

ON THE PATHS OF THE SOUL: STANISŁAW PRZYBYSZEWski  
AND THE RUSSIAN STAGE. THE CASES OF  
VERA KOMISSARZHEVSKAIA AND VSEVOLOD MEIERKHOL'D  
(1900-1910)

by

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Slavic Languages and Literatures  
and the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Kansas  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

On The Paths Of The Soul: Stanisław Przybyszewski  
And The Russian Stage. The Cases Of  
Vera Komissarzhevskaja And Vsevolod Meierkhol'd  
(1900-1910)

Michael D. Johnson  
University of Kansas, 2008

This dissertation inquires into the impact of the controversial Polish dramatist, essayist, and novelist Stanisław Przybyszewski on the theatrical innovations of two great Russian actor-directors of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vera Komissarzhevskaja and Vsevolod Meierkhol'd. An erudite and prolific writer almost forgotten today, Przybyszewski has long been regarded as a major figure of *Młoda Polska*. His unique synthesis of metaphysics, occultism, eroticism, and aestheticism created great controversy in the fin-de-siècle Russian Empire, as the changing Russian theatrical landscape moved from realism and naturalism to less representational forms. My argument for a significant reception in the Russian theater rests on Przybyszewski's aesthetic theories, and particularly, his concept of the "path of the soul." I propose that this concept acted as a catalyst for change in the artistic and professional development of both Russian theatre figures.

This dissertation is divided into three sections. The first section, Chapter I, provides a background on the state of Russian theatre at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and reviews the early reception of Przybyszewski in the Russian press. The second section, Chapters II-IV, examines Komissarzhevskaja's reception of Przybyszewski within a historical-descriptive framework. After examining the possible origins of her affinity for Przybyszewski, Chapter II offers an analysis of textual parallels between Komissarzhevskaja's correspondence and a Russian translation of *On the Paths of the Soul* (1900). Chapter III draws on Austro-Romanian psychiatrist Jacob L. Moreno's theory of the "psychodrama" to speculate as to why Kommissarzhevskaja was drawn to Przybyszewski's dramas. It explores the hypothesis that Komissarzhevskaja experienced catharsis as she performed her psychologically demanding Przybyszewski roles. Chapter IV examines thematic parallels between Przybyszewski's 1902 theoretical essay *On Drama and the Stage* and comments that Komissarzhevskaja made in defense of her production of Przybyszewski's drama, *Life's Banquet*, in 1909.

The third section, Chapters V and VI, examines Przybyszewski's reception in Meierkhol'd's writings and productions during his formative years as a member of the Association of New Drama (*Tovarishchestvo Novoi Dramy*). Chapter V sets forth the

possible reasons for Meierkhol'd's affinity for Przybyszewski. Chapter VI argues that Przybyszewski's "path of the soul," with its focus on the soul as a reflection of the eternal, prescribed particular methods, such as synthesis and symbolization, which Meierkhol'd used to break from the confining traditions of naturalism. Chapter VI argues that Meierkhol'd's 1903 production of *Snow* represents one of his earliest experiments with non-representational (*uslovnyi*) forms. In support of this claim, this chapter provides an interpretive analysis of two articles by Aleksei Remizov and the production's combination of music, drama, and lighting.

To my father,  
Duane T. Johnson (1930-2004),  
who gave me the gifts of music and art

and my mother,  
Miona Marie Mumm Johnson,  
who gave me love and a Slavic heritage

## Acknowledgements

Research for this dissertation was supported in part by the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Award Program, administered by the U. S. Dept. of Education, as well as a fellowship from the Winterburg Fund of KU. The Louis B. Skalny Fellowship, awarded by the American Council for Polish Culture, supported the initial work on this prospectus. Sincere gratitude is also shown to my mother, Marie Johnson, whose financial and emotional support has been more than any son could ever expect.

I should like to thank my committee members, Profs. Edith W. Clowes, John Staniunas, Svetlana Vassileva-Karagyozova, Nathan Wood, and William J. Comer.

I am grateful to the faculty of the KU Slavic Dept., Profs. Joseph Conrad, Marc Greenberg, Stephen J. Parker, Maria Carlson, Gerald Mikkelson, Maia Kipp, Jadwiga Maurer, and Andrzej Karcz, as well as the faculty (and former faculty) of the University of Iowa Russian Dept., Profs. Ray Parrott, Jr., Harry Weber, Margaret Mills, Vadim Krejd, Russell Valentino, and Kathryn Henry, and the faculty of the University of Utah Russian Dept., Profs. Gene Fitzgerald, Eric Laursen, and Jane Hacking.

A special thanks to the Watson Library Slavic Studies Dept., which has found numerous Polish and Russian articles for me, as well as provided me financial support. Finally, a special thanks to my special friends in the KU Choral Dept. and University Theatre, who have supported me financially, artistically, and especially, emotionally over the years.

## Statement on Transliteration and Style

This work is meant to be accessible to many audiences, across several languages and disciplines. At the same time, like Przybyszewski, I have tried to maintain a level of scholarly “aristocracy.” Word processing has made referencing multiple languages easier than in the past, and I have taken advantage of that ability.

I have tried to maintain the following guidelines throughout this work:

1. Transliteration of Russian follows a modified Library of Congress system. I do not, however, employ established English variants (Meyerhold), unless the referenced text does.
2. Theatre, not theater.
3. In the main body, English translations of Przybyszewski’s works are used, whether in Russian and Polish, with the original title(s) in brackets: *The Golden Fleece* [*Zolotoe runo*, Rus.; *Złote runo*, Pol.]
4. Titles of journals are translated upon first reference. Further references are in the original language: *Obozrenie teatrov* (*Theatre Review*) References to works in German and French remain in the original language: *Die Schmetterlingsschlacht*, usually with a reference to the Russian.
5. Spelling: in the main body, orthography follows post-Revolution standards. However, the bibliography retains pre-Revolution forms, with the exception of the deletion of final “ь” (“tverdyi znak” or “hard sign”), and the post-reform conflation of “и / i” and “е / iat’.” The letters “е” and “ѐ” (stressed ‘e’) are not distinguished, unless this occurs in the reference.
6. The use of word processing and international fonts has allowed the exact orthographic imitation of the original texts. Therefore, guillemots, inverted quotes, italics and other such nineteenth century conventions have been retained where possible.
7. The transliteration of Przybyszewski’s name in Russian was not yet codified at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Spellings may differ.
8. The Kommissarzhevskiis spelled their name with two “m”s. However, even during her lifetime, some reviewers spelled it with one. I have followed the contemporary spelling throughout, unless a referenced text does otherwise.
9. Forward slashes (“/”) are used to denote paragraph breaks in the original text.

### **Footnotes, appendix, and references:**

10. Alternate Polish, German or Russian texts are included in the notes for scholarly purposes of comparison (Appendix I). Due to the number of Russian translations used and Przybyszewski's own habit of translating and editing texts with friends while under the influence of one or two glasses or cognac or whiskey, there will sometimes be differences. These texts will be referenced/glossed to the original footnote (i.e., a second text to accompany footnote #15, chapter II, will be referenced as #2.15) and appended separately.

Textology is not the main focus of this dissertation, so discussions about textual variants will generally be absent.

In general, I have tried to reference the most likely source. In the general review of Przybyszewski's aesthetics in Chapter I, Polish texts have been used as original sources. However, Russian texts are used later, as they become the historical context for each discussion.

In referencing publications, I have retained the date of publication (26. X. 19xx) where possible, as well as the issue number. Newspaper citations include "p." and page number to break the chain of numerals that would occur if it were deleted. This should make them more legible.

### **Format:**

11. Due to the growth of on-line documents and the recognition that my own work may only be read electronically, I have chosen to use the footnote format. Although this may hinder those readers who wish to read through the text without the "clutter" of scholarly citations and asides, I hope that by placing that scholarly discourse on the same page, rather than in traditional endnotes, this will make it easier for my readers to follow my line of research, without having to constantly move back and forth between text and notes on a computer screen.
12. All translations are my own, except as otherwise noted. I am responsible for all discrepancies. Special thanks to Profs. Edith W. Clowes and William J. Comer, who massaged out some egregious mistakes, and Dr. Maia Kipp, who also pointed out some suspect orthography and translations.

## General abbreviations:

- GBL** (Gosudarstvennaia biblioteka im. Lenina)  
The Lenin State Library, Moscow
- IMLI** (Institut mezhdunarodnoi literatury i iskusstvo)  
(The Gor'kii) Institute for International Literature and Art
- RGB** (Rossiiskaia gosudarstvennaia biblioteka)  
Russian National Library, St. Petersburg
- RGALI** (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstvo)  
Russian State Archives of Literature and Art, Moscow
- RGIA** (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv)  
Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg
- TsGTMB** (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi teatral'nyi muzei im. Bakhrushina)  
Bakhrushin Central State Theatre Museum and Archive, Moscow
- SPbTB** (Sankt-Peterburgskaia teatral'naia biblioteka)  
St. Petersburg Theatre Library

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In the beginning was the Soul,  
and the Soul flowed from the primordial fire;  
the Soul longed for self-realization and became.

Na początku była dusza, a dusza płynie z pra-ognia;  
—i dusza zapragnęła uświadomić się i stała się.

Stanisław Przybyszewski

aphorism written in an album  
at the Café Paon, Kraków, c. 1899

## PREFACE

How did the works and aesthetic views of Stanislaw Przybyszewski impact Russian theatre at the turn of the century? More specifically, how did they impact the artistic and professional development of two of that period's most famous theatre innovators, Vera Komissarzhevskaja and Vsevolod Meierkhol'd? This dissertation moves beyond the general discussion of thematic parallels which has characterized research on this subject for many years, in an attempt to show concrete evidence that both creative artists actively engaged with Przybyszewski's aesthetic views, especially his prescription to follow "the path of the soul."

The topic of Przybyszewski's Russian reception developed first from conversations with Professor Maria Carlson about my interests in Russian Symbolism and Polish. Professor Carlson suggested Stanisław Przybyszewski as a writer whom I might be interested in reading. In my third year of language study I read and translated the prose-poem *Nad morzem* (1899; Ger. *Am Meer*, 1897; *By the Sea*). Przybyszewski's works (as many works of Polish literature) are not readily available for non-readers of Polish. In Professor Jadwiga Maurer's Polish literature class I started to collect bibliographic materials and presented my first talk on Przybyszewski. Since 2000 I have given three presentations on Przybyszewski: the first on Przybyszewski as an example of the Polish cultural impact in Russian and Eastern European culture; the second on possible parallels between Przybyszewski and Bal'mont, and the third on Przybyszewski's prose poem *Nad morzem*.

I have been intrigued by the apparent impact that Przybyszewski, the cultural figure and his work, had on Russian literature and culture, both through his writings and through personal contacts. The fact that Przybyszewski was an amateur musician, had written theoretical essays on art, drama, and had led a “decadent” lifestyle, all continued to appeal to me—this was a fascinating individual, both as a literary figure and artist. I wanted to understand how his writing, today considered florid and vague, could have won so many readers at the turn of the century.

As I worked through this dissertation, I received support from many individuals. I wish to thank my advisor, Prof. Edith W. Clowes, who guided me through, held weekly meetings to make sure I was “on track,” and read my drafts meticulously. John Staniunas, my second reader, provided input from the standpoint of theatre. Christine Soderstrom Jensen, my unofficial second reader, also provided valuable assistance to help me become a better writer. William Comer gave me valuable advice in preparation for doing archival research before I left on Fulbright-Hays. The other members of my committee, Svetlana Vassileva-Karagyozeva and Nathan Wood, have been patient in reading final drafts of this work.

Special mention should be made of the people who helped lay the bibliographic foundation for this dissertation and all future work. The staff of Watson Library Slavic Studies assisted me in gathering bibliographic materials, much of which had to be requested through interlibrary loan. For almost three months straight, without a break, the staff of the Fontanka branch of the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg patiently filled my requests for newspapers. The friendly

staff at the Moskovskii Prospekt branch eased the pain of making tifs from microform and monographs. Pavel Dmitriev, Iuliia Prestynskaia, and the rest of the staff of the St. Petersburg Theatre Library all provided a friendly and supportive atmosphere as I studied scripts of Przybyszewski's plays while the library underwent renovation in May and June 2006.

This research has been funded by four organizations. A Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Award funded ten months of research in St. Petersburg and Moscow in 2005-2006. The Winterburg Fund at KU provided additional financial assistance; the Louis B. Skalny Scholarship (2005) recognized my early work on the prospectus. Several fellowships and a scholarship in honor of William Kuhlke, KU Professor of Theatre, partially funded my early years of study. Finally, no words can express the gratitude I feel toward my mother and father, their love and support will be forever in my heart.

## INTRODUCTION

The stage has become a site for the bloody battle going on in the human soul: [a place] of peripeteia and impulses, of pleasures and sufferings, [and] of passions barely accessible to the senses. The contemporary stage has withdrawn into itself as it were; it opens new horizons, new life perspectives; [it] touches on phenomena hidden at the bottom of the human soul, and opens wide all its depth before the viewer's eyes.

Przybyszewski, "On Drama and the Stage" (1902)<sup>1</sup>

The stage is an area in any structure, an "acting space" where an actor plies his trade. Normally, as in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia, that acting space was separated from the audience by a row of footlights and more often than not, the physical set which filled the stage was a faithful, "archeological" re-creation of either historical or contemporary reality. Przybyszewski's metaphorical conceptualization, set forth in his 1902 essay "On Drama and the Stage," made the stage into a setting for the allegorical re-creation of the soul's internal conflicts. As such, it presented challenges for actors, directors, and designers who wanted to transform or "translate" a chosen text through the medium of theatre—shifting from a literary text with abstract subject matter to a performance text involving the interaction of the body and

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<sup>1</sup> Stanislaw Pshibyshevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, t. IV, *Dramy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Moscow: Sablin, 1910), 341. "—сцена стала местом кровавой борьбы, происходящей в душе человека, колебаний и порывов, наслаждений и страданий, едва доступных для чувств страстей. Современная сцена, если можно так выразиться, удалилась, она открывает новые горизонты, новые жизненные перспективы, толкует явления, скрытые на дне души человеческой, и открывает перед глазами зрителя всю ее глубину." I refer to the essay according to its well-known 1905 title, which corresponds to its Russian version. Przybyszewski originally presented these ideas in a serialized version published as "Kilka uwag o dramacie i scenie," *Kurjer Teatralny*, no. 1, 18. IX (1. X). 1902, p. 4. Przybyszewski's 1905 Polish text varies slightly. See Appendix 1, text 0.1.

concrete objects in the theatrical space. The visual representation of the “soul” on stage became a major difficulty for the director. Simultaneously, the corporeal expression of that “soul” as character through speech and gesture became the actor’s major task. However, these difficulties also opened new opportunities to the creative process. As Przybyszewski’s statement implies, when the creative artist turns his gaze inward, that gaze reveals new horizons and perspectives.

This dissertation inquires into the nature of Przybyszewski’s impact on the theatrical vision of two of the greatest Russian innovators of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, actress-entrepreneur Vera Komissarzhevskaja (1864-1910) and the actor-director Vsevolod Meierkhol'd (1874-1940). My argument for a significant reception rests on Przybyszewski’s aesthetic theories, and particularly, his concept of the “path of the soul.” Komissarzhevskaja fixed her inward gaze upon painful early-life experiences. Przybyszewski’s concept of the “soul,” transmuted to the theatre stage, I argue, thus became an “experiential space” through which—and upon which—the actress could make sense of and then interpret those life experiences and emotions. For much of Komissarzhevskaja’s life, Przybyszewski’s “path of the soul” remained an essentially personal experience. Meierkhol'd’s directorial gaze, in contrast, first turned inward toward the soul as he sought a new direction in art, then outward, as he attempted to express his discoveries through the medium of theatre. Through his investigation of the possible methods of representing the soul and its manifestations on the theatrical stage the soul became an “experimental space.” Both Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd staged a significant number of Przybyszewski’s then-published plays and

showed strong interest in his theories both privately and publicly. Unlike Komissarzhevskaiia, whose early enthusiasm for Przybyszewski is palpable in her early correspondence, Meierkhol'd's attraction to and reception of the Polish dramatist, pronounced explicitly in his private correspondence, also became public through allusions made in interviews and promotional announcements.

Both Komissarzhevskaiia and Meierkhol'd appeared on the Russian stage at the end of the nineteenth century, and both soon sought to break from theatrical convention. These two innovators came from different social backgrounds. Komissarzhevskaiia was the daughter of a well-known Mariinskii opera singer, while Meierkhol'd was the son of a Penza vodka distiller. However, their lives shared several elements: their childhood environment was filled with art, music, and drama; although early in their artistic careers both worked with Konstantin Stanislavskii, each soon moved beyond the aesthetic purview of the Moscow Art Theatre. Both privately admitted an interest in Przybyszewski and selected his controversial works as they experimented with new dramatic forms. The apex of their separate paths would be their artistic collaboration during the season of 1906-1907, when their productions at Komissarzhevskaiia's Dramatic Theatre moved Russian theatre decisively beyond the traditions of naturalism and realism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Naturalism" will be understood as that "multifaceted" and "self-contradictory" trend and form of realism, which was based on philosophical materialism and stressed the "cult of instinct" and the "biologicalization of emotions." It allowed for a subjective interpretation of nature and a "longing for the absolute" (cf. Neoromanticism), but (paradoxically) also sought a brutal, microscopic observation of human reality, a reality that frequently, but not always, concentrated on the sordid side of lower-class life. In drama, this resulted in a staged verisimilitude of life, as

The main questions before us as we investigate the nature of Przybyszewski's impact on Russian theatre are these: why did Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd feel an affinity for the works and ideas of Przybyszewski? What specific impact did his theories have on these two people's theatrical activities? Did his theories provide an impetus for change, and if so, how was this change reflected in their art?

In this dissertation I argue that Przybyszewski's aesthetic views and works attracted both Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd on two levels, the personal and the professional, provoking strong, personal responses.<sup>3</sup> For Komissarzhevskaja, I conjecture that Przybyszewski's notions of art became a catalyst that allowed her to move toward self-realization as a creative artist.<sup>4</sup> The expression of her own soul, and the emotions found there, moved Komissarzhevskaja to break with old theatrical traditions and embark on a new path. For Meierkhol'd, I hypothesize that Przybyszewski's notions of art provided a part of the theoretical foundation upon

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characters attempted to dress, act, and speak authentically, as in everyday life. Naturalism also retained the social activist or publicistic slant that characterized positivism. The chief theorist of naturalism was Emile Zola (*Le Roman expérimental*, 1880). See E. J. Czerwinski, ed., *Dictionary of Polish Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 275-276; Oscar G. Brockett, *The Theatre: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1969), 299-300; Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb, *Living Theatre: A History*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 406-407. Cf. also M. H. Abrams, "Realism and Naturalism," *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999), 260-261.

<sup>3</sup> In this dissertation the term "personal" relates to their private interaction with Przybyszewski's ideas as they impact each figure's own biography and career, whereas the discussion of the "professional" level will illustrate the ways in which this personal reception affected their public roles as actor, entrepreneur, and director.

<sup>4</sup> "Creative artist" in the sense of a person who uses their imagination, body, and skill to produce a work of aesthetic value. This term is broader than "actor/actress," and recognizes Przybyszewski's own application of his theories to the visual and plastic arts.

which he could build a progressive acting company. Przybyszewski's ideas then became a prescriptive method that Meierkol'd would use to break from the representational fetters of naturalism. Considered together, Przybyszewski's impact on both of these major theatrical figures, working on both sides of the footlights, will reveal an important and, as yet, unrecognized link between this forgotten leader of *Młoda Polska* and the development of Russian theatre during the first decade of the twentieth century.

Paweł Ettinger established the foundation for further research on Przybyszewski's positive impact on Russian literature and culture in his brief 1926 article, "Przybyszewski in Russian literature."<sup>5</sup> Ettinger claimed that for many Russian intellectuals, especially those drawn to the new literary movement of modernism, Przybyszewski's novels "constituted a completely mature and, at the same time, splendid incarnation of [its] general principles."<sup>6</sup> This view was also

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<sup>5</sup> Paweł Ettinger, "Przybyszewski w literaturze rosyjskiej," *Wiadomości Literackie*, no. 21 (1926): 3. This piece was written on the occasion of a July ceremony held in Moscow to honor Sergei Poliakov, the founder and patron of the Skorpion publishing house.

<sup>6</sup> Ettinger, *op. cit.*, 3. "powieści Przybyszewskiego stanowiły zupełnie dojrzałą i świetną zarazem inkarnację haseł modernizmu." Although Ettinger does not define the term "modernism," we suspect that his meaning was close to what Polish writer and critic Antoni Lange (1861-1929) described as the "contemporary art," full of "neurosis and anxiety, madness and excess, [...] melancholy and cynicism, spasms and resignation, yearning for death and [...] love." Cited in Artur Hutnikiewicz, *Młoda Polska* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994), 22. The mood described by Lange, for the most part, has been superseded by the term "fin-de-siècle." Lange's definition will be the fundamental meaning of this term, and should be understood in any citation of period criticism, memoirs, et al. However, on occasion, we will also understand "modernism" as an umbrella term that includes all the various literary or artistic trends such as decadence, symbolism, neo-romanticism, and impressionism, which attempted to break with the traditional forms and concepts

shared in 1981 by the Soviet scholar of Russo-Polish literature, E. Z. Tsybenko, who further claimed that Przybyszewski's influence on Russian culture could be explained by the manner in which he captured the mood of society and that the very controversies that surrounded his works mirrored the contradictions and philosophical and aesthetic searching of the times.<sup>7</sup> Polish literary historian Artur Hutnikiewicz's 1994 view synthesized both Ettinger's claim of Przybyszewski as a symbol of early modernism and Tsybenko's opinion of Przybyszewski as an embodiment of his times, adding his observation that late-twentieth-century literary and cultural historians pay little attention to this writer today. These remarks on Przybyszewski's status as a

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of Western art. See Abrams, *op. cit.*, 167. *Młoda Polska* is the literary epoch that occurred roughly from 1890-1918 in Poland. The Polish critic Artur Górski (1870-1959) first coined the term in an article that appeared in Przybyszewski's journal *Życie* in 1899. This period follows Polish positivism (1863-1890), and the term "*Młoda Polska*" is the "broadest term that takes into account all the literary trends followed by the writers of that time." See Czerwinski, *op. cit.*, 274. Among those trends that coexisted at this time are realism, and naturalism, as well as the others listed above. See Hutnikiewicz, *op. cit.*, 22-29; Czerwinski, *op. cit.*, 273-280. It is difficult to categorize Przybyszewski under any one single literary tendency, although critical articles cited in the following pages may suggest that he was recognized in the Russian press primarily as a "decadent." Czerwinski does not assign a specific literary tendency to Przybyszewski at all, although he describes him as "the most militant follower and propagator of extreme modernist aestheticism." See Czerwinski, *op. cit.*, 334. Miłosz claims that Przybyszewski's "dynamism focused all the disparate tendencies...and the movement...became known as Przybyszewski's *Moderna*." Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 329-330. Alexander Cyps, in his 1923 monograph, *Stanisław Przybyszewski od antynaturalisty do mistyka* (Łódź: Spółka Wydawnicza), argues that Przybyszewski moves philosophically from an "anti-naturalist" position to that of a "mystic." Przybyszewski himself used the terms "new art" and "new drama," which indicates a positioning as "contemporary" or "modern" in the original French sense of the term. He also developed his own theory of symbolism. Stanisław Przybyszewski was a true representative of *Młoda Polska*, and he drew his themes and styles from all these disparate tendencies.

<sup>7</sup> E. Z. Tsybenko and A. G. Sokolov, eds., *Russkaia i pol'skaia literatura kontsa XIX-nachala XX veka* (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1981), 246-247.

early representative of new literary currents serve as a platform for a brief discussion of some bibliographic details and the general critical landscape that surrounded Przybyszewski's works in Russia.<sup>8</sup>

There are writers whose significance is based on the greatness of the works they have created. But there are those whose work, seeming to be a characteristic phenomenon of a specific epoch, submits slowly to the erosion of time, although their name remains in the memory as a symbol, as a point of orientation, and one of the turning points in the unending flow of cultural phenomena.<sup>9</sup>

Contrasting critical views of Przybyszewski and his works are evidence of the controversy he has generated in literary and cultural history. Aleksander Rogalski, Polish literary critic and author of "Stanisław Przybyszewski. An attempt at a revision of his work," written in 1937, held a completely negative view of the writer.<sup>10</sup> Rogalski argued that Przybyszewski was worthy neither of the designation "artist," nor his works worthy to be called "artistic compositions."<sup>11</sup> He faulted the novels for their solipsism, painting them as emanating from a "terribly tangled-up truth"—

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<sup>8</sup> For example, the novel *Homo sapiens* was published in 10 editions; translations and reprints account for 151 titles in current bibliographies of Przybyszewski's works. Tsybenko and Sokolov, *op. cit.*, 247.

<sup>9</sup> "Są pisarze, których znaczenie polega na wielkości dzieł, jakie stworzyli. Ale są też tacy, których twórczość, zdając się być fenomenem znamionym określonej epoki, ulega jednak z wolna jakby erozji czasu, choć ich nazwisko pozostaje w pamięci jako symbol, jako znak orientacyjny i jeden z punktów zwrotnych w nie kończącym się przepływie zjawisk kulturowych." Hutnikiewicz, *op. cit.*, 201.

<sup>10</sup> Aleksander Rogalski, "Stanisław Przybyszewski. Próba rewizji twórczości," *Literatura i cywilizacja. Eseje i studia* (Warsaw: PAX, 1956), 42-55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

Przybyszewski's own ego.<sup>12</sup> Rogalski mentioned little about Przybyszewski's dramas, but noted that even these were only of historical interest and showed the weaknesses of his creative mind.<sup>13</sup> In order to support his broad generalization, Rogalski claimed that Przybyszewski's dramas sought to redeem their lack of logical cause and effect with emotional truth and lyricism, and indirectly related this deficiency to his "monotonous" novels.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Rogalski stressed the fact that Przybyszewski left no lasting literary heirs as further evidence of his insignificance within the context of contemporary Polish literary history.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "...tak mała rozpiętość treści wewnętrznych; wszystko zlewa się w jedno: w jakąś straszliwe poplątaną istotę – emanację Przybyszewskiego." Rogalski, *op. cit.*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>14</sup> "Dramaty, oparte na logice uczucia, nie raziły, nawet gdy zbyt rozmięły się z prawem przyczynowości, okupywała błąd prawda uczucia i głęboka poezja (*Złote runo, Śnieg*)" and "Tematem tym to „ja“ autorskie, to Przybyszewski. Wszędzie pod zmienionymi nazwiskami i zmienionymi kreacjami występuje w gruncie rzeczy tylko on sam. I stąd taka monotonia w jego powieściach" *Ibid.*, 53. For his comments on the dramas, Rogalski relies on a quote from author and critic Wilhelm Feldman (1868-1919). See Feldman, *Współczesna literatura polska* (Kraków: Nakład Krakowskiej Spółki Wydawniczej, 1930), 250-251, cited in Rogalski, *op. cit.*, 53. An enthusiastic supporter of both Młoda Polska and Polish independence, Feldman's own criticism is both emotional and impressionistic. See Czerwinski, *op. cit.*, 111-112. Compare the comments quoted by Rogalski to those which appeared in an early version of Fel'dman's essay, included in volume six of Sablin's fourth edition (1910) of Przybyszewski's collected works. In the Sablin essay Fel'dman praises Przybyszewski for the "iron logic" of his driving plots, his highly dramatic dialogues and "striking" denouements: "в Пшибышевском скрыт замечательный драматург. Произведение кипит страстью, события вытекают с железной логикой, в безумном темпе, не сворачивая ни на иоту с главной линии, намеченной характерами, диалоги высоко драматичны, развязка конфликтов потрясающая. Эти качества, перенесенные на сцену, дали сильные драмы, хотя и односторонние, как все творчество автора, вся его теория, классически воплощенная" (41-42). "St. Pshibyshevskii. Oчерk Fel'dmana," in St. Pshibyshevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, T. VI, *De profundis. Deti satany*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Moscow: Sablin, 1910), 7-43.

<sup>15</sup> Rogalski, *op. cit.*, 54.

Curiously, an American doctoral student was one of the first scholars to begin an examination of Przybyszewski's reception in Russia. Irena Szweide's 1970 Ph.D. dissertation, "The Works of Stanislaw Przybyszewski and Their Reception in Russia at the Beginning of the XX Century," analyzes the impact of the works written during the early part of his career, from 1892 to 1906.<sup>16</sup> By identifying the most characteristic modernist features in Przybyszewski's works, Szweide hoped to discover which traits attracted the attention of Russian critics.<sup>17</sup> Confirming Ettinger's assertion, Szweide acknowledged that Russian critics generally recognized Przybyszewski as a leading modernist writer, and claimed that opposition to his works came from those who opposed modernist trends.<sup>18</sup>

Szweide devoted relatively little space to a discussion of Przybyszewski's dramas, but did attempt an exposition of the 1905 theoretical essay "On Drama and the Stage" and provided a brief analysis of the dramas.<sup>19</sup> In her discussion of Przybyszewski's essay Szweide stressed several points about the new drama. The new drama: 1) demands new skills from the actor; 2) centers on internal conflict and omits external action and much exposition; 3) introduces a symbolic character, who often represents two sides of the protagonist's self; 4) is characterized by a sense of

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<sup>16</sup> Irena Szweide, "The Works of Stanislaw Przybyszewski and Their Reception in Russia at the Beginning of the XX Century" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1970). Szweide's use of scholarly references is minimal, sometimes making it difficult to ascertain the source of her claims.

<sup>17</sup> Szweide, *op. cit.*, v. Szweide uses "modernism" as an umbrella term encompassing all the concurrent literary trends. *Ibid.*, 22. Among the modernist traits Szweide identifies are the "highly individualistic hero" and the themes of eroticism and evil. *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-60, 110-125.

fatalism that is present throughout the play; this fatalism, in turn affects the manner in which the conflict is presented.<sup>20</sup> Szwede also offered her interpretation of Przybyszewski's term "synthetic drama" as that drama which combined universal themes, simplistic settings, and the hero's psychological experiences.<sup>21</sup> As we shall see in our discussion of Przybyszewski's concept of the soul and Meierkhol'd's production of *Snow* in December 1903, this synthesis should also include a consideration of the combination of sensorial experiences, or synaesthesia.

Szwede believed that two elements formed the core of Przybyszewski's dramas: eroticism and metaphysics. These aspects are represented by his phrase "the dance of love and death," a theme which unites his first five dramas.<sup>22</sup> According to Szwede, the main theme of Przybyszewski's dramas was the "impossibility of modern man's achieving happiness," a happiness that often was thwarted by punishment for deeds occurring in one's erotic life.<sup>23</sup> This concept of "irrevocable punishment," in Szwede's view, moves Przybyszewski toward the position of a Christian moralist, and away from his fascination with the occult.<sup>24</sup>

In Poland, a major reexamination of Przybyszewski's impact on Slavic literature and culture took place after 1977, the fiftieth anniversary of his death. This new scholarship contrasted sharply with Rogalski's view that Przybyszewski left no traces in literary history. Much of this scholarship appeared in two major anthologies

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<sup>20</sup> Szwede, *op. cit.*, 56-59.

<sup>21</sup> Szwede, *op. cit.*, 58, 115.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 112, 114.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 114, 113.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

of criticism, published in the early 1980s.<sup>25</sup> Several essays that appeared in these anthologies, such as those by E. Z. Tsybenko and H. Galska, are germane to the present discussion.

Tsybenko's 1982 essay, "The Discussion of Stanisław Przybyszewski's Works in Russia" has been useful as a general source of bibliographic history, providing a review of publications and publishing dates.<sup>26</sup> This Soviet scholar was the first to use the extensive bibliography then being compiled by I. K. Kurant, which still stands today as the most complete published listing of Przybyszewski's works in Russia.<sup>27</sup> In particular, Tsybenko noted that Przybyszewski's drama *Snow* was published the most often, and that theatres throughout the empire staged his plays. She also considered *Snow* to be both the most popular of his plays, based on the number of reviews published in the Russian press, and the most controversial.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková and Edward Madany, eds., *Słowiane w świecie antynorm Stanisława Przybyszewskiego. Pokłosie międzynarodowej Sesji Naukowej zorganizowanej w 110 rocznicę urodzin Stanisława Przybyszewskiego przez Komitet Słowianoznawstwa PAN i Instytut Słowianoznawstwa PAN w dniach 10-11 maja 1978 w Warszawie na temat 'Stanisław Przybyszewski w literaturach słowiańskich'*. (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo PAN, 1981); Hanna Filipkowska, ed., *Stanisław Przybyszewski w 50-lecie zgonu pisarza* (Wrocław: Zakład narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo PAN, 1982).

<sup>26</sup> Helena Cybienko [E. Z. Tsybenko], "Dyskusje o twórczości Stanisława Przybyszewskiego w Rosji," in Janaszek-Ivaničková and Madany, *op. cit.*, 121-144.

<sup>27</sup> I. L. Kurant, *Pol'skaia khudozhestvennaia literatura XVI—nachala XX veka v russkoi i sovetkoi pečati. Ukazatel' perevodov i literaturno-kriticheskikh rabot na russkom iazyke, izdannyykh v 1711-1975 gg. T. 4* (Moscow; Warsaw, 1995), 89-113. Kurant's work has superceded that by M. Morshchiner, *Khudozhestvennaia literatura stran narodnoi demokratii v perevodakh na russkii iazyk. Pol'sha, konets XVIII-1950*. (Moscow, 1951). Russo-Polish Przybyszewski scholar Andrei Moskvina has discovered additional references, as have I.

<sup>28</sup> Tsybenko, "Dyskusje," 122-123, 125. Further refinement of this claim of popularity is in order. Tsybenko does not take into consideration the fact that

Tsybenko cited the opinions of two Russian critics, D. Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii and V. V. Vorovskii, to support her latter claim.<sup>29</sup> Her selection of opinions is not completely objective, however. Both critics responded to Przybyszewski negatively, although they used contrasting methods of analysis. Starting from a premise that Przybyszewski's symbolic characters could not be understood in the traditional sense of philosophical idealism, Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii suggested that the reader had to analyze them psychologically.<sup>30</sup> In doing so, he found the characters in *Snow* to be spiritually barren and without purpose.<sup>31</sup> Writing twenty five years later, in the Soviet period, and from a sociological standpoint, the Marxist critic Vorovskii believed the character of Eva did have a purpose. In fact, she represented the bourgeois morality against which the contemporary woman was struggling. In Tsybenko's interpretation, Vorovskii's sociological character analysis of this play represented a "new element" in its criticism.<sup>32</sup> My research indicates that for both Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhof, it was the intense psychological experiences of Przybyszewski's characters that attracted them. Even though these artists held

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repeated performances of a play by a particular company may not have been reviewed, or that some productions may not have been reviewed at all. For the comment on the controversial nature of *Snow*, see p. 135.

<sup>29</sup> D. N. Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii, "K kharakteristike sovremennago simvolizma v iskusstve. I. *Sneg* Pshibyshevskago," *Iuzhnye zapiski*, no. 15-16 (28. III. 1904): 81-90; V. V. Vorovskii, "Eva i Dzhokonda (Literaturnye paralleli)," *Krasnaia nov'*, no. 6 (June 1929): 159-165. Without providing further evidence, Tsybenko writes that Vorovskii's essay was "most likely" written in 1903, making it one of the first responses to Przybyszewski's play. However, this essay was not published until 1929. See Tsybenko, "Dyskusje," 136. *Iuzhnye zapiski* was an Odessa weekly.

<sup>30</sup> Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii, *op. cit.*, 81-82, 85.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 84; Tsybenko, "Dyskusje," 135.

<sup>32</sup> Vorovskii, *op. cit.*, 164; Tsybenko, "Dyskusje," 136.

progressive social, and, in the case of Meierkhol'd, socialist political, views, the tendentious need to advocate a struggle against “bourgeois morality” was of secondary importance to them.

In presenting these two views of Przybyszewski’s work, Tsybenko failed to mention a favorable article by Petr Iartsev that appeared in *Teatr i iskusstvo* four months before Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii’s essay.<sup>33</sup> Unlike Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii, who felt that Przybyszewski’s reliance on psychology was a detriment to his art, Iartsev believed that Przybyszewski’s talent lay in the very fact that mere psychology could not explain the simple action in the play and that therefore, the reader should look beyond psychology for meaning.<sup>34</sup> This dissertation, in presenting a background of Russian criticism that generally portrayed Przybyszewski in a negative light, will demonstrate that important cultural figures such as Vera Komissarzhevskaiia and Vsevolod Meierkhol'd could still react positively to Przybyszewski’s works and aesthetic ideas. Furthermore, Iartsev’s notion that the reader must “look beyond” for meaning in a Przybyszewski work clearly resonates in Meierkhol'd’s use of these dramas as an experimental space in which to move beyond the limits of naturalism.

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<sup>33</sup> P. Iartsev, “Novaia drama: (*Sneg Pshibyshevskago*),” *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 50 (7. XII. 1903): 964-967. Iartsev would later join Komissarzhevskaiia’s company and become the assistant director of Meierkhol'd’s 1906 production of Przybyszewski’s *The Eternal Tale*. This essay is listed in Kurant’s bibliography. See Kurant, *op. cit.*, 101. The theme of psychology in Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii’s essay resonates from Iartsev’s earlier essay.

<sup>34</sup> Iartsev, *op. cit.*, 964. “И чувство того, что к простой драме Пшибышевского нельзя подходить с простыми мерками психологических ценностей, волнует душу. В этом и заключается скрытая мысль драмы «Снега», ее мучительная красота и то в ней, что называется новым искусством. Новое искусство, прежде всего, начатки новой психологии.”

Essays by Tamara Agapkina, Roman Taborski, and Jan Zieliński, all appearing in Filipkowska's 1982 edited volume of essays, provide supplemental evidence of Przybyszewski's controversial status as a dramatist and identify themes that underlie the Russian reception of his dramas.<sup>35</sup> Roman Taborski's essay, "Regarding the Stage Productions of Przybyszewski's Dramas," provides a contrastive foundation for understanding Przybyszewski's impact on Russian theatre by describing his concurrent influence and controversial impact on the theatre of his native Poland, primarily in cities then under Russian and Austro-Hungarian rule, such as Warsaw, Kraków, and Lwów (now L'viv). Taborski also provides a subjective measure against which the number of performances of a particular production may be judged, given the repertory tradition in effect at this time: in a review of productions staged by Tadeusz Pawlikowski at Lwów's Municipal Theatre (*Teatr Miejski*) from 1900-1906, Taborski considered the twelve performances of *The Golden Fleece* to be a "considerable" number.<sup>36</sup> In Warsaw, the thirty-three performances of the same drama at the Variety Theatre (*Teatr Rozmaitości*) made it the hit of the 1901-1902

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<sup>35</sup> Tamara P. Agapkina, trans. Ewa Głębička, "Rosyjskie kontakty Stanisława Przybyszewskiego," in Filipkowska, *op. cit.*, 163-212; Roman Taborski, "Z dziejów scenicznych dramatów Przybyszewskiego," in Filipkowska, *op. cit.*, 213-233; Jan Zieliński, "Wpływ Przybyszewskiego na rosyjską powieść modernistyczną," in Filipkowska, *op. cit.*, 141-150.

<sup>36</sup> Taborski, *op. cit.*, 215, 229. 12 performances out of a total of 302 positioned *The Golden Fleece* in fifteenth place during that six-year period. Taborski cites F. Pajęczkowski, *Teatr lwowski pod dyktando Tadeusza Pawlikowskiego 1900-1906* (Kraków, 1961), 452-453, as his source. Polish productions of Przybyszewski's plays underwent a resurgence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with performances of *Snow* in Kielce, Warsaw, and Opole, *For Happiness* in Katowice, and *Life's Banquet* in Kraków. Productions of *Snow*, *For Happiness*, and *Life's Banquet* all have been televised. Taborski, *op. cit.*, 227.

season.<sup>37</sup> *For Happiness* was a success the following season, playing only seventeen times.<sup>38</sup> These numbers compare favorably with the sixteen performances of *The Eternal Tale* during the 1906-1907 season at Komissarzhevskaiia's Dramatic Theatre (*Dramaticheskii Teatr*) in St. Petersburg, when she staged a total of eleven plays, including two one-acts by Maeterlinck and Blok.

Soviet scholar Tamara Agapkina's essay, "Stanisław Przybyszewski's Russian Contacts," despite its slightly Marxist tone, presents a generally well-researched overview of Przybyszewski's Russian reception in the sense of personal contacts and criticism.<sup>39</sup> Like Tsybenko, Agapkina summarized the number of editions of Przybyszewski's works that appeared in the period from 1901 to 1918. Important for this dissertation is her observation that a wide circle of creative artists, such as

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<sup>37</sup> Taborski, *op. cit.*, 215.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>39</sup> Even this scholar presents some historical inaccuracies. For example, she claimed that the novel *Homo sapiens* (1896) was Przybyszewski's first work to appear in the Russian press. "Utwory Przybyszewskiego, począwszy od 1901 roku, kiedy to w czasopiśmie »Wiesnik wsiemirnoj literatury« wydrukowano przekład powieści "Homo sapiens" (w 1902 r. ukazała się ona w wydaniu książkowym, były publikowane nieprzerwanie do roku 1918 włącznie." Agapkina, *op. cit.*, 163. Agapkina refers to: St. Pshibyshevskii, *Homo sapiens*. [I.] *Na rasput'i*, trans. from the Polish by Erve, *Vestnik vseмирnoi istorii*, no. 10 (1901): 222-245; no. 11 (1901): 126-153, no. 12 (1901): 132-186. This claim omits the translations of his prose poems that appeared several years earlier in Moscow and Kazan' newspapers: "Epipsikhidion," trans. V. Lavrov, *Kur'er* [Moscow], no. 325, 25. XI. 1898, p. 1; no. 331, 1. XII. 1898, p. 1; no. 334, 4. XII. 1898, p.1; "U moria: (Otryvok)," trans. V. Borodzich, *Kazanskii telegraf*, no. 1885, 24. II. 1899, p. 3; "Svetlye nochi (Vtoraia pesnia iz poemu 'U moria.'): Otryvok," *Kazanskii telegraf*, no. 1896, 10. III. 1899, pp. 2-3. This claim may represent Agapkina's reliance on the 1951 Morshchiner bibliography.

writers, painters, and musicians, were interested in his works.<sup>40</sup> Agapkina illustrated her claim that Russian musicians showed interest in Przybyszewski by citing a connection made between his play, *Snow*, and Chaikovskii's *Sixth Symphony* in an anonymous article that appeared in the Kherson newspaper *Iug* [*The South*].<sup>41</sup> This dissertation will explore the connections between those two works more deeply in its analysis of Meierkhol'd's 1903 production of *Snow*.

Agapkina relied partly on information published in the press during Przybyszewski's visits in 1904 and on some archival materials, especially those involving Meierkhol'd, Komissarzhevskaja, and Anatolii Lunacharskii (1875-1933). Correspondence between Przybyszewski and these individuals is included among the eight letters reprinted in a brief appendix that follows her article.<sup>42</sup> In her exposition, Agapkina divided her attention between those readers who admired Przybyszewski, such as the symbolist poet Konstantin Bal'mont (1867-1942) and those who were his detractors, such as the realist writer Vladimir Korolenko (1853-1921).<sup>43</sup> Agapkina

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<sup>40</sup> Agapkina, *op. cit.*, 163-164. Agapkina infers this interest through professional associations. For example, Mikhail Feofilaktov illustrated several covers of the Skorpion edition of Przybyszewski's works; Vasilii Denisov designed the set for Meierkhol'd's production of *The Eternal Tale* (1906).

<sup>41</sup> "Gorodskoi teatr," *Iug*, 19. XII. 1903, p. 2; Agapkina, *op. cit.*, 164. I follow Fel'dman in attributing this article to Meierkhol'd and Remizov, or Remizov alone.

<sup>42</sup> Agapkina, *op. cit.*, 198-204. In her appendix, Agapkina includes one letter written to *Odesskie novosti* and the three known letters that Przybyszewski wrote to Komissarzhevskaja in 1909 (RGALI, f. 778, op. 2, ed. khr. 36, l. 1-5).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 170, 167-168. Przybyszewski held Bal'mont in high esteem; the epigraph to Bal'mont's poem "Nash tanets," from the cycle "Ptitsy v vozdukhe," is taken from Przybyszewski. Korolenko, on the other hand, considered the Russian public's interest in Przybyszewski to be evidence of the perverted literary tastes which had temporarily seized it ("как иллюстрация эпидемического извращения литературных вкусов, которое временами охватывает некоторые части

scholar also named several people whom she identified as “polemicists”: Kornei Chukovskii, Andrei Belyi, Aleksandr Blok, and Lunacharskii.<sup>44</sup> She explained that critics did not know how to explain Przybyszewski’s popularity or his ability to draw many admirers, for they considered him to be a “caricature” of the new trends.<sup>45</sup>

Zieliński’s 1982 essay, “Przybyszewski’s Influence on the Russian Modernist Novel,” attempted to describe the Polish writer’s exact impact on Russian literature in general, given the “stunning popularity” of his novels and plays.<sup>46</sup> He came to the conclusion that Przybyszewski enjoyed popularity in Russia for two reasons. First, Przybyszewski’s work represented a “mature...incarnation of modernism.” Second, it also reflected the influence of Dostoevskii. Zieliński thus agreed with Galska and Ettinger on the first hypothesis, and traced his second back to a comment Przybyszewski had made in his memoirs.<sup>47</sup> Under the rubric of “modernism” Zieliński included such notions as Przybyszewski’s exploitation of the Nietzschean character of the “superman,” his non-utilitarian aesthetic, and his defense of spiritualism, realized in the theory of the “naked soul.”<sup>48</sup>

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матущегося „культурного“ общества”). V. G. Korolenko, “Stanislav Pshibyshevskii. Homo sapiens,” in *Sobranie sochinenii*, t. 8 (Moscow: 1955), 322. Cited in Agapkina, *op. cit.*, 168.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>45</sup> Agapkina, *op. cit.*, 166.

<sup>46</sup> Zieliński, *op. cit.*, 141. “Zawrotna popularność powieści i dramatów Stanisława Przybyszewskiego w Rosji w pierwszym dziesiątku naszego stulecia jest faktem niezbitym.”

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 141. Cf. S. Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni. Wśród obcych* (Warsaw: 1926), 269-270.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

Zieliński counted Przybyszewski among the four predecessors, or “fathers,” of the Russian modernist movement who had advocated the liberation of the self, each by a different path.<sup>49</sup> According to Zieliński, Przybyszewski proposed the path of sensuality, which became the feature literary historians of the period recognized most in his writings.<sup>50</sup> The Polish scholar then superficially traced this theme of sensuality in selected works of several Russian writers: Belyi, Fedor Sologub, and Mikhail Artsybashev.<sup>51</sup> As a caveat to his discussion, Zieliński suggested, however, that because Przybyszewski’s art was a combination of new form and old tradition, “one cannot say whether any given typically modernist element is found in a given Russian novel through Przybyszewski’s mediation or independently of him.”<sup>52</sup>

Zieliński’s recognition of this ambiguity of stylistic and thematic origins is the crux of the problem for any new research on Przybyszewski’s effect on Russian culture. One must be able to determine particular imagery or themes that are not part of the *Zeitgeist* of modernism and that can be attributed specifically to this author.

Acknowledging this problem, this dissertation uses close textual analysis to identify

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<sup>49</sup> “Czterech ojców mieli moderniści rosyjscy” *Ibid.*, 142. The other “fathers” and their liberating paths are: Wilde (aestheticism), Maeterlinck (mysticism), and Hamsun (irrationalism).

<sup>50</sup> Zieliński, *op. cit.*, 142. “Charakterystyczne są określenia posłania Przybyszewskiego: ekstaza płciowa, kult płci, filozofia rozpusty. Aspekt, do którego współczesny Przybyszewskiemu historyk literatury sprowadzał całą jego twórczość i jej wpływ na pisarzy rosyjskich”

<sup>51</sup> Zieliński believes Przybyszewski’s novel *Homo sapiens* and its antihero, Falk, are the literary heirs to Sologub’s novel *The Petty Demon* (1907) and to Artsybashev’s *Sanin* (1907). He also finds traces of Przybyszewski in the eroticism of Bely’s *Fourth Symphony (The Goblet of Blizzards)*; 1908). *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 142. “Nie można powiedzieć, czy dany element typowo modernistyczny znalazł się w danej powieści rosyjskiej za pośrednictwem Przybyszewskiego, czy niezależnie od niego.”

parallels in the texts under discussion and compares these with other known possible influential texts, such as Valerii Briusov's essay "An Unnecessary Truth" (1902). Furthermore, a discussion of the affinity shown by both Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd for Przybyszewski will prove that his popularity in Russia did not derive solely from the eroticism present in his novels.

Several articles and one monograph have discussed Przybyszewski's possible impact on Russian theatre. Hanna Galska's 1981 essay, "Przybyszewski's Theatre as the First Stage in Meierkhol'd's Reformatory Theatrical Activity—The 'Theatre of Searching'," provides a general historical outline for scholarly work in the area of Przybyszewski's on the Russian stage.<sup>53</sup> Galska argued that Meierkhol'd's productions of Przybyszewski's dramas were a necessary phase in the Russian director's artistic development, and therefore, in the development of contemporary theatre.<sup>54</sup> She based her argument partially on the fact that Meierkhol'd staged Przybyszewski's plays during several moments in his early career.<sup>55</sup>

Although the proof of her claim suffers from several deficiencies, Galska's observation informs my research. The chief problem is that Galska uses primarily secondary sources. When information in these sources is not corroborated or verified, its repetition can perpetuate factual errors. For example, she repeats Helsztyński's

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<sup>53</sup> Hanna Galska, "Teatr Przybyszewskiego jako pierwszy etap reformatorskiej działalności teatralnej Meyerholda—Teatr poszukiwań," in Janaszek-Ivaničková and Madany, *op. cit.*, 153-181.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 181. "Analiza reformatorskiej drogi reżysera Meyerholda udowadnia, że teatr Przybyszewskiego jako pierwszy etap jego działalności stanowił ów „teatr poszukiwań“, bez którego osiągnięcia współczesnego nam teatru byłyby niemożliwe."

