

# IDENTIFYING EGOISM, INDIVIDUALISM, SELFISHNESS AND FREEDOM OF CHOICE WITH THEIR CHARACTERS BY HINTING TO BIBLICAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS IN THE CONTEXT OF TWO PLAYS: HENRIK IBSEN'S PEER GYNT AND OSCAR WILDE'S SALOMÉ

Bağlam İçinde İncil'e Ait ve Mitolojik Karakterleri İşaret Ederek Karakterlerini Egoizm, Bireysellik ve Seçim Özgürlüğüyle Özdeşleştiren İki Oyun: Henrik Ibsen'in Peer Gynt'i ve Oscar Wilde'in Salomé'u

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### ABSTRACT

As an example of the first generation, this paper will focus on Henrik Ibsen's Peer Gynt published in 1867. For exemplification of the second generation, Oscar Wilde's Salomé first published in 1891 will be studied. Finding similarities between two plays, showing how they fulfill the specific elements of symbolism and sometimes decadence, and analyzing the main symbols in the plays are the main purpose of this paper. Although Peer Gynt and Salomé are not quite similar to each other, the authors of the plays used the same technique of creating a new story from the ashes of an old. This paper will start by comparing Ibsen and Wilde's styles, and why they chose to base their modern plays on old stories. Before analyzing these plays, it will be shown that these two plays are not from the pure imaginations of the authors and that the playwrights were inspired by ancient stories. Thus, some background information on each play will be given. Secondly, this paper will discuss the features and content of Peer Gynt. Structure and the content are very important in this play because it is written in poetic language, and thus is very different from his previous conventional plays. The play is about a young man in his twenties. He is dreaming and recounting his dreams to others. He is accused of being a liar because the dreams he recounts are not true. He makes up adventures that he in fact wants to experience. The play has five acts and it is not structured as a well-made play. Finally, the symbolism in Salomé will be analyzed. Salomé is not a poetic drama and has a different style from Peer Gynt. However, the basic idea is the same. This story is based on a biblical story about the prophet John who is executed by the Tetrarch.

**Key Words:** The Symbolist Movement in Literature, Purely Symbolic Characters, Stereotypical Images, Wholeness of Experience

### ÖZET

İlk neslin bir örneği olarak, bu makalede Henrik Ibsen'in 1867 yılında yayımlanan Peer Gynt eserine odaklanılacaktır. İkinci neslin bir örnekleme adına, Oscar Wilde'm ilk kez 1891 yılında yayımlanan Salomé eseri üzerinde durulacaktır. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı iki oyun arasında benzerlikleri ortaya koymak, sembolizmin ve bazen de gerilemenin belirli unsurlarını nasıl hayata geçirdiklerini göstermek ve oyunlardaki temel sembollerin analizini gerçekleştirmektir. Peer Gynt ve Salomé birbirlerine pek benzer oyunlar olmasa da yazarları aynı şekilde, eski bir öykünün küllerinden yeni bir öykü yaratma tekniğini kullanmışlardır. Çalışma, Ibsen ve Wilde'm tarzlarının karşılaştırılmasıyla başlayacak ve neden modern oyunlarını eski öyküler üzerine kurdukları sorusu yöneltilecektir. Bu oyunların incelenmesinden önce oyunların, yazarlarının saf hayal gücünden doğmadığı, yazarların kadim öykülerden etkilendiği ifade edilecektir. Dolayısıyla her oyuna ilişkin bilgi verilecektir.

Çalışmanın ikincil amacı, Peer Gynt'in özellikleri ve içeriğini ortaya koymaktır. Yapı ve içerik bu oyunda oldukça önemlidir çünkü oyun şiirsel bir dille yazılmıştır ve bu yüzden de yazarın diğer geleneksel oyunlarından oldukça farklıdır. Oyun yirmili yaşlarında genç bir adamı anlatır. Karakter, hayal kurmakta ve kurduğu bu hayallerin başkalarına anlatmaktadır. Yalancı olmakla suçlanır çünkü anlattığı hayaller gerçek değildir. Aslında deneyimlemek istediği maceralar uydurur. Oyun beş perdeden oluşmaktadır ve iyi bir oyun olarak kurgulanmamıştır. Son olarak Salomé'deki sembolizm incelenecektir. Salomé şiirsel bir dram değildir, Peer Gynt'tan farklı bir tarzı vardır. Ancak sunulan temel fikir aynıdır. Öykü Tetrarch tarafından öldürülen peygamber John'a ilişkin İncil'den esinlenilmiş bir öykü üzerine kurgulanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Edebiyatta Sembolist Akım, Bütünüyle Sembolik Karakterler, Basmakalıp İmgeler, Deneyimin Bütünlüğü

