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## SYMBOLISM AND THEATRE OF MASQUES: THE DEATHLY CARNIVAL OF *LA BELLE ÉPOQUE*

**Abstract:** The junction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe sharpened the clash of artistic novelties in the Western and Slavonic worlds, caused by developed *Symbolism* and *Expressionism*. As an output of the former reappeared in the “Jahrhundertwende” the transformed characters of the *Commedia dell’arte*, flourished in art, literature and music in Italy, France, Austria and Russia. Exponents of Italian *Renaissance* theatre, Stravinsky’s *Petrushka* (1911) and Schönberg’s *Pierrot lunaire* (1912) turned soon to be main works of the Russian and Austrian expressionistic music style, inaugurated by Strauss’s *Salome*, which won opera stages from the 1905 on. Influences of the latter were widespread and unexpected, reaching later the “remote” areas of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as the Balkans (in 1907 the Canadian dancer Maud Allan performed *The Vision of Salome* in Belgrade – music Marcel Remy – making her *debut* in Vienna 1903). Compositions of Strauss and Schönberg (*Erwartung* included) reflected also the strong cult of death present in Vienna’s *Fin-de-siècle Symbolism*, concerning among other works plays by Wedekind and Schnitzler (*Veil of Pierrette* was staged successfully in Russia, too), with prototypes in Schumann’s *Carnival* and *Masquerade* by Lermontov (both works written in 1834!). It was not by chance that Schumann’s piano suite became one of the first ballets of Diaghilev’s *Saisons Russes* (1910) and *Masquerade*, performed with the incidental music by Alexander Glazunov, the last pre-revolutionary piece of Vsevolod Meyerhold (1917).

**Key-words:** *Commedia dell’arte*, Symbolism, Expressionism, street theatre, *Fin-de-siècle*.

According to what the historian Zalevsky said in his book on the Russian Tsar Nicholas I, Nikolai Berdiayev (1874–1948) thought (as stated in his work *Smysl istorii*, 1923 – *The Meaning of History*) that with World War I and the Russian Revolution mankind entered a disastrous period in its development at a catastrophic pace that had not been known before<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, not only does World War I rank among the most atrocious world wars that have ever been waged on this planet, but it had also marked a substantial turn in history that subsequently gave rise to unpredictable consequences. Anyway, is it possible to foresee the consequences of a cataclysm at all? On the other hand, Zalevsky believes (and is probably not alone in such

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Zalevsky, *Nikolai I, Imperator Nikolai Pavlovich i ego epokha (po vospominaniam sovremennikov) – Imperator Nikolai Pavlovich and his epoch (after the memoirs of contemporaries)*, ed. by the author, printed in Germany by Polyglott Druck GmbH, Frankfurt a. M., 1981, 206.

deliberations) that the beginning of calamitous historical developments was actually marked by the year 1848.

The number of artists, who were affected by the 1848 Revolution, where not few- Richard Wagner (1813–1883) being the first, and Franz Liszt (1811–1889) also – as well as by that from the 1830 when the Polish emigration with Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849) found its domicile in Paris. This means that the whole Romantic Movement became an omen in its climax of the apocalyptic events Europe was to be thrown into by World War I and the October Revolution. The box of Pandora was already open – maybe with the French Revolution (or it had never been really shut?).

In the second half of the 19th century Wagner certainly heralded “Weltuntergang” by his Tetralogy, to unite (mostly posthumously) by his complete work the literary symbolists, first in France and then in other countries worldwide. Shattering the leading minds in music of his time, he forced his contemporaries – after he had shaken tonality by the Tristan chord – to change their views on music, whether they liked his work or not. Fiodor Dostoievsky (1821–1881) wrote his novels – prophecies prognosticating the October overturn with *Besy (The Devils – 1870)*, that was to cause agony to the Russian people and subsequently to others as well.

What preceded the doomsday, the fall of the East and West? It was surely the splendour and the feast during the time of plague. Art flourished all over, in France, Austria, Germany, Italy, the swan song, “The Silver Era” in Russia, the development and synthesization of arts, as well as the realization of the spiritualization of culture, emphasized by Vasily Kandinsky (1866–1944), not only as a result of the emerging of gifted individuals or groups but also of the free exchange of artistic ideas and experiences on the Paris-Vienna-Munich-Moscow-St. Petersburg route. The intellectual Europe was solidary much more than ever.

However, the *Fin-de-siècle* was in fact the *Fin-du-monde*, following numerous climaxes, particularly in Russia. The junction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe intensified the already existing clash between artistic novelties in the Western and Slavonic worlds, caused by developed *Impressionism*, *Symbolism* and *Expressionism*. In a brilliant moment, the “silver” or “golden” era of the last and first decade at the “Jahrhundertwende” concentrated in *Symbolism* – a short living but splendid manifestation of arts, which summoned the impressionistic craving for transparent beauty and expressionistic perverse exaltation. The *Impressionism* was moved by “the mystery of love” and “the mystery of death” was the moving spirit of *Expressionism*.

