

Carmen and Salome: the theme of "femme fatale" in the ballets of Mukaram Avakhri

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Abstract

The article deals with the image of the so-called femme fatale in Kazakh choreographic art in the case study of two ballets by Mukaram Avakhri: "Carmen" and "Salome". The author analyzes the artist's interpretation of the images of the two title characters as canonical cultural texts in the discourse on the history of female representation. At present, the choreographic theory is at the junction of feminist thought and choreographic interdisciplinary practice that strives to view the dancing female body through alternative means of cognition. The stereotype of femininity in dominant conceptions of the Western culture can be deconstructed through the new experience of female authors that influences the performer and the viewer in a new way. The directing and plastique-based approaches that help the young female Kazakh choreographer to achieve this are of interest to the authors.

Keywords: art history, ballet, female image, female choreographer, canon.

1. Introduction

Any discourse in the history of choreographic art of the late 19th and entire 20th centuries in Western culture cannot avoid the intersection with issues of aesthetic, gender, and class ideologies. This is particularly true of the topic of viewing the female body. To trace this relationship for us means to understand how the stage movement is formed and controlled in the context of theatrical performance as well as what the desires and expectations of the public and the invisible authors of dance art bring to this process. The need to study the work of female choreographers of Kazakhstan in the aspect of gender issues is dictated by the accumulated global experience and trends in modern choreography. The above determines the relevance of this study. As a hypothesis, we assume that groundbreaking representations of the female image in ballet can be created, on the one hand, by the historical and socio-cultural characteristics that have developed in a particular culture and, on the other hand, by the individual experience and personal characteristics of the choreographer.

1.1. Background

Historical experience shows that it was women who often became dance innovators (I. Duncan, M. Graham, P. Bausch, and others). The first essays on Western feminist art criticism which emerged from the second wave of the feminist movement in the 1970s focused on highlighting and

presenting the names of female authors to the public. The results published in recent studies prove the existence of female choreographers long before the names listed above, starting with Marie Salle in France in the first half of the 18th century, Madam Marikita from the 1870s to 1920s, and Katti Lanner in England at the same time. Susan Leigh Foster [1], Judith Chazin-Bennahum [2], Sarah Gutsche-Miller [3], and Ivor Guest [4] talk about the suppression of their creative achievements in art history, even though during their lifetime the artists' works in academic theaters and music halls were very popular.

2. Methods

The methodology of this study is based on the works of prominent specialists A. Daly [9], G. Pollock [7], E. Showalter [14], V. Midgelow [12], A. Koritz [29], and A. Ousmanova [6] who worked in a descriptive manner, which implies the need to question the theoretical foundations of art history and its patriarchal models of interpretation. The existing canons traditionally portrayed women in the gender roles as the object of the "male gaze" [5]. It should be understood that currently, it is not enough just to analyze how female choreographers in Kazakhstan are transforming the gender field. The recognition of female choreographers is the first step in the canonization process. The more recent works of Western feminist critics provide an opportunity to focus on how a new aesthetics is formed and asserted on the Kazakh scene within the framework of the narrative theoretical approach.

The possibility of a woman's multiple relationships with art is suppressed by the domineering position of the male creator. The object of worship turns out to be so repressed that has no choice but to admire the "narcissistic image of the male ego" [6, p. 467]. Such established patriarchal models created a natural opinion for society about the female image in art either within the framework of absolute positivity ("the ideal of beauty", "moral purity") or "depravity" and "lascivious profligacy" of unworthy women. It is no coincidence that G. Pollock believes that the conception of the images of women needs to be replaced by the notion of woman as a signifier in an ideological discourse [7]. Therefore, one of the main tasks of gender issues in art is to ask female authors to create new images of femininity beyond the already existing forms of representation. It is women authors who can "construct a different viewing space, intervening in the cultural construction of woman as fantasy object, replacing it with the 'subject-performer'" [8, p. 256].

In the global history of choreography, this was largely achieved by the pioneers of modern dance who indirectly defended feminist principles with the styles of the anti-ballet movement [9, p. 307]. In Kazakhstan, during the second half of the 20th century, this trend continued. While the stationary academic theater adhered to the classical and national direction, bold experimenters actively rose to prominence on alternative venues, and most of them were female choreographers: Gabbasov Sisters, Gulnara Adamova, Irina Dubrovina, and others.