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Symbols could be seen everywhere literature and even in people's daily lives. Without giving any sub-meaning, a word would be worthless in literature. Symons Arthur and Richard Ellmann (2006) emphasize in their contributed book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* that "without symbolism there can be no literature; indeed, not even language". The beginning of the symbolic drama does not have a certain point since "it was a residue from an older, romantic philosophy" (Styan, 1981, p. 5). However, it was verbalized first in the nineteenth century of French Literature in the poets' school. The aim was to apply this style into poetry and for symbolists the important thing was "the existence of transcendent realism of being" (Mullane & Wilson, 1989, p. 169). "Although the term Symbolism was first applied to this school of poets by Jean Moréas in 1885, the stylistics, thematic and philosophical tenets of the movement were established earlier(...)" (Mullane & Wilson, 1989, p. 169). For instance, Richard Wagner (1813-83) is considered the pioneer of symbolist writing and composing. He believed that "myth" has a significant place in man's imaginative world. It is the source of inspiration. Wagner argued that music and drama should be together. With the harmony of these two, "the ideal lyric drama" can be created. In order to create the 'tone' of lyricism in drama, poetry needs to be used. Thus, the combination of music and poetry serves as poetical drama to its audience.

Symbols are important in poems. When poetic drama is used, symbols automatically transfer into the drama as well. There are some key points in symbolist arts. "Key terms in the symbolist poetics of the fin-de-siècle were 'evocation', 'allusion' and 'suggestion' and it is thus unsurprising to note that the symbolists were initially suspicious of what they perceived as the theatre's 'material and external nature'" (Chamberlain, 1997, p.25). While reading a text, the reader should feel suspicious about the characters and the things these characters mention in the play. In addition to this, there should be allusions. For instance, mythical or biblical images can be interpreted in the text. Staging the drama is also important in symbolist theatre. That is why the text is more important than the setting in the play. Styan (1981, p. 7) indicated that it is not possible to say anything directly on symbolism, but "Wagner's vision of purity and idealism in art led him well away from the realism of the later nineteenth-century stage". The idea of symbolism gained strength with Wagner's "desire to present a full emotional and spiritual experience on the stage" (Styan, 1981, p. 9). Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) contributed to the idea of symbolism with his work *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit* published in 1872. His aim was "to describe a drama which expressed our 'inmost being', and justify the necessity of a dream-world" (Styan, 1981, p.10).

Literature is associated with the imagination of the author and this imagination comes from the spirit. In Nietzsche's and Wagner's arguments on emotional expression of the dream world, "symbolist drama widened to embrace all theatrical manifestations of dream and fantasy" (Styan, 1981, p. 29). With the Naturalist movement, science became more important in literature and of course in drama. Symbolism was created as a reaction to this movement. "The naturalists regarded symbolists as romantic and decadent, and the symbolists scorned the naturalists as political and materialistic" (Styan, 1981, p. 24). They are in direct opposition to each other. Symbolists give importance to individualism, unlike Naturalists. "Defining the principles of Symbolist art, Gourmont noted that Symbolism meant 'individualism in literature, liberty in art,' and the 'abandonment of existing form,' as well as 'anti-naturalism' and a 'tendency to take only the characteristic detail out of lie'" (Mullane & Wilson, 1989, p. 170). As mentioned, "dream world" and "myth" are important to create drama, which is both far away from realism, yet also integrated with real life. One can separate the symbolist movement into two generations. The first generation is before Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949); the second is after Maeterlinck. Maeterlinck believed that poetic drama should not be performed as contemporary drama because "the style of acting" in contemporary drama was "too realistic" (Styan, 1981, p. 28). The spirit is important in poetic drama. Without spirit, the play would be meaningless. "If we stay on a realistic level, we remain ignorant of the eternal world, and therefore of the true meaning of existence and destiny, of life and death. The poet must deal with what is unseen, superhuman and infinite" (Styan, 1981, p. 28).

