

Reception of Opera *Salome* by Richard Strauss in Aspazija's Novel "The Autumn Nightingale"

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Abstract One of the most striking characteristics of the Latvian culture and literature in the first decades of the twentieth century is the focus on diverse cultural and literary currents dominating the Western Europe cultural space. Having been greatly influenced by the phenomena of other cultures and literatures Latvian literature reveals transformations in human's individual and collective consciousness. The change of the paradigm of culture can be traced via the analysis of the reception process of significant "alien" impulses and their impact on "one's own" cultural space. The aim of the article is to study the importance of the monumental opera *Salome* (1905) by Richard Strauss in Latvia's cultural space of the first half of the twentieth century and its reception in literature by analysing Aspazija's (Elza Rozenberga; 1865–1943) novel "The Autumn Nightingale" [Rudens lakstīgala] (1933). The "alien" discourse in Aspazija's novel becomes "one's own" pre-text and a significant tool for depicting the atmosphere in the nation's biography and the perception of woman in the end of the nineteenth century society.

Key words cultural space; cultural context; *Salome*; opera; reception; Latvian literature

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Introduction

“Comme la princesse Salomé est belle ce soir!”

“How beautiful is the Princess Salomé tonight!”

“Wie schön ist die Prinzessin Salome heute Nacht!”

“Как прекрасна принцесса Саломея сегодня ночью!”

“Cik skaista ir Princese Salome šovakar!”

Traditionally, the concept “cultural space” is interpreted as a physical (geographical) space where one nation or part of its community cultivates certain cultural values. When one national cultural space interacts with another, the values that get imported most frequently are those which cannot be found in one’s own cultural space, but for which the national cultural space is spiritually ready. The periods of cultural transition and transformation, which signal the change of traditions, never relate to only one definite territory and nation, since any cultural space falls within a wider cultural context characterized by an informed choice of specific cultural values and models.

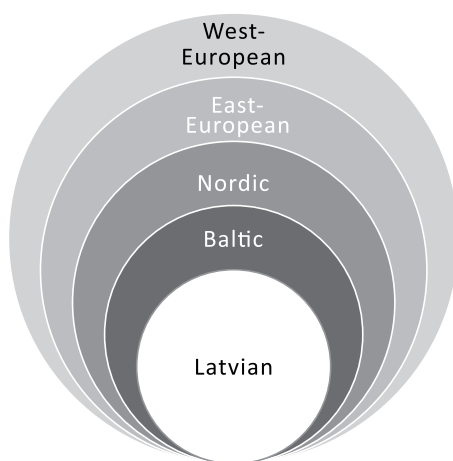
Culture, and consequently also cultural space, is a changeable reality; affected by the shifting contexts different cultural forms are in a constant process of changes. The dynamics of these processes is demonstrated by the transition periods which materialize in between the establishment of different social systems, namely, when the changes in the consciousness of the individual representing a specific cultural space are observed and when the old models still continue to exist but do not function any more, while the new ones are in the phase of formation. According to the Polysystems theory by Itamar Even-Zohar, there is a constant competition between the conservative and the innovative systems enhancing the inter-systemic transfer, thus within the framework of a polysystem the dynamics of a constant process is ensured (Even-Zohar).

West European early modernists’ creative works have received much attention all over the world, including cultures of small nations. Since the beginning of the twentieth century the vital inspiration for the Latvian literature has been the image and symbol of the erotic and dangerous woman Salomé, the female character in Oscar Wilde’s (1854–1900) one-act tragedy *Salomé* (1891), originally written in French and then translated into English. Hedwig Lachmann’s (1865–1918) German translation of Wilde’s play became the source for the German composer of the late Romantic and early Modern eras Richard Strauss’ (1864–1949) opera in one act *Salome* to his own libretto. The paper is aimed at studying the importance of the

monumental opera *Salome* by R. Strauss in Latvia's cultural space of the first half of the twentieth century by analysing the novel "The Autumn Nightingale" [Rudens lakstīgala] (1933) written by Latvian writer Aspazija.