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

report that Przybyszewski was present at Meierkhol'd's production of *Snow* in 1904.<sup>56</sup> Another such error is her claim that Przybyszewski's editorial response to criticism of the 1903 productions of his works in St. Petersburg, which appeared in the Petersburg Polish-language newspaper *Kraj*, mark "the first theoretical formulations on the theme of the new theatre."<sup>57</sup> A cursory review of Helsztyński's 1968 bibliography would have prevented this erroneous claim.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, although Galska argued that there is no doubt that Meierkhol'd knew of this essay, that is, he either read it personally or Aleksei Remizov brought it to his attention, she did not present any supporting evidence.<sup>59</sup> This dissertation chronicles the beginning of Meierkhol'd's reception of Przybyszewski, which occurred at the end of 1901, fourteen months before the appearance of this 1903 article. Within this context, this research also delves deeper into the artistic influence Remizov had on Meierkhol'd during the provincial seasons.

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-157. Galska cites S. Helsztyński, *Przybyszewski* (Warsaw: 1973), 339-340. Newspapers certainly would have reported Przybyszewski's appearance at the December 1903 premiere of *Sneg* in Kherson, as they had when he visited St. Petersburg in early 1903. When Przybyszewski did visit Kherson in 1904 (*Iug*, 13. XI. 1904, 16. XI. 1904, 17. XI. 1904), Meierkhol'd was in Tiflis. However, Przybyszewski most likely did attend rehearsals of Iureneva's productions of his plays. He was in Russia at the invitation of her husband, the poet Aleksandr Voznesenskii, who had translated them. See Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 191-199.

<sup>57</sup> Galska, *op. cit.*, 155-156. See Q, "Eksperyment Przybyszewskiego," *Kraj* (pril. *Życie i sztuka*), no. 7, 14. II. 1903, p. 10; St. Przybyszewski, "W sprawie wzorowego teatru polskiego," *Kraj* (pril. *Życie i sztuka*), no. 8, 21. II. 1903, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Stanisław Helsztyński, *Bibliografia pism Stanisława Przybyszewskiego w 100 rocznicę urodzin 1868 7.V 1968* (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Książki, 1968), 21.

<sup>59</sup> Galska, *op. cit.*, 174. In fact, when the *Kraj* articles appeared in mid-February 1903, Meierkhol'd was in Kherson, and Remizov was still in exile in Vologda.

Galska's reliance on secondary sources creates weakly supported claims based on coincidental evidence without further corroboration. For example, Galska claimed that both Przybyszewski and Meierkhol'd shared several similar views: both conceptually divided drama into the "old" and the "new," both believed that this style of drama created a need for a new style of acting, and consequently, the need for a "new" actor.<sup>60</sup> This shared interest leads Galska to infer that Przybyszewski, as a reformer and modernizer of the Polish theatre must have piqued Meierkhol'd's interest.<sup>61</sup> While these inferences may be fundamentally correct, they beg for corroborating evidence. This dissertation, in its examination of newly published primary sources, provides such material through its analyses of Meierkhol'd's creative path, his pronouncements on the new drama, and its interpretive analysis of several early productions.

Herta Schmid's 1990 article, "Stanislaw Przybyszewski's Significance to the Development of Vsevolod E. Meierkhol'd's Experimental Theatre," identified elements to which Meierkhol'd allegedly responded while working with Przybyszewski's dramatic texts.<sup>62</sup> Starting from a premise that Meierkhol'd's experiments in non-representational theatre have their source in Briusov's "An

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>61</sup> Galska, *op. cit.*, 165. "Myśl zreformowania współczesnego teatru prowadzi więc Przybyszewskiego od teoretycznych rozważań do praktycznych działań reżyserskich, które traktuje jako niezbędny element swoich eksperymentów w dziedzinie sztuki teatralnej. / Tak więc bezsprzeczne zasługi Przybyszewskiego jako reformatora teatru w Polsce wyjaśniają zainteresowanie się jego twórczością dramaturgiczną przez wybitnego przedstawiciela rosyjskiej reformy teatralnej Wsiewołoda Meyerholda"

<sup>62</sup> Herta Schmid, "Znaczenie Stanisława Przybyszewskiego dla rozwoju eksperymentalnego teatru Wsiewołoda E. Meyerholda," *Ruch literacki* 31, no. 6 (183) (1990): 419-433.

Unnecessary Truth,” Schmid sought to demonstrate how Przybyszewski’s drama *The Golden Fleece* served as the material for these early trials.<sup>63</sup> This experiment was made easier due to six elements that Przybyszewski’s dramas had in common with the Chekhovian drama Meierkol’d had been staging. These elements were: 1) the transformation of interior monologue into equivalent dramatic forms; 2) a change of interior dialogue to exterior; 3) the use of light and shade; 4) Przybyszewski’s use of *leitmotiv*; 5) his use of symbolism; 6) the all-embracing poetics of “breaking the norm.”<sup>64</sup> Schmid further identified several elements that differentiated Przybyszewski’s drama from other naturalist works. According to Schmid, the most important of these was the motif of transforming the spiritual into objective and spatial signs.<sup>65</sup> In our discussion of *Snow*, we will explore the mechanisms Meierkol’d used to accomplish this transformation, which marked the beginnings of non-representational theatre.

Andrei Moskvin’s 2007 monograph, *Stanisław Przybyszewski in Russian Culture at the End of the 19th and Beginning of the 20th Century*, is the first and only book on the subject of Przybyszewski and Russian culture.<sup>66</sup> Although it has appeared since the Russian publication of two volumes of archival material on Meierkol’d, this monograph is basically a compilation of the author’s articles that

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 424, 426.

<sup>64</sup> Schmid, *op. cit.*, 427-431.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 432.

<sup>66</sup> Andriej Moskwin, *Stanisław Przybyszewski w kulturze rosyjskiej końca XIX – początku XX wieku* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2007). Further citations will appear as “*SP w kulturze rosyjskiej.*”

appeared in Polish journals over the last decade.<sup>67</sup> By and large, Moskvin's historical-descriptive analysis seems superficial, and his articles are filled with copious citations from newspaper reviews. The scholar has no hypothesis and rarely engages in deep analysis. For example, although he cites Meierkhol'd's November 1901 comment that he (Meierkhol'd) had recently been "hypnotized" by Przybyszewski and other modernists, Moskvin investigates neither the origins nor consequences of that statement.<sup>68</sup> Instead, he claims merely that Meierkhol'd became interested in the new drama during his work in Kherson, which began the following fall.<sup>69</sup> This dissertation explores both the origins of that comment and hypothesizes its consequences.

With respect to Komissarzhevskaja's affinity for Przybyszewski, Moskvin claims that Przybyszewski's heroines attracted the actress with a long list of qualities: their "detachment from reality", their "unrestrained desire to defend the right to love," their "confidence in one's own individuality and self," their "surrender to mood and intuition," their "aspiration for something new and indefinite," and their "desire to understand the mystery of the universe and life."<sup>70</sup> While all these characteristics

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<sup>67</sup> The two most important articles for this study are: "Dzieje sceniczne dramatu „Śnieg“ Stanisława Przybyszewskiego w Rosji początku XX wieku," *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 42, no. 3 (1998): 133-147; "Recepcja dramatów Stanisława Przybyszewskiego w teatrze rosyjskim początku XX wieku," *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 47, no. 3-4 (1998): 410-450. See the complete listing of Moskvin's previous articles on p. 18 of *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*.

<sup>68</sup> Moskvin has added this comment to his 1998 essay, "Recepcja dramatów," which serves as the basis of his chapter.

<sup>69</sup> Moskvin, *op. cit.*, 141.

<sup>70</sup> Moskvin, *op. cit.*, 159. "Jego bohaterki przyciągały Komissarzewską swoim oderwaniem od realnego świata; niepohamowanym pragnieniem obrony prawa do

describe Przybyszewski's heroines, Moskvin provides no direct evidence that Komissarzhevskaiia was drawn to them for exactly these reasons.

Moskvin also asserts that Komissarzhevskaiia became acquainted with Przybyszewski's work through the publication of *The Golden Fleece*, which appeared as a supplement to the second issue of *Teatr i iskusstvo* in 1902. According to Moskvin, Komissarzhevskaiia then "immediately" decided to stage the work, unconcerned that she lacked both a director and actors.<sup>71</sup> An examination of the historical context of this chain of events makes their occurrence unlikely. Moskvin's evidence is a letter to actor and director Nikolai Popov (1871-1949), begging him to direct the play while she is on tour.<sup>72</sup> In making this exaggerated claim, however, Moskvin fails to consider the possible date of the letter, or the fact that Komissarzhevskaiia did receive a copy of the play in mid-January. At that time she was still employed by the Aleksandrinskii and, therefore, had only limited control over her repertoire. Her greatest chance to act in a play she had personally selected would have been as an invited artist in an unnamed touring company. However, two published letters from Komissarzhevskaiia to Popov that mention her desire to stage *The Golden Fleece*, dated by content to August 1902, suggest that Komissarzhevskaiia's decision to stage this play came after her departure from the

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miłości; pewnością własnej osobowości, swojego „ja”; poddaniem się nastrojowi i intuicji; dążeniem do czegoś nowego i nieokreślonego; pragnieniem pojęcia tajemnicy wszechświata i życia.”

<sup>71</sup> Moskvin, *op. cit.*, 160. “natychmiast podjęła decyzję o jego [dramatu *Złotego runa*] wystawieniu. Nie przstraszyły jej ani brak odpowiedniego reżysera, ani dobrych aktorów.”

<sup>72</sup> Nikolai Popov, *Dramaticheskii teatr V. F. Komissarzhevskoi (po vospominaniiam N. A. Popova)*. *Glava II*, TsGAMB, f. 216, ed. khr. 493, l. 7.

Aleksandrinskii.<sup>73</sup> Through close textual analysis, this dissertation will trace Komissarzhevskaja's association to Przybyszewski to a letter written in April 1902. This evidence does not directly dispute Moskvin's claim that Komissarzhevskaja read Przybyszewski's play, but does explain for her departure from the Aleksandrinskii and consequently, her desire to stage *The Golden Fleece*.

Finally, having argued that Komissarzhevskaja had an affinity for Przybyszewski's roles, Moskvin cites numerous reviews of her performances to suggest that these works influenced the development of her craft.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, this discussion is marred by a lack of comparative evidence, such as descriptions by the same reviewer of Komissarzhevskaja's performance in a non-Przybyszewski production. In his attempt to make broad, encompassing claims, Moskvin sometimes supports them in paragraphs based on material from a variety of sources from different dates, obscuring both their origins and chronology.<sup>75</sup> This writing style only blurs the problem of Komissarzhevskaja's artistic development. Therefore, we cannot isolate Przybyszewski's works as the primary cause of that development, nor can we create a valid chronology of development. My methodology examines Komissarzhevskaja's performances on two levels: personally (Chapter III) and theoretically (Chapter IV). By fighting the urge to support every claim of a potential

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<sup>73</sup> A. Ia. Al'tshuller, ed., *Vera Komissarzhevskaja. Pis'ma aktrisy, vospominaniia o nei i materialy* (Leningrad-Moscow: Izd. Iskusstvo, 1964), 120.

<sup>74</sup> Moskvin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 164 ff.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, several citations (here simplified) from footnote #98: "*Kijewskoje Slovo* 21 III 1904; *Pridniestrowskij Kraj* 8 X 1902; N. I. Komarowskaja, *Widiennoje i pieriežitije*, Leningrad-Moskwa 1965; W. Wolin [W. Ejchenbaum], *Tieatr Komissarzhevskoj w Moskwie*, Moskwa 1907; *Czas* 4 IX 1907." *Ibid.*, 165.

link between Przybyszewskian theories and Komissarzhevskaja's acting style with evidence from a subjective performance review, I hope to create a clearer, basic image of the possible effects of those aesthetics on the acting craft in Russia. While this may result in some hypothesizing, this theoretical foundation can then be used in later research to finesse and justify Moskvina's claims.

My impulse to investigate the possible psychological and biographical parallels which exist between Komissarzhevskaja's life and Przybyszewski's dramas also originates in Mary C. Resing's 1997 Ph.D. dissertation, "Vera Fedorovna Kommissarzhevskaja: A Life in Performance."<sup>76</sup> In her discussion of the actress's "self-selected roles," Resing claims that Komissarzhevskaja chose only thirty-two out of "hundreds." These include six that she chose for her benefits while acting in the provinces.<sup>77</sup> Resing suggests that, in 1895, Komissarzhevskaja began to seek roles that would allow her to portray "doomed, flawed, and sinning women" that would "appeal to conservative audiences."<sup>78</sup> At the same time, she also portrayed independent women, whose fates, "emulated the fates of popular women radicals and revolutionaries" of the period. In this way, Komissarzhevskaja could capture "the imagination of a society on the brink of change, a society looking for solutions to deeply ingrained social problems."<sup>79</sup> Przybyszewski's heroines and Komissar-

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<sup>76</sup> Mary C. Resing, "Vera Fedorovna Kommissarzhevskaja: A Life in Performance" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1997).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

zhevskaja's own biography clearly presents a problem: why would an actress who had endured such emotional distress in her life decide to portray these characters?

Without supporting evidence, Resing claims that Komissarzhevskaja approached Przybyszewski in 1902 about producing his works, hoping to create "distinctive performances in little known roles."<sup>80</sup> As we shall see, Przybyszewski's plays were just becoming known throughout Russia. Although they had yet to be performed by Russian troupes, the point that they were "little known" can be argued. In fact, the controversy surrounding Przybyszewski's works was just beginning. Curiously, after pointing out that Komissarzhevskaja sought out Przybyszewski to stage *The Golden Fleece*, Resing fails to mention that she staged *The Eternal Tale* in 1906, preferring to mention Maeterlinck's well-known *Sœur Beatrice* and D'Annunzio's *Francesca da Rimini* as examples of her symbolist roles.<sup>81</sup> Finally, Resing suggests that Komissarzhevskaja turned to several comedic roles at the end of her career because "playwrights such as Przybyszewski, D'Annunzio and Maeterlinck typically wrote long, humorless dramas which appealed to only a small portion of the theatre-going world."<sup>82</sup> The fact that Komissarzhevskaja's own theatre had staged Przybyszewski's *The Eternal Tale* over thirty times, and that one of her last self-selected roles was that of Hanka in *Life's Banquet* weakens this claim.<sup>83</sup> Finally, Resing's comments about the differences between *effektnaia* ("spectacular,"

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>83</sup> To her credit, Resing offers a caveat, maintaining that Komissarzhevskaja did not abandon serious roles such as Hanka altogether, they were interspersed with lighter fare which would ensure better profits in the box office. *Ibid.*, 60.

“effective”) and “*prostaia*” (“simple”) acting styles will find greater resonance as we explore Komissarzhevskaiia’s intellectual responses to the “path of the soul” and Przybyszewski’s theory of acting.<sup>84</sup>

Because the writer Aleksei Remizov in his position as dramaturg for the Association of New Drama plays a significant role as an intermediary between the Przybyszewski works and Meierkhol'd, a brief discussion of his reception of Przybyszewski is in order. Greta Slobin’s 1991 monograph, *Remizov’s Fictions, 1900-1921*, which deals primarily with the novels, treats any links with Przybyszewski only in a general manner.<sup>85</sup> She mentions Remizov’s time in Vologda, his position as dramaturg and his translation of *Snow*, but does not offer any interpretation of his 1904 article in *Vesy*.

Nadezhda (Gergalo) Tkachik has devoted several articles to this topic. Her article, “On the Problem of Aleksei Remizov and Stanislaw Przybyszewski,” briefly describes the Vologda circle and recounts Remizov’s translation efforts.<sup>86</sup> Tkachik dedicates several pages to the identification of thematic and stylistic parallels between Remizov’s prose poem “Demon” and Przybyszewski’s works. Tkachik identifies broad themes, such as “yearning” and “fate,” as thematic parallels that might be

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<sup>84</sup> Resing, *op. cit.*, 62ff. See her chapter “Performance of Self Through Acting Styles.” Resing supports her discussions of these styles with subjective descriptions by Komissarzhevskaiia’s contemporaries and excerpts from correspondence.

<sup>85</sup> Greta N. Slobin, *Remizov’s Fictions, 1900-1921* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991). For Przybyszewski, see 18-19, 38, 53.

<sup>86</sup> Nadezhda Gergalo, “K probleme Aleksei Remizov i Stanislav Pshibyshevskii,” *I. S. Shmelev i literaturnyi protsess nakanune XXI veka. 125 so dnia rozhdeniia I. S. Shmeleva*. [VII Krymskie Mezhdunarodnye Shmelevskie chteniia] (Simferopol’—Alushta: “Tavriia-Plus,” 1998), 95-106.

traced to his translation work and interest in Przybyszewski.<sup>87</sup> Although she mentions Remizov's work with Meierkhol'd, she devotes only a few paragraphs to the subject.

Tkachik's second article on Remizov is devoted to a general overview of his relationship to Polish literature.<sup>88</sup> Most of the article is devoted to general comments about Remizov's interest in Polish literature after he was exiled to Vologda, and the various authors, such as Przybyszewski, Tetmajer, and Kasprovicz, whom he began to translate. Quoting a letter from Remizov, Tkachik describes Vologda's literary atmosphere as "defined by Przybyszewski's influence," and suggests that Remizov wanted to be Przybyszewski's Russian translator.<sup>89</sup> She explains that Remizov's Polish skills were not strong, and that Ivan Kaliaev, a Polish student in exile there, most likely guided his first translation efforts. Remizov later shared translating duties with his wife, Serafima Remizova-Dovgello.<sup>90</sup> In her brief discussion of his time spent in Kherson, Tkachik mentions that Remizov introduced Meierkhol'd to Przybyszewski's plays.<sup>91</sup> Her general comments on Remizov and Przybyszewski thus invite deeper investigation.

Let us now turn to a review of biographical and archival sources. Published in 1964, Al'tshuller's collection of Komissarzhevskaja's correspondence, cited above, is the generally accepted source for epistolary evidence. Only one other collection of

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>88</sup> Nadezhda Tkachik, "Aleksei Remizov i pol'skaia literatura," *Przegląd Rusycystyczny*, no. 4 (92) (2000): 5-13.

<sup>89</sup> Tkachik, *op. cit.*, 9.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

additional materials has appeared, Rudnitskii's *On Komissarzhevskaiia: The Forgotten and New (Reminiscences, Articles, and Letters)*, published in 1965.<sup>92</sup> Biographies and reminiscences about Komissarzhevskaiia began to appear shortly after her death. My research relies on several, such as those by N. V. Turkin (1910) and D. Tal'nikov (1939), the first complete biography.<sup>93</sup> The memoirs of Komissarzhevskaiia's sister, Nadezhda Skarskaia, have been useful in re-constructing the events surrounding her marriage, its failure, and her subsequent nervous breakdown.<sup>94</sup> Victor Borovsky's 2001 biography, *A Triptych from the Russian Theatre: The Komissarzhevskys*, is the first English-language monograph about Komissarzhevskaiia and her family.<sup>95</sup> Although copiously footnoted, Przybyszewski's name is never mentioned in this text, despite the fact that Komissarzhevskaiia appeared in four of his dramas, or that *Life's Banquet* was one of the last plays Komissarzhevskaiia appeared in before her death. Iu. P. Rybakova's chronicle of Komissarzhevskaiia's life and work has been invaluable in reconstructing events and providing some evidence in the form of citations from newspaper reviews.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> K. Rudnitskii, ed., *O Komissarzhevskoi. Zabytoe i novoe. (Vospominaniia, stat'i, pis'ma)* (Moskva: Vserossiiskoe teatral'noe obshchestvo, 1965).

<sup>93</sup> N. V. Turkin [Dii Odinskii], *Komissarzhevskaiia [sic] v zhizni i na stsene* (Moscow: Knigoizdatel'stvo "Zlatotsvet," 1910); D. Tal'nikov, *Komissarzhevskaiia* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gos. izd. "Iskusstvo," 1939).

<sup>94</sup> N. F. Skarskaia and P. P. Gaideburov, *Na stsene i v zhizni. Stranitsy avtobiografii* (Moscow: Gosizdat "Iskusstvo," 1959).

<sup>95</sup> Victor Borovsky, *A Triptych from the Russian Theatre: The Komissarzhevskys* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001).

<sup>96</sup> Iu. P. Rybakova, ed., *V. F. Komissarzhevskaiia. Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva* (St. Petersburg: RIII, 1994).

Memoirs written by Komissarzhevskaiia's colleagues have also been useful for their observations about particular events, such as her final tour.<sup>97</sup>

In my attempt to trace the influence of Przybyszewski's aesthetic views in Komissarzhevskaiia's artistic and personal life, I am faced with the necessity of initiating a discussion on the possible conflicts between his philosophy of art and that of John Ruskin, the English philosopher whose works have resonated in history far more than those of Przybyszewski. Several of Komissarzhevskaiia's letters contain quotations from his works. Although her biographers frequently acknowledge Komissarzhevskaiia's love of Ruskin, no scholarly articles have appeared on the topic. In her 1970 monograph, Rybakova devotes several pages to Komissarzhevskaiia's obvious intellectual influences—the writer K. S. Staniukovich and the philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and John Ruskin.<sup>98</sup> According to Rybakova, Komissarzhevskaiia found support for her developing feminism in Ruskin's books, while his thoughts on art and beauty also coincided with hers. For Komissarzhevskaiia, Ruskin's criticism of the existing English economic system, his encouragement of moral improvement, and his advocacy of love for one's neighbor amounted to a “call to battle with life's imperfection.”<sup>99</sup> Devoting two paragraphs to the topic of Ruskin's influence on

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<sup>97</sup> See, for example: Aleksandr A. D'iakonov, *Venok V. F. Kommissarzhevskoi* (St. Petersburg: Izd. O. K. Kan, 1913); M. S. Narokov, *Biografiia moego pokoleniia. Teatral'nye memuary* (Moscow: VTO, 1956); Georgii Pitoev, “Vechnoe-vechno.” In *Alkonost. Sbornik, kn. 1* (St. Petersburg: Izd. Peredvizhnogo teatra P. P. Gaideburova i N. F. Skarskoi, 1911) 95-107; A. Zonov, “Vospominania o kontse.” In *Alkonost, Sbornik, kn. 1* (St. Petersburg: Izd. Peredvizhnogo teatra P. P. Gaideburova i N. F. Skarskoi, 1911), 108-117.

<sup>98</sup> Iu. Rybakova, *Komissarzhevskaiia* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1970), 60-62.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

Komissarzhevskaja, Borovsky agrees with Rybakova's general claim, declaring that Komissarzhevskaja "shared literally all his views on the world, on life and on man's mission."<sup>100</sup>

Karen Lisa Myers, whose 1999 dissertation examines Komissarzhevskaja's correspondence as a cultural artifact from a feminist perspective, devotes several pages to Ruskin.<sup>101</sup> In her introduction, Myers claims that the "greatest formative influence on [Komissarzhevskaja's] world view was probably John Ruskin's concept of an art which served civic and spiritual goals, by enlightening the 'heart and soul,' society would thus be bettered."<sup>102</sup> Myers was the first scholar to identify particular works by Ruskin that Komissarzhevskaja may have read, but her claims are unsubstantiated.<sup>103</sup> None of these scholars have attempted to identify the source (or sources) of the specific quotes from Ruskin found in Komissarzhevskaja's correspondence, which would then create a concrete foundation for further research of this problem.

Biographers, such as Tal'nikov (1939) and Borovsky (2001), and other scholars of Russian theatre (Schuler, 1996) tend to emphasize her grand plans to establish a "theatrical university" (*stsenicheskii universitet*) at the end of her life.

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<sup>100</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 137.

<sup>101</sup> Karen Lisa Myers, "Public Myth and Private Self in the Russian Silver Age: The Correspondence of Vera Komissarzhevskaja (1864-1910)," (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1999).

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>103</sup> For example, Myers claims that Komissarzhevskaja "was especially interested in Ruskin's treatise on the roles of men and women in society, *Sesame and Lily* [sic]," and suggests that she may have read translations of Ruskin in *Mir iskusstva*. *Ibid.*, 131-132, 129.

These plans then become the subtext for understanding the actress' decision to leave the acting profession in November 1909.<sup>104</sup> Although acknowledging that much remained inexplicable, Tal'nikov firmly believed that Komissarzhevskaja's decision was not so much an artistic one, as it was socio-ideological. In doing so, the critic molded an image of Komissarzhevskaja that would allow her memory to endure in Soviet society. Her concept of art was moving from an aesthetic construct, represented by Przybyszewski's principle of "art for art's sake," to a social and ethical construct popularized and later enforced by the social democrats and their political heirs. In establishing her school, Tal'nikov believed, Komissarzhevskaja, the actress who came "from life," would return "to life" and to the Russian people, whom she had abandoned during her search for "new forms."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Schuler (1996) bases her opinion on an undated interview in *Obozrenie teatrov* (no. 839, 1909, pp. 7-8), in which Komissarzhevskaja states that the goal of her new tour was to raise money for a new venture, a theatre school located in St. Petersburg. See Catherine A. Schuler, *Women in Russian Theatre: The Actress in the Silver Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 183-184. Tal'nikov (1939) notes Komissarzhevskaja's separate letter to her sister, her sister, Ol'ga, which begins, "I have arrived at a great decision and, as always, true to the artist's behest in myself, I am submitting to this decision joyfully. I am opening a school, ..." ["Я пришла к большому решению и, как всегда, верная велениям в себе художника, подчиняюсь радостно этому решению. Я открываю школу."] Komissarzhevskaja's idealistic notion that this future school might be a place for "young souls" to learn, understand and love the "truly beautiful," and "come to God" indicates the continuing influence of Ruskin. According to the actress, this was her "mission in life." See Tal'nikov, *op. cit.*, 376, and Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 177-178. The Soviet scholar dates this letter as "end of 1909-beginning 1910." Rybakova (1970), after citing the farewell letter, declares that "The idea of a theatre school was [her] last hope." See Rybakova, *Komissarzhevskaja*, 187. Borovsky suggests that a similar decision by the popular actor Aleksandr Lenskii, who had already established his own school before shocking the public with his announced retirement, may have influenced the actress. See Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 217-218.

<sup>105</sup> Tal'nikov, *op. cit.*, 375-376.

Neither of these scholars acknowledges the frustration which Komissarzhevskaja certainly felt as she saw her personal and professional investment in *Life's Banquet* come to naught as reviews in Odessa panned the play, its performers, and its production. Nor has any scholar considered Komissarzhevskaja's decision to leave as the consequence of Zonov's comments made in 1911 about *Life's Banquet* being her first "experiment of the future school."<sup>106</sup> This manuscript will examine the threads which connect these notions together, demonstrating that, in 1909, Przybyszewski was just as much of Komissarzhevskaja's future as he was her past.

O. M. Fel'dman's two volumes of Meierkhol'd's archival materials, published in 1998 and 2006, represent the major sources for recreating the events surrounding the biographical and professional details of Meierkhol'd's reception of Przybyszewski.<sup>107</sup> These tomes are extensively annotated, and include previously unpublished correspondence and press reviews, as well as sketches from Meierkhol'd's director's notebooks. The publication of set designs from these provincial seasons makes research of this early period much easier. Special mention should be made of N. E. Zvenigorodskaja's book, *Vsevolod Meierkhol'd's Provincial Seasons: 1902-1905*, the first monograph to explore this important early period in his

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<sup>106</sup> Zonov, *op. cit.*, 111.

<sup>107</sup> O. M. Fel'dman, *Meierkhol'd. Nasledie. Tom 1. Avtobiograficheskie materialy. Dokumenty 1891-1903* (Moscow: O.G.I., 1998); *Meierkhol'd. Nasledie. Tom 2. Tovarishchestvo novoi dramy. Sozdanie Studii na Povarskoi. Leto 1903—vesna 1905* (Moscow: Novoe Izdatel'stvo, 2006).

career.<sup>108</sup> Zvenigorodskaja annotates profusely, using primarily press reviews, biographies, and correspondence for her sources.

Among English-language sources Edward Braun's monograph, *Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre*, stands out as probably the first to cite Remizov's quote from *Vesy* that pointed out the importance of Przybyszewski's *Snow* in Meierkhol'd's early development.<sup>109</sup> At the same time, Braun repeated the erroneous claim that Przybyszewski and Meierkhol'd had met, as well as a false claim that the company performed *Snow* only once in Kherson.<sup>110</sup> In general, of all the English-language monographs on Meierkhol'd, such as those by Hoover and Leach, Braun spends the most time examining Meierkhol'd's early career.<sup>111</sup>

A study of Meierkhol'd's biography necessarily must examine his departure from the Moscow Art Theatre in 1902. Of four biographies offering hypotheses (Hoover, Braun, Leach, and Pitches), those of Hoover and Braun deserve some discussion.<sup>112</sup> Hoover's 1974 monograph stresses three basic causes: "Meyerhold

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<sup>108</sup> N. E. Zvenigorodskaja, *Provintsial'nye sezony Vsevoloda Meierkhol'da. 1902-1905* (Moscow: URSS, 2004).

<sup>109</sup> Edward Braun, *Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 22.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>111</sup> Marjorie Hoover, *Meyerhold: The Art of Conscious Theater* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1974); Robert Leach, *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>112</sup> Leach ascribes Meierkhol'd's decision to leave to his growing ego: "By 1902 Meyerhold was clearly looking to enter a larger theatrical world than he felt Stanislavsky's company could offer." Leach, *op. cit.*, 4. In his discussion, Leach suggests that this "larger theatrical world" was the world of Japanese director Otodziro Kawakami and Austrian director Max Reinhardt (1873-1943). If Meierkhol'd knew of Reinhardt at this time, he did not mention the actor-director's name in any existing notebooks or correspondence. Pitches offers a simplistic a

apparently left the Moscow Art Theatre in 1902 more for practical and personal reasons than for differences of principle with its artistic tendencies.”<sup>113</sup> Braun’s claim is similar to Hoover’s. He suggests that Meierkhol'd left for a “combination of personal and political” not practical, reasons.<sup>114</sup>

Hoover suggests the following “practical and personal reasons”: first, Meierkhol'd was not made a member of the future joint-stock company. Second, “his gifts as an actor were proving less than they had at first promised.” Third, “his keen literary perception caused him at least once to disapprove the theater’s choice of a play as departing from its own set goals.”<sup>115</sup> However, Hoover then asserts that because Meierkhol'd’s new company would imitate MKhT in its choice of repertoire, his decision to leave MKhT actually reveals a man who had “no clearly defined goals of his own” except, perhaps, to follow “the latest literary fashion.”<sup>116</sup>

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simplistic view based on the Art Theatre’s financial condition, that Meierkhol'd was “underperforming” as an artist and had lost the support of Nemirovich-Danchenko. See Jonathan Pitches, *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (London: Routledge, 2003), 6, 8. Cf. Leach, *op. cit.*, 3, who writes that Meierkhol'd “gradually fell out of favour, particularly with Nemirovich-Danchenko, and in January 1902 quarrelled fiercely with Stanislavsky.”

<sup>113</sup> Hoover, *op. cit.*, 22.

<sup>114</sup> Braun, *op. cit.*, 14.

<sup>115</sup> The factual basis of Hoover’s claim is Meierkhol'd’s dislike of Nemirovich-Danchenko’s *In Dreams*. Meierkhol'd considered that work to be “shallow.” Hoover, *ibid.*, 22, 321, footnote #2. She cites E. A. Polotskaia, “Chekhov i Meierkhol'd,” *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, no. 68 (1960): 428-429. See also Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 417; Rudnitskii, *RM*, 24.

<sup>116</sup> Hoover, *ibid.*, 22. Hoover gives Meyerhold credit for breaking the MKhT mold with “at least one play,” von Schönthan’s *The Acrobats*, which premiered in Kherson on 26 January 1903. According to Hoover, the director’s notes for this work are the “earliest written evidence” that Meierkhol'd had moved beyond the naturalistic style of the Art Theatre (22). In doing so, Hoover seems to follow the opinion of Rudnitskii, who dismisses Meierkhol'd’s productions of Przybyszewski while noting

Hoover's first and third claims are based in fact and are valid arguments. I agree with Hoover's conclusion that financial considerations did have some influence on Meierkhol'd's decision to leave, although this deduction diverges completely from Meierkhol'd's own pronouncement, published in *Kur'er* on 24 February 1902, declaring: "our departure from the company is not connected at all with considerations of a material character."<sup>117</sup> Braun believes Meierkhol'd's announcement is basically true.<sup>118</sup> However, Hoover, like Volkov (1929), is willing to question Meierkhol'd's and Kosheverov's denial of financial considerations.<sup>119</sup>

Hoover's third argument, that Meierkhol'd disapproved of MKhT's repertoire, is partially true, but her argument, at least superficially, contradicts her own claim that he left "more for practical or personal reasons than for differences of principle with its artistic tendencies."<sup>120</sup> Hoover does not define these "artistic tendencies" clearly, so the reader is left to wonder if they are connected with the Art Theatre's continued use of naturalist aesthetics.<sup>121</sup> Why should we not believe Meierkhol'd's

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that the Tiflis public quite enjoyed *The Acrobats*, which became a "hit." See Rudnitskii, *RM*, 41-42. As we shall see, Meierkhol'd sought to move in a new direction much earlier than this, and Przybyszewski's works enabled him to do this. See Leach, *VM*, 194-204, for an appendix which lists the premieres of most of Meierkhol'd's productions. *Zvenigorodskaia*, *op. cit.*, provides an even more detailed listing of productions during the period 1902-1905. See pp. 185-214.

<sup>117</sup> The original letter written by Kosheverov and Meierkhol'd now appears in Feldman, *Nasledie*, 1, 464-465: "считаем долгом заявить, что уход наш из состава труппы совершенно не связан с соображениями материального характера."

<sup>118</sup> Braun, *op. cit.*, 14.

<sup>119</sup> Volkov, *op. cit.*, 139. Meierkhol'd was not the only individual excluded from the reorganization of MKhT. Also excluded were Meierkhol'd's future business partner, Aleksandr S. Kosheverov, and A. A. Sanin (Shenberg/Schönberg).

<sup>120</sup> Hoover, *op. cit.*, 22.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

own assertion from 1913 that he left for independence and the opportunity to continue his development in the area of dramatic theory?<sup>122</sup>

Hoover's second claim, that Meierkhol'd's talents as an actor were "less than" they had been when he was hired four years earlier, is not supported by evidence and should be questioned. Agreeing with Hoover's basic claim, Braun (1995) offers a refinement, acknowledging that Meierkhol'd, "in the public eye at least ...had not lived up to the early promise" of his first major role, that of Konstantin in Chekhov's *The Seagull*.<sup>123</sup> Braun weakens his own argument in two ways. First, he does not cite any negative statements by Stanislavskii, Nemirovich-Danchenko or fellow actors concerning Meierkhol'd's acting ability. Second, citing Gladkov, he notes that Meierkhol'd's *emploi* at this time was very broad, and that MKhT called upon him to play everything from tragedy to comedy.<sup>124</sup>

This dissertation will contribute to the discussion of Meierkhol'd's departure by describing the nature of his developing acting skills, as well as providing a fuller interpretation of his frame of mind during the critical months of late 1901 and early 1902, before his departure. Evidence from archival documents supports a view that, contrary to Hoover, Meierkhol'd did leave MKhT because of a growing difference in "artistic principles." In fact, Meierkhol'd's self-proclaimed state of "hypnosis," caused, in part, by his new fascination with Przybyszewski, contributed to that

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<sup>122</sup> Feldman, *Nasledie*, 1, 27.

<sup>123</sup> Braun, *op. cit.*, 14.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

“difference in artistic principles” whose influence Hoover does not consider to an appropriate degree.<sup>125</sup>

Hans Robert Jauss’s model of reception theory provides the theoretical foundation for this dissertation, especially his notion that a given work gains significance both synchronically and diachronically.<sup>126</sup> By analyzing the relationship of Przybyszewski’s works and two individual readers, that is, Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol’d, as well as how that relationship is actualized, I create a “specific history” for Przybyszewski’s works which then permits us to situate them within the “general history” of modernist literature and drama, and the aesthetic succession from realism to non-realist forms.<sup>127</sup> In this case, I believe Przybyszewski’s idea of the “path of the soul” stimulates both Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol’d to change their lives in significant ways: Komissarzhevskaja leaves the Aleksandrinskii Theatre to start an independent career, while Meierkhol’d forcefully pushes against naturalist traditions in theatre.<sup>128</sup>

Jauss applies his theory of reception only to the literary text. However, his comparative discussion—Paul Valéry’s resetting of Goethe’s own *Faust*—leaves an opening for an application of his reception theory to other forms of literary text, such

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<sup>125</sup> Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 430.

<sup>126</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 37-39.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 17.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 41. In Jauss’s words, the work thus incites the “aesthetic perception in the sensorial realm” of each reader.

as drama, and its realization in the theatrical production.<sup>129</sup> In his discussion, Jauss's conception of the reader or "audience" here is very narrow—it is only the author Valéry himself. Jauss never deals with *Faust* as a performed text with a live audience, it remains only words on a page to be perceived by a single reader.

Susan Bennett has applied reception theory to the drama as performance.<sup>130</sup> She does so by first recognizing that theatre is a more complex "communication system," demanding a complex model of reception than just the reader-text model theorized by Jauss.<sup>131</sup> By applying notions from the field of semiotics, researchers have been able to theorize the interaction of audiences and the performed dramatic text.

The problems presented by this dissertation place it in a space between these two theories of reception and semiotics, but not beyond the applications of reception theory. The first steps in this application are the understanding and interpretation of the literary and dramatic text by primary readers, in this case Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd. These steps correspond to those presented by Jauss as part of the hermeneutic process of reading.<sup>132</sup> The third step, application, as employed by both Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd, shifts the dramatic text from the page to the stage, where Bennett's ideas are more applicable. However, the limitations of this

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-138. In the following chapter, Jauss discusses a poetic text, Baudelaire's "Spleen II."

<sup>130</sup> Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (NY: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>132</sup> Jauss, *op. cit.*, 139.

dissertation, as well as the lack of available information on performance details, such as staging, costuming, and lighting, make broader investigations difficult.<sup>133</sup>

A historical and critical analysis provides the foundation for my examination of Komissarzhevskaja's and Meierkhol'd's reception of Przybyszewski. In order to understand more fully how Przybyszewski's views impacted the creative development of Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd, I have attempted to follow both a chronological and thematic exposition of my hypotheses. Furthermore, I strive to contextualize this impact, using each artist's most likely literary sources. As I cannot be certain that both Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd read exactly the same texts during their artistic development, the close textual analysis used in this work sometimes references different Russian translations of the same Polish text. I believe this method represents a truer reconstruction of the creative history for each of them.

Komissarzhevskaja worked within the traditional Russian theatrical system where either the State or private impresarios hired actors to fill a particular *emploi* or type, such as a comic character or an ingénue. An actor could conceivably play the roles within this *emploi* throughout an entire career. By choosing to leave the service of the Imperial theatres and open her own theatre, Komissarzhevskaja moved beyond these roles and normal social expectations for women and, especially, actresses.

Other actress-entrepreneurs, such as E. A. Shabel'skaia, who first staged

Przybyszewski's play *The Golden Fleece* [*Złote runo*, Pol.; *Zolotoe runo*, Rus., 1901]

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<sup>133</sup> Moskvina has gathered many critical responses to performances of *Snow*, but fails to investigate how this work affected the horizon of expectations of audiences with respect to non-realist and non-representational theatre. See his previously cited article, "Dzieje sceniczne" (1998).

at her Petersburg Theatre (*Petersburgskii teatr*) in October 1901, and L. V. Iavorskaia (1871-1922), also established short-lived, private theatres in St. Petersburg and produced the latest plays. These productions usually featured the actress in a starring role. Neither of these women, however, sought innovation in theatrical art as did Komissarzhevskaja in her fifteen years on the public stage, nor did they establish a theatre whose repertoire went beyond works that functioned solely as “star vehicles.”<sup>134</sup>

Documenting Komissarzhevskaja’s own intellectual history or pronouncements on dramatic art is difficult. Early in her professional life Komissarzhevskaja left no autobiography, diaries, or memoirs.<sup>135</sup> Scholars seeking to understand the interaction of Komissarzhevskaja’s personal life, world outlook, and opinions and their expression in the public forum must look to collections of her personal correspondence (Al'tshuller, Rudnitskii), the memoirs of her colleagues (Khodotov, D'iakonov, Zonov, Narokov), and finally, biographies written by acquaintances, relatives, and scholars (Turkin, Skarskaia, Tal'nikov, Borovsky) for assistance in explaining her drive to experiment with theatrical convention. Chronicles of her life and work (Rybakova) also assist us in re-creating the details of Komissarzhevskaja’s biography. The main evidence we have of Przybyszewski’s reception by Komissarzhevskaja is her choice of repertoire. Between 1902 and 1909 she performed roles in *The Golden Fleece*, *Snow* [*Śnieg*, Pol., *Sneg*, Rus.], and *The*

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<sup>134</sup> For more information on the changing role of actresses in *fin-de-siècle* Russia from a feminist perspective, see Schuler, *op. cit.*

<sup>135</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 3.

*Eternal Tale* [*Odwieczna baśń*, Pol., *Vechnaia skazka*, Rus.]. Moreover, in 1909, she co-directed and performed in *Life's Banquet* [*Gody zycia*, Pol., *Pir zhizni*, Rus.]. In short, Przybyszewski's plays and aesthetic theories pervade Komissarzhevksaia's independent career. This reception history begs for further investigation.

In tracing the impact of Przybyszewski on Komissarzhevksaia's biography, I use several methodologies. First, I offer close textual analysis of phraseological borrowings between her correspondence and Przybyszewski's works. Second, given the dearth of evidence about Komissarzhevksaia's inner development, I note parallels between her biography and the roles she chose to perform. At the risk of engaging in what T. S. Eliot called the biographical fallacy, I find it remarkable that an actress who had endured personal tragedies would choose to re-create repeatedly similar experiences before an audience. I wondered whether "catharsis," which normally applies to the emotional cleansing or "emptying out" of the audience, might also apply to an actor. Further searches on-line and in the library led to the theories of the Austro-Romanian psychiatrist Jacob L. Moreno (1889-1974), a student of Freud, and pioneer in the use of group psychotherapy.<sup>136</sup> I conjecture that Komissarzhevksaia found "personal catharsis" in the roles of Przybyszewskian heroines. Aristotle's

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<sup>136</sup> Today, his theories help form the foundation for an entire field of modern psychiatry, that of drama therapy. See the website of the National Association for Drama Therapy, [www.nadt.org](http://www.nadt.org), for more information on the profession and an extensive bibliography on psychodrama and drama therapy compiled by the profession itself.

concept of “catharsis” and Moreno’s theory of the “psychodrama” can provide a possible framework for understanding this phenomenon.<sup>137</sup>

The discussion about the Aristotelian concept of catharsis or “purgation” is generally based on a single phrase in Book VI of *The Poetics* defining tragedy: “Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude ... *through pity and fear affecting the proper purgation of these emotions.*”<sup>138</sup> Aristotle, in this definition, recognized a remarkable feature of Greek drama, and tragedy in particular. Drama can arouse powerful feelings in the spectator, which then also have a therapeutic effect. Thus, having witnessed theatrical portrayals of suffering, the spectator at the end of the drama does not grow depressed as should be expected but instead feels a level of relief.<sup>139</sup>

In his work, Moreno shifted the emphasis of cathartic effect from the spectator to the actor, or within the therapeutic context, to the patient-subject.<sup>140</sup> As a result of this change of emphasis and combined with his work in group therapy, Moreno created what he termed the “psychodrama” as a therapeutic form which permits patients to explore interpersonal relationships and other “private worlds,” such as

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<sup>137</sup> Jean Fanchette has explored parallels between Moreno’s theory and elements of contemporary theatre. See his discussion of the theories of Stanislavskii, Pirandello, and Artaud in *Psychodrame et Théâtre moderne* (Paris: Éditions Buchet/Chastel, 1971).

<sup>138</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, in Bernard F. Dukore, *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 36. My emphasis.

<sup>139</sup> “Tragedy,” in Abrams, *op. cit.*, 322; J. A. Cuddon, “Catharsis” in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Penguin, 1991), 124.

<sup>140</sup> See Jonathan Fox, ed., *The Essential Moreno: Writings on Psychodrama, Group Method, and Spontaneity by J. L. Moreno, M.D.* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1987), 5.

delusions or hallucinations, through the creation and re-creation of life situations within the medium of dramatic scenes.<sup>141</sup> Through the experience of psychodrama the patient-subject is able to gain satisfaction from a feeling of spontaneity that does not occur in reality, to learn about others around them through role reversal, and to integrate elements of the self in order, thereby attaining “a sense of and power and relief, a catharsis of integration.”<sup>142</sup>

Moving beyond Aristotle’s association of the cathartic experience with the spectator and Moreno’s use of catharsis in clinical therapy, one can envision a similar cathartic effect occurring in the actor who performs roles in which the dramatist has expressed emotions or life-situations very close to those experienced in the actor’s life. Moreno himself came to that conclusion:

if it should happen that an actor has a certain affinity for the part which is assigned to him –if the playwright has managed to express certain of his private emotions better than he, himself, could have expressed them—we

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<sup>141</sup> Fox, *ibid.*, 13. Moreno adopted the lexicon of drama to describe his “instruments of [the] psychodramatic method.” Thus, the patient or subject becomes the “actor,” the analyst assumes the role of “director,” and staff members assume roles as supporting characters or “auxiliary egos” (5). In the psychodrama, the patient may enact a particular “role,” that is, the “actual or tangible form which the self takes” (62). This role, chosen by the patient or director/analyst, functions as a bridge between the social reality and the unconscious, a means by which the patient can “bring shape and order” to the unconscious (15, 62, 63). A role may be social, psychosomatic (depicting physiological aspects of the self), or psychodramatic (depicting psychological aspects of the self) in character (62). The patient may pretend to play a role, re-enact a role from the past, live through a present life-situation, or test a future role (62). The patient may pretend to play a role, re-enact a role from the past, live through a present life-situation, or test a future role (14).

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

my expect some degree of catharsis to take place in the private person of the actor.<sup>143</sup>

We might ask, could Komissarzhevskaja continue to experience catharsis in the Pryzbyszewski roles despite rehearsals or repeated performances which might weaken the positive effect of purgation? Moreno's theories also address this problem. In his discussion of the actor in conventional drama, Moreno argued that catharsis will continue to affect the actor, despite the adverse effect that the rehearsal process can have on the actor's spontaneity and sincerity in the role. Moreno felt that the amount of catharsis received was proportional to the amount of personal investment (Moreno's "private interest") which the actor placed in a particular role. This personal investment or interest would help determine the quality of an actor's reproduction of that role and therefore, the amount of catharsis received.<sup>144</sup> Hypothetically, the Russian system of repertory in effect during Komissarzhevskaja's lifetime helped the actress to mitigate the numbing effect of consecutive, repeated performances of cathartic experiences, as each company would perform a different play each evening. An actor could therefore retain the spontaneity required to perform well. In summary, Moreno's theory of the psychodrama aids in understanding Komissarzhevskaja's experimentation with several "self-selected"

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<sup>143</sup> Jacob L. Moreno, *Mental Catharsis and the Psychodrama* (Beacon, NY: Psychodramatic Inst., 1940), 226.

<sup>144</sup> "The more often they [actors] have to rehearse and play a part, the more will they lose in spontaneity and sincerity--and in private interest—in the part. The amount of private interest an actor has in a part is a measure of the spontaneity he is able to display in it. The amount of spontaneity, in turn, is a measure of the amount of catharsis which the private personality of the actor will gain from the process of acting this part." Moreno, *op. cit.*, 226. Moreno's works include an early monograph on drama and spontaneity, *Das Stegrieftheater (The Impromptu Theatre, 1921)*.

roles (to use Resing's term) as she sought to move beyond the restrictions of her first *emploi*, the comedienne.

In contrast to Komissarzhevskaja, from the start of his career Meierkhol'd worked outside the Imperial theatre system, in the privately owned Moscow Art Theatre between 1898 and 1902. Dissatisfied with his position at the Theatre, Meierkhol'd left to establish his own company, at approximately the same time as did Komissarzhevskaja. Like her, beginning in 1902 he also acted in several Przybyszewski plays, including *The Golden Fleece* and *Snow*. Unlike Komissarzhevskaja, his work as a director motivated him to translate Przybyszewski's written text into a visual form. Beginning with Volkov's 1929 biography, it has been generally accepted that Meierkhol'd's production of *Snow* in 1903 marked the beginning of his attempts to move toward *uslovnost'* (non-mimeticism; the theatrical art independent of observed, physical "reality") in theatrical presentation. Meierkhol'd used stylization and *uslovnost'* as devices to move Russian theatre away from the naturalist productions of the Moscow Art Theatre and the Imperial Theatres.<sup>145</sup> In doing so, Meierkhol'd moved toward an unexplored horizon of

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<sup>145</sup> There is no generally accepted definition of the term *uslovnost'*. Its adjectival form, *uslovnyi*, has two related meanings in the *Oxford Russian-English Dictionary*: 1. "conventional," 2. "conditional." Another recent specialized dictionary, *Anglo-russkii i russko-angliiskii teatral'nyi slovar'* (Moscow: Filomatis, 2005), compiled by Elli Perel', gives a range of meanings, all dependent on context: 1. ("in the traditional, generally-accepted style"): "conventional" 2. ("in the context (*stil'*) of symbolism"): "symbolic" 3. ("in the context of formalism") "formalistic, formalized." Marjorie L. Hoover, in her monograph on Meierkhol'd, glosses the word as "conditional," while providing a definition more fitting with the first meaning, and making the faux-pas of using a form of the word in its definition: "in general, an agreed-upon condition or assumption; in particular the assumption that the theater is an art in its own right, not

symbolism, when objects and figures on the stage acquire multivalenced attributes, signifying more than the conventional physical and social “reality” around us.