## 2. SYMBOLISM IN IBSEN'S PEER GYNT and WILDE'S SALOME

The spirit has a big role in writing symbolist plays. It is individuality itself and old fairy tales and myths contribute to removing materialism from the self. The material world, which is assumed to be reality, causes a person to become alienated from his or her own self and own reality. "Recognizing the illusory nature of the material world, the journey would be made back to the spirit" (Gerould, 2009, p. 81). Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* is an example of spiritual findings and selfness. Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* is also a play that describes

egoism and spirituality. While Wilde uses biblical image for the play, Ibsen chooses to use a character from an Old Norwegian fairy tale. Ibsen and Wilde unite a modern understanding of storytelling with old style stories. Both plays are re-constructed on old fairy tales and myths because the intention was not to create new stories, but to create a new form of storytelling with the help of old ones. Daniel Gerould (2009, p. 81) provides this idea in his article “The Symbolist Legacy” and says that symbolism “...sought not a rejection of the past, but reclamation of large bodies of secret knowledge and reconciliation of older, forgotten wisdom with the latest perceptions and insights”. In addition to this, Raymond Williams (1954, p. 97), in his book *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, indicates that Ibsen was in search of a new form. “Ibsen inherited a drama essentially formless, in any important sense; that this very formlessness limited the success of his refinement of the drama; but that he was always concerned to discover a new and adequate form, and at times came near to achieving it”.

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) dealt with unreal characters with real situations in his plays. These “purely symbolic characters” are not intentionally created as symbols because Henrik Ibsen did not want to be classified as a symbolist writer. He was always concerned about social problems in his plays, his “interest was not in the abstract problems” (Williams, 1954, p. 95). He mostly wrote allegorical texts to show how religion or society’s morality corrupted. In addition to these, he cared about a woman’s place in a male-dominated society. However, *Peer Gynt* as a poetic drama is not the same as any of Ibsen’s other plays such as *Ghosts*, *Hedda Gabler* or *A Doll’s House*. Although this play is different from his others, this difference did not prevent him from using his traditional “ideal woman” character or including “religion” in *Peer Gynt*. After all, Peer’s dream world is not unreal at all. All of Ibsen’s plays have symbols in them. He used symbols in his plays because he believed “life is full of symbols” (Styan, 1981, p. 26). Thus, although they are often hidden, the symbols in his plays are related to realism according to Ibsen himself. Despite his reluctance to be a symbolist writer, Ibsen is counted as one of the best symbolists in literature.

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) famously claimed “All art is immoral” (Styan, 1981, p. 35). His play *Salomé* is about the beautiful, young, virgin princess of Judea. Wilde retells an often-re-told old biblical story in this play. Even so, he changes some parts of this old story. Salomé, the main character, is a jealous young virgin who becomes the victim of her own sexual desires. She causes Iokanaan, the prophet, to be killed. Wilde was inspired by the biblical version of this story found in *The Book of Mark*, in which the prophet John is beheaded by the daughter of Herodias, wife to Herod:

And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give [it] thee. (...) And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother (King James Bible, 2010, 22-28).

In contrast to *Peer Gynt*, *Salomé* is not living in dreams. The only resemblance between these two plays is that they are based on old stories and include biblical references. For example, both plays also include reference to The Book of Matthew: “If thine eye offended thee, pluck it out!” (p. 74). *Peer Gynt* is a non-theatrical drama and Ibsen did not mean for it to be performed on stage. It is full of imageries and unreal characters. The basic theme is religion even though the main character tells made up stories through the play. “*Peer Gynt* is a romantic fantasy, or, as Ibsen called it, a ‘caprice. It is cast in the traditional form of the quest, but it is a quest, (...), which is devoid of self-consciousness of the more usual kind” (Williams, 1954, p.57). While Peer’s mother Ase is trying to find her son after he elopes with Ingrid, the bride from Hagstad, she says “(...) and of course one is glad to be quit of one's cares, and try all one can to keep thought far away. Some take to brandy, and others to lies; and we-why we took to fairy-tales of princes and trolls and of all sorts of beasts; and of bride-rapes as well. Ah, but who could have dream that those devil's yarns would have stuck in his head?” (Williams, 1954, p. 58). Peer’s mother is aware that Peer is living in a fantasy world. Peer’s whole being is based on those tales left to him from his ancestors. He expresses himself through lies, which are actually fairy tales that he tells others. The Symbolists reinterpreted myths eclectically and subjectively and created new mythologies that were intensely personal, subjective, and mysterious” (Gerould, 2009, p.82). In *Peer Gynt*, there are many mythological and fairy tales’ characters. The main character benefits from tales to create his own stories. For instance, trolls are featured throughout the play. Peer even has a son with the daughter of the Troll King. The trolls symbolize the *id* from Freud’s psychoanalytic theory (Styan, 1981, p. 24). They are ugly and they only think about themselves. “Troll, to thyself be- enough” (p. 69) is the advice given to Peer by the King of the Trolls. Peer as a free man symbolizes the *ego*. The interpretation of egoism is the individualism in symbolism.

