

SALOMÉ

An enamel woman on a silver casket in a porphyry cavern. Legs closed, hands joined, pudendum concealed. An occasional flush: collar, calves, globe encircling the womb. The warm breath of dying passions, despite the seeming cold. Her eyes: "as if the decision to shut had not been Salomé's".

A boy's sun-blackened body. Wandering eye, passionate thigh. A gift, a vanity. Who was the first woman to never possess him? Jokanaan in the desert, waiting for the double moment: initiation into, and fall from, grace.

Ivory fingers find their thigh and a rivulet is released. Elsewhere a watery dove descends. A woman's wardrobe through which a warm breeze...

The edges of the desert and the city are traced. Scholars of scripture question your gaze. Outside the sanctuary, complacent slavery.

Since your birth's denial, scents and golden familiars, proffering, blessing. Hair's orison; a bluer nipple.

1983 *Austro Silva*

Jokanaan's dream of grace. Children in forests of lapis lazuli. Tigers become sages reconciling the interpretations of the Law.

And the cell door opens.

Passions are mental phenomenon. Thighs in an emerald agony for a saint are a dance, a shout. Herod Antipas-done for this world, and most likely the next-sees in her Venus Pandemos. And Salomé? The instrument of a wicked woman's spite for a dying man.

Pity the slayers of saints! Send the charger to the Princess.

You hold the head of a smiling youth you never knew. Salvation through beauty restrained. Temple and bedroom, an invitation; a boy and a girl, a denial to the Emperor. His body reunited and yours renounced. You will hear nothing of wars and wise men; occasionally a stray poet will chance upon you.