

ARTHUR SCHNITZLER'S *THE VEIL OF PIERRETTE*

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Arthur Schnitzler's *The Veil of Pierrette* (*Der Schleier der Pierrette*) a ballet-pantomime in three scenes, grew out of an earlier work, *The Veil of Beatrice* (*Der Schleier der Beatrice*).¹ This latter work was first a five-act prose and verse play (1900) and then transformed into a prose tale (1913) set in Renaissance Bologna. Themes that were elaborately developed in *The Veil of Beatrice* Schnitzler returned to, only within a narrower scope, in the ballet pantomime.

The Veil of Pierrette (1910) was set in early 19th-century Vienna and was populated with commedia dell'arte characters – Pierrot the painter-artist, Pierrette the Bride, and Arlechino the Bridegroom – in contrast to the Renaissance characters found in *The Veil of Beatrice* – Filippo, the poet-artist, Beatrice the Bride, betrothed to Lionardo Bentivoglio, the Duke of Bologna. The conflict between Pierrette's love for the painter-artist Pierrot and her parents' arrangement to marry her to the wealthy merchant Arlechino is on the surface the same basic conflict as that in *The Veil of Beatrice*.² In both works a bridal veil uncovered in the quarters of a lover symbolized the woman's infidelity to her betrothed. The difference, however, is the doom that awaits.

¹ For a résumé and discussion of *The Veil of Beatrice*, see Urback 1973: 145-155. See also his chronology for the dates of *The Veil of Beatrice* as a play and as a prose tale, pp. 6-7. Aside from this thematic parallel to *The Veil of Beatrice* as the basis for the plot of *The Veil of Pierrette*, Daviau (1981: 19) provides another account for the genesis of the ballet-pantomime and states Schnitzler began the piece as early as 1892. Schnitzler, like Hermann Bahn, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and others, became interested in pantomime as a genre in reaction to naturalism, rationality, language, excessive psychology, and static lyric drama.

² *Der Schleier der Pierrette* 1981: 10-12.

Beatrice is death to avenge dynastic honor because of her betrothal to the Duke, sovereign and absolute ruler of Bologna, whereas the psychological destruction that attends Pierrette is the result of economic and patriarchal power, a consequence of her betrothal to a typical affluent merchant of the Biedermeier period (ca. 1815-1848).³

Schnitzler completed the writing of the ballet-pantomime in 1908. He met with Max Reinhardt on July 15th, 1908 and read the text of the pantomime to the famous director of the Berlin Deutsches Theater and the Kammerspiele des Deutschen Theater. Reinhardt was eager to see it produced at the Kammerspiele or Chamber Theater. Ernst von Dohnányi, the composer, was asked to complete the score as soon as possible, which he did by September 21st.⁴ The first production, however, was not destined to be directed by Reinhardt because of a dispute that involved the composer, Dohnányi. Even though the program lasted only about one hour, Dohnányi expected to conduct his music for the ballet pantomime exclusively as a full-evening performance. However, when he learned that the premiere was a twin bill to be shared with Oscar Straus, who composed the music for Schnitzler's second piece, *The Gallant Cassian*, Dohnányi refused to appear on the same program with Straus. Because the plans for the opening collapsed, Reinhardt did not direct the premiere. So, new arrange-

³ As a period term, *Biedermeier* was used to extoll the bourgeois life of cultivated gardens, domestic tranquility, and simple virtues associated with rural culture. In reaction to the uncertainties of the Napoleonic reign from 1798 to 1815, the spirit of *Biedermeier* withdrew from the sophisticated values of urbane life found in political, bureaucratic, or government circles. The name *Biedermeier* derives from *bieder*, meaning upright, honest, proper, and from *meier*, a common, generic German surname, like Smith in English. Thus, it roughly translates as Honest or Proper Meier. In 1885, Ludwig Eichrodt used the term to satirize such sentiments as those held by a Biedermeier in *The History of the Swabish Schoomasters Gottlieb Biedermaier and his Friend Horatio Trueheart (Die Gedichte des schwäbischen Schulmeisters Gottlieb Biedermaier und seines Freundes Horatius Treuherz)* in the *Mänchner Fliegenden Blättern*, a publication, which popularized Biedermeier "as a philistine caught in a narrowly idyllic conception of the world". See *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry* 1990: 77.