Latvian Cultural Context

Many cultural artefacts of "large" nations have a monumental nature and they influence other nations, since the roots of any culture involve borrowing and adopting. The culture of Latvia, as the culture of any "small" (also "new" and immature (Rosseau)) nation, is in general characterized as heterogeneous – the feature that is being formed in the result of different historical, political and social circumstances and events. Latvia had been subjected to other countries since the thirteenth century till 1918, after a short period of independence it was occupied again regaining its independence in 1990. This ensures a unique cultural context and testifies to an undeniable influence of other cultures on the change of the paradigm of Latvian culture (including that of literature).



Graph 1. The Principal Creators of Latvian Cultural Context

If the transformations in human consciousness nowadays are to be looked upon as a conversion from the national to the global structure of culture, then in the history of every specific nation there is a stage(-s) when an opposite action takes place, namely, from the diversity, multi-formity, hybridity or absolute "literary vacuum" of culture to national cultural purity, the latter being the basic criterion for the appearance and existence of every "small" nation.

The second half of the nineteenth century in Latvian cultural space is marked

by two essential developmental stages which include both the tendencies of purification and globalization / modernization: 1) from the 50-s of the nineteenth century the processes of the formation of Latvian national consciousness are taking place, when, with *Latvianness* becoming a basic principle, the literature of national awakening is emerging; 2) at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century (especially from the 1890-s), for the first time in the history of its development, Latvian literature purposefully focuses on the general processes and values of European literature which become an integral driving force of Latvian literature. These events testify to a rapid dynamics of cultural processes and to transformations in human's individual and collective consciousness.

The ambivalent and polyphonic spirit of the aesthetic changes in West European culture of the end of the nineteenth century testified to artistic re-orientation; the new culture of Latvia also gravitated towards this, thereby, in an accelerated way and to a certain extent by leaps, moving towards the general cultural tendencies of "large" European nations, especially towards those cultural novelties between which the time distance was minimal. At Europeanization of the Latvian culture, the specific values of the national cultural heritage, and values of European cultural heritage of the past centuries were united with those of the present, because "[...] for the first time, West European cultural sources were widely open for the Latvian Nation. This is why the first [...] pioneers of the great cultural current [in Latvia] were completely engrossed in writings of nations of old and new cultures. The thoughts they thought were West European thoughts, the feelings they felt were the ideals of great nations, which in their fancies of quick-growing took shape of a voluptuously beautiful and imaginary consistent new world where poets and dreamers were governors and masters" (Klaustiņš 124-125).

An active participant of this process in the nineteenth century Latvia was the social anti-provincialism and female equality movement of "Jaunā Strāva" [New Current], and among them also the writers of the European and world level, prominent poets, playwrights and active public and culture figures Rainis (Jānis Pliekšāns; 1865–1929) and Aspazija (Elza Rozenberga; 1865–1943) (later husband and wife), whose activities are tightly linked with western Europe, especially Germany, and the culture of German speaking nations. Three decades later, while pondering on the setting of the novel "The Autumn Nightingale," Aspazija chooses the gone by times, i.e. the time of 1890s in Latvia, however in the exposition the main character — young opera singer — is performing the role of Salomé in opera, which is the event of the twentieth century. Thus, while describing the past events of her own and her contemporaries' lives at the end of the nineteenth century Latvia

(the period of “Jaunā Strāva”), the future event (opera *Salome*) is represented in the novel as such that has seemingly taken place already. By synthesizing the historical and cultural events from two centuries while depicting a specific culture historical epoch of Latvia, the retreat from the historical truth is made to symbolically depict the border situation of not only Latvian culture, but also the perception of a woman in the society and the woman’s self-awareness. The time when the novel was being created and published (1933) coincided with a current wave of popularity of Richard Strauss’ music in Latvia.



Picture 1. Opera “Salome” by R. Strauss in the National Opera on May 7, 1934.

Photo from the magazine *Atpūta* No 498, 1934.

