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## Pantomimes in the repertoire of the *Crooked Mirror* Miniature Theater: From theory to practice

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**Abstract.** Pantomime can rightfully be considered one of the most innovative and sought-after theatrical genres of the Silver Age. Iconic productions of the 1910s, such as Vsevolod Meyerhold's *Columbine's Scarf* (1910, House of Interludes) and Alexander Tairov's *The Veil of Pierrette* (first staged in 1913 at the Moscow Free Theater)—both based on Arthur Schnitzler's play with music by Ernst von Dohnányi—resonated deeply within Russia's artistic and theatrical circles.

Theater scholar Vadim Shcherbakov links the premiere of *Columbine's Scarf* to the appearance of Nikolai Evreinov's pantomime *Fiametta's Four Dead Men* (1911) in the repertoire of the *Crooked Mirror* theater. However, an analysis of the theater's repertoire and of programmatic articles by its artistic director, Alexander Kugel, from the late 1900s and early 1910s, suggests that the theater approached the genre of pantomime gradually, systematically accumulating both theoretical and practical experience. Actual pantomime in the *Crooked Mirror* repertoire was preceded by performances utilizing silhouette techniques (*Polka in the Style of Béranger*, *Near the Ballet in the Old Days*), the mimodrama *Pierrot in Love*, and the staging of the Arabian fairy tale *On the Six Beauties Who Were Not Like One Another*. This article aims to provide a brief characterization of the *Crooked Mirror's* "pre-pantomime experiments" leading up to 1911.

**Keywords:** Alexander R. Kugel, Nikolai N. Evreinov, Vsevolod E. Meyerhold, the Theater of miniatures *Crooked Mirror*, *Fiametta's Four Dead Men*, *Columbine's Scarf*, pantomime

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Музыкальный театр

Научная статья

**Пантомимы в репертуаре  
театра миниатюр «Кривое зеркало»:  
от теории к практике**

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**Аннотация.** Пантомиму можно по праву считать одним из наиболее новаторских и востребованных театральных жанров Серебряного века. Знаковые постановки 1910-х годов «Шарф Коломбины» Всеволода Эмильевича Мейерхольда (1910, «Дом интермедий») и «Покрывало Пьеретты» Александра Яковлевича Таирова (впервые — 1913, «Свободный театр»), обе по пьесе Артура Шницлера на музыку Эрнеста Донаньи, вызвали в художественной и театральной среде России огромный резонанс. С первой из них («Шарф Коломбины») театровед Вадим Анатольевич Щербаков связывает появление в репертуаре «Кривого зеркала» пантомимы Николая Николаевича Евреинова «Четыре мертвеца Фьяметты» (1911). Однако анализ

репертуара «Зеркала», а также программные статьи его художественного руководителя Александра Рафаиловича Кугеля конца 1900-х — начала 1910-х годов свидетельствуют, что к жанру пантомимы театр подходил постепенно, активно накапливая теоретический и практический опыт. Собственно пантомиме в репертуаре «Зеркала» предшествовали номера, выполненные в технике силуэта («Полька в стиле Беранже», «Около балета в старину»), мимодрама «Влюбленный Пьеро» и инсценировка арабской сказки «О шести красавицах, не похожих друг на друга». Краткая характеристика этого «предпантомимного эксперимента» «Кривого зеркала» до 1911 года и составляет задачу настоящей статьи.

**Ключевые слова:** А. Р. Кугель, Н. Н. Евреинов, Вс. Э. Мейерхольд, театр миниатюр «Кривое зеркало», «Четыре мертвеца Фьяметты», «Шарф Коломбины», пантомима

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### Introduction

In recent decades, the history and artistic practices of Russian cabarets and theaters of miniatures have increasingly drawn the attention of Russian scholars. The primary focus of this interest lies in the heritage of leading small-form theaters: Moscow's *The Bat (La Chauve-Souris)* and St. Petersburg's *The Crooked Mirror* and *The Stray Dog*. Theater historians, philologists, and cultural studies experts examine these institutions to identify the specific features of Russian cabaret models in relation to their foreign prototypes [1, pp. 19–26], analyze individual plays from the repertoire [2] and genres [3, pp. 47–55], and reconstruct both the events of cabaret life [4, pp. 79–110] and the biographies of its participants [5, pp. 232–252].