In early 1905 Meierkhol'd and Stanislavskii chose *Snow* as part of the repertoire for the ill-fated Theatre-Studio in Moscow. In 1906 he directed *The Eternal Tale* for Komissarzhevskaiia's Dramatic Theatre. Unlike Komissarzhevskaiia, Meierkhol'd mentions Przybyszewski's name several times in conjunction with his reading (1901) and professional plans (1905). He even credits Przybyszewski for contributing to his own professional development and growth (1908, 1913). The task

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dependent upon reality as its point of reference.” See Hoover, *Meyerhold: the Art of Conscious Theater* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1974), 330, and her discussion of the term, 46-47. *Uslovnost'*, as Hoover suggests in her gloss, is associated with theatre as an art form, i.e., it can be viewed as an intrinsic quality of theatre. In this sense, the term is closely related to the English words “theatrical” and “theatricality.” Meierkhol'd originally used the term *uslovnyi* in describing his efforts to move away from the constrictions enforced by realism and its emphasis on mimesis and naturalistic representation. Therefore, I understand the term as “non-mimeticism” or “non-representational theatre,” i.e., an attempt to recognize theatre as a physical and performative space in which a variety of interconnected semiological systems involving linguistics, history, aesthetics, logic, et al., govern the interaction between the performer and spectator, not purely a re-creation of external reality in a performance space. See the section on theatrical systems and codes in Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 43 ff. Edward Braun, translator of Meierkhol'd's major theoretical writings, uses the English term “stylization” for both *uslovnost'* and *stilizatsiia*, but does not explain his choice of lexicon. In doing so, however, he obscures Meierkhol'd's own lexicon in the essays “*Teatr-studiia*” and “*Pervye popytki sozdaniia uslovnogo teatra*” dating from 1907-1908, published as the article “On Theatre” (*O teatre*). For example, Meierkhol'd himself uses the word “*stilizatsiia*” (“stylization”), which he defines as a concept “indivisibly tied up with the idea of convention (*ideia uslovnosti*), generalization and symbol.” Thus, for Meierkhol'd in 1908, “convention” (“non-mimeticism” or “non-representationalism” in this dissertation) is only one element which can create “stylization.” See Edward Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1969), 43, 49.

before us is to contextualize these references and understand how Przybyszewski and his works moved Meierkhol'd forward in his search for new theatrical forms.

Meierkhol'd's status as one of Russia's greatest theatrical directors has made many of his personal documents available for research. Two volumes of archival documents have recently been published (Fel'dman, 1998, 2006). These annotated volumes include fragments from his diaries, sketches from the director's notebooks, newspaper reviews and articles, and previously unpublished correspondence. Evidence for production analysis can be found in Meierkhol'd's published sketchbooks (Fel'dman), as well as a folio by Mikhailova. Because Meierkhol'd did not always leave detailed notes about his intentions in the notebooks from 1902-1905, however, we must also look to previous observations of his productions by his dramaturg and close friend, Aleksei Remizov (1877-1957). Finally, newspaper reviews of Meierkhol'd's productions can offer enlightening insight into the look of sets, lighting, costumes and acting.

As with the chapters on Komissarzhevskaja, I use historical and critical analysis for the discussion of Meierkhol'd. I closely analyze several of Meierkhol'd's pronouncements on theatre, noting thematic and phraseological parallels between his and Przybyszewski's texts. The Remizov articles are also closely analyzed, because I suggest they provide a framework for the interpretation of directorial intent. Przybyszewski scholars such as Tkachik and theatre historians such as Rudnitskii have given these articles little attention.

Chapter I provides a background on the state of Russian theatre at the turn of the nineteenth century, and presents the early reception of Przybyszewski in the Russian-language press in the 1890s. The controversy surrounding the first performance of a Przybyszewski play, *The Golden Fleece*, in 1901 in St. Petersburg receives special attention, as well as the creation of Przybyszewski's scandalous image as a "decadent" after the death in Tiflis of Dagny Juel, his wife.

Chapters II, III, and IV examine Komissarzhevskaja's reception of Przybyszewski within a chronological framework. In Chapter II, biographical information from the period 1864-1901 is provided to support the hypothesis that crucial events in Komissarzhevskaja's life created an affinity for Przybyszewski's aesthetic views, as presented in the recently published booklet, *Aphorisms and Preludes* [*Aforizmy i preliudy*, 1902]. These views catalyze previously-held notions in Komissarzhevskaja's worldview, leading her to transform her life by leaving the service of the Aleksandrinskii Theatre and embarking on an independent career. My argument for a direct reception of Przybyszewski's views rests on an examination of textual parallels between Komissarzhevskaja's correspondence and Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms and Preludes*. Further evidence is provided by an examination of Komissarzhevskaja's use of the concepts of "soul," "artist," and "art" in the periods before and after her receipt of this booklet in April 1902. Finally, I offer a brief, introductory discussion of the possible ways in which Przybyszewski's aesthetic views may have interacted with those of English philosopher John Ruskin, whose views Komissarzhevskaja is widely known to have articulated. I do not intend this

discussion to be an exhaustive one, but rather, a simple foundation upon which other scholars of intellectual history may begin their investigations.

Chapter III draws on Moreno's theory of the "psychodrama" to explore the hypothesis that Komissarzhevskaja experienced catharsis as she performed her psychologically demanding Przybyszewski roles. I suggest that each role offered Komissarzhevskaja an "experiential space" where she could explore and re-examine the emotions stemming from unhappy events in her past, such as marital infidelity and attempted suicide. In the roles of Sonka (*The Eternal Tale*) and Hanka (*Life's Banquet*) Komissarzhevskaja could explore the emotions of alternative experiences, such as past romances and maternity.

Chapter IV ends the examination of Komissarzhevskaja's reception with a review of personal contacts with Przybyszewski through purported meetings and brief periods of correspondence. I examine several comments Komissarzhevskaja made about acting immediately following her reading of *Aphorisms and Preludes*, as she began rehearsals of *The Golden Fleece*. I also investigate thematic parallels between Przybyszewski's theoretical essay, "On Drama and the Stage" ("O dramie i scenie," 1902), and comments Komissarzhevskaja made in defense of her production of Przybyszewski's drama, *Life's Banquet* (1909). These parallels provide evidence that Komissarzhevskaja continued to evaluate Przybyszewski's aesthetic views during her own artistic development, even after her initial introduction to his *Aphorisms* in 1902. *Life's Banquet* thus serves as an "experimental space," in which I conjecture Komissarzhevskaja applied some of Przybyszewski's views not only on art, but also

on drama. An investigation of these remarks will allow us to suggest that Przybyszewski's further influence on Komissarzhevskaja's own acting style extended as far back as December 1904, the Russian publication date of "On Drama and the Stage," or earlier. By extension, this investigation allows us to hypothesize that not only not only Komissarzhevskaja, but other Russian actors as well, attempted to apply Przybyszewski's theories of acting. Within this context, I also examine Zonov's suggestion that, in her production of *Life's Banquet*, Komissarzhevskaja experimented with ideas that she then hoped to use in her future school.

Chapters V and VI examine Przybyszewski's reception in Meierkhol'd's writings and productions. The early experiments with non-representational forms receive special attention. In Chapter V, I trace the possible sources of Meierkhol'd's enthusiastic reception of Przybyszewski in November 1901. I review the events surrounding Meierkhol'd's departure from the Moscow Art Theatre and ways in which Przybyszewski's views reinforced Meierkhol'd's decision to leave the Moscow Art Theatre in early 1902. The chapter proceeds with a chronological discussion of Meierkhol'd's pronouncements on art and productions of Przybyszewski's dramas *The Golden Fleece* (1902) and *Snow* (1903).

Because of its innovations, Meierkhol'd's production of *Snow* receives detailed treatment in Chapter VI. Discussion starts with Remizov's press release which urged audiences to look beyond the mundane plot of the play. Next, I examine an impressionistic review of the production by Remizov, which sheds light on Meierkhol'd's approach to *Snow*, including the elements of music, drama, and

lighting. Discussion of Meierkhol'd ends with the 1904 production of *Snow* in Tiflis, which opened Meierkhol'd to further experimentation in non-representational form.

In conclusion, this dissertation will situate Przybyszewski's aesthetic and dramatic works more deeply within the context of the changing Russian theatrical landscape as it moved from realism and naturalism to less representational forms. By investigating the particular responses of two readers, Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd, both members of the artistic intelligentsia, I will show that Przybyszewski, a writer now generally ignored, had an identifiable, dynamic impact on the development of Russian theatre during his lifetime.

**Chapter I: REHEARSALS FOR CHANGE:  
RUSSIAN THEATRE IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

SORIN: We can't do without the theatre.

TREPLYOV: We need new forms. We need new forms, but if there aren't any, it's better to have nothing.

Chekhov, *The Seagull* (1896)<sup>1</sup>

A reaction emerged; free theatres shot up in Europe like mushrooms after a rain. [...] It seems to me, though, that this was not a reaction created for the author's benefit, but rather, a performers' revolution, directed against uniformity and the leveling of individuality.

Przybyszewski, "Przybyszewski in Petersburg" (1903)<sup>2</sup>

These citations, although written seven years apart by Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) and Stanisław Przybyszewski (1868-1927) respectively, articulate the intense soul-searching in Russian and Polish theatre at the turn of the nineteenth century. The first, a brief exchange between two characters, the young playwright Treplev and Sorin, his uncle, from the first act of Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1896), illustrates the belief in theatre as an indispensable art form and Treplev's desire to be original, to create "new forms." Both literary and theatre historians acknowledge the manner in which Chekhov's own works provided "new forms" for experimentation and progress, especially for Stanislavskii's Moscow Art Theatre. However, the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Seagull*, Act I. Anton Chekhov, *Plays*, trans. Peter Carson (New York: Penguin, 2002), 87.

<sup>2</sup> "Powstała reakcja; wolne sceny wyrastały w Europie, jak grzyby po deszczu. ... Ale zdaje mi się, że to nie była reakcja, stworzona na korzyść autora, ale raczej rewolucja artystów, zwrócona przeciwko zuniformowaniu i zniwelowaniu indywidualności." Stanisław Przybyszewski, "Przybyszewski w Petersburgu," *Kraj*, no. 5, 31. I. 1903, p. 22.

playwright's dramatic text does not perform itself, it must have agents to translate the word to the stage.

The second citation, an excerpt from an editorial written by Przybyszewski on the eve of his first visit to St. Petersburg, addresses the impact of those agents within the theatrical experience. In that piece, Przybyszewski glanced back at the theatrical reforms that had occurred after the historic European tours of the Meiningen company. Przybyszewski shifted the impetus for change from young playwrights, whose artistry and identity could be homogenized by external forces such as censorship and public taste, to those performers who sought to rise above the mediocrity around them.<sup>3</sup> Just like the fictitious Treplev, who wished to push the boundaries as a dramatist, it is these performers—talented young Russian actors and directors of the early twentieth century—who were soon looking beyond even Chekhov's innovative works for alternate spaces in which they could assert their identities and continue their experimentation in the theatrical arts.

The plays of the Polish novelist and dramatist Stanisław Przybyszewski provided such an alternative space, as they also had for Polish theatre during this period.<sup>4</sup> Przybyszewski's dramas and ideas appeared during a period of tremendous

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<sup>3</sup> Przybyszewski, "Przybyszewski w Petersburgu," p. 22. "W pierwszej chwili zdawało się że wolna scena chciała ominąć prawa zbyt ostrej cenzury i w zamkniętem kole stowarzyszenia uwypuklić indywidualność autora, która dotąd musiała być dokrojona do gustu publiczności i do poziomu zwykle mało wykształconego widza. / Ale zdaje mi się, że to nie była reakcja, stworzona na korzyść autora, ale raczej rewolucja artystów, zwrócona przeciwko zuniformowaniu i zniwelowaniu indywidualności."

<sup>4</sup> According to Polish theatre historian Tadeusz Sivert, the successful premiere of *The Golden Fleece* [*Złote runo*] in Warsaw at the Teatr Rozmaitości (6. XII. 1901) marks

flowering in Russian culture. As the twentieth century approached, theatrical traditions were moving toward increased mimesis through naturalistic and realistic stage representation, as exemplified by productions at the Moscow Art Theatre. In contrast, art and poetry, particularly those works by the younger generation of Symbolist writers, were moving beyond the confines of mimetic representation. Przybyszewski's plays, which contained a synthesis of both naturalist and emerging Symbolist elements, became living laboratories in which young, innovative members of the Russian stage, such as the director Vsevolod Meierkhof'd and actress Vera Komissarzhevskaja, could experiment with new theatrical forms and content.<sup>5</sup>

In order to “set the stage” for Przybyszewski's reception, it will be helpful to provide a brief biography of Przybyszewski and outlines of his concept of the soul and of his dramatic theory. For comparison, we will also outline Valerii Briusov's 1902 essay on theatre, “An Unnecessary Truth.” We will then describe selected elements that defined the cultural setting of Russian theatre at the turn of the twentieth century: venue, censorship, roles and acting opportunities, and audience. We will conclude this chapter with a review of Przybyszewski's early reception in the

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a turning point in the type of repertoire seen on the Polish stage: after this date, modernist works became much more predominant. Although the works of Ibsen and Hauptmann had been produced in Warsaw, they were exceptions to the conservative repertoire. Przybyszewski's dramas were also the first modernist works to be produced in Lublin. See Tadeusz Sivert, *Dzieje teatru polskiego, t. IV, Teatr polski w latach 1890-1918, zabór rosyjski* (Warszawa: PWN, 1988), 197-198, 528.

<sup>5</sup> Sivert claims that Przybyszewski's plays became vehicles for an investigation of a character's psychology, with the concomitant loss of importance of “type.” See Sivert, *op. cit.*, 554.

Russian press, including a look at the controversy that surrounded the first Russian performances of *The Golden Fleece*.

Stanisław Przybyszewski was born in the Polish lands then occupied by Prussia. He was educated in a Prussian gymnasium in Wągrowiec near Thorn (Toruń) and was taught piano by his mother. Upon graduation, he left for Charlottenburg where he studied architecture, then medicine. For a short period he edited a socialist newspaper, *Gazeta Robotnicza* [*The Workers' Gazette*]. He quickly rose to fame after the publication of *Zur Psychologie des Individuums* [*On the Psychology of the Individual*] in 1892, his collection of two essays that examined Chopin, Nietzsche, and the Swedish author, Ola Hansson (1860-1925), as examples of creative genius.<sup>6</sup> This work was “a clear attempt at conquering naturalism in art,” the literary style still dominant in Germany at that time.<sup>7</sup> Przybyszewski’s use of scientific and medical terminology in a belletristic work attracted special attention from young readers.<sup>8</sup> *Totenmesse* (1893), his next work, amazed German readers

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<sup>6</sup> Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Zur Psychologie des Individuums. I. Chopin und Nietzsche. II. Ola Hansson* (Berlin: W. Fontane, 1892). For a brief English-language discussion of Przybyszewski and Nietzsche, see Andrzej Walicki, “Nietzsche in Poland (Before 1918),” in Alice Freifeld, Peter Bergmann, and Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, eds., *East Europe Reads Nietzsche* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1998), 43-84; for comments on Hansson and Przybyszewski, see David R. Hume, *The German Literary Achievements of Ola Hansson 1888-1893* (Bern, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1979), 38-39; for Chopin, see S. Świerzewski, “Stanisław Przybyszewski o Fryderyku Chopinie,” *Poradnik Muzyczny*, no. 5 (1971): 7-9; Lukas Richter, “Chopinisieren. Zur Musikanschauung von Stanisław Przybyszewski,” *Rocznik Kasprowiczowski* 7 (1990): 201-217.

<sup>7</sup> Gabriela Matuszek, *Der Geniale Pole? Niemcy o Stanisławie Przybyszewskim (1892-1992)* (Kraków: Universitas, 1996), 13. This scholarly monograph remains one of the best discussions of Przybyszewski’s German reception.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

with its stylistic mix of inner monologue, stream of consciousness narrative, associative combinations of dreams, visions, and memories, symbolic and medical terminology, and synaesthetic imagery.<sup>9</sup> Ola Hansson called it a “nonpareil in modernist literature.”<sup>10</sup> Przybyszewski also popularized the work of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch (1863-1944).<sup>11</sup> As a member of the Berlin *bohème* that gathered at the tavern *Zum schwarzen Ferkel* (The Black Piglet), Przybyszewski counted among his associates such figures as Munch, the Swedish writers August Strindberg (1849-1912) and Hansson, as well as the German writers Richard Dehmel (1863-1920) and Johannes Schlaf (1862-1941).

Przybyszewski's first play, *Das grosse Glück* [*For Happiness*; Pol., *Dla szczęścia* (1901); Rus., *Dlia schast'ia*, (1904)], although published in 1897, did not receive a German premiere until October 1903, two years after its first performance in Russia.<sup>12</sup> This was one year after the German publication of his dramatic cycle, *The Dance of Love and Death* [Pol., *Taniec miłości i śmierci*; Ger., *Totentanz der*

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> O. Hansson, “Eine moderne Totenmesse,” *Die Nation*, no. 1 (1893/1894): 15. Cited in Matuszek, *op. cit.*, 23.

<sup>11</sup> Stanislaw Przybyszewski, “Psychischer Naturalismus,” *Neue Deutsche Rundschau. Freie Bühne*, no. 5 (1894): 150-156; *Das Werk des Edward Munch*, Stanislaw Przybyszewski, ed. (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1894). This work was the first of Przybyszewski's to be translated into English. See *The Work of Edvard Munch. Four Essays*, trans. Hanna Marks, (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1894), which is now a rarity, or the more recent “The Work of Edvard Munch,” trans. from the German by Anselm Hollo, *Artes* (1997): 42-50. For secondary literature on this topic, see Władysława Jaworska, “Munch and Przybyszewski,” *Polish Perspectives* 15, no. 12 (1972): 61-72; Carla Lathe, “Edvard Munch and the Concept of ‘Psychic Naturalism’,” *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 93 (March 1979): 135-146.

<sup>12</sup> Stanislaw Przybyszewski, “Das große Glück,” *Die Gesellschaft* 13, no. 1 (January 1897): 54-83. Matuszek, *op. cit.*, 80.

*Liebe*].<sup>13</sup> In general, although some found his works fascinating, German critics received Przybyszewski's hybrid dramas coldly, as they were considered derivative of Ibsen's analytical style, Strindberg's subjectivity, and Maeterlinck's symbolism.<sup>14</sup>

In 1898 Przybyszewski moved to Kraków (then under Austrian control), where he became editor of the modernist journal *Życie* [*Life*]. When that periodical closed in 1900, he joined the editorial board of *Chimera*, another literary-artistic monthly, based in Warsaw (then under Russian control). The Russian press noted both of these facts in its coverage of Przybyszewski.<sup>15</sup> Czesław Miłosz has described Przybyszewski as a “profound mind” and a “liberating influence,” whose role as a leader in the literary epoch now known as *Młoda Polska* [Young Poland] “can hardly be exaggerated.” Miłosz even designates the first years of this movement as “Przybyszewski's *Moderna*.”<sup>16</sup>

On 18 February 1899 *For Happiness* premiered at the Teatr Miejski (Municipal Theatre) in Kraków.<sup>17</sup> The correspondent of St. Petersburg's *Kraj*, the second largest Polish-language newspaper in the Russian Empire, described Przybyszewski as “undoubtedly the hero of the season.”<sup>18</sup> He declared that both

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>14</sup> Matuszek, *op. cit.*, 76-78.

<sup>15</sup> See for example, L. Ukrainka [Larysa Kvitka-Kosach], “Zametki o noveishei pol'skoi literature,” *Zhizn'*, no. 1, (January 1901): 115; V. P., “Pol'skii khudozhestvennyi zhurnal,” *Mir iskusstva*, no. 5/6 (1902): 99. This piece serves as an introduction to Vladimir Peremilovskii's translation of “On the Paths of the Soul.”

<sup>16</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 331, 329, 330.

<sup>17</sup> Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 95.

<sup>18</sup> Świadek, “Echa Zachodnie (Kraków, 18. lutego),” *Kraj*, no. 7, 12 (24). II. 1899, p. 23. Cited in Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 97.

supporters and detractors of Przybyszewski's work could rejoice in the fact that Polish literature had acquired a "great talent."<sup>19</sup> When the play was revived in Kraków the following year, one critic praised the play for its deep psychology and noted that audience members had to become involved with the creative process: "The actors have a tremendous opportunity to display their talents, and the audience must be creators themselves, so that they can create the whole depth of the human soul from what the author presents on stage. . . . This is a drama for first-rate actors and selected audience members."<sup>20</sup>

The play premiered in Lwów in October 1900, with most of the Kraków cast.<sup>21</sup> Critics praised Przybyszewski for his dramatic technique and the play for its beautiful language.<sup>22</sup> The praise continued when *The Golden Fleece*, directed by Tadeusz Pawlikowski, premiered in Lwów in March 1901.<sup>23</sup> Hints of controversy began to show, however, as *Gazeta lwowska* [*The Lwów Gazette*] regretted the waste of Przybyszewski's talent on a play that, in its opinion, depressed the audience with its "degradation of women, the futility of philanthropy, [and] the triumph of the

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<sup>19</sup> Świadek, *op. cit.*, 23; Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 97.

<sup>20</sup> "Aktorzy mają tu ołbrzymie pole do popisu, a słuchacze muszą być twórcami sami, aby z tego, co im autor na scenie przedstawia, odtworzyć całą głębię duszy ludzkiej. . . . To jest dramat dla znakomitych aktorów i wybranych słuchaczy." *Krytyka*, no. 3 (1900); cited in Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 130. Przybyszewski's notion of the "intelligent spectator will be discussed in the following section.

<sup>21</sup> Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 134.

<sup>22</sup> Pajączkowski, *op. cit.*, 68, cited in Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 134-135.

<sup>23</sup> Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 141-142.

ruthless, fatalistic power of crime.”<sup>24</sup> The controversy reached its apex in May. Just as *The Golden Fleece* and its epilogue, *The Visitors* [*Goście*, Pol.; *Gosti*, Rus.], were opening in Kraków, the local authorities in Lwów pulled *The Golden Fleece* from the repertoire due to its questionable moral content. Przybyszewski protested publicly in the press.<sup>25</sup> In Kraków, officials pulled *The Golden Fleece* from the repertoire after four performances, an incident eventually reported in the St. Petersburg and Russian provincial press.<sup>26</sup> Przybyszewski, the prophet who had preached that the artist should not be held to mediocrity and public taste, thus became a martyr for the new art.

Although this erudite and prolific Polish writer may be almost forgotten today, his unique synthesis of metaphysics, occultism, eroticism, and aestheticism created great controversy in the fin-de-siècle Russian Empire. Przybyszewski drew his worldview from, among others, Schopenhauer’s pessimism and conception of the Will, Nietzsche’s individualism, critique of morality, and the concept of the Übermensch, and Ola Hansson’s emphasis on sensuality.<sup>27</sup> His conception of the soul

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<sup>24</sup> “Przygnębia poniżenie kobiety, bezskuteczność filantropii, triumf bezwzględnej fatalistycznej siły występku.” Pajączkowski, *op. cit.*, 68-69, cited in Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 141.

<sup>25</sup> Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 143-146. Przybyszewski’s letter is reproduced in Przybyszewski, *Listy*, t. 1, 269-270.

<sup>26</sup> J. Kotarbiński, *W służbie sztuki i poezji* (Warsaw: 1929), 73, cited in Przybyszewski, *Listy*, t. 1, 269; for the Russian report, see A. D-skaia, A. [A. Damanskaia], “Stanislav Pshibyshevskii,” *Rossiiia*, no. 915, 11. XI. 1901, p. 2; repr. in *Volyn’* [Zhitomir], no. 266, 6. XII. 1901, p.3.

<sup>27</sup> Stanisław Eile, “The Prophet of the ‘Naked Soul’: Stanisław Przybyszewski,” *Intellectuals and the Future in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1890-1914*, László Péter and Robert B. Pynsent, eds. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 176, 182. See also Krystyna Janicka, “O poglądach estetycznych Stanisława Przybyszewskiego,”

and psyche, together with recognition of the primacy of intuition, had roots in Bergsonian philosophy.<sup>28</sup> In the use of symbolic characters in his dramas, Przybyszewski showed the influence of late Ibsen and, especially, Maeterlinck.<sup>29</sup> During a writing career that lasted thirty-five years, Przybyszewski published several trilogies in novel form, eleven dramas, essays, and programmatic works on psychology, art, the occult, Chopin, and the Polish character.<sup>30</sup> All his major works written before the outbreak of World War I were published in Russian translations, and the plays form a major part of Przybyszewski's published legacy in Russia during the early twentieth century: *Snow*, first published in 1903 and staged by both Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd, eventually appeared in ten editions, in seven

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*Sztuka i krytyka* 7, no. 3-4 (1956): 177.

<sup>28</sup> Janicka, *op. cit.*, 177.

<sup>29</sup> Irena Szczygielska, *Przybyszewski jako dramaturg* (Poznań: Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, 1936), 12-13. For a brief discussion on the influence of Ibsen, Maeterlinck, and Strindberg on Przybyszewski, see Roman Taborski, ed., "Wstęp," in *Stanisław Przybyszewski. Wybór pism* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1966), L-LIII. Taborski cites the influence of Strindberg in Przybyszewski's of the fatal power of sexuality, of Ibsen in the rejection of the structure of the well-made play, and of Maeterlinck in the technique of creating atmosphere.

<sup>30</sup> The novels include: *Homo sapiens* (I. *Über Bord*, II. *Unterwegs*, III. *Im Malstrom*; 1895-1896); *Satanskinder* (1897); *Synowie ziemi* (I. *Synowie ziemi*, 1904; II. *Dzień sądu*, 1909; *Zmierzch*, 1911); *Mocny człowiek* (I. *Mocny człowiek*, II. *Wyzwolenie*, III. *Święty gaj*, 1912-1913); *Dzieci nędzy* (I. *Dzieci nędzy*, II. *Adam Drzaga*, 1913-1914); *Powrót* (1916); *Krzyk* (1917); *Il regno doloroso* (1923); the prose poems-novellas: *Totenmesse* (1893); *Vigilien* (1895); *De profundis* (1895); *Am Meer* (1899); *Androgyne* (1900); the dramas: *Das grosse Glück* (1897); *Taniec miłości i śmierci* (I. *Złote runo*, II. *Goście*, 1901); *Matka* (1903); *Śnieg* (1903); *Odwieczna baśń* (1906); *Śluby* (1906); *Gody życia* (1910); *Topiel* (1912); *Miasto* (1914); *Mściciel* (1927); the major programmatic works: *Zur Psychologie des Individuums* (1892); *Die Synagoge des Satan* (1897); *Na drogach duszy* (1900); *O dramacie i scenie* (1905); *Szopen a naród* (1910); *Polen und der heilige Krieg / Polska i święta wojna* (1915); *Von Polens Seele / Szlakiem duszy polskiej* (1917); *Ekspresjonizm, Słowacki i „Genezis z Ducha”* (1918).

different translations.<sup>31</sup> Russian companies performed his plays not only at the Imperial theatres and in the capitals, but in provincial cities such as Kiev, Odessa, Saratov, Kazan', Baku, Tiflis, Ufa, and Tomsk.<sup>32</sup>

Przybyszewski also toured Russia three times, in 1903 and 1904, visiting the cities of St. Petersburg, Kiev, and Odessa, among others.<sup>33</sup> In 1903, during his tour to St. Petersburg, the “talented and popular” Przybyszewski joined the Russian Theatre Society in order to gain control over publishing rights and royalties, becoming the first Polish writer to do so. This was something not even the well-known novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz had done.<sup>34</sup> Other newspapers outside St. Petersburg publicized this event as well. In its announcement, *Kievskaiia gazeta* [*The Kiev Gazette*] implied that Przybyszewski’s works would now become popular in Russia, just like the works of the French dramatists who had joined previously.<sup>35</sup> Przybyszewski also made a personal visit to a performance of his play, *The Golden Fleece*, which had been chosen as an examination piece for a class at the Imperial School of Dramatic Arts.<sup>36</sup> His 1904 lecture tour included performances of his plays and a reading of his lecture

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<sup>31</sup> Cybienio, [E. Z. Tsybenko], “Dyskusje,” 122-123

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix II, “Known Productions of Przybyszewski’s Works in Russia, 1901-1912.”

<sup>33</sup> Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 34. For further information on these trips, see pp. 34-63.

<sup>34</sup> “Khronika. Teatral'noe obshchestvo,” *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 8 (1903): 174; “Obo vsem,” *Nuvellist*, no. 7, (1903): 10. His efforts proved for naught; he relinquished his membership the following year.

<sup>35</sup> “Iz pol'skikh gazet,” *Kievskaiia gazeta*, no. 58, 27. II. 1903, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Homo novus [Aleksandr Kugel'], “Uchenicheskii spektakl',” *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 11 (9. III. 1903): 241-242; Vera Iureneva, a student in that production, describes her impressions of his visit in his memoirs. See Vera Iureneva, *Zapiski aktrisy*, (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosizdat Iskusstvo, 1946), 58-62.

“The New Drama and Symbolism,” reviews of which appeared in the Russian-language press.<sup>37</sup> In some cities, his appearance prompted articles discussing his aesthetic views.<sup>38</sup>

The Moscow publisher Sablin published Przybyszewski’s collected works in four editions beginning in 1905. Its fourth edition appeared from 1910-1912. His dramas appeared as a separate volume beginning with the first edition.<sup>39</sup> Among Polish authors, his success in Russia was second only to Sienkiewicz.<sup>40</sup> The Russian public read Przybyszewski’s works voraciously; in 1907, the year his “dramatic poem” *The Eternal Tale* (1905-1906) was published, the Kiev public libraries reported that the circulation of Przybyszewski’s works was second only to that of Mikhail Artsybashev, whose novel, *Sanin*, had just been published. In that particular market, the young clientele was far more interested in reading Przybyszewski than Ibsen, Turgenev, or Tolstoi.<sup>41</sup> *Zolotoe runo* [*The Golden Fleece*], one of the major

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<sup>37</sup> К. Chukovskii, “Pshibyshevskii o simvole. (Pis'mo iz Odessy),” *Vesy*, no. 1 (1904): 33-37.

<sup>38</sup> V. Kamenskaia, “Stanislav Pshibyshevskii i ego tvorchestvo,” *Iug* [Kherson], no. 1913, 13. XI. 1904, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Cybienko, [E. Z. Tsybenko], “Dyskusje,” 122-123.

<sup>40</sup> Hutnikiewicz, *op. cit.*, 208.

<sup>41</sup> “В общественной библиотеке не имеется, к сожалению, сводок требованиям читателей, — подсчитаны и систематизированы только выдачи. Эта не дает полного представления о запросах читателей, так как не все требования, за отсутствием достаточного числа экземпляров [sic] наиболее читаемых книг, возможно удовлетворить. Но все же известное представление о вкусах и симпатиях читающей публики можно получить по данным о выданных книгах.

Вот некоторые цифры за 1907 год.

Арцыбашев—выдавался 402 раза (наибольшее число тех выдач падает на последние 3 месяца, когда вышел в свет «Санин»), *Пушбышевский*—516 раз, Вербицкая—502, Андреев—406, Ибсен—284, Тургенев—222, Гамсун—192, Золя—146, Юшкевич—128, Аш—116, Чириков—91, Мережковский—73, Л.

symbolist journals of the period, serialized his newest novel, *Judgment Day*, during 1909.<sup>42</sup> As a result of his popularity and ubiquitous presence, many Russian writers and other cultural figures of the period mentioned him in their essays or reviewed his works.<sup>43</sup> Thus, with personal appearances, publications, and productions of his works, Przybyszewski enjoyed a very strong presence in Russian culture at the beginning of the twentieth century.

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Толстой—68, Соллогуб [sic]—64, Каменский—44, Шекспир—43, Успенский и Зудерман по 36 раз... Остальные авторы, и в том числе целый ряд классиков, выдались еще меньшее количество раз.” А. Poliatskii, “Chto teper' chitaiut,” *Kievskie vesti*, no 77, 19. III. 1908. My emphasis. Poliatskii’s opinion that Artsybashev is the most popular writer at this time, despite his figures that suggest Przybyszewski’s books have circulated more often, is also based on the number of requests for an author’s work. Poliatskii based his findings on interviews conducted at two locations, the public and the Idzikovskii libraries.

<sup>42</sup> *Den' sudnyi. Roman. Zolotoe runo*, nos. 1-9 (1909). For a general description of Przybyszewski’s works and criticism in both *Zolotoe runo* and *Vesy*, see Andriiej Moskwin, “Recepcja twórczości Stanisława Przybyszewskiego przez rosyjską prasę modernistyczną: „Wiesy” i „Złote runo,”” *Białostocki Przegląd Kresowy* 6, (1998): 111-126.

<sup>43</sup> For example, in chronological order: Lesia Ukrainka [Larysa Kvitka-Kosach], “Zametki o noveishei pol'skoi literature,” *Zhizn'*, t. 1, (January 1901): 115-119; K. Bal'mont, “Tip Don Zhuana v mirovoi literature,” *Mir iskusstva*, no. 5-6 (1903): 269-292; M. Voloshin, “Zhurnal'noe obozrenie,” *Kievskie otkliki*, no. 61, 22. I. 1904, p. 2; Georgii Chulkov, “Svetleiat dali,” *Vesy*, no. 3 (1904): 13-16; A. Remizov, “Tovarishchestvo novoi dramy. Pis'mo iz Khersona,” *Vesy*, no. 4 (1904): 36-38; V. G. Korolenko, “S. Pshibyshevskii: *Homo Sapiens*,” *Russkoe bogatstvo*, no. 9 (1904): 85-91; K. Chukovskii, “Pshibyshevskii o simvole: (Pis'mo iz Odessy),” *Vesy*, no. 11 (1904): 33-37; Nina Petrovskaia, “Stanislav Pshibyshevskii, kniga chetvertaia. *Zaupokoinaia messa*. Perevod Semenova,” *Pereval*, no.1 (1906): 49-50; Valerii Briusov [V. P.], “Pshibyshevskii S. *Deti satany*. [Per. E. Tropovskago]. M., 1906,” *Vesy*, no. 6 (1906): 71-72; A. V. Lunacharskii, “Zametki filosofa. Eshche ob iskusstve i revoliutsii,” *Obrazovanie*, no. 12 (1906): 75-91; A. Amfiteatrov, “Homo sapiens,” *Kontury* (SPb, 1906), 129-140; A. Belyi, “Pshibyshevskii: Siluet,” *Chas*, no. 18, 2. IX. 1907, p. 2; Teffi [N. A. Buchinskaia], “Novye knigi: Pshibyshevskii St. *Sinagoga satany*. Izd. V. M. Sablina. Moskva 1909 g. Ts. 1 r.,” *Rech'*, no. 90, 13. IV. 1909, p. 3; [M. Kuzmin], “Teatry. Teatr K. N. Nezlobina. *Sneg Pshibyshevskogo*,” *Russkaia khudozhestvennaia letopis'*, no. 17 (1911): 266-267.

## Pre-set 1: Przybyszewski's evolving concept of the "soul"

In order to grasp just how Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkol'd understood and applied Przybyszewski's aesthetic views, especially his concept of the "soul," we must trace Przybyszewski's own development of that general concept during the first decade of his literary career. His evolving conception of the "soul" is obscure and has not been thoroughly investigated. Scholars usually discuss it tangentially, within the context of his famous concept of the "naked soul."<sup>44</sup> With his concept of the "naked soul," a synthesis of the natural sciences and metaphysics, Przybyszewski would attempt to transcend the laws of psychology and reconcile faith with science.<sup>45</sup> Although the limits of this dissertation prevent a full explication of his worldview, Przybyszewski's Catholic upbringing, his training in biology and medicine, as well as his interest in esoteric knowledge and the occult, all shape the background for our discussion.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> One of Przybyszewski's most direct statements on the "naked soul" can be found in his forward to the Lektor edition of *De profundis*. See Stanisław Przybyszewski, "Frontispice," *De profundis. Powieść* (Lwów-Warsaw: Lektor, 1922), 6. The most comprehensive scholarly discussion of that concept is Edward Boniecki, *Struktura „Nagiej duszy.” Studium o Stanisławie Przybyszewskim* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1993), 39ff. See also Kazimierz Wyka, "Naga dusza' i naturalizm," *Przegląd Współczesny*, no. 10 (186), 1937: 114-131.

<sup>45</sup> Boniecki, *op. cit.*, 107, 49.

<sup>46</sup> Recognizing this synthesis, Boniecki has written his monograph within that framework: he devotes one chapter to Przybyszewski's religious and Gnostic views and the next chapter to his views on the unconscious. While Boniecki is able to present a summary of his theories with the benefit of temporal distancing, we must confine our examination of Przybyszewski's views within a much narrower continuum, the period 1892-1902, when Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkol'd first became acquainted with his aesthetic views.

From the beginning, Przybyszewski associated his conception of the soul with creativity and art. His first characterization of the “soul” (*die Seele; dusza*, Pol.) occurs in the context of his explication of the psychology of the genius, in *Zur Psychologie des Individuums*.<sup>47</sup> Describing Chopin’s music, Przybyszewski explained:

Hier zum ersten Male hat der arrière-fond der Seele Ausdruck gefunden, ein bisher unbekanntes Leben, von dem das Bewußte der verschwindend kleine Teil ist, ein direkt zweites Leben, das sich nur reflexiv äußert, worin wir aber den Grund und die Ursache aller unserer Lebensäußerungen zu suchen haben....<sup>48</sup>

Here, for the first time, the soul’s innermost depth found expression; a life unknown until now, of which consciousness is only a very minute part; really, a second life which expresses itself only in reflexes; in which, however, we must search for the reason and cause of all our life experiences....

In this lengthy proclamation Przybyszewski identified “soul” as a part of “consciousness.” Yet the part of the soul that really concerned him is that which lies beyond that “very minute part” known to science. Several pages later Przybyszewski credited Nietzsche —an heir to Chopin, who Przybyszewski saw as “that most refined psychologist of the unconscious”—with clarifying our understanding of the

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<sup>47</sup> According to Boniecki, some of Przybyszewski’s views anticipate the early work of Freud. See Boniecki, *op. cit.*, 47. The first Russian translation of this work appeared in 1905. It has never been translated into English. Helsztyński translated the work into Polish in the late 1960s.

<sup>48</sup> Stanislaw Przybyszewski, “Zur Psychologie des Individuums I. Chopin und Nietzsche,” *Werke. Band 2. Zur Psychologie des Individuums. Erzählungen und Essays* (Paderborn: Igel Verlag, 1991), 109. Cited in Boniecki, *op. cit.*, 47. Cf. the Russian, Appendix I, text 1.48.

mysterious workings of the soul.<sup>49</sup> In this earliest conception, the soul shares qualities with instinct as an inborn, biological power.<sup>50</sup> According to Przybyszewski, Nietzsche conceived the soul as the “the collective name for all animals that man had been before he became himself,” alluding also to Nietzsche’s “will to power” as the unifying element between humankind and animal.<sup>51</sup> It is unclear which elements of Nietzsche’s concept Przybyszewski subsumed in his own definition of the soul, and which elements belong strictly to his conception of the “soul’s innermost depths,” that is, the “naked soul.”<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, in Przybyszewski’s vague appeal to Nietzsche, the soul represents a thinking, feeling, and desiring entity (*ein etwas*) within a person, but without material form. Although the soul is encased within the body, the soul controls its membranous casing. Moreover, the soul is not permanently confined, for at any moment it can shake off its mortal frame.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> “Chopin, der feinste Psychologe des Unbewußten.” Przybyszewski, “Zur Psychologie,” 112.

<sup>50</sup> Eile, *op. cit.*, 177. Eile recognizes that this concept will become more abstract in Przybyszewski’s later writings.

<sup>51</sup> “Der Ausdruck Seele ist für ihn [Nietzsche] ein Kollektivbegriff für die Seelen aller der Tiere, die er nach einander war, bevor er zum Menschen wurde, der Mensch vereinigt das Reptil und das Raubtier und den Wiederkäuer in sich. Und alle diese Tierseelen bekämpfen und paralysieren sich gegenseitig; es gibt aber ein Streben, in dem sich alle einig sind, ein großes biogenetisches Gesetz, dem sie alle gehorchen, und das ist der Wille zur macht.” Przybyszewski, “Zur Psychologie,” 116; cf. Roman Taborski, ed., *Stanisław Przybyszewski. Wybór pism* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1966), 28. Cited Eile, 177-178.

<sup>52</sup> For example, following Taborski’s discussion of *Zur Psychologie*, Eile cites this passage, but then continues on with his discussion of the “naked soul,” suggesting that the latter concept is similar both to “instinct, i.e. energy generated by sexual desire” and Freud’s notion of “libido.” He does not attempt to define “soul” as a separate concept. See Eile, *op. cit.*, 177.

<sup>53</sup> “erklärte er [Nietzsche] sich den Glauben an die Seele als ein etwas, das in dem Menschen sitzt, das denkt, fühlt und will, dem ein ausgedehntes, obwohl nicht

However, Przybyszewski did not discuss just how the soul would transform, and thus, liberate itself.<sup>54</sup>

Przybyszewski again explored the relationship of the soul to the mind in his 1893 novella, *Totenmesse* [Pol., Rus., *Requiem Aeternam*], but introduced a biological element in the controversial form of sexuality (*das Geschlecht*; *chuć*, Pol.), frequently understood as “lust” or “libido.”<sup>55</sup> Although Russian editions of this work did not appear until after the easing of censorship in 1905, it is important to place this work within the proper chronological context of Przybyszewski’s philosophical development. In *Totenmesse*, this “sexuality” is both the original state of existence

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materielles, ein einfaches absolutes Sein zukommt, das den Leib beherrscht und diese Hülle von sich ohne weiteres wegschütteln kann.” Przybyszewski, “Zur Psychologie,” 113.

<sup>54</sup> Boniecki believes that Przybyszewski, as a Catholic, could never fully abandon the Church’s dogma of the inseparability of soul and flesh: “*anima intellectiva est forma corporis*” or “*Nusquam anima sine carne est.*” Przybyszewski thus sought answers in the occult. Boniecki suggests that Przybyszewski’s “naked soul” is a further development of Carl du Prel’s concept of the “astral body.” See Boniecki, *op. cit.*, 40-42.

<sup>55</sup> Stanislaw Przybyszewski, *Totenmesse* (Berlin: W. Fontane, 1893). The novella has never been translated into English. Przybyszewski’s concept of “*das Geschlecht*,” as used in the novella, is difficult to translate. In the Polish edition, Przybyszewski translated this word as “*chuć*” (“lust, concupiscence”), which lacks the broader linguistic resonance that the German provides: e.g., “sex,” meaning gender (both in the physiological and linguistic sense); “generation,” “family,” or “lineage,” e.g., “*das Geschlecht der Hapsburger*,” or “*von altem Geschlecht*”; and “race,” e.g., “*das Geschlecht der Menschen*” (“mankind”), “*das Geschlecht der Götter*” (“the gods”). Stanisław Borzym suggests that, in its widest sense, “*das Geschlecht*” is analogous to Bergson’s *élan vital*, and envisions it as the “evolutionary force” (*napeł ewolucji*) which acts on history as well as on the human psyche. See Borzym, “Przybyszewski jako filozof,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 59, no. 1 (1968): 16. In order to avoid the negative connotations that the word “lust” usually carries, I have chosen to translate “*das Geschlecht*” as the neutral “sexuality,” which combines the notions of differentiated physical characteristics and the will to procreate. However, this term lacks Borzym’s sense of a neutral evolutionary force acting upon the psyche.

and the force of all creation.<sup>56</sup> After splitting itself into two sexes, sexuality creates mind as an instrument of perception. At first, the mind, through its connection to sexuality, is in close contact to it as the original state of existence. The soul is born as a result of the division of the mind into thousands of pieces, which occurs when sexuality seeks a greater intensity of sensory impressions.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, the mind loses its eternal nature.<sup>58</sup>

The soul, which in *Zur Psychologie* had been described only as “entity,” now takes on physiological characteristics in Przybyszewski’s description. The soul suckles, childlike, at the breast of sexuality. Sexuality, in turn, becomes the soul’s life-giving connection to the absolute, its umbilical cord, its instrument of perception, its “lens,” its “musical scale,” its “scope.”<sup>59</sup> Przybyszewski’s association of the soul with sexuality and the primeval urge to procreate would remain a constant, albeit sometimes implied, element in his theory of the naked soul throughout his life.

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<sup>56</sup> Przybyszewski’s novella begins with the notorious declaration: “Am Anfang war das Geschlecht. Nichts außer ihm –alles in ihm.” It continues, several lines later, with “Das Geschlecht is das ewig Schaffende, das Umgestaltend-Zerstörende.”

<sup>57</sup> Stanislaw Przybyszewski, “Totenmesse,” *Werke. Band 1. De profundis und andere Erzählungen* (Paderborn: Igel Verlag, 1990), 10-12. See Boniecki for a much more developed, albeit, psychological, interpretation of this work. In Boniecki’s Cartesian interpretation, which he derives from an essay Przybyszewski wrote in 1921, “Naokoło śmierci,” mind is equivalent to consciousness, and libido (sexuality), to the unconscious. Cf. Boniecki, *op. cit.*, 39, 51.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>59</sup> “Das Geschlecht liebte die Seele. An seiner hermaphroditischen Brust ließ es die Gehirnseele erstarken; es war für sie die Aorta, die von dem Herzen des Allseins ihr das Lebensblut zuführte; es war für sie die Nabelschnur, die sie mit der Allgebärmutter verband; es war der Linsenfokus, durch den die Seele sah, die Skala, in der sie die Welt als Ton, der Umfang, in welchem sie die höchste Lust, den höchste Schmerz perzipierte.” Przybyszewski, “Totenmesse,” 11.

Two years later, in the 1895 preface to his novella *De profundis*, Przybyszewski presented another definition of the soul. He now identified the soul simply as an entity that lies in stark opposition to the mind (*das Gehirn*; *mózg*, Pol.).<sup>60</sup> As he had written in *Zur Psychologie*, the soul still stands above the mind in a position of superiority. However, it is now described as an “unknown power endowed with strange abilities.” In contrast to the cosmology presented in *Totenmesse*, in which the soul appears almost as a coequal of the mind, here the soul is dominant. The soul has created the mind in order that it not be bothered with the “banality of life,” or, in stronger language, in order not to “prostitute itself.”<sup>61</sup> Przybyszewski would develop this concept of superiority, especially with respect to that artist who communicates his soul’s experiences to the world, more fully in *On the Paths of the Soul* [*Na drogach duszy*, 1900].

Przybyszewski’s 1897 essay on the Norwegian sculptor Gustav Vigeland (1869-1943), “*Auf den Wegen der Seele. Gustav Vigeland*,” clarified his conception of the mind-soul in terms of creativity.<sup>62</sup> Under the influence of the metaphoric language used in *Totenmesse*, the soul now became not just a formless entity, but a

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<sup>60</sup> “ich denke die Seele immer im schroffsten Gegensatz zum Gehirn. Das ist Alles.” Stanislaw Przybyszewski, “*Pro domo mea*,” *Werke. Band 1*, 154. This preface appeared in both the Skorpion and Sablin editions of this work beginning in 1905.

<sup>61</sup> “es noch etwas Anderes gebe außer dem dummen *Gehirn*, ein au delà vom Gehirn, eine unbekannte macht mit seltsamen Fähigkeiten begabt, nämlich: *die Seele – die Seele*, die Ekel empfand, in der fortwährenden Berührung mit der lächerlichen Banalität des Lebens zu stehen und sich das Gehirn geschaffen hatte, um sich nicht jeden Tag prostituieren zu müssen...” [italics and ellipses in original]. *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>62</sup> Stanislaw Przybyszewski, *Auf den Wegen der Seele* (Berlin: Kritik Verlag, 1897). Przybyszewski subsequently reworked parts of this essay after he moved to Kraków. A section appeared as part III of “Aforizmy i Praeludia,” in *Na drogach duszy* (L. Zwoliński i S-ka, 1900).

metaphysical “organ” in the body, with a designated physiological function. Its “strange abilities,” which Przybyszewski had vaguely ascribed to it in *De profundis*, now became more closely associated with the abilities to relate to the ideal world, to convey or interpret mystical experiences, and thereby, to create.<sup>63</sup> The parallels made here between creativity and the mystical experience, suggested by the mention of the stigmatic Augustinian nun Anna Katharina Emmerich (1774-1824), would resonate several years later in *On the Paths of the Soul*, as Przybyszewski equated art with religion and the artist with prophet and magus.<sup>64</sup>

Die Seele ist das Organ, das das Unendliche und das Raumlose begreift, das Organ in dem Himmel und Erde ineinander fließen, das Organ, mit dessen Hülfe eine Katharina Emmerich ein gänzlich ungebildetes Weib, mit peinlichster, fast archäologischer Genauigkeit die Stätte beschreibt, auf der Christus gelitten hat, und die Qualen des Kreuzigungstodes mit einer physiologischen Fachkenntnis schildert. Das ist das Organ der visionären Ekstase und der somnambulen clairvoyance, das Organ des höchsten Erethismus, in dem ein Rops seine Sataniques und ein Chopin seine *B-moll*-Sonate geschaffen hat.<sup>65</sup>

The soul is that organ which comprehends the infinite and boundless; the organ in which Heaven and Earth flow together; the organ, with the aid of which a

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<sup>63</sup> In this dissertation, the terms “the absolute,” the “the ideal,” “universal consciousness,” and “eternity/the eternal” are used interchangeably.