The French painting and music and the harsh tone of German new tonal investigation promoting hysteria and ugliness, both rooted in Richard Wagner’s art, stood side by side with the occurrence of *Symbolism* in literature. Soon, *Symbolism* found itself on the very top of the all-inclusive

pyramid. Its radiations were felt most intensely in the fields of painting and music in France and Austria (Paris and Vienna), and in Russia as well (St. Petersburg and Moscow) in performing arts, painting and music.

Surrounded today by an abundance of experiments in the sphere of theatrical pursuits one may fail to recognize the amount of contribution the Italian *Renaissance* theatres have made to the fundamentals of the Western and, up to a degree, Eastern European theatrical arts, and how extensively that form of the theatre of masques has been present in many branches of the European art.

At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, in particular, either the genuine or transformed characters of *Commedia dell'arte* virtually blossomed in art, literature and music. It is noteworthy that various sophisticated transpositions of the popular theatrical personalities found their place in the intellectually appealing forms of performing theatres during the seemingly short reign of symbolist aesthetics, which certainly persisted longer at all the different European spots, than it might appear at first sight. Symbolist “clowneries” filled up theatres in the interwar period, too, and exerted a far-reaching influence, the effects of which are felt even today.

In the original form of the popular Italian theatre, servants, like the witty Harlequin (Trufaldino, Pulcinella), the frivolous Colombina and the non-adaptable, clumsy Pedrolino (Pierrot), used to help the young couple (let us take the example of Beaumarchais/Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, 1816, or *Maskarade* by Carl Nielsen, 1865–1931) to felicity, in spite of the opposing parents or tutors (Pantalone and Cassander).

Beginning in the sixteenth century, Italian personalities who originated from common people were being shaped by a pleiade of actors, even the generations of families. Soon, the Italian theatre was making its appearance in France and England, renewed in the nineteenth century, thanks to sophisticated literary forms presenting the former servants as newly established gentlemen and ladies. From the last century on, *Commedia's* personalities gradually turned into haunted lovers in different interpretations. Sometimes they would make a comic triangle, but in a majority of cases the outcome was tragical.

In the operatic world Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1857–1919) with his *Pagliacci* in 1892 inaugurated also the deathly harlequinade. The rebirth of the theatre of masques (or the success of the Leoncavallo's opera) inspired Pietro Mascagni (1863–1945), the already celebrated author of *Cavalleria Rusticana* (premiered 1890), to turn to more funny versions of *Commedia* and compose *Le maschere, commedia lirica e giocosa in 3 atti*, which received great publicity in 1901, when it was simultaneously performed in 7 Italian cities, namely in Venice, Verona, Genova, Milan, Rome and Turin in January 17, Naples January 19. The immediate successor to the two operas was the piece *Die neugierigen Frauen (Le donne curiose)* by Ermanno

Wolf-Ferrari (1867–1948), also performed in several cities (Berlin, Vienna, Prague, Antwerp, Riga, Warsaw) in 1905, after the première in Munich in 1903. The Dane Nielsen gave a similar tone to his comic opera in three acts (*Maskarade*, 1907), but the elements of the refined Italian theatre were predominantly characterized by morbidity.

The end of the nineteenth-century dancing repertoire in Europe, especially in Russia, was represented by the same kind of subjects, exploited in *Nutcracker* (1892) by Peter Tchaikovsky (1840–1893) or *Die Puppenfee* (*Fairy Doll*, 1888) by Josef Bayer (1852–1913). Touched with melancholy was the well-known ballet *Harlequinade* by Riccardo Drigo (1846–1930), one of the many Italians who spent (almost) their whole lives in Russia. The ballet was produced in St. Petersburg and Moscow in 1900, to achieve afterwards fame beyond Russia under the title *Les Millions d'Arlequin*. The ballet *Colombine* (Berlin 1904) by Oscar Straus (1870–1954) was competing to that of Drigo's whose interpretation of the drama of Colombina, Pierrot, and Harlequin was a donation to the current fashion for the *Commedia dell'arte* in Russia.

All kinds of exclusive small cabarets in St. Petersburg at the *Fin-de-siècle* were full of Colombinas and their two indispensable companions, ready for self-destruction. There, the transformed Italian theatre of masques was coloured by gloomy *Romanticism* and the grotesque, as was the case with the symbolist plays by Alexander Blok (1880–1921), *Balaganchik*, *The Small Showbox*, 1906, Leonid Andreyev (1871–1919), *Chornye maski*, *Black Masks*, 1907/8, and others. Let us add to the list the Schumann's *Carnival*, first choreographed by Mikhail Fokine (1880–1942) for the ball audience of St. Petersburg in 1910 in a private club and subsequently seized by Sergei Diaghilev (1872–1929) for his *Seasons* in Paris.

One may be inclined to believe that the *Symbolism* represented by the Italian *Renaissance* theatre was imported into Russia and the Slavonic world, but Russia, too, had its own Pierrot – Petrushka, the folk-hero of fairground booths, who turned in the *Belle Époque* to be the protagonist of the most unhappy love story in the ballet and the puppet-world. In the Russian *Symbolism* the romantic irony was followed by the cynicism of the *Belle Époque*, not entirely unknown from before, which gave rise to grotesque situations and an atmosphere that became a predecessor to the avant-garde of new theatrical trends.