Publications edited by Nora Buks have become an invaluable source of information for researchers: *Russian Entertainment Culture of the Silver Age* [6], *Cabaret Plays of the Silver Age* [7], *Theatrical Miniatures of the Silver Age* [8], and *History of the Silver Age Cabaret* [9]. The first of these is a collective monograph, while the other three are primarily dedicated to the publication of the cabaret repertoire; however, they also contain extensive factual material, including memoirs, articles from the periodical press, biographical sketches, and much more.

The authors and editors focus on a wide variety of genres, primarily dramatic miniatures and parodies, as well as couplets, poems, and cabaret songs. Perhaps the only genre that has been almost entirely overlooked by scholars is the dramatic pantomime, which occupied a modest but significant place in the repertoire of small-form theaters. The only exception in this scholarly landscape is the monograph by Vadim Shcherbakov, which includes a chapter dedicated to a landmark pantomime at the *Crooked Mirror*—*Fiametta's Four Dead Men* [10, pp. 77–96].

The present article aims to partially fill this gap; it examines the history of theoretical reflection and the creative practice of pantomime at the *Crooked Mirror* theater prior to 1911.

#### *The First Pantomime Experiments at the Crooked Mirror*

On September 18, 1911, the *Crooked Mirror* theater of miniatures hosted a new premiere: the pantomime *Fiametta's Four Dead Men*, directed

by Nikolai Evreinov with music by Dmitry Bigday. The emergence of this production was undoubtedly linked to the heightened interest in the language of movement and its potential, observed in Russian theatrical culture in the early 1910s. During this period, Alexander Kugel (the artistic director of the *Crooked Mirror*), along with critics Sergei S. Goloushev (also known as Sergei Glagol'), Eduard Stark (writing under the pseudonym Siegfried), and others, repeatedly advocated for limiting or even entirely abandoning the spoken word in order to approach the immanent properties of theater and performance. However, according to Vadim Shcherbakov, the “first practical argument” in the debate between “theatricality” (*teatralnost'*) and “literariness” (*literaturchina*)<sup>1</sup> was Vsevolod Meyerhold’s sensational production of Arthur Schnitzler’s play with music by Ernst von Dohnányi—*Columbine’s Scarf* (*House of Interludes*, 1910).

Meyerhold’s production emerged at the intersection of two major trends in early 20th-century Russian art. The first was the aforementioned interest in movement and plastic expression (*plastika*); the second was the revitalization of *commedia dell’arte* characters, references to which were pervasive in the poetry, drama, and painting of the period. As Natalya Kirillova rightly observes, “...the cult of the mask proved consonant with the modernization processes of Russia’s socio-cultural sphere and the prevailing sentiments among the creative intelligentsia at the turn of the 20th century” [11].

*Columbine’s Scarf* firmly linked the genre of pantomime with the “mask plot,”<sup>2</sup> giving rise to various iterations in the theatrical practice of the Russian Silver Age. Typically, this lineage includes the pantomime *The Veil of Pierrette*—also based on Arthur Schnitzler’s play<sup>3</sup> with music by Ernst von Dohnányi—staged

<sup>1</sup> For more details on this debate, see [12, pp. 33–76].

<sup>2</sup> The role of the mask theme in Meyerhold’s work has repeatedly been the subject of research by both Russian and international scholars. Among the publications, including those from recent years, we should note the articles by Vadim A. Shcherbakov [13, pp. 252–273], Natalia B. Kirillova [11, pp. 77–93], Yuliya E. Galanina and Oleg M. Feldman [14, pp. 364–383], as well as the study by C. Moody [15, pp. 859–869], among others.