<sup>64</sup> Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 16.

<sup>65</sup> Stanislaw Przybyszewski, “Auf den Wegen der Seele. Gustav Vigeland,” *Werke. Band 6. Kritische und essayistische Schriften* (Paderborn: Igel Verlag, 1992), 17. Cf. the Polish variant of this paragraph, which omits the references to Emmerich in favor of other abstract, metaphoric language, emphasizing the creation of an absolute unity. See Appendix I, text 1.65.

Katharina Emmerich,<sup>66</sup> a completely uneducated woman, describes, with the most meticulous, almost archeological precision, the site where Christ suffered, and portrays the torments of the Crucifixion with the specialized knowledge of a physiologist. It is that organ of visionary ecstasy and somnambulant clairvoyance, the organ of greatest erethism,<sup>67</sup> in which a Rops<sup>68</sup> has created his *Sataniques* and Chopin his *Sonata in B minor*.

In “*Auf den Wegen der Seele*” Przybyszewski further delineated the differences between the mind and soul: the mind only perceives objects with respect to space and time; the soul does not. The mind is associated with the five senses, and, by association, with contemporary philosophical materialism, such as Socialism in politics and Naturalism in the arts. In contrast, the soul is associated with “the anxiety before the deep” and “an inward-directed view” that is endowed with “completely different sensory organs.”<sup>69</sup>

Przybyszewski reaffirmed his concept of the soul as that part of the indivisible, universal consciousness in his collection of essays, *On the Paths of the Soul*, which he published after moving to Kraków in 1898 and returning to Polish, his native tongue.<sup>70</sup> Our attention immediately turns to several comments that first

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<sup>66</sup> Anna Katharina Emmerich (1774-1824) was an Augustinian nun, stigmatic, and visionary from Westphalia. German poet Clemens Brentano recorded her visions from 1819 to 1824. Pope John Paul II beatified her in 2004.

<sup>67</sup> Erethism—“an unusual or excessive degree of irritability or stimulation in an organ or tissue,” *Random House College Dictionary*.

<sup>68</sup> Przybyszewski held Belgian artist Félicien Rops (1833-1898) in high regard, especially for his portrayal of woman as a cosmic power.

<sup>69</sup> Przybyszewski, “*Auf den Wegen der Seele*,” 18.

<sup>70</sup> Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy* (Kraków: L. Zwoliński i S-ka, 1900).

appeared in the short essay “For the New Art.”<sup>71</sup> The aphoristic notion, “The soul is the absolute; its most minute manifestation is the conscious self,” is a restatement of Przybyszewski’s synthesis of psychology and metaphysics, first evident in *Zur Psychologie*.<sup>72</sup>

In a much longer description of the soul, Przybyszewski temporarily shed the physiological metaphor of the soul as an “organ,” which he had used in the 1897 essay on Gustav Vigeland, in favor of the more abstract notion of a “force” (*potęga*). Using language reminiscent of Eastern, Neoplatonic, or Gnostic philosophies, Przybyszewski described this force as a reincarnating one that moves between the absolute and artist’s unconscious, acting as a lifeline of creative nourishment. Przybyszewski retained an echo of this maternal imagery in the phrase “[the soul] returns to the bosom of eternity” (*wraca z powrotem na łono wieczności*). As the soul grows more aware of the absolute, its corporeal host, the artist, is able to delve deeper into life’s mysteries. Przybyszewski called this special, enlightened artist the “genius”:

Zasadniczą postawą całej tak zwanej »nowej« sztuki, wszystkich prądów i kierunków w sztuce, jest zatem pojęcie duszy, jako potęgi osobistej, duszy kroczącej od jednej wieczności do drugiej, duszy, która raz poraz nieznaną potęgą zmuszona idzie na ziemię, wraca z powrotem na łono wieczności i znowu się ucieleśnia, bogatsza, silniejsza, więcej uświadomiona niż pierwszym razem, i tak bez końca, aż wreszcie dochodzi do świadomości całej swej potęgi, przenika najtajniejsze rzeczy, obejmuje najodleglejsze i

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<sup>71</sup> St. Przybyszewski, “O ‘nową’ sztuce,” *Życie*, no. 6 (1899); reworked as section II, “Aforyzmy i Praeludia,” *Na drogach duszy*, 18-24.

<sup>72</sup> “Dusza jest absolutem, a drobnuteńkim jej przejawem to świadome Ja.” *Ibid.*, 21.

najskrytsze związki, t. j. staje się geniuszem, t. j. odslania się w swoim absolutie, w całym przepychu swej »nagości«.<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, the concept of the soul as a particular force, [of] the soul, progressing from one eternity to another, [of] the soul, which treads upon the earth again and again, compelled by an unknown force, [which] returns to the bosom of eternity and again becomes flesh, more abundant, stronger, and more conscious than the first time; and thus until the end, until at last it reaches the consciousness of its full might; [which] penetrates the most mysterious things, embraces the furthestmost and most concealed connections, that is, it becomes the genius; that is, it unfolds itself in its absolute form, in the full splendor of its “nakedness” —this is the essential attitude of the entire, so-called “new” art, of all the currents and trends in art.

Przybyszewski was not ready to abandon the physiological metaphors entirely. He returned to the image of the organ once again, several pages later. As in his earlier cosmology presented in *Totenmesse* and restated in “*Auf den Wegen der Seele*,” Przybyszewski reiterated the soul’s essential distinction from the mind. The mind’s perception is limited by its five senses, in contrast, in the soul these senses combine in a synaesthetic unity, reflecting the absolute:

Dusza jest jedyna i niepodzielna, jej uświadomiona cząsteczka potrzebuje tych kilku biednych zmysłów, ale po za zmysłami tkwi jeden niepodzielny organ, w którym miliony zmysłów się przenikają, w którym każde zjawisko objawia się we wszystkich swych wartościach, objawia się jako jedność i absolut.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 18. Appendix I, text 1.73.

<sup>74</sup> Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 23. Appendix I, text 1.74. Cf. the same idea in “*Auf den Wegen der Seele*”: “Die Seele ist der Zustand, in dem das ganze millionenfach zerrissene Leben zu einer Einheit wird, die millionenfache Gleiderung zur einfachen Gestalt und Millionen von Jahrhunderten in einer Sekunde zusammenzuschmelzen.” Przybyszewski, “*Auf den Wegen der Seele*,” 18.

The soul is unique and indivisible, its conscious part requires several of those poor senses, but beyond these senses lies a single, indivisible organ, in which millions of senses intermingle, in which each phenomenon appears in all its qualities, it appears as a unity and the absolute.

In summary, when Komissarzhevskaja and Meierhold encountered Przybyszewski's works at the end of 1901 and the beginning of 1902, his conception of the soul at this early stage (1892-1902) shared a combination of psychological and metaphysical features. Without material form, the soul denotes the unconscious in any person and is therefore related to the *psyche* in the traditional sense. However, it is also a reincarnating force that remains in continual contact with the universal consciousness, the Absolute. By virtue of this ability, it is superior to the mind, whose perception of the world is limited by the five senses. In contrast, the soul's perception is unlimited. It is synaesthetic, beyond even the limits of space and time. As the soul reincarnates, it evolves, as does its host. Through its host, the soul is able to create, that is, to express the absolute artistically. Society subsequently recognizes that individual whose soul has evolved the furthest as a "genius." Finally, the strong element of sexuality, starkly evident in *Totenmesse* (1893), is generally lacking in Przybyszewski's general conception of the soul as presented in his other works of this period.

### **Pre-set 2: Przybyszewski and dramatic theory: the New Actor and the New Drama**

The historical reception of Przybyszewski in Russian theatre started to deepen and call forth creative responses with the publication of his theoretical works. In his

essay “On Drama and the Stage” (“O dramacie i scenie,” 1902 Poland; 1904 Russia), Przybyszewski divided drama into two periods, the “old” and the “new,” with the works of Ibsen creating a dividing line.<sup>75</sup> Whereas the dramatic conflict of the “old” drama was based on external events, such as fate or the desire for wealth, Przybyszewski believed that the dramatic conflict of the “new” drama would be focussed inward, toward the psychological “struggle of the individual with himself.”<sup>76</sup>

According to Przybyszewski, the stage was no longer the place of “jugglers and acrobats,” actors who affected pathos by means of broad and agile physical movements or affected vocal inflection, but a space within and upon which dramatists and actors could reveal “new horizons,” “new life perspectives,” and the hidden depths of the human soul.<sup>77</sup> By revealing the depths of the soul, the actor would become not only a performer who executed the author’s will through the dramatic

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<sup>75</sup> Stanislav Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” *PSS*, t. IV, 337. In this section the general discussion of Przybyszewski’s dramatic theories will reference this edition. Cf. the original serialized editions of this work, Stanisław Przybyszewski, “Kilka uwag o dramacie i scenie,” *Kurjer Teatralny*, nos. 1-3, and “Teatr a krytyka,” *Kurjer Teatralny*, nos. 24-30 (1902); S. Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” trans. V. S., *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 49 (5. XII. 1904): 869-878, and no. 50 (12. XII. 1904): 891-893. Cf. also the original complete Polish edition: Stanisław Przybyszewski, *O dramacie i scenie* (Warsaw: Księgarnia Naukowa, 1905).

<sup>76</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” 339. “Новая драма заключается в борьбе индивидуума с самим собою, т.-е с психическими категориями, которые по отношению к самым глубоким и сокровенным индивидуальным источникам, составляющим сущность самого индивидуума, так к нему относятся, как внешнее относится к внутреннему.”

<sup>77</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” 341.

text, but a co-author as well.<sup>78</sup> In order to do this, actors must learn to express emotions and impressions just as the spectators who were watching them.<sup>79</sup>

To some extent, Przybyszewski's attack on the actor's broad movements and empty declamation and his emphasis on the character's emotions represents a different perspective on this problem, which French director André Antoine would soon raise at the Théâtre Libre in Paris. Antoine would also oppose "that high-flown style, that everlasting curse of the arts," in an essay titled "Causerie sur la mise en scène," which appeared six months later, in spring 1903.<sup>80</sup> However, Antoine, who sought faithfulness in character depiction on what he called a "material and spiritual" level, would devote only a few paragraphs to the actor's art—specifically, on movement, i.e., the actor's external physicality, not emotions—but would provide no prescription to affect change.<sup>81</sup>

As Przybyszewski articulated it, "Absolute truth in the actor's craft—this is what contemporary drama demands."<sup>82</sup> However, the actor's goal was not to create this "absolute truth" through the exacting re-creation of material details or the observation of particular human activities, such as death, which was the hallmark of

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<sup>78</sup> Szczygielska, *op. cit.*, 36. Szczygielska contrasts the terms "wykonawca" (performer) and "współtworca" (co-creator).

<sup>79</sup> Pshibyshevskii, "O drame i stsene," 340.

<sup>80</sup> André Antoine, "Causerie sur la mise en scène." *La Revue de Paris* 10 (1. IV. 1903): 596-612; repr. as "Behind the Fourth Wall" trans. Joseph M. Bernstein, in Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, eds., *Directors on Directing: A Source Book for the Modern Theater* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1976), 89-102.

<sup>81</sup> Antoine, *op. cit.*, 100.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 343. "Абсолютной правды в игре актора – вот чего требует современная драма." Like Przybyszewski, Antoine believed the old style of acting was "opposed to truth and life." See Antoine, *op. cit.*, 100.

the naturalistic style. In order to achieve this “truth,” the actor’s chief talent, Przybyszewski believed, must be “intelligence” (*inteligencja*, Pol.). This intelligence, as Komissarzhevskaja rightly understood later in 1909, was based not only on rationality, but on the actor’s ability, by means of “that mysterious feeling,” “to penetrate the author’s designs“ and “to embody” a given character.<sup>83</sup> While Przybyszewski did not define “that mysterious feeling” directly, it seems related to “clairvoyance” (*dar iasnovideniia*), an ability which he also deemed an important theatrical skill for the actor.<sup>84</sup>

Przybyszewski’s call for “intelligence” bears only a slight resemblance to the unnamed quality which allowed Antoine’s actors to “know” the importance of

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 341. “Современный актер должен удовлетворять одному главному условию, и условие это—интеллигентность, но, конечно, чисто специфическая интеллигентность на почве того таинственного чувства, при помощи которого он может воплощаться в данную индивидуальность.” See Appendix I, text 1.83. Both Russian translations of this essay (in *Teatr i iskusstvo* and *PSS*) render the original Polish word “*inteligencja*” (“intelligence, intellect”), not by “*um*” or “*intellekt*,” but by the Russian word “*intelligentnost*” (“intelligence, intellect” or “cultivation”) suggesting a mental power that can be obtained through education and cultural development. This may be partially true, but Przybyszewski balances this demand with the need for clairvoyance. The way in which Russian translators and readers understood Przybyszewski’s call for “intelligence” must also be considered within the contemporary context of A. P. Lenskii’s call, at the First All-Russian Congress of Theatrical Workers (*Pervyi vsrossiiskii s'ezd stsenicheskikh deiatelei*) in March 1897, for actors and other people active in theatre to become more educated in their chosen field of endeavor and cease reliance on presumed “talent” alone. Komissarzhevskaja, resting in Tambov guberniia at this time, did not attend this conference, but Meierkhol'd, who was living in Moscow at the time, did. See Nikolai Volkov, *Meierkhol'd, Tom 1. 1874-1908* (Moscow-Leningrad: Academia, 1929), 76-78; Rybakova, *ibid.*, 88.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 344. Cf. “O dramacie i scenie”: “sztuka aktorska jest par excellence wizjonerską. *Być aktorem-artystą znaczy posiadać możność miewanie wizji.*” (15) Emphasis in original.

physical movement.<sup>85</sup> Antoine would imply that this knowledge could come from years of training.<sup>86</sup> In contrast, Przybyszewski's identification of the three essential characteristics of the new actor—intelligence, clairvoyance, and simplicity and truth—are all based on the ability to break with conventions and the traditions taught in schools.<sup>87</sup>

While some critics may wish to equate the actor's "mysterious," clairvoyant ability to create a character with "intuition," it is important to consider the metaphysical aspects of the interaction between the actor and the playwright. In *On the Paths of the Soul* Przybyszewski had declared that art was metaphysical, or for some, a form of mysticism.<sup>88</sup> In his essay on drama Przybyszewski expressly stated that the actor's goal was to cease being himself, and embody the character he is portraying.<sup>89</sup> Here Przybyszewski purposefully used the Polish verb *wcielać się* ("to take shape; to personify") to describe the action by which an actor "becomes" a

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<sup>85</sup> "These actors know:" Antoine, *op. cit.*, 100.

<sup>86</sup> "The best of our acting personnel... are recruited from among actors who have risen in the ranks. They have developed themselves, by contact with audiences and in the serious work of laborious rehearsals." *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>87</sup> Pshibyshevskii, "O drame i stsene," 344-345. I refer here to "intelligence" in the original Polish sense of "inteligencja," not the Russian mistranslation.

<sup>88</sup> "Sztuka w naszym pojęciu jest metafizyczną, ..., a są jeszcze ludzie, dla których to jest mistyką" Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 17. Cf. his later essay on Polish culture, *By Way of the Polish Soul [Szlakiem duszy polskiej]*: "Istota sztuka jest w treści swojej metafizyczną – głąb wewnętrzna, nieskończoność, ukryta na dnie duszy jest,...." Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Szlakiem duszy polskiej* (Poznań: Nakładem Ostoji Spółki Wydawniczej, 1917), 83. Przybyszewski is speaking specifically about the art of Zenon Przemyski here; in form, Przybyszewski adds, "true art" is symbolic.

<sup>89</sup> Pshibyshevskii, "O drame i stsene," 341.

character.<sup>90</sup> Its meaning is closely related to that of its non-reflexive form, *wcielać*, meaning “to merge; to embody; to incarnate.” Given that art, as Przybyszewski had expressed in “Aphorisms and Preludes,” the first section of *On the Paths of the Soul*, was a “cosmic, metaphysical force” through which “the absolute and eternal” is made known, and that the actor’s obligation is to express that “absolute,” the actor as a *creating* artist thus becomes a conduit for the “cosmic force” of art upon the stage.<sup>91</sup>

Furthermore, Przybyszewski claimed that words are incapable of expressing the entire depth of the soul or mystical reality within, i.e., the “absolute,” and proposed that the soul could be revealed with the aid of the “reproduction and disclosure of emotions, thoughts, impressions, dreams, [and] visions *simultaneously*, just as they make themselves felt in the soul, without logical associations, in all their sudden leaps and combinations.”<sup>92</sup> Therefore, this disclosure of the soul through

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. Przybyszewski, “O dramacie,” 11. “aktor...mógł przestać przez jakiś czas być sobą samym, a mógł się stać tą osobą, w którą się wcielić zapagnie.”

<sup>91</sup> For the statement on art as a cosmic force, see Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 16.

<sup>92</sup> “Za pomocą nie zmysłowego, ale uczuciowego kojarzenia wrażeń roztworzyć pragniemy nowe widnokreśli, odsłonić rzeczy tajne i dotychczas w słowa nieujęte, Metoda, jaką się na razie posługujemy, to oddawanie i odtwarzanie uczuć, myśli, wrażeń, snów, wizyj, b e z p o ś r e d n i o j a się w duszy przejawiają, bez logicznych związków, we wszystkich ich gwałtownych przeskokach i skojarzeniach.” Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 23-24. Cf. the Kursinskii translation in Appendix I, text 1.92, or Stanislav Pshibyshevskii, “Na putiakh dushi,” trans. V. Peremilovskii, *Mir iskusstva*, no. 5/6 (1902): 102. The Russian critic Faddeev-Bobyl' was aware of the internal chaos of the soul which Przybyszewski expected the artist to re-create on stage, and its similarity to what many today would call “deviant behavior”: “In Przybyszewski’s work there is always pathology; it is not the pathological condition of the moment, but an infinite series of moments in the past and future, terrible and imperative in their extreme realness, the most profound realness of life, that do not give themselves to tangible analysis, but only to emotion.” See N. Faddeev-Bobyl',

emotional experience and other mental states is the true, unstated goal of the actor. Contemporary drama, Przybyszewski believed, would permit actors to accomplish this goal by awakening “the memories of those minutes that [they] have experienced, and if they are not exactly those [they have experienced], then, in any case, [they are] very similar.”<sup>93</sup> In some ways, Przybyszewski’s notion that an actor should refer to “experienced memories” which echo in the self and can be then simulated on stage corresponds and anticipates Stanislavskii’s concept of “emotion memory,” which he articulated in *An Actor Prepares*.<sup>94</sup>

In his essay, “On Drama and the Stage,” Przybyszewski provides a prescription, or “creative process” (*proces twórczy*, Pol.; *tvorcheskii protsess*, Rus.) for the actor to achieve his goal of acting successfully in the post-Ibsen “new drama.” In this process, the actor must read the script, realizing it is only a structure within which he must completely explore motivations and interrelations. Przybyszewski referred to the printed text as a “stenogram” (*stenogram*, Pol.) or form of shorthand, within which the actor was to develop his/her character, using the authorial remarks

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“Meterlink i Pshibyshevskii,” in *Spolokhi. Al'manakh. kn. 3* (Moscow: Izd. Stozhary, 1908), 170.

<sup>93</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” *PSS*, t. IV, 342. “ведь почти каждая современная драма найдет отзвук в душе актера и разбудит в ней воспоминания тех минут, которые он пережил, а если и не совсем тех, то во всяком случае очень похожих.” See Appendix I, text 1.93.

<sup>94</sup> “Just as your visual memory can reconstruct an inner image of some forgotten thing, place or person, your emotion memory can bring back feelings you have already experienced.... Sometimes the emotions are as strong as ever, sometimes weaker, sometimes the same strong feelings will come back but in a somewhat different guise.” See Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hargood (NY: Theatre Arts Books, 1936), 158.

as guides for acting choices, not as required gestures or movements.<sup>95</sup> While the word “stenogram,” related to “stenography,” implies a verbatim transcript, this is not what Przybyszewski had in mind. On the contrary, Przybyszewski’s advice to the progressive dramatist of the new art is to keep authorial remarks “to a minimum,” allowing the actor the freedom to be a true artist.<sup>96</sup> With respect to the actor’s craft, Przybyszewski permits the skilled performer to change both text and gesture to suit his/her needs. “Walking hand-in-hand,” Przybyszewski wrote, the dramatist and performer would thus lead a renaissance in the dramatic art.<sup>97</sup>

When the actor works within this outline, each scene—and by extension—the entire drama becomes a “living picture.”<sup>98</sup> While this process may seem obvious or naïve to the contemporary actor today, several of its steps were innovations at the time:

Творческий процесс у артиста-актера я представляю себе так: актер должен прежде всего прочесть всю драму и читать ее до тех пор, пока он до того не охватит ее в целостности, что то, что для него было прежде мертвой буквой, станет перед его глазами живой картиной, пока он не увидит вокруг себя действующих лиц, пока он с полной интенсивностью не поймет всех самых мельчайших

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<sup>95</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” *PSS*, t. IV, 345.

<sup>96</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” *PSS*, t. IV, 345. “Автор, который с любовью следит за развитием сценического искусства, который от души радуется тому, что прежний жонглер и комедиант превращается в настоящего артиста-творца, должен предоставлять актеру полнейшую свободу, свои указания сокращать до minimum’a, а драму свою считать чем-то в роде стенограммы...”

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 346. Although Przybyszewski uses the term “aktor-artysta” (Pol.) / “akter-artista” (Rus.) here, he clearly grants this artistic freedom to the skilled performer or “creative artist” (“twórczy artysta” (Pol.) / “artista-tvorets” (Rus.). Cf. Przybyszewski, “O dramacie i scenie,” 16-17.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

подробностей драмы. В некоторой степени он становится всеми действующими лицами сразу, и как галлюцинации, перед его глазами встает одна сцена за другой. Только теперь он берет в руки свою собственную роль.<sup>99</sup>

I imagine the performer-actor's creative process thus: the actor must first of all read through the entire drama and read it until s/he grasps it in its entirety; so that what previously had been only 'dead letters' becomes a *tableau vivant* before his eyes.<sup>100</sup> [S/He sees] the characters around him [and] accepts with complete intensity the most minute details of the drama. S/He immediately becomes all the characters to some degree, and one scene after another rises before his eyes like hallucinations. Only now can s/he take up her/his own role.

First, Przybyszewski expected the true actor, as a “*creative* (or *creating*) artist” (*twórczy-artysta*, Pol.; *artist-tvoretz*, Rus.) to read the entire script, not just his own role. The idea of an actor reading an entire script was still new at this time, when actors were usually only provided a “side,” or a booklet containing one’s own lines and cues.

The second step in the actor’s creative process is a natural outgrowth of the first. Having read the script, Przybyszewski believed that the actor would be able to understand the minute details of each character’s interactions with every other character. In the context of Przybyszewskian aesthetics, this understanding of the web of character interactions, together with a detailed knowledge of a character’s psychology, help to create a “higher reality” which Przybyszewski believes is a

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 343-344. See Appendix I, 1.99.

<sup>100</sup> Przybyszewski’s original phrase for this phenomenon is “*naoczna wizja*,” lit. “a vision seen with one’s own eyes.” Cf. “*naoczny świadek*” or “eye-witness.” The *tableau vivant* is an inanimate work of art, an object, come to life, as in a vision.

reflection of the absolute, i.e. soul. Furthermore, a character in the new drama should not be defined by a single strong emotion such as love, hatred, revenge, or despair, as had been done previously in the tradition of Greek tragedy. Rather, the creative artist or director should understand each character as a combination of chaotic, internal emotions and motivations, a concept which Przybyszewski had presented earlier in the second section of *On the Paths of the Soul*.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, Przybyszewski's focus is on the internal psychological details of the character, not the external trappings of scenic design and physical characterization that had become the hallmarks of naturalist drama.<sup>102</sup> By understanding the chaotic, ever-changing psychology of each character Przybyszewski believed that the actor would "become the center of the drama, [and] enter into certain relationships with other characters," eventually becoming one with the character played, as if the actor had been reincarnated.<sup>103</sup>

The *tableau vivant*, or "living picture," which Przybyszewski envisions upon the stage has little to do with the popular late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century tradition of dramatic *natur-mort* in which costumed figures posed with props in front of painted scenery in an attempt to recreate famous historical scenes or paintings. That tradition matured even in the first productions of the Moscow Art Theatre. As critic Iurii Beliaev wrote in his review of the 1899 MKhT production of *Tsar Fedor*, "Each act in this theatre begins with a *tableau vivant* (*zhivaia kartina*).

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<sup>101</sup> Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 23-24; Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 21-22.

<sup>102</sup> Pshibyshevskii, "O drame i stsene," *PSS*, t. IV, 344.

<sup>103</sup> Pshibyshevskii, "O drame i stsene," *PSS*, t. IV, 344. "Он становится центром всей драмы, вступает в известные отношения с другими лицами, перевоплощается, становится тем, кого он играет."

When the curtain is still down, the footlights suddenly blaze, then go out, together with all the lighting in the hall. The curtains open wide, revealing behind them a darkened space. Then the footlights and back reflectors blaze up again, and the *tableau vivant* lies before the spectator.”<sup>104</sup>

In contrast to the Stanislavskian still life recreated for stage effect, Przybyszewski’s new drama is a series of *tableaux vivants* created by the recognized inter-relationships of characters, each played by a creative artist channeling the cosmic force of art.<sup>105</sup> In this way the performance becomes a physical re-creation of the metaphysical, a representation of the transcendent and universal plane within and upon the worldly plane, a living organism through which flows the eternal and absolute. Therefore, it is essentially a symbolic-mystical redefinition and direct assault upon the mimetic-naturalist vision of stage production which had reigned at the Moscow Art Theatre since its inception. It is natural, then, that Przybyszewski should suggest that the creative artist would view these *tableaux* as “hallucinations.” In comparing the performance act to an altered state of consciousness, Przybyszewski further equated stage reality with that higher reality which the artist can reach only

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<sup>104</sup> “Каждое действие в этом театре начинается живой картиной. Когда еще занавес спущен, рампа вдруг вспыхивает, затем снова гаснет и с нею гаснет все освещение в зале. Занавес распахивается, открывая за собою темное пространство. Затем снова вспыхивают рампа и боковые рефлексоры и перед зрителем живая картина.” Volkov, *op. cit.*, 126-127.

<sup>105</sup> According to Rogacki, Przybyszewski had begun to develop his idea of art as an unseen force which influences and penetrates the material world even at the time of his introductory remarks to a performance of Maeterlinck’s *Interieur*, titled “Mysticism and Maeterlinck” (“*Mistyka a Maeterlinck*”), read in Kraków in February 1899. See Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 99-100.

through those altered states and thus extends his concept of artist and genius (*das Individuum*) to include that of the actor.<sup>106</sup>

“Intelligence” was not the only quality which Przybyszewski asserted was necessary in the new artist. “To be an actor means to possess the gift of clairvoyance,” he writes.<sup>107</sup> The creative artist also needed sincerity, simplicity, and truth, as well as the courage to break with tradition and convention.<sup>108</sup> Armed with these traits, the actor, in partnership with the dramatist, could transform the reality

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<sup>106</sup> This shift in consciousness is also signalled linguistically by Przybyszewski’s differentiation in terminology between the the simple “aktor” (actor) and the enlightened “artysta-aktor” (actor as creative artist).

<sup>107</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” 344. “Быть актером значит обладать даром ясновидения.” Arkadii Zonov, possibly echoing Przybyszewski, attributed “some kind of prophetic gift of clairvoyance,” together with “a most profound knowledge of the human soul” to Komissarzhevskaiia, and gave the epithet “actor of intellect” to the new type of actor that Komissarzhevskaiia envisioned training at her future “university of the stage” (*stsenicheskii universitet*) before her death. See A. P. Zonov, “Vospominaniia o kontsa,” in *Alkonost. Sbornik, kn. 1* (SPb: Izd. Peredvizhnogo teatra P. P. Gaideburova i N. F. Skarskoi, 1911), 111, 116.

<sup>108</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” 344-345. Przybyszewski places special emphasis on the need for courage, and optimistically senses it as a “distinguishing characteristic” of the new generation of actors and creative people “in the fullest sense of the word.” According to Zonov, Komissarzhevskaiia’s new actor would also possess “bold impulses toward the new” that would smash against the inertia of performers who have forgotten the spirit and only observe life in photographic detail. See Zonov, *op. cit.*, 115. Director, dramatist, and theorist Nikolai Evreinov (1879-1953), who would direct Komissarzhevskaiia’s production of *Salome*, held these comments about the creative artist in very high regard. He considered Przybyszewski one of the great dramatic theorists of the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. See N. N. Evreinov, *Pro scena sua. Rezhissura. Litsedei. Posledniia problemy teatra* (St. Petersburg: Kn-vo “Promotei” N. N. Mikhailova, 19xx), 133. Cf. also Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 208. Evreinov’s comments originally appeared in his essay “Griadushchii litsidei,” *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 8 (1909): 152.

represented on the stage into a “real fact” (*fakt realnyi*). Without them, the actor upon the stage was only a performing monkey.<sup>109</sup>

Not only did the actor need intelligence, but so did the spectator. Just as the unnamed Kraków critic had suggested that Przybyszewski’s dramas forced knowledgeable audience members to reconstruct the human soul from the action on stage, Przybyszewski himself articulated a similar notion in *On Drama and the Stage*. Przybyszewski expected his spectator, the “intelligent viewer” (*inteligentny widz*), to find creative pleasure in reconstructing the drama’s “horizons of the past and future.”<sup>110</sup> These horizons, as Przybyszewski explained, were the events that had taken place before the drama begins, and the events which take place after its conclusion.<sup>111</sup> By placing the burden of the reconstruction of the backstory (Przybyszewski’s “horizon of the past”) on the spectator, Przybyszewski could change the dramatic structure substantially. The action could now begin *in medias res*, without a full act of exposition, a tradition of the well-made play.

Finally, Przybyszewski expected his clairvoyant, sincere actor to be able to portray the so-called “character-symbol.”<sup>112</sup> The “character-symbol” really serves as

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<sup>109</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” 344. “Чтобы добиться этого, актер не должен прибегать ко всевозможным техническим тонкостям и виртуозной обработке своей игры до мельчайших ее подробностей—все это будет только мешать публике сосредоточиться, --напротив, усиливать впечатление реальности он может только абсолютной искренностью, простотой и правдой. / Интеллигентность, дар ясновидения, искренность и правда—вот три принципиальные условия, без которых актер—ничто, или самое большее только—обезьяна.”

<sup>110</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” 351; Przybyszewski, “O dramacie,” 23.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 351. Cf. Szczygielska, *op. cit.*, 16-17.

<sup>112</sup> See the brief discussion in Szczygielska, *op. cit.*, 17-18; Szwede, *op. cit.*, 57.

the physical and psychological center of the *tableau vivant*. This dramatic device originated in Przybyszewski's beliefs that dramatic conflict radiated from the conflict happening within a character's own soul, and that this invigorated symbol must be created from the character, not the character from the symbol. Consequently, a character created in this manner would not represent simple universal concepts such as "death," as in the early symbolist works of Maeterlinck, but different sides of character's self. In Przybyszewski's dramas, dialogues would replace the countless monologues and scenes created just for character exposition. In theory, a protagonist, through dialogues, would actually be conversing or arguing with different facets of his/her own personality. In this way, the dramatist would be able better to express the metaphysical significance of a work and its connection to the mysterious, universal "tragedy of all people, of all generations," just as the entire sky can be "embodied in one drop" [of water].<sup>113</sup>

### **Pre-set 3: Briusov's "An Unnecessary Truth": A Russian attack on naturalism**

Long considered a major manifesto on Russian theatre, Valerii Briusov's essay, "An Unnecessary Truth," appeared on the pages of *Mir iskusstva* in April 1902.<sup>114</sup> Therefore, it postdates Przybyszewski's German-language essays and the

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<sup>113</sup> Pshibyshevskii, "O drame i stsene," 357. "Если же он хочет показать более глубокое, если можно так выразиться – метафизическое значение какой-нибудь трагедии, связь ее с таинственной трагедией всех людей, всех поколений, если он хочет показать, как в этой одной капле воплотилось все небо, то без символа он обойтись не может."

<sup>114</sup> Valerii Briusov, "Nenuzhnaia Pravda (Po povodu Moskovskogo Khudozhestvennogo teatra)," *Mir iskusstva*, no. 4 (1902), repr. in Valerii Briusov, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh, T. 2. Stat'i. Retsenzii 1893-1924. Iz knigi 'Dalekie i blizkie'*. *Miscellanea* (Moscow: Khudozhevstvennaia literatura, 1987), 56-67. An English

Russian publication of *Aphorisms and Preludes*, but predates both the Polish and Russian publications of *On Drama and the Stage*. Although the tone of Przybyszewski's and Briusov's essays is similar, there are major differences in emphasis and goals.<sup>115</sup> Briusov divided his essay into two sections, the first being a general philosophical consideration of the proper content, form, and material of art, and the second, being a focused attack on the current trends in staging at the Moscow Art Theatre. Although he wrote of the "new" and "old" art, he provided no definition, maintaining only that the Moscow Art Theatre appealed to both "supporters of the new art and defenders of the old."<sup>116</sup>

Like Przybyszewski before him, Briusov believed the artist's (*khudozhnik*) goal was to "illuminate his own soul" in the creative act, thereby reflecting his emotions and outlook on life.<sup>117</sup> Briusov's main emphasis, however, was not on ways the actor could express that soul, but the means of that expression, the physical, tangible representation of the soul on the "external world" of the stage.<sup>118</sup> In

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translation of a later (1908) version appears as "Realism and Convention on the Stage," in Laurence Senelick, *Russian Dramatic Theory from Pushkin to the Symbolists: An Anthology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 171-182.

<sup>115</sup> These two essays are worthy of a more in-depth comparison than can be attempted here; special attention should be made of thematic similarities between Briusov's essay and *Aphorisms and Preludes*, which preceded it.

<sup>116</sup> Briusov, *op. cit.*, 61.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 56. "Художник в творчестве озаряет свою собственную душу,— в этом наслаждение творчеством." "Предмет искусства — душа художника, его чувствование, его воззрение."

<sup>118</sup> Briusov, *op. cit.*, 58. "Внешний мир — только пособие, которым пользуется художник, чтобы дать осязательность своим мечтам."

Briusov's view, the sole purpose of theatre was "to help the actor reveal his/her soul before the audience."<sup>119</sup>

The Moscow Art Theatre's attempt at recreating reality, Briusov felt, was an impossible goal, because the audience would never accept its theatrical devices. The stage was inherently theatrical, or non-representational (*uslovna*).<sup>120</sup> Briusov's rejection of naturalist devices coincided with Przybyszewski's call for greater simplicity of setting. It was necessary for the dramatist to reject the urge to "copy life." However, Briusov's prescription—a return to the obvious ("conscious") theatricality of Greek theatre, with its masks and single set design, was alien to Przybyszewski's modern sensibilities.<sup>121</sup>

### **Cue 1: The established State theatre and the rise of private theatres**

The first performances of Przybyszewski's works occurred not in the Imperial theatres, but in a private one. These theatres were a new institution in Russia; they did not even exist until Alexander III ended the Imperial monopoly on theaters in 1882. The major drama schools, where students such as Komissarzhevskaja studied, were also associated with the Imperial Theatres. Thus, one cannot speak of the development of theater in Russia, both with regard to practice and aesthetics, without focusing the discussion on the repertoire, production values, and acting styles found at the five state institutions: the Malyi (drama) and Bol'shoi (opera, ballet) theatres in Moscow and the Aleksandrinskii (drama), Mariinskii (opera, ballet), and

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 61. "помочь актеру раскрыть свою душу перед зрителями – вот единственно назначение театра."

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

Mikhailovskii (touring) theatres in St. Petersburg.<sup>122</sup> For a short time a sixth theatre existed in Moscow—the Novyi—situated opposite the Malyi and adjacent to the Bol'shoi. This is the theatre where Przybyszewski's *For Happiness* eventually premiered in January 1906.<sup>123</sup>

When *For Happiness* finally premiered, that event represented a certain level of official acceptance of Przybyszewski's works beyond the level signified by the censor's stamp of approval, either for publication or stage production. This official acceptance is significant because the Imperial Theatres—as their moniker suggests—were, in fact, operated as part of the Court, under the aegis of the Court Ministry, by a directorate with offices in both Moscow and St. Petersburg, and their administrators were bureaucrats.<sup>124</sup> The Directorate held virtual control over the activities of the Imperial theatres—from the signing of the performer's contract, the designation of type of role, or "*emploi*," to be played by a performer (*artist*) such as Komissarzhevskaiia, the selection of venue (whether the artist would appear in

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<sup>122</sup> Arkady Ostrovsky, "Imperial and private theatres, 1882-1905," in *A History of Russian Theatre*, Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 218. The focus of this dissertation on drama itself will naturally limit commentary to issues surrounding productions at the Aleksandrinskii and Malyi theaters.

<sup>123</sup> See Appendix II. The Novyi theatre was ultimately unsuccessful and closed in 1907, after only a nine-year period of existence. See Murray Frame, "Censorship and Control in the Russian Imperial Theatres during the 1905 Revolution and Its Aftermath," *Revolutionary Russia* 7, no. 2 (December 1994): 165.

<sup>124</sup> Frame, *op. cit.*, 165.

Moscow or St. Petersburg), to the scheduling of rehearsals, and finally, the choice of repertoire.<sup>125</sup>

This choice of repertoire was conservative and primarily based on the classics—both Russian and foreign. Thus audiences in the capitals could expect to view works by Shakespeare, Molière, and Schiller, as well as Fonvizin, Griboedov, and Gogol'.<sup>126</sup> This foundation of basic repertoire from the past precluded any in-depth discussion on the Imperial stage of changing social conditions—despite the fact that during the last decade of the nineteenth century the empire was becoming increasingly urbanized, industrialized, and educated.<sup>127</sup> Yet these changing mores were exactly the subject of Przybyszewski's works. The seriousness of Przybyszewski's dramas was also in conflict with light-hearted subject matter of the repertoire that proliferated at the Imperial Theatres. This was due to the marked tendency for the theaters, both in the capitals and provinces, to rely on works in popular genres—vaudevilles, for example—and works by the “house” dramatists, many of whom are forgotten today.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Frame, *ibid.*, 166-167. A copy of the new 1903 Imperial contract was published in *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 4 (1903): 101-108.

<sup>126</sup> B. V. Varneke, *History of the Russian Theatre: Seventeenth Through Nineteenth Century*, trans. Boris Brasol, rev. and ed. Belle Martin (1951; fasc. ed., New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1971), 375, 381.

<sup>127</sup> Varneke, *op. cit.*, 374.

<sup>128</sup> Marc Slonim, *Russian Theater: From the Empire to the Soviets* (Cleveland & New York: World Publishing Co., 1961), 83. For example, almost 50 percent (607 out of 1227) of the works produced at the Aleksandrinskii and Malyi Theaters during the period 1862-1881 were translations or adaptations of foreign works. Among the remaining Russian works, 80 percent (500) of these were vaudevilles or other works by third-rate writers. Other productions included the “classics” and works by Aleksandr Ostrovskii (1823-1886), Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826-1889) and

The late premieres of Przybyszewski's plays on the Imperial stages illustrate how slow and conservative the Imperial system could be in reacting to the theatrical marketplace. It was not until the 1905-1906 season, well after premieres by Polish touring companies and those of Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd, that the Imperial Theatre's Moscow Literary Committee, headed by N. I. Storozhenko, selected two of Przybyszewski's plays for production on the Imperial stage. *For Happiness* opened 11 January 1906, while *The Golden Fleece* opened the following season, on 3 October 1906.<sup>129</sup> The former work had premiered in a St. Petersburg production by the Polish entrepreneur Bolesławski three years earlier (2 February 1903) under Przybyszewski's personal supervision, while the latter had premiered at a St. Petersburg private theatre almost exactly five years earlier (10 October 1901).

These premieres also took place more than two years after V. A. Teliakovskii (1860-1924), the Director of the Imperial Theatres from 1901-1917, personally attended a performance of *The Golden Fleece* on 1 February 1903 at the Imperial School of Dramatic Arts in St. Petersburg, where students performed the play as one

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Nikolai Leskov (1831-1895). See Cynthia Marsh, "Realism in the Russian Theatre, 1850-1882" in Leach and Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 162.

<sup>129</sup> The Novyi used Aleksei Remizov's translation of *For Happiness*; S. D. Romanovskii-Roman'ko and M. A. Veikone translated *The Golden Fleece*. The 1905-1906 Moscow committee included Storozhenko and Prince A. I. Sumbatov-Iuzhin, who was a playwright himself. The committee selected 16 plays, the most noteworthy being a translation of Ibsen's *The League of Youth*. The 1906-1907 Petersburg committee selected both Przybyszewski's *Vechnaia skazka* [*The Eternal Tale*] and Dagny Juel Przybyszewska's one-act *Kogda solntse zachodit* [*When the Sun Sets*] for future production, but neither play was staged. See P. P. Gnedich, ed., *Ezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov, sezon 1905-1906 gg. Vypusk XVI* (SPb: Izd. Direktsii Imperatorskikh Teatrov, 19xx), 81-82, 176, and *Ezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov, sezon 1906-1907 gg. Vypusk XVII* (SPb: Izd. Direktsii Imperatorskikh Teatrov, 19xx), 173, (part II) 81.

of their examination pieces. Teliakovskii noted in a diary entry the following day that Przybyszewski's drama might be acceptable for the Imperial stage.<sup>130</sup> While Teliakovskii could write privately that *The Golden Fleece* might be acceptable for the state theatres, Aleksandr Kugel', the reviewer of *Teatr i iskusstvo* [*Theatre and Art*] was quite adamant in his public opinion that this work was not acceptable for such scholastic examinations, because it did not reflect life truthfully. He explained:

*The Golden Fleece* is the play of a talented author, but it is confused, vague, far from our life, [and] uncharacteristic for the imitation of nature, which is the essence of the dramatic, as of every, art. It is definitely unfit as a scholastic exercise.<sup>131</sup>

The early performances of Przybyszewski's works, which explored the broad themes of love and death, guilt and retribution within the context of the changing sexual mores of the fin-de-siècle, created controversy in the world of the state theatres. It was easier to deny that the problems that Przybyszewski discussed did not exist in contemporary society, and this early attack on a semi-public performance probably hindered the play's early acceptance by the Literary Committee of the Imperial Theatres.

The end of the Imperial theatrical monopoly in 1882, as well as the visits of the Duke of Meiningen's company in 1885 and 1890, both mark the beginnings of

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<sup>130</sup> V. A. Teliakovskii, *Dnevniky direktora imperatorskikh teatrov. 1901-1903* (Moskva: Izd-vo "Artist-Rezhisser-Teatr," 2002), 424.

<sup>131</sup> "«Золотое руно»-- это пьеса талантливого автора, но она смутна, неопределенна, далека от нашей жизни, нехарактерна для подражания натуре, которое и есть сущность драматического, как и всякого, искусства, и решительно непригодна, как школьное упражнение." Homo novus [Aleksandr Kugel'], "Uchenicheskii spektakl'," *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 11 (9. III. 1903): 241.

theatrical evolution in Russia. They therefore also mark a point of origin for a discussion of Przybyszewski's later impact during the early twentieth century. In the years after 1882, private theaters became a major constituent of the institutional landscape.<sup>132</sup> Although the audiences for these theater companies may have been smaller due to the fixed size of the house, the sheer number of such companies and their distribution over a larger geographical area made them an integral, if not influential, agent in the dissemination of culture throughout the Empire. Finally, it is in this private realm, rather than the public, that the first known Russian performance of a Przybyszewski play occurred—at E. A. Shabel'skaia's theatre in St. Petersburg in October 1901.<sup>133</sup> The establishment of private theatres created venues and organizations not directly dependent on the traditions and customs of the Imperial stages. The effect of this change could be seen in such areas as casting. Stage

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<sup>132</sup> Two other forms of theater during this period will remain outside the scope of the present study due to the lack of substantial evidence. Both the amateur and “popular” theaters are also institutions of the cultural landscape and should be recognized as such. Various forms of amateur theater, presented by private citizens or artistic circles in salons or small, private spaces, had always provided a venue for the presentation of works beyond regulation of government censors. For example, a summer theatre located at the Kuokalla station on the Finland railway presented Przybyszewski's *For Happiness* on 22 May 1905. See “Khronika Teatra i iskusstva,” *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 22 (1905): 344. The so-called “popular” theaters, established by governmental organizations, temperance societies, and industrialists for the purpose of providing enlightenment and entertainment to a growing urban population of workers and less-privileged, came under stricter censorship. See Swift, *Popular Theater*, 10-11.

<sup>133</sup> Henryk Izador Rogacki, *Żywot Przybyszewskiego* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1987), 149. Leo Belmont notes a production of *Zolotoe runo* in Erve's Russian translation in *Kraj* (no. 42), the local Polish newspaper in St. Petersburg. The private theater established by E. A. Shabel'skaia, critic and entrepreneur, was located in the former Nemetti Theatre on Ofiterskaia Street and lasted only two seasons. See I. Petrovskaia and V. Somina, *Teatral'nyi Peterburg. Nachalo XVIII veka --oktiabr' 1917 goda* (Sankt-Peterburg: RIII, 1994), 225.

managers at the Imperial theatres customarily gave the minor roles to inexperienced or ill-suited individuals. However, theatres such as F. Korsh's Russian Drama Theatre, established in 1882, or later, Stanislavskii's and Nemirovich-Danchenko's Moscow Art Theatre (1898) treated secondary or minor parts as having equal relevance to the production as the major roles. These directors believed that minor roles could offer practical applications for an apprentice-actor's abilities as well as could a major one.<sup>134</sup>

Other changes that took place at this time, such as the rise of historical realism as a style, can be traced to the influence of the visits of Meiningen's troupe. This realistic style was reflected in staging (*mise-en-scène*), acting style, and costuming. Przybyszewski's call for simplified sets and intelligent (*intelligentne*, Pol.) actors and Meierkol'd's experiments in non-representational theatre both represent a theoretical (Przybyszewski) and pragmatic (Meierkol'd) offensive against the past, including the recent artistic legacy of the Meiningen company. Thus, later criticism of realist drama from Przybyszewski and Briusov also reflected indirectly on its main Russian proponent, the Moscow Art Theatre.<sup>135</sup> In other ways, Przybyszewski's call for a better-trained actor represents a defense of the new methods which Stanislavskii's and Nemirovich-Danchenko's theatre characterized.

Duke Georg II of Saxe-Meiningen (1826-1914) was the patron of a court theater that he founded in 1848 in Thuringia. Under the direction of Ludwig

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<sup>134</sup> Varneke, *op. cit.*, 392.

<sup>135</sup> In Russian, *Moskovskii khudozhestvennyi teatr*; in the theatre world it is widely known by its initials, MKhT. For brevity and variation, this manuscript will sometimes use its acronym.

Chronegk, one of its actors, and Ellen Franz, the duke's third wife, the company gained recognition throughout Europe for the historical accuracy of its productions, its use of lighting and sound effects, and ensemble acting.<sup>136</sup> The influence of this company extended to Russia via its two tours there, and it had considerable impact on the modernization of Russian theater.<sup>137</sup> The two Russian theatrical figures who were most effected by the Meiningen troupe were Konstantin Stanislavskii (1863-1938), Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (1858-1943). The artistic efforts of these men at the Moscow Art Theater, which they established in 1898, represent the epitome of Russian theatrical development at the end of the nineteenth century.

One of the ways in which the Moscow Art Theatre reflected the influence of Meiningen's production values was the evolution of the strong director with a single artistic vision. The need for a strong, unifying voice during the staging of Russian productions was evident in 1893, three years after the Meiningen company's second visit, when the actor Iurii Iur'ev complained that at the Aleksandrinskii actors rehearsed on their own, worrying only about their own role and stage positions. Such a mindset resulted in productions that lacked cohesion.<sup>138</sup> In contrast, productions at the Moscow Art Theater resulted from directorial decisions that occurred in all areas of theatrical production, from direction to acting and *mise-en-scène*, or the arrangements of all elements of a stage picture.

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<sup>136</sup> Wilson and Goldfarb, *op. cit.*, 382-383, and Slonim, *op. cit.*, 101.

<sup>137</sup> Slonim, *ibid.*, 102.

<sup>138</sup> Iurii M. Iur'ev, *Zapiski*, t. 1 (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1963), 353; cited in Ostrovsky, 234.

