rises a large peacock-feather fan, providing a kaleidoscopic halo for her spectacular head: “une roue de paon nain, en fond changeant, moire, azur, or, émeraude, halo sur lequel s’enlevait sa candide tête, tête supérieure . . .” (223). Her face carries the typical “sourire crucifié” (223) and “yeux décomposés” of the Laforguian Eternal Feminine.

Here Laforgue explicitly links Salomé with Salammbô. Both have powdered hair, a symbolic gold chain about the ankles, a pink mouth, bare arms, a peacock-feather headress, and a black lyre. Both are associated with the moon: Salammbô follows its cycle and literally grows weak as it wanes; for Salomé, “pour faire un sort à la petite personne en question, la Lune s’était saigné à quatre veines” (227). Both descend the stairway slowly and, accompanied by the lyre, chant a nearly incomprehensible hymn. Although the subject of Salomé’s parodie chant departs from Salammbô’s incantation, Laforgue does not abandon it: Salammbô’s tale of Masisabal, whose head was cut off, attached to the prow of his victor’s ship, and carried along on the waves, returns at the end of the parody, when Iaokanaan’s head, thrown into the sea, is likewise borne along by the waves. The parodie integration of Salammbô into Salomé here prepares us for the final scene, the conversion of the Baptist into another figure whose head floats on the waves, Orpheus.

Despite her resemblance to Salammbô, however, Salomé possesses a significantly distinctive trait: her unusually large head, her “candide tête supérieure,” so heavy that it literally and figuratively
inhibits her actions. "Que sa tête lui était onéreuse! Elle ne savait que faire de ses mains, les épaules même un peu gênées" (225). Her cumbersome head functions caricaturaly, representing her over-developed faculty, her excessive cerebrality; she resembles the “théosophes hydrocéphales” (229) of her song. Her large head, her metaphysical preoccupations and the imbalance that they cause, keep her from performing the essential Salomé act, the dance, and inspire instead the parodie hymn. The heavy head is also consistent with the inversion of Salomé and the Baptist, and the theme of revolution, that the story has developed: in the last sentence of Hérodias, his heavy head is transferred to her.34 Ioakanann’s head will be buoyed up by the waters; Salomé’s would be too heavy to float.

In a ludicrous prose replete with puns, alliteration, verbal play, periphrasis, and an abstract philosophical vocabulary, the hymn preaches the aesthetic and moral of the Unconscious—absolute harmony, passivity, and total submission to the Unconscious law of the universe:


This revolutionary rejects all divisions and hierarchies ("Loin, les cadres, les espèces, les règnes!” 235) and calls for self-consciousness to give way to the purer state of the Unconscious: “Est-ce une vie que s’obstiner à se mettre au courant de soi-même et du reste, en se demandant à chaque étape: ‘Ah, ça! qui trompe-t-on ici?’” (235). But Laforgue undermines her proposal to plunge into the “harmonieuse mansuétude des moralités préétablies” (235) and lose oneself forever, not only by making it consist largely of word play and interior rhyme (“Ça s’avance par stances, dans les salves des valves, en luxures sans césures, en surplus appâlis, qu’on abdique vers l’oblique des dérives primitives,” 235), but also by suggesting from the beginning that she is aware of putting on an act:
Salomé, ayant donné cours à un petit rire toussotant, *peut-être pour faire assavoir que surtout fallait pas croire qu'elle se prenait au sérieux*, pinça sa lyre noire... et, de la voix sans timbre et sans sexe d'un malade qui réclame sa potion dont, au fond, *il n'a jamais eu plus besoin que vous ou moi*, improvisa à même. (227f., emphasis mine)

The narrative accordingly interrupts her opening sentence with an incredulous “se moquait-elle?” (229). Her performance is derided as a “sommaire abatage de théogonies, théodiciées et formules de la sagesse des nations,” and a “garalement mystique” (233). She herself weakens her credibility by her Latin quotation, whose authority she chooses badly: as always, Molière’s joke (“Pourquoi l’opium fait-il dormir? parce qu’il a une valeur dormitive”) ridicules purely verbal reasoning, and hers is verbal reasoning par excellence. More ironically, the quotation reflects on the tedious, soporific chant itself, which may impress the islanders but simply bores the Princes du Nord, who look at their watches and wonder when she will be put to bed (237). Salomé is a fake and a hypocrite: in a symbolic gesture, she resolutely breaks her lyre over her knee and silences herself forever.