The Astana Ballet Theater, founded in 2012, has become a unique team in view of its team of performers, multi-style orientation, and repertoire policy. The main members of the troupe of the new metropolitan collective consisted of 24 young girl-dancers. This feature contributed to the fact that the experiment-oriented theater put on some original performances in the first seasons. One of the brightest and most promising choreographers of the theater, in our opinion, is Mukaram Avakhri. Professionally trained in the classical Russian ballet school and at the same time brought up in a traditional Central Asian family with strong family ties, Avakhri, as a choreographer, has the quality of "doubled sensibility which is capable of seeing more than in the West or the East alone" [10, p. 46]. The choreographer's intellect has always been attracted by the concept of duality,

"mirroring" when the division into black and white is rejected. The aesthetics of Avakhri's creations hint at her desire to speak not directly but with symbolic associations that can be seen in all the works. At the beginning of the creative career, Avakhri's aspirations were focused on the search for new expressive forms of national dance which characterized the searches of all post-Soviet artists of the 1990s in the process of the so-called "ethnic renaissance" [10]. The changes in the world of the 2000s prompted Avakhri to move from introspection to social and political reality, and it was then that the female image became the artist's main theme. Two of the most successful eponymous ballets – Carmen and Salome – became the starting point of this research.

3. Results

Carmen and Salome are eternal canonical images, classical cultural texts, which, in our opinion, is even more interesting for an alternative interpretation. Reinterpreting from a different perspective can reveal the multi-layered contradiction and ambivalence in these works. The importance of such a rethinking is to look back with a fresh look, to enter the old text from a new critical direction so that the text becomes something more than another chapter in the history of culture. For women, reinterpretation becomes an act of survival: "Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves" [11, p. 18], – just as Vida Midgelow writes the work on the coded bodies of the ballet canon that ballet canon reworkings have re-choreographed the body such that a wider variety of bodily incarnations are encompassed allowing for divergence and multiplicity, as opposed to uniformity and sameness [12]. This is exactly what happens with Avakhri's works. Applying this approach to interpreting the images of Salome and Carmen, the artist explicitly and consciously brings the complexity of these femmes fatales to the foreground.

The idea of the show "Carmen" to the music by Bizet-Shchedrin was born from two factors: the choice of the director who knows how to find unconventional creative solutions and the limitations due to the absence of male performers. As a result, the choreographer demonstrates "a different mentality" [13, p. 48]. The artist makes an attempt to free her own and the viewer's gaze from the traditional fixed attitudes imposed by the centuries-old ideology of female representation. However, as Avakhri delves deeper into the issue, the artist immediately faces the problem of how such a gender approach is constructed in works of art. The author (in this case, the choreographer) seems to speak in two voices: the voice imposed by the dominant cliché in society and the voice associated with the thoughts and feelings of the suppressed social group. That is, the voice represents both "male" and "female" worldviews (double-voiced discourse) [14, p. 204]. The reason for this paradox, in this case, is that the author of the original novel, Prosper Mérimée, introduces Carmen to the world in 1845 through three narrators. All the narrators are men, each of whom portrays Carmen in his way. Mérimée makes no mention of motives, feelings, and thoughts on behalf of the female character herself. Only with the appearance of the opera by Georges Bizet 30 years later, the plot is given a deeper drama, in which "devilish passion, demonstrative destruction of regulations ..., disarming courage in the face of the death of Carmen anticipated the impending feminization" [15, p. 61].

The young Kazakh choreographer shifts the semantic emphasis inside the dramatic performance and gives Carmen the chance to reveal herself. What is the secret of the name Carmen? Femme fatale, actress who reached the heights in the art of flirting and seduction. What is her true face? Avakhri tries to understand what drives the character and decides to disassemble her personality into its components. Thus, five faces appear on the stage, the "five hypostases" of Carmen [13, p. 48]. (Photo 1-2).