Anyhow, the artistic climate in Europe was feverish at that time and the strong cult of death, cherished in Vienna, broke through to the Russian stages via Schnitzler's and Wedekind's plays, also inspiring musicians. A great swing was given by *Der Schleier der Pierrette*, *The Veil of Pierrette*, Schnitzler's and Dohnányi's musical pantomime (with its 1910 première in Dresden) performed several times in Russia very successfully. Vsevolod Meyerhold (1866–1942) staged the piece (under his own title *The Scarf of Colombine*) in St. Petersburg's theatre Interlude House in 1910. Alexander

Tairov (1885–1950) mounted *The Veil of Pierrette* twice in Moscow, in the Free Theatre of Konstantin Mardjanov (1872–1933) in 1913, and in his own Chamber Theatre in 1916.<sup>2</sup> Schnitzler's play *Die Frau mit dem Dolch*, *The Woman with a Dagger* was composed and published as an opera in 1912 by the "symbolist" author Vladimir Rebikov (1864–1920).

At the beginning of the twentieth century The "Wiener Zeitgeist" was felt inevitable in the Balkan regions within Austria-Hungary as well as in the Kingdom of Serbia, and in Bulgaria. The influence of Schnitzler's "Einakter" can be traced in the writings of the Serbian author Miloš Crnjanski (1893–1977). During World War I, he wrote, among other works, a drama, entitled *The Mask*, the action of which took place in Vienna in the 1850s. Along with the main characters, restless lovers, there also appeared some authentic personalities on the scene who played important role in the development of the Serbian culture of that time. Let us point out that quite a number of Serbs lived in Austrian capital in the nineteenth century.

Celebrities appearing in the Crnjanski's play were Branko Radičević (1824–1853), the poet, and Kornelije Stanković (1831–1865), the composer, the followers of new roads originally paved by Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864), whose accomplishments in the field of linguistics brought him the fame of the founder of the modern Serbian and Croatian language. The new wave coincided with the awakening of the national conscience at the beginning of the nineteenth century among the Slavonic people who lived within the Austro-Hungarian borders, however in the first place among those oppressed by the Turks.

A certain carnival note of tragicomedy of the time (*The Mask* was first published in Zagreb in 1918) reflected the spirit of the *Fin-de-siècle* that was, in effect, retrospectively transferred into a drawing-room piece with subjects from the beginning and the middle of the nineteenth century. The spirit of the modern *Commedia del'arte* had an impact, likewise, on the authentic characters of the drama (the poet Radičević and the composer-pianist Stanković both died young of tuberculosis), their role being also to contribute to the genuine presentation of the Serbian bourgeois milieu that dwelled in Vienna, mainly in the Pan Slavonic circles.

But the first traces of the Serbian literary *Symbolism* (which may freely be regarded as a direct product of *Romanticism*) can be found in the pseudo-historical drama *Maksim Crnojević* by Laza Kostić (1841–1910), a Serbian

<sup>2</sup> See Jurij Elagin, *Temnyj genij (Vsevolod Meierhold) Dark Genius (Vsevolod Meyerhold)*, Frankfurt am Main: Polyglott-Druck, Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd., 1982, 160–162 (first published, also in Russian, by Chekhov Publishing House of the East European Fund Inc., 1955, New York) and Alexandre Taïrov, *Le Theatre libéré*, Traduction, préface et notes de Claudine Amiard-Chevrel, Lausanne, 1974, La Cité – L'Age d'Homme, 30, 31, 39, 201 (Theatre Années Vingt, Collection dirigée par Denis Bablet, Série "Ecrits Théoriques").

writer who like Crnjanski lived in Vojvodina. The drama was written in the early 1860s by the young author who was fascinated by Shakespeare's works, but also had his own original ideas stemming from the Serbian national epic poetry that had survived, thanks to the already mentioned language reformer, Vuk Karadžić.<sup>3</sup> The tragic denouement of the play *Maxim* took place at a wedding party – carnival, in the style of the romantic knightly tragedies. The unusual, but yet recognizable, triangle in the drama, rooted in the epic poem of the same name – the prototype of the drama, suggests that the idea of tragic lovers of *Commedia dell'arte* had been employed long before the Italian theatre took roots on a wide scale in a retransformed shape on the European stages.

In that sense, the novel *Idiot* by Dostoievsky contains the same archetypal triangle with its Colombina accompanied by Harlequin and Pierrot (or even two Pierrots) before the *Belle Époque*. Maybe, the spectators had a presentiment of it when they exclaimed, at the premiere of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* in Paris, 1911, that "C'est très à la Dostoievsky!"<sup>4</sup> In the like manner both *Maxim Crnojević* and *The Idiot* (although extremely remote works) are the genuine carnivals of death within the overall cosmos of art and philosophy of the *Romanticism* and *Belle Époque*.