⁴ *Der Schleier der Pierrette* 1981: 9-10. The musical score composed by Ernst von Dohnányi was published under the title of *Klavierauszug mit Text (Klavierpartitur) [Pianoforte Arrangement with Text (piano full score), Opus 18]* Leipzig, Ludwig Doblinger (Bernard Herzmannsky), 1910. This is an annotated score with cues from Schnitzler's verbal text related to passages in the music to accompany the dramatic action.

ments had to be made, and the opening was delayed for a little over a year until finally, on January 22, 1910, the ballet pantomime opened at the Königliches Opernhaus in Dresden (*Der Schleier der Pierrette* 1981: 12).

A synopsis of the plot reveals a number of important details that suggest the ballet pantomime differs significantly from *The Veil of Beatrice*, and because it was a *ballet pantomime* it interested not only Max Reinhardt at the time but other avant-garde directors as well.

In *Scene I*, Pierrot, the painter artist, is alone, restless and impatient with his lot because he has not seen his love for some time. Friends enter his garret studio to entice him to join them in going out for the evening. Pierrot refuses; the friends leave. His manservant appears requesting the evening off to see his beloved. Pierrot begrudgingly grants his request. Pierrot, looking out the window to the street below, suddenly sees the figure of Pierrette, who has come to see him. When she enters, she appears in her wedding dress and bridal veil. They lament their situation, she having been betrothed to a wealthy merchant, Arlechino, and he losing the woman he loves to another. They decide to share a last meal and begin to set the table. Pierrette proposes that since they cannot live together they should die together. She offers a vial of poison to be placed in their wine. They toast, Pierrot drinks it, but Pierrette loses her nerve. Before falling to the floor, Pierrot knocks the wine glass from her hand and dies. Pierrette flees in despair, leaving her bridal veil behind.

In *Scene II*, the Bride's home, a ball is about to commence with all the invited guests assembled and Gigolo, the Master of Ceremonies, to direct the festive activities of the evening. The Master of Ceremonies calls for a quadrille of the orchestra, the couples are assembled to dance, but Arlechino has no partner. The Master of Ceremonies asks him where his bride is so the Bridegroom could join in the dance. All begin a search throughout the house for Pierrette. She is nowhere to be found. Arlechino is furious that she is missing and in a rage starts to break up the instruments of the musicians. Pierrette suddenly appears, making excuses that she was in her room, but Arlechino does not believe her. They join in the dance together. Suddenly, a phantom of Pierrot appears bearing the bridal veil in his hand. Pierrette alone sees the vision and is terrified. Pierrot pursues her throughout the dance, and Pierrette in terror flees the ballroom. Arlechino follows her out.

Scene III opens with Pierrette entering the garret studio and Arlechino in hot pursuit. He sees Pierrot lying on the floor next to the couch with the empty wine glass nearby, so Arlechino concludes that Pierrot is drunk and has passed out. He props the dead body of Pierrot on to the couch and discovers Pierrette's bridal veil on the floor. He chastises her for her infide-

lity. As a punishment he makes love to her by forcing himself on her. Pierrette, horrified by the attempt, rushes back and forth in the room to escape her fate. Arlechino, seeing his revenge having its effect, mocks her rejection and leaves Pierrette to her dead lover, locking the door behind him. Pierrette, claustrophobic from her incarceration with the corpse, dances furiously around the room, frantically trying to escape but to no avail. Soon, she drops to the floor next to the dead Pierrot, expiring beside him. Pierrot's friends return to find the two dead lovers lying on the floor (Schnitzler 1910).

Schnitzler's text for the pantomime lists the three main characters, six supporting characters, several musicians, and an indeterminate number of elderly and young wedding guests. He describes the setting in some detail and writes up the action in the form of dialogue – just as one finds in any elocutionary play – to serve as a guideline for pantomimic and dance movement. Early into the text the author tells us in a footnote that “what is brought about in the dialogue of the text becomes self-explanatory and is expressed only in pantomime”.⁵ Thus, the regisseur-director is given great freedom to interpret the text through means other than the power of the spoken word.

The genre of the wordless drama, less familiar perhaps to general theatre audiences of the day, was not entirely unknown. Although Reinhardt did not get to stage Schnitzler's ballet-pantomime, he did produce a relatively successful example of the genre – wordless except for a spoken prologue. *Sumurûn*, by Frederick Freska in nine scenes, with music composed by Victor Hollaender, opened on April 22, 1910.⁶ Interest in the “wordless” drama, an experimental theatrical form that may have taken its inspiration from the cinematic effects of silent films, attempted to re-create “reality” by means of the total effect of various theatrical devices. The wordless play freed the regisseur from considering the spoken text and allowed him to concentrate on specific instruments of the theatre – scene design, lighting, costume, music, stage dynamics, and body movement to define character and dramatic action. It was another opportunity to create the

⁵ On p. 3, a footnote reads “was im Text dialogartig gebracht ist, wird selbst verständlich nur pantomimisch ausgedrückt”.