1. The first variation of the five Carmens (photo by N. Kamashev for Astana Ballet)



2. The promotional photo of the Carmen performance (photo by A. Nurekin for Astana Ballet)

For the choreographer to follow the desire to reveal the very essence of the feminine principle meant to abandon the storyline. Dramatic twists and turns are redundant in this case. The basis of the performance is dance scenes, in which five ballerinas shine one by one and then in the ensemble, making up a single image of Carmen. The character's versatility is represented, respectively, by five sensual constants: temptation (red), premeditation (blue), playfulness (pink), tenderness (yellow), and love of freedom (black). Therefore, an attempt is made to prove through a well-known example that a "ballerina does not always have to be a passive sylph or seductive siren any more, for sylphs can be powerful and sirens deeply moral" [16, p. 14]. With this technique, the author also avoids painting in white and black as a timeless depiction of virtue and vice. Where one ends and the other begins is up to the ballerinas themselves (not even the choreographer who allows the dancers to show their individuality in the use of the choreographic text).

The personification of the moral purity of Micaëla, as opposed to the fatal Carmen, is being reinterpreted. Avakhri admits that the poem by Garcia Lorca [17, p. 3] prompted the artist to think that the character's image, captured alone at the beginning of the story in a ray of light, is like "the prayer of all unfortunate women whose life is ordinary and boring" [18]. The first shot of Micaëla dressed in an ordinary gray suit is associatively superimposed by the recipient on the first picture of the famous Carmen Suite by Alberto Alonso. A feeling of a discrepancy between what was expected and what was seen involuntarily arises: who are we looking at, is it Carmen? Further,

meeting in a duet scene, Micaëla and Carmen act as characters of equal strength, different and close at the same time, denying each other and responding to the pain and feelings of the other.

In visual design, the choreographer and the costume designer Olga Shaishmelashvili avoid deliberate sexuality, dressing dancers in satin, medium-length dresses, simply cut. The "rebellious Gibson flapper girl's" [13, p. 48] head is ascetically adorned with a black bob cut. This is the case when external aesthetics affects how the movement and the body (in particular, female) react to it, which is now positioned as a potential place of resistance, a place that is never just a passive object but has the power of counter-strategic reinscription [12]. Only once during the performance, the audience sees a naked body, and this scene becomes the culmination. We believe that the scene of the revelation of the freedom-loving Carmen in black makes her the central figure of the ballet. The expressive body of the dancer is de-erotized through the most dramatic musical fragment (in Alonso's version – the fortune-telling scene) and the artistic content of the choreographic text. During the dance, Carmen in black takes off her wig and dress which draws the audience's attention, which from that moment on follows the choreographer's idea. Namely, a story-confession about the endless loneliness of a tormented soul which sounds with emotional anguish, denying the muteness of a naked body. The mirrors used in scenography are symbolic as ambiguous symbols of the feminine principle. One can hide from the crowd but one cannot run away from oneself.

The significance of symbols in Avakhri's ballets can hardly be underestimated. In "Carmen", the method of selecting a symbol refers to the generalization of the recipient's "various defects of visual activity" [6, p. 472]. For example, the beginning of the performance opens with a view of the original curtain, decorated with black fringe like the hem of a Spanish skirt. When the curtain rises, outlines of bare graceful female legs appear below, which refers to the aesthetics of voyeurism. In the final act, after the last common variation, the five Carmens again retreat into the depths of the stage and, turning their backs to the audience, hide behind the hanging fabric. In the third scene (the only one based on an excerpt from Bizet's opera "La Taberna de Lillas Pastia" which is absent in R. Shchedrin's adaptation), the theme of voyeurism is supported by a purely scenographic method. In the space above the middle of the stage, shutters are vertically suspended, behind which the Spanish women hide and observe what is happening, dressed like majas – young Andalusian maidens.

To sum up, let us say that the show "Carmen" by Avakhri appeared at a time when the female voice sounding from the stage no longer shocked the public. Undoubtedly, female choreographers of Kazakhstan had raised this theme earlier, for example, in the performance of "Female Dogs" by the Gabbasov sisters, but if we talk about representation as a deconstruction of traditional categories in art created by men for male authors, then:

- the work represents the first such experience for understanding the role of the female gaze in Kazakh art;
- for the first time, the author aims to reveal the psychological world of the main character from the inside;
- in the process of constructing images, the choreographer entrusts a large role to the performers' interpretation, thereby allowing the dancers to talk about themselves.
- for all the novelty of the author's idea, the theme did not find sufficient choreographic embodiment. The text does not differ in the richness of vocabulary, the five images of Carmen, with external distinctive attributes, do not have their own individual "faces".