Perhaps Dostoievsky's *Idiot* of the 1860s reappeared in the 1880s and 1890s in some distant transformed shape in the numberless French Pierrots of Paul Margueritte (1860–1918), Théodore de Banville (1823–1891) and Edmond Rostand (1868–1918, *Les deux Pierrots*, a one-act poem in verse, performed also in Russia). Let us add to the list some others, nowadays also forgotten pieces as the musical pantomime (one of predecessors of *The Veil of Pierrette*) – *L'histoire d'un Pierrot* in three acts by Fernand Bessier, with the score by Pasqual Mario Costa (1858–1933), played in Paris in 1893 and also in Prague in 1904 and Zagreb in 1909 (In Prague and Zagreb the title

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<sup>3</sup> Let us also recall that Kostić, the author of the drama, gave a brilliant lecture in German on the female characters in the Serbian national epic poetry at the Wissenschaftlicher Club in Vienna 1876, which assembled the cream of the scientific and artistic intelligentsia. 1876 was the year of the Serbian-Russian liberation war against Turks, the event accounting for the enormous interest the Viennese audience took in the subject. The lecture *Über die weiblichen Charaktere in der serbischen Volkspoesie* appeared first (in German) in St. Petersburg (St. Petersburger Zeitung No 104–106, 20–22 April, 2–4 Mai, 1877). The Serbian version *O ženskim karakterima u srpskoj narodnoj poeziji* (*About the Female Characters in the Serbian National Poetry*) was printed in the monthly journal *Srpska Zora* (Serbian Dawn), Vienna, May, 1877, vol.5, 113–116, and June, vol.6, 134–138. See: *Laza Kostić o književnosti i jeziku* (*Laza Kostić about Literature and Language*), prepared by Hatidža Krnjević, Matica Srpska, Novi Sad, 1990, 108–126 and 285–300, Collection of Laza Kostić's Work, ed. by Mladen Leskovac.

<sup>4</sup> Vera Krassovskaia, *Russkij bal'etnyj teatr nachala XX veka, 1. Choreografy* (*Russian Ballet Theatre of the Beginning of the Twentieth Century, 1. Choreographers*), Leningrad, Iskusstvo, 1971, 376.

role was performed by the Croatian actor Ivo Raić, 1881–1931). *König Harlequin*, masquerade in four acts by Rudolf Lothar, was equally interesting, premiered in Vienna in 1900 and in Zagreb in 1902, in Moscow 1917.

Viennese cabarets and clubs were full of “decadent” clown-pieces of the epoch, in the fashion of the *Jugendstil* and the *Sezession*. At the turn of the centuries, everything was dream and reality in Vienna and Budapest, two cities of brilliant operettas. It was difficult to separate daily events from phantasmagoria. The dream was Gustav Klimt (1862–1918), the early Schönberg, with the hypertrophied sound of *Gurrelieder* (1911), not in the least weaker than that in Mahler’s or Scriabine’s orchestra, the latter being heard in Paris at the time. Reality was the other side of the coin on the road to the cataclysm. While “Congress was having fun”, the underground kept itself busy with the presence of the powers of darkness. Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) and Leon Trotzki (1879–1940) were residing in Vienna in 1908, and the revolutionary Bolshevik school was set up at Lenin’s directives in the Paris suburb Longjumeau in 1911, when the *Ballets Russes* were at their glorious pinnacle.

The feeling of death was often replaced by a high cult of beauty, unquestionably apparent in the *World of Art* (*Mir iskusstva*) – *Ballets Russes* movement that owed so much to the Russian *Impressionism* of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908) and Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971). Let us evoke the magnificent music of Stravinsky’s *Firebird* (1910) which supports the idea of reunited or mingled musical styles at the beginning of the twentieth century. The romantic idea of *Chêf-d’œuvre*, the idea of transcendental beauty was symbolised by the never-to-be-reached bird of fire.

This symbol of unreachable beauty had its origin in *Swan Lake* (1877), *Sleeping Beauty* (1890) and *Nutcracker*, as well as *Raymonda* (1897), the typical products of the *Fin-de-siècle*,<sup>5</sup> among which also ranks the opera *The Queen of Spades* (1892) along with the *Fifth* (1888) and *Sixth Symphony* (1893) by Tchaikovsky, the most theatricalized musical pieces of the kind. Tchaikovsky’s last works were inspired by the Russian and hoffmannesque literary phantasy and thoroughly Russian mysticism. Tchaikovsky’s *The Queen of Spades*, a contemporary of Mascagni’s *Cavalleria* (here we forget the story-prototype by Giovanni Verga, 1840–1922, but do not lose from sight the verbal basis of the opera from the pen of Alexander Pushkin, 1799–1837), brings by its libretto and music that carnivalesque turmoil where the innamorati pay by their lives, each in his or her own way.

As expressed by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), every sujet is a mask on the face of the drama, and the specific fabula is given, in this case by symbolists and before them (or at the same time) by romanticists, only a

<sup>5</sup> For *Raymonda* see Detlef Gojowy, *Alexander Glasunov, Sein Leben in Bildern und Dokumenten*, unter Einbeziehung des biographischen Fragments von Glasunows Schwiegersohn Herbert Günther, München, List Verlag, 1986, 84.

new dimension in expressing the human tragedy. Thus the musical interpretation of the Pushkin's story by Tchaikovskys, with Modest as librettist and Peter as composer has given to the work of the Russian writer an entirely different meaning where the romantic opera aesthetics with its postulates about love and death underlies the concept of the main roles. Of course, the style and meaning of the musical prototype may be changed not only by the musical but also by directing interpretation. However, it has not been the intention to discuss at this point the staging of the opera *The Queen of Spades* or, to be more precise, its two stagings, by Konstantin Stanislavsky (1930) and Vsevolod Meyerhold respectively (1935), even though the topic is worthy of attention.