In the role of Salomé – Milda Brehmane Štengele; Jokanaan – Ādolfs Kaktiņš

One of the examples is reviving of the opera *Salome* by R. Strauss in the National Opera in 1934 (Picture 1), the first of such waves being undeniably the beginning of the twentieth century. Individual’s (also nation’s) identity having been incorporated in a specific cultural space becomes a variable entity in the result of interaction between time, space and different cultural contexts and discourses (Freeman).

Salomé in Latvian Culture in the Context of West-European Reception

Salomé initiates in Latvia O. Wilde’s personality cult and the beginning of

Modernism, linking together into one system the tendencies of French – British – German – Russian – Scandinavian modern literatures and their influences. The role of Germany as an important transfer of both bringing the images and symbols of O. Wilde's Nietzschean-type works to Latvian culture and in connection with the first production of R. Strauss' opera *Salome* is one of the most actively discussed issues in Latvian periodicals of the beginning of the twentieth century.

Wilde and Strauss' "tandem" and opera *Salome* were rather frequently discussed in Latvian periodicals of the first half of the twentieth century. The precedent of the Latvian reception of *Salome* was the event in Germany – on November 15, 1902, producer Max Reinhardt¹ offered a private staging of *Salome* in Berlin *Kleines Theater*. Among the 300 elite guests there was also composer R. Strauss, whom Gertrud Eysoldt's rendering of Salome, bringing "anarchic, "animal" traits of Salomé to life grandly" (Kohlmayer 118), inspired for work at the opera (Evangelista 7).

The tragedy *Salomé* was shown on the stages of the greatest cities of Germany and in the Empire of Austro-Hungary, as well as in other countries, however the reflection of all these events of cultural life in periodicals published in the first half of the twentieth century in Latvia was outshone by the monumental work, the premiere of R. Strauss' opera *Salome* in the metropolis of the German opera — Dresden.

The development of Wilde's *Salomé* from French original into English, via Beardsley drawings, Lachmann's translation, Reinhardt's production, i.e. Eysoldt's acting, shows a process of increasing radicalization and brutalization of the character of Salomé, who is removed from the historical context of early Christianity and shaped with increasing clarity into an icon of eruptive sexuality. (Kohlmayer 119)

Latvian periodicals more than once informed about the changes concerning the date of the performance in Dresden, mentioning obstacles and difficulties "that arise during staging this opera, because it is the longest one-act opera hitherto written, moreover, the text of opera music is absolutely similar to that of Wilde's drama" (Opera *Salome*). The misinterpretation of facts was corrected later, when it was discovered that the composer had shortened the text almost for a half but had

¹ On Max Reinhardt in the context of the twentieth century Germany and Latvia, see: Radzobe, Silvija, "Makss Reinhards," 20. *gadsimta teātra režija*. Ed. S. Radzobe (Rīga: Jumava, 2002): 504-543.

precisely followed R. Wagner's principle of composition according to which melody had to emerge from word (Kohlmayer 119).

In 1907, the newspaper *Rigasche Zeitung* gave the analysis of both the tragedy *Salomé* by O. Wilde and the sensation opera by R. Strauss. In the article, O. Wilde's bond with the latest tendencies in literature was discussed (Hofmann "Eindrücke..." 3-4). This article stressed the idea that O. Wilde's *Salomé*, shown as "the glorification of hysterics," is a novelty. In its turn, R. Strauss' "language" or "Wagnerian ecstasy" was characterized not as an original creation but rather as "a dialect from the homeland of Isolde" derived from R. Wagner's music. Contrary to Wilde, who was marked as a brilliant bearer of the new epoch, R. Strauss, in critics' opinion, did not offer innovative musical thinking, but still was characterized by virility (Hofmann "Nachwort..." 19-20). Episodically, the name of R. Strauss could also be read in the context of O. Wilde's and H. von Hofmanstahl's life and work. Such evaluations can be explained by the fact that Wilde was given full honour as the original creator of *Salomé*: in Latvian periodicals of the end of the nineteenth century Wilde was first introduced by mentioning the ban of *Salomé* on the basis that it was illegal to depict Biblical characters on the stage ("Rakstnieciskas..."), but the first decade of the twentieth century was the first peak of Wilde's popularity among Latvian early Modernists who saw him as their "guiding star." The tragedy *Salomé* by O. Wilde was translated into Latvian a couple of years after the premier of R. Strauss' opera — in 1907 (by F. Jansons) and in 1912 (second version in 1939) (from French by J. Akuraters), namely, during the time when *Salomé* was an equally important segment of modern culture in both Germany and Russia¹ (the impact of both cultural spaces upon Latvian culture is undeniable).