However, some obstacles will be overcome already in the next ballet, in which the choreographer again turns to the theme of the femme fatale – Salome. If Carmen in Avakhri's interpretation appears to be diverse, sometimes strong and free, sometimes soft and vulnerable, sometimes bright and alluring but always equally lonely, then in Salome, the lambency of the facets of the character's personality becomes difficult to catch due to the variety of existing interpretations of the original work. The libretto is based on the eponymous drama by the English poet and playwright Oscar Wilde. It was Wilde's aesthetics with illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley that served as the basis for the idea of the play, according to Avakhri. Full of contradictions and aesthetic sophistication, the text of the drama attracted the choreographer's imagination, in which the ideas of beautiful ugliness, good and evil, love and madness coincided: "I am excited about the dark and the light in man. These are the facets of a single whole. We would not know what beauty is, not having been horrified by ugliness or vice. Human nature is inexplicable" [18].

Salome (fr. Salomé) is a one-act tragedy written by Oscar Wilde in French in 1891, translated into English, and published in London in 1894. The tragedy is based on the biblical myth of the Jewish king Herod Antipas' stepdaughter. Although the name of Salome is not given in the biblical text, we owe the character's name to Flavius Josephus who mentions Salome in the Antiquities [19]. The story also formed the basis for Gustave Flaubert's story "Herodias" from the collection Three Stories. If in Flaubert's version Salome is a puppet in the mother's hands in an attempt to get revenge on the prophet John who publicly condemned the marriage of Herod and Herodias, then Wilde introduced an unexpected detail into the ancient legend: the cause of the prophet's death is Salome's love for him. John angrily refuses the princess' ardent confessions while the saint is not prone to earthly temptations. However, Salome, consumed by passion, longs for a kiss, even if the price is the life of the loved one. Having performed the Dance of the Seven Veils, Salome deceives Herod and demands the head of the prophet John, who is in prison, as a reward.

Wilde's elaboration of the psychopathic concept of Salome's image is believed to have been inspired by the Danish novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans and Gustave Moreau's paintings *Salomé Dancing before Herod* (1876) and *L'Apparition* (1876) [20, 21].

The reaction of the public after the premiere was mixed but more often it was expressed rather sharply. A reviewer for the Times wrote: "...an arrangement in blood and ferocity, morbid, bizarre, repulsive and very offensive in its adaptation of scriptural phraseology to situations the reverse of sacred" [22, p. 133]. Bram Dijkstra said in his work "Idols of Perversity": "The spectacle of Salome's bestial passion makes Herod shiver... But the outrages of feminine desire continue. In a passage in which Wilde directly equates semen and the blood which feeds man's brain, Salome, woman, the vampire hungry for blood, tastes the bitter seed of man, depredates the spirit of holy manhood" [23, p. 398].

The public resonance aroused interest in the play, and very soon an opera production of the work emerged. The Dresden premiere of a one-act opera by Richard Strauss based on a libretto in German translation by Hedwig Lachmann took place in 1905.

Interpreted as an expressive drama, full of metaphors, symbolism, energy, beauty, exoticism, and sensuality, the opera conveys the decadent nature of Wilde's work, the playwright's free and painful decorativeness, in which Strauss manages to notice features that are very relevant for the era – features of the cruel passion, hidden feelings of horror in the face of dark psychological conflicts, already expressionistic [24]. Some textual changes, including abridging in some places, led to the transformation of the image itself: "Wilde's image of Salome as an inexperienced and fairly innocent young girl is shifting more and more towards a sex-seeking woman" [21, p. 159]. "While in Wilde's text Salomé's monstrosity always threatens to regress into adolescent

naughtiness, Strauss's dramatic soprano is a creature of power and steely invincibility. Even her dance, meant as tableaux of sensuality, is performed with the strong determination of an Amazonian general, behind her a "brazen, convulsive orchestra" [25, p. 146]. However, Wilde appears to have repeatedly tried to offer an aestheticized, symbolic interpretation of the character and the play as a whole, which is characteristic of his writing style in general: "The very choice of writing in French for Wilde partly was an aesthetic choice to 'enlist the aid of language against nature ... where words become precious images'" [26, p. 323]. In this sense, Wilde's aestheticism is familiar to Avakhri. The choreographer refuses the musical material of Strauss, although there were attempts to start work with the composer: a few years earlier Avakhri created the choreographic miniature "Eclipse" for the same Strauss Dance of the Seven Veils. However, when creating the ballet, the choreographer makes a choice in favor of the music of the contemporary Turkish composer Fazil Say (the ballet uses a compilation from Istanbul Symphony op. 28 and from "1001 Nights in the Harem", op. 25, as well as the Turkish folk song "Katibim" in the orchestration by Fazil Say). Although Avakhri often refrains from direct statements, it is the musical material that creates the necessary outline of sensuality, allowing the director-choreographer to focus on other tasks.

