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Biblical story of Salome in Czech Decadent Culture and Art in the Early 20th Century

The specific atmosphere at the beginning of the 20th century significantly reflects the process of transformation of the Czech society based on economic, civic and socio-cultural constants and showing apprehensions related to further development of human civilisation expressed by the contemporary Art. At the turn of the century appeared in the Bohemian art a new type of imagining scheme of woman as a dangerous, dominant, arrogant, attractive and sensual creature – the femme fatale. It is also necessary to bear in mind the fin de siècle conception of the male artist (decadent, dandy), which actually constitute the basic interpretative framework for understanding of the imagining of the woman. This situation was reflected in the character of Salome the biblical dancer. The biblical story of Salome is perceived as a cultural phenomenon in the Czech art and culture of the early 20th century. The synoptic gospels all failed to give more detailed information of Herod's daughter, hence the subject provided space for original artistic interpretation, determined by the crisis in the spiritual values of modern society. The visual typology of Salome is closely associated with the representational conventions of the femme fatale, but in particular her distinctively sexualized kinetic potential as a dancer (understood by the evangelists as doomsday) is complicated by the artists through further levels of meaning. Modern treatments see the story of Salome and John the Baptist as an allegory of the tragedy of modern individual, lacking a spiritual essence of being. It also acquires significance as a conflict between the two sexes when the man is understood by Bible exegesis as a carrier of a spiritual message while the woman presents the opposite pole of existence and is a biologically determined being. Works of art were already being produced here after 1900 in response to the literary treatment of this subject. The initiation role in the transfer of this topic to the Czech milieu was played by French, English and Nordic literary and artistic models, especially in the circle of the periodical *Moderní revue* which brought the whole complex of exemplars of fatale woman. *Moderní revue* also established in the Czech milieu modern tendencies, topics and problems and supported artistic expression of decadence, symbolism and Art Nouveau. The woman was thus a product of male imagination surrounded by an aura of magic and gained particular sexual attraction, cruelty, domination and dynamic behavior typical for male character. Within

domestic output it achieved its greatest significance in the spiritualist and spiritually oriented circle of late symbolists known as the Sursum group.

Female involving many varieties of biblical, mythological or literary characters and is seen in the close relation to the male identity, but it is not possible to search her meaning only in the sexual plane, which is reflected in these connotation. Artists disagreed with the uniformity of the modern society and supported the individuality of art theme, expression and content, imaginative transcription of phenomena of a woman and active participation of the viewer in the final piece of art. The ever changing paradigm of artists loosens the boundaries of their personal choice when picking the topic and broadens imagination dimensions in the process of creation.