<sup>3</sup> The plays of Arthur Schnitzler, a prominent representative of the so-called “drama of mood” (*Stimmungsdrama*), enjoyed great success in early 20th-century Russia. It is hardly surprising that his *The Veil of Pierrette* attracted the attention of such stage masters as Meyerhold and Tairov. For a more detailed discussion of Schnitzler’s “drama of mood” on the Russian stage, see [16, pp. 1–13]. Furthermore, Schnitzler’s works frequently served as the basis for librettos in Russian operas of the period (see [17, pp. 115–133; 18, pp. 50–67]).

by Alexander Tairov at the Free Theater in 1913.<sup>4</sup> *Fiametta's Four Dead Men* is far less known, yet the production emerged as a direct result of the influence of *Columbine's Scarf*. As Shcherbakov writes:

The triumph of Meyerhold's cabaret pantomime could not go unnoticed at the *Crooked Mirror*. Kholm'skaya [the theater's founder. — N. E.], Kugel, and Evreinov all wanted to have their own silent hit [10, p. 82].

It appears, however, that Meyerhold's production served as an occasion rather than the underlying cause for the turn toward pantomime. In his articles from the late 1900s and early 1910s, Kugel demonstrated a sustained interest in the problems of "literariness" (*literaturchina*) and "theatricality" (*teatralnost*), as well as in pantomime as a theatrical genre. Analyzing the productions of the 1909/1910 season, he concluded:

The more I think, the more I am convinced that the renewal of the theater must proceed by curbing the word [...] The tempo and rhythm of life have accelerated to such an extent... that the spoken word on stage seems slow, clumsy, and old-fashioned. Give us the lightning of instantaneous experiences, and music, music, and dances, dances!..<sup>5</sup>

It is symptomatic that, in Kugel's view, the paths toward the renewal of theatrical art lay not only in the realm of movement (*plastika*) but also in the realm of music.

In his *Theatrical Notes* (1910), the critic moves from the concept of dance toward that of pantomime. The catalyst for these reflections was the three-act production of Max Reinhardt's theater, *Sumurun*, based on a tale from *The One Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>6</sup> "Heroes, heroines, raisonneurs, *ingénues*, and noble fathers, accustomed to 'searing the hearts of people with the Word,' moved, mimed, and gestured to music all evening," wrote Kugel with admiration, though he had not yet seen the production himself. Nevertheless, he was *a priori* certain that it contained "moments of high artistic interest."<sup>7</sup> While highly valuing the concept of pantomime itself, the critic—as a true "miniaturist"—questioned the optimality of a full-scale production: "...I do not think,

<sup>4</sup> For a comparison of Meyerhold's and Tairov's differing interpretations of Schnitzler's play, see [13, pp. 252–273].

<sup>5</sup> Homo Novus (Kugel, A. R.). (1909). *Po teatram* [Around the theaters]. *Teatr i Iskusstvo* [Theater and Art], (41), 706.

<sup>6</sup> Kugel, A. R. (1910). *Teatralnye zametki* [Theatrical notes]. *Teatr i Iskusstvo* [Theater and Art], (34), 634.

<sup>7</sup> Kugel, 1910.

however, that it was consistently entertaining; a three-act pantomime for an entire performance is too much.”<sup>8</sup>

Approaching the problem of renewing theatrical language, Kugel identified the “root of all evil” in the strict division of theater into specific genres (“If thou art an actor, then declaim; if a singer, then sing; and if a ballet dancer, then dance”<sup>9</sup>). He proposed the celebrated *Gesamtkunstwerk*—a synthesis of arts within a cabaret framework—as the panacea for this fragmentation.<sup>10</sup> The broad integration of musical, choreographic, and mimetic elements appeared promising to him, as did the maximum limitation or complete absence of the spoken word: “...words today have become very cheap. [...] Word has settled into its own routine; it has withered and petrified.”<sup>11</sup> While theater certainly needs poetry, Kugel concluded, this poetry is not embodied in speech. He wrote:

[It is necessary] to find forms and means of expression for the romantic, fantastic, and mystical elements of theater in which abstract concepts and operations on logical data would be entirely absent—where thought would not be distracted by reasoning, moralizing, or syllogisms. Music? Yes, certainly. But music is not active (*deystvenna*). Theater, however, is found in action. Consequently, it must be pantomime. In pantomime, the narrative is active, while music provides the atmosphere and lyrical coloring. Let us try!<sup>12</sup>

Kugel’s call was somewhat belated. By the time the article was published (August 22, 1910), the first experiment in the pantomime genre had already taken place on the *Crooked Mirror* stage. According to the chronicle of Maria Yarotskaya,<sup>13</sup> the mimodrama *Pierrot in Love* premiered on either January 17 or 18, 1909. It was staged with music by Worms (which exact piece could not be determined) and, according to the chronicler, “despite the elegance of the dances and the good music... it did not stay in the repertoire.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Kugel, 1910.

