

# La Belle Juive: The Myth of the Beautiful Jewess in Czech Literature at the Turn of the 20th Century\*

Vojtěch Smutný

Faculty of Arts, Palacký University Olomouc, Department of Czech Studies  
smutvo00@ff.upol.cz

## SYNOPSIS

In the Czech culture of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we can see the phenomenon of the orientalising of the Jewish populace, in which the archetype of the beautiful Jewess (la belle Juive) occupied a significant and somewhat different position. This study examines types of depiction of the beautiful Jewess in travelogues and fictional literature, and divides these tendencies into three types. The beautiful Jewess is construed by means of biblical similes and antecedents, while these often concern heavily eroticised representations that are not based on a biblical template but rather arise out of the imagination of the authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The erotic subtext plays a fundamental role also in the case of the second tendency, though here the primary precursor is not a biblical figure or narrative, but the fictional character in the story rather represents a unique existence, without direct and determining intertextual ties. This type of beautiful Jewess is characterised by a significant borderline role between the Orient and the Occident, and at the same time in the narratives she also occupies the role of a tragic figure. The final tendency is to conceive the beautiful Jewess negatively, in which the narrative accentuates her use of her beauty in order to pursue her own selfish interests. Among other factors, the study examines modes of the orientalising of beautiful Jewesses, and reflects upon whether they concern positive or negative representations.

## KEYWORDS

Beautiful Jewess; la belle Juive; Orientalism; travel literature; Esterka; Jews in literature; Salome; Galicia; Ghetto; Krakow; Czech literature; Occident.

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While reading through a number of travelogues published in magazines at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, searching for mentions of the Jewish population and the ghettos, I noticed one literary archetype which stood out in a certain way above the others. Whereas the majority of the Jewish characters in the travelogues of the time were described with reference to familiar negative stereotypes, and in addition the

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environment which the Jews inhabited was depicted by employing unprepossessing adjectives referring to filth, odour and other negative aspects, by contrast there was one type of Jewish figure that was represented in an ostensibly positive manner, and which was not markedly afflicted by the attributes of the place from where she had originated. This is the figure of the beautiful (young) Jewess, a myth and artistic motif that was frequently fashioned among non-Jewish writers in Europe during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century — in the academic literature the character is often denoted according to the French expression ‘la belle Juive’. Although it may appear on first impression that the positive representations of the beautiful Jewess are evidence of a certain form of assimilation, this often concerned merely a superficial aspect beneath which there may lurk discursive modes that sustain anti-Semitic and patriarchal practices, founded upon the exoticism of the time — incidentally, as Jean-Paul Sartre points out, the collocation ‘beautiful Jewess’ is shrouded in an aura of rape and massacre.<sup>1</sup>

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe it is possible to divide the Jewish population into two categories according to their location and their degree of assimilation into the majority culture, thus into Eastern European and Western European Jews. Eastern European (Galician) Jews were characterised by practices with the aid of which they closed themselves off from the surrounding populace into their own groups, while by contrast Western European Jews attempted to assimilate into the local culture.<sup>2</sup> Even if the differences between the groups were determined especially geographically, the Western European Jews were conceptualised by means of negative stereotypes which were also based on an image of (Eastern European) orthodox Jews, for example aspects of poor hygiene in the Jewish ghettos, ‘predatory’ business practices, cultural and ‘physiognomic’ differences. The lived folklore of the Eastern European Jews was essential for the image of the beautiful Jewess, since within it practices and rituals had been preserved which the Western Jews had lost through their assimilation.<sup>3</sup> The authentic Eastern European Judaism was interesting for non-Jewish travellers and writers due to the fact that it embodied the then fascination with exoticism and Orientalism.<sup>4</sup> During the period of colonialism (especially after

1 “There is in the words “a beautiful Jewess” a very special sexual signification, one quite different from that contained in the words “beautiful Rumanian”, “beautiful Greek”, or “beautiful American”, for example. This phrase carries an aura of rape and massacre. The “beautiful Jewess” is she whom the Cossacks under the czars dragged by her hair through the streets of her burning village’ (Sartre 1995, p. 34).