The production style of the Meiningen company and that of the *Freie Bühne* in Berlin, another company known for its dedication to the realism of Ibsen and naturalism of Hauptmann, also set new standards for set design and *mise-en scène*.<sup>139</sup> This resulted in a heightened sense of realism evident in the early productions of MKhT. Sets and costuming became extremely detailed, as Stanislavskii strove to recreate settings authentically. For example, the production of *Julius Caesar* recreated narrow Roman streets, while productions of Ibsen and Hamsun featured sets rich in Norwegian ethnographic detail. Plays set in contemporary Russia, such as

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<sup>139</sup> Evgenii Znosko-Borovskii, *Russkii teatr nachala XX veka* (Praga: Izd. Plamia, 1925), 120, and Wilson and Goldfarb, *op. cit.*, 409. Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) is generally considered the founder of theatrical realism. In contrast to *Romanticism*, which stressed mood and atmosphere over believable plot and characters, *Realism* sought to portray everyday life and events and often introduced contemporary social issues in its subject matter. Actors employing the Romantic style used strong physical gestures, improvisation, vocal pointing (the emphasis of specific lines or speeches), and wide emotional range. Moreover, unlike the simplified, black and white morality found in melodrama, the morality of Realist plays, reflecting an attempt at “objective,” exact observation, was frequently blurred and undefined—acknowledging the shades of gray with which life abounds. *Naturalism* should not be confused with the Russian *natural'naia shkola* (natural school) that predated it, although the subject matter of both could be the same. As a pure theatrical form, Naturalism was short-lived and began in France, where its major theorist was Émile Zola (*Le Roman experimental*, 1880). As an extreme form of Realism, Naturalist dramas attempted to “reproduce nature exactly as it is seen with the eye” (Hodge, 345) and frequently concentrated on the sordid side of lower-class life. Its subject matter also retained a social activist or publicistic slant that parallels a similar concern in Polish Positivism, a movement whose aesthetics found generic expression primarily in the novel. Actors working in a Naturalist style would seek to imitate the physical appearance and gestures of individuals who represented their character type. See Wilson and Goldfarb, 362-364, 403-405; Oscar G. Brockett, *The Theatre: An Introduction* (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1969), 299-300; and Hodge, *op. cit.*, 345. Perhaps the greatest Naturalist dramatist was Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946), whose plays became a major part of Meierkhol'd's early repertoire. Maksim Gor'kii's masterpiece *Lower Depths* is a prime example of Russian Naturalism. See Harold B. Segel's *Twentieth-Century Russian Drama: From Gorky to the Present* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 7.

Gor'kii's *The Lower Depths* [*Na dne*], which premiered 18 December 1902, became photographic replicas of Moscow's poorer neighborhoods.<sup>140</sup> This was an extreme change from Russian stage tradition, in which a limited number of standard "sets" were used, consisting of painted flats, such as the "drawing room," the "study," the "prison," and the "forest." A generic "Gothic" set was used for performances of the classics: Shakespeare, Hugo, Schiller.<sup>141</sup>

The turn toward "authentic" costuming, which accompanied the move toward "archaeological" sets, which forced actors to abandon their broad romantic, Delsartean gestures in favor of a more naturalistic style.<sup>142</sup> In many instances actors found they just could not move their bodies in the same way while clothed in historical fashions.<sup>143</sup> The attempts to clothe actors in "archaeological clothing," that is, stage dress that accurately recreates a period in history, is a direct consequence of

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<sup>140</sup> Znosko-Borovskii, *op. cit.*, 122-124; Segel, *op. cit.*, 3; and Jean Benedetti, "Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre, 1898-1917," in Leach and Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 264.

<sup>141</sup> Ostrovsky, *op. cit.*, 223.

<sup>142</sup> The term "naturalistic" here refers to the natural, lifelike acting style used within the broader context of the movement of Naturalism, as opposed to the "romantic" style that incorporated stylistic elements from Delsarte. François Delsarte (1811-1871), a major French acting theorist and teacher, taught that many physical gestures and body movements were universal in nature. By such movements—now stereotypical of melodrama—an actor could portray the inner thoughts and emotions of a character. Delsarte's system quickly spread across Europe and the United States after 1839, and remained the basis for acting technique until questioned by the realists late in the nineteenth century. Supporters noted the system's foundation on scientific observations of life, while detractors decried its inability to individualize character. See Wilson and Goldfarb, *op. cit.*, 374.

<sup>143</sup> Marsh, *op. cit.*, 156.

the Naturalists' response to scientific observation and investigation of the past.<sup>144</sup>

This was an approach much favored by the Moscow Art Theatre.

The Moscow Art Theater became the most famous and enduring private theater. Yet it was not the first, and it never staged a Przybyszewski production, as did some other theatres, such as Nezlobin's.<sup>145</sup> The establishment of private commercial theaters is an early example of entrepreneurship by women in Russia: in addition to Komissarzhevskaiia, actresses such as Anna Brenko, Mariia Abramova, and Elizaveta Goreva all established private theaters. Many of these were short-lived, however, and did little to change Russian stage practices.<sup>146</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia's Dramaticheskii teatr (Dramatic Theatre), established in 1904, was the longest lasting theatrical enterprise of all those launched by women. Its spiritual heir, the Novyi Dramaticheskii teatr V. F. Komissarzhevskoi (Komissarzhevskaiia's New Dramatic

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<sup>144</sup> This definition of "archeological clothing" follows Francis Hodge, *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1994), 262. The terms "historical fashions" and "archeological clothing" are used here synonymously. The term "historical" may be contrasted with "civilian" to denote dress that was not akin to the actor's "street clothes." For a similar usage of this term, see Ostrovsky, *op. cit.*, 223. Similarly, a stage design that is "archeological" strives for extreme verisimilitude; it may include the use of genuine items as properties or set pieces from the time period depicted. See the brief discussion about the director as an "archeologist" who strives for realistic reproduction in Hodge, *ibid.*, 377-378.

<sup>145</sup> Despite the fact that Stanislavskii saw Komissarzhevskaiia's performance of *The Golden Fleece* in February 1904, and that Przybyszewski offered him the rights to *Life's Banquet* in 1909. See Konstantin Stanislavskii, *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo K. S. Stanislavskogo. Letopis', t. 1, 1863-1905* (Moskva: Vserossiiskoe teatral'noe obshchestvo, 1971), 456; Konstantin Stanislavskii, *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo K. S. Stanislavskogo. Letopis', t. 2. 1906-1915* (Moskva: Vserossiiskoe teatral'noe obshchestvo, 1971), 202.

<sup>146</sup> Ostrovsky, *op. cit.*, 219. Brenko's theater lasted from 1880-1882, Abramova's from 1889-1890, and Goreva's survived only eighteen months.

Theatre), remained in operation for two seasons, under the direction of Leonid Andreev, even after her death in 1910. The theatre mounted a revival of *Life's Banquet*, the last Przybyszewski drama in which Komissarzhevskaja appeared, there in December 1910.<sup>147</sup>

## **Cue 2: Censorship**

Moral issues explored in Przybyszewski's works, such as marital infidelity, which could be discussed in print, were frequently denied representation on the morally conservative Imperial stages. This denial was due, in part, to the intricacies of censorship and bureaucratic control, and partially explains why Przybyszewski's works did not appear on the Imperial stages before 1905, when censorship was eased, but not abandoned. This censorship had greater effect on productions at the Aleksandrinskii than at the Malyi. Due to its physical proximity to the administrative seat of power, St. Petersburg bureaucrats selected the repertoire for the Aleksandrinskii and treated it almost as a "servant of the court."<sup>148</sup> Even as pressures grew in Russia from the political left after the popular revolutions in Europe in 1848, and populism itself gained Russian adherents, the conservative forces of censorship prevented controversial social and political themes from being represented on the stage. A brief discussion of this process will serve as an introduction to the problem of Przybyszewski and Russian censorship.

Like much of the Russian Imperial bureaucracy, the censorship process was complex and convoluted. After 1865, the Chief Administration for Press Affairs

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<sup>147</sup> Petrovskaja and Somina, *op. cit.*, 238. See Appendix II.

<sup>148</sup> Varneke, *op. cit.*, 386.

(*Glavnoe Upravlenie po delam pechati*), a division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, was charged with the censorship of dramatic texts. Play approval, in essence, became a two-stage process as a work was read and approved first for publication, then approved for staging.<sup>149</sup> This process created a list of plays that satisfied one standard but not the other. Sometimes the Imperial censors allowed plays to be published, but not performed. In other instances they permitted performances of “suspect” works only in the capitals, where the ideas presented in these plays were more likely to be understood in an appropriate manner by a more educated audience. By the turn of the century, censors examined not only political, social, and religious content, but also the acceptability of the play’s content for working-class audiences.<sup>150</sup>

Government censors adopted a stronger tone after the termination of the Imperial monopoly on theatres in 1882 and the growth of independent, private theatres, many of which sought a broader audience than the aristocrats and bureaucrats who frequented the Imperial theatres in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In censoring particular works, the government felt that it was protecting the public from moral corruption. At the same time, this attitude was founded in the basic notion that theatre could educate the “common man” (*prostoliudin*), and therefore, must present “moral” views.<sup>151</sup> Such patronizing attitudes in the government, while cognizant of

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<sup>149</sup> E. Anthony Swift, “Fighting the Germs of Disorder: The Censorship of Russian Popular Theater, 1888-1917,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 5.

<sup>150</sup> Jean Benedetti, “Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre, 1898-1917,” in Leach and Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 260.

<sup>151</sup> For example, Internal Affairs minister Dmitrii Tolstoi defended his 1888 plan to institute a special censorship policy for the new “popular theatres” (*narodnye teatry*),

differing levels of education among various levels of Russian society, formed the basis of censorship laws that remained in effect from May 1888 until 1917.<sup>152</sup>

Theatre historian E. Anthony Swift identifies five general issues which censors considered when reviewing individual plays, of which two are relevant for the censorship of Przybyszewski's plays. These five are:

1) "representations of rulers." This rubric generally prohibited the depiction of Russian rulers and the Romanov family on stage, a regulation which dated from the time of Tsar' Nicholai I in 1837. Exceptions could be granted if the work was deemed of sufficient artistic merit.<sup>153</sup>

2) "portrayals of the past," including descriptions of serfdom or periods of social and political unrest. This rubric illustrated the discomfort officials felt about the depiction of past historical events that could allegedly be misunderstood by the uneducated masses. The location of portrayed events carried little weight in the

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which catered to the emerging working-class audience, writing: "Due to his level of mental development, his outlooks and conceptions, the common man [*prostoliudin*] will often interpret in an utterly wrong sense something that would present no temptation for a somewhat educated person, and thus a play containing nothing blameworthy from a general point of view may be unsuitable and even harmful for him [the common man]. Since the theater unquestionably has an important educational significance, it would seem necessary to ensure that the people receive from it sober and beneficial impressions and nothing that would promote their moral corruption." D. A. Tolstoi, "Ob izdanii vremennykh pravil o poriadke razresheniia p'es prednaznachaemykh k postanovke na stsene narodnykh teatrov" (Jan 21, 1888), RGIA, f. 776 (*Glavnoe upravlenie po delam pechati*), op. 1, d. 24, ll. 1g-1d. Cited and translated in Swift, "Fighting the Germs," 3-4.

<sup>152</sup> Swift, "Fighting the Germs," 4.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18, 29.

acceptance of a work: even if the setting was outside Russia, a play could be prohibited for the popular theatres.<sup>154</sup>

3) “respect for authority.” Plays possibly prohibited under this rubric allegedly portrayed authority or religious figures or officials in a bad light, which censors believed could lessen their authority. In addition, works with references to religious issues, even those with historical themes such as the Inquisition, could be banned from the popular stage, although permitted on the Imperial stage.<sup>155</sup>

4) “wealth, privilege and social discord.” Swift claims censors prohibited plays under this heading with “particular zeal,” the result of a desire by officials to prevent class ridicule and enmity.<sup>156</sup> As social unrest grew at the turn of the century, officials strived to prevent any depiction of abuses by factory owners or the aristocracy or discussion of labor issues.<sup>157</sup>

5) “immoral impressions.” Under this category censors attempted to protect the uneducated public from representations of unpunished crime, adultery, or other, more serious sex crimes.<sup>158</sup>

The long history of Przybyszewski and Russian censorship began as soon as the novella *Totenmesse* appeared in Berlin in 1893. Przybyszewski’s obscure, metaphoric writing style only contributed to the controversy surrounding his themes and works. On 5 October 1893, an unnamed censor banned the work from the

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-27.

<sup>155</sup> Swift, “Fighting the Germs,” 31-33.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 33, 35.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

Empire, citing the author's lack of talent and the work's "absolute incomprehensibility, bordering on nonsense and complete uselessness."<sup>159</sup> However, another censor thought differently. When officials confiscated the Skorpion edition of this novel in 1904, Mikhail Nikolskii, a member of the censorship committee, defended the work. He argued that the indecent and blasphemous thoughts and views of the work's character could not be equated with the author himself. Przybyszewski's complex prose style had to be taken into account: "It [*Totenmesse*] is a confession by one of those Teutons, whose moral life has not submitted to the conscious will. However, one hears expressions from the lips of this psychotic, which, in a majority of instances, are only symbols and metaphors, concealing an idea of another nature."<sup>160</sup>

Russian censors continued to confiscate Przybyszewski's works even after the easing of censorship in 1905. When a new translation of *Totenmesse* appeared in the seventh volume of the Sablin edition in 1909, authorities confiscated the book and began to prosecute its editor.<sup>161</sup> The appearance of Przybyszewski's drama *Nuptials* [*Śluby*, Pol.; *Obruchenie*, Rus.] in the Sablin edition was delayed because the editor

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<sup>159</sup> RGIA, f. 779, op. 4, ed. khr. 266b, l. 205. "Z powodu braku talentu, absolutnej niezrozumiałości zakrawającej na nonsense i całkowitej bezużyteczności tego utworu uważam, że nie można wydać zgody na jego publikację." Moskwin, *Stanisław Przybyszewski [SP] w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 232; cf. Andriej Moskwin, "Twórczość Przybyszewskiego przez pryzmat cenzury rosyjskiej końca XIX i początku XX wieku," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 89, no. 2 (1998): 168. Moskwin cites these comments in Polish, not Russian.

<sup>160</sup> "Jest to spowiedź jednego z tych teutonów, których życie duchowe nie zostało podporządkowane świadomej woli. Ale z ust tego człowieka, opętanego psychozą, słyhać wyrazy, które w większości wypadków są tylko symbolami, metaforami, ukrywającymi idee o innym charakterze." Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 236; cf. Moskwin, "Twórczość Przybyszewskiego przez pryzmat cenzury," 171.

<sup>161</sup> Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 237; cf. Moskwin, "Twórczość Przybyszewskiego przez pryzmat cenzury," 171-172.

paired the work with *The Synagogue of Satan*, which, due to its content, was immediately banned until 1911.<sup>162</sup> Even seemingly innocent journalistic works such as Przybyszewski's anniversary lecture on Chopin, "Chopin and the People," could not survive the censor. That work was banned in 1910 for the alleged enmity it showed toward the Russian people.<sup>163</sup>

Social and moral issues most affected the censorship of Przybyszewski's early plays, rather than issues like Satanism. Several Przybyszewski dramas came under the Russian censors' red pen. *The Visitors* was the first drama censored.<sup>164</sup> Although the work had been published previously in both *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury* and *Odesskii listok* in 1901, Vortev, the new municipal censor in Khar'kov, prohibited its publication and staging in 1904.<sup>165</sup> Vortev probably objected to the epilogue's theme of the cycle of inescapable guilt and inexorable retribution, which censors in Warsaw judged to be in direct conflict to the Christian belief in universal salvation. Because the characters in Przybyszewski's drama seek suicide as an exit from this cycle, censors found the work harmful to society, especially the youth.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 238.

<sup>163</sup> "Szopen a naród," (Kraków: 1910). Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 239. A Russian translation eventually appeared in 1912.

<sup>164</sup> Moskwin cites this work as the drama that encountered the "greatest difficulties" with the censors. This is arguable, given the cuts demanded in *The Eternal Tale*. See Moskwin, *ibid.*, 230.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 230. Cf. A. Damanskaia, trans., "Gosti. Dramaticheskii epilog v odnom deistvii Stanislava Pshybyshvetskago [sic]," *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 77-88; L. Lebedeva, trans., "Gosti. Dramaticheskii epilog v odnom akte," *Odesskii listok*, no. 279, 29. X. 1901, pp. 1-2; no. 282, 1. XI. 1901, pp. 1-2. Moskwin does not mention the Lebedeva translation. In 1903, Russian officials in Warsaw had banned the play from all theatres in the Kingdom of Poland.

<sup>166</sup> Moskwin, *ibid.*, 230-231.

In the case of Przybyszewski's four-act drama *Mother* [*Matka* (Pol., 1903); *Mat'* (Rus., 1904)], censors in St. Petersburg objected to the passing mention of civil and religious obstacles to marriage, as well as the mention of the possibility of an incestuous-looking marriage. Censors prohibited its publication on 24 May 1904, but permission was granted subsequently on 5 November 1905, after the deletion of several sections.<sup>167</sup> In Khar'kov, Vertov banned sales of this play and of *Snow* because of allegedly indecent illustrations on their covers, one of which depicted a nude, semi-recumbent woman, embraced by a snake that, in Vertov's modest words, covered "a certain part of the body."<sup>168</sup>

*The Eternal Tale*, which premiered at Komissarzhevskaja's Dramatic Theatre in 1906, serves as an example of a work raising objections for disrespecting authority and fomenting social discord. In *The Eternal Tale*, a group of courtiers try to prevent the marriage of an unnamed king to Sonka, his beloved, who is a symbol of light and purity. Her father Wityn is the king's spiritual advisor, and is accused of being an alchemist and sorcerer. The chancellor, a personification of eternal evil, who stands at the head of the conspiracy to prevent this marriage, incites the people against the

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<sup>167</sup> Cf. Moskvin's similar conclusion from his reading of the censor's accounts housed in the State History Archives (RGIA, f. 776, op. 26, ed. khr. 24, l. 203). See Andriej Moskwin, "Twórczość Przybyszewskiego," 166. The dates are Moskvin's. There is some inconsistency concerning dates between the censor's records as cited by Moskvin and the permission/prohibition date recorded on the actual script. The N. Budkevich and A. Remizov translations of this play are archived at the St. Petersburg Theatre Library (SPbTB), items # 31000 (Budkevich) and #31088 (Remizov). The Remizov text is "clean," while the Budkevich text carries the censor's notations. The latter script carries a prohibition date 28 May 1904, while permission was granted 7 November 1905, according to the censor's notation.

<sup>168</sup> RGIA, f. 776, op. 21, ch. I, ed. khr. 698, l. 135. Cited in Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 231.

king and Sonka. Civil strife ensues. The play ends as the king and Sonka both renounce the throne and walk off to live in their idealistic world, where love and peace reign. The throne stands empty and the chancellor remains, only temporarily defeated.

Oskar Lamkert, the governmental censor, initially prohibited this play for its “abundance of unsuitable fragments, which, in the view of the censor, for example, portray an antagonism between the ruler and the people” as well as “the vague symbolism, with which the entire play is permeated, as are all the works of this not completely normal writer.”<sup>169</sup> While it is easy to see how “antagonism between the ruler and the people” could reflect both disrespect for authority, as well as the potential for social unrest, it is difficult to imagine how the censor’s warning of “vague symbolism” fits under any of Swift’s five censorship issues.<sup>170</sup> On the one hand, this comment could be an allusion to such cryptic lines in the play such as the unorthodox blessing offered by the alchemist Wityn, Sonka’s father and the King’s mentor, in Act I, scene vi: “May the One and Triune God—the God of Silence, the

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<sup>169</sup> Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 229. “obfitością niewłaściwych pod względem cenzuralnym fragmentów, przedstawiających, na przykład, antagonizm pomiędzy władzą i narodem” and “mglistym symbolizmem, którym jest przeniknięta cała sztuka, jak i wszystkie dzieła tego nie całkiem normalnego pisarza” (f. 776, op. 26, ed. khr. 25, l. 96). The problem of Przybyszewski and Russian censorship is still open for further research.

<sup>170</sup> Lamkert’s 1906 comment about “vague symbolism” in *The Eternal Tale*, taken with the 1893 censor’s criticism of *Totenmesse*, that it was incomprehensible because of its metaphoric language, suggests that we add another, unwritten rubric to Swift’s list: “unambiguous form.” The outcomes of texts that offered multiple readings were difficult to control in the marketplace of ideas, whether under the Autocracy or the Bolsheviks. Many thanks to Maia Kipp for pointing this out.

God of Darkness, and the God of Light—be with you.”<sup>171</sup> On the other hand, it could have just been the personal opinion of a government official who did not think highly of Przybyszewski’s works. Despite the censor’s initial misgivings and opinions about this play, *The Eternal Tale* eventually premiered 4 December 1906, after Meierkhol’d and Komissarzhevskaja agreed to necessary cuts in the text.<sup>172</sup>

The overwhelming negative controversy surrounding Przybyszewski’s works—in both the dramas and the novels-- frequently turned on his characters’ lack of moral compass or perceived sexual degeneracy. In other words, their actions corresponded to those under Swift’s fifth rubric, “moral impressions.” As far as the dramas are concerned, however, this controversy could have been more a result of the

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<sup>171</sup> “Витин. Единый и Тройственный Бог –Бог Молчания, Бог Мрака и Бог света – да будет с тобой.” S. Pshibyshevskii, *Vechnaia skazka*, per. E. Tropovskogo. SPbTB, item # 36611, p. 22. The line was changed to a more acceptable “May God be with you.” Moskvin’s essay does not discuss the possibility of objections to this particular text for religious reasons, although he does cite such objections (“antireligiousness, anti-Christianity, amorality, and even anarchism”) [antyreligijność, antychrześcijaństwo, amoralizm i nawet anarchizm] with respect to Skorpion’s 1902 edition of the novel *Homo sapiens*. See Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 234. A more complete account of Skorpion’s battle with the censors over that novel may be found in N. V. Kotrelev, “Perevodnaia literatura v deiatel'nosti izdatel'stva ‘Skorpion’,” *Sotsial'no-kul'turnye funktsii knigoizdatel'skoi deiatel'nosti. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov*, N. V. Kotrelev, ed. (Moscow: VGBIL, 1985), 68-133.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. the Tropovskii translations of *The Eternal Tale* archived at the St. Petersburg Theatre Library (SPbTB), items # 36611 (censor’s copy) and # 35953/94895 (Skorpion edition). For example, Lambert cut the courtier Povalala’s lines in the very first scene of Act I: “Сказать по правде – сам чорт не мог бы придумать лучшего средства, чтоб отвлечь короля от государственных дел, незаметно отстранить его от управления, пускать ему туман в глаза и водить за нос.” [To tell the truth—even the devil himself could not think up a better means to divert the King from governmental affairs, to distract him imperceptibly from ruling, to obscure the issues and lead him by the nose.”] SPbTB, #36611, s. 1-2. These lines do appear in the Skorpion text, published in mid- or late-December 1906. Time and space constraints prevent a full exposition of the problem of censorship and this dramatic text.

individual critic's own opinions on moral issues, as the Przybyszewskian character does, indeed, have a moral compass and often seems forced to act in a cruel world defined both by predestined, primeval sexual urges and by a gnawing conscience, which punishes any choice that contradicts societal mores.

The issue of morality probably explains better than any other the delay the Imperial theatres showed in staging Przybyszewski's works, even though Teliakovskii had signaled his private acceptance of them in February 1903.<sup>173</sup> In fact, P. P. Gnedich, a theatre habitué and editor of the government's theatre annual, believed the roles in Przybyszewski's *For Happiness* provided good material for the actor.<sup>174</sup> Naturally, the "official" view of *For Happiness*, published in the Imperial Theatre's 1905-1906 annual, did not emphasize the quality of Przybyszewski's roles for the Imperial actor, but, instead emphasized the theme of moral dilemma:

The characteristic peculiarity of Przybyszewski's creative work," says one of his critics, "lies in the fact that he, in his numerous works, by means of very distinctive literary devices, based upon a psychiatric experiment, reveals before us all the fundamental elements of man's moral nature and shows that man cannot in any way escape from this nature and that if he attempts to escape from it, then it will end in either death or madness."<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Teliakovskii, *op. cit.*, 424.

<sup>174</sup> RGIA, f. 497, op. 10, ed. khr. 859, s. 3; cited in Moskwin, "Twórczość Przybyszewskiego," 165.

<sup>175</sup> "Характерная особенность творчества Пшибышевского, говорит один из его критиков, заключается в том, что в своих многочисленных произведениях он, — посредством очень своеобразных литературных приемов, в основу которых положен, так сказать, психиатрический эксперимент—обнажает перед нами одну за другою все основные стихии нравственной природы человека и показывает, что от этой природы уйти человеку никак нельзя и что, если он пытается от нее уйти, то кончает смертью, или сумасшествием." P. P. Gnedich,

The theme of moral choice and its ramifications is felt even more strongly in *The Golden Fleece*, where the sins of the father, having sought the “golden fleece” of love, are visited upon succeeding generations. The 1906-1907 theatre annual described *The Golden Fleece* thus:

...But if the Greek heroes or even gods perished or suffered from opposition to the will of a terrible fate-destiny, then Przybyszewski’s heroes, writes one of his critics, must experience the force of retribution, which inevitably follows every violation of the natural law of morality and truth. This law is inexorable and terrible; thus the children, or even successive generations, must pay for the sins of the father.<sup>176</sup>

We may conclude from Gnedich’s comments about the beneficial nature of Przybyszewski’s roles, as well as the descriptions of these two plays as they appeared in the official annuals, that the staging by the Novyi Teatr of *For Happiness* and *The Golden Fleece* and its planned staging in St. Petersburg by the Imperial theatres justifies a perceived positive moral stance in these works. In the least, the decisions to stage these works signalled a response by the directorate of the Imperial Theatres to the changing sexual mores of Russian society.

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ed., “Drama. (Obozrenie deiatel'nosti moskovskikh teatrov),” in *Ezhegodnik 1905-1906 gg.*, 176.

<sup>176</sup> “...Но если греческие герои, и даже боги, погибали или страдали от противодействия воле грозного фатума-судьбы, то и герои Пшибышевского, пишет один из его критиков, должны испытать силу возмездия, которое неминуемо следует за всеми нарушениями естественного закона нравственности и правды. И этот закон неумолим и страшен, так как за грехи отцов приходится расплачиваться их детям и даже следующим поколениям.” P. P. Gnedich, ed., “Drama. (Obozrenie deiatel'nosti moskovskikh teatrov),” in *Ezhegodnik 1906-1907*. Vypusk XVII, 173.

### Cue 3: Roles and acting opportunities

Training and prospects for actors in the late nineteenth century was of a limited nature, and this fact must be taken into account as we examine the opportunities Przybyszewski's plays opened for the actor. Przybyszewski's complex characters represented a contrast to the simpler characters created by such popular dramatists as Aleksandr Ostrovskii (1823-1886). This psychological complexity would attract actors such as Komissarzhevskia, who sought to create roles of individual heroines, not types. Ostrovskii's characters provide a prime example of the types portrayed in the Russian repertoire at the Imperial theaters at this time, which did generally win the approval of government censors. The characters of his plays represented social types and levels: peasantry, merchants, government officials, and fashionable society.<sup>177</sup>

After the Ministry of Education criticized his first play, *It's All in the Family-We'll Settle It Ourselves* [*Svoi liudi sochtemsia*, 1850], for a lack of morality, Ostrovskii began to create plays that generically resembled the familiar melodramas that were a staple of the provincial stages.<sup>178</sup> Ostrovskii's plays, peopled with characters from the merchantry and peasantry, marked "the end of the aristocratic

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<sup>177</sup> Varneke, *op. cit.*, 333, 334-335. Only in his later years did Ostrovskii temporarily abandon his realistic and satiric situations for folkloric fantasy—in 1873's *The Snow Maiden* [*Snegurochka*]

<sup>178</sup> The Ministry suggested that although Ostrovskii portrayed vice darkly and repugantly, he did not denounce it sufficiently. Cf. Varneke, *op. cit.*, 328-329; Victor Terras, *A History of Russian Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 371-372.

comedy and the [beginning] of the democratization of the Russian stage.”<sup>179</sup>

However, this social “democratization” of drama came at the price of moral heterogeneity and complexity. Ostrovskii’s division of characters into either villainous and virtuous types, together with dramatic finales in which virtue triumphs and vice punished, are stylistic elements more closely related to the popular genre of melodrama than Russian Realism, the literary school with which he is more closely associated.<sup>180</sup>

In contrast, Przybyszewski fundamentally rejected any aesthetic view that divided art, and therefore, dramatic characters and situations, into the morally or socially “good” and “bad.”<sup>181</sup> Therefore, after the protracted appearance of Ostrovskii’s simplified characters and their morals on the Russian stage, Przybyszewski’s psychologically complex heroes and heroines would represent an increasingly multifaceted view of human character. The complex nature of the Przybyszewski character made them more difficult to portray for many Russian actors at the beginning of the twentieth century, as well as a challenge for actors seeking to improve their craft.

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<sup>179</sup> Slonim, *ibid.*, 74.

<sup>180</sup> Varneke, *op. cit.*, 341. A. M. Skabichevskii describes these character traits from a socio-economic perspective. Thus, the villainous types accumulate money illegally and see no benefit in work, while the virtuous are hard working and honest. See Varneke, *ibid.*, 339. For a basic discussion of the elements of nineteenth-century melodrama, see Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb, *Living Theatre: A History* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 364-367.

<sup>181</sup> “Sztuka w naszym pojęciu nie zna przypadkowego rozklasyfikowania objawów duszy na dobre lub złe, nie zna żadnych zasad czy to moralnych, czy społecznych: dla artysty w naszym pojęciu są wszelkie przejawy duszy r ó w n o m i e r n e, nie zapatruje on się na ich wartość przypadkową...” Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy* (Kraków: L. Zwoliński i S-ka, 1900), 14.

Comic or melodramatic roles, vaudevilles, *balagany* or puppet shows, and elaborately staged historical pantomimes, all continued to be popular with audiences throughout this period. Following stylistic traditions, actors employed a set of exaggerated gestures or movements to portray various emotions such as love, hate, fear, anger, or situations such as the discovery of a hidden identity, or death in its varied forms, many based on the melodramatic style of acting. Such gestures, now considered cliché and evidence of “overacting” or the lack of formal training, included the opening of letters with trembling hands in expectation of tragic news, the quick crosses back and forth to denote a character’s anxiety, and the clasping of the chest or frantic tearing of the collar during a death scene.<sup>182</sup> Backstage rivalries and the highly theatrical form of the *balagan* caused many actors, especially in the provincial theaters where income was dependent on hierarchy of *emploi* (specific character type, or “line of business”) and popularity with the audience, led many to exaggerate these gestures further in order to curry favor with their public.<sup>183</sup> As Anatoly Altschuller notes, the acting technique of this period was “abstract, superficial, and effect-oriented.”<sup>184</sup>

Through the end of the nineteenth century acting companies in both the capitals and provinces hired actors to fill a particular *emploi*. In 1903 the popular theatre in Penza sought actors to fill the following categories: heroine, *ingénue*,

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<sup>182</sup> Slonim, *ibid.*, 92.

<sup>183</sup> Catriona Kelly, “Popular, provincial and amateur theatres 1820-1900,” in Leach and Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 135-136.

<sup>184</sup> Anatoly Altschuller, “Actors and acting, 1820-1850,” in Leach and Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 119.

*grande-dame*, hero-lover, *raisonneur*, comic-*raisonneur* and character roles, simpleton, and others.<sup>185</sup> Many actors became famous for the type of role they played. So ingrained was this system that the famous Malyi Theatre actress, Mariia N. Ermolova (1853-1928), portrayed the heroic *ingénue* Joan of Arc on the stage for eighteen years, a period almost as long as the historical figure herself lived.<sup>186</sup> The young Komissarzhevskaja was originally hired in Novocheerkassk as an *ingénue comique*, who further specialized in singing (*s peniem*).<sup>187</sup>

The categorization of roles by *emploi* never fully left the Russian theatrical world.<sup>188</sup> Meierkhol'd himself, so progressive with respect to stage design and development of the actor's art, even authored a volume in 1922 titled *The Actor's Emploi* for the State Graduate School for Theatre Directors, (the Meierkhol'd Workshop).<sup>189</sup> Meierkhol'd's table of *emplois* does illustrate a broadening and deepening of this concept to include 34 types, male and female. Thus, beside the traditional roles of "hero/heroine," "lover," "clown/fool," and "moralist/matron,"

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<sup>185</sup> "Sdacha teatrov i angazhamenty," *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 15 (1903): 323.

<sup>186</sup> Ostrovsky, *op. cit.*, 229.

<sup>187</sup> Iu. P. Rybakova, *V. F. Komissarzhevskaja. Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva* (S.-Peterburg: RIII, 1994), 35, 44.

<sup>188</sup> For example, members of several provincial troupes in Feodosiia and Kaluga were listed in the weekly journal *Teatr i iskusstvo* by their *emploi* as late as 1911. See *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 16 (1911): 343 and no. 17 (1911): 361.

<sup>189</sup> V. E. Meierkhol'd, V. M. Bebutov, and I. A. Aksenov, *Amplua aktera* (M: 1922). See Marjorie L. Hoover, "Appendix 2: Amplua aktera. The Set Roles of the Actor's Art" in *Meyerhold: The Art of Conscious Theater* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974), 297-310, for an English translation of this document.

Meierkhol'd includes such types as “mischief maker,” “villain/villainess intriguer,” “mysterious stranger,” “friend/confidante,” and “messenger.”<sup>190</sup>

#### **Cue 4: Audience**

The final background topic is the audience: we cannot understand the reception of Przybyszewski's new *form* (the shape and structure) and *content* (the material being shaped), as embodied in his aesthetics and dramas, without first knowing something of the people viewing his plays both in the capitals and in the provinces.<sup>191</sup> Officials censored plays in order to protect audiences and the government, and critics reviewed plays to inform them. Since no studies exist which examine the exact demographics of audiences at either Komissarzhevskaja's or Meierkhol'd's early productions, we must rely on comments about general trends at

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<sup>190</sup> Hoover, *ibid.* Meierkhol'd also listed the desired physical features of each type, as well as examples of the role and their dramatic function. The system remains in force, consciously or unconsciously, among stage and casting directors even today but can be broken, often in order to derive comedic effect (“casting against type”).

<sup>191</sup> I choose to use the terms “form” and “content” here in the same way that Hodge does in his classic text on directing, 289. Hodge distinguishes six elements of form: given circumstances, dialogue, dramatic action, characters, ideas, and rhythmic beats (tempos and moods). Several of these—given circumstances, characters, and ideas—will be recognizable to the literary scholar as “chronotope,” “characteri-zation,” and “themes.” The other terms are more germane to an investigation of drama as an art form and will be defined as needed, especially in the discussion on Meierkhol'd's search for new methods of presenting the new drama, which Przybyszewski's works represented at the turn of the century. Hodge also provides a useful, more nuanced definition of “content.” In this dissertation the simple term “content” will broadly mean “theme” or “philosophy” which guides or backgrounds the action. Here it is equivalent to Hodge's term “idea”: it is the “core meaning” of the play (Hodge, 46). The broad term “content” should not be confused with the delimited terms “dramatic content” (the six elements of form) and “theatrical content” (the elements of form in staging) including, but not limited to: gesture, movement, various considerations in speaking (subtext, projection), scenery, properties, costume, and sound. See Hodge, *op. cit.*, 289, for a summary of these concepts as they apply to these two terms.

the beginning of the twentieth century to form an idea of those audience members and their “horizon of expectations,” to use Jauss’s term.<sup>192</sup>

In general, Russian theater audiences were growing more diversified by the end of the century.<sup>193</sup> This change mirrored the growing diversification of Russian society itself as the Empire industrialized and urbanized. Audiences became less aristocratic in nature as merchants, workers, and students now joined the more traditional “core” theater audience of military officers, nobility, and government employees.<sup>194</sup> Students and members of the younger generation, especially young women, became recognizable and enthusiastic patrons of Komissarzhevskia’s performances at the Aleksandrinskii, and later, her theatre.<sup>195</sup> The younger generation also formed an important part of Przybyszewski’s reading public, and therefore, a potential audience for his plays, whether they were performed in the capitals or in the provinces.<sup>196</sup>

E. Anthony Swift, who has attempted a more detailed analysis of Russian theater reception during this period, identifies four demographic features which differentiated audiences at this time: level of literacy, degree of social assimilation,

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<sup>192</sup> Although this dissertation does not deal with *audience* reception *per se*, these comments will also aid in understanding why Przybyszewski’s works are forgotten today, yet proved extremely popular in the years leading up the Revolution.

<sup>193</sup> Slonim, *op. cit.*, 89-90, and Marsh, *op. cit.*, 157.

<sup>194</sup> Varneke identifies the latter social groups as the main constituents of Aleksandrinskii audiences in St. Petersburg. See Varneke, *op. cit.*, 386.

<sup>195</sup> Catherine A. Schuler, *Women in Russian Theatre: The Actress in the Silver Age*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), 156, 166.

<sup>196</sup> Poliatskii, *op. cit.*; Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 231. In the words of the Russian censor in Warsaw: “Przybyszewski cieszy się niezaprzeczalnym autorytetem w określonej grupie społeczeństwa szczególnie w środowisku egzaltowanej młodzieży” (RGIA, f. 776, op. 25, ed. khr. 730, l. 9).

familiarity with theater, and performance expectations, but does not take age into consideration.<sup>197</sup> Each of these features can affect how an audience interacts with a particular theatrical experience. For example, the combination of expectation of moral instruction and increased educational level (both with respect to the traditional acquisition of knowledge and the familiarization with theatrical conventions) could cause audiences at the turn of the century to search for meaning where none was meant.<sup>198</sup>

Despite this growing diversification, there does not seem to have been a radical shift in audience expectations. Spectators brought their own expectations, and Russian theater retained its traditional (and polarized) social functions, both hedonistic, as a source of “entertainment” or “pleasure,” and didactic, as source of “moral instruction.” Thus, as Korsh soon discovered, some members of the “new bourgeois” continued to prefer light comedies to long, complicated tragedies.<sup>199</sup> Comments from audience surveys of workers in St. Petersburg and Riazan’ — relatively new as audience members— suggest, however, that those who sought instruction in morals were more literate and more highly skilled than those who

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<sup>197</sup> Swift, *Popular Theater*, 207. Swift particularizes the feature of assimilation as “assimilation into urban culture.” See especially chapter 6, “The People at the Theater: Audience Reception,” 205-231.

<sup>198</sup> Benedetti, *op. cit.*, 263-264. Benedetti cites this example: letters to MKhT provide evidence of political “readings” of the 1901 production of Ibsen’s *Enemy of the People*, even though Stanislavskii and Nemirovich-Danchenko professed no overt political agenda. The issue is more complex, of course. Hypothetically, any production can create diverse meanings, both anticipated and unanticipated, within specific social and historical contexts.

<sup>199</sup> Ostrovsky, *op. cit.*, 220. The terminology “new bourgeois” is his.

sought escapist fare.<sup>200</sup> In addition, a third, perceptive function arose as certain segments of the population, most notably workers, looked to the theater as a means of heightening their own awareness of self and their position in society.<sup>201</sup> These three general social functions of theater—hedonistic, didactic, and perceptive—can serve as a framework for our understanding of audience responses to Przybyszewski's works. If Swift's generalization about audiences holds true, then audiences who attended Przybyszewski's plays were more literate than those who attended comedies. However, if these same audiences sought didactic moral instruction from these works, they may have been challenged by Przybyszewski's desire to present complex characters and situations.

Sometimes audience expectation and generational conflict could be reflected in critical reviews of Przybyszewski's plays. The comments of two reviewers, written two years apart, but appearing under the contrasting pseudonyms of "Old Theatregoer" (1902) and "Young Theatregoer" (1904), illustrate the variety of expectations among audience members. Older audiences, such as those represented by "Old Theatregoer," viewed Przybyszewski's works, in this case *The Golden Fleece*, as vulgar and a libelous attack on social values: "The public did not like Przybyszewski's play, they saw the vulgarity in it, and were ready to brand it as a

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<sup>200</sup> Swift, *Popular Theater*, 210-214. Swift lists several other reasons audiences gave for going to the theater: some were seeking "edification" and models of self-improvement, others sought guides to good behavior (found in plays featuring the nobility or more privileged social groups). *Ibid.*, 215-216.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

defamation of humanity.”<sup>202</sup> These comments served as a platform from which reviewers could then discuss contemporary moral values and exemplify the expectations of audience members who recognized the didactic function of the theatrical experience.

Younger audiences, generally holding more progressive social and political views, could ignore the discussion of moral values to concentrate on questions surrounding the new literary and theatrical aesthetics that Przybyszewski represented. Thus, “Young Theatregoer,” an informed spectator who had read the play, framed his review of *Snow* in Odessa in these opening comments: “I do not dare to doubt that the director and artists of our Dramatic Theatre, having undertaken a production of *Snow*, knew and understood what they were getting into, and how to go about their business. The question was only whether they would succeed in executing their task as they understood it.”<sup>203</sup> This introduction led “Young Theatregoer” into a discussion of acting styles. For example, this reviewer showed concern for the actress who played Eva. He believed she was concerned more with her character’s physical appearance, than with the expression of the author’s symbolic fantasy. “Young Theatregoer” also complained that Vera Iureneva, the actress who played Bronka, portrayed her

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<sup>202</sup> “Пьеса Пшебышевского [sic] публике не понравилась, в ней усмотрели пошлость, ее готовы заклеить, как пасквиль на человечество... [sic]” Staryi Teatral [I. M. Kheifets], “*Zolotoe runo. (Gorodskoi teatr),*” *Odesskie novosti*, no. 5814, 26. XI. 1902, p. 2.

<sup>203</sup> “Не смею сомневаться, что и режиссер, и артисты нашего Драматического театра, взявшись за постановку „Снега“, понимали и знали, к чему они подходят и как им к своему делу подойти. Вопрос только о том, сумеют-ли они выполнить свою задачу так, как они ее понимают.” Molodoi Teatral, “*Sneg. Pshibyshevskago. (Dram. teatra Sibiriakova),*” *Odesskie novosti*, no. 6202, 22. I. 1904, p. 3.

character's restless mood swings "much bolder and more beautifully" than the "symbolic, spiritual charm of a 'snow-white' woman."<sup>204</sup> These comments imply a spectator who is not concerned with didacticism. Yet these perceptive comments, focused not on the self, as Swift's rubrik suggests, but on the aesthetics of theatre itself, implies the rise of a new type of theatergoer, the informed and knowledgeable spectator who was aware of how theatre was developing. These were the very people for whom Przybyszewski wrote his essays and dramas.<sup>205</sup>

### **Cue 5: Przybyszewski's reception in the Russian press, 1894-1901**

The Russian press first created an image of Stanisław Przybyszewski as a representative of the new literary movements in Europe, first in Germany, then in Poland, often disparaged as "decadent."<sup>206</sup> The thick journals based in the capitals,

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<sup>204</sup> "У артистки гораздо рельефнее и красивее вышли мятежные припадки настроения, чем эта символическая прелесть духовного роста „белоснежной“ женщины." *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>205</sup> "Pozatem nie piszę ani dla dzieci, ani dla panienek, tylko dla artystów i dla ludzi, którzy doróśli do kultury czysto artystycznej, t. zn. ludzi, którzy w sztuce nie szukają »pożytku« i umieją ją odłączyć od spraw etycznych i społecznych." [Therefore, I write neither for children nor for young girls; only for artists and people who have grown up in a purely artistic culture, that is., those who do not seek "utility" in art and know how to disassociate it from ethical and social matters.] Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 9.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. Victor Erlich, "Russian Symbolism and Polish Neo-Romanticism: Notes on Comparative Nomenclature of Slavic Modernism," *American Contributions to the Seventh International Congress of Slavists. Warsaw, August 21-27, 1973. Vol. II: Literature and Folklore*, ed. Victor Terras (The Hague-Paris: Mouton, 1973), 186-187. Although many critics identify "decadence" as an early precursor to symbolism or a pejorative orientation toward symbolism on the part of hostile critics, it should be recognized as its own literary current. Several features define artistic "decadence," which has its literary origins in the work of Baudelaire. The decadent writer prefers stylistic and artistic artifice to "natural" representation and cultivates refinement to a high degree, interests himself in bizarre subject matter, and attempts to investigate super-normal realms of experience by altering his consciousness through the use of

whose readers were members of the aristocracy, intelligentsia, and students, were the first to mention Przybyszewski's name. Several years later, provincial newspapers, whose audience was broader, began to publish excerpts of the Polish writer's works.

Although this dissertation is focused on the reception of Przybyszewski's dramas and dramatic theories, a discussion of this particular genre without contextualization or reference to the others would create a false and simplistic view of Przybyszewski's reception at this time. Przybyszewski was a multifaceted writer, who worked in a variety of genres. Not surprisingly, the Russian press introduced the public to these genres—the prose poem, the aesthetic essay, the drama, the novel—at different times and in different ways. For example, in 1894 the Russian press first discussed Przybyszewski's *Zur Psychologie des Individuums*, a philosophical essay. Newspapers first published his prose poems in 1898. Beginning in 1902 and later, in 1905, when the Moscow publishing houses of Sablin and Skorpion began to publish Przybyszewski's collected works, the first volume to appear was *Homo sapiens*, a novel. However, a majority of newspapers articles published after 1901 reflect the ubiquitous nature of Przybyszewski's dramas, as reviewers throughout the empire discussed their themes, their symbolism, and actual performances by both Russian

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drugs or alcohol. The sense of individualism in decadence may take the form of solipsism, when the artist or character feels they alone are the center of existence or creative power (cf. Huysmans' character des Esseintes). The mood of many Decadent works is one of ennui, languor and pessimism. Although the term today has acquired pejorative overtones, my use will not carry this bias. See Abrams, *op. cit.*, 54-55; Hutnikiewicz, *op. cit.*, 27-28). A diachronic study of Russian critics as they characterized Przybyszewski as a "modernist," "symbolist," or "decadent" is a topic worthy of further investigation.

and Polish companies. Therefore, this chronological review of the press will incorporate each of these genres as they were mentioned in the Russian press.

Two early articles portrayed Przybyszewski as a “decadent” representative of the new literary current in Germany. Ieronim Iasinskii, editor of the western-looking St. Petersburg journal *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury* [*Foreign Literature Herald*], made what is believed to be the first reference to Przybyszewski in the Russian press in 1894, in his article “To Whom Does the Future Belong?” which meditated on the future of literature in the 20th century.<sup>207</sup> Iasinskii described Przybyszewski as a “German decadent” whose world view held nothing new, but nevertheless was at the forefront of a new “philosophical–literary” movement. In addition, Iasinskii contrasted Przybyszewski’s curious view, espoused in the essay *Zur Psychologie des Individuums*, that society was evolving spiritually in a positive direction, to that held by the German critic Max Nordau, author of *Entartung* [*Degeneration*, 1892], who believed that society was degenerating. Iasinskii agreed with Nordau that the “youthful” literature of the west was in a period of complete and unprecedented decline.<sup>208</sup> By setting up this comparison with Nordau’s social view, Iasinskii painted the “decadent” Stanisław Przybyszewski as the “new art’s” standard-bearer in Germany.

An 1895 article in the Petersburg journal, *Severnyi vestnik* [*Northern Herald*], also linked Przybyszewski with *Junges Deutschland*, the new German literary

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<sup>207</sup> I. I. Iasinskii, “Komu prinadlezhit budushchee?,” *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 9 (1894): 5-24. Iasinskii did not define what he meant by “decadent,” he only set up an opposition between Przybyszewski’s and Nordau’s worldview.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

movement.<sup>209</sup> In contrast to Iasinskii, A. Brauner, its Vienna correspondent, did not use the term “decadent,” but labeled Przybyszewski an “undoubtedly talented” writer, the “single representative of Satanism in the new literature of the Germans.”<sup>210</sup>

Brauner’s essay marks an early attempt to portray Przybyszewski negatively as anti-Christian and therefore, immoral.

Brauner was the first critic in the Russian press to mention that Przybyszewski was a dramatist. Displaying an intimate knowledge of *Junges Deutschland* circles, Brauner noted that Przybyszewski had just finished a play (*Das große Glück*), which was evidence that the writer “has finally come down to earth and now, perhaps, it won’t be difficult to understand him.”<sup>211</sup> Brauner’s comment about the incomprehensibility of Przybyszewski’s works sets the stage for numerous later attempts by

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<sup>209</sup> A. Brauner, “Sovremennaia ‘Molodaia Germaniia,’ (Okonchanie),” *Severnyi vestnik*, no. 12 (1895): 263-278.

<sup>210</sup> Brauner, *ibid.*, 266. Brauner does not develop this theme and it is unclear where he has heard of Przybyszewski’s interest in the occult. Przybyszewski had just finished his novel, *Satans Kinder* at the end of 1895; the book is actually a retelling of Dostoevskii’s *Devils* [*Besy*]. The publicistic essays “Die Synagoge des Satan. Erster Teil: Die Entstehung der Satanskirche“ and “Die Synagoge des Satan. Zweiter Teil: Der Kult der Satanskirche“ would not appear in the German journal *Die Kritik* until 1897. See George Klim, *Stanislaw Przybyszewski. Biographie* (Paderborn: Igel Verlag, 1992), 96, 336.