<sup>9</sup> Kugel, 1910.

<sup>10</sup> The synthetic type of actor, who is equally proficient in various historical styles and diverse “genre-specific” skills, was described in detail by Liudmila Tikhvinskaya in her monograph (see [19, p. 135]).

<sup>11</sup> Kugel, 1910, p. 635.

<sup>12</sup> Kugel, 1910, p. 635.

<sup>13</sup> Yarotskaya, M. K. (1908–1918). *Letopis teatra “Krivoe zerkalo”* [Chronicle of the *Crooked Mirror* theater] (Fund 2352, Inventory 1, File 62). Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), Moscow, Russia.

<sup>14</sup> Yarotskaya, 1908–1918, p. 21.

In August 1910, while traveling through Europe, Kugel and Zinaida V. Kholmetskaya passed through Munich and attended a performance of Reinhardt's *Sumurun*, an experience that prompted the critic to further reflection. In his *Theatrical Notes*, he essentially formulated certain tenets of his "theory of pantomime" and perhaps even constructed a prototype for the future pantomimic miniatures of the *Crooked Mirror*. His starting point remained the potential rejection of the literary word. At the same time, the critic became convinced that his assumptions regarding the scale of this new pantomime were correct: it should be neither multi-act nor lengthy.

Reinhardt, apparently, has not yet grasped the main point: that the pantomime of the dramatic theater is, in its future, inextricably linked with the general movement of the theater—its fragmentation and its "miniaturization." The very language of pantomime became necessary because it is a telegraphic, stenographic language, rather than the language of the long-winded epistle through which the theater corresponds with the public via the masters of literary affairs...<sup>15</sup>

Kugel prioritizes the language of the body and mimetic movements. In describing it, he resorts to musical terminology, thereby bringing music and movement (*plastika*) closer together; in his view, these elements express the poetry of emotion on stage far more accurately and vividly than any literary text. The critic was deeply impressed by the actress Camilla Eibenschütz, who played the role of Sumurun:

There she is [Sumurun.—*N. E.*], throwing her arms over Nur al-Din's shoulders and crossing them just above the wrists. What eloquence of the hands! [...] And looking at this music of the hands, at this scale of some unheard tones, [...] I said to myself: this would not have happened if she were speaking; she could not have produced so many measures of *amoroso* and *andante* in the fading play of her hands if she were speaking. Then, it would have been inartistic. The music of speech is despotic and demanding. It would have cut short this part of the symphony.<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, Kugel "equates" music and pantomime, as in the latter "...emotions are depicted ideally, as in music."<sup>17</sup>

It is significant that this new pantomime was intended specifically for dramatic actors, for classical dance does not yield the same results as the plasticity of gestures. After all, the aforementioned Eibenschütz "...does not dance at all;

<sup>15</sup> Kugel, 1910, p. 650.

<sup>16</sup> Kugel, 1910, p. 651.

<sup>17</sup> Kugel, 1910, p. 651.

perhaps she does not even know how to dance properly. ...yet it was she, a dramatic actress—and not a ballet dancer or a professional dancer—who was able to convey without words what she conveyed...”<sup>18</sup>

Kugel’s theoretical reflections soon found application in the creative practice of the *Crooked Mirror*. *Pierrot in Love* initiated a series of experiments in “pantomimic” miniatures, both with and without words. In her article, Maria Yarotskaya asserted that the “theater approached pantomime gradually.”<sup>19</sup> From her perspective, actual pantomime was preceded by miniatures performed using the silhouette technique, in which actors dressed in black moved against the backdrop of an illuminated screen. “...The technique of our *Blanc et Noir* [numbers] was quite simple,” Zinaida Kholmskaya recalled. “A white backdrop was set up, a thin mesh was stretched across, and in the middle, performers dressed entirely in black moved through pastorals, duets, or choreographic miniatures, creating a beautiful and original impression of living silhouettes. Although the audience was accustomed to looking for something inevitably funny, satirical, or parodical at the *Crooked Mirror*, they watched our experiments in the realm of the serious with equal interest” [20, p. 131]. In *Polka in the Style of Béranger* (1910), the screen depicted a modest room where a seamstress sat at her work. With the appearance of an artist, she “becomes distracted from her labor and, gradually growing more cheerful, dances a polka.”<sup>20</sup>