⁶ For a discussion of the play, see Styan 1982: 26-30. An overview of Reinhardt's career is given in Leiter 1991: 83-119. A study of Max Reinhardt's production of *Sumurûn* has been done by Kueppers 1980: 75-84.

Gesamtkunstwerk, but without the spoken word. A theatrical sub-genre, the wordless play served as an antithesis to the “discussion” plays of playwrights such as George Bernard Shaw or the naturalistic plays of Henrik Ibsen and Gerhardt Hauptmann. Reinhardt had great success with *Sumurún* not only when first performed in Berlin in 1910, but later when touring in London in 1911, New York in 1912, and Paris in 1912.⁷ Schnitzler had only a brief association with this experimental sub-genre of the ballet-pantomime. Even so, Schnitzler’s text for *The Veil of Pierrette* provided his directors with a text that put him in one sense at the cutting edge of the new thinking in dramatic forms that was emerging during the first decade of the twentieth century.⁸

Evidence for this is born out as one traces the career of Schnitzler’s ballet-pantomime not only among German directors, but also among the Russian directors such as Vsevolod Meyerhold (1870-1940) and Alexander Tairov (1885-1950).⁹

⁷ The success of *Sumurún*, first presented on April 22, 1910 at the Kammerspiele in Berlin, later appearing at the Coliseum in London (January 30, 1911), at the Casino Theatre in New York (January 16, 1912), and at the Théâtre du Vaudeville, Paris (May 24, 1912), was international. It is interesting to note further that *Der Schleier der Pierrette* (1981: 12), attributes co-authorship of *Sumurún* to Grete Wiesenthal, a popular dancer from Vienna and a well-known performer for Max Reinhardt. Her name, however, has not appeared among the credits as “Mitautorin der Pantomime” or co-author. In Huesmann 1983 (Item #477) identifies Grete Wiesenthal as choreographer for the Berlin premiere. In subsequent productions, her name is omitted from the list of credits. Only in the Paris production of May 1912 is another choreographer acknowledged – Tortola Valencia, who also played the role of the Hindu Dancer. See Item #2439.

⁸ Daviau (1981: 21) tells us that Schnitzler, influenced by Hermann Bahr, began to explore the significance between the individualization of verbal language and the universalization of gesture. However, Daviau (1981: 23) also feels that Schnitzler was not an innovator of theatrical forms when he worked with pantomime; having written only two, he simply used pantomime as a vehicle to express his pessimism and deterministic *Weltanschauung*.

⁹ Identification and brief discussions of various productions of the ballet-pantomime appear in *Der Schleier der Pierrette* 1981. This source, however, treats various productions in Germany, Austria, the Balkans, Scandanavia, and one in Petrograd and in New York. Little attention is given to Russian avant-garde directors Meyerhold and Tairov, whose productions of Schnitzler’s ballet pantomime in retrospect enjoyed considerable success as an avant-garde vehicle.

Vsevolod Meyerhold, formerly of Constantine Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre, began to experiment with non-naturalistic theatrical devices as early as 1906 when he directed Alexander Blok's *The Fairground Booth* (*Balagančik*). The main characters in Blok's anti-realistic play were *commedia dell'arte* figures – Pierrot, Columbine, and Harlequin, supplemented by Mystics, a clown, three pairs of lovers, and a satirical parody of the author. The ambience was that of the fairground booth, creating the effect of watching a Punch and Judy show. His scene designer, Nicholas Sapunov, created arresting non-realistic sets for the actors to perform in. The interior for Scene One, for example, was a painted backdrop of a room with a banquet table and chairs, and there were cut-outs in the canvas for the heads, arms, and legs of the Mystics who appeared to be seated at the table. In one incident in the play, the Lover takes his wooden sword and brings it down on the head of a clown who then falls over the footlights and a stream of cranberry juice gushes from his head. Later, Harlequin recites a departing soliloquy and leaps through a window, painted on paper, leaving a gaping hole in the backdrop. Thus, such incidents all created a distancing effect from any realistic action in the play (*Meyerhold on Theatre* 1969: 141).

Meyerhold's production of Blok's play was considered an early significant step in Russian theatre toward a symbolist reaction to the psychological realism of the Moscow Art Theatre. Despite Meyerhold's unorthodox experiments, ironically, on September 1, 1908, Vladimir Teliakovsky, Director of the Imperial Theatres, appointed Meyerhold director in charge of the traditional repertory at the Alexandrinsky dramatic theatre and at the Maryinsky opera. To continue his avant-garde interests, however, Meyerhold adopted a pseudo-identity as Dr. Dapertutto to pursue his experimentations, underground as it were, in the cabaret theatres of St. Petersburg.