Being not only a choreographer-director but also the author of the artistic concept of the play, Avakhri again very subtly uses symbols – this is, first of all, the moon (full moon), which becomes bloody during the performance and then is completely absorbed by the darkness. The play of light, acting as scenery, enveloping the entire space of the open stage without curtains, according to critic U. Alieva, introduces a semantic subtext: we see bright "divine" streams of light in the form of intersecting crosses in scenes with Jochanaan, dim light on the dead Salome in the finale. Wilde's symbolism is also reflected in the clothes of the four main characters: Salome's silvery tunic ("it looks like a silver flower"), purple colors in the robes of Herod and Herodias ("purple like Caesar's mantle"), and Jochanaan's canvas robe [27].

Turning to history, we can find confirmation of the words of the scholar Amy Koritz that Wilde's inability to convince his readers of the symbolist reading of the play is explained by their needs and the needs of their culture in denying and affirming the power and threat of an exotic woman [28, p. 75]. The main factors in the rethinking of female imagery in the early 19th century led to the fact that ideas of gender equality, starting with the Great French Revolution, turned into polemics about the place of women in society and into the struggle of the first feminists for their rights. Significantly, the Revolution itself in France was portrayed as a woman (Eugene Delacroix "Liberty Leading the People"). Z. Freud's philosophical reflections about the art of that period boiled down to the fact that this was an attempt to balance the man's neurotic fear of a woman at the expense of aesthetic pleasure [29]. The onset of a spiritual crisis led to a natural search for a cultural alternative and a new religion. If during the period of romanticism the theme of the East was of some decorative interest, then by the early 19th century the invasion of the Eastern myth as invisible, wise, magical, and enchanting was significant and gave impetus to rethinking Western heritage in art. In the landmark work "Orientalism", Edward Said accurately sums up the idea that "oriental culture and cultural forms have been exoticized due to the operation of orientalism... The "Orient" and the "Occident" are man-made" and are more to do with imaginative geography than a fact of nature". Said usefully identifies long-lived and powerful forces of oppression and argues that the images and stereotypes constructed by Western artists and scholars about the "other" have produced unhelpful myths which repress and exoticize their subjects [30, p. 5]. Further, Mario Praz outlines the relationship of exoticism to eroticism: "A love of the exotic is usually an imaginative projection of a sexual desire" [31, p. 207]. Thus, in Western culture, pervasive sexuality and frozen eternity characterize Western stereotypes of the East. Thus, Wilde's Salome, exotic/erotic and mystical/transcendental, fits into both categories in the context of the time [28, p. 77], which is

exactly what Avakhri uses in the choreography. The artist does not attempt to get away from what Vida Midgelow expressed as "slipping into and around the canon – into the heart of dominant Western culture" [12, p. 46]. The author seems to deliberately layer texts, creating complex ambiguous facets where each of them is "an infinitely varied code of information, where one can find new allusions and reminiscences" [27]. A little-known expressive musical score contrasts with the minimalism of the design, the graphic nature of the poses. The layers are also spatial: vertical (light rays and the effect of descending devices), horizontal (three moving levels of the stage, one of which is a table on wheels that occupies the entire width of the stage, the use of an orchestra pit), diagonal (rearrangements of the corps de ballet, accent scenes in different corners of the stage). We understand the semantic meaning of Sai's oriental music as a desire to "play by the rules", but since the score is modern, the sound is different and fresh. This benefits the performance, in which the author raises universal human questions about the present day. Avakhri enjoys the right to be a female choreographer in the same way that Isadora Duncan embraced the socially privileged attitude of women towards nature to add value to her art. Avakhri is frank without pretense and, at the same time, uses expressiveness sparingly, pictorial, and allegorical. In the choreographer's plastique interpretation, a hint of movement takes on equal importance with the pas itself, minor turns of the head and looks become key accents, and pauses are no less important than movement.