He is a symbolist character since his imaginary life interferes in his real life. It is difficult to understand which of Peer's experiences. They may all be fantasy or they may all be reality. Peer is also a character from Norwegian literature who Ibsen incorporated into his work. He also writes in one of his letter "Peer Gynt is a real person who lived in the Gudbrandsdal, probably at the conclusion of the last [i.e., the eighteenth] or at the beginning of this century. His name is still familiar to the people up there, but of his actions they do not know very much more than what can be found in Asbjørnsen's *Norwegian Fairy-Stories*" (Downs, 1950, p. 72). It is obvious that Ibsen attempts to show the reader that the imaginative world is not so far removed from real life. The self and the universe are together. Subjectivity is what leads one's destiny. "The specific question that Ibsen asks again and again in a half dozen plays is whether man is the master of his own destiny, that is, how far he of his own free will may determine how he shall live and how he shall die" (Arestad, 1959, p. 286). With the help of inner self and imagination, Peer tries to take control of his own life. He might be seen as a failure as he sometimes loses his selfness in the name of being "Prince." However, he insists on remaining who he is. Peer can also be seen as the symbol of liberty and freedom. He acts according to his will. He lies for his own benefit. If this feature were analyzed from the perspective of religion, he would be the antagonist in the play. Despite Peer's obvious shortcomings, he is still a sympathetic character for the reader. Nothing can make Peer give up on his freedom. He indicates this idea while dealing with the Old Man of Dovre, King of Trolls:

To gain a bride and kingdom as well I'm ready to give up certain amount... Yet... there's a limit to everything. (...) a man can always go back on an oath... But to know that I'll never be free again – that I shouldn't die as an honest man but pass as a hill-toll all my lie, knowing that 'there is no return' as it says in the Bible – *that* makes you think- and it's something that I shall never agree to (p. 74-75).

Peer Gynt is a very intelligent character despite being a bit crazy. His intelligence comes from the tales that he spins and adapts to himself. His craziness makes him different from others. He is considered a storyteller. However, since society has particular norms such as lying is bad or imagination is unnecessary, Peer Gynt becomes an entertainment for the "normal" people. When he goes to Ingrid's wedding, he is humiliated. If he had not been excluded from society, he would just continue to lie and never damage others. Still, for Peer, anything can be an excuse to justify what he does. For instance, he engages in slave-trading to America and sells idols to China. In return, he helps missionaries to get to Asia and buys a place in Africa where he and his slaves can live in wealth, in order to get rid of his hamartias.

In spite of his sins, he becomes a religious image in the play because he prays whenever he gets into the trouble. God immediately fulfills Peer's wishes. For instance, when he prays to God in Act Four, he asks God to punish his rebellious friends on the ship: "(...) What a treacherous friend! Oh, hear me good Lord! You're so wide and so righteous – do punish the brutes! Lord, it's me- Peter Gynt Oh, Lord, please pay attention – unless you look after me, I shall be done for!" (Ibsen, 1966, p.121). Then, in what can only be interpreted as divine intervention, the ship sinks. The help of God and the way Peer prays (order) to God are ironic. The continuity of that act is more ironic because Peer becomes a fake prophet to cheat the Arabs. He tries to seduce Anitra with his prophecy. His disguise shows the reader that Peer is "every man" and every man carries hypocrisy inside. When he needs help, Peer remembers God and begs to Him, after gaining what he wants, he uses the image of God to deceive others. Moreover, Peer implies that he is every man:

"Yes, by birth; but cosmopolitan in spirit. For fortune such as I've enjoyed, I have to thank America. My amply-furnished library I owe to Germany's later schools. From France, again, I get my waistcoats, my manners, and my spice of wit, - from England an industrious hand, and keen sense for my own advantage. The Jew has taught me how to wait. Some taste for *dolce far niente* I have received from Italy, - and one time, in a perilous pass, to eke the measure of my days, I had recourse to Swedish steel (Ibsen, 1966, p. 113).