On the other side, it could be of interest to review the director's approach which Meyerhold employed in *Masquerade*, a four-act drama in verse, written by Mikhail Lermontov (1814–1841) in 1834, at the time when Robert Schumann (1810–1856) composed his "masquerade", a piano suite named *Carnival* and at the same time when Pushkin wrote *The Queen of Spades*. The play by Lermontov begins where the story by Pushkin ends or, more specifically, at the gambling table, the actual conflict developing after a masked ball in the high society of St. Petersburg. As in Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604), the innocent heroine falls as the victim of her husband's unfounded jealousy.

At first, Lermontov's *Masquerade* was not looked at with a benevolent eye by the Russian censorship, because of the alleged cynicism and nihilism that were pronounced by the author. After Lermontov's premature death (dying younger than Pushkin, also in a duel) the play got to the theatre in the nineteenth century. However, the première on 28 February 1917 was given with an extraordinary glamour in the interpretation of Meyerhold. It was the swan song of the controversial Romanticist, the future chief doer of the Theatrical October and subsequently a victim of the doctrine of socialist realism.

In the hands of a phantast as Meyerhold was, the Lermontov's drama gained a brilliant *Belle Époque* flair, with paintings by Alexander Golovin (1863–1930) that added to the competitiveness of the stage set of the new *Commedia dell'arte*, in contrast to the splendour of the applied arts of *Art Nouveau*. It was the last "imperial" staging by the director who was meritorious for the spreading of *Symbolism* in Russian theatres. This performance of Lermontov's *Masquerade* was unjustifiably signified as a symbol of the "decadent theatre of the overthrown dynasty" which was later accepted by the Soviet theatrics, too. However, it would be interesting to note that the performance, which was qualified by Alexander Benois (1870–1960) as "futile beauty" and the preparation of which took six years, did not receive adequate recognition.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jurij Elagin, *Temnyj genij (Vsevolod Meierhold) Dark Genius (Vsevolod Meyerhold)*, Frankfurt a. M., 1982, 198–200, 203–206, 210.

This is the ambiance that was so picturesquely described in the *Poème sans héros* by Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966), the “plot” of which developed in St. Petersburg in 1913. In a dreamlike vision, as in a masked ball of ghosts, by the sound of Chopin’s *Marche funèbre*, through the poem are marching the personalities from the literary and artistic world of the nineteenth century and the St. Petersburg *Belle Époque*. The masks of death, nightmare carnivals, besiege the imagination of the Europeans and especially Russians before World War I and the Revolution. The Russians have the premonition of the catastrophe and they anticipate it nonambiguously.

The text of Akhmatova’s highly theatricalized *Poema bez geroia* (*The Poem without the Hero*) is impregnated with the features of the Russian folkloric theatre and sketches of the exclusive artistic theatrical clubs of St. Petersburg. It resembles a modern operatic libretto, even more an avant-garde ballet scenario (which is indicated by the author herself in the commentaries on the poem), by quotations from dramatic literature (*Faust*, *Don Juan*), replicas from the opera texts and the stage directions from ballets, namely from *Petrushka*. In this way, the author evoked the deathly triangle of the Russian *Commedia dell’arte* presented in this stage work of Stravinsky’s. In reality it was the young poet Vsevolod Kniazev (1883–1913), who committed suicide, being unhappily in love with the actress Olga Glebova (1885–1945), future wife of Sergei Sudeikine (1882–1946).<sup>7</sup>

A certain role or rather the role of the hero of the poem has been preserved for the Russian capital, St. Petersburg, featured by the poetess as a mythical town. In the last decade preceding World War I, the St. Petersburgian culture offered to the artists – writers and painters infinite inspiration in respect to themes and modes of expression and a chance to enhance the city in their works in a theatrical-like manner.<sup>8</sup> It goes without saying that the architecture of the city favoured such tendencies – a phenomenon very much resembling the theatre-like structure of Viennese architecture – the Ringstraße in particular, the concept of which was (in)directly influenced by Richard Wagner.<sup>9</sup>

The multinationality and cosmopolitanism of St. Petersburg, at the same time a very typical Russian town, imparted the atmosphere of a “museum-city” or a “book-city”. Therefore, it was no wonder that the spirit of *The World of Art*, originating from the Russian *Symbolism*, developed on such an

<sup>7</sup> Anna Akhmatova, *Poème sans héros (1940–1962) Triptyque*, présenté et traduit par Jean Rude, Édition bilingue (translated by Jean Rude – bilingual edition, Russian and French), Paris, Seghers, 1970, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Boris Kats, “Scrytye muzyki” v Akhmatovskoj “Poeme bez geroia” (“Hidden musics” in Akhmatova’s “Poem without Hero”, *Sov’etskaia muzyka*, Moscow, February 1989, No. 2, 75.