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Latvian literature created a number of works that quoted, referred to or argued with the image of a demonical and erotic woman (the poem (1905) and the story (1906) "Salome" by Birznieku Sofija; "Sfinksa" by Zemgaliešu Biruta (1906) a.o.); in later years, in the 1920-s–1930-s, by synthesizing the images of *Salomé*, Sphinx, Judith, Nora, Hedda Gabler, Latvian invariants of *Salomé* and hybrid formations of the New Woman were created in poetry, prose and drama by the next generation of Modernists ("Salome" by Kārlis Dziļleja (1925), "Salome ar Johanana galvu" [Salome with Jokanaan's Head] by Marta Endzelīne (1927) a. o.) (Kačāne). The texts basically referred to O. Wilde's tragedy, in a few works by Latvian authors the opera *Salome* (the dance of the seven

¹ The translations of *Salomé* in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century: V. Adruson, L. Adruson, K. Balmont (ed.) (1904), anonymous (1906), E. Brik (1907), K. Balmont un E. Andrejeva (1908), M. Likiardopulo (1908). (Polonsky 164; Roznatovskaja 70).

veils) had been used as an inter-text.

At the beginning of the twentieth century some of Wilde's plays were staged in Riga city Russian theatre, nevertheless, the first production of the tragedy *Salomé* in Riga Latvian Theatre (Interimtheatre) took place on October 2, 1918 under the restrictive circumstances of German occupation (in the role of Salomé — Milda Riekstiņa (M. 6.); director — A. Freimanis (Kundziņš 59). The first stage version of *Salomé* in the independent Latvia was shown on December 27, 1920 in Daile Theatre, produced by Eduards Smilģis — the supporter of the theory “art for art's sake” (in the role of Salomé — Tija Banga, Anta Klints) (Sniedze 106). The premiere of the opera *Salome* after the libretto of O. Wilde's drama took place in the season of 1922/1923 — on February 24, 1923.

More and more often the Latvian periodicals evaluated R. Strauss' work positively, especially in the 20-s and 30-s when the composer's contribution was being re-evaluated and the composer was considered the first of all musicians who, prepared and freed from fear by Nietzsche, had descended to “the night of humaneness” (quoted — German critic Dr. Volbach) (Sproģis 15) and whose contribution best of all manifested itself in the context of O. Wilde's *Salomé* and H. von Hofmanstahl's *Electra*. It is just the opera version of the play that becomes a media of the avant-garde art work which incorporated the nature of transformation, firstly, from English to German and from a literary text to a musical one, synthesizing into the genre of *Literaturoper* (literature opera), popular at the beginning of the twentieth century; and secondly, it marked the general shift from France as a performer of a leading role in Europeanization the image of the New Woman to the cultural space of Germany and the Empire of Austro-Hungary (See: Walton 217-228).

Opera *Salome* by Strauss and the Novel “The Autumn Nightingale” by Aspazija

In 1921, the outstanding Latvian poet and dramatist Rainis dwelled upon the evaluation of Wilde's *Salomé* in his diary notes and expressed a very negative opinion:

I strongly dislike when love is combined with bloodshed. Love — the acme in human's life — spiritual — as a phenomenon, and it is combined with the inferior — bloodshed. As in *Salomeya*. This can be done only by a barbaric, uncivilized person. The fact that this play is such a success shows how wild this time is. I wanted to read *Salome*, but could not read it till the end — I feel

disgust. [...] the whole life shows that the European culture is still brutal, only covered with a veil. (Rainis 52)

Despite such a dramatic assessment of the tragedy *Salomé* on the part of Aspazija's husband Rainis, the opera *Salome* by R. Strauss is an entity for characterizing the epoch's border situation, cultural-historical landscape and a version of the New Woman in Aspazija's novel "The Autumn Nightingale" published in series in the magazine *Atpūta*, 1933 (the subtitle of the novel is "The Novel from the 90-s" [Romāns no deviņdesmitajiem gadiem] (Aspazija). (See Picture 2 and 3).