The second silhouette production, staged during the same season to the music of Benjamin Godard, was an elegant stylization:

The screen represented a lace fan, upon which appeared two black figures—a marquis and a ballerina. The marquis sang of how, while attending the ballet near the King, he fell in love with a shepherdess and her lamb. Accompanied by the marquis’s romance, the actress had to depict herself tending a lamb with a small bell around its neck.<sup>21</sup> (*Illustration 1*)

Despite the inclusion of the spoken word, Yarotskaya considers this number to be pantomimic; furthermore, it enjoyed significant public success and remained

<sup>18</sup> Kugel, 1910, p. 651.

<sup>19</sup> Yarotskaya, M. K. (n.d.). *Pantomimy, postavlennye v dorevolyutsionnyi period teatra “Krivoe zerkalo”* [Pantomimes staged during the pre-revolutionary period of the *Crooked Mirror* Theater] (Fund 396). A. A. Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum (GCTM), Manuscript Department, Moscow, Russia.

<sup>20</sup> Yarotskaya, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Yarotskaya, n.d., p. 1.



*Illustration 1. Near the Ballet in the Old Days.*

Ballerina—Maria Yarotskaya, Marquis—Armen Abramyan.

Source: *Teatr i Iskusstvo* [Theater and Art], 1910, no. 51, p. 1000

in the repertoire from 1910 to 1912. Critics also appreciated this elegant “trifle” (*pustyachok*):

The ballet transports us to the era of the “Sun King”, wrote a reviewer for the journal *Teatr i Iskusstvo*. The Marquis sings before the ballerina, professing his love. The ballerina responds gracefully in the language of ballet. Godard’s music is superb, and this entire charming 18th-century scene, with its inherent poetry, presents a beautiful vision—a certain synthesis of arts (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) combining music, singing, dance, and painting. The success is bolstered by the performance of Ms. Yarotskaya (as the ballerina) and the beautiful singing of Ms. [Astra (Azra)] Abramyan (as the marquis).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> A. B. (1910). *Krivoie zerkalo* [The Crooked Mirror]. *Teatr i Iskusstvo* [Theater and Art], (51), 988.

While focusing on “silhouettes” as the immediate predecessors of pantomime, Yarotskaya does not mention *Lanner’s Waltz*, which appeared in the program on February 3, 1909. Performed by “Mr. Ikar [Nikolai Barabanov] and Ms. [Elizaveta Nelidova],” it was specifically identified as a pantomime by an anonymous chronicler in *Obozrenie Teatrov* (*Theater Review*).<sup>23</sup>

*On the Six Beauties Who Were Not Like One Another*

On the path toward Fiametta’s *Dead Men*, the *Crooked Mirror* undertook another experiment in combining the spoken word, sound, and movement (*plastika*). During his first season at the theater (1910), Evreinov staged an adaptation of the Arabian tale by Muhammad al-Bafi, *On the Six Beauties Who Were Not Like One Another*, featuring his own music, with sets and costumes designed by Mikhail Yakovlev.<sup>24</sup>

It is possible that the turn toward this source was partially “provoked” by Kugel’s impressions of Reinhardt’s *Sumurun*, as both plots share a spicy Oriental exoticism. However, in his memoirs, the director offers a different rationale. During his inaugural season at the *Crooked Mirror*, he wished to “...dazzle with a production whose success relied not only on the wit of the dialogue and action, but also on its pictorial-theatrical presentation...” [21, p. 140].

It should be noted that the play lacks any particular wit, and its plot is quite simple. Three pairs of concubines in a harem—The White (White Moon) and The Black (Coal in Fire), The Plump (Full Moon) and The Slender (Houri of Paradise), The Golden-Haired (Sun of Day) and The Dark-Haired (Apple of the Eye)—vie for the attention of a handsome youth, Ali al-Yamani. They compete in elegant, ornamentally Oriental speeches, singing, and dancing, so that the youth may choose

<sup>23</sup> Khronika [Chronicle]. (1909, February 4). *Obozrenie teatrov* [Theater Review], (653), 8.