He tells the story of his becoming rich to his fake friends in Act Four. Ibsen indicates through these lines that Peer is a man that does not belong to one nation. Williams (1954, p. 92) claims that "(...) Ibsen's rejection of the 'individual personality' as the basis of the character convention in drama. [Peer Gynt] is not human at all, but purely symbols of a poetic vision". The female character Solveig is just as important as that of Peer as a symbolic image in the play. She is the common woman who fears and obeys a man for the sake of love. She waits long years for Peer to return to her. Ibsen shows her as the ideal pure image of woman. She is strong enough to live on her own in the forest. She is not selfish, unlike Peer:

Solveig in Peer Gynt, too, is an ideal figure of Ibsen's womanhood, whose greatness and strength of heart consist in her belief and trust and in her readiness to sacrifice herself. But Solveig is a little more than a victim of Peer Gynt's demands. She serves to indicate Ibsen's belief that woman is fundamentally society's

support. In this case, it is the pure woman, the basis of social morality, that proves to be society's redemption (Neserius, 1925, p. 35).

Even though Ibsen has a different style in this play, he still shows women's place in society. Three stereotypical female images are seen in *Peer Gynt*. The first is the troll woman [The Woman in Green] who is the image of demon or "whore", she seduces Peer and causes the separation of Solveig and Peer. Similar to the first image is that of the three dairy girls who Peer seduces. They have the same image as the Woman in Green. Second is Ase as the typical mother figure who is always thinking about her son. Finally, Ingrid is the image of the easily seduced woman:

Since Peer's state of mind alternates between the animalistic and the sublime, his mind is populated with female characters who reflect the low and the high. Peer's view of women therefore reflects the symbolic opposition between whore and Madonna – a view that has been soundly criticized as an expression of male chauvinist fundamentalism by modern feminist theorists (Lanlan, 2005, p. 173).

Xie Lanlan indicates that unreal characters and Peer's adventurous life are not the only symbols in the play. Peer's imaginative world about women separates women into categories. Peer's desire for women is similar in aspect to Wilde's *Salomé's* theme. One can assume that Peer's sexual desire causes him a great deal of trouble. This is similar to the situation in the play *Salomé*. Both main characters have a sexual weakness.

Other important figures in *Peer Gynt* are the mad people in the play. Peer stands before the statue of Memnon and hears its singing. The Sphinx is the "himself" of Peer. Huhu is the Language Reformer of Malabar and it is personified in the play. According to Dows, The Fella conceives King Apis as an ancestor of himself "a satirical give at the Swedes, with their cult of Charles XII" (p. 100). Minister Hussein is the person who identifies himself "alternately a pounce-box and a pen, nothing in fact but a writing-machine, as the Swedish foreign minister of that time, Manderström, prided himself on the efficacy of his official notes in 1864, when he achieved nothing beyond writing them" (Dawns, 1951, p. 100).

In Wilde's play, the main theme is sexual desire and the play fulfills some specific elements of symbolism and decadence. Petra Dierkes-Thrun (2008, p. 368) points out that "Wilde's *Salomé* (...) includes elements specific to symbolism and decadence, I employ symbolism to refer to the play's linguistic-poetic style and decadence to refer to particular content and themes". Herodias, Herod, The Young Syrian and Salomé are slaves of their sexual desires. Herod, the King of Judea, desires Salomé. Herodias desires the Young Syrian. The Young Syrian desires Salomé. The Page of Herodias says to the Young Syrian: "You are always looking at her. You look at her too much. It is dangerous to look at people in such fashion. Something terrible will happen" (Wilde, 2002, p. 4). The Young Syrian repeatedly tells others and himself how beautiful Salomé is. "She is very beautiful tonight" (Wilde, 2002, p. 4). Salomé desires Iokanaan who fiercely rejects her. She three times wants to touch Iokanaan with lust, but is rejected each time. These repetitions and foreshadowing justify the naming of this play as symbolist theatre:

Wilde's *Salomé* features a typically symbolist theatrical style and language characterized by synesthesia, evocation, and verbal repetition (similar to Maurice Maeterlinck's 1889 symbolist play *La princesse Maleine*, to which *Salomé* is often compared), paired with blatantly decadent subject matter and gender politics that include homoeroticism and a notorious fin de siècle femme fatale. *Salomé* also hints at the pervasive "sense of an ending" accompanying the nineteenth century's close, with its prominent themes of ennui and immorality in a corrupt world (Herod's decadent and divided court) (Dierkes-Thrun, 2008, p. 369).