That the wordless drama was one of Meyerhold's interests as a genre is evident early in 1910 from his appearance as Pierrot in Mikhail Fokine's *Le Carnaval*, a studio ballet produced at Pavlova Hall, with Robert Schumann's music and Léon Bakst's scene designs. Fokine's ballet, opened on March 5, 1910, was populated with a full panoply of *commedia dell'arte* characters.¹⁰ Later that year, Meyer-

¹⁰ Rudnitsky 1981: 147-148; Braun 1979: 105. Dr. Dappertutto is a name of a character drawn from E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Adventure on New Year's Eve*. Marjorie L. Hoover (1989: 86) describes some of the movement Fokine choreographed for

hold, in his alter ego character of Dr. Dapertutto, found Schnitzler's ballet pantomime attractive as a vehicle for his experimental efforts in the cabaret theatre, *The House of Interludes*. Under the title of *Columbine's Scarf*, the ballet-pantomime opened on October 9th, 1910 (Braun 1979: 102). Meyerhold's interpretation of Schnitzler's text departed strikingly from the somewhat Biedermeier mood of Schnitzler's conception and transformed it into a grotesque.¹¹ The three tableaux of Schnitzler were substituted by fourteen episodes in the mood of E. T. A. Hoffmann, with the second tableau transposed into a veritable "bal macabre". During the spectral appearance of Pierrot, one critic, Yevgeny Znosko-Borosky, described the terrifying scene as follows:

The ball begins; then whilst an old-fashioned quadrille is playing, Pierrot's flapping white sleeve is glimpsed first through the windows, then through the doors. The dances, now fast, now slow, turn into an awful nightmare, with strange Hoffmannesque characters whirling to the time of a huge-headed Kapellmeister, who sits on a high stool and conducts four weird musicians (Braun 1979: 103).

Nicholas Sapunov's scene design was such that it supported the macabre mood of the grotesque rendering of Meyerhold's interpretation. Meyerhold also incorporated a number of symbolic devices from Blok's *Balagančik* into *Columbine's Scarf*, such as having the performers mingle with the audience, the Kapellmeister flee in the final scene directly through the auditorium, a Blackamoor perform as a "proscenium servant" and speak asides directly to the audience.¹²

Another significant Russian production of the Schnitzler's ballet-pantomime represented a complete reversal in theatrical point of view.

Meyerhold; for a discussion of Fokine's *Carnaval* see Horowitz 1985: 21-23.

¹¹ A general definition of the term *grotesque* is that it is a comedy that ends in disillusionment. It employs devices that distort the perception of surface reality in order to call attention to the inadequacy of reason and science to account for the meaning of life such as employed in naturalism. It reflects the presence of the irrational in life, a distrust of any construction for a cosmic order, and expresses a general frustration with man's lot in the universe.

¹² For a discussion of Meyerhold's production of *Columbine's Scarf*, see Braun 1979: 102-105 and *Meyerhold on the Theatre* 1969: 115 ff. See also Heresch 1982: 105-107; Hoover 1989: 62-66. For an English translation of A. Blok's *Balagančik*, see Green 1986: 47-57.

When Meyerhold's former actor Alexander Tairov joined the Free Theatre of Konstantin Mardzhanov in 1913, he was given the opportunity to direct Schnitzler's *Der Schleier der Pierrette*, which opened October 27, 1913. Thomas J. Torda (1977: 68-69, 162-178) provides some details of this production. Tairov's excitement, when given the assignment by Mardzhanov, derived from his perception of the pantomime as a unique opportunity to experiment with his own version of theatricality or *Gesamtkunstwerk*. As Meyerhold veered toward making his actors mere puppets in his productions, Tairov in reaction restored the actor to the center of things in the theatre. Unlike Meyerhold, whose experiments mixed the effects of genres using comic devices to lead to grotesque results, Tairov respected the formal distinctions between comedy and tragedy. For him this ballet-pantomime was a tragic story of the defeat of love. Konstantin Rudnitsky (1988: 15) notes that Tairov, avoiding Meyerhold's grotesque presentation of Schnitzler's ballet-pantomime, held in disdain "the buffoonery and mischievousness of the Meyerhold harlequinade" and presented instead a "stirring, tragic poem of love". Unlike the Meyerhold production, the main character in Tairov's pantomime was not Pierrot, but Pierrette, a role performed by Alice Koonen, formerly of the Moscow Art Theatre, who was later to become Tairov's wife.