2 For further details see Fottová (2016).

3 Hildegard Frübis in her study ‘The Figure of the Beautiful Jewess: Displacements on the Borders between East and West’ mentions a similar focus on the culture of the Eastern European Jews (Ostjuden), though from a position of Jewish writers (specifically Stefan Zweig), who in the Eastern Jews saw an idealised image of ancient Jewish spirituality and tradition, which then served as an instrument for the politics of the Zionist movement: ‘From a Zionist point of view the Eastern European Jews were a stronghold of spiritual and cultural inspiration; they came to epitomize a lived Jewish folklore which West European Jewry had largely lost owing to their assimilation’ (Frübis 2017, p. 65).

4 A certain type of fascination with an exotic environment can indeed be seen in travelogues relating to Eastern European towns, in which the travellers visit Jewish ghettos.

the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century), the culture of the Occident began to elaborate a discourse about the Orient, in which all cultural differences were usually disparaged. Edward W. Said, in his pioneering work *Orientalism* (1978), divides this term into three mutually interrelated meanings. The first relates to the fact that the Orientalist discourse of the time was heavily influenced by academic disciplines, in which scholars (anthropologists, sociologists, historians etc.) explored the specific characteristics and differences of the Orient. The second meaning (which is defining for this article) is also closely located with the academic mapping of the Orient, and Said sees this in texts that compare the differences between the Occident and the Orient. However, in contrast with academicism, here we are dealing with a broad palette of texts of various subject matters and genres (novels, poems, political, economic, philosophical tracts etc.). In the case of the final meaning, the author, under the influence of Foucauldian theories, delineates Orientalism as a discourse of the power influences of the West, which moulds the Orient in its own image: 'Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (Said 2003, p. 3).

The myth of the beautiful Jewess is configured within this discursive milieu, transcending the sphere of artistic genres, and as a result we can see manifestations of this myth both in literary travelogues and artistic genres. It is precisely upon the background of selected travelogue writings that I shall attempt to typologise specific representations of the beautiful Jewess, and subsequently to locate corresponding literary figures in prose and poetry works from the time. In this article I shall thus highlight three tendencies with the aid of which the figure of the beautiful Jewess was portrayed in literary texts. In the first, the authors of the time accentuated biblical, pagan and historical mythological figures of beautiful Jewesses, whom they either discussed directly or compared with other characters. In the second type, the beautiful Jewess represents a passive, exotic object, to whom erotic and sexual motifs are attached. Such a depiction often fulfils the role of a *borderline figure*<sup>5</sup> between Christianity and Judaism, and at the same time represents a tragic figure, who during the course of the narrative suffers and even dies as a result of her origin. The final representation is borne in the spirit of negative portrayals of the beautiful Jewess, who for example in the narratives actively seduces other men, and is frequently presented as manifesting cruelty and pursuing selfish interests.

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5 The beautiful Jewess as a borderline figure is the subject of the study 'The Beautiful Jewess as Borderline Figure in Europe's Internal Colonialism: Some Remarks on the Intertwining of Orientalism and Antisemitism' by Ulrike Brunotte (2019b) and 'The Figure of the Beautiful Jewess: Displacements on the Borders between East and West' by Hildegard Frübis (2017).



## THE BIBLICAL ANTECEDENT AND INTERTEXTUAL REFERENCES

*Pierre Loti, in his Palestinian sketches, speaks of the Polish Jews in unflattering terms; he saw them lamenting and praying before the old temple wall in Jerusalem, and declared the physiognomy of those Polish-Hebrew pilgrims to be the most disagreeable that he had ever seen. No objections can be raised against his judgement in this peculiar, individual case which he observed, and many would perhaps also approve of his judgement in a general sense. But we know how relative opinions can be concerning the beauty or ugliness of the types of other tribes, and though it may be the case that a large part of Galician Jewry is considered unappealing due to their uncleanness and various bad habits, I must nonetheless state that during my first visit, and now among the old, I saw there many a face of the biblical patriarch, and among the young many a peculiarly handsome, finely spirited face; and in particular I have no doubt that among the young Galician Jewesses there is yet many a graceful Esterka, worthy of such a noble lover as was her old namesake from the times of King Casimir (Čech 1903, p. 84).*

In his travelogue sketches from Krakow, Svatopluk Čech takes a liberal view of the Jewish population — he frequently points to their linguistic assimilation (he did not encounter German speaking Jews in Krakow, which also gratifies him from a patriotic perspective), and he explores certain stereotypes regarding their physiognomy. It is evident from the excerpt that the author construes the figure of the beautiful Jewess as based upon the mythical template of Esterka, the lover of King Casimir III the Great. In the literature of the time, the figure of the beautiful Jewess was based also on other models, in which a very common motif was the Jewish Queen Esther from the Old Testament *Book of Esther*. In his poem 'Izraelské dceři' (To Israel's Daughter), Emanuel Lešehrad depicts the beautiful Jewess Esther, who despite being an embodiment of the biblical material, for the lyrical subject chiefly represents an object of desire, which at the conclusion of the poem is even transformed into erotic forms:

*Rest your head in my palm, and weep, O daughter of Zion,  
my dark Esther,  
thousands of your ancestors perhaps have shed their own tears  
from your brown eyes...  
I would stand with you now by the crumbling walls of Jerusalem,  
to weep with you  
over the tribe now scattered throughout the world by a fate perfidiously cruel,  
far from its father's fertile land...*

[...]

*Solomon awaiting, I am an apparition of the fair Shulamite  
in the doors of the palace,  
I have sprinkled roses upon the marble which your foot shall sanctify  
in sandals of cedarwood,*

*I have adorned your fragrant chambers with the splendour of tapestries, gems  
for your acceptance,  
in the evening, when I shall rest my crowned temple in your lap,  
injured with love,  
you shall hear from my lips the sighing of a silver harp  
the glory of songs!*  
(Lešehrad 1921, p. 105)



By means of biblical references and comparisons to biblical or pagan myths, the figures of beautiful Jewesses are orientalised. Whether they relate to the figure of Esterka, Esther, Salome, Rachel or Judith, all have in common the feature that in poetry they are depicted as exotic beauties, who are nonetheless rather the product of imagination<sup>6</sup> than a direct reference to a biblical story.<sup>7</sup> So for example, the artistic obsession with the body of Salome was significant in Europe only towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Brunotte 2019a, p. 247). The erotic body of the beautiful Jewess Salome can be found also in the poem 'Salome' by S. K. Neumann, who in the first stanza depicts men passionately thirsting 'for goblets of wine, for goblets of lips / after young women in bloom' (Neumann 1925, p. 31), and between stanzas the word 'Dance!' resounds, whereupon they bring the head of John the Baptist to Salome as a reward. In addition to the familiar narrative, the poet describes the beautiful 'body naked, breasts youthful' (ibid., p. 32), and presents a similar work also in his poem from the same collection entitled 'Judith', which deals with the biblical story in which Judith beheads Holofernes. However, before she does so an erotic scene is described: 'Oh, Jehovah, those kisses burn me! [...] Those lustful hands on my hips, my breasts, / that mouth gnawing at my skin / do not freeze me, and if I tremble, my God / it is not in disgust... I feel fire within myself / and its blazing is sweet... Am I going insane?' (ibid., p. 24). In both poems beauty and eroticism are intertwined with cruelty and death, and a similar situation applies also in the poem 'Herodias' by Jaromír Borecký, in which the poem presents the beauty of the Jewess juxtaposed with her thirst for blood:

*Like a broken lily, she is convulsed by the rhythm of groans,  
her hair is whipped aside, pungent with the scent of violets,  
from the snow of her veil, like a pale rose shines  
her stiff breast, lovesick with the dreams of flutes.*

[...]

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- 6 The empty spaces of bible stories were first of all filled by religious commentators and later by literature, opera and the fine arts, especially of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Brunotte 2019a, p. 247).
- 7 Ulrike Brunotte, in her study 'Seeing, Hearing and Narrating Salome: Modernist Sensual Aesthetics and the Role of Narrative Blanks' (ibid.), focuses on the empty spaces in biblical narratives in the example of Salome, and refers to the ways in which authors fill these empty spaces with their own imagination.



*Only her mother on the throne knows in her rancorous frenzy,  
with those gilded nails which beat in the sistrum,  
that today the blood of the severed head  
will flow into the lap of the robe of lilies*  
(Borecký 1892, p. 66).

## THE ORIENTALISING AND EROTICISATION OF THE BODY OF BEAUTIFUL JEWESSES

The orientalising of beautiful Jewesses takes place not only in connection with biblical and pagan motifs, but the very physicality of the beautiful Jewess is frequently characterised by means of its exotic otherness. It is precisely the difference of Jewesses from Western European women that allows for such a striking description of them, and thus the second typology corresponds with the Orientalist tendency in its exploration of the unknown. Male, non-Jewish travellers often saw in the Jewess an exotic object of erotic desire, and represented her in a thoroughly positive way. Even though it is possible to discern similar discursive modes in the depiction of the first type, the primary template here for the character of the beautiful Jewess is no longer a biblical figure or narrative, but the fictional character in the story is rather a unique existence, without direct or determining intertextual ties. In travelogues, this type of beautiful Jewess was placed in contrast with the surrounding, unprepossessing environment and the dirty Jews, and the Jewess thus occupied a borderline role between the cultures of the Occident and the Orient. It is evident from the texts examined here that the European travellers desired the beautiful Jewesses, and as a result we can see in their representations symbols of otherness, with their roots precisely in the Orientalist discourse: 'Here and there a girl's head of the beautiful type could be glimpsed at the window, with her dark, sparkling eyes, blazing beneath the shadow of her black eyebrows, looking out curiously into the street for a moment' (Kamper 1897, p. 2).

A phenomenon was evident in the topographies and travelogues of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which the authors believed that ethnic origin could be determined by means of a number of physiological features, while at the same time they interpreted ethnicity via the predominant modes of behaviour. The external and internal characteristics of Jews were introduced into the academic discourse by means of academic disciplines<sup>8</sup> and other texts comparing the Orient with the Occident, as Edward Said asserts (Said 2008). The authors often focused on stereotypes of the Jewish physio-

<sup>8</sup> Here I could mention for example the British ethnologist John Beddoe, who determined ethnic origin on the basis of physiognomic evidence (Beddoe 1861), or the Australian folklore scholar Joseph Jacobs, who in his article 'On the Racial Characteristics of Modern Jews' (Jacobs 1886) attempts to use quantitative methods in order to determine the predominant Jewish features. In his twelve-volume *Jewish Encyclopaedia* (1901–1906), Joseph for example states that the eyes of Jewesses are darker than those of male Jews, that dark hair predominates (even if he also sees an unusually larger proportion of blond and ginger hair), and the aforementioned studies also speak of the typical Jewish nose.





gnomy, and thus in the case of beautiful Jewesses striking dark (brown or black) eyes and hair are frequently recurring symbols, for example in the presentation of Jewesses in the travelogue by Antonín Dostál, who in the magazine *Obzor* described his first journey to Krakow: '[...] but only half of the beautiful complexions appeared to be of Christian origin, whereas a good half belonged to the daughters of the nation of Israel, and were so made up that Byron, as in his first Hebrew melody, would once again marvel at the charm of their voluptuous eyes' (Dostál 1890, pp. 308–309).

Although no anti-Semitic stereotypes are evident in this type of representation, it is nevertheless impossible to regard it as exclusively positive, because we are dealing with a patriarchal vision of a beautiful woman as an object of sexual desire. In the fictional texts examined here, this type of beautiful Jewess is represented very passively (for example her fate is determined by the surrounding characters), she is virtually voiceless and her psychological profile is not developed, though she is described by means of an exuberant external, exotically conceived characterisation. In Karel Klostermann's short story 'Srul', the narrator recounts the tale of the Jew Srul, who has moved together with his family to a small town. Although Srul is initially detested by the local populace, later the strained relations are gradually pacified. However, one summer a heatwave arrives, and after heavy rainfalls the townsfolk begin to die of dysentery. The Jew Srul then once again becomes an object of hate, since fables circulate among the local populace that the Jew brings bad luck, and that he may also have poisoned the water in the well. The accusations subside at the moment when the enraged villagers break into the Jew's home and see that his children have died of dysentery. In the following section, the figure of the beautiful Jewess enters the scene:

*The only daughter left to Srul — let us call her Malka — grew up, as has already been denoted, into an uncommonly pretty girl. I knew her when she was in the full bloom of her youth and beauty; she appeared to me to be the type of those Syrian beauties who in ancient times, besides the reports of the old authors, became such fateful figures for the iron-clad legionnaires of world-conquering Rome. Now it was not these men who were bewitched by Malka's beauty, rather it was the son of the burgrave who fell absolutely madly in love with her, causing no small horror to both his own parents and those of the girl* (Klostermann 1925, p. 24).

Malka in this narrative is a passive figure without any kind of voice, whose fate is influenced by the actions of the other characters, since the fact that a non-Jewish youth falls in love with the beautiful Malka means that she must be imprisoned in her home, away from the outside world, or escorted around the town by her mother and grandmother — neither of the families wishes for the couple to marry. But we do not know how Malka herself regards her own situation, since the thoughts of the beautiful Jewess are entirely absent from the narrative (we have no idea as to whether or not the youth appeals to her whatsoever). The next stage in her life is directed by her father Srul together with the burgrave, who attempt to marry her off to other suitors. During her last courtships in December, when the caravan is returning to the town it is caught in a heavy blizzard, and due to the foul weather Malka and her grandmother disembark from the vehicle and continue home on foot. However, they



do not make it back to the village, and on the third day they are found by the villagers, both frozen to death.

In the above short story it is possible to see the aforementioned borderline and tragic aspects, since the beautiful Jewess Malka finds herself in a space somewhere between Christianity and Judaism, which becomes the cause of her death. In the case of this type of beautiful Jewess, we also encounter the question of religious convergence, which was thematised in a certain manner also in Klostermann's short story. A text which is paradigmatic of the time in terms of the aforementioned character type is represented by the opera composed by Jacques Fromental Halévy and Eugène Scribe entitled *The Jewess* (*La Juive*, 1835), in which the beautiful Jewess dies precisely because of her love for a Christian boy. The tragedy is multiplied when it transpires that she is the daughter of the cardinal who condemns her to death (Valman 2007, p. 2). A similarly tragic fate awaits the figure of the beautiful Jewess in the drama *Rasa* (Race, 1922) by Josef Till, in which Ilonka Török attempts to hide her Jewish origins from her anti-Semitic husband (Géza Török), but eventually commits suicide out of fright.

An exotic description of the external physiology and erotic charge of the beautiful Jewess is evident also in a number of love poems. In the poem 'Neznámá židovka' (The Unknown Jewess), Jaroslav Kvapil speaks of a beautiful Jewess whom he saw 'once upon a time on a summer evening':

*Long, thick lashes shade the eyes, though the flame  
beneath them yearningly, wildly burns,  
as if the world were inviting the porcelain of your shoulders,  
and wished with its blaze to burn the blossoms of the love of spring*  
(Kvapil 1907, p. 69).

In this manner the poet describes his unknown Jewess, and in his amorous infatuation adds the erotic verses: 'I would only in the warm shelter of your soft shoulders / find succour on your breasts alone' (ibid., p. 70). In 'Balada o krásné židovce' (The Ballad of the Beautiful Jewess), Antonín Sova describes an exquisite Jewess as she descends a staircase, beneath which there stood a throng of infatuated men; 'those barons who wait here / those sad cretins, bankers' (Sova 1918, p. 69), relates the lyrical subject, while a former lover then emerges from the crowd, and shoots the beautiful Jewess in a fit of jealousy. The beautiful Jewess also appears as a tragic figure in Rudolf Jaroslav Kronbauer's short story 'Hoříkvět'<sup>9</sup> (Blazing Flower; Kronbauer 1900), in which the narrator describes a recollection of an asylum for the insane, in which there was a Jewess, 'about twenty years old, slim and lithe, who had lustrous, almost reddish hair,' and 'white teeth like the crowns of lilies of the valley,' but as a consequence of her mental illness 'her alluring and seductive body seemed to have lost all its charms, and a great sadness emanated from her youthful appearance' (ibid., p. 91).

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9 The Czech word 'Hoříkvět', literally meaning Blazing Flower, is the term for the plant Pheasant's eye, *Adonis annua*.



## THE BEAUTIFUL JEWESS IN NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS

The erotic body of beautiful Jewish women is described far more explicitly by the traveller Karel Vika, who mentions beautiful Jewesses in several places during his travels around Galicia. We encounter a characterisation which we could rank among the second type, since the author describes the Jewesses almost erotically, and himself feels a sexual desire for them, simultaneously with a moral revulsion. The following quote illustrates a negative portrayal, which is pivotal in the third tendency of depicting beautiful Jewesses:

*I know of nothing which is more irksome to the nerves than this varied kaleidoscope: filth, trinkets, junk, revolting Semitic types, the unperfumed odour of the Orient, and the blazing eyes of young Jewesses, beautiful, seductive and mysterious. And Satan often rises up close to you and does not retreat. A man recognises that he is young, and that in the name of youth he could stamp on the throat of morality... [...] Those Jewish beauties, even in that filth and in their simple kirtles, are quite alluring. Alluring, for sure. They have tenderness, loose, bold movements, feline agility, in a word they have everything we demand from womanhood; their eyes are so childlike, so delightfully naive. The sound of their voices touches the heart; at every step their whole body trembles in a fit of unconscious, girlish chastity... It is only when we leave the store and the foul smelling air of the ghetto cools our temples that we realise: It is an illusion my friend, nothing but an illusion (Vika 1906, p. 562).*

The last type of beautiful Jewess has its roots in the previous tendency. Although the Jewess is represented as a mysterious and seductive beauty, subsequently her negative aspect surfaces within the internal characterisation of the figure — a figure who exploits her beauty in order to turn a certain situation to her advantage and pursue her own selfish goals. In beautiful Jewesses, Vika sees witches who lure men and over the course of time metamorphose into ugly ‘matrons’:

*The Jewesses, finally... they are beautiful. Understand that I mean the young Jewesses. Up to the age of twenty years at most! At most! They have fabulous eyes, an uncommonly soulful gaze, they are sweet and delightful, some even pure... But it is hard to believe that these sweet young things will in a few years become matrons so vile that one would have difficulty even speaking of them (ibid., p. 538).*

In further episodes of his travelogue the writer elaborates on his thoughts:

*Look at this old Jewess, sitting here before her dish of hot boiled beans. Even she was once such a beauty. You saw her present; this is the future! An old witch with furrowed cheeks, with hair on which the dirty grey has settled like the mould of six decades — this is the future of your ‘sweetie pie’, who you saw there just a few minutes ago (ibid., p. 572).*

The almost pure type can be very aptly illustrated in Karel Klostermann’s short story ‘Černý pátek’ (Black Friday), in which a young student during the holidays sets out



to visit a friend in a small town in Southern Bohemia. Here he notices the beautiful Jewess Salome, whom he describes as follows:

*When I first saw her my head was in a whirl, it is a wonder I wasn't overwhelmed with dizziness. A figure of medium size, the curves of a body extraordinarily fine, petite beautiful arms and legs, her gait a little languid, every movement fluent, with a supremely graceful posture; and this beautiful head, this face as if carved out of white, pure Carrara marble by the hands of an artist, with the difference that this marble blushed slightly beneath its clean, smooth surface; a small mouth, continually and amiably smiling, so that behind somewhat thick, cherry lips her even, flawless teeth glistened with almost translucent whiteness. The allure of that mouth was not spoiled in the slightest by the light black down on her upper lip, indeed it rather endowed it further with something appealing, seductive, just like her thick black eyebrows, which in a pair of uncommonly symmetrical curves arched above her eyes. Oh, those eyes! — More beautiful I have never seen! The look from their mysterious depths gave you the feeling as if you were gazing, on a clear August night, into the bottomless abyss of a luminescent sea. And black as those eyes was her hair, which in natural curls lined her white forehead, her temples and the nape of her neck, black hair with a peculiar bluish tint (Klostermann 1925, p. 127).*

In the above example we see evidence of how many ways the beautiful Jewess can be orientalised. The narrator allusively names the Jewess as the biblical figure of Salome, which in itself produces intertextual meanings that enhance the fictional figure, and further orientalises her by means of external characteristics — he mentions the 'light black down on her upper lip', which is a symbol of her otherness, and her black hair and eyes, while at the same time likening her beauty to an artistic object (a face like Carrara marble and symmetrical curves above her eyes). In another part of the text the narrator conceives Salome as the reincarnation of 'one of those Syrian slave girls about whom [I] have read in the classical novel by Apuleius, who overpowered the iron-clad warriors of world-conquering Rome, so that they melted in their embrace as if they were made of soft wax'<sup>10</sup> (ibid., p. 128).

Although we could attribute the description of the beautiful Jewess Salome to the second tendency, within the framework of the narrative Salome is transformed into a negatively conceived figure. Initially the women of the town spread slanderous gossip about Mrs. Salome Rosenstock, but the men are seduced by her beauty. Even the mother of the student's friend warns the narrator, who is also the chief protagonist of the story, not to lose his head over the 'dangerous siren' (ibid., p. 136). The narrator meets with Salome, whereupon he is enchanted with her, and thus arranges an outing with her the following Saturday. However, on Friday the student is unexpectedly called upon to leave for his home town, which upsets Salome and drives a wedge between her and the student forever. Throughout the remainder of the short story, the ways in which Salome transforms the town's fortunes are depicted; for example through her flirtation with important men she gains political influence and enrichment, and there is even a mention of a woman who poisons herself because of her

10 The same simile is used by Klostermann in his short story 'Srul' (Klostermann 1925, p. 24).

husband's infidelity. Years later the student meets Salome once again, but she is still dismissive and hostile in her behaviour towards him.

In the above examples it is evident that the orientalising of beautiful Jewesses takes place on several levels, and is mostly concentrated around their otherness. In the majority of cases the literary archetype of the beautiful Jewess is described as having brown eyes, dark hair, accompanied with the usual attributes of the female body (especially breasts). The aspect of otherness is multiplied by the device of abstractly expressed exoticism (e.g. mystery), which in the examined texts is conceived especially in essentialist terms, but without doubt its origin can be found rather in cultural differences — whether this concerns the different environment of the ghetto mentioned by the traveller Vika or the motifs of family conservatism, different religious persuasion and potential convergence that can be seen in Klostermann's short story 'Srul', all the differences refer rather to a different habitus than an essential character. Essential otherness is nonetheless emphasised in the texts also by the means of biblical myths, which the authors liken to the figures of the beautiful Jewesses, and the figures then intertextually refer to their ancient mythical antecedents, thereby taking on a dimension of a certain depth which in the texts is conclusive for a conception of essential otherness. However, we may view otherness in a dual manner, since in the usual sense differences are mentioned with reference to the majority culture, but in the examined texts the beautiful Jewesses are compared also with their own cultural environment. This is evident in the work of Karel Vika and Svatopluk Čech, who within the environment of the 'revolting' Jewish ghetto spy an aspect of beauty in the form of young Jewesses. Beautiful Jewesses can therefore be conceived as borderline figures which transcend cultural and religious differences. In this sense love poems provide compelling evidence, since although they contain a level of otherness and exoticism (which are traditionally interpreted by means of negative stereotypes), the beauty and sexuality in the physicality of these beautiful Jewesses in its exoticism creates a certain transgression, thus otherness in the case of beautiful Jewesses is conceived positively. However, I do not believe that in all cases this necessarily concerns manifestations of philo-Semitism, and I view them rather as expressions of a male lust for the exotic body of Jewesses for the reason that in their descriptions they accentuate especially physicality, erotica or motifs of sex, and also because Jewesses in the narratives are depicted as tragic figures who symbolically die (the second type), or who use their beauty to serve selfish ends (the third type).

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