<sup>211</sup> “Przybyszewski [sic] совсем сошел на землю и, может быть, теперь его не трудно будет понять.” Brauner, *ibid.*, 266. Przybyszewski’s play eventually appeared in the January 1897 issue of *Die Gesellschaft*. Brauner may have heard of the new play from Richard Dehmel, with whom Przybyszewski had corresponded about the play several times in July and August 1894. See Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Listy. Tom I, 1879-1906*, ed. Stanisław Hellsztyński (Warszawa: Spółka Wydawnicza Parnas Polski, 1937), 92, 94, 95-96.

other critics, such as Aleksei Remizov and Ivan Bezdomnyi, to offer interpretations of their meaning for the general public.<sup>212</sup>

Przybyszewski's name became more familiar outside the two capitals, the traditional centers of culture, as provincial newspapers began to publish excerpts from his prose poems. These short pieces of unusually ornate, lyrical prose first appeared in the Moscow daily *Kur'er* [*Courier*] in November and December 1898, when three long excerpts from "Epipsykhidion," a "colossal, symbolist phantasmagoria," were published as examples of the newest Polish, not German, belletristic writing.<sup>213</sup> Several months later excerpts from the same prose poem appeared in the Kazan' press.<sup>214</sup> By 1902 other provincial newspapers in Zhitomir, Riga, Nizhnii Novgorod, and Stavropol' had published Przybyszewski's prose poems.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> See, for example: [Remizov], "Teatr i iskusstvo. „*Sneg*“,” *Iug*, no. 1657, 19. XII. 1903, p. 2; K. I. Khranevich, "Literaturnia novosti. O dramakh Przhibyshevskago [sic]," *Novyi zhurnal inostrannoi literatury*, no. 3 (1903): 290-296; D. N. Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii, "K kharakteristike sovremennago simvolizma v iskusstve. I. *Sneg* Pshibyshevskago," *Iuzhnye zapiski*, no. 15-16 (1904): 81-90; A. Uman'skii, "Iz sovremennoi literatury: (Simvolizm. Drama S. Pshibyshevskago *Sneg*. Ee dostoinstva i neiastnost' simvolov.)," *Nizhegorodskii listok*, no. 110, 23. IV. 1904, p. 2; I. Bezdomnyi, *Podrobnoe izlozhenie i smysl p'esy St. Pshibyshevskago 'Sneg' (Dramaticheskoe libretto)*, (Odessa: Poliatus, 1904).

<sup>213</sup> Stanislav Pshibyshevskii, "Epipsykhidion," trans. V. Lavrov, *Kur'er*, no. 325, 25. XI. 1898, p. 1; no. 331, 1. XII. 1898, p. 1; no. 334, 4. XII. 1898, p. 1.

<sup>214</sup> "U moria: (Otryvok)" [*Nad morzem. Rapsod III*], trans. V. Borodzich, *Kazanskii telegraf*, no. 1884, 24. II. 1899, p. 3, and "Svetlye nochi (Vtoraia pesnia iz poemy 'U moria.'): Otryvok" [*Nad morzem. Rapsod II*], *Kazanskii telegraf*, no. 1896, 10. III. 1899, pp. 2-3.

<sup>215</sup> The fragment, "More: (Otryvok)" [*Nad morzem. Rapsod III*] trans. G. S., appeared in Zhitomir's *Volyn'*, no. 1, 1. I. 1902, p. 5; Riga's *Pribaltiiskii krai*, no. 60, 13. III. 1902, p. 1, and *Nizhegorodskii listok*, no. 139, 24. V. 1902, p. 2; while "Gde zh tebia vziat'?" ["Gdzie chwicić cię?" fragm. *Z cyklu Wigilii*] and "Toska" ["Tęsknota" fragm. *Z cyklu Wigilii*], trans. K. S., both appeared in Stavropol's *Severnyi Kavkaz*, no. 79, 4. VII. 1902, p. 2.

When *Kur'er* took the rare step of also publishing a glowing, lengthy foreword by the poet Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, it marked the first journalistic piece in the Russian press that did not label Przybyszewski a “decadent.” In that foreword, Tetmajer noted the writer’s early fame in Germany, the “phenomenal” writer’s return to Poland, the land of his birth, and the poem’s thematic link to the European tradition through Poe and Shelley.<sup>216</sup> This presentation of Przybyszewski as a deserving heir to such literary traditions set the stage for later critical salvos by the Russian press, aimed at weakening his position as a voice for the new literary movement.

The first in-depth attack on Przybyszewski’s aesthetic views came in early 1901, with Lesia Ukrainka’s essay “Notes on the Newest Polish Literature,” which appeared in the thick journal *Zhizn'* [*Life*].<sup>217</sup> This critique also stands out as one of the first full-blown assaults on Przybyszewski. Because of this significance, as well

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<sup>216</sup> *Życie*, no. 1 (1899): 1-4; cf. *Kur'er*, no. 325, 25. XI. 1898, p. 1. Like Shelley’s 1821 lyrical narrative to Emilia Viviani, the daughter of the Pisan governor, the theme of Przybyszewski’s prose poem is the yearning of one soul for another. Stopford Brooke describes the “epipsychidion” as a soul “which is a complement of, and therefore responsive to, another soul like itself, but in higher place and of a higher order. The lower would then seek to be united with the higher, because in such union it would be made perfect, and the pre-established harmony between them be actually realized.” See Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Epipsychidion*, ed. Robert Alfred Potts, fasc. repr. (1821) (London: Reeves and Turner, 1887), xlv-xlvi. The new writer’s style and intellect also led Tetmajer to suggest that Przybyszewski’s originality, in the future, would produce a legendary work in the tradition of Mickiewicz and Słowacki: “Известно только откуда он вышел, но идет он своей дорогой, а куда он придет – неизвестно. Байронист Мицкевич написал „Пана Тадеуша”, Словацкий „Царя Духа“, — вещь, свидетельствующую об импонирующей и необычайной оригинальности его интеллекта.”

<sup>217</sup> Lesia Ukrainka [Larysa Kvitka-Kosach], “Zametki o noveishei pol'skoi literature,” *Zhizn'*, no. 1 (January 1901): 115-119. Ukrainka is generally recognized, with Taras Shevchenko, as one of Ukraine’s great writers. A Marxist, she translated *The Communist Manifesto* into Ukrainian and defended the artistic representation of socialist ideals in realism in her article, “Utopia in belletristic literature” (1906).

as the fact that Meierkhol'd may have read it, it is worth devoting several paragraphs to its content.<sup>218</sup>

Exemplifying the fluidity of terminology at this time, Ukrainka, a Ukrainian-born socialist writer, identified Przybyszewski as the “leading fighter” of the “Kraków School,” which advocated “metaphysical naturalism, or decadence, or modernism.”<sup>219</sup> In her critique of Przybyszewski’s aesthetic theories developed in the essays “Confiteor” (1899) and *On the Paths of the Soul* (1900), Ukrainka emphasized six points to differentiate them from the current trends in art: 1) The theory of “art for art’s sake” does not follow from current aesthetic formulas—“art” is not equivalent to “beauty.” Art is a “re-creation of the eternal...independent of time and space,” and “a re-creation of the essence, the soul.” It re-creates that soul in its varied forms: as it appears in the universe, in humanity as a whole, or the individual self.<sup>220</sup> 2) Art re-creates the soul in all its manifestations and is not subject to either ethical or aesthetic prejudices. Ukrainka explained that this particular point follows from Przybyszewski’s guiding principle that art is “force, a self-possessing energy.”<sup>221</sup> 3)

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<sup>218</sup> Meierkhol'd notes this journal in his notebooks for the period February-August 1900. See O. M. Fel'dman, ed., *Meierkhol'd. Nasledie. Tom 1. Avtobiograficheskie materialy. Dokumenty 1891-1903* (Moscow: O.G.I., 1998), 365.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 112, 118.

<sup>220</sup> “Искусство есть воссоздание того, что вечно, независимо от всяких изменений и случайностей, от времени и пространства, следовательно: „оно есть воссоздание сущности, т. е. души, притом души, где бы она ни проявлялась: во вселенной ли, в человечестве, или в отдельном индивидууме.” Ukrainka, *ibid.*, 116. Cf. Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 13. Refer to Appendix I, text 2.76.

<sup>221</sup> “принцип новой эстетики не красота и не этика, а *сила*, энергия самодовлеющая, ничему не подчиненная.” Ukrainka, *ibid.*, 116. Italics in original. Cf. Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 14, 16.

Ukrainka stressed that the goal of art is itself, it is “absolute,” because it is a reflection of the “absolute,” that is, the soul.<sup>222</sup> 4) Art that serves morality or social concerns is not art, it is only a “*biblia pauperum*” or “poor man’s bible,” for the uneducated.<sup>223</sup> 5) Art must not lower itself to plebian tastes; it need not be “democratic” because art, by its very nature, is not accessible to all.<sup>224</sup> 6) Finally, the artist, as “priest of this new religion,” is also free from moral obligations and values, for he stands above life, pure and holy.<sup>225</sup>

Ukrainka concluded from her final point that art and the artist are “absolutely free,” a position which suggested a number of problems to her. She identified what seemed to be an ironic contradiction in Przybyszewski’s theory: if the artist is “absolutely free,” then he should have the right to depict anything. Yet Przybyszewski argued in his work that the only proper subject of art is the “naked soul,” or the unconscious emotions of the soul, not the crowd (which, in her words, is the realm of the agitator), or society (which is the realm of the scientist). This limitation of subject matter amounted to a prohibition against any existing form of “realism,” which was, in Przybyszewski’s opinion, only a “morass” (*bezdrozh'e dushi*), a false path to the soul. This limitation also created a very narrow range of subjects for the artist: love, death, “emotions, thoughts, impressions, dreams, [and] visions.”<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Ukrainka, *ibid.*, 116; cf. Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 15.

<sup>223</sup> Ukrainka, *ibid.*, 116-117; cf. Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 15.

<sup>224</sup> Ukrainka, *ibid.*, 117; cf. Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 15.

<sup>225</sup> Ukrainka, *ibid.*, 117; cf. Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 16.

<sup>226</sup> Ukrainka, *ibid.*, 117.

After pointing out the illogical nature of Przybyszewski's "artistic freedom," Ukrainka concluded her critique with a hopeful sentiment. Perhaps, she wrote, followers of Przybyszewski's path, these "Polish metaphysical naturalists," would eventually be led to the same goal as other wayward idealists and populists, "namely, to the re-creation of one of the parts of eternity, the people."<sup>227</sup> In fact, in *On the Paths of the Soul* Przybyszewski had already argued that an intrinsic, apolitical connection existed between the artist and the people:

Naród to częśćka wieczności, i w nim tkwią korzenie artysty, z niego z ziemi rodzinnej ciągnie artysta najżywotniejszą swą siłę. W narodzie tkwi artysta, ale nie w jego polityce, nie w jego zewnętrznych przemianach, tylko w tem, co jest w narodzie wiecznem: jego odrębności od wszystkich innych narodów, rzeczy niezmiennej i odwiecznej: rasie.<sup>228</sup>

The nation is a part of eternity, and the artist's roots lie in it; the artist draws his most vital strength from it and the land. The artist is rooted in the nation, but not in its politics, not in its external metamorphoses, only in that which is eternal in the nation: its peculiarities from all other nations, something unchangeable and everlasting, race.

Thus, when Ukrainka suggested that Przybyszewski should look to the people for inspiration, she avoided summarizing and thus, propagandizing, Przybyszewski's own idealistic view, which conflicted with the internationalist worldview of doctrinaire Marxists such as Rosa Luxemburg. Przybyszewski's view could easily be interpreted as a reflection of the nationalistic aspirations of the Polish people, who, as

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<sup>227</sup> "—возможно, что эти грезы приведут польских натуралистов-метафизиков к тому же, к чему привели приверженцев органического труда всех оттенков, идеалистов, реалистов, народников, а именно к воссозданию одной из частей вечности--народа, говоря стилем Пшибышевского." Ukrainka, *op. cit.*, 118.

<sup>228</sup> Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 17. See Appendix I, text 1.228.

a consequence of “external metaphormoses” engineered by the three partitioning powers, had become a nation without a state at the turn of the twentieth century. By not mentioning Przybyszewski’s nationalist views on the connection between artist and nation, Ukrainka diplomatically avoided exposing or deepening the bitter rift that existed between nationalists and internationalists within the young Polish social democratic movement in 1900.<sup>229</sup>

Przybyszewski’s representation in the Russian press as a “decadent” acquired a new meaning after the death of his wife, Dagny Juel, on 23 May 1901 in Tiflis.<sup>230</sup> The term “decadent,” which had been used by his Russian critics but had never been clearly defined, now became associated with sexual immorality. This shift occurred most noticeably when P. I. Rotenshtern (pseudo. A. Tezi) published the sensational piece, “A Tragedy of Free Love (Letter from Vienna),” in the Moscow newspaper *Novosti dnia* [*The Daily News*].<sup>231</sup> Rotenshtern unabashedly extrapolated a sensational web of associations, some false, from Dagny’s death and Przybyszewski’s novel *Homo sapiens* in order to prove that what had happened in Tiflis was only the result of contemporary immoral behavior by so-called “decadents.” Przybyszewski, in Rotenshtern’s words, the “prophet of free love,” had stolen Dagny, the wife of

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<sup>229</sup> For general information on the early Polish socialist and nationalist movements, see Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Poland*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 198 ff.

<sup>230</sup> Władysław Emeryk, Dagny’s 25-year-old lover, shot her in the back of the head, then shot himself. “Po gorodu,” *Tiflisskii listok*, no. 119, 24. V. 1901, p. 2; “Po gorodu,” *Tiflisskii listok*, no. 120, 25. V. 1901, p. 2; cf. Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 146.

<sup>231</sup> A. Tezi [P. I. Rotenshtern], “Tragediia svobodnoi liubvi: (Pis'mo iz Veny),” *Novosti dnia*, no. 6465, 14. VI. 1901, p. 2; reprinted in *Tiflisskii listok*, no. 142, 20. VI. 1901, p. 3.

“decadent poet” August Strindberg, with whom she allegedly had two children, just to prove that society is based on false concepts of love. Strindberg, in turn, had stolen Dagny away from a Norwegian doctor.<sup>232</sup> In a clear case of biographical fallacy, Rotenshtern claimed that all these immoral deeds were described in Przybyszewski’s novel and Strindberg’s own novel, *Inferno*.<sup>233</sup> Rotenshtern’s column was one of the first to directly associate the concept of “decadence” with sexual mores. Although the subject of morality in Przybyszewski’s works is tangential to this dissertation, this issue will arise once again, as Komissarzhevskaja is forced to defend Przybyszewski’s drama *Gody zhizni* [*Pir zhizni, Life’s Banquet*, 1909] against charges of “decadence” from her own company.

One of the first articles about Przybyszewski’s works that appeared in the Russian press after Dagny’s death is a piece by O. Kapeliush, “From the latest literature. Stanisław Przybyszewski’s *The Golden Fleece*,” which appeared in a July 1901 issue of *Odesskii listok* [*The Odessa Flyer*].<sup>234</sup> It was subsequently reprinted in the St. Petersburg music-theatre monthly *Nuvellist* in November 1901, four months later, after the debate over Przybyszewski had begun.<sup>235</sup> Its geographical origin and scholarly tone are significant for three reasons. First, it is evidence that discussion of

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<sup>232</sup> Tezi, *op. cit.*, 2. Rotenshtern-Tezi promulgated several inaccuracies: first, Dagny had two children, but by Przybyszewski, not Strindberg. Second, she was the daughter of a Norwegian doctor, not the wife.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>234</sup> O. Kapeliush, “Iz noveishei literatury. *Zolotoe runo*, drama Stanislava Pshibyshevskago,” *Odesskii listok*, no. 188, 22. VII. 1901, p. 2.

<sup>235</sup> “*Zolotoe runo*. Drama Stanislava Pshibyshevskago,” *Nuvellist*, no. 11 (1901): 4-6. Given its relatively late reprinting, this article seems to be an attempt by *Nuvellist*, to add its own voice to the Przybyszewski debate, albeit through a proxy.

Przybyszewski's literary work and aesthetic views elicited interest not only in St. Petersburg, a traditionally western-looking city, but also in Odessa.<sup>236</sup> Second, its scholarly tone differs greatly from the sensationalist tone of Rotenshtern. Third, its writer offers views that may have entered the intellectual circles in Petersburg or Moscow through *Nuvelist*, coloring future dialogue on Przybyszewski.

Either well aware of the potential audience, or perhaps a genuine advocate of the new literary trends (or both), Kapeliush described Przybyszewski in glowing terms: Przybyszewski's influence in European literature could be compared to that of Nietzsche, while the secret of his success lay partially "in the character of Polish poetry, and in general, in the Polish spirit."<sup>237</sup> Kapeliush recognized Przybyszewski as a member the "newest literature," which was characterized by a "cult of the unconscious, Satanism, neo-Catholicism, and mysticism."<sup>238</sup> "*Die Moderne*,"

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<sup>236</sup> A full translation of *The Visitors* would appear in a November issue of *Odesskii listok*. See [Lidiia Lebedeva], "*Gosti*. Dramaticheskii epilog v odnom akte," *Odesskii listok*, no. 279, 29. X. 1901, pp. 1-2, and no. 282, 1. XI. 1901, pp. 1-2. Lebedeva was the cousin of symbolist poet Konstantin Bal'mont.

<sup>237</sup> "а между тем в Европе он создал целую школу и, можно сказать, главенствует в современной литературе рядом с Ницше. Влияние его не ограничивается одной польской литературой." "Секрет влияния... следует искать в характеристике польской лирики, польского духа вообще" Kapeliush, *op. cit.*, 2. Cf. "*Zolotoe runo*," *Nuvelist*, 4.

<sup>238</sup> "Новейшую литературу характеризует культ бессознательного, сатакизм [sic], неокатолицизм, мистицизм." Kapeliush, *ibid.*, 2. Cf. "*Zolotoe runo*," *Nuvelist*, 4. The typographical error appears in both editions. This is a much simplified, semi-mystical view of the movement than Ukrainka's earlier 1901 characterization. She had complained that the new Polish poetry, as well as the works of its "idol" Przybyszewski, echoed "all the pessimistic tendencies of world poetry," including "Byron's demonism, Shelley's pantheism, Leconte de Lille's 'cold, cosmic pessimism,' Baudelaire's satanism, Nietzsche's 'superhuman contemptuousness,' Verlaine's 'anguish of satiety and piety of despair,' Rimbaud's 'moral nihilism,'"

Kapeliush suggested, whose roots could be traced to such writers as Barbey d'Aureville, and romantics such as Poe and Novalis, rejected realism and the ideas of its stalwart advocates such as Zola. These writers considered the subjective impression or the "atmosphere" (*kolorit*) more important than the fact. As one of these new writers, Kapeliush suggested, Przybyszewski's drama had to be read "between the lines." In doing so, the reader would move beyond purported "dissonances" in the text and come face to face with a shocking picture of reality.<sup>239</sup> In the words of the symbolists, these works thus would transport the reader from "the real" (*realia*) to "the more real" (*realiora*).

Kapeliush considered an ethical point of view to be a new feature of Przybyszewski's work. Kapeliush noted two different ideas in *The Golden Fleece*: first, the concept of retribution, and second, the sanctity of maternal memory.<sup>240</sup> Regarding retribution, he reminded readers that concepts such as retribution were to be understood in a relative manner. In Przybyszewski's worldview, each individual, and therefore, humanity, was only a mannequin in the hands of fate, and justice could be served in any number of ways. It did not have to be immediate or fair. Therefore, one could find examples in society where crimes went unpunished, or adulterers lived

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d'Annunzio's 'eternally suffering aestheticism,' and Peladan's 'senseless lunacy.'" Cf. Ukrainka, *ibid.*, 112.

<sup>239</sup> "На первом плане стоит не факт, не характеристика, даже не идея, не мечта, а колорит. Колорит тайны, загадки, бездны... То же самое мы видим и в „Золотом руне“ Пшибышевского. К этой драме нельзя прилагать обыкновенного масштаба, ее надо читать между строк. Тем выше заслуга Пшибышевского, который, при всем том, сумел избежать диссонансов и дал нам потрясающую картину из действительной жизни." Kapeliush, *op. cit.*, 2; cf. "Zolotoe runo," *Nuvellist*, 4.

<sup>240</sup> Kapeliush, *ibid.*, 2; cf. "Zolotoe runo," *Nuvellist*, 5-6.

happily with their partners. However, examples such as these did not disprove Przybyszewski's general theory. Therefore, Kapeliush believed his dramas should be considered not as depictions of objective reality, but as a subjective commentary on it.<sup>241</sup>

### **Cue 6: Controversy over *The Golden Fleece***

The premiere of Przybyszewski's *The Golden Fleece* [*Zolotoe runo*] at Szabelskaia's Petersburg Theatre on 10 and 11 October 1901, marked a new level of controversy in the Russian press about Przybyszewski and his aesthetic views. Until this time, coverage on Przybyszewski had been limited to sporadic, albeit significant, comments made in general articles on the contemporary state of German and Polish literature, or the continuous coverage presented on the pages of Petersburg's Polish-language weekly, *Kraj*. There had also been the brief notice of the tragic murder of his wife, Dagny Juel in Tiflis in June 1901. Translations of several of Przybyszewski's prose poems, such as "By the Sea" [*Am Meer*, 1897; *Nad morzhem, U moria*], had also appeared. Kapeliush's article on *The Golden Fleece* had also appeared in a July issue of *Odesskii listok*. Now, however, articles appeared in the daily newspapers of St. Petersburg which directly addressed the Przybyszewski phenomenon in theatre. Critics were evenly split between detractors and supporters.

V. Burenin, the critic for the Petersburg daily *Novoe vremia* [*New Times*] set a decidedly sarcastic and negative tone for the dialogue in his column "Critical essays." This article, which appeared two days before the reviews of *The Golden Fleece*, was a

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<sup>241</sup> Kapeliush, *op. cit.*, 2; cf. "Zolotoe runo," *Nuvellist*, 5.

review of Augusta Damanskaia's translation of the one-act play, *The Visitors*, which was just appearing in *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*.<sup>242</sup> Burenin echoed the description of Przybyszewski as "the head of *Młoda Polska*" which had appeared in the article "The Newest Polish Literature," but sarcastically wondered if the description was deserved. Burenin suggested that a representative of a literary movement such as *Młoda Polska*, whose works united "Byron's dark demonism, Verlaine's sinfulness and saintliness (?) [sic], Annunzio's perverted aestheticism, and Baudelaire's Satanism," should be able to produce a work that would "make the dead rise in their graves."<sup>243</sup> However, in copying the tone and style of Maeterlinck's *Princesse Maleine*, Burenin wrote, Przybyszewski's *The Visitors* revealed itself as only a "scholastic exercise in the imitation of the so-called 'symbolic' works of Maeterlinck."<sup>244</sup> He continued his attack on Przybyszewski's "fashionable," syncretic manner in a parody, based on a conversation about transgression that occurs at the beginning of the play:

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<sup>242</sup> V. Burenin, "Kriticheskie ocherki," *Novoe vremia*, no. 9198, 12. X. 1901, p. 2; "Gosti. Dramaticheskii epilog v odnom deistvii Stanislava Pshybyshvskago [sic]. Pervod s pol'skago A. Damanskoi," *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 77-88; "Noveishaia pol'skaia literatura," *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 340-343.

<sup>243</sup> Burenin, *op. cit.*, 2. "Он считается у поляков главою «Молодой Польши», — которая будто бы соединяет в творениях своих выдающихся представителей «мрачный демонизм Байрона, греховность и святость (?) Верлена, извращенный эстетизм [sic] Анунцио и сатанизм Бодлера. Если этому верить, то «Молодая Польша» должна предъявлять такие литературные вещи, от которых даже «упокойники восстают в гробах»...." Original orthography. The anonymous author of "Noveishaia pol'skaia literatura," repeats these features of *Młoda Polska* literature from Ukrainka's earlier article in *Zhizn'*. Cf. Ukrainka, *ibid.*, 112; "Noveishaia pol'skaia literatura," *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 340-341.

<sup>244</sup> Burenin, *ibid.*, 2.

1-Й СТАРЕЦ. Напишешь пьесу в модном,  
«символическом» жанру.

2-Й. И оказывается, что украл и тон, и манеру у  
Метерлинка.

1-Й. А избитое пессимистическое настроение и  
избитые идейки у Нитцше...<sup>245</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> OLD MAN: You will write a little play in a  
fashionable, “symbolic” genre.

2<sup>nd</sup>: And it turns out, that you have stolen both the tone  
and manner from Maeterlinck.

1<sup>st</sup>: And the hackneyed pessimistic mood and  
hackneyed notions from Nietzsche...

Despite his parodic and condescending tone, Burenin observed the symbolic connection between the play’s “visitors,” or “terrible guests,” and its setting, as had Pawlikowski, the theatre director in Lwów: “The simplistic ethics lie just in this: “a pang of conscience in the form of ‘terrible’ visitors,” which fill the entire house, that is, the human soul, always appear after a transgression.”<sup>246</sup> This important observation, which Burenin could have broadened into a general discussion of the problem of theatrical representation (how does one depict “the soul” on stage?), was left untouched, as the critic went on to mention that the old men, who have seemed to function as a Greek chorus, thankfully leave. However, the problem of how to

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<sup>245</sup> Burenin, *ibid.*, 2. Przybyszewski’s original dialogue, quoted by Burenin, is as follows: 1-Й СТАРЕЦ. Да конечно, все может быть преступлением.

2-Й. Даже сама жизнь, потому что так или иначе мы живем за счет других.

1-Й. Женишься на женщине, не зная, любит ли она тебя...

2-Й. Родится дитя, которого нет средств воспитать...

1-Й. Задушить (однако!)[VB] отвратительного скрягу, деньгами которого можно бы осчастливить целый мир...

<sup>246</sup> “Прописная мораль заключается вот в чем: за преступлением всегда является «угрызение совести в виде «страшных» гостей», которые и наполняют весь дом», т. е. душу человека.” Burenin, *ibid.*, 2. Orthography as in original.

represent concepts such as the soul on stage would be taken up by Vsevolod Meierkhol'd two years later.

The controversy surrounding Przybyszewski and his new drama continued with the appearance of the actual reviews of *The Golden Fleece*. The first appeared in *Birzhevye vedomosti* [*Exchange News*] and the second two days later, in *Novoe vremia*.<sup>247</sup> Osip Dymov's favorable review in *Birzhevye vedomosti* concentrates on retelling of plot, but several comments illustrate a view that the dialogue about Przybyszewski's literary worth began in the Russian press at this time. Dymov used the prism of Maeterlinck to frame this dialogue.

Dymov did not directly confront Burenin's claim that Przybyszewski's work was only an imitation of Maeterlinck's *Princesse Maleine*. Instead, he developed his defense of Przybyszewski around a long quotation from "The Tragical in Daily Life," a chapter from Maeterlinck's philosophical work *Le Trésor des humbles* (1896).<sup>248</sup> Dymov suggests that, in *The Golden Fleece*, Przybyszewski had attempted to depict both "the life of the soul amidst an infinite world" and "the dialogue of man with his fate," ideas which Maeterlinck had presented in *Le Trésor*.<sup>249</sup> Furthermore, Przybyszewski's plot, based on the simple commandment, "Thou shalt not commit

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<sup>247</sup> O. Dymov, "Teatr, muzyka i iskusstvo. Peterburgskii teatr. *Zolotoe runo*, dr. v. 3 d. St. Pshibyshevskago. *Starshina Burambii*, komediia v 3 d. Petra Rybakova," *Birzhevye vedomosti*, no. 278, 12. X. 1901, p. 2-3; "Teatr i muzyka. Moskva," *Novoe vremia*, no. 9200, 14. X. 1901, p. 4. Osip I. Dymov (Perel'man, 1878-1959) was a writer and dramatist.

<sup>248</sup> Dymov, *ibid.*, 2. "...С. Пшибышевский, молодой польский писатель, так-называемого, нового направления..." Punctuation as in original. Cf. Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Treasure of the Humble*, trans. Alfred Sutro (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1903), 97-98.

<sup>249</sup> Dymov, *ibid.*, 2.

adultery,” was only an outline within which to develop Maeterlinck’s theories of the soul and fate. Within that outline Przybyszewski’s *dramatis personae* became almost symbols or riddles, due to the “half-poetic, half-mystical tone” with which he rendered them. For example, the character Ruszczyc represented “conscience,” and Irena, “sun, music, and young life.” Allegorical characters such as these were acting challenges even for the best actors.<sup>250</sup> In presenting Przybyszewski’s work as a continuation of Maeterlinck and a challenge for actors, Dymov’s review gave the Polish author another form of cachet that would distinguish him from other contemporary writers in the eyes of the Russian theatre world and general public.

The anonymous reviewer for *Novoe vremia* made no attempt to seek further parallels between Maeterlinck and Przybyszewski.<sup>251</sup> Although the writer acknowledged that *The Golden Fleece* was a symbol of love (“love—everyone is searching for it, living by it; dying for it”), he did not attempt to find symbolism in the play’s setting, a psychiatric hospital, as Pawlikowski had done when he openly questioned the setting of *The Visitors*.<sup>252</sup> Przybyszewski’s setting became a basis for metaphorical descriptions of the play’s characters and a judgment on the proper subjects of art. The reviewer mused that “dramatists are now concerned with semi-mad people” and that Przybyszewski’s characters were not original types that ordinary people could identify with, but “neurasthenics” and “psychopaths.”<sup>253</sup>

Assuming a morally superior pose much like Rotenshtern’s, the reviewer of *Novoe*

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<sup>250</sup> Dymov, *op. cit.*, 3.

<sup>251</sup> “Teatr i muzyka,” *Novoe vremia*, no. 9200, p. 4.

<sup>252</sup> Pełka, *op. cit.*, 535.

<sup>253</sup> “Teatr i muzyka,” *Novoe vremia*, no. 9200, p. 4.

*vremia* easily equated psychopathic actions with marital infidelity. The reviewer explained further, “All at once Przybyszewski has given [us] five psychopaths: two betrayed husbands, a lover, a wife who is both betrayed and betraying, and the father of one of the betrayed husbands.”<sup>254</sup>

Writing for *Teatr i iskusstvo*, Vl. Linskii called *The Golden Fleece* a “mood play” (*p'esa nastroeniia*) written in “half-tones.”<sup>255</sup> According to Linskii, this enigmatic style of writing prevented him from fully presenting the plot, for any brief description would reduce it to banality.<sup>256</sup> Moreover, the strength of the play lay not in its plot, Linskii wrote, but in the creation of atmosphere and the use of dialogue.<sup>257</sup> In voicing his opinion, Linskii suggested that there was more to a Przybyszewski drama than just a mundane story, but did not offer any specific interpretation. Unlike Dymov, Linskii did not suggest that the simple plot could act as a structural artifice for deeper meaning. However, his suggestion that the written plot held further meaning does echo Kapeliush’s earlier advice that a Przybyszewski play “must be read between the lines.”<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> “Пшебышевский [sic] сразу дал пять психопатов: двух обманутых мужей, любовника, обманывающую и обманутую жену и отца одного из обманутых мужей.” “Teatr i muzyka,” *Novoe vremia*, no. 9200, p. 4.

<sup>255</sup> Vl. Linskii, “Peterburgskii teatr,” *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 42 (14. X. 1901): 748. Linskii refers only to the “new literature.”

<sup>256</sup> “Я хотел-бы вам рассказать содержание пьесы. Но возможно-ли это? «Пьесу настроения», пьесу написанную в полутонах, нельзя передать в нескольких словах: получится только остов пьесы, нередко банальный с виду, ибо ее так сказать, отвлеченную сущность можно выразить только художественными образами.” Linskii, *ibid.*, 748.

<sup>257</sup> “Вся сила пьесы в диалогах и в том настроении, каким проникнута пьеса.” Linskii, *op. cit.*, 748.

<sup>258</sup> Kapeliush, *op. cit.*, 2; cf. “Zolotoe runo,” *Nuvellist*, 4.

Linskii also suggested that there were “a great deal of symbols and allegories” in the play. However, he did not identify any specific symbols, except the golden fleece, which represented “the happiness which love is able to give.” As if alluding to Dymov’s review, Linskii also noted the presence of characters who were “half-symbols.” However, Linskii did not believe that these were detrimental to the play, but rather, suggested that these types of characters were reflective of reality, because people really were “half-symbols” and “half-enigmas.”<sup>259</sup>

Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd both began their searches and experimentation in a theatrical environment ripe for change. The state of the Russian theatrical art at the turn of the century was progressing slowly, dependent mostly on the efforts of the private theatres. Led by the Moscow Art Theatre, these private theatres offered less conservative repertoire and more innovative productions than the tradition-bound Imperial Theatres in St. Petersburg and Moscow. However, repertoire in both types of theatre was still subject to state censorship. This prevented the staging of plays such as Przybyszewski’s one-act epilogue, *The Visitors*, due to its “immoral” content. Even in 1906, after censorship had been eased, works such as *The Eternal Tale* still suffered cuts by the censors.

There was limited training and opportunities for actors at this time. The best actors, trained at the Imperial Schools of Dramatic Art, could be assured of work in the provinces or the capitals. Less talented actors were forced to work in the provinces, where the bulk of the repertoire consisted of melodramas, vaudevilles, and

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<sup>259</sup> Linskii, *ibid.*, 748-749.

comedies. Companies hired actors to fill a certain *emploi*, or character type, which limited the kinds of roles they would play, almost to the end of their career. The basic acting style varied from the traditional, melodramatic DelSartean style, to a simpler, more natural style. Dramatic productions in both the capitals and provinces suffered from short rehearsal periods, lack of artistic unity, or both.

Russian theatre audiences were diversifying at the turn of the twentieth century. Each type of audience brought its own expectations to the theatre: the “new bourgeois” sought entertainment, while educated workers, wanting to rise further in society, sought enlightenment and moral instruction. Both Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd cultivated an audience made up of the intelligentsia and students. Komissarzhevskaja was especially popular among female students. This younger generation appreciated the artistic searching in which both Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd were engaged.

Przybyszewski's early reception in the Russian press painted him as a “decadent,” but talented, writer, first, as a leader of the new literary trends in Germany, then, after 1898, in the Polish lands. Although censors prevented the publication of Przybyszewski's early novellas, such as 1893's *Totenmesse*, citing its obscure, metaphoric language and allegedly blasphemous content, by 1898, Russian newspapers in the capital and provinces were publishing his prose poems. After the May 1901 (OS) death of Dagny Juel, Przybyszewski's wife, his representation as a “decadent” became more closely associated with sexual immorality. This shift only added to the criticism of Przybyszewski from conservative elements in the press.

Przybyszewski could find little solace in the leftist press, where critics such as Lesia Ukrainka criticized him for the aesthetic principle of “art for art’s sake” and his abandonment of the *narod* as the proper subject of art. Such criticism was somewhat unfair, however, for Przybyszewski believed that every artist’s roots lay in his national identity, and thus, with his people and the land.

Przybyszewski, in both his early essays on art (1894-1900) and his essay on drama (1902), sought to rebel against the naturalist aesthetic by turning the focus inward, toward the soul. Closely related to the concept of the soul were the concepts of creativity and the genius. The “soul,” a reincarnating reflection of the androgynous Absolute, lay deep beneath the consciousness, and its representation was accessible to the artist through synaesthetic means. Synaesthesia was necessary because this was the original quality of the Absolute, before mind and soul separated. Its synaesthetic quality made it superior to the mind, whose perception of the world was limited by the five senses. Przybyszewski termed any artist who successfully expressed the soul in art a “genius” (*das Individuum*).

In drama, both Przybyszewski and Briusov rejected the illusory representation of reality through the re-creation of material details, a hallmark of naturalism. Przybyszewski held a view similar to Briusov’s, that the artist’s, and therefore, the actor’s, goal was to express his soul. However, while Briusov only spoke of the soul in vague terms, associating it with emotions, Przybyszewski was much more adamant in expressing his belief that the actor must express the emotional and psychological conflicts arising within the soul. Furthermore, these conflicts were the basis for

dramatic conflict, not external events. Unlike Briusov, Przybyszewski prescribed intelligence (*inteligencja*, Pol.), sincerity, simplicity and truth, as well as clairvoyance and courage, as qualities that the actor needed in order to become a true “creating artist.” This “creating artist” would be able to read the dramatic text as an outline and channel the cosmic force of art in order to embody the character. The “creating artist” would also break with theatrical conventions and thereby transform the stage into a series of *tableaux vivants*, or “living pictures,” each reflecting the changing, chaotic life of the soul.

The next five chapters will examine how two major theatre figures, Vera F. Komissarzhevskaja and Vsevolod Meierkhol'd, responded to Przybyszewski's aesthetic views and works. Chapters II, III, and IV will investigate Komissarzhevskaja's seven-year artistic reception of Przybyszewski. As we shall see, during that period the actress read Przybyszewski's article, *Aphorisms and Preludes*, sought to stage his plays, and used his concepts on acting to defend her own production of his work *Life's Banquet* at the very end of her life. Chapters V and VI will examine the ways in which Meierkhol'd applied Przybyszewski's aesthetic notions to his own search for new forms.

## Chapter II.

### PRZYBYSZEWSKI AND KOMISSARZHEVSKAIA: SOUL AS CATALYST AND TRANSFORMATIVE SPACE

“Art must reflect the eternal, and the eternal is only one thing  
—the soul.”

Komissarzhevskaiia, April 1902<sup>1</sup>

Art is a reflection of that which is eternal ... the reflection of the  
essence, that is, the soul.

Przybyszewski, “Aphorisms and Preludes”  
*On the Paths of the Soul*, 1900<sup>2</sup>

Komissarzhevskaiia wrote these idealistic words about art in spring 1902, as she was struggling to decide her future at the Aleksandrinskii Theatre in St. Petersburg. By placing these phrases in quotation marks, Komissarzhevskaiia treated this aphorism as a quotation in a letter to her young acting partner, Nikolai Khodotov. In the Soviet period individuality and “soul,” of course, were not topics that could be discussed positively in a society where atheism and collectivism were the officially professed ideals. Consequently, while theatre historians and biographers have often quoted her comment, none have attempted to identify its source.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, this

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<sup>1</sup> “«Искусство должно отражать вечное, а вечно только одно—это душа».” “Letter to N. N. Khodotov [April 1902],” in A. Ia. Al'tshuller, ed., *Vera Fedorovna Komissarzhevskaiia. Pis'ma aktrisy. Vospominaniia o nei. Materialy* (L-M: Izd. “Iskusstvo,” 1964), 116.

<sup>2</sup> “sztuka jest odтворzeniem tego, co jest wiecznem, ...odтворzeniem istotności, t. j. duszy.” Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 366 (the commentary for this letter); Rybakova (1994), *op. cit.*, 182. Yet even contemporary theatre historians such as Victor Borovsky have failed to identify its origins. See his comments on this letter in Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 141. The inability or unwillingness of Russian or Soviet scholars to look for parallels in Przybyszewski's works is not surprising, given the negative opinion of his aesthetics and philosophy voiced by early Bolshevik critics. See, for example, these early attacks on Przybyszewski: Pavel Kogan, “Filosofia i poezia poroka—Stanislav Pshibyshevskii,” a chapter in *Ocherki po istorii zapadno-*

general concept of art as a window to the soul was not new and could be traced back to Romantic notions of art, which only obscured the contemporary origins of these remarks. Some critics have even suggested these ideas originate in Chekhov: the “very tone and language [of comments such as these found in Komissarzhevskaiia’s letters] resemble Nina’s soliloquy about ‘the universal soul.’”<sup>4</sup> Hence, the true origin of Komissarzhevskaiia’s own citation that “Art must reflect the eternal...the soul” has gone unidentified for many years. However, close textual analysis allows us to conclude that Komissarzhevskaiia, in her quotation and subsequent paraphrases, is responding to Przybyszewski’s booklet *Aphorisms and Preludes*, in a 1901 translation by Aleksandr Kursinskii.<sup>5</sup> Although the aesthetic views presented in this essay were

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*evropeiskikh literatur*, t. 3, ch. II, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Moscow: 1911), 66-94, or V. M. Friche’s *Ocherki razvitiia zapadno-evropeiskoi literatury* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1922), 223-225.

<sup>4</sup> In the introductory remarks to his citation of this letter, Arkady Ostrovsky (1999) writes: “Her [Komissarzhevskaiia’s] letters, often signed with her characters’ names, not only contain many hidden quotations from *The Seagull*, but their very tone and language resemble Nina’s soliloquy about ‘the universal soul.’” Ostrovsky’s unsupported claim thus strongly suggests that Komissarzhevskaiia’s following quotation has its basis in a work she had premiered five years earlier, in 1896. See Ostrovsky, *op. cit.*, 244.

<sup>5</sup> Stanislav Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy i preliudy*, trans. A. Kursinskii (Moscow: Voprosy iskusstva, 1901). Khodotov, who could have identified the source, refers to this letter in his 1932 memoirs, *Blizkoe-dalekoe*, but does not openly state that the booklet he presented Komissarzhevskaiia was Przybyszewski’s *Aforizmy*. See Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1932), 162-163, or Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1962), 115. Aleksandr Kursinskii (1873-1919) was an old friend of Valerii Briusov’s. Although this pamphlet was not published directly by Skorpion, a full-page advertisement for that company’s publications, including a proposed “complete collection” (*polnoe sobranie*) of Przybyszewski, is evidence that the *Skorpionisty* were aware of this volume. Kursinskii would later become the literary editor of *Zolotoe runo* in October 1906. The following spring, that new modernist journal published several pieces by Przybyszewski, as well as a serialization of his novel *Den’ sudnyi* throughout 1909. A second edition (1903) of Kursinskii’s translation exists as well, reported in an early 1904 edition of *Literaturnyi vestnik* with a review by A. I. Iatsimirskii. In that brief

not original, it was Przybyszewski's particular synthesis and phrasing of them that offered Komissarzhevskaja a new direction and an alternative to her socially-oriented aesthetic of previous decades. In this chapter I analyze the textual parallels between Komissarzhevskaja's letter and Przybyszewski's text. I also argue that Przybyszewski's aesthetic theories, which he articulated in this text, acted as a catalyst and inspiration in 1902, transforming Komissarzhevskaja into a confident entrepreneur, who subsequently set out on an independent journey of creative exploration. The consequences of that creative journey with respect to Przybyszewski are the subject of Chapters III and IV.

In order to understand just why Komissarzhevskaja had an affinity for Przybyszewski and how the writer's views prompted Komissarzhevskaja to reject theatrical traditions and strike out on her own, we must review her life and early career as an actress, focusing especially on her developing views of art, the artist, and the soul. Much of her family environment and many of the events surrounding her early professional years molded a personality that could easily identify with

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essay, the reviewer states that Przybyszewski "undoubtedly will be placed on the first pages of the chronicles of the recently risen 'new art,'" while praising Przybyszewski's "passionate," "direct" and "sometimes naïve" presentations of his ideas on art as a concept above "plebian" concerns such as patriotism and pure entertainment. Iatsimirskii also reiterates Przybyszewski's view of realism as a "delusion of the soul" and the true artist (*istinn[yi] khudozhnik*) as the "highest priest, standing higher than life, higher than the world, this lord of lords (*vladyk[a] nad vladykami*)," who needs serve neither society nor the idea. He would later provide the Przybyszewski entry for the 1907 supplemental edition of the Brockhaus-Efron encyclopedia. See A. Iatsimirskii, "S. Pshibyshevskii. *Aforizmy i preliudy*. Pervod s pol'skago A. Kursinskago. M. 1903 g. Tsena 20 k." in *Literaturnyi vestnik*, tom VII, kn. 2 (1904): 74-75, and *Entsyklopedicheskii slovar'*, t. 4 (St. Petersburg: Brokhaus & Efron, 1907), 493-495.

Przybyszewski's elevated view of art and the role of the artist in society. The following discussion will explore Komissarzhevskaiia's developing view within a framework that includes these five general areas: 1) life experience within a range of cultures; 2) career experience and obstacles to personal growth; 3) a spiritual, but not strictly religious, worldview; 4) a positivist view of the intelligentsia; 5) a developing view of "decadence" as a search for beauty and truth.

### **Komissarzhevskaiia's early career: developing affinities and obstacles to personal growth**

As the oldest daughter of Mariinskii Theatre tenor Fedor Petrovich Komissarzhevskii (1838-1905) and Mariia Nikolaevna Shul'gina (1840-1911), Vera Fedorovna grew up in a progressive, intellectually stimulating atmosphere filled with literature, music, and the arts. Her father's leading position at the opera meant that Komissarzhevskaiia learned at an early age to discriminate between levels of culture, becoming more accustomed to "high" cultural forms such as opera than she was to "low," popular forms such as vaudevilles or farce, which then were the staples of the provincial theatres.<sup>6</sup>

The distinctions between these two cultural forms would become more sharply defined in Komissarzhevskaiia's mind during the early years of her career. Her first roles were in popular forms: she first appeared on the St. Petersburg stage in

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<sup>6</sup> Schuler, *op. cit.*, 157. For more information on the cultured atmosphere in the Komissarzhevskii home, see D. Tal'nikov, *Komissarzhevskaiia* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gos. Izd. "Iskusstvo," 1939), 12-16; Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 13-14; Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 22, 28-29; N. F. Skarskaia and P. P. Gaideburov, *Na stsene i v zhizni. Stranitsy avtobiografii* (Moscow: Gos. Izd. "Iskusstvo," 1959), 107.

1889 during an amateur evening of gypsy songs.<sup>7</sup> The following year, 1890, she moved to Moscow and studied with her father, who taught singing at the recently formed Society of Art and Literature.<sup>8</sup> Although she had studied acting for a short while in St. Petersburg with V. N. Davydov, her real education began at this time.<sup>9</sup>

The Society of Art and Literature, with its young amateur actor-director Konstantin Sergeevich Alekseev (pseud., Stanislavskii, 1863-1938), introduced her to a new level of professionalism. Stanislavskii had recently attended performances of the Meiningen company, and the disciplined—almost despotic—style of its director, Ludwig Chronegk, made a strong impression on him.<sup>10</sup> Like Chronegk, Stanislavskii stressed the importance of rehearsals and the unifying vision of a director. These artistic elements, now associated with the professionalism of the Society of Art and Literature, would remain with her throughout her independent career.

Komissarzhevskaiia soon appeared with Stanislavskii as Zina in her first one-act comedy, P. P. Gnedich's *Burning Letters* [*Goriashchie pis'ma*], and as Liubskaiia in her first vaudeville, in A. N. Pleshcheev's *A Ruse for a Ruse* [*Za khitrost' — khitrost'*].<sup>11</sup> The following year, in 1891, under the pseudonym of Komina, she

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<sup>7</sup> Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 21, 24; Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 322.

<sup>8</sup> The amateur Society of Art and Literature, organized by F. P. Komissarzhevskii, A. F. Fedotov, and K. S. Alekseev (Stanislavskii) in 1888, was the predecessor of the influential Moscow Art Theatre.

<sup>9</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Leach, *Stanislavsky and Meyerhold* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 17-19; cf. Constantin Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, trans. J. J. Robbins (New York: Theatre Arts, 1952; reprint, New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts, 1996), 197-201.

<sup>11</sup> Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 27; Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 323. Stanislavskii has very little to say about Komissarzhevskaiia's early performances, noting only that it was the "first and very successful debut of the future celebrity." Writing his memoir after her death,

appeared as Betsi in Tolstoi's comedy *The Fruits of Enlightenment* [*Plody prosveshcheniia*], which Stanislavskii directed.<sup>12</sup> In summer 1891 she appeared in her father's productions of Gounod's *Faust* and Chaikovskii's *Evgenii Onegin*.<sup>13</sup>

The year 1893 marked the beginning of Komissarzhevskaiia's professional career in the provinces, and her unpleasant experiences there would leave a permanent psychological imprint on the actress, molding her resolute and passionate view of art as an elevated pursuit. With the assistance an old family friend, the actor I. P. Kiselevskii, Komissarzhevskaiia received an invitation to work for a professional troupe in the southern provincial city of Novocherkassk.<sup>14</sup> As she had little professional training, it was necessary for Komissarzhevskaiia to take this step in order to develop her craft and gain experience so that she might eventually gain a highly respected position at the Imperial theatres in Moscow or St. Petersburg like her father.

Given her comedic roles in Moscow, Komissarzhevskaiia's designated *emploi* in the Novocherkassk troupe of N. N. Sinel'nikov, where she was a member from September 1893 to February 1894, became that of the "second ingénue" and "singing

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Stanislavsky is more description in his portrayal of Komissarzhevskaiia as a sad, suffering daughter: "Hiding from all, she, to the accompaniment of her guitar, hummed sad gypsy songs of lost love, treason and the sufferings of a woman's heart." See Stanislavsky, *op. cit.*, 205-206.

<sup>12</sup> Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 28; Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 323. Stanislavskii's new "despotism" was reflected in the company's efforts: V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, then a critic for *Novosti dnia*, declared in his review of Tolstoi's *The Fruits of Enlightenment* [*Plody prosveshcheniia*], that he had never seen such ensemble acting in a group of amateurs and was almost convinced that they were professionals. *Novosti dnia*, 10. II. 1891, cited in Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Al'tshuller, *ibid.*, 323.

<sup>14</sup> Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 30-31; Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 12.

vaudevillian.”<sup>15</sup> Sinel'nikov was an extreme example of the “director’s despotism,” imitative of Meiningen and Stanislavskii, which was then spreading through Russian theatre companies.<sup>16</sup> It is hard to imagine that the inexperienced actress was able to develop her craft further in an atmosphere where the director left the actor little creative liberty, demanding slavish imitation of movement and intonation. According to one actress, Sinel'nikov believed that an actor’s duty was not to create, but to repeat, and did little to explain his directorial decisions to the actors.<sup>17</sup> The schedule was demanding; there was little time for rehearsals when several new productions were mounted every week. Sometimes the cast was so poorly rehearsed that they all lined up near the prompter’s box for assistance.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, her *emploi* limited her roles: in the two-month period after her debut, Komissarzhevskaiia appeared in no less than seventeen productions, the majority of which were comedies.

Komissarzhevskaiia’s letters of this period already show signs of her growing passionate devotion to art. They hint at her belief that there is a connection between an artist’s inner being and the ability to create, her ideal of self-sacrifice, and her belief in a woman’s special role in art. In an 1894 letter to the actor N. P. Roshchin-

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<sup>15</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 323.

<sup>16</sup> Stanislavsky, *op. cit.*, 201. Stanislavskii credits himself with the spread of this movement. In retrospect, he admitted that he began to understand “the wrongness of the principle,” believing that it could have undesirable consequences on the actor, especially among less-talented directors. *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>17</sup> Pavla Vul'f, *V starom i novom teatre. Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Vserossiisk. teatr. obschestvo, 1961), 129-130.