Because of the incestuous relationship between Herodias and Herod, Salomé's thirst of blood, the sexual desires of many characters and lastly the inconvenient conversations about gods make the play decadent. For instance, The Cappadocian says that their "gods are dead" (Wilde, 2002, p. 5) and the First Soldier says, "The Jews worship a God one cannot see" (Wilde, 2002, p. 6). In addition to these, holding a prophet captive is a disrespectful action towards Gods. The play includes some important metaphors such as the moon, pomegranate, cedars of Lebanon, and the daughter of Sodom. The characters describe their desires for the opposite sex with these metaphors. For instance, the moon is the most repeatedly used metaphor in the play and it is the symbol of virginity and death. It is both beautiful and scary. Black night is the dark side of the moon. This might be interpreted the dark side of the people, especially women because of Salomé's actions towards Iokanaan. On the contrary, the moon is white and also symbolizes the good side of people, especially again women. Salomé is the one who references moon imagery the most throughout the play. "How good to see the moon! She is like a little piece of money, a little silver flower. She is cold and chaste. I am sure she is a virgin. She has the beauty of virgin. Yes, she is a virgin. She has never defiled herself. She

has never abandoned herself to men, like the other goddesses” (Wilde, 2002, p. 9). Salomé likens Iokanaan’s lips to the pomegranate fruit. This fruit symbolizes death in Greek mythology. Hades, the god of the underworld, uses this fruit to keep the daughter of Zeus, Persephone, in the underworld. This metaphor might foreshadow the execution of Iokanaan and of course Salomé.

The Page of Herodias defines Salomé’s beauty with death and the moon. “Look at the moon. How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from the tomb. She is like a dead woman. One might fancy she was looking for dead thing” (Wilde, 2002, p. 3). “She is like a woman who is dead” (Wilde, 2002, p. 3). Edgar Allan Poe (1846) defines a beautiful woman as a dead one in “The Philosophy of Composition”. The essence of this poem is beauty and beauty can be only created by the image of a woman according to Poe. He uses dead female imagery in his works, meaning that woman is death and that makes her the most beautiful woman in the world. Poe’s idea can be adapted into Wilde’s play, *Salomé*. Poe sells the female image and it is seen that Wilde uses the image of woman as demon, virgin-pure and also as the core of the desires. Poe prefers the dead woman image because he wants to silence the female character. Wilde does not silence Salomé or Herodias. As the woman is the demonic figure in the play, both women cause bad things.

In addition to Poe’s argument, Christopher Nassar and Nataly Shaheen (1999, p. 132) explain the image of Salomé as “the symbol of pure evil” and “vampire” in their article, “Wilde’s Salomé”. They claim that the play has three parts. “One of the significant tripartite associations of the play is Salomé’s connection with mythic demonic creatures. In his attempt to dramatize Salomé as a symbol of pure evil, Wilde associates her with the vampire, the siren, and the werewolf”.

At the beginning of the play, Salomé is described by both the Young Syrian and the Page of Herodias as being pale: “She is like a woman rising from the tomb” (Wilde, 2002, p. 3). Salomé, according to Nassar and Shaheen, is looking for blood to satisfy her desire. She “demands the head of Iokanaan” (Wilde, 2002, p. 39) and never gives up on that wish. Repetition appears in this scene as well. Salomé repeats her wish to have Iokanaan killed several times. Herod says to Salomé that the moon has turned red, which symbolizes that death is approaching for Iokanaan. After kissing the dead lips of the beheaded Iokanaan, Salomé exclaims: “Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Iokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth. There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood? .... Nay; but perchance it was the taste of love.... They say that love hath a bitter taste...” (Wilde, 2002, p. 45). The taste of blood satisfies her. She sounds like a crazy woman because she thinks the bitter taste comes from the love. One might think that the red moon symbolizes the loss of Salomé’s virginity. However, she does not lose her virginity physically. She loses her soul’s chastity. Salomé sacrifices her pride to Iokanaan and dances for the Tetrarch even though she despises him. After dancing, she is given the head of Iokanaan on a shield and kisses it. One more time she loses her chastity. Salomé is no longer pure and is now seen as the demonic figure of the play, supported by her mother Herodias. Herodias thus becomes the mother of the Devil. She says at the end of the play: “I am well pleased with my daughter. She has done well” (Wilde, 2002, p. 44).