Although she forsakes the tradition of the dance, Salomé remains true to her heritage by asking for the head of laokanann on a platter. Laforgue’s story has none of the traditional explanations (the ire of Herodias, the wrath of Salomé for having been scorned), but has provided sufficient clues to the parodie one, which he makes explicit in part four as the heroine holds court with the night sky:

Ah! chères compagnes des prairies stellaires, Salomé n’était plus la petite Salomé! et cette nuit allait inaugurer une ère nouvelle de relations et d’étiquette!

D’abord, exorcisée de sa virginité de tissus, elle se sentait maintenant, vis-à-vis de ces nébuleuses-matrices, fécondée tout comme elles d’évolutions giratoires.

Ensuite, ce fatal sacrifice au culte (heureuse encore, de s’en tirer à compte si discret!) l’avait obligée, pour faire disparaître l’Initiateur, à l’acte (grave, on a beau dire), nommé homicide... 

Allons, c’était sa vie; elle était une spécialité, une petite spécialité. (241)

This otherworldly creature aims beyond the Decadent Isles and their lunar ideal and seeks to emulate the stars, most of all those stellar representations of the Unconscious, the nebulas, “les a-
morphes, les perforées, les à tentacules,” and especially Orion, “ce pâté gazeux aux rayons maladifs” (241), the mystical nebula of her puberty (243). Indeed, this has inspired the sacrificial and sacrilegious act of sexual initiation. She is now “fécondée tout comme elles d’évolutions giratoires,” and can proudly look Orion in the eye (243). She even dresses according to the night sky: diamonds twinkling in her hair, and a deep-mourning violet gown with golden polka dots, like the dark heavens flecked with stars.

But if Salomé has discreetly made for herself a place in outer space, she nevertheless is determined to dispose of the evidence, Iaokanann’s head (now referred to more intimately as “Jean,” 241). Her passion for scientific experiment makes her try to send electric currents through it, like Poe’s *in articulo mortis* experiments in magnetism, an effort that here parodically yields only grimaces. But she has skill with chemicals too, as the Salle des Parfums attests, and she thus prepares the head elaborately:

"Or là, sur un coussin, parmi les débris de la lyre d’ébène, la tête de Jean (comme jadis celle d’Orphée) brillait, enduite de phosphore, lavée, fardée, frisée, faisant rictus à ces vingt-quatre million d’astres. (241)"

The parenthetical aside, specifically likening the Baptist’s head to that of Orpheus, integrates into the parody another famous Moreau painting related to his Salomé ones, “La Jeune Fille thrace portant la tête d’Orphée,” in which Orpheus’s head indeed rests on his lyre. This suggests Salomé’s plan—rolling it into the water—and also prefigures the end of the parody and its symbolism: the rise of a new, true bard to replace the ineffectual and fallen Salomé. Significantly, the head here sits on the pieces of her shattered lyre, symbol of her “shattered” purity and powers. Accordingly, she places her greatest treasure, the Orion opal from her crown, “comme une hostie” (243) in his mouth. She may intend to bury with him this symbol of her puberty (243), but as a host it is also a sacrificial offering, thus ensuring his salvation. Like another parodic Salomé, Stendhal’s Mathilde de la Môle—as outrageous an example of Romanticism as Laforgue’s heroine is of Decadence—Salomé gives the head of her lover a last kiss. But if Mathilde’s macabre actions derive from her desire to bury her lover’s head with her own hands, Salomé’s “petites mains de femme” are more
violent, grasping the "géniale caboche" and tossing it over the cliff into the sea:

L'épave décrivit une phosphorescente parabole suffisante. Oh! la noble parabole!—Mais la malheureuse petite astronome avait terriblement mal calculé son écart! et, chavirant par-dessus le parapet, avec un cri enfin humain! elle alla, dégringolant de roc en roc, râler, dans une pittoresque anfractuosité que lavait le flot, loin des rumeurs de la fête nationale, lacérée à nu, ses diamants sidéraux lui entrant dans les chairs, le crâne défoncé, paralysée de vertige, en somme mise à mal, agoniser une heure durant. (245).