As for the central character of the ballet, Salome, Avakhri also interprets her as beautiful and terrible, covered and naked, the portrayed and the artist. The author believes that one of these personality manifestations is impossible without the other. In the beginning, Salome appears as the light in a kingdom without the sun, in a kingdom where the moon shines. Salome's appearance is light as if the character is looking for meaning in the surrounding dark world where both relations between people and the whole system of values are destroyed, where her desires and actions are inevitable. Contrary to expectations, the dance of the Seven Veils is not the center of the performance. Traditionally, the dance of seduction was performed in an erotic context, Salome would take off seven capes and remain naked by the end of the performance. This episode sparked a keen interest in performers and creators, in part because Wilde's play contains no description of the dance. As mentioned above, contrary to the author's desire to portray Salome outside of the femme fatale stereotype, critics tended to view Salome's dance as the most sexualized moment in the narrative, the moment when the character is completely immersed in the physical. According to Arthur Symons, the weakness of Wilde's play lies in the fact that Herod's oath was given before Salome's performance and not in response to the dance [32, p. 178], which gives the audience an idea of the dance as the culmination of Salome's sexual power. For example, one of the first Salome dancers was the British dancer Maud Allan, whose big debut in the "Vision of Salome" dance was met with a predictably loud response and was called a "delicious embodiment of lust" [28, p. 35] and the transformation of "little Salome into a woman" [28, p. 43]. Salome's sexuality is inevitable, which makes the stubborn denial or condemnation of this sexuality by both artists and viewers inevitable as well. Avakhri creates a sensual, somewhat aggressive solo, which, in terms of the strength of its growth, only continues the figurative line of Salome from the beginning of the performance (Photo 3-4).



3. Salome's dance (photo by A. Nurekin for Astana Ballet)

Therefore, removing the culmination moment from the Dance of the Seven Veils, as a female artist, Avakhri can build another space of action, in which, through the intervention, the artist creates the construction of a female image not only as an object of fantasy. In Avakhri's show, the center of the narrative and emotional action becomes the phantom duet of Salome and the prophet which ends with a welcome kiss and a feeling of complete emotional devastation: "... in Salome's love dreams, the 'naked' soul of the character is revealed – tender, sensual, burning" (Photo 4). Even the dancer's plastique changes – from quivering pulsating to incredibly soft, enveloping, and at the same time something flighty. Thus, the final component of the duet is terrible: having achieved the long-awaited kiss from Jochanaan, Salome wraps her legs around his shoulders and coldly snaps his neck like an executioner [27].



4. The duet of Salome and Jochanaan (photo by A. Nurekin for Astana Ballet)

The culmination is followed by the final scene, there are six of them in the one-act ballet. The author of this article is also a co-author of the libretto. We do not see the need to cite the entire libretto verbatim, but the description of the last scene is of interest. The scene is called "The Sunset of the World" and contains an address directly to the viewer: "Do not avert your gaze, the feast continues. But fiery voluptuousness is replaced by satiety. The outlines of feelings are blurred: there is neither joy nor horror, only humility before the irreversibility of the end". The performance ends with a musical and corps-de-ballet reprise of the first scene, logically closing the circle: "The feast continues again". However, the second time the scene develops to a state of agony, the characters' inner conflict reaches its climax. The final image is a picture of devastated guests of the feast, slaves, Herod and Herodias, scattered, all of them mixed and it is impossible to distinguish between them. Sai's fading music accompanies the characters on their last journey. Lost, blind, and deafened, the characters scatter and fall into the abyss (in the stage solution – the empty orchestra pit). What this black pit represents, we do not know, but it is something finite and timeless. Someone falls into nothingness, someone is indifferent and doomed in their action, someone is rapidly moving towards their end. However, everyone goes to the end to meet the unknown, realizing that now there is no other way. While the figure of the torn Salome lies on the dais, all the rest go to the "other world". If Wilde creates an atmosphere of anxiety in the drama, the expectation of incredible events, perhaps an impending catastrophe, then Avakhri seems to conclude that the tragedy of Salome today is already possible for everyone.