### 3. CONCLUSION

Symbolist theatre is related to the imaginative world of the author. Both of the plays discussed in this paper were re-created with the dream world and ideologies of the authors. While Ibsen wrote his play with a structured poetic style, Wilde preferred a one-act well-made style in his play. Both main characters in each play, Peer and Salomé, meet with poor endings. Peer dies and Salomé goes mad – she is actually executed by the Tetrarch, but in Wilde’s play, her execution is not included-. The main characters in both plays are victims of their sexual desires. They never have the opportunity to be truly happy within the play. Because they become blinded by materiality, they either lose their beloveds or the lose the opportunity to be together. In both plays, especially in *Salomé*, with the exception of Ase and Solveig in *Peer Gynt*, women are seen devilish. Beyond stereotypical images, *Peer Gynt* and *Salomé* reject “the official doctrines and dogmas of institutional religions and politics” (Gerould, 2009, p. 90). Thus, one can assume that the consciousness of self and the “wholeness of experience” are the belief of symbolists.

Although there is no specific indication of when symbolic drama was first used, it can be said that symbolism in literature first appeared in the nineteenth century. It has since become an important aspect in our lives and is equally important in literature, especially poetry, as without it, literature would not exist as we know it. *Peer Gynt* is an example of the first generation of the Symbolist Movement in Literature, while *Salomé* can be considered an example of the second generation of this movement. Imagination and spirit are two other aspects that are important in symbolist literature. The Symbolist Movement in literature was a reaction to the Naturalist Movement. In fact, Symbolism and Naturalism are natural opposites: naturalists

believed symbolists were romantic and decadent, while symbolists believed naturalists to be too political and materialistic. Thus, the symbolist concepts of individualism and liberty became more important in drama and literature. The aim of this paper is to compare the writing styles of Ibsen and Wilde and why they chose the technique of creating a new story from the ashes of an old one rather than creating a purely imaginative story. A further aim of this paper is to analyze the structure and content of their respective plays *Peer Gynt* and *Salomé*. Symbolism in terms of the characters and imagery presented in both plays will also be examined. This paper first compares the writing techniques used by Ibsen and Wilde to create their plays. Then it analyzes the features and content of *Peer Gynt* and *Salomé*, with a focus on symbolic characters, stereotypical imagery, and wholeness of experience. Biblical and stereotypical character imagery will also be focused on. Ibsen wrote about unreal characters in realistic situations, but in a dream-world. His characters are considered “purely symbolic”. In contrast, *Salomé* does not use the dream-world and includes several biblical references throughout.

The results of the analysis of these two works demonstrate that Ibsen used mythological imagery while Wilde uses biblical imagery. Both writers were more interested in creating a new form of storytelling rather than creating new stories. Although Ibsen never wanted to be classified as a symbolist writer, he believed that life was full of symbols and therefore included symbolism in his writings. Interestingly, Ibsen is considered one of the most renowned symbolist writers. Wilde found inspiration in biblical stories and he specifically included symbolism within his writing. There is a great deal of character symbolism in *Peer Gynt*. The main character himself symbolizes freedom and liberty, there is nothing throughout the play that can make Peer give up on his freedom. He also symbolizes religion through his fervent prayers for help to God. The female characters symbolize the common woman and the ideal woman and woman as a victim. *Peer Gynt* is also a quest story with religious undertones. Mythological characters in the form of trolls are featured in this play. These mythological creatures symbolize the *id* while Peer himself symbolizes the *ego*. In *Salomé*, the main character symbolizes the femme fatale and the pure woman. Iokanaan’s repeated rejections of Salomé foreshadow the tragic ending of the play. This repetition throughout the play is an element specific to Symbolist literature. Symbols in the form of metaphors can also be found in the play through the use of the moon, pomegranates, the cedars of Lebanon, and the daughter of Sodom. The moon symbolizes virginity and death. The moon also symbolizes both sides of woman, the dark and the light side. The moon also represents the main character’s loss of chastity. The pomegranate is a symbol of death in Greek mythology. Both plays have distinctly different structures, one poetic the other a one-act play. Both main characters of the two plays meet with distinctly unpleasant endings. Both plays reject religion and politics, leading to the conclusion that consciousness of self and “wholeness of experience” are symbolist beliefs.

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