<sup>24</sup> According to Olga Kraeva’s commentaries on Kholmskaya’s memoirs, “the tale is part of the *One Thousand and One Nights* cycle; in Russian translation, it is titled *The Tale of Six Slave Girls* [...] Evreinov used the sixteen-volume French edition: Mardrus J.-Ch. *Le livre des mille nuits et une nuit* / Ed. de la Revue blanche puis Fasquille, 1899–1903” [20, p. 130]. Music played a significant role in Evreinov’s extensive and diverse body of work. During the pre-revolutionary period, he occasionally composed music for stage miniatures, including the parody opera *The Sweet Pie* and the musical comedy *The Runaway* (the musical scores are held at the A. A. Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum). For more details on Evreinov as a composer, see [22, pp. 38–49; 23, pp. 122–139].

the fairest among them. This plot contained an underlying *divertissement* quality, which the director deemed appropriate for non-aesthetic reasons, as he believed Zinaida Kholmskaya was devoted to the *divertissement* format.

The primary dramaturgical technique employed by Evreinov consisted of a deliberate distancing of the stage action from the spoken word. A narrator (The Storyteller) was introduced into the adaptation, recounting the tale with an appropriately Oriental deliberateness and addressing the audience directly; scenographically, he was isolated from the primary action (*Illustration 2*). As the Storyteller narrated, the characters illustrated his words: “All characters”, Evreinov notes several times in the stage directions, “behave in accordance with the words of the narrator.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the experiment involved the illustration of the spoken word through the means of theatrical action. Kugel regarded this technique as innovative, though, unfortunately, the critics failed to notice the innovation:

Here, N. N. Evreinov has staged Scheherazade’s *The Tale of the Six Beauties Who Were Not Like One Another*, Kugel wrote in his *Notes*, where a reciter, in the guise of an Arabian storyteller, reads the narrative while the tale is acted out behind him. [...] Yet I have not read a single word anywhere suggesting that Mr. Evreinov’s experiment is original—as if all theaters have been doing this for ages, and it is all as old as the invention of printing and Chinese ink.<sup>26</sup>

*The Tale of the Six Beauties* cannot, of course, be unconditionally classified as a pantomime. However, within this unique cabaret synthesis, movement played a significant role, while the spoken word, conversely, was somewhat weakened and partially removed from the framework of the stage action. Judging by the libretto of the adaptation, held in the Dramatic Censorship Fund of the St. Petersburg State Theatre Library, one must admit that the mimetic portion of the performance was developed in considerable detail, albeit somewhat naively, in my view.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Evreinov, N. N. (n.d.). *O shesti krasavitsakh, ne pokhozhikh drug na druga* [On the six beauties who were not like one another]. Adaptation of the tale by Muhammad al-Basri. St. Petersburg State Theatre Library (SPbGTB), Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts (ORiRK), St. Petersburg, Russia. Typescript.

<sup>26</sup> Homo Novus [Kugel, A. R.]. (1910). *Zametki* [Notes]. *Teatr i Iskusstvo* [Theater and Art], (42), 786.

<sup>27</sup> However, it is possible that such “naivety” was a deliberate artistic objective of the director, who sought to stylize conventionalized Oriental movement (*plastika*).



Illustration 2. *The Tale of the Six Beauties Who Were Not Like One Another.*  
The Storyteller (bottom right corner)—Lev Fenin.

Source: *Teatr i Iskusstvo [Theater and Art]*, 1910, no. 41, p. 761

For instance, this is how Black Coal performs her *divertissement* number:

The Black One [addressing her rival, the White Moon—N.E.] (*folds her hands and brings them to her face*): Do you know, O ignorant one, the passage in the Quran where Allah swears by the darkness of the night and the light of the day?.. Well then (*stepping forward and stretching her hands out*), in this oath, He mentioned the night first, and only then the day. Allah would not have done so (*pulling her hand to her shoulder*) if the primacy of the day had been dearer to Him. And when (*hands forward*) do friends gather, if not at night? And to whom (*both hands by her face, leaning forward*) do lovers owe the concealment of their caresses, if not to the gracious night!<sup>28</sup>