<sup>18</sup> N. V. Turkin, *Kommissarzhevskaiia v zhizni i na stsene* (Moscow: Kn-vo “Zlatotsvet,” 1910), 44; cited in Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 42. Such situations could be especially embarrassing when it occurred during an actor’s benefit. Such was the case with Komissarzhevksaiia’s benefit performance of Krylov’s one-act comedy *V osadnom polozhenii* [*A State of Siege*] in February 1894.

Insarov, Komissarzhevskaja explained that she always sought “the beautiful” in everything and everywhere.<sup>19</sup> She berated her fellow actor for signs of *poshlost'* (vulgarity) which would prevent him from self-improvement:

И вот она-то засела в Вас, заела Вас, пустила глубокие непоколебимые корни. Это для меня так же ясно теперь, как неясны были до сих пор многие в Вас противоречия. Артист Вы большой, повторяю, но Вы никогда не будете тем, что могли бы быть при Вашем таланте. Вы останетесь на точке замерзания, никто, ничто не спасет Вас: от себя спасения нет. Вы заснули для духовной жизни, без которой начнет умирать в Вас и артист. (...) Ваши духовные очи закрылись навеки, и таким образом вы не отличаете уже хорошее от дурного. Порой является у Вас самосознание, пробуждается в Вас художник и, чувствуя, что конец его близок, собирает последние силы, чтобы стряхнуть с себя всю пошлость гнетущую, которой его придавили, душат.<sup>20</sup>

And now it [*poshlost'*] has lodged in you; you have fallen prey to it, it has set deep, unshakeable roots. This is so clear to me now just as many of your contradictions were unclear up until now. You are a great performer (*artist*), I repeat, but you will never be that which you could be with your talent. You will remain at a

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<sup>19</sup> “Letter to N. P. Roshchin-Insarov [February-March, 1894],” Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 33; Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 44-45. Theatre historian Victor Borovsky, who identifies the infamous womanizer Roshchin-Insarov (1861-1899) as Komissarzhevskaja's lover, presents this letter in the context of the pair's separation and the refusal of Roshchin-Insarov as leading man to take on the role of Solness in Ibsen's drama *The Master Builder* for Komissarzhevskaja's benefit performance. Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 96-97. Roshchin-Insarov's off-stage relationships finally reached an apex when an aggrieved husband fatally shot the actor outside a theatre in 1899, an event that may have had no slight psychological impact on Komissarzhevskaja, a supposition Turkin's early biography supports. Turkin, however, states that Komissarzhevskaja did not give in to Roshchin-Insarov's advances, because of her previous experiences with her own husband. He also attributes her actions to the fact that Roshchin-Insarov's “old flame” was still a member of the company. See Turkin, *op. cit.*, 49-50.

<sup>20</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 33; Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 44-45.

standstill; no one and nothing will save you: there is no saving you from yourself. You have fallen asleep with respect to spiritual life, without which the performer (*artist*) in you will begin to die. ... Your spiritual eyes have closed forever, and thus you cannot distinguish the good from the bad. At times self-consciousness appears within you and the artist (*khudozhnik*) in you awakens. Feeling that the end is near, he gathers [his] last powers in order to shake off all the oppressive *poshlost'* which has weighed him down and is suffocating him.

The vulgarity that Komissarzhevskaja perceived in Roshchin-Insarov is certainly connected with both his amorous liaisons and his restriction of her own professional development. The actress, presumably just as guilty as he, did not directly judge Roshchin-Insarov's probable infidelities. Instead she rebuked him within the context of the elevation of art, a concept that would remain with her throughout her life and one that would soon create a strong affinity with Przybyszewski's aesthetics.

This letter is evidence that Komissarzhevskaja held art in high regard, believing that it should not be subordinate to personal vanity. Furthermore, her comments, that Insarov had "fallen asleep with respect to spiritual life," clearly indicate that she believed in a moral or spiritual connection between the performer and the further development of his/her talent. Roshchin-Insarov's use of his profession to pursue his personal sexual conquests ("all-possible aspirations") had impeded his artistic development as well as destroyed the proper relationship between performer and art:

Что могло бы спасти Вас? Одно, только одно: --  
любовь к искусству, к тому искусству, которое

давно перестало быть для Вас целью, а стало лишь средством удовлетворения собственного тщеславия и всевозможных стремлений, не имеющих ничего общего с искусством.<sup>21</sup>

What could save you? One thing, one thing only—a love of art, of that art which long ago ceased to be a goal for you and became only a means of satisfaction of your own vanity and of all possible aspirations that have nothing in common with art.

Komissarzhevskaja then recounted the tale of a certain Parisian sculptor as a behavior model for the actor. This sculptor, in an act of total devotion and self-sacrifice, covers his new creation with his own bedding on a cold night to protect it from the harsh elements, sacrificing himself. “This is how one must love one’s work,” she wrote.<sup>22</sup> In Komissarzhevskaja’s opinion it was evident that Roshchin-Insarov, unlike the anonymous sculptor, lacked any notion of self-sacrifice in service to his art.<sup>23</sup> She then suggested that he needed the proper guidance of a female guardian or muse to protect and counsel him. Only then would he be able to develop as a performer.<sup>24</sup> Komissarzhevskaja, of course, envisioned herself as the spiritual woman who could have filled the role of both guardian angel and muse.

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<sup>21</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 33-34.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. “Вот как надо любить свое дело.”

<sup>23</sup> “При такой любви к искусству Вы не могли бы окунуться с головой в ту яму, в которой останетесь теперь навеки. Окружающие Вас смрад и затхлый воздух кажутся уж Вам теперь чудным ароматом, и Вы с упоением вдыхаете отраву, от которой невредима остается внешняя оболочка человека, но гниет нравственная.” *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>24</sup> “Конечно, конечно, все это Вы переживали когда-то, но уснули, уснули навеки все эти порывы, дающие так много мук и наслаждений. Уснули навеки они в Вас и вот почему. Во-первых, Вы рано вступили в эту ядовитую для молодой души атмосферу, а во-вторых, не было возле Вас женщины-друга. Именно женщина должна была дать Вам ту поддержку, которая так нужна

This letter to Roshchin-Insarov marks Komissarzhevskaja's first use of the word "soul" in her correspondence. Through context we can conjecture how she understood the concept. In her advice to Roshchin-Insarov, Komissarzhevskaja recognized that in the mind-soul duality it is the "soul" which is able to grasp the complexities of life and is a better guide for the artist. Only through the medium of the soul can the artist properly comprehend his place in life and society:

Доходили ли Вы когда-нибудь до полного отчаяния, до мучительного сознания своего бессилия, до горького, обидного сознания, что разум не в силах обнять, а душа воспринять всей полноты бытия....<sup>25</sup>

Haven't you ever reached [a state of] complete despair, an agonizing consciousness of your own weakness, the bitter, painful consciousness that reason does not have the strength to encompass all the fullness of existence, nor does the soul [have the strength] to perceive [it]....

Although Komissarzhevskaja observed religious ritual, here she identifies creative energy as a vital force, apart from the Christian "God."<sup>26</sup> This seemingly mystical view of the creative process would make her receptive later to Przybyszewski's own synthesis of mysticism and aestheticism.

In the summer of 1894 Komissarzhevskaja was finally able to broaden her range in non-comedic roles when she took a position as "second ingénue" at a

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каждому человеку, а артисту особенно. [...] Да, именно при возрождении в человеке артиста, при развитии его необходимо присутствие возле него такой женщины" *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>25</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 34.

<sup>26</sup> Turkin, *op. cit.*, 47-48. Writing before the revolution, he attributes Komissarzhevskaja's religiosity to the tribulations of her personal life, but adds that she was "almost superstitious." Borovsky, without providing evidence, claims that Komissarzhevskaja superstitiously arranged her debut in Ostrovskii's *Bespridannitsa* on September 17 [1896] to coincide with her name-day. See Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 121.

summer theatre based in Ozerki, a northern suburb of St. Petersburg. Yet Komissarzhevskaja also grew increasingly aware of the gulf between the public expectations of an actor and her own abilities and elevated ambitions. It was in Ozerki she first met her future acting and business partner, Kazimir Vikent'evich Bravich (Baranovich, 1861-1912). Bravich would translate Przybyszewski's drama, *Snow*, in late 1903.<sup>27</sup> In a letter to Turkin, written shortly before her 17 May departure to Petersburg, she repeated her strong commitment to acting. She had found a "goal, the possibility of serving a cause which has seized all of me, it has swallowed me whole, not leaving room for anything."<sup>28</sup>

If conditions had been bad in Novocherkassk, Komissarzhevskaja now discovered that even in the environs of the capital the public responded to the same low cultural standards as in the provinces. Although originally hired as the second ingénue, Komissarzhevskaja had begun to take on more dramatic roles. Simultaneously, critics and audiences began to grow more enthusiastic about her performances.<sup>29</sup> This praise should have pleased Komissarzhevskaja. However, in

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<sup>27</sup> The two had met during Komissarzhevskaja's single season in Vilno, 1894-1895. The exact dates of Bravich's birth and death seem to be in dispute. The editor of Khodotov's memoirs, A. M. Brianskii, in his notes to that book, places the actor's birth in 1865 and his death in 1911. See N. N. Khodotov, *Blizkoe—Dalekoe* (Moscow-Leningrad: Academia, 1932), 136. Moskvin uses the dates 1861-1912 in his new monograph on Przybyszewski. Komissarzhevskaja valued his talent and intelligence. See Moskvin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 156. Bravich's translation first appeared in *Pravda*, no. 1 (1904), but P. Iartsev had already referenced it in his review of *Snow* that appeared in *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 50 (1903).

<sup>28</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 35. "From a letter to N. V. Turkin [first half of May, 1894]." "И вот я нашла цель, нашла возможность служить делу, которое всю меня забрало, всю поглотило, не оставляя места ничему."

<sup>29</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 102.

another letter to Turkin, written shortly after her arrival in Petersburg, Komissarzhevskaja expressed frustration: she felt surrounded by enemies and therefore needed to prove herself somehow. Even more worrisome was the sense that she was falling into a state of artistic paralysis. As she wrote in early May 1894:

Я ...знаю лишь ...что все это невыносимо тяжело и что я ни одной роли не сыграю так, как я могу сыграть. По-моему, такое состояние для актера то же, что паралич для рук пианиста. Успех я имела, насколько его можно иметь у петербургской публики, которая, сидя в театре, просыпается только тогда, когда, актеры ведут такие сцены, где надо вопить не своим голосом или кататься по полу в конвульсиях.<sup>30</sup>

I ...only know ...that this is unbearably difficult and that I will not perform one role the way I am able. In my opinion, for an actor such a state is just like paralysis for a pianist. I have had success, as much as one can have it among the Petersburg public, which, while sitting in the theatre, wakes up only when the actors perform such scenes where it is necessary to wail in an unnatural voice or roll on the floor in convulsions.

Here Komissarzhevskaja notes her dissatisfaction with the exaggerated acting style then common in many theatres. She simultaneously presents a condescending view of audiences that would find this style of acting pleasing. Her own developing style was different; critics were struck by the simplicity and naturalness of Komissarzhevskaja's acting, an attribute that would remain with her throughout her career.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 38; Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 102. My translation closely follows Borovsky's.

<sup>31</sup> Theatre critic and journalist N. Rossovskii was particularly taken with the young actress: "Mlle Komissarzhevskaja played Elena Mareva in a surprisingly simple and

Beginning in August 1894 the well-known theatrical impresario Konstantin Nezlobin (1857-1930) offered Komissarzhevskaja and Bravich positions with his company in Vil'no. For Komissarzhevskaja, a new position with this outstanding entrepreneur held promise as a means to cure the paralysis she felt in artistic development. Komissarzhevskaja worked there for the next two seasons, until her debut at the Aleksandrinskii Theatre in 1896. In Vil'no Komissarzhevskaja was given a wider range of roles to perform: her first role was Sofia in Griboedov's *Gore ot uma* [*Woe From Wit*]. Her popularity with audiences continued to grow, as did her

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natural way...." (*Peterburgskii Listok*, 16. VI. 1894); "Mlle Komissarzhevskaja's acting [as Liuba in *Sorvanets*] is not only natural and truthful, but she is interminably nice at the same time..." (*Peterburgskii listok*, 28. VI. 1894). The critic may have been favorably predisposed to the actress through long-held professional connections, as he suggests in the latter article that Komissarzhevskaja evidently has inherited her father's artistic nature. The critic of *Novosti i Birzhevaia gazeta* was less enthusiastic: "Mlle Komissarzhevskaja cannot spoil any role, but I again repeat that she is able to play dramatic roles only because there is no real *ingénue dramatique* in the troupe." See Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 48, 49. Borovsky misleadingly attributes Komissarzhevskaja's success at this time not just to a simplicity or naturalness, but to her ability to portray a character's "mood, of communicating what lies behind the words, and what words therefore cannot express," a quality noted by the critic Zabrezhnev in an essay published later in 1898. See Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 103. While pointing out that "the dramas of Chekhov had not yet been written" at this time, the Zabrezhnev quote Borovsky uses to support his assertion that "the novelty of Komissarzhevskaya's approach to character portrayal had already been noticed" is, in fact, in reference to her role as Sasha in Chekhov's drama *Ivanov*, which Komissarzhevskaja performed three years later, in 1897. Cf. Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 223, footnotes # 62, 63: "I. N. Zabrezhnev, 'V. F. Komissarzhevskaya. Vpechatleniya (V. F. Komissarzhevskaya. Impressions), St. Petersburg, 1898, p. 8)" and Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 93. This inaccuracy emphasizes the difficulty for the theatre or cultural historian in describing the historical development of such an ephemeral art as acting before the advent of film, a medium that can visually document by capturing the acting moment in time. Borovsky may also be suffering from a case of "Chekhovitis" (my terminology), or the obligation felt by critics and scholars to associate everything and everyone in Russian theatre during this period to one of its greatest playwrights, Anton Chekhov.

commitment to her profession. In correspondence with historian and *Novoe vremia* correspondent Sergei Tatishchev, written at the end of December 1895, Komissarzhevskaiia reiterated her commitment to the “first, chief and genuine goal of [my] life—the service of art.”<sup>32</sup>

### **The Aleksandrinskii, 1896-1902: further obstacles at the apex of Russian theatre**

Significantly, it was under the aegis of the Imperial Theatres, where Russia’s best actors performed, that the last obstacles appeared preventing the fulfillment of Komissarzhevskaiia’s aesthetic ideal of “service to art.” These obstacles included the theatrical traditions that prohibited the growth of challenging repertoire and the inability to develop artistically through roles outside her given *emploi*.<sup>33</sup> The backstage rivalries that now continued even in Russia’s best theatre were an example of an unprofessional attitude that others did not hold art in the high regard as she did. Komissarzhevskaiia struggled with these conditions for six years until she finally freed herself and left the Imperial service in 1902.

On 4 April 1896, Komissarzhevskaiia made her debut at the Aleksandrinskii Theatre as Rosi in Sudermann’s comedy, *Boi babochek* [*Die Schmetterlingsschlacht; The Butterfly War*]. She had finally arrived on the Imperial stage. However, after mostly good reviews during three seasons of provincial performances, reviews of her debut were mixed, as critics strove to reconcile the pre-debut “buzz” with the

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<sup>32</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 53. “Letter to S. S. Tatishchev, [end of December, 1895].”

<sup>33</sup> Moskvin suggests the same environment, but does not elaborate: “W latach 1896-1900 wstępowała w cesarskim Teatrze Aleksandryjskim w Sankt Petersburgu, jednak dość szybko uświadomiła sobie, że repertuar i panująca tam atmosfera wstrzymują jej rozwój artystyczny. Porzuciwszy tę scenę, aktorka zaczęła poszukiwać własnej drogi.” See Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 158.

performance they had just experienced. Komissarzhevskaiia's ability to stand above this new criticism suggests a growing self-confidence and inner strength, which, when combined with her elevated notion of art, created another psychological and personal connection to Przybyszewski, who wrote that the artist "stands above life."<sup>34</sup>

Komissarzhevskaiia's response to the criticism of Aleksandr Kugel', an influential critic at *Petersburgskaia gazeta* [*The Petersburg Gazette*], is an example of this new confidence. Kugel' lost no time in putting the Komissarzhevskaiia's ego in its proper place, declaring that she was an able actress, but did not have "the originality, depth, originality, verve, [or] all that which marks a leading talent."<sup>35</sup> If the bad reviews had any lasting effect on Komissarzhevskaiia, she did not let others know. In a letter the following week to a family friend, Anna Liutsidarskaia, she wrote that her debut had gone "splendidly."<sup>36</sup>

Life would not continue in such a "splendid" manner, as the backstage intrigues to which she had been introduced in the provinces became more aggravating and threatened her burgeoning career. These intrigues now revolved not around love affairs, but Komissarzhevskaiia's perceived rivalry with the reigning "empress" of the Imperial Theatre, Mariia Savina (1854-1915). Moreover, this rivalry resonated in press reviews, where critics felt compelled to portray new actresses such as

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<sup>34</sup> Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 16.

<sup>35</sup> "Артистка всегда будет хорошо иргать и выдвигать изображаемые ею характеры, но самобытности, глубины, оригинального захвата, всего того, что знаменует выдающийся, недюжинный талант, у нее нет, по крайней мере, судя по первому дебюту." *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, 6. IV. 1896. Excerpted in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 75. See also Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 119-120.

<sup>36</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 56. "Letter to A. A. Liutsidarskaia, [2 April 1896]."

Komissarzhevskaja in a negative light, or, at the least, were compelled to describe their talents diplomatically, so as not to offend Savina's ego.<sup>37</sup> This journalistic attitude became harder to maintain as Komissarzhevskaja began to attract a young audience of university students, *kursistki* (female students), and women of the intelligentsia. These women identified with her heroines, who suffered, endured, and strove for "purpose, direction and meaningful activity."<sup>38</sup> The character type Komissarzhevskaja tended to play, "alienated adolescents" and *femmes fragiles*, was somewhat contradictory in nature: in her suffering, this character was fragile; yet in her desire for purpose, she was strong. It was a type with which these audience members could closely identify.<sup>39</sup>

Savina, on the other hand, was a "champion of traditional values and commercial expediency."<sup>40</sup> Savina's notion of "commercial expediency" meant

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<sup>37</sup> Turkin, *op. cit.*, 91-93.

<sup>38</sup> Schuler, *op. cit.*, 156, 160.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 160, 166. For a discussion of Komissarzhevskaja as *femme fragile*, see Myers, *op. cit.*, 213 ff. An inversion of the strong *femme fatale*, the *femme fragile* accentuates the qualities of self-sacrifice, devotion, purity, fragility, and passivity. Myers, *op. cit.*, 222, 213. Typical *femme fragile* roles included those in Ostrovskii's and Sudermann's plays. *Ibid.*, 17. According to Myers, Nina Zarechnaia in *The Seagull*, as well as other Chekhov heroines, were new interpretations of this image. *Ibid.*, 218, 225. Schuler likens the *femme fragile* to the contemporary image created by Judy Garland, who "established the professional image of an artless, pre-sexual adolescent. Typically, this pretty (rather than beautiful), essentially benign youngster acquires wisdom 'beyond her years' after passing through a spiritual, emotional, or perhaps even physical ordeal" and believes that the type "constrained [Komissarzhevskaja's] development as a mature artist." *Ibid.*, 176, 177. If this is indeed true, then the Przybyszewski roles, which Komissarzhevskaja and other actresses would undertake later, carry even more weight as models that reflect the changing roles of women in Russian society.

<sup>40</sup> The phrase in Schuler's. She describes the rivalry between the two actresses as "personal, professional, and ideological." Schuler, *op. cit.*, 162. Cf. Turkin, *op. cit.*,

providing the public with entertainment from low-quality, hack pieces—many of them “star vehicles” for Savina herself. These plays were just the type with which Komissarzhevskaiia had become familiar in the provinces and the type she had sought to avoid when she joined Nezlobin’s company in Vil’no. This dislike of low-quality art and an eye for her future led Komissarzhevskaiia to reject certain proffered comedic roles, such as that in the one-act farce *The Governess* [*Guvernantka*] by N. I. Timkovskii, for fear they would typecast her as a comedienne.<sup>41</sup>

Circumstances such as Komissarzhevskaiia’s refusal to take on purely comedic roles, her eventual acceptance of the non-comedic role of Nina Zarechnaia in Chekhov’s *The Seagull*, and certain elements surrounding its production, particularly its casting and lack of rehearsals, most likely added to her determination to leave the service of the Aleksandrinskii and open her own theatre. Although Komissarzhevskaiia was not originally cast in the ingénue role of Nina, the young, impressionable girl who wanted to be an actress in Chekhov’s *The Seagull*, that role

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93. Turkin paints a very unflattering portrait of Savina and her circle in his book: “И на Александринском сцене, в Петербурге, приходилось уже становиться перед лицом самого первоисточника власти театрального царства. Вся петербургская театральная критика пресмыкалась перед М. Г. Савиной, а следовательно и перед всеми характерными особенностями созданного ею театрального периода.” *Ibid.*, 91-92.

<sup>41</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 57, 329, 349. A letter to Evtikhii Karpov, chief director of the theatre, dated 8 September 1896. Komissarzhevskaiia balked at playing the role of Vostriakova. Karpov must have heeded Komissarzhevskaiia’s pleas, as another actress, O. F. Burmistrova, took over the role after Komissarzhevskaiia’s debut on 20 September 1896.

both secured her great reputation and served as a vehicle for her developing aesthetic views that would later find an affinity in Przybyszewski's writing.<sup>42</sup>

The differences between the old system, which Savina represented, and the "fresh, bright" talent of the future, which Komissarzhevskaja represented, came to the foreground during the casting and rehearsal process of *The Seagull*.<sup>43</sup> Disagreement arose over who would play the role of seventeen-year-old Nina. Aleksei Suvorin, owner of the St. Petersburg newspaper *Novoe vremia*, Chekhov's publisher, and his representative in the capital, wanted Savina, because the star would assure the success of the bold, new play.<sup>44</sup> However, Evtikhii Karpov (1857-1926), chief director of the Aleksandrinskii from 1896-1900, preferred the youthful Komissarzhevskaja, whom he felt better fit the role.<sup>45</sup> Savina was eventually chosen for the role, but just ten

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<sup>42</sup> For comments on *The Seagull* as establishing Komissarzhevskaja's legacy, see Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 121.

<sup>43</sup> N. A. Selivanov, in his review of Komissarzhevskaja as Klärchen in Sudermann's *The Destruction of Sodom*, praised her "fresh, bright talent." *Novosti i Birzhevaia gazeta*, 4. X. 1896, quoted in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 80.

<sup>44</sup> For the comment about Suvorin, see Schuler, *op. cit.*, 162. For a short discussion on Chekhov's dramatic innovation and the cast's reaction to it, see Laurence Senelick, *The Chekhov Theatre: A Century of the Plays In Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 30-31. Even Chekhov felt that he was writing something new. "I'm taking terrible liberties with theatrical convention," he wrote at the time. See A. P. Chekhov, *Perepiska*, t. 1, (Moscow: 1984), 252, quoted in Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 128. Rayfield notes that *Seagull* was the first work that Chekhov wrote after his initial encounter with the new drama, represented by Hauptmann's *Einsame Menschen* and Ibsen's *Little Eyolf*. See Donald Rayfield, *Understanding Chekhov: A Critical Study of Chekhov's Prose and Dramas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 138.

<sup>45</sup> Schuler, *op. cit.*, 162.

days before the premiere, she decided she was not right for the part and gave it up.

Komissarzhevskaiia accepted the role after reading through the entire play overnight.<sup>46</sup>

Komissarzhevskaiia's experiences with the role of Nina provide a foundation for further conjecture about both her personal relationship to her roles and her affinity for the "decadent" view of art that Treplev represented. Georgii Pitoev, who translated Przybyszewski's *Life's Banquet* in 1909, recalled in 1911 that Komissarzhevskaiia had told him that, upon reading Chekhov's play, she had cried all night after reading *The Seagull*. She had fallen in love with the play and closely identified emotionally with the character of Nina. She told Pitoev, "I lived as the Seagull's soul."<sup>47</sup> In his 1911 reminiscences of Komissarzhevskaiia Karpov corroborated this personal connection. He recalled that, by the third rehearsal, the actress was "living the role."<sup>48</sup>

Komissarzhevskaiia left no correspondence from this period that contains personal reflections illuminating either Pitoev's or Karpov's statement. However, given her previous statements on art and her role as an actress in the service of art, we may hypothesize that Komissarzhevskaiia, as Nina, developed an affinity for the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 162; Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 128; Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 81. Chekhov himself said that he would never forget Komissarzhevskaiia in the role of Nina, and that no one else understood it like her. See Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 26.

<sup>47</sup> "В первый раз я прочла Ч а й к у в эту ночь. Всю ночь проплакала. Утром я любила Ч а й к у и была она моей—я жила душою Чайки." Georgii Pitoev, "Vechnoe-vechno," in *Alkonost. Sbornik, kn. 1* (Peterburg: Izd. Peredvizhnogo teatra P. P. Gaideburova i N. F. Skarskoi, 1911), 95. Quoted in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 81. This conversation occurred while both were in Paris, during the summer, before her final tour. Komissarzhevskaiia became upset when she almost forgot to buy a volume of Baudelaire there. Pitoev, *op. cit.*, 96-97.

<sup>48</sup> E. P. Karpov, ed., *Sbornik pamiati V. F. Komissarzhevskoi* (St. Petersburg: 1911), 64. Quoted in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 81; cf. Schuler, *op. cit.*, 162.

character of Treplev and his “decadence.”<sup>49</sup> As the soliloquist of Treplev’s brief dramatic scene that depicts the end of the universe and merging with the “World Soul,” Komissarzhevskaja was forced to come to terms, at least for a moment, with this mystical worldview in order to represent it sincerely on stage, as she spoke such lines as: “In me human consciousness has merged with animal instinct, and I remember everything, everything, everything, and every life I live out in myself anew”; or: “I am destined to conquer, and thereafter matter and spirit will blend in a beautiful harmony and there will come the kingdom of universal will... But till then horror, horror....”<sup>50</sup>

A letter from July, 1900, shows some affinity for an idealism Komissarzhevskaja saw in “decadent” searchings. Komissarzhevskaja herself initially equated the movement with a search for beauty and truth:

И потом, откуда это у меня явилось вдруг такое «стремление к декадентству», «отчужденность от русской жизни». Как будто мы не вели никогда долгих бесед на эту тему и Вам неизвестны мои взгляды! Как будто я не говорила Вам сто тысяч раз, что декадентство, то, о котором я знаю, то есть заявляющее себя в таких уродливых формах, стремящееся уйти от идеала *чистой* красоты, не может никогда говорить моей душе. Я не могу относиться к декадентству с тем презрением, с которым относитесь Вы, потому что среди декадентов найдутся не только такие, которые, прикрывшись этим прозвищем, дают волю всему гнусному, что сидит в них найдутся и такие, кто ищут правды для своего тоскующего духа и в этом

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<sup>49</sup> Seemingly annoyed with the performance of her son’s play, Arkadina remarks “This is a bit of decadent theatre,” during Nina’s soliloquy in Act I. Anton Chekhov, *Plays*, trans. Peter Carson (New York: Penguin, 2002), 92.

<sup>50</sup> Ellipses in original. Chekhov, *Plays*, 92-93.

движении думают найти ее. Это слепые —я  
пожалую их, но не пойду за ними.<sup>51</sup>

But then why did such a “desire for decadence,” [this] “alienation from Russian life” appear in me? It’s as if we didn’t have these long talks on this theme and my views are unknown to you! It’s as if I hadn’t told you a thousand times, that decadence, as I know it, is turning up in such ugly forms, striving to move from the ideal of *pure* beauty, it cannot say anything to my soul. I cannot relate to decadence with the same disgust with which you do, because among the decadents are found not only those, who, having hidden themselves behind this nickname, give their will to all that is vile, that sits within them, [but] are also found those, who search for truth for their yearning spirit and think they can find it in this movement. They are blind—I pity them, but will not follow them.

Komissarzhevskaiia’s own attitude, obviously not as extreme as Karpov’s, seems ambivalent toward the decadents. She understands their yearning for “truth and beauty,” but cannot relate to its “vile forms.” The meaning of “vile forms,” remains ambiguous, for Komissarzhevskaiia’s opinion stands in stark contrast to the only names mentioned in her correspondence which we could possibly associate with “decadence” at this time in 1900, Merezhkovskii and Nietzsche.<sup>52</sup> However, this

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<sup>51</sup> Al'tshuller, *ibid.*, 86-87. “Letter to E. P. Karpov [Ialta. End of July, 1900].” Emphasis in the original.

<sup>52</sup> In a letter to Karpov in March 1898, Komissarzhevskaiia urges her friend to remove the obstacles that appear in life and strive toward his goals. She quotes lines from Merezhkovskii’s poem, “S potukhshim fakelom moi genii otletaet” (1886), which relate to living for the moment: “Весь пыл души моей истратил я на грезы, когда настанет жизнь, мне нечем будет жить. Я пролил над мечтой восторженные слезы, когда придет любовь, не хватит сил любить!” See Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 61, 350. In a letter to Chekhov from early January 1899, she urges the dramatist to write a kind review of S. P. Nani’s translation of excerpts from *Also sprach Zarathustra*, which the author dedicated to her, for *Novoe vremia*. *Ibid.*, 70, 353. In a letter to

attitude, expressed in 1900, which could easily have its origins in the 1896 role of Nina Zarechnaia, does help explain why the actor Nikolai Khodotov may have recommended the newly published booklet by Przybyszewski, *Aphorisms and Preludes*, to Komissarzhevskaja in April 1902.

Whatever her view of the decadents in 1900, in 1898 Komissarzhevskaja was professing a distinctly positivist view of art, not a decadent one: her chief concern was the ability of the artist to change society for the better. In a letter from 1898 to Karpov Komissarzhevskaja wrote:

Смотрю я на нужду, которая вокруг меня, нужду вопиющую, тихую, потому что кричать сил у нее нет, да и бесполезно, и вспоминается мне жизнь, которую ведем мы «избранные», или, вернее, сами себя избравшие, и такие тоска и грусть охватывают меня, что ни залить, ни запить их душа не может. В чем оправдание, или, вернее, где искать права на подобное существование? Ум подсказывает целый ряд слов, фраз, готовых во всякую минуту к ускугам фарисейству нашего Я. Тут и служение искусству, и назначение высшее артиста, облагораживание душ, но сердце не колыхнется на все это. Что же делать? Не знаю. И Вы не знаете.<sup>53</sup>

I look at the indigence that is around me, the scandalous indigence, silent because it has no strength to cry out, and it's useless; I remember the life that we, the "elect," lead, or rather, we the "self-chosen"—and such yearning and sorrow seizes me that my soul can neither quench nor slake it. Where is the justification, or, rather, where does one seek the rules for such an existence? The mind prompts a whole series of words and phrases, ready at any minute in service to the

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Khodotov four months later, in July 1900, Komissarzhevskaja will advise her partner not to make Nietzsche's philosophy a "symbol of faith." *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>53</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 64; Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 67. "Letter to E. P. Karpov [14. V. 1898]."

Pharisaism of our “I.” Herein lies both the service to art and the artist’s higher purpose—the ennobling of souls, but the heart will not be swayed to all this. What to do? I don’t know. You don’t know either.

Komissarzhevskaiia’s concern for the less fortunate would find an outlet not in overt political action, but through her participation in many charity functions that raised money for such causes as students entering the university or medical institute (31 October 1898; 12 February 1900; 4 November 1900), the convalescent (4 December 1899), and various arts organizations (2 January 1899; 27 March 1899; 3 April 1899).<sup>54</sup> Her designation of an unnamed group (“we”) which she identifies as “chosen” or, as she more narrowly defines the term, “self-chosen” (*sami sebia izbravshie*), suggests, in the least, an elitist view that there is some quality (or qualities) which separate(s) her from the rest of the general populace. At the same time, Komissarzhevskaiia’s statements provide evidence that she now sensed a need to engage in philanthropy or somehow engage in activities to help others.

In another letter to Karpov in 1898 Komissarzhevskaiia again professed a positivist view of art, now, however, suggesting that science and art would unite to cure the ills of the world through enlightenment. At the same time, Komissarzhevskaiia’s mention of an “unseen hand” hints at the mystical elements in her worldview and a hope for a miraculous change in society:

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<sup>54</sup> See Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 329-331 or Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 103, 106, 116, 123, 127, 147. As historical events changed, so did the focus of Komissarzhevskaiia’s charitable activities: during the Russo-Japanese War she gave monies to help clothe the lower ranks of the army and navy; in 1905 she participated in a concert to aid striking workers. Rybakova, *ibid.*, 258, 301.

Будем же живыми камешками того щебня, который невидимая рука сыпает в одно место для фундамента той башни, на которой зажжется свет яркий, такой яркий, что ничто уж не будет в силах его погасить. Наука, искусство, все слабое и все сильное соединится в одном стремлении и легко подымет страдающих, затравленных и обратит их к свету.<sup>55</sup>

We will be the living pebbles of that detritus, which the unseen hand sprinkles into one place for the foundation of that tower on which a bright light will flare up, so bright that nothing will have the power to extinguish it. Science, art, the weak, and the strong will all unite in a single aspiration. [It] will easily lift the suffering and persecuted and turn them to the light.

In summary, in the review of Komissarzhevskaja's life and early career from 1894 to 1902, we can identify five distinct, but interrelated, elements that would merge and contribute to her strong affinity for Przybyszewski's aesthetic views and, paraphrasing them, lead her to declare that "Art must reflect the eternal, and the eternal is only one thing—the soul."

These five elements are:

1) Life experience in the full range of culture, both high and low. This allowed Komissarzhevskaja to develop an appreciation for an elevated, if not elitist, view of art.<sup>56</sup> She then became its devoted servant. However, her experiences at Ozerki demonstrated that a chasm existed between low public expectations and her own higher standards. This difference was evident in both the public's appreciation

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<sup>55</sup> Al'tshull er, *op. cit.*, 66. "Letter to A. P. Karpov [July 1898]."

<sup>56</sup> Khodotov, in retrospect, declared that Komissarzhevskaja possessed an "artistic idealism." Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1932), 164; *op. cit.* (1962), 116.

of an actor's abilities and its desire for lower forms of entertainment, such as vaudevilles and comedies.

2) Career experience in the provinces and at the Aleksandrinskii Theatre.

During the period from 1894-1902 Komissarzhevskaja met obstacles in her personal struggle for self-improvement as a creative artist, not only in the provinces, but also in Russia's best theatre. In the provinces, despotic directors and an unprofessional environment limited her artistic growth. At the Aleksandrinskii, bureaucratic traditions contributed to a tolerance of mediocrity and intolerance for artistic progress, whether in repertoire, acting style, or *mise en scène*. The criticism Komissarzhevskaja endured during these years only hardened her resolve to continue on her own path.

3) A spiritual worldview that was tied neither to one particular faith or nor to strict religious observance. Although Komissarzhevskaja demonstrated outward signs of religious ritual, her practice of Orthodoxy did not prevent her from tolerating other forms of spirituality. Within this worldview was a recognition that the soul, however Komissarzhevskaja defined it, could perceive some things that the mind could not.

4) A view of the intelligentsia as a chosen segment of society. Articulated in letters to Karpov from 1898, this view was closely related to a notion that art could serve a higher purpose, such as the ennoblement of the soul. In contrast to a strict positivist view that science alone could cure society's ills, Komissarzhevskaja

believed that a union of science and art could accomplish this goal. At the same time, Komissarzhevskaja admitted that she was still seeking answers to these problems.

5) A developing view of “decadence” as a search for beauty and truth, concepts that remained undefined. This view was accompanied by a rejection of its “vile forms,” a concept that also remained unarticulated for Komissarzhevskaja.

The identification of Przybyszewski’s booklet, *Aphorisms and Preludes*, as a catalyst which fused these five elements together and served as Komissarzhevskaja’s source for her notion that art is a reflection of the soul, is the subject of the next section of this chapter.

### **Przybyszewski’s *Aphorisms and Preludes*: catalyst for a life “on the threshold”**

In late March or early April 1902, Nikolai Khodotov (1878-1932), Komissarzhevskaja’s young acting partner at the time, gave her several unnamed booklets to read.<sup>57</sup> Khodotov was an admirer of the latest literary trends and had attended meetings of the Artistic Circle in Moscow, where Przybyszewski was most likely a

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<sup>57</sup> Komissarzhevskaja was romantically involved with Khodotov at this time; the two exchanged a flurry of letters from July 1900 to February/March 1903. Although the relationship was brief (they separated in 1904), it had a significant impact on both of them. See Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 142-143. Borovsky declares the relationship between Khodotov and Komissarzhevskaja to be Komissarzhevskaja’s “greatest romance,” which proved to be “the most significant event in Khodotov’s existence.” Evidence of their personal correspondence—what remains of it—is found at RGALI, in Khodotov’s archive, f. 901. After their separation, Komissarzhevskaja asked for Khodotov to return the originals of her letters to him; Komissarzhevskaja presumably destroyed all Khodotov’s letters to her. *Ibid.*, 140-141. According to Al’tshuller, more than 375 letters passed between Khodotov and Komissarzhevskaja. Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 5. The majority of these, now known only from the copies that Khodotov made, have not been published and may contain additional information on Przybyszewski’s reception by both Khodotov and Komissarzhevskaja.

topic of conversation.<sup>58</sup> In April 1902, Komissarzhevskaja wrote a letter to Khodotov, whom she affectionately called “Azra,” thanking him for the gift.

Although we do not know their precise titles, it is crystal clear from the phrasing in her letter that one of these booklets was Przybyszewski’s *Aphorisms and Preludes*.

Given Komissarzhevskaja’s past, we hypothesize that this work appealed to her for the following reasons:

1) Przybyszewski’s declaration that he had arrived at his views independently provided Komissarzhevskaja with a valuable intellectual confirmation of her own questioning spirit, while preserving a sense of free will.<sup>59</sup> His characterization of

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<sup>58</sup> It is difficult to determine Khodotov’s affinity to the early Russian modernist movement in Russia. In the 1962 edition of his memoirs Khodotov mentions that during his leisure time in Moscow he would attend meetings of the Artistic Circle (*Khudozhestvennyi kruzhok*). He specifically remembers that he attended the meeting devoted to the publication of Bal'mont’s collection of poetry, *Goriashchie zdaniia*, which appeared in 1900, and listened to its disputes about the “new poetry.” He names Briusov, Belyi, and Voloshin as defenders of the new tendency and Prince A. I. Sumbatov-Iuzhin, Bazhenov and N. E. Efros as their opponents. Given Przybyszewski’s recognized status in both the German and Polish modernist movements by Russian and Polish-language critics such as Iasinskii (1894), Brauner (1895), Tetmajer in *Kur'er* (1898), various correspondents in *Kraj* (1899, 1900), *Ukrainka* (1901), his works and ideas probably would have been discussed at these meetings. See Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1962), 158. This passage does not appear in the 1932 edition of *Blizkoe--dalekoe*. Efros may not have been an opponent of the new trends for long, or perhaps he was playing devil’s advocate. Within several years he would become a contributor to the Sablin edition of Przybyszewski’s works and is credited by Al'tshuller as the translator of *Snow* for Komissarzhevskaja’s 1904 production. See Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 378.

<sup>59</sup> “не сомневаюсь, что то, что скажу я, уже высказано раньше меня. Однако к тем заключениям, которые изложены ниже я пришел совершенно самостоятельным путем” Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 5.

*Aphorisms* as a “view,” not a “program,” also preserved his reader’s sense of freedom to agree or disagree with specific points as presented by its author.<sup>60</sup>

2) his elevation of art to the status of a “religion” and the artist as its “priest” paralleled Komissarzhevskaja’s own elite notion of art and herself as its servant.<sup>61</sup> Komissarzhevskaja’s acceptance of the intelligentsia as an elite group easily accommodated Przybyszewski’s more extreme identification of the artist as the “chosen” element of society. Unlike Przybyszewski, Komissarzhevskaja felt that art could fill an instructional role in society.

3) his criticism of those artists who valued fame and public acclaim over their art resonated with Komissarzhevskaja, who had endured criticism herself and had witnessed the public’s (and profession’s) tolerance for mediocrity.<sup>62</sup>

4) his presentation of a “path of the mind,” which opposed a “path of the soul,” was consistent with Komissarzhevskaja’s recognition of a mind-soul duality, illustrated in her 1894 letter to Roshchin-Insarov. In addition, Komissarzhevskaja’s religious views were not strict enough to prohibit the reception or adaptation of other, more mystical views.

5) his discussion of psychology, e.g., the existence of deeper levels of consciousness, within the context of a discussion of the artist and creativity, appealed

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>61</sup> “искусство стоит выше жизни,” “искусство становится высшей религией и жрецом же ее является художник.” *Ibid.*, 8, 9.

<sup>62</sup> “Художник, который жаждет рукоплесканий и жалуется на недостаточную признательность толпы, еще не чувствует себя господином, который милостыни не кланчит, а сам щедрою рукою бросает ее в толпу, не требуя благодарности; последней ищет лишь плебей духа, ищут ее только выскочки.” Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 11. See Appendix I, text 2.62.

to Komissarzhevskaja's desire for a union of science and art.<sup>63</sup> She had articulated that desire in an 1898 letter to Karpov.<sup>64</sup>

6) Przybyszewski's rejection of older trends in art, such as naturalism, and his discussion of the soul as a reflection of the Absolute, resonated in Komissarzhevskaja's identification with Chekhov's character of Nina Zarechnaia, the mouthpiece of Treplev's new and "decadent" play, who spoke of matter merging with the "World soul."<sup>65</sup>

More importantly, the content of Komissarzhevskaja's letter to Khodotov signals a radical change in her thinking about her art, her own destiny, and the socially oriented aesthetic she had professed in her correspondence over the last several years:<sup>66</sup>

Мой Азра, мой Азра! Вот потому что Вы прислали мне эти книжки, потому что Вы откликнулись на прочитанное в них— я могу говорить с Вами. Боже! Вот в чем *главное* для меня, мой Азра. Я стою на пороге великих событий души моей... Я малодушна, настал момент, когда *должна* решиться участь моя. Да, это ведь и есть моя вера: «Искусство должно отражать вечное, а вечно только одно—это душа». Значит, важно только одно—жизнь души во всех ее проявлениях.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>64</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 66.

<sup>65</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 8; Chekhov, *Plays*, 92. "NINA: The bodies of living beings have turned into dust and eternal matter has changed them into stones, into water, into clouds and all their spirits have merged into one. I ... I am that universal spirit...." Ellipses in original.

<sup>66</sup> The name "Azra" comes from the poem, "Der Asra," based on an Arab legend by Heine; Anton Rubinshtein set it as a romance (*Sechs Lieder von Heine*, no. 6). Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 360. Heine's final stanza reads: "Und der Sklave sprach: 'Ich heiÙe Mahomet / und bin aus Yemen. / und meine Stamm sind jene Asra, / welche sterben, wenn sie lieben.'"

Помните, я говорила Вам раз: «Совсем не надо никаких типов создавать»--я не поясняла, что я хотела сказать, но это и было *то*. Помните мою лихорадку, с какой я говорила Вам о Жанне д'Арк. [...] Тут должно решиться все. И если бы эта вещь была слабей во сто раз, чем она есть, она будет пробным камнем для меня, потому что это я скажу или не скажу, свое слово—не свое, а исповедую свою веру открыто, даже и не так. Если я не могу быть творцом в *этой* вещи,--значит, я не художник, значит, я не умею отдаться тому, где говорит *только* вечное.<sup>67</sup> Ах, как мне много хочется сказать и невозможно писать об этом. [...]<sup>68</sup>

My Azra, my Azra! This is why you have sent me these booklets: because you have responded to what is written in them—I can speak with you. Lord! Here is *the main thing* in it for me, my Azra. I stand on the threshold of my soul's great events... I am faint-hearted, [but] the moment has come, when my destiny *must* be decided. Yes, this really is my credo: “Art must reflect the eternal, and the eternal is only one thing—the soul.” That means one thing only is important—the life of the soul in all its manifestations. Remember, I was telling you once: “One must not create any types at all”—I didn't explain what I wanted to say, but it was just *that*. Remember the fever with which I spoke to you about Jeanne d'Arc. [...] Everything must be decided now. If this piece [the Annenkova-Bernar play] were a hundred times weaker than it is, it would [still] be a touchstone for me, because either I will or will not make my own statement—not my own, but I am openly making my confession, even if it's wrong. If I cannot be a creator (*tvorets*) in *this* piece,—that means that I am not an artist (*khudozhnik*), that means that I do not know how to give myself up to that [place], where *only* the eternal

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<sup>67</sup> At this point there is a slight discrepancy between published texts that cannot be rectified at this time. This will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

<sup>68</sup> Al'tshuller, *ibid.*, 115-116. “Letter to N. N. Khodotov [April 1902].” Ellipses and emphasis as in original, as edited by Al'tshuller. Khodotov's original letter is archived at RGALI, f. 901, op. 1, ed, khr. 19, no. 88.

speaks. Oh, how much there is I would like to say and it's impossible to write about it. ...

Komissarzhevskaja responds strongly to this work and declares that she must now decide her future. That fate seems to be closely associated with her portrayal of Joan of Arc in the Aleksandrinskii's upcoming production and her own desire to express individual characters, not "types." This supposition is confirmed by Khodotov, who believed that Komissarzhevskaja left the Aleksandrinskii, not only because of the intrigues with Savina, but also because she was unhappy with the Aleksandrinskii's refusal to stage the Annenkova-Bernar play, *Daughter of the People* [*Doch' naroda*], to which she refers in her letter. In his 1932 memoirs, Khodotov suggests that Komissarzhevskaja identified psychologically with the heroine, and claims that her restless spirit was dissatisfied with the theatre bureaucracy.<sup>69</sup>

Komissarzhevskaja's perception of a change in her fate is evidently also connected with the concept of "soul" and "the eternal," notions to which she has reacted strongly and emotionally ("I can speak with you. Lord! Here is *the main thing* in it for me, my Azra. ... This really is my credo"). Uncannily, by declaring that the notions which follow are her "credo" (*vera*) and confession (*ispoveduiu svoiu veru*), Komissarzhevskaja creates a generic parallel, a confession of faith, with the unstated source of these ideas, Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms and Preludes*.<sup>70</sup> In turn,

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<sup>69</sup> Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1932), 162.

<sup>70</sup> Komissarzhevskaja's acceptance of Przybyszewski's aesthetic notions as "my credo" or "my faith" seems to support Laurence Senelick's claim that "Kommissarzhevskaya encountered the Symbolists and instantly, almost unthinkingly, adopted

Khodotov, her romantic partner and philosophical “soul mate,” who clearly shared some of Przybyszewski’s views (“because you [Khodotov] have responded to what is written in them”), becomes Komissarzhevskaja’s epistolary confessor.<sup>71</sup> In addition to his position as a confessor figure, Khodotov also serves as a priestly intermediary and conduit of the new “religion of art” to his convert, Komissarzhevskaja.

Przybyszewski had published the first part of *Aphorisms and Preludes* previously in the Polish journal *Życie* under the Latin title “Confiteor” (“I confess”), the title of a prayer used in the Catholic Mass.<sup>72</sup> Komissarzhevskaja thus adopts Przybyszewski’s “confession” as her own, becoming a voluntary disciple of the “new

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them as her salvation, without fully comprehending their aesthetic principles” (Senelick, 479). However, parallels found in Komissarzhevskaja’s later comments made in defense of *Life’s Banquet* in 1909 and Przybyszewski’s essay “On Drama and the Stage” indicate that, indeed, the actress did grasp the meaning of some aesthetic trends of the period, although she may not have always discussed them. For a further discussion of the relationship between Komissarzhevskaja and the circle of Symbolist writers with which she associated, see Laurence Senelick, “Vera Komissarzhevskaya: The Actress as Symbolist Eidolon,” *Theatre Journal* 32, no. 4 (1980): 475-487.

<sup>71</sup> According to Gaik Adonts, the editor of the 1932 edition of Khodotov’s memoirs, Khodotov himself extolled the “cult of the soul.” Adonts considered this trait a “dubious attribute of little use” to actors who wished to build a proletarian theatre. See “Predislovie,” in Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1932), 22.

<sup>72</sup> Stanisław Przybyszewski, “Confiteor” *Życie*, no. 1 (1899): 1-4. “*Aphorisms and Preludes*,” the first section of *On the Paths of the Soul*, is actually a compilation of two earlier essays, “Confiteor,” and “For the New Art” (“O nową sztukę”), as well as additional material on Edvard Munch (the second major section of *On the Paths*). The other sections of *On the Paths* are “Edvard Munch,” “Gustav Vigeland,” “Chopin (Impromptu),” “The Passionate One (Alfred Mombert),” and “Apostrophe to the King-Spirit on the Threshold of the New Century. In Memory of Juliusz Słowacki.” For an early bibliography of Przybyszewski’s works in the German and Polish press, see Helsztyński, *Bibliografia pism Stanisława Przybyszewskiego* (Warsaw: 1968). For an English translation and brief introduction to this important manifesto of *Młoda Polska*, see Richard Sokoloski, “Stanisław Przybyszewski’s ‘Confiteor,’” *The Polish Review* 29, no. 1/2 (1984): 39-46. The remaining sections of *On the Paths of the Soul* have yet to appear in English.

art.” There are several possible reasons why Komissarzhevskaiia frames her comments in this manner. First, Khodotov, her intermediary, probably heard the provenance of Przybyszewski’s work discussed at one of the meetings of the Artistic Circle which he had attended in Moscow and communicated this information to Komissar-zhevskaiia. Second, Komissarzhevskaiia herself is likely reacting to the quasi-religious language (“highest religion,” “priest,” “first prophet,” “lord of lords,” “in the ecstasy of prayer,” “the poor in spirit,” “those who carried the sign of God upon them,” et al.) which fills Przybyszewski’s work.<sup>73</sup> Third, this generic framework symbolically mirrors the relationship of Komissarzhevskaiia, the convert, to Khodotov, her personal prophet, whom she poetically nicknamed “my little Mohammed” in her correspondence of July 1901.<sup>74</sup> This nickname was another reference to the poem by Heine from which she took Khodotov’s nickname, “Azra.”