<sup>9</sup> Karl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna, Politics and Culture, II, the Ringstraße, its Critics, and the Birth of Urban Modernism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1981, 70.

unusual ground. *The World of Art* contributed to the rising of the St. Petersburg cult that reached its climax also in Anna Akhmatova's *Poem*. The inspirer, or rather the woof of it was Tchaikovsky's opera *The Queen of Spades* – "the ideal embodiment of the St. Petersburgian myth" through the music of the great Russian composer and, perhaps, through the mentioned directing of the opera by Meyerhold, for which he had commissioned a new libretto.<sup>10</sup> It must have additionally inspired Akhmatova along with the Meyerhold's production of *Masquerade* by Lermontov in 1917. The nostalgia of the poetess who at the time when the *Poem* was written had by far outlived many of her contemporaries – close friends, artists and writers, and the ex-husband who had been executed by the communists – gave to her an aureole of the protectress of a time that was gone for ever.

The poem, an outstanding specimen of universality, *Gesamtkunstwerk sui generis*, takes us back to the times when few houses in the towns of Russia could be imagined without a reproduction of the paintings by Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901), the *Isle of Dead* in particular (1880), made and known in many versions, of which the black-and-white copy inspired Sergei Rakhmaninov (1873–1943) to compose a symphonic poem of the same name, *Ostrov mjortvyh* (1909).<sup>11</sup> The spirit of that music as well as the music by Alexander Skriabine (1872–1914) illuminates the Akhmatova's *Poem without the Hero*. It seems as if the synaesthetic characteristics of her work concentrated in themselves the aspirations and accomplishments of the Russian artists of the first decade of the twentieth century.

Nikolai Roerih (1874–1946) could "see" music and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov was able to "hear" colours. Their research was equally important in the creation of the composer's last works, the operas *The Tale of the Invisible City of Kitej* and *The Maiden Fevronia* (1904), a Christian-orthodox-pantheistic mystery, and *Golden Cockerel* (1907) whose symbolism is not merely to be regarded as a satire of the Tsarist's regime. The spirit of the Russian "Silver era" reflects itself in the enigmatic "personalities" – those of Golden Cockerel and the Firebird, which like Sirin and Alkonost, the Birds of Paradise from Russian folklore and *Kitej* symbolizes the unattainable happiness the human being can only aspire to. The Golden Cockerel caused destruction of Dodon's realm, and death to Tsar Dodon himself. *Kitej*, too, is death, the afterlife, life in Paradise, and, as such, different from the one expressed by Tchaikovsky in his *Sixth*. In any case the *Belle Époque* gave its share to a better understanding and appreciation of Tchaikovsky's output both at home and abroad, through the *World of Art* and Diaghilev's *Ballets*

<sup>10</sup> Boris Kats, *Op. cit.*, Sov'etskaia muzyka, June 1989, No. 6, 102.

<sup>11</sup> Tamara Levaia, *Russkaia muzyka nachala XX veka v hudozhestvennom kontekste epohi* (*Russian Music in the Artistic Context of the Epoch*), Moscow, Muzyka, 1991, 18, 19. About "Museum-City" see p. 102.

*Russess* that brought the fame of stage works by Tchaikovsky on their touring all over the globe.

In the same way in which the hoffmannesque phantasy obsessed artists throughout the nineteenth century, including the Russian writers from Pushkin to Gogol, and composers to a considerable extent (Schumann's influence not to be lost from sight) –, the romanticised horror of the *Fin-de-siècle* introduced in the theatre apparently new themes as *Salome* (Wilde) and the Greek myth (Hofmannsthal).

The spirit of “Ewiges Weibliches”, embodied by the end of the century – interpreted by the German and Austrian philosophers – in awesome feminine domination, became associated in the male subconsciousness with claims for female acknowledgment, of which the women's right to study at universities represented an important advance. The image of fatal woman, in effect, regarded as “evil woman”, was connected with man's destruction and death. Coming from the classical myth (Medusa, Clytemnestra) and the Bible (Herodias, Salome), it found a fertile soil in literature, and through it in music.

Colombina disguised as “vamp” made appearance first in Wilde's *Salome* (1892) and then in literature of Frank Wedekind (1864–1918). The indifferent and insensitive lady, who may also be recognized in fairy tales throughout the world as the wicked stepmother, entered Wedekind's pieces, or rather two dramas, known as “Lulu-plays”, titled *Der Erdgeist, Spirit of the Earth* (1895) and *Die Büchse der Pandora, Pandora's Box*, 1904 (jointly serving as the basis for the future opera by Alban Berg, 1885–1935). At the beginning of the play and opera, Columbine-Lulu is portrayed by her lover in the costume of Pierrot, representing here the very symbol of death. Eros and Tanatos never walked so closely arm-in-arm as in the *Belle Époque*, addressing the crucial questions of human existence, revealing something that was otherwise kept in privacy – the problem of dual moral, on account of which those works were quite often banned, like plays by Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931).

The Wilde's *Salome* and the “Lulu-plays” were initially treated by the censors in almost the same way, at least in the German-speaking world. In Berlin, in November and December 1902, one could attend the premières of both, the Wilde's controversial play (produced by Max Reinhardt, 1873–1943) and Wedekind's *Spirit of the Earth*. It seemed as if they had been brought together by fate, since Wedekind put once that Lulu was *Salome*<sup>12</sup>, but also because of something else they had in common: both characters were played by the illustrious Gertrud Eysoldt (1870–1955). Another part of

<sup>12</sup> “Was ich mir dabei dachte (kurzer Kommentar zu den Werken Franz Wedekinds von ihm selbst. Niedergeschrieben 1911, mit – deutlich erkennbar – eingefügten Ergänzungen aus den Notizen anderer Jahre)” in Frank Wedekind, *Prosa, Dramen, Verse*, edited and selected by Hansgeorg Maier, München, Langen und Müller, s. a., 957.