Some detailed information about Tairov's methods of coaching and staging of the ballet-pantomime are recorded in Alice Koonen's recollections of her working with him.¹³ However, there does not seem to be much attention given to Tairov's efforts in staging the dance movements of the actors in the piece. It is significant, perhaps, to note that Tairov made an earlier attempt to direct in the *commedia dell'arte* style: Jacinto Benevente's *The Bonds of Interest*, produced in 1912 at the Reineke Theatre in St. Petersburg. Tairov in this production used a choreographer, Boris Romanov, to stage the movement of the actors (Rudnitsky 1988: 15). For the production of *The Veil of Pierrette* in Moscow a year later, no choreographer is generally cited in discussions of the production. However, Mikhail Mordkin (1880-1944), principal dancer with the Imperial Bolshoi Ballet, Diaghilev's Ballet Russes, and the Pavlova Company, is identified as having collaborated on the choreography for this production.¹⁴

¹³ Heresch (1982: 108-110) quotes many observations of Tairov's direction of the pantomime recorded by Alice Koonen.

¹⁴ N. Martianoff- M. A. Stern 1932. The claim is repeated in *Mikhail Mordkin*

Nowhere else is this confirmed by others who have written in English about the production.

Tairov's production of *The Veil of Pierrette*, opening on October 19, 1916, was essentially a revival of the 1913 production. Anatoly Arapov executed the scenery and lighting; however, a new artist, Vera Mukhina (1889-1953), designed the costumes in a cubist style touched by details reminiscent of rayonnist works of Natalia Gontcharova and Mikhail Larionov (Torda 1977: 169). The effectiveness of the Arapov scene design of the 1913 production was felt to be somewhat extravagant in its elegance and its monochronistic color, and Tairov considered it less than supportive of his directorial aims (Torda 1977: 174). However, in the 1916 production, Mukhina's highly stylized and sharp-edged geometric design of Pierrette's costume announced a new direction in Tairov's theatre, foreshadowing of the "constructed costume" later developed by Alexandra Exter (Rudnitsky 1988: 16).

Both first productions of Schnitzler's ballet-pantomime as a wordless drama in Russia were generally well received. There were a number of subsequent productions. Tairov's several revivals of the 1913 production (1916 and 1919 at the Kamerny, in 1923 when the Kamerny went abroad, and others) remained something of a signature piece for Alice Koonen. For Vsevolod Meyerhold, however, a later production in 1916 was not as esteemed as the 1910 Sapunov production. The reason is not exactly clear; if the 1916 effort was a revival of the 1910 interpretation, then, according to Marjorie Hoover, the scene designs of Sergei Soudeikine for Meyerhold's concept did not successfully sustain the director's interpretation.¹⁵ If Meyerhold, on the other hand, tried an entirely new conception of the piece, then the new version of the pantomime would not seem to have been as effective as the original concept despite Soudeikine's efforts in design.

1937-38. "From 1913 to 1917, [Mikhail Mordkin] collaborated with the Kamerny Theatre of Moscow and with its director, Alexander Tairoff, on experiments with first mimo-drama productions, *The Veil of Pierrette* by Arthur Schnitzler, with Music by Erno Dohnanyi, and *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde, music by Joseph Giutel".

¹⁵ Marjorie Hoover (1989: 99-100) lays the failure at Sergei Soudeikine's door because of his penchant for extreme statements in bold colors and lines. It is not clear, however, from her discussion whether this *Columbine's Scarf* is simply a revival of the 1910 production with a new designer or whether it is a new interpretation by Meyerhold of Schnitzler's pantomime.

Whatever the case, the unsuccessful revival opened on April 18, 1916 at the Comedian's Rest in St. Petersburg. Nevertheless, Schnitzler's pantomime in the hands of Russian experimental directors was well served and had a distinguished career both in Moscow and St. Petersburg during the second decade of the century.

A little known Russian performing company that billed itself as the Kikimora Theatre of Moscow brought their version of *Der Schleier der Pierrette* from Paris to Berlin. The company consisted of actors who were emigrés from the Moscow Kamerny Theatre and a ballerina formerly of the Bolshoi Imperial Theatre in Moscow. Elizabeth Anderson, the choreographer of the pantomime, also was a ballerina formerly from the Bolshoi. Ironically, it was this company, and not Max Reinhardt's, that brought Schnitzler's ballet-pantomime to the Kammerspiele des Deutschen Theater in Berlin. Schnitzler himself was in attendance when it opened on September 22, 1922.¹⁶ This production received mixed reviews from Berlin critics, who were particularly disappointed with the performance of Sofia Fedórova. As a principal dancer with the Bolshoi Imperial Theatre, Fedorova had gained considerable renown as a character ballerina, and as early as 1909 she acquired a reputation abroad for her performances with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. She was the principal dancer in Mikhail Fokine's *Pollovtsian Dances* from *Prince Igor* that overwhelmed Parisian audiences with its vigorous Russian character dancing.

In Berlin, however, she was less admired. One critic saw her performance as a disappointment and somewhat nostalgically recalled with pleasure the performance of Elsa Galafrés in 1912, who apparently gave a highly satisfactory interpretation of the role of Pierrette.¹⁷ Otto Gysae, another critic, regretting the presence of so many

¹⁶ Huesmann (1983: Item #1342) offers a list of credits for the Kikimora production at Reinhardt's Kammerspiele des Deutschen Theater. There were twenty-nine players in the cast for this production: three principals, and ten secondary roles, and sixteen ladies, gentlemen, and servants. Among the principal cast members, Anatoly Chabrov appeared as Arlechino, a role he played opposite Alice Koonen at the Tairov's Kamerny Theatre in Moscow. See Heresch (1982: 117) photographic plate of Koonen and Chabrov. For a recent account of the Berlin production see Böhmig 1990: 138-142.

¹⁷ L. S., *Theater.*, "Berliner Tageblatt und Handels-Zeitung" 23 September 1922, p. 2. The reviewer was also perplexed by the company's name: "Was der uns komisch klingende Name – ein Signenname? – bedeutet, weiss ich nicht". He said the only

Russian companies on the German stage, grumbled about the nationalistic enthusiasm of the Russian emigrés who dominated the composition of the opening night audience at the *Kammerspiele*. He, too, remembered fondly the past. For him Irma Tervani's original *Pierrette* at the *Königliches Opernhaus* in 1910, under the musical direction of Ernst von Such, was "such a ravishing and soulful lover".¹⁸ Fedorova was neither a dancer nor an actress, for him, only a "Balletteuse", who lacked subtlety and grace. The other principals in the cast, Sam Vermeil as *Pierrot* and Anatoly Chabrov as *Arlechino*, were no more successful than Fedorova, according to Gysae. Although he noted with disapproval that they performed Schnitzler's wordless drama as a ballet, he found some redeeming qualities about Elizabeth Anderson's work as choreographer:

The production was that of a good dancemaster; it failed at all the points where feeling should have spoken, but it was artistic and danced over the most difficult stairs where ballet form was needed.¹⁹

Neither of these critics mentioned anything about Natalia Gontcharova's scene design or costumes. A third reviewer did find space to acknowledge the designer's work. Like some other critics, he dwelled upon the effectiveness of the second scene. He says:

The second act, with its colorful feast for the eyes – Natalia Gontcharova's decorations and costume designs are certainly to be commended for their individual character – with skillful direction (A. Chabrov) and the charm of the male and graceful female dancers vaulting over steps and stairs, sets off the whole thing, so to speak.²⁰

thing he really knew was "dass es keine hohen Kunst war". He notes that the almost totally Russian audience was highly pleased by the performance of their comrades on stage, unlike his own response. Another critic notes at the beginning of his review "Wieder eine neue russische Truppe. Bald werden wir mehr russische Theater haben als deutsche". *Kikimora* was a name found in Russian folklore, designating an imaginary, tiny old woman who dwelled in the family kitchen and to whom any mishaps were attributed. She was a kind of friendly gremlin. The meaning in association with this theatre company, however, remains a mystery.

¹⁸ Gysae 1922: 2: "eine so bezaubernede und seelenvolle Geliebte".

¹⁹ Gysae 1922: 2: "Die Regie was die eines guten Tanzmeisters: sie versagte an allen Stellen, wo das Gefühl hatte sprechen müssen, aber sie was virtuos und tanzte über dies schwierigsten Treppenstufen, was es sich um Ballett-formationen handelte".

²⁰ Anonymous, *Kammerspiele*, "Germania Zeitung für Das Deutsche Volk", 23

It was perhaps to be expected that Russian performers when working with the art of another nationality would be appreciated better on Russian home ground than on a foreign soil, especially if the literary text was the same as the language of the host nation. The Berlin critics expected much more from Fedorova as representative of great Russian ballerinas and invidiously compared her with Pavlova and ballerinas from Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Not all the Berlin critics, however, rejected the production as a whole because Fedorova failed to meet their expectations. One critic praised Dohnányi's music, conducted by Henri Forterre, for its appropriateness in supporting Schnitzler's dramatic text, the orchestra's quality as a chamber quartet supplemented with additional wind instruments, and Gontcharova's decorative framework, all of which enhanced the efforts of the performers. Again, Elizabeth Anderson's choreography was noted. The reviewer for the "Vorwärts Berliner Volksblatt" went on to say:

The actors altogether have a grandiose realness, pureness of mime; their movements in walking full of tragedy, in dancing full of smoothness. Pierrot's first act is particularly impressive through the support of silhouette-cuts of the figures. The directing permits and demands the filling in of the small artfully, tastefully arranged rooms, as is only possible or to be expected from people who have the smoothness of movement found in animals. In that play, there is hardly a pause, only from time to time one might give a start when there is a clever premeditation of a movement. Other than that, there is over this play a mood that originates only from full and very deeply experiencing artists.²¹

Sep. 1922, p. 2. "Der zweite Akt mit seiner bunten Augenfreude [Augenschmaus] – die Dekorationen und Kostüm entwürfe von Natalie Goncharowa sind in ihrer Eigenart wohl zu loben – mit seiner geschickten Regie (U. Tschabow) und der Anmut der über Stufen und Treppen voltigierenden Tänzer und graziösen Tänzerinnen reißt, wie man zu sagen pflegt, die ganze Geschichte heraus".

²¹ K. S. *Russische Tanzpantomime*, "Vorwärts Berliner Volksblatt" 24 September 1922, p. 2. "Die Darsteller haben allesamt eine prachtvolle Echtheit der Mimik, ihre Bewegungen schreitend voller Tragik, tanzend voller Geschmeidigkeit, Pierrots erster Akt durch Silhouettenschnitt der Figuren besonders eindringlich, die Regie erlaubt und bedingt ein Ausfüllen der kleinen kunstvoll hergerichteten Räume, wie es nur von tierhaft gelenkigen Menschen erreicht wird. Im Spiel bleibt kaum eine Pause, nur hie und da einmal stutzt man bei einer klügen Vorbedachtheit der Bewegung. Sonst aber liegt über diesem Spiel die Stimmung, die nur von ganzen und erlebnis starken Künstlern auszugehen pflegt".

One gets the impression from the specific detail this reviewer provides that the production received a closer scrutiny on the merits of its overall performance and, therefore, one feels that the assessment is probably a more accurate evaluation than what was offered by the other critics. Their disappointments may have been influenced more by the ubiquity of Russian emigrés residing in Berlin, the number of Russian performing artists vying for attention on the Berlin stages, and the threat of foreign competitors for employment in a shrinking market, than on the performing efforts of the artists.²²

One other reason for the reserved reception of the production by the Berlin critics may be in reaction to the unrestrained appreciation by some Russian members in the audience. Michaela Böhmig offers as an example the critical assessment of N. Berberova, which is quite breathtaking in its enthusiasm for the performances of the principals:

Chabrov was an ingenious actor and mime; there is no other way of describing him; his magical radiating power and his expressive, great talent were unusual. Together with him performed Fedorova II. . . and Samuel Vermeil, who played Pierrot. I can still recall every detail of this unique performance – nothing ever impressed itself upon my memory like “Veil”. . . . When Chabrov and Fedorova II danced the polka in the second act, while the dead Pierrot appeared on the little balcony (Columbine does not see him, but Harlequin knows that Pierrot is there), I understood for the first time (and forever after) what real theatre meant and cold shivers still run down my spine when I think of Schnitzler's pantomime in the performance of these three actors. Such acting goes to the spectator's blood, not metaphorically, but really; it does something to him, changes him, influences his whole future life and thinking, and seems to him like a communion.²³

²² Similar grumbling was evident in the Paris press in 1921, expressing fears from 23,466 Russian residents in Paris competing with the native born for employment. *L'étranger à Paris*, “La Croix”, 4 janvier 1921, p. 2.