As we shall see, a comparison of the phrase which Komissarzhevskaiia purports to cite (“Art must reflect the eternal...the soul”) in her April 1902 letter and the main phrase of her following sentence, which she *does not* treat as a quotation

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<sup>73</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*. “искусство становится *высшей религией, жрецом же ее является художник*” (9), “он [художник] было *первым пророком*” (9), “он [художник] *владыка над владыками*” “он [художник]...знает единственно только мощь этих проявлений, одинаково сильную ... и в *экстазе молитвы*” (10), “поучать, *нищих духом*” (11), “В былое время отдавались искусству лишь *те, которые носили на себе печать Бога*” (28), “*анакореты, жившие в уединении лесов,*” “Художник средневековый *приготовлял свою душу долгой молитвой и постом; в судорожном экстазе молил благодати Св. Духа*” (29). My emphases.

<sup>74</sup> In their correspondence, Komissarzhevskaiia frequently signed her letters as “Vash Svet” (“Your Light”); usually referred to as “Azra,” in July 1901 Khodotov became “moi Magometik” (“my little Mohammed”). See Al’shuller, *op. cit.*, 80, 94, 99, 104, 105, 107, (“Vash Svet”); 109 (“moi Magometik”).

(“the life of the soul in all its manifestations”), leaves no doubt as to its Przybyszewskian origins.<sup>75</sup> Komissarzhevskaja actually summarizes, in paraphrase, not one, but three related points which Przybyszewski makes early in his essay:

1. “Art is the reflection of that which is eternal....”
2. “.... a reflection of the essence, that is, the soul”
3. “That is, art is the reflection of the life of the soul in all its manifestations”

Note the linguistic and thematic parallels between these points and lines from Przybyszewski’s *Aphorisms*. The physical positions of these points, as the initial phrases at the head of consecutive paragraphs as they appeared in the Russian text, seem to indicate that Komissarzhevskaja had either taken notes or perhaps, had underlined these important notions (in italics) as she followed Przybyszewski’s arguments:

*Искусство есть отражение того, что вечно, независимо ни от каких перемен и случайностей, независимо ни от времени ни от пространства, а следовательно: отражение сущности, т. е., души. И при том, души, независимо от того, проявляется ли она во вселенной, в человечестве или в отдельном индивидууме. Значит, искусство есть отражение жизни души во всех ее проявлениях, независимо от того, будут ли они хороши или дурны, отвратительны или прекрасны. В этом основной пункт нашей эстетики.*<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Komissarzhevskaja’s quotation and paraphrase: “«Искусство должно отражать вечно, а вечно только одно—это душа». Значит, важно только одно—жизнь души во всех ее проявлениях.”

<sup>76</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 6. My emphases. See Appendix I, text 2.76.

*Art is a reflection of that which is eternal, irrespective of any changes or chance incidents, irrespective of either time or space, and consequently:*

*[it is] a reflection of the essence, i.e., the soul.*

Moreover, [it is a reflection] irrespective of whether it [the soul] is manifested in the universe, in humanity or in the individual self.

*That means that art is a reflection of the life of the soul in all its manifestations, whether they be good or bad, ugly or beautiful.*

The fundamental point of our aesthetic lies in this.

Komissarzhevskaja's opening comment to Khodotov in her letter, "Here is what is *the main thing* in it for me, my Azra," supports this hypothesis. While this comment may refer to her immediate decision ("I stand on the threshold of my soul's great events"), it also echoes Przybyszewski's own declaration that "the life of the soul in all its manifestations" must be the fundamental focus of art ("The fundamental point of our aesthetic lies in this"). Komissarzhevskaja's own paraphrastic summation ("That means *one thing only is important*—the life of the soul") also echoes Przybyszewski's assessment.

The focus of Komissarzhevskaja's letter shifts from art, the subject of Przybyszewski's text, to her own situation and self-assessment as a performing artist ("either I will or will not make my own statement," "that means that I am not an artist," "If I cannot be a creator in *this* piece"). In shifting focus, Komissarzhevskaja internalizes a statement Przybyszewski makes several paragraphs after the section she has just paraphrased: "Therefore the artist (*khudozhnik*) reflects the life of the soul in

all its manifestations.”<sup>77</sup> While Przybyszewski’s statement acts as a reiteration of his previous comments on art and the artist, for Komissarzhevskaja it acts as a catalyst for soul-searching. She now asks herself, How do I, as an actress, “reflect the life of the soul”?

The meaning of the Russian term “*khudozhnik*,” used by Kursinskii to translate Przybyszewski’s Polish “*artysta*,” helps Komissarzhevskaja to shift her focus inward. Przybyszewski obviously uses the term “*artysta*” in its broader sense, as the discussion in “Aphorisms and Preludes” serves as an introduction to essays on Edvard Munch (painter), Gustav Vigeland (sculptor), Alfred Mombert and Juliusz Słowacki (poets), and Frédéric Chopin (composer).<sup>78</sup> In addition, Przybyszewski’s use of “artist” is similar to its widespread use at the turn of the century, when the term could refer to those working beyond the visual arts, as, for example, poets.<sup>79</sup>

“*Khudozhnik*,” while a general term for a practitioner of fine arts, can be used in the same way, and, in its figurative sense, “*khudozhnik*” can mean any person seeking perfection and mastery in their craft.<sup>80</sup> Because Komissarzhevskaja identified herself

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<sup>77</sup> “Итак художник отражает жизнь души во всех ее проявлениях” Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 7. Cf. “Artysta odtwarza zatem życie duszy we wszystkich przejawach” *Na drogach duszy*, 14.

<sup>78</sup> “artysta.” “człowiek, kunszt jakowy czyli sztukę posiadający, umiejący, n. p. malarz, snycerz, aktor teatralny ... ein Künstler.” *Słownik języka polskiego*, v. 1 (A-F), M. Samuel Bogumił Linde, ed. (Warsaw: PIW, 1951), 30.

<sup>79</sup> Philippe Jullian, *Dreamers of Decadence*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Praeger, 1971), 19.

<sup>80</sup> художник” 1) Творческий работник в области изобразительных искусств (живописец, скульптор, график). X. называют также представителей других областей искусства (архитектора, иногда писателя, композитора и др.) 2) В переносном смысле—человек, достигший высокого совершенства, проявивший большой вкус и мастерство в к.-л. работе. *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*,

as just such a person, it was easy for her to transfer this figurative meaning to her own profession. For her, Przybyszewski's essay became not only a work about the artist in general, but about the actor or performer (“*artist dramy*”) as well.<sup>81</sup>

Komissarzhevskaja's soul-searching is further reflected in her lexicon. A lexical-thematic parallel exists between Komissarzhevskaja's 1902 letter and Przybyszewski's essay. This is her juxtaposition of the words “*tvorets*” (*creator*) and “*khudozhnik*” (Eng. “*artist*,” in the general sense): “If I cannot be a creator (*tvorets*) in *this* piece,—that means that I am not an artist (*khudozhnik*), that means that I do not know how to give myself up to that [place], where *only* the eternal speaks.” Here Komissarzhevskaja gives special emphasis to the meaning of artistic creativity, noting that she is neither a “creator” nor an “artist” if she cannot surrender to the soul, or “that place where *only* the eternal speaks.” In her own way, Komissarzhevskaja is paraphrasing another concept found in Przybyszewski's pamphlet—his view of genius, the creative individual who is able to reflect the soul “in all its manifestations.”

In part II of *Aphorisms* Przybyszewski relates the concept of genius to the concept of the soul and the subconscious—the Maeterlinckian ‘*mare tenebrarum*’.<sup>82</sup>

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v. 46, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Moscow: BSE, 19xx), 408.

<sup>81</sup> “художник(-ца)” artist; 1) человек художественной профессии / артист, артистка. Perel', *op. cit.*, 413.

<sup>82</sup> Untitled in Kursinskii's edition (pp. 13-22), but corresponding to Przybyszewski's Polish-language essay, originally published as “O Nową sztukę,” *Życie*, no. 6, 1899. Cf. Maurice Maeterlinck: “Il y a en notre âme une mer intérieure, une effrayante et véritable mare tenebrarum, où sévissent les étranges tempêtes de l'inarticulé et des l'inexprimable et ce que nous parvenons à émettre en allume parfois quelque reflet d'étoile dans l'ébullition des vagues sombres... Je voudrais étudier tout ce qui est

The genius, Przybyszewski argues, is that rare individual who is able to communicate the soul's experiences and penetrate into the depths of existence.<sup>83</sup> The genius not only sees images and hears sounds unknown to other people, but also combines these synaesthetically in an attempt to re-create the original, indivisible nature of the soul.<sup>84</sup> Only such a genius can be a true "creator."<sup>85</sup> This is not a surprising concept in Przybyszewski's system, as he believes that the traditional limitations of the five senses are therefore inadequate to describe the Absolute. When combined synaesthetically, however, these combinations are all able to relate to the deeper, internal emotions of the soul<sup>86</sup> Przybyszewski continues:

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informulé dans une existence, tout ce qui n'a pas d'expression dans la mort ou la vie, tout ce qui cherche une voix dans un cœur. Je voudrais me pencher sur l'instinct en son sens de lumière, sur les pressentiments, les facultés inexplicables, négligées ou éteintes, sur les mobiles irraisonnés, sur les merveilles de la mort, sur les mystères du sommeil..." "Maurice Maeterlinck, réponse aux questions: «Comment concevez-vous votre art? Qu'est, pour vous, l'Art en général etc...»,» *L'Art Moderne* (28 February 1890). This quotation: Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond, "Le cœur sans paroles ou les voix du sublime," *Revue de musicologie* 83, no. 2 (1997): 268.

<sup>83</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 15.

<sup>84</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*. "Есть люди, перед очами которых проходит все, что пережила их душа ... люди, которые углубляясь в беспредельность, видят очаровательные образы и эдемы нездешнего мира, слышат мелодии и звуки, о которых не снилось человеческому слуху" (15); "Душа едина и неделима..., но за внешними чувствами коренится один неделимый орган, через который проникают миллионы чувств, [...] Здесь звук одновременно является и цветом, и запахом, и всем тем, чему в языке нет выражения. [...] В этой глубине, в абсолютном познании теряют цену всякие ассоциации мысли, что создались при посредстве внешних чувств, а появляются новые, единственно действительные связи и сочетания, относящиеся к внутреннему чувству." (21). See Appendix I, text 2.84.

<sup>85</sup> "Такой человек есть творец." Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 15.

<sup>86</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 15, 21. Przybyszewski describes the creation of the senses in connection with the creation of the mind in his novella, *Requiem Aeternam* (*Zaupokoinaia messa*). See Stanislav Pshibyshevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*,

The former creator (*tvorets*) revealed ‘things,’ the new creator reveals the state of his soul. / The former understood the particulars in objects and impressions, as they floated in his mind, believing in their objectiveness; the latter, on the contrary, understands the particulars only in the emotions, as they are stimulated by these objects.<sup>87</sup>

Komissarzhevskaiia’s recognition of this basic tenet in Przybyszewski’s aesthetics, that there is a fundamental difference between an artist who lacks originality and merely imitates, and one who truly “creates,” is reflected in a slight lexical shift in her correspondence from 1894-1902, specifically in the usage of words denoting the creative individual or “artist.” Until her letter to Khodotov in early April 1902, Komissarzhevskaiia had only used the terms “*artist*” (performer) or “*akter*” (actor) when referring to her profession.<sup>88</sup> However, her specific use of the term “creative artist” or “creator” (*tvorets*) in this letter seems to be unique in her correspondence of this period.<sup>89</sup> Significantly, Komissarzhevskaiia’s use of “*tvorets*”

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T. VII, *Stikhotvoreniia v proze. Requiem aeternam. Vechnaia skazka*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Sablin, 1910): 69-70.

<sup>87</sup> “Прежний творец раскрывал «вещи», новый творец раскрывает свое состояние души. / Первый разбирался в вещах и впечатлениях, как оне влиявали в его мозг, веруя в их объективность; последний, наоборот, разбирается только в чувствах, какие вызываются этими вещами.” Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 17. See Appendix I, text 2.87. The word “*veshch*” (“thing,” Pol. “*rzecz*”) here is vague and difficult to translate, but both Komissarzhevskaiia and Przybyszewski use the same word. In Kursinskii’s text, the best translation seems to be “object,” while in Komissarzhevskaiia’s letter a better translation is “piece.” Indeed, in actor’s parlance a play is a “piece.”

<sup>88</sup> For examples of Komissarzhevskaiia’s use of the word “artist,” see Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 33, 42, 51 (VFK as an “*artistka*” of the Imperial theatres), 81, 82, 87; for uses of “*akter/aktery*” or rarely, “*aktrisa*,” see Al’tshuller, *ibid.*, 35 (“*aktrisa*”), 38, 42, 51, 65, 77, 79, 102, 108 (Khodotov as a “*molodoi akter*”).

<sup>89</sup> “If I cannot be a creative artist in *this* piece,—that means that I am not an artist (*khudozhnik*).”

echoes Przybyszewski's similar usage in *Aphorisms*, meaning an artist who reaches a higher level of consciousness and is able to engage the various states of the soul.<sup>90</sup> Her use of the term “*khudozhnik*” in this letter, in the general sense of a creative individual, as roughly equivalent with “artist” but not specifically designating a painter or scenic designer, echoes Kursinskii's use of the term in his translation.<sup>91</sup> Finally, even Komissarzhevskaiia's condescending use of the word “piece” (“*veshch'*,” “If I cannot be a creator in *this* piece” (ital. in orig.)), rather than a neutral word such as “play” or “drama,” appropriately echoes Przybyszewski's opposition of the artist of the “old art,” who depicts the mundane (“things”), and the artist of the “new art,” who depicts the transcendental (“the eternal,” the “states of the soul”).<sup>92</sup> Thus, Komissarzhevskaiia's strong confession of faith professed in her letter indicates that she, as one who now has identified herself with the “new art,” would seek to express that tumultuous, psychological reality that comes from within—from the soul—rather than a reality created by external forces, natural and mortal.

### ***Near – Far: Supporting evidence from the benefactor***

An examination of Komissarzhevskaiia's letter, published in Khodotov's 1932 memoirs, will provide further evidence establishing Przybyszewski's booklet as the

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<sup>90</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 15, 17. “Есть люди, перед очами которых проходит все, что пережила их душа, есть люди, в которых гораздо сильнее дает знать себя абсолютная душа, нежели в других, ... / И такой человек есть творец” (15); “Прежний творец раскрывал „вещи“, но новый творец раскрывает свое состояние души”(17). Przybyszewski will make a similar distinction in his essay on drama.

<sup>91</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 7, 9, 10, 11, etc. Komissarzhevskaiia uses the term “*khudozhnik*” specifically as a reference to a painter or designer in two instances, see letters #2 to Turkin (1894) and #77 to Karpov (1900), in Al'tshuller, *ibid.*, 33, 76.

<sup>92</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 17. See footnote #87.

source of Komissarzhevskaiia's quote. His citation of this letter varies slightly from the "definitive" version which Al'shuller published in 1964. Khodotov's version concludes:

если я не могу быть творцом в этой вещи, значит, и не художник, значит я не умею отдаться тому, где говорит только вечное, потому что отдавшись ему, не надо делать никаких уступок реальному «прошлому» искусству!..<sup>93</sup>

If I cannot be a creator in this piece, that means that I am not an artist either; it means that I do not know how to give myself up to that [place], where only the eternal speaks, because, having surrendered to it, one must not make any concessions to "bygone," realistic art.

Khodotov's version includes the concluding phrases, "because, having surrendered to it, one must not make any concessions to the realistic art of the past." The sentiment of this line, that the art of the past is "real" or "realistic," in opposition to the art of her (Komissarzhevskaiia's) future, "the eternal," echoes and paraphrases comments made by Przybyszewski in *Aphorisms*, several pages after his discussion of the "former" and "latter" creators, which we have discussed in connection with Komissarzhevskaiia's letter. Przybyszewski continues:

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<sup>93</sup> Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1932), 163. The 1962 edition further offers another slight variant, replacing "отдавшись ему" with "отдавшись ей." Cf. Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1962), 115. Konstantin Rudnitskii discusses this fragment in his introduction, "Sud'ba Komissarzhevskoi," in the second volume of biographical materials, *O Komissarzhevskoi. Zabytoe i novoe. (Vospominaniia, stat'i, pis'ma)* (Moscow: Vserossiiskoe teatral'noe obshchestvo, 1965). His concise paraphrase reads: "Искусство, -- говорила она, -- должно выражать вечное. Вечное только одно— это душа. Значит, важно только одно – жизнь души во всех ее проявлениях. Не надо делать никаких уступок реальному прошлому искусству!" Rudnitskii, *op. cit.*, 30. Further citations of Rudnitskii will appear as "ZN." Rudnitskii does not discuss the validity of his own paraphrase or its variance with the published version in Al'tshuller.

Все искусство до наших дней, за исключением тех редких случаев, когда творил гений, было искусством реальным. Разделение же его на идеалистическое и реалистическое основывается разве только на известных данных этического и религиозного характера. Искусство есть проявление души. Все предшествовавшее искусство, искусство реалистическое, -- было заблуждение души.<sup>94</sup>

All art before our time, with the exception of those rare instances when the genius created, was realistic art (*iskusstvom real'nym*). The division of it into idealistic and realistic [tendencies] is based only on well-known grounds of an ethical and religious character. Art is a manifestation of the soul. All preceding art, realistic art (*iskusstvo realisticheskoe*) —was a delusion of the soul.

Przybyszewski rejects the former divisions of art into “idealism” and “realism.” This rejection is based on two premises: first, that the world we know is only Maia, an illusion masking the Absolute.<sup>95</sup> Second, that any art that submits to external ethical influence, based on this illusory worldview, is inherently false. Therefore, even though past trends may have been identified as “idealistic,” they were still false, because they operated under moral and ethical constraints. In this way, Przybyszewski also contrasts the former aesthetic trends of “realism,” which reflects the art of the five senses, to the true idealistic, synaesthetic art of the soul, the

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<sup>94</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 20-21. See also Appendix I, note 2.94.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. “человечество окружала страшная злобная иллюзия, Майя, фантом действительности.” Przybyszewski was familiar with Schopenhauer and various forms of esoteric thought. His reading of such modern spiritualists as Blavatskaia molded his understanding of the latter. See, for example, chapters VII and XIII of *Moi współcześni*.

“absolute.”<sup>96</sup> Therefore, if this phrase about surrendering oneself to “the art of the past” is a genuine sentiment professed by Komissarzhevskaiia, it is further evidence of echoes between Komissarzhevskaiia’s letter and Przybyszewski’s *Aphorisms* and a foundation for Komissarzhevskaiia’s affinity for later experiments in symbolism and *uslovnyi* theatre. If it is only an interpolation added by Khodotov, it still points to the Przybyszewski text as its possible source.

Khodotov’s memoirs provides additional evidence identifying Przybyszewski as an origin of Komissarzhevskaiia’s “artistic idealism.” In that work, Khodotov continues his discussion of the actress immediately after his own citation of this letter. “Art for Komissarzhevskaiia was a value outside of space and time,” Khodotov writes, “and for genuine creativity she demanded a renunciation of distracting, mundane, petty interests. In her opinion the artist (*khudozhnik*) must be sublimely disposed, otherwise he will be a dwarf on stilts.”<sup>97</sup> Khodotov’s association of Komissarzhevskaiia with the notion of art as a phenomenon lying beyond time and space is not accidental. This comment echoes another paragraph in *Aphorisms*, as Przybyszewski

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<sup>96</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 19-21. Rudnitskii, in his brief discussion of this text, correctly equates “realistic” (*real'noe*) with “past” or “bygone” (*proshloe*) art, but, not recognizing the origins of Komissarzhevskaiia’s comments, asserts that this rejection of the past does not mean that the actress meant that her “future ‘theatre of the soul’” would turn against realism entirely. The Soviet historian felt that Komissarzhevskaiia was simply uniting the concept of “reality” (*real'nost'*) with the old, worn-out forms of realism so hateful to her at that time. He supported this view by noting Komissarzhevskaiia’s continued interest in realist authors such as Ibsen, Gor'kii, and, of course Chekhov, that is, the repertoire of MXT, which she would copy in her first independent season of 1904-1905. See Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 31. This change in repertoire does, indeed, occur, but the seeds for further, more radical change in the “old” mimetic impulse of theatre—developed during the 1906-1907 season, are sown here as well.

<sup>97</sup> Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1932), 163; *op. cit.* (1962), 115.

elaborates on the concept of art as eternal. This was the very same paragraph that Komissarzhevskaja had paraphrased in her letter. Przybyszewski writes:

Art is a reflection of that which is eternal, irrespective of any changes or chance incidents, irrespective of either time or space, and consequently:  
[it is] a reflection of the essence, i.e., the soul.  
Moreover, [it is a reflection] irrespective of whether it [the soul] is manifested in the universe, in humanity or in the individual self.<sup>98</sup>

Khodotov's introduction of the notion of "time and space" in his memoirs at the very point that he discusses the April 1902 letter from Komissarzhevskaja serves three purposes. First, in suggesting that Komissarzhevskaja views art as timeless, he emphasizes the actress's own desire to stage repertoire that contained universal themes and moved beyond the popular pieces which were a staple of the Imperial theatres. Furthermore, Khodotov's remark, "In her [Komissarzhevskaja's] opinion the artist must be sublimely disposed, otherwise he will be a dwarf on stilts," suggests that this view of art also stood in opposition to the popular forms found on the vaudeville stage and at the circus.<sup>99</sup> Second, he presents his own opinion of the actress herself. In his view, in the twenty years since her death Komissarzhevskaja had become an iconic figure standing outside "outside time and space." Third, despite the fact that he did not openly identify it in his memoirs, Khodotov's own comment resonates from the booklet he himself had presented Komissarzhevskaja

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<sup>98</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 6. Previously cited, see Appendix I, text 2.76.

<sup>99</sup> Khodotov's 1932 remark echoes a similar comment made in "On Drama and the Stage." In that essay, Przybyszewski decries contemporary actors who still thought themselves as "some kind of dexterous juggler or acrobat." Pshibyshevskii, "O drame i stsene," 341. Special thanks to Prof. William J. Comer for urging me to take a second look at this remark.

and directs the knowledgeable reader back to the source, Kursinskii's 1902 translation of *Aphorisms and Preludes*.

Through a comparison of lexical parallels and a survey of circumstantial evidence from Khodotov's memoirs, we have now established that Komissarzhevskaiia was familiar with Przybyszewski's pamphlet, *Aphorisms and Preludes*. We have also examined elements of Komissarzhevskaiia's developing worldview to understand why she felt an affinity for Przybyszewski's work. In order to understand how *Aphorisms and Preludes* might have contributed to Komissarzhevskaiia's changing aesthetic views we can observe how Komissarzhevskaiia treats the concepts of "soul," "art" and "artist" in her early correspondence.

### **Changing notions of soul, artist, and art: the personalization of Przybyszewski's aesthetic views**

A preliminary survey of these particular concepts — "soul," "artist," and "art" — in Komissarzhevskaiia's letters will demonstrate that the actress was already adopting broadly subjective, neo-romantic views of art and artist, before she read *Aphorisms and Preludes*. Thus, we can be certain that these concepts, at the very least, contributed to Komissarzhevskaiia's strong affinity for the aesthetic views professed by Przybyszewski. However, the interrelation of these concepts, as well as Komissarzhevskaiia's specific contrast of the terms "*khudozhnik*" and "*tvorets*" can be uniquely tied to her April 1902 letter.

In the period immediately following her April 1902 letter, that is, from May to December, and continuing into 1903, the concepts of "soul," "artist," and "art" become much more closely related to Komissarzhevskaiia's personal journey of

perfection in self and art. For example, her personalization of the concept of “soul,” which was a major subject of Przybyszewski’s booklet, resulted in a marked change in Komissarzhevskaiia’s epistolary lexicon. For example, before April 1902, Komissarzhevskaiia had used the word “soul” freely in standard phrases, as a synonym for “heart.”<sup>100</sup> Immediately after April 1902 this synonymous use ended, resulting in an almost complete absence of the words “soul” (*dusha*) from her epistolary lexicon until September 1902.<sup>101</sup> Likewise, the word “performer” (*artist/ka*) is also absent from her correspondence after April 1902. The consequences of this change in lexicon are the subject of the following discussion.

Komissarzhevskaiia’s various uses of the word “*dusha*” (“soul”) in the period 1894 to early 1902 closely correspond to the categories of usage which N. G. Bragina describes in her appendix to *Memory in Language and Culture*.<sup>102</sup> During this period Komissarzhevskaiia was far more likely to refer to the “soul” rather than the “heart.”<sup>103</sup> As Bragina points out, the two words can be used alternately in many

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<sup>100</sup> Surviving letters #1-140 in Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 31-115; #1-25 in Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 149-164.

<sup>101</sup> Surviving letters #142-170 in Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 116-129; #26-29 in Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 164-166. The word “*dusha*” re-enters her epistolary vocabulary during 1903, generally signifying a place of strong feeling. See letters #171, 172, 176, 177, 182, 199. No piece of 1903 correspondence published in Rudnitskii mentions “*dusha*” or “*serdtse*.” Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 166-168.

<sup>102</sup> N. G. Bragina, “Prilozhenie 3. Dusha / serdtse: slovarnye stat'i frazeologicheskogo slovaria,” in *Pamiat' v iazyke i kul'ture* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2007), 389-429.

<sup>103</sup> Of the materials reviewed the ratio of usage for the words “*serdtse*” (“heart”) to “*dusha*” (“soul”) is 9 to 52; Komissarzhevskaiia does not use either word in the existing correspondence from December 1901-April 1902 published in the Al'tshuller volume. References to either “*serdtse*” (“heart”) or “*dusha*” (“soul”) in Rudnitskii are 0 to 7. See Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 149-164.

standard phrases, with only a slight change of meaning. In Russian, in such phraseological combinations the word “heart,” rather than “soul,” can carry a more corporeal connotation.<sup>104</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia sometimes uses the standard phraseological forms “to the depths of the soul” or “from the depths of the soul” meaning that internal emotional space, often beyond a person’s rational control, where the most personal thoughts and emotions lie.<sup>105</sup> In this context, in her personal correspondence Komissarzhevskaiia is signalling her sincerity or ability to be deeply moved.<sup>106</sup> “To weigh on the heart/soul heavily” is another standard phrase Komissarzhevskaiia uses at this time, denoting an oppressive feeling or restlessness.<sup>107</sup>

Komissarzhevskaiia’s references seem to suggest that she envisioned the soul psychologically, as the source for deep-seated emotions and ethical judgment. She rarely referred to the soul in a specifically religious or Christian mystical context, especially in its relation to the Holy Trinity.<sup>108</sup> In two instances where Komissar-

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<sup>104</sup> Bragina, *op. cit.*, 392-393. English phraseology carries the same distinctions as Russian: the phrases “with all one’s heart/soul” are equally valid; the English phrase “heart *and* soul” even emphasizes the perceived distinction.

<sup>105</sup> “каждое слово его шло из глубины моей души, из той глубины, где лежат самые заповедные думы, чувства, слова” (Letter #92, 1900) or “письмо... тронуло меня до глубины души” (Letter #25, 1895) Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 51, 88; “Вид «Ostro–Hramil» тронул меня до далекого уголка души моей” (Letter #14, 1901) Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 157. These phrases are related lexically and semantically to Bragina’s example of “в глубине души” (“in the depths of the soul”). See the brief discussion in Bragina, *op. cit.*, 397-399.

<sup>106</sup> Related to this meaning is Komissarzhevskaiia’s use of the phrase “with all my soul” or its variants. See Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 51, 68, 77, 113.

<sup>107</sup> “Такая тоска сдавила мне сердце!” (Letter #9, 1894) and “У меня какой-то вдруг камень лег на душу” (Letter #87, 1900) Al’tshuller, *ibid.*, 43, 83. Cf. Bragina, *op. cit.*, 413-414.

<sup>108</sup> “Psikhologiiia” in *Entsyklopedicheskii slovar'*, v. 50 (St. Petersburg: Brokgauz & Efron, 1898), 678.

zhevskaiia made a reference to both soul and Christian concepts, the reference is indirect. In a letter to Khodotov from 1900, for example, Komissarzhevskaiia writes: “one may say about the artist’s soul what Christ said of himself: ‘I am the truth, and I am the way to truth’,” and “If you can pray in such a way [for those who undergo hardship], then some kind of wave, seemingly, will rise in your soul.”<sup>109</sup> Rudnitskii claimed that Komissarzhevskaiia had a “delicate spiritual makeup,” but did not follow any one particular religious movement, although she habitually closes her correspondence with a traditional “Christ be with you.”<sup>110</sup>

Komissarzhevskaiia rarely moved away from the common conception of soul as a “general state, a recognition of one’s ‘ego’ (*‘ia’*), of one’s individuality, more or less connected with a material body, but not identical to it, but only using it as an abode, an instrument, an organ...., a driving principle (*dvizhushchee nachalo*), a ‘force’ found in us.”<sup>111</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia expressed this notion of the soul as a moving force at least once, in a letter to Khodotov from late 1900.<sup>112</sup> In an explanation of a quote from Dostoevskii’s novel *The Idiot*, in which Dostoevskii writes, “Compassion is the most important, and perhaps, the only mover of

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<sup>109</sup> “про душу артиста можно сказать то, что Христос сказал про себя: «Я— правда, я и путь к правде»” (cf. John 14: 6 (NKJV), “I am the way, the truth, and the life”) and “и помолитесь за всех, кому тяжело. Если помолитесь Вам так, то у Вас как будто волна какая-то поднимется потом в душе.” (Letter to Khodotov #85, 1900), Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 81, 82.

<sup>110</sup> Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 14; Komissarzhevskaiia usually closed with “Khristos s vami,” more rare is “Gospod’ s vami” or “Bog s vami.” For examples of these epistolary closings, see Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 69 (1898), 75 (1900), 76, 77, 79, 80, 82, 83, 103, 104, 106 (1901), et al.

<sup>111</sup> “Dusha” in *Entsyklopedicheskii slovar’*, v. 11 (St. Petersburg: Brokgauz & Efron, 1893), 277.

<sup>112</sup> “From a letter to Khotodov [Petersburg. October 1900],” Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 91.

humanity,” Komissarzhevskaja tried to provide an exegesis of the notion as she understood it.<sup>113</sup> She explains that “compassion makes one perspicacious, it always looks forward, and as it lives in the soul, that means that it helps the soul to move.”<sup>114</sup> She then contrasted this movement of the soul to that of the mind, which, in its search for knowledge, may “stop and thus remain until the end.” According to Komissarzhevskaja, the soul must keep moving, whereas the mind may cease moving “for some reason or the other.”<sup>115</sup> Komissarzhevskaja’s expressed recognition of a mind-soul duality, as well as her notion of a living (“moving”) soul, could easily have made her more receptive to Przybyszewski’s Bergsonian conception of the soul as an *élan vital* and his presentation of two paths in art, as expressed in *Aphorisms and Preludes*. Moreover, Przybyszewski’s own identification of the “path of the mind” as an old, false tendency in art and the “path of the soul” as a progressive, forward looking tendency, allowed Komissarzhevskaja to admit this notion into her own developing worldview, easily fusing with her own notion that the compassionate soul is a forward-looking, moving force. At the most fundamental level, Komissarzhevskaja and Przybyszewski shared this idea of the soul as a progressive force in humanity. For Komissarzhevskaja, the impetus of this force is compassion, for Przybyszewski, it is the creativity driven by the artist’s own suffering and pain.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> “Сострадание есть главнейший и, может быть, единственный двигатель человечества” (part II, chapter V). *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>114</sup> “Ведь сострадание делает прозорливым, оно всегда вперед глядит, а так как оно в душе живет, то значит, душе двигаться помогает.” *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>115</sup> Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 91.

<sup>116</sup> Przybyszewski, “Zur Psychologie,” 104-105. Cf. the Russian text: *PSS, Kritika*, 8-11.

Excepting her April letter to Khodotov, only once during the entire period from 1894 to December 1903 does Komissarzhevskaiia indirectly associate the three separate concepts of art, eternity, and soul, which are expressed so concisely in Przybyszewski's phrase: "Art must reflect the eternal, and the eternal is only one thing—the soul."<sup>117</sup> These references occur in a 1900 letter to Evtikhii Karpov, chief director of the Aleksandrinskii. After explaining to Karpov that they were both fated by a Higher Law (*opredeleno Vysshym Zakonom*) to serve art and for which they must sacrifice even themselves, Komissarzhevskaiia writes:

Идите же, дорогой, хороший, неужели Вы будете таким слабым и измените ему ради житейской бури. Пусть оно новую струю еще вольет в душу Вашу! Ведь это все временное, наносное, а вот сейчас, в эту минуту *вечность* говорит с Вами через меня. Да, да, вечность, потому что редко моя душа бывает так напряжена, как сейчас, и так прозорливо видеть все—она может только в такие минуты, и я чувствую, что я еще должна жить и *сделать что-то большое*, и это сознание вызвано не чем-нибудь, поверхностным, человеческим, это голос Высший—а грех тому, кто не ответит на мой призыв в такую минуту.<sup>118</sup>

Go then, dear, good man; can it be possible that you will be so weak and betray it [art] for the sake of the life's tempest? Let it yet pour a new spirit<sup>119</sup> into your soul! For everything is temporary [and] alien (*nanosnoe*), but right now, at this minute *eternity* speaks to you through me. Yes, yes, eternity, because rarely is my soul so tense as now, and it [the soul] can

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>118</sup> "From a letter to E. P. Karpov [Zheleznovodsk. Before 19 July 1900]." *Ibid.*, 82. Emphasis in the original. Al'tshuller dates the letter by content and with reference to the preceding and following letters.

<sup>119</sup> "struia" in its figurative meaning as "impetus." No equivalence with "Holy Spirit" (*Sviatoi dukh*) is intended.

only see everything so perspicaciously in *these* minutes,— and I feel that I must live more and *do something great*. This consciousness is summoned not by anything superficial, human, no, it is a Higher Voice—and it is a sin for him who will not answer my summons at such a minute. ...

Yet even this letter, which, in its abundant use of religious lexicon, foreshadows her letter to Khodotov—is further evidence why Komissarzhevskaja declared in April 1902 that Przybyszewski’s statement about art “really is my faith.” In this July 1900 letter Komissarzhevskaja noted that her view of art seems to be diverging with Karpov’s, and she also gently reproached her friend for becoming “a bit of a symbolist.”<sup>120</sup> Although she realized that there may be more than one path to the same goal, she accepted the fact that she and Karpov both serve art and must sacrifice themselves to its service. In her first pronouncement that art might be eternal, Komissarzhevskaja declared that they both must serve art because “it [art] will survive this sacrifice, all our joys and sorrows, and even ourselves.”<sup>121</sup>

Several themes presented here in 1900 anticipate Komissarzhevskaja’s April 1902 letter to Khodotov. Komissarzhevskaja mentions the concept of “eternity” for the first time. It is significant, however, that this concept is not directly identified as an inherent quality of art, although Komissarzhevskaja’s idea that “art will survive” is ample evidence that she recognizes the lasting quality of true art. Komissar-

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<sup>120</sup> “Мы с *Вами* совсем разное понимаем некоторые вещи, на способ служения мы смотрим разное, но Вы, помимо себя, сделали уже символистом немножко, и, наконец, можно разными путями идти к одной цели.” Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 82  
Italics in original.

<sup>121</sup> “...оно переживет и эту жертву, и все наши радости и печали, и нас самих”  
*Ibid.*, 82.

zhevskaiia's thought that "eternity speaks to you through me" is evidence that she views herself as a mouthpiece for "eternity." Here we can already see in Komissarzhevskaiia an affinity for Przybyszewski's extreme reworking of the neo-Romantic view of the artist as a chosen individual, a "priest" who viewed art as sacred. While the notion of the elevated position of the artist was not new to her when she read Przybyszewski, she was certainly responsive to it.

Komissarzhevskaiia's statement that it is only in this excited state of her soul that she is capable of seeing more clearly and becoming the medium for the eternity, as she describes, would find resonance in Przybyszewski's premise that it is chiefly through these heightened states of consciousness that one must seek the true manifestation of the soul.<sup>122</sup> Finally, Komissarzhevskaiia's appellation of a "Higher Voice" as the source of her call to greatness, rather than an overt identification with God or the Holy Spirit, is possible evidence that her religious views were not rigid or fixed and permit the assimilation of mystical elements, such as those presented in Przybyszewski's works.

In contrast to Komissarzhevskaiia's frequent colloquial use of the word "soul" in her correspondence before April 1902, the word does not appear again, curiously,

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<sup>122</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 14. "А следовательно, по нашему пониманию, душа человеческая является абсолютным познанием и остается им и после своего воплощения, а только незначительная частица этого абсолютного познания проявляется в мозгу, как наше абсолютное „Я“; незначительная часть изредка проявляется в снах, видениях, в моменты необычайных и могучих подъемов духа; еще меньше часть сказывается в постигновении глубочайших, но некогда известных тайн, --как чудо." See Appendix I, text 2.122.

until September 1902, when she is rehearsing *The Golden Fleece*.<sup>123</sup> In this letter to her friend Mariia Ziloti, Komissarzhevskaja's use of the word "soul" signifies the deep emotional connection, even distress, that her impending debut and the challenging role of Irena must have brought. Weak from rehearsals and anxious about her future, Komissarzhevskaja questioned whether she had the strength to prepare such roles. In her words, it was as if an "iron hand had squeezed out the life of the soul, and it [the soul] doesn't even try to struggle."<sup>124</sup> Significantly, the phrase "life of the soul" echoes Komissarzhevskaja's unique previous use of this phrase, the unacknowledged and unidentified quotation of Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms*, in her April letter to Khodotov: "That means one thing only is important—the life of the soul in all its manifestations."<sup>125</sup>

Komissarzhevskaja elaborated further: "I am forcing myself to think that these are the torments, in which the soul must forge its faith in itself and the future, but right now it is so difficult, so unbearable, that I would like to lie down on the ground

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<sup>123</sup> "Letter to M. I. Ziloti [First part of September 1902]," Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 121-122.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122. "Я слабая, слабая до дна, душа полная такой тоски, что дышать нечем. Как мне все и все противны здесь. Господи, по силам ли я взяла на себя задачу, Господи, ведь мне надо роли готовить и такие роли, как «Родина», «Золотое руно», а я ничего, ничего не могу. Какая-то, будто железная рука сдавила жизнь души, и она даже не пробует бороться."

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 116. The implications of this phrase in Komissarzhevskaja's acting will be discussed in Chp. IV.

and feel that I am disappearing into it.”<sup>126</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia’s doubts echo Przybyszewski’s warning in *Aphorisms* that the “path of the soul” would be difficult. In articulating those doubts, she again reacts, either consciously or unconsciously, to the religious allusions and imagery which fill *Aphorisms*. Komissarzhevskaiia’s allusion to the consequences of her torments, a desire for physical or spiritual death (“I would like to lie down on the ground and feel that I am disappearing into it”), uncannily echoes Przybyszewski’s description of the soul’s tribulations and the ultimate consequences of those torments, that is, eventual reincarnation with the Absolute:

Различны эти дороги, – потому что мозг это серенькие будни, знойный труд, – это математика, это логика, а душа – это редкий праздник, нечто, чего ни вычислением, ни суждением охватить нельзя, слава человечества, его вознесение.<sup>127</sup>

These roads are different, because the mind is like humdrum working days, sultry labor; it is like mathematics and logic; but the soul is that rare holiday, something that is impossible to grasp by calculation or judgment; [it is] the glory of humanity, its Ascension.

Komissarzhevskaiia’s use of words “*khudozhnik*” and “*artist/akter*” are less frequent during these subsequent nineteen months, but retain their specialized meanings. The word “*khudozhnik*” (Eng. “artist”), which Komissarzhevskaiia had used in its broader sense, following Kursinskii (“If I cannot be a creator (*tvorets*) in

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<sup>126</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 122. “Я заставляю себя думать, что это те муки, в которых душа должна закалить веру в себя и в будущее, но сейчас так трудно, так невыносимо хочется лечь на землю и чувствовать, что уходишь в нее.”

<sup>127</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 23. The religious imagery is also evident in the Polish: “to chwała i wniebowstąpienie rodu ludzkiego.” See Appendix I, text 2.127.

*this* piece,—that means that I am not an artist (*khudozhnik*”), in her letter to Khodotov, now assumes its former, narrower meaning: a person employed with the visual arts, such as scenic design or painting.<sup>128</sup> Consequently, this term logically appears in Komissarzhevskaiia’s correspondence with prospective directors, such as Evtikhii Karpov and Nikolai Efros.<sup>129</sup> The word “*tvorets*” (“creator”) is completely absent from her correspondence at this time, as is the French cognate, “*artist*” (“artist, performer”). The absence of the latter is probably because Komissarzhevskaiia had used it in accordance to its specialized meaning: an actor or craftsman employed by the Imperial Theatres.<sup>130</sup> During this period, when Komissarzhevskaiia needed to refer to a person in her profession, she turned to both “*akter*” (“actor”) and now, “*aktrisa*” (“actress”), a term which had been rare during the years 1894-1902.<sup>131</sup>

This brief review of Komissarzhevskaiia’s epistolary lexicon during the period before and after April 1902 supports the argument that both the interrelated concepts of soul, eternity, and art and Komissarzhevskaiia’s contrastive use of the words

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<sup>128</sup> “Letter to N. N. Khodotov [April 1902],” Al’tshuller, *ibid.*, 115-116; for Przybyszewski’s use of “*tvorets*,” see Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 15, 17.

<sup>129</sup> “Вы мне нужны, как художник,” “Letter to E. P. Karpov [Petersburg. 21 December 1902],” Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 127; “Я бы хотела поговорить с ним [director A. A. Sanin] раньше художников [those at МКhТ],” “Letter to N. E. Efros [Petersburg. September/beginning of October 1903],” Al’tshuller, *ibid.*, 142, 377; “Вам необходимо завести дружбу с [writer V. V.] Вересаевым, если художники не будут приезжать,” “Letter to N. E. Efros [Petersburg. 20 October 1903],” Al’tshuller, *ibid.*, 144, 377. Italics in original.

<sup>130</sup> “Artist” in *Entsyklopedicheskii slovar'*, v. 2 (St. Petersburg: Brokgauz & Efron, 1890), 204-205.

<sup>131</sup> For example, “Ходила смотреть здешних акеров,” “From a letter to N. N. Khotodov [Zheleznovodsk. July 1902],” Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 118; “Актеры, молодежь, все, в ком живет еще любовь к прекрасному,” “From a letter to N. N. Khotodov [Moscow. 13 December 1902],” Al’tshuller, *ibid.*, 126; see also examples from 1903: *Ibid.*, 130, 132, 139.

“*tvorets*” (“creator”) and “*khudozhnik*” (“artist”) have their probable origin in Przybyszewski’s booklet.

### **Conflict or complement?: the aesthetics of Ruskin vs. Przybyszewski**

Komissarzhevskaja’s presumed acceptance of Przybyszewski’s aesthetic views beginning in April 1902 invites a preliminary discussion of the possible ways in which it complemented or conflicted with her known affinity for the socio-political and aesthetic views espoused by John Ruskin (1819-1900).<sup>132</sup> Although she quotes Ruskin’s *Lectures on Art*, Komissarzhevskaja’s affinity for Ruskin was probably due more to his advocacy of education for women than his views on art. This affinity would not have proven an obstacle in her acceptance of Przybyszewski’s views. However, the lack of detailed information on Ruskin and Komissarzhevskaja makes it difficult to hypothesize how Komissarzhevskaja synthesized the views of both men.

In May 1900, Komissarzhevskaja closed a letter to Evtikhii Karpov with a quotation from Ruskin. Evidently, the director had been struggling with the set designs for several productions, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Snow Maiden* [*Snegurochka*], and was feeling dejected. In the body of her letter, Komissarzhevskaja explained to Karpov that he, as “a director, no less than a good actor, must progress or [he would] become enslaved to routine” (*ili sovsem soidete na*

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<sup>132</sup> Surprisingly few of Ruskin’s works on aesthetics were published as monographs in Russia at the turn of the century. His works on social mores and economy, such as *Sesame and Lilies* (1864-65), *Pearls for Young Ladies* (1878), and “*Unto This Last*” (1860), were among the first four volumes published in the collected works that appeared beginning in 1900.

*rutinerstvo*), but she was convinced that this would not happen to him.<sup>133</sup> She advised him to go to the public library in St. Petersburg, where he would find engravings that would give him ideas for sets that would be “original, beautiful, and true to the period.”<sup>134</sup> She closed her letter with the following aphorism:

«Насколько возможно проследить связь творческих возможностей с нравственным характером жизни, мы видим, что лучшие произведения искусства созданы людьми хорошими. *Рёскин.*»<sup>135</sup>

“As far as it is possible to trace the connection of artistic potentialities with the moral character of life, we see that the best works of art are created by good people. *Ruskin.*”

Without identifying its source or its context, scholars have implied that Komissarzhevskaiia, in her citation, was suggesting to Karpov that the moral purity of an artist was a precondition for creativity.<sup>136</sup> This is a misreading of Komissarzhevskaiia’s intention, although it may not be a misreading of Ruskin’s general aesthetic views. From its context, it is evident that Komissarzhevskaiia has meant Ruskin’s aphorism as an encouragement to Karpov, not a specific reproach or judgment of his morals. In her opinion, Karpov is a “good man,” therefore, he will survive this temporary inability to create.

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<sup>133</sup> “From a letter to E. P. Karpov [May 1900],” Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 77.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>135</sup> Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 78.

<sup>136</sup> Rybakova, *Komissarzhevskaiia*, 62; Myers, *op. cit.*, 130. Quoting this phrase, Rybakova writes: “the moral cast of an artist, his spiritual purity—is an important condition for creativity.” Similarly, Myers declares that Komissarzhevskaiia has written these lines to “to emphasize the point that the ‘good actor’ combines moral and technical integrity.”

More importantly for our discussion, we can identify the source of Komissarzhevskaiia's aphorism as one of Ruskin's *Lectures on Art* (II. "The Relation of Art to Religion") read at Oxford in 1870.<sup>137</sup> These lectures had recently been published in 1900 as part of a collection of Ruskin's works.<sup>138</sup> The conclusive identification of the source of this aphorism provides a foundation upon which further discussion of Komissarzhevskaiia's reception of Ruskin and Przybyszewski can be continued. If scholars are correct in assuming that Komissarzhevskaiia held very closely to Ruskin's views, several of the ideas presented in those lectures present obstacles to her passionate reception of Przybyszewski.

There are certain notions in Ruskin's work which facilitate the reception of Przybyszewski's more extreme views. Both Ruskin and Przybyszewski believe that the artist must create for himself, not for the crowd. Ruskin articulates this notion as a criticism of those artists who seek profit or success from unintelligent patrons.<sup>139</sup> He later declares that "men must paint and build neither for pride nor for money, but

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<sup>137</sup> The complete English version of this aphorism is as follows: "And so far as we can trace the connection of their powers with the moral character of their lives, we shall find that the best art is the work of good, but of not distinctively religious men, who, at least, are conscious of no inspiration, and often so unconscious of their superiority to others, that one of the greatest of them, Reynolds, deceived by his modesty, has asserted that 'all things are possible to well-directed labour.'" John Ruskin, *Lectures on Art* (New York: Allworth Press, 1996), 91.

<sup>138</sup> There were two translations of these lectures available to Komissarzhevskaiia in 1900. The first was translated by L. P. Nikoforov: *Sochineniia Dzhona Rëskina, kn. 4. Lektsiia ob iskusstve, chitannye v Oksfordskom universitete v 1870 godu* (Moscow: Izd. mag. "Knizhnoe delo" i I. A. Balandin, 1900). A second edition was translated by P. S. Kogan: *Lektsiia ob iskusstve, chitannye v Oksfordskom universitete v 1870 godu Dzhonom Rëskinyim* (Moscow: Tip. A. I. Mamontova, 1900). L. P. Nikoforov's biography of Ruskin appeared in 1896, while La Sizeranne's monograph on the philosopher, *Ruskin and the Religion of Beauty*, appeared in 1900.

<sup>139</sup> Ruskin, *op. cit.*, "Lecture I. Inaugural," 52.

for love; for love of their art.”<sup>140</sup> These views easily accommodate Przybyszewski’s more extreme view that the artist who seeks public acclaim cannot consider himself a master of his art.<sup>141</sup> Ruskin also declares that art can be degraded when it conforms to vulgar tastes (Lecture I), and he questions the relationship between art and religion (Lecture II).<sup>142</sup> In the former case, Ruskin’s view agrees with that of Przybyszewski, who reproaches the artist who lowers himself to the level of crowd.<sup>143</sup> In the latter lecture, Ruskin’s distrust of what he called the “Pride of Faith” and the illegitimate use of art to confirm one’s religious views anticipates Przybyszewski’s own rejection of tendentious art in service to some preconceived morality.<sup>144</sup>

Finally, Ruskin’s pronouncements on love in these lectures at times anticipate and, at times, conflict with those of Przybyszewski. Ruskin has a great admiration for love and its influence on art. His belief that the Greeks’ inability to perