

She was at the time resting and en pension, and many of the pension's habitués extracted an agreeable excitement from watching her with lynx eyes to see whether she showed any feeling. And as she neither went into hysterics nor wept uncontrollably on some dowager's shoulder, they decided she was a very hard and unnatural person. At the end of what seemed to her an endless ten days, a telegram reached her and was given to her as she was passing through the hall, where suddenly they all crowded around her and bombarded her with questions. She read the telegram, folded it up again with a deliberate exactness that should have told them something of her benumbed state, made her stiff lips form the words "They are safe," and went quietly to her room, while they whispered loudly that it was very strange that she could receive such news without fainting. And they were so aggrieved at being cheated out of this agreeable break in the monotony of their lives that they never quite forgave her, and believed most firmly henceforth that she was a person devoid of natural affection.<sup>6</sup>

There is no question that between her debut in Vienna and her first performance of *The Vision of Salome* two years later, Maud had to struggle to keep body and soul together. Although her occasional recitals were appreciated by a small circle of cognoscenti, they were far from remunerative. That struggle came to an end – although notoriety preceded affluence – with the first performance of *The Vision*. This work, undoubtedly her chef d'oeuvre, although by no means her favourite work, was a sensation in London and brought her international fame as the Salome Dancer, an epithet she deeply resented as unworthy of her unique artistry.

*The Vision* presented Salome as a *femme fatale* and as decadence incarnate. Both views were modern. For centuries Salome had been approved by the Church and was a popular subject for artists in many disciplines. The traditional view, carefully nurtured by the anti-feminist policies of the Church, was simply that she was an evil woman responsible for John the Baptist's death.<sup>7</sup> In the mid-nine-

teenth century, however, artists began to view her as the archetypal *femme fatale*. Heinrich Heine, Gustave Flaubert, and, a generation later, Oscar Wilde, wove elaborate fantasies around her, and in so doing removed her from traditional associations. Some half dozen composers including Alexander Glazunov and Jules Massenet had written operas based on her story long before Richard Strauss composed his masterpiece. Foremost among painters fascinated by the figure was Gustave Moreau, whose *Tattooed Salome* was considered his masterpiece during his lifetime. Moreau (1826–1898) became obsessed by the figure of Salome. After his mother's death, he confined himself to the apartment he had shared with her, attempting to paint Salome out of his system.

All these nineteenth-century artists focussed on Salome's sensuality, perverseness, and seductive powers. By the end of the century she also personified the decadence of an old society on the brink of radical reform or dissolution.<sup>8</sup>

The most immediately important influence on *The Vision of Salome* was Max Reinhardt's production of Wilde's play *Salome*, first given in Leipzig in 1904. From a theatrical point of view – and *Salome* was nothing if not *fin de siècle* drama – Reinhardt's production was daringly innovative. The subject was, if not sacred as in England, then certainly considered unsuitable for the stage and, in the notorious Wilde's treatment, scandalous. Both Marcel Remy and Maud saw this Reinhardt production in Berlin.

Choreographic treatment of the story was not original. A number of Maud's contemporaries had enjoyed considerable success with dance interpretations of the drama. As early as 1895, Loie Fuller was performing a *Salome* composed of three short dances. However, Remy's treatment of the material was highly original and daring, as it exploited Maud's personal experience. Remy caused Maud to identify the Baptist's execution and, more forcefully, his decapitated head, whether papier mâché or invisible, with that of her brother. In effect, Maud was giving vent to her fierce passions with the aid of her intensely vivid imagination.