Wedekind's diptych, *Pandora's Box*, could only be shown in Vienna as a private performance in the Trianon Theater, whereas, there existed no way for *Totentanz* (subsequently titled *The Death and the Devil*) to get access to any of the Vienna stages of the time.<sup>13</sup>

The dreadful femininity, breaking its way through censorship on the operatic scene, too, first in *Samson and Delilah* (1877) by Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921), culminated in Wilde's and Strauss's *Salome*. But for them, there was not much place in Vienna, even not much for the Canadian Maud Allan (1873–1956), who appeared in the Austrian capital in 1903 in her "hit", called *The Vision of Salome*. Actually, Wilde's *Salome* and, to no smaller degree, Strauß's opera gave birth to seven-veiled performances in the dancing world, independently of the play, representing attractive numbers on concert podiums of different night-clubs in European metropolises. Accompanied by the music of Marcel Remy, Allan caused a scandal in Vienna by dancing in *Vision of Salome* without tights. On the contrary, her performance in Paris in 1907 was received with admiration and was also well-accepted in Belgrade, the capital of the Serbian Kingdom, in the same year.

Nobody in the patriarchal milieu of the Serbian state was frustrated with Allan's barefooted and barelegged dancing, not yet having seen Wilde's play, first performed in Belgrade in the Royal National Theatre in 1909, when no one felt offended. But in Russia, in St. Petersburg, the drama, actually two parallel stagings in 1908, one directed by Meyerhold with Ida Rubinstein (1885–1966) in the title role and incidental music by Alexander Glazunov (1864–1936), and the other by Nikolai Evreinov (1879–1953), were banned after the dress rehearsals.<sup>14</sup>

The opera *Salome* was not to be seen in Wiener Hofoper until after the end of World War I. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Vienna still held the dominating role in music, not strictly confined to Central Europe, thanks to the glamour of Hofoper in particular, and of many other stages, where the spirit of new music was still fighting conservative ideas – thus accounting for Gustav Mahler's statement – "Tradition ist Schlampererei". The Hofoper hosted the hysterical *Elektra* (1909), and the frivolous *Rosenkavalier* (1911), but not *Salome* (première in Graz in 1906, and in Wiener Volksoper in 1907). To some extent, the reaction must be understood, because of what the audience could be capable of sympathizing in a "would-be-perverted love" of a remote Judean princess.

In Russia, where *Symbolism*, falling on a yielding soil, bore a distinguished aura, it was not only the question of the deathly carnival, which spread over large and small theatrical scenes in St. Petersburg and Moscow.

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<sup>13</sup> Günter Seehaus, *Frank Wedekind in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Vol. 213 of Rowohlts Monographien, ed. by Kurt Kusenberg, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1974, 146.

<sup>14</sup> Vera Krassovskaia, *Op. Cit.*, 226.

Nor was it the question of the *femme fatale*, who, in the guise of Salome, was haunting the artistic world. It was a shade of pornography that sometimes accompanied the performances of this kind. In Paris, where “vice in nice garments” was welcome, the audience was shocked at some gestures of Vaclav Nijinsky (1890–1950) in the finale of *L'après midi d'un faun* by *Ballets Russes* in 1912, but was enthusiastic when orgies and crime, crowned by the spectacular and glamorous massacre, triumphed in Fokine's *Schéhérazade* two years earlier.

Richard Strauss's *Salome* won the German and the rest of the world audience (although not without obstacles) after the première in Dresden in 1905, thanks to the novelties in its music inaugurating *Expressionism* before the New Viennese School. On the other hand, this operatic “Einakter” was a typical product of *Belle Époque*, synthesizing lust, splendour and misogyny. It also prepared the way to Arnold Schönberg's stage work. Theatralized verses of Albert Giraud (1860–1929) in the provoking German translation served Schönberg to make a concert piece out of Pierrot's extravagant life, but the composer could not avoid being theatrical himself, at the same time not allowing the choreographers to make ballet of his *Pierrot lunaire* (1912). The composer must have thought that Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, which in many ways was also an output of *Sezession* or *Art Nouveau*, would throw a dark shadow on his *Pierrot*.

Another typical *Fin-de-siècle* phenomenon was Richard Strauss's ballet *Josephslegende* (*La Légende de Joseph*), commissioned in 1912 by Sergei Diaghilev for his *Ballets Russes*.<sup>15</sup> The new “Einakter” brought lavishly to the stage once again the virtues of the Strauss symphonist in the choreography of Fokine. Here, the tragedy of the *femme fatale* and her victims was repeated, Potiphar's wife being evidently the “spiritual” sister of Salome, Armida, Turandot or Thais. The luxurious set design by Jose Maria Sert (1876–1945) and exquisite costumes by Leon Bakst (1860–1924) provided for a great gala in the Paris Opéra in May 1914.<sup>16</sup> The ballet was scheduled for another German tour of the Russian artists in October of 1914, but the event never occurred, because the War smashed so many lives, not only the ballet plans of Diaghilev. Was *Josephslegende* another omen and “futile beauty” performed for the last time in London in June of 1914?