Picture 2. Aspazija on the Cover of First Page of the Magazine *Atpūta* No 430, 1933



Picture 3. Starting the Publication of the Novel "Autumn Nightingale" in the Magazine *Atpūta* No 430, 1933

The novel is considered semi-autobiographical. It depicts the period of "Jaunā strāva" in Latvia; the characters representing the cultural life in Riga are projected with the author of the novel herself (Arta Augstkalne) and Rainis (Jarmuts Asmins) — the then new editor of "Dienas Lapa" (in the novel — editor of "Jaunā Diena").

The love story of both writers began in 1894; at the end of the nineteenth century, they both experience an active period of individualism and a dynamic stage of seeking one's own self. In the 30-s of the twentieth century, Aspazija, now a mature writer who has already realized many of her intentions, through a narration in the third person, through a vast description of cultural-historical materials and an emotional depiction of spiritual atmosphere that go beyond the limits of the turn

of the nineteenth and twentieth century, looks back on the life of a modern woman (also on her own) as well as on that of Latvia at the end of the past century, or at the individual and national identity.

The novel begins with a description of an evening in a crowded theatre hall, where an unpopular but extremely talented singer performs on the stage, and the opera-goers are fascinated by her debut in the role of Salome, among the audience there is also Jarmuts Asmins:

This evening in the theatre was the fourth one when Salome was performed with the young actress in the title role. The opera was repeated time and time again, and it almost outrivalled the theatre performances that were shown on the same stage. (Aspazija, "Rudens..." 31)

In the context of the epoch, cultural life in the novel is characterized through mentioning 1) the difficult economic conditions that interfere with work and existence of culture institutions, and therefore in the premises of one theatre (Riga Latvian Theatre is mentioned) both plays and opera performances performed by a specially organized opera company are shown; 2) the restrictive circumstances of censorship, which initiate rather than stop seeking for free manifestations by modifying different art forms. *Salome*, often called "a small opera" (Aspazija, "Rudens..." 32.), is characterized in the novel as an adequate work for expressing oneself through music even under the restrictive circumstances of censorship:

The censor was also sent the score of Wilde's Salome along with its libretto. In notes he, of course, did not understand anything, they looked to him like flypaper stuck round with flies, but the text after all was taken from the Bible [...]. (Aspazija "Rudens..." 32)

An important aspect of Aspazija's novel in the context of this theme is the fact that the protagonist of the novel is an opera singer in R. Strauss' opera *Salome* in the period when this opera has not yet been created in the historical reality. Philipp W. Stockhammer notes that history is always being interpreted in an individual way, and all important world historical, and consequently also cultural, events are locally adapted and become part of the process of hybridization, since the diachronic nature of history is inevitably related to changes and hybridization:

History is always perceived and recorded locally and individually. This means

that the so-called grand narratives of world histories are locally appropriated in a process which [...] might be termed hybridization. [...] every historical perspective is diachronic and most diachronic developments are connected with change. Change, however, is often inseparably connected with the phenomena of cultural hybridization. (Stockhammer 3)

For Aspazija essential is not the chronological truth, but rather the description of the transition period situation and the image of a new, free, confident and determined woman. In the novel, the staging of the opera *Salome* is laconically declared as the beginning of a new stage in Latvia's culture: "With this the epoch of opera began then" (Aspazija, "Rudens..." 32).

Aspazija and drama are as indivisible as Aspazija and poetry, however, if poetry implies deep feelings and musicality of soul (Aspazija, "Mana..." 259), then drama relates to the conflicts of human soul. Opera, in turn, as Aspazija says, is the emblem of great European nations which has to be rooted in the traditions established in the past; in the young Latvia, opera performances basically introduce alien values and thus are connected with "alien" and "high" art, which stands in stark contrast with the form how culture is manifested by "smaller" nations – heavy and rustic, but "one's own" theatre. To Aspazija's mind, unlike the theatre which is the cultural institution of the whole nation, but is undervalued by the Latvian government, the status of opera, including the outward splendor and elegance, singles it out as the place of representation, relaxation and relish for an upper class representative of urban space (Aspazija, "Opera vai..." 627-628). If theatre is concerned with the specific features of Latvian culture and is national by nature, then "we can't speak about our national opera as yet" (Aspazija, "Opera vai..." 628) since it is trans-national and embodies trans-cultural world values. Latvian opera emerged and started to become professional only during the period of independent Latvia, drawing ideas from West European opera, especially from German or, to be more precise, from German — Austrian opera which then dominated in intensity and influence. Within the context of three opera schools — Italian, French, German — just the latter had been given the decisive word in the history of opera by the Latvian periodicals, it was characterized as being especially close for a Latvian, since a deeply national and fantastical spirit together with truly German and profound thoughts permeated by romanticism, as well as modern psychologism singled out this school as being unique and spiritually close for a Latvian (Sproģis 14). In her memories, Aspazija characterized German opera as "very well-functioning" and professional. (Aspazija, "Atmiņas..." 408). The periodicals

published in the first half of the twentieth century considered Carl Maria von Weber, Richard Wagner, and R. Strauss to be the strongest foundation of the German opera.

The opera *Salome* by R. Strauss, just like the erotic and emotional heroine Salome, is a unique culture value and the manifestation of extreme individualism and freedom. Without denying what is specifically national, via the image of protagonist Arta Augstkalne, a former country (provincial) tutor and simultaneously also a mysterious sphinx, Aspazija reveals not only woman's, but also Latvia's (Latvia — a woman/mother) longing for changes, her need for transformations and inner freedom which through the artefacts of world-scale or "alien" cultures open greater opportunities for understanding "oneself" and "one's own" individual self-confidence, as well as the future prospects of "one's own" culture and social activities in the context of European innovative tendencies. The beginning of the so-called opera era is a symbolic declaration of a new start in nation's history. The author synthesizes things that are close and known ("Many of them had quite good voices, trained in choirs and at song festivals under the guidance of famous leaders." (Aspazija, "Rudens..." 32)) with what is European and modern, overstepping the boundaries of historical truth in favor of ideological ones.

The name of the protagonist has not been chosen by chance: Arta — art; Augstkalne — high + mountain (in the feminine gender) or "art that gravitates towards a high mountain" (Aspazija, "Rudens..." 34). The "high soprano" of the performer of Salome's role — the symbol of the prime origin of female — rises over Latvia's "joint choir" in terms of professionalism (standing for the outward, visible part of manifestation); this woman is also full of pride and energy and is approximated to Brunhild from *Nibelungenlied* (standing for inner psychological conflict):

Several [singers] have been tried in this role, but all of them were quite inexpressive, lacked fire, emotional intensity and especially refined psychology that this role required.

Was it in general possible to find such [a singer] among the Latvians who were such simple, gentle souls? This role was to be played with excited, torn nerves, which composed, though intelligent and gifted, persons did not have at all. We could somehow do with the voices, but acting, this erotic and semi-crazy acting which the role required — who could have been able to perform it? (Aspazija, "Rudens..." 32)

The transformation process of a strong but contradictory individual is demonstrated

via mentioning the past, i.e., Arta's old life with her husband-alcoholic, full of phantoms and humiliation, does not exist anymore, but the opera stage is only a platform on the way towards the understanding of the new world, it is the space of initiation to inner freedom. In the novel, opera is a symbolic border-space, it should be crossed just like "the Rubicon of the past" (Aspazija, "Rudens..." 84), because:

Stage alone was not enough for her, she thought about the stage of humanity. Being a strong person with a centrifugal gravity in the system of suns and planets, she wanted to unite and create out of the mist new luminaries round herself, so that through them she herself would break out brighter and would be able to radiate light in the darkness. (Aspazija, "Rudens..." 59)

In the novel, Arta is a symbol of a transition stage and dynamics, "We are people of transition, we are a road, not a goal" (Aspazija, "Rudens..." 76).

Deeply symbolic is protagonist's tight link with the Latvian Germans and German culture which she, just like the author herself, knows well since the very childhood. When the soloist, often called "the divine nightingale" and "the artist blessed by God," and critical reviews about whom could be read in both German periodicals and newspapers "Rigaasche Rundschau" and "Rigaasche Zeitung" published in Latvia, was dismissed from opera due to her social activities, thanks to the German family she received the invitation to perform in Germany. But Aspazija's heroine, though being a representative of "pure art" and a Latvian version of *femme fatale*, becomes also the advocate of social life and new truth in "one's own" cultural space, since according to the protagonist's and also author's belief a great artist must be also a great person. Having received a stimulus for the development from the "alien," but simultaneously close cultural space, the way to the individual feminine self should be paved further by herself.

Opera is the symbol of contradictoriness of philosophical search in the time when the musical drama of romanticism enters a new developmental stage, synthesizing the ideas of F. Nietzsche, A. Bergson, A. Schopenhauer and O. Wilde. Consequently, "woman" in the novel is viewed within a wider system of categories — "man," "society," "beauty," "art," "love" — in the transformation phase of ethical and aesthetic values. By transforming the text of the play into the system of semiotic sounds, the composer reveals deeply hidden anarchical and feminine rather than animalistic feelings in a human soul.

The masculine in the national discourse symbolizes national heroic spirit,

strength and nation's aspirations for independence and freedom, whereas the feminine is appropriated to symbolize the reproducer of the nation and the bearer of its symbolic values. (Meskova 276)

The image of a decadent, demonic and manly domineering woman-destroyer is supplemented by woman's (artist's) creative source and delicacy of soul, namely, to make one's way from the stagnation of the past towards the ideals of the future we need fighting strength and womanness. The title of the novel testifies to this fact when the daybreak song of a nightingale overpowers autumn darkness. A nightingale, taken as a synonym for words "song" and "poetry," symbolizes human's (a poetess') striving for the skill of achieving euphony of a language and orator's dexterity; a nightingale is an allegory of a poet's teacher.

Conclusion

In Aspazija's novel, the re-evaluation of the recent past has been done with a time distance of about 30 years and there is nothing accidental in the portrayals of time, space and people. In 1894, the time which corresponds to the time depicted in the novel, Aspazija's first big work — the play "Vaidelote" — is performed in Riga Latvian Theatre, where the protagonist, finding herself in a border-situation between the conservative and the innovative, quite often the radical, revolts against prejudices and emphasizes the value of a woman as a person itself. For Aspazija, Salome is the symbol of inner strength, unyieldingness and victory, and thus the mentioning of Strauss' opera shows both the themes of her own plays and forms of manifesting a literary heroine's inner freedom as a road of searching for one's own personal happiness.

The value of the novel lies in synthesis of the past, present and future time in a crossroad situation of national cultural space, when not only the cultural context, but also its sub-text becomes the reflection of the epoch, thus testifying about a complicated model of the evolution of cultural space from homogenous to heterogeneous, rather than about an individual's simple way from the old system towards the new one. Aspazija's novel shows the link with the modern Western imagination but disputes about the notion "backwardness" (see Davies 28-31), when the culture of "small" nations is being seen from the perspective of "great" nations as a peripheral imitation of the culture of Western Europe (Baer 4). Aspazija's heroine as a performer of the role of Strauss' opera Salome is a woman of protest and a new archetype of the feminine. The main heroine, the same as the author, having been aware of various cultural contexts and inspired by the grand works of

the word culture, chooses her own path in life symbolizing the independence of both a woman in particular and the culture of Latvia in general. Thus, at depicting the atmosphere in the nation's biography and perception of woman in the society in a specific period of its history, the "alien" discourse in Aspazija's novel becomes "one's own" pre-text and indicates to changes in individual and nation's consciousness, and consequently to changes in a specific cultural space.

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