²³ Böhmig 1990: 141-142. “Cabrov war ein genialer Schauspieler und Mime, anders kann ich ihn nicht nennen, seine magische Ausstrahlung und sein ausdrucksstarkes, grosses Talent waren ungewöhnlich. Zusammen mit ihm spielten Fedorova II ... und Samuil Vermel', der den Pierrot spielte. Noch jetzt erinnere ich mich an jede Einzelheit dieser einzigartigen Vorstellung – nichts hat sich je so in mein Gedächtnis eingepägt wie dieser “Schleier”... Als Cabrov und Fedorova II. im zweiten Akt die Polka tanzten, während der tote Pierrot auf dem kleinen Balkon erschien (die Kolombine sieht ihn nicht, doch der Harlekin weiss schon, dass der Pierrot dort ist), habe ich zum erstenmal (und für immer) verstanden, was echtes Theater ist und noch jetzt läuft

Finally, one other Russian production about which virtually nothing has been written was presented as *Columbine's Veil* at the Institute of Art History in Petrograd, which opened on May 9, 1923. The production was directed by N. A. Shcherbakov, and the scene design was executed by Vladimir Dimitri. The choreography was created by Georgi Balanchivadze,²⁴ who did not begin to use the name George Balanchine until 1924 when he left Russia and joined Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in London (*George Balanchine* 1983: 24). A list of cast members for the production apparently has not survived, and little other information is available at present.

The identification of this production with Meyerhold, as it is given in *Der Schleier der Pierrette* (1981), is not corroborated by the catalogue of Balanchine's choreographic works (*George Balanchine* 1983: 59). Furthermore, it seems unlikely that Elizabeth Souritz (1990: 75) would omit mentioning Meyerhold's connection with the 1923 Balanchine effort if indeed there was one. Only two Meyerhold productions appear regularly in the discussion of Schnitzler's *Der Schleier der Pierrette*, and both are cited under Meyerhold's title, *Columbine's Scarf* in 1910 at the House of Interludes and in 1916 at the Comedian's Rest. Nor does Marjorie Hoover in *Meyerhold and His Set Designers* acknowledge Meyerhold's involvement with the Shcherbakov production or with Vladimir Dimitri's scene designs. And so it remains doubtful that Meyerhold was involved in the Shcherbakov production of 1923.

Our selected survey of various Russian productions of Schnitzler's ballet-pantomime aims to show that the piece held great attraction for experimental directors in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Their influence was even felt abroad when Tairov's Kamerny Theater toured

es mir kalt den Rücken hinunter, wenn ich an Schnitzlers Pantomime in der Darstellung dieser drei Schauspieler zurückdenke. So ein Theater geht ins Blut des Zuschauers, nicht metaphorische, sondern wirklich, tut etwas mit ihm, verändert ihn, beeinflusst sein ganzes weiteres Leben und Denken und erscheint ihm wie eine Kommunion".

²⁴ *Der Schleier der Pierrette* (1981:17) describes Balanchine's choreography as follows: "1923 kommt der 'Schleier der Pierrette' in Petrograd zur Aufführung. Choreograph ist niemand anderer als George Balanchine. Für die Inszenierung ist der Meyerhold-Schüler-Scherbakow verantwortlich. Der neunzehnjährige Balanchine erzieht mit seiner Choreographie 'Moment höchster Expressivität'" See also Souritz 1990: 75. For a list of production personnel, see also *George Balanchine*: 1983: 59, Item 15.

with it in Vienna and elsewhere, when the Kikimora Theatre of Moscow presented it in Berlin, and even when the American Laboratory Theatre presented it, under Russian emigré direction, in New York in 1928 (Sullivan 1993: 13-20). The wordless drama, as Rudnitsky states (1988: 10), provided these directors with a work by which they may escape the demands of authors and the priorities claimed for their verbal texts – what may perhaps be regarded as the tyranny of the written word. It afforded them the opportunity to achieve a successful dramatic experience through purely theatrical means. That is, all the other available devices of the theatre – scenery, lighting, costume, bodily movement, gesture, the challenge of the barrier of the proscenium arch, even the challenge to use the very auditorium itself, etc. – provided them with other equivalents to create effects an author achieved by the written word.

Such experimental pursuits were largely successful in presenting Schnitzler's narrative of the defeat of love in ways probably not envisioned by him at the time of the writing. One reason for whatever success the ballet-pantomime had for each of the directors was that Schnitzler's piece was at best an effort in a minor genre. The three scenes could be encompassed within a one-hour performing time, it had a classic three-character conflict, and it offered modern, rather than traditional, *commedia dell'arte* character types as behavioral points of reference. Finally, the ballet-pantomime could readily be performed in a little theatre. The play allowed directors to experiment with new devices, *multo in parvo*, as it were, testing them in miniature for their dramatic or theatrical value before introducing them into a larger dramatic works. One only wishes that Max Reinhardt, who was diverted in his original attempt, had another opportunity to return to the task of directing Schnitzler's pantomime. His conception would perhaps have provided us with another standard by which to judge the success of later productions.

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