The pun on "parabole" (parabola and parable) makes the arc traced by the Baptist's head a literal allegory for Salome: she indeed follows suit, but parodically, falling over the railing and crashing headlong into a hollow of the rocks below. This "petite astronome" (243) resembles that of the famous fable, "l'astrologue qui se laisse tomber dans un puits," and reflects a similar moralité: she who can measure the exact position and magnitude of the stars cannot correctly calculate the distance to the edge of her own parapet, and she pays for it with her life.

But however artificial her past, Salome utters, at last, "un cri humain," and thus her gruesome end seems unwarranted. Even the famous Laforguian irony is rarely so gratuitously harsh as to condone such brutality. Here the answer again derives from the parody, which distorts a feature of Morcau's "Apparition" as Huysmans describes it in A Rebours. There the gems of her costume seem to come alive by the light emitted by the Baptist's nimbus, and stab her with fiery sparks:

Sous les traits ardents échappés de la tête du Précurseur, toutes les facettes des joailleries s'embrasent; les pierres s'animent, dessinent le corps de la femme en traits incandescents; la piquent au cou, aux jambes, aux bras, de points de feu, vermeils comme des charbons, violets comme des jets de gaz, bleus comme des flammes d'alcool, blancs comme des rayons d'astre.38

Laforgue parodically ignores the metaphor and stabs his heroine quite literally with the jewels, each representing a star, with which she has dressed her hair. Moreau and Huysmans depict the Baptist's posthumous revenge on his executioner; Laforgue's Salomé is
punished, more appropriately, by the very emblems of her other-worldliness and artificiality, her star diamonds. She finds her longed-for place "loin des rumeurs de la fête nationale," but far, as well, from the observatory and even farther from her goal, the nebulas, as the text tells us with ironic banality: "Quant aux lointains du ciel, ils étaient loin" (245).

Significantly, Iaokanann's head becomes a kind of star, a "phosphorescent étoile flottante . . . sur la mer," somewhat closer to earth than Salomé's distant ones. Like the head of Orpheus, it is buoyed up and carried along by the waters, and the allusion suggests that it will, like his, ultimately reach land and survive. Iaokanann thus takes over for Salomé, who, in a parody of the last line of Salammbo ("Ainsi mourut la fille d'Hamilcar pour avoir touché au manteau de Tanit"),39 dies:

Ainsi connut le trépas, Salomé, du moins celle des Îles Blanches Esotériques; moins victime des hasards illettrés que d'avoir voulu vivre dans le factice et non à la bonne franquette à l'instar de chacun de nous. (245)

In a manner typical of the genre, the explanation of Salomé's accident becomes a commentary on the parody itself. Laforgue comically implies that the "hasards illettrés" which constitute the parody do not account for her end; her fate does not result merely from a parodic need to alter the original. Decadence actually kills itself and thwarts its own aesthetic purposes. However, he also reminds us that it has permitted the parody by which, transformed, it lives: Salomé herself made the Baptist a "shining star" and a new Orpheus, by her preparation of the head in phosphorous and by her bold venture out of herself, her sacrificial gift represented by the Orion opal placed so carefully in his mouth.

Moreover, consistent with the self-reflexivity described in chapter 1, the parody here does not have the final word. It is merely another text, subject to the same critical treatment that the original and target have undergone. The qualifying aside about Salomé ("du moins celle des Îles Blanches Esotériques") admits openly the existence of other Salomés, other versions that are, or will be, as valid as this one. And the irony of the last line (the quaint "à la bonne franquette" and the literary "à l'instar de") in fact directs the mockery at "chacun de nous," the parodist and ourselves. The sto-
ry has brought Decadence under fire, but ends by reminding us that the solution proposed in its stead may be no less absurd. For every artificial, Decadent Salomé there is, on the other side, a ludicrous, bourgeois Prince du Nord. Laforgue thus proposes a new text altogether, with the lesson of the parody at issue. Only this Salomé has died, only this *Salomé* has ended; the ironic last sentence suggests another parody, with another heroine, "à l'instar de chacun de nous."