As for the Russian ballet, the events of the kind were made known to the peripheral parts of the Austro-Hungarian state through newspaper articles. Serbian and other South-Slav artists who could see the performances in Paris were only few. However, theatrical novelties from Vienna and Bu-

<sup>15</sup> Hans Hollander puts *Salome*, *Pierrot lunaire* and *Josephslegende* in different categories of *Art Nouveau* in his *Musik and Jugendstil*, Zürich, Atlantis Verlag, 1975, 51, 57, 115.

<sup>16</sup> See Joseph Gregor, *Kulturgeschichte des Ballets, seine Gestaltung und Wirksamkeit in der Geschichte und unter den Künsten*, Wien, Gallus Verlag, 1944, 317, 325.

dapest, also from Germany, kept reaching the Slavonic population in the Austria-Hungary, Serbia and Bulgaria, through quite a number of students, who came from “distant” regions to Germany (Munich), Austria-Hungary (Vienna, Budapest, Prague) to learn musical and other art disciplines.

While the Serbian art was somehow trying to keep the pace in literature and painting with developed European centres, it was too early to think of more advanced forms in music, the local output being still based on choral traditions established by Kornelije Stanković. However, only a few people were capable to surrender to the new tendencies. Among them were Petar Konjović (1883–1970), a student of music in Prague, who began making sketches for his opera *Maksim Crnojević (Prince of Zeta)* in 1906, and Stevan Hristić (1885–1958), a student in Leipzig, who composed the oratorio *Resurrection* in 1912, inspired by his research in Italy, France and Russia, also having in mind Debussy’s *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* (1911), known for the interpretation by Ida Rubinstein.

Miloje Milojević (1884–1946), a Munich student, obsessed by the Strauß’s *Salome* composed incidental music for the symbolist drama *Kraljeva jesen, The King’s Autumn*, written by the very promising young poet Milutin Bojić (1892–1917, the first to introduce the character of Salome into Serbian poetry), and performed in Belgrade in 1913.<sup>17</sup> It is noteworthy that Stevan Marković (1893–1916), a student of Max Reger (1873–1916), strongly influenced by Strauß’s music, composed *Also sprach Zarathustra*. There are no close information about it, the facts were sporadically announced in Serbian newspapers, but the whole output of Marković is lost because of his early death. Bojić also died prematurely during the War.

The deathly carnival could not bypass anyone, especially in Russia, struck by a horrendous fate during and after the Revolution, when thousands of people left their land, during and after the World War I, to save their lives. Among refugees, artists brought to the South-East of Europe the spirit of the *Belle Époque* of the Russian style, which was for this area a novelty ranked as avant-garde act. So Serbia, now in a newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was flooded with entirely new artistic concepts

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<sup>17</sup> Before the war Serbia had in its capital the National Theatre, but no full opera with ballet and no complete symphonic orchestra, so that Strauß’s stage works if not heard abroad, were to be seen much later in Belgrade *Salome* in 1931 (with the ever best protagonist Bahria Nuri Hadžić, the first Berg’s Lulu in Zürich), and *Josephslegende* in 1934; see Mirka Pavlović, “*Veličina iz Beograda*” (“*Eine Größe aus Belgrad*”) – *Bahrija Nuri Hadžić (The Greatness from Belgrade – Bahrija Nuri Hadžić)* in 125 godina Narodnog pozorišta (125 years of the National Theatre of Belgrade), Coll. of papers from the congress organized 16–19. Nov, 1994, ed. by Stanojlo Rajičić, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade, 1997, 418, 419, 421, and Nadežda Mosusova, “*Josif*” i “*Till*” u Beogradu, *Kreacije Pie i Pina Mlakar* (“*Joseph*” and “*Till*” in Belgrade, *Creations of Pia and Pino Mlakar*), Orchestra, Dance journal ed. by Ivana Milovanović, Belgrade, No 5, Fall 1996, 16,17.

which had been brought over by the Russian emigration, the members of Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, and the stage and costume designers of *World of Art*, the part of the glory of the Imperial Russia, to enrich the theatrical and musical life of the later Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Was such a flourishing of artistic life of the Twenties and Thirties a new overture for the Second World War *Danse Macabre*?

Translated into English by Snežana Popadić.

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#### СИМБОЛИЗАМ И ТЕАТАР МАСКИ: СМРТОНОСНИ КАРНЕВАЛ КРАЈА ВЕКА

*(Резиме)*

Симболизам који је захватио европске земље у области књижевности, сликарства и музике у раздобљу од 1880. до почетка Првог светског рата, довео је до поновног и проширеног цветања театра маски транспонованог у софистицираном виду у литературу и музичке облике посвећене сцени. Иза свега стоји романтизација и стилизација сижеа некадашњих уличних забава у Италији из времена Ренесансе и садржаја средњевијековног народног луткарског позоришта у Русији, која је преко Беча или Париза посредно зрачила и на словенске крајеве на Балкану.

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