The “monologue” of the Fat One is developed in even greater detail:

The Fat One: Glory be to Allah (*placing her hands behind her head, voluptuously*), who stuffed my skin with fat that smells of dewy incense near and far,

<sup>28</sup> Evreinov, n.d., p. 6.

and who did not deny me (*lowering her right hand with tension*) a sufficient amount of muscle, so that if necessary, I could deliver such a blow (*gestures*) that would instantly (*lowering her hands expressively*) turn an enemy into quince marmalade. (*Everyone laughs. The Fat One extends her hand*). Do not laugh. The sages said that the joy of life consists of three things (*counting on her fingers*): eating meat, embracing meat, and merging with meat. Allah Himself (*raising her hands*) approves of fat in His Book when He commands the sacrifice (*lowering her hands*) of fat rams, fat lambs, and (*hands on hips*) fat calves. (*Crossing her arms, head held high, defiantly*) Has anyone ever heard of a customer asking a butcher for lean meat?<sup>29</sup>

Judging by the press reviews, this elaborately developed mimetic language also failed to attract significant attention. Critics mentioned the performer of the narrator's role ("...the figure of the storyteller Fenin is magnificent"<sup>30</sup>), the scenography ("...the original costumes are well-conceived and colorful,"<sup>31</sup> "...the sets are good"<sup>32</sup>), and briefly touched upon the acting, which was described as "not bad." They also noted "Ms. Batorskaya, who performed the role of the White Beauty excellently, and Ms. Abramyan, who sweetly sang a romance."<sup>33</sup> A reviewer for *Peterburgskii Listok* [*St. Petersburg Leaflet*] highlighted the beautiful staging. However, there was not a single word about Evreinov's music. It can be assumed that it failed to garner attention due to its functional (applied) nature or perhaps its mediocre quality. Nevertheless, verifying such an assumption is currently impossible: the piano score (or full score), if they ever existed, has not yet been located.

The question of the contemporary critical reception of the staged adaptation also remains open. *Peterburgskii Listok* briefly states that the poetic *Tale of the Six Beauties* was a success.<sup>34</sup> The reviewer for *Teatr i Sport* [Theater and Sports], writing under the pseudonym Sary Vorobey [Old Sparrow], does not provide such details; however, in his opinion, despite the colorful scenography and decent acting, the play lacks a high artistic level and integrity:

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<sup>29</sup> Evreinov, n.d., p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Sary Vorobey. (1910). *Teatr i Sport* (October 3), as cited in Yarotskaya, 2003, p. 90.

<sup>31</sup> Sary Vorobey. (1910). *Teatr i Sport* (October 3), as cited in Yarotskaya, 2003, p. 90.

<sup>32</sup> *Peterburgskii Listok* [St. Petersburg Leaflet], 1910 (270, October 2), as cited in Yarotskaya, n.d., p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> As cited in Yarotskaya, n.d., p. 91.

<sup>34</sup> As cited in Yarotskaya, n.d., p. 91.

...For such a *tableau vivant* to be captivating,—he writes,—it is required that every element of art—dance, singing, recitation, and finally, ‘beauty’ itself—be equal to the overall task. From an external perspective, there is no illusion of Oriental beauty, where everything is built upon the Oriental languor and plasticity of the heavenly houris competing before their lord.<sup>35</sup>

### Conclusion

*The Tale of the Six Beauties* had a relatively short stage life and was not fully appreciated by either critics or, presumably, the public. However, for the theater itself, it represented a significant step toward dramatic pantomime. The weakening of the literary word and its displacement beyond the boundaries of the theatrical action, the detailed elaboration of the plastic plot, and the fact that the performance was intended specifically for dramatic actors—all the core points of Kugel’s theoretical program were realized in this production. All that remained was to completely abandon the spoken word and introduce a “mask-based plot” (*maskochnyi syuzhet*) to fully meet the demands of the time. Such a pantomime appeared in the repertoire of the *Crooked Mirror* in 1911—a “silent blockbuster,” as Shcherbakov put it—titled *The Four Dead Men of Fiammetta*.

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<sup>35</sup> Stary Vorobey, 1910, as cited in Yarotskaya, 2003, p. 90.

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