The topic of revising canonical images such as Carmen and Salome is always burdened with the binding factor of power and aesthetic values that were established by the great creators of these images. Given the opportunity for such practice, modern directors and choreographers strive and establish new models, expand the canonical cultural text, adequately reflecting the vision of women and non-Western authors who have been deprived of this right throughout history. Since in this case, Avakhri develops the theme of the artist's best, without exaggeration, ballets in images created outside Avakhri's culture by European male authors, images that have a long complex stage life in the established designated role of femme fatale. What makes the images of such "divas" interesting today for a young author and the author's audience in Kazakhstan? In this vein, we understand Steven Price's words about Salome: "Salome may take a biblical story as its ultimate source, but it stands as a complex and beguiling comment upon its own historical time and its author's place within it, so we should consider conditions where this creation was rewritten" [33, p. 22]. The revision can cover temporal, geographic, and even genre conditional intersections. Avakhri's female characters exist outside this framework, the artist's language is universal and, as far as possible, devoid of any signs of belonging. Just as such works can be considered not only as a set of dance scenes but also in the aspect of the used methods of storytelling based on the body and their existence in interaction with perception and spectator interpretation. If in "Carmen" an attempt is made to free oneself from the masculine type of language, in which the striving for a single truth and logic prevails, to blur the system of previously created meanings by searching for "feminine" handwriting, then in "Salome" it becomes clear that the author decides, directorially and choreographically, to prefer the modernity of the narrative, reflects on how the viewer will perceive this topic today, when any gender clichés are no longer so relevant. Avakhri's female characters are close to today's audience but the choreographer narrates in the language of dance, where the body is the main subject and object at the same time. Ballet's gender vocabulary has become so expressive, and the dancers' bodies have undergone pressure and the transformation alien to nature, that it casts doubt on how it is possible to ensure equal existence for the male and female bodies on stage. One of the critical features of the dance body revision is the re-choreography of the cultural source in the direction of resistance to order. Although, in any case, it is difficult to

offer a completely new interpretation, the works under discussion embody the program of anti-canonical discourse. The images of Carmen and Salome created by the choreographer exist in a double frame, at the same time confirming and questioning their sources. Avakhri has managed to transform ideas about a familiar text, which can help the viewer realize their assumptions and change the perception of the past and present in art.

Naturally, in "Carmen" we still observe (partly due to the lack of male performers) a feminist manifesto, when male characters are present on the stage only nominally in the form of mannequins (photo 2). The male characters are ruled by women who reign on the stage. However, female dominance is not ensured by this fact, the structure of the performance is directed in such a way that the man has no place in it, and the woman becomes its center. If, for example, Balanchine nevertheless introduces a man into his women's ballets to highlight the female dancer, then Avakhri's "Carmen" does not leave such a chance. In "Salome" this line is less noticeable, but female characters again dominate the stage, being symbolically and literally above men: Herodias walks on the backs of the slaves and Salome sits on the prophet's back in the middle of the performance and then steps on his chest after the cherished kiss. In doing so, the author seems to be back on the path once traveled. What is characteristic of the author's style, in terms of time and geographical location, is that Avakhri's "female gaze" on the issues of separation and unity, mental loneliness and plurality in "Carmen", a personal choice between vice and virtue, duality (two sides of the same coin), division and unity in "Salome" ultimately suggests the unity of the main antagonism, namely: female and male. The scope of the theme and its implementation in Avakhri's work is universal. Interest in Carmen indicated the artist's attitude to the viewer's demand and desire to give the image the accompanying qualities of a femme fatale, which then led in "Salome" to full exposure in the final act: we see what we want to see, endowing the stage images of the femme fatale women Carmen and Salome with our ideas.

As a prominent young choreographer, Avakhri can raise complex social issues in her works while remaining somewhat detached from the existing canons. The theme of the femme fatale in ballet is always mysterious and as if not directly explained to the end, but the theme is always something more than just representation. No classical cultural text today can be fully represented in one stage solution but can be embodied in different ways with different people. This is the main and well-known theatrical truth. However, the mystery is not the many incarnations of the text but the still unknown lives hidden in the text which can be revealed for the modern spectator and performer. The complexity of the embodiment for the Kazakh choreographer was that the critical climate in the art of the 21st century is accompanied by the socio-cultural consequences of such movements as poststructuralism, postcolonialism, feminism, queer, and postmodernism. Finding an approach to understanding performers and spectators, considering their historical and personal experience, becomes the most important task for authors. Avakhri's solution and its implementation in the choreographer's work, the artist's view on the creation of female canonical images helped to create innovative representations of the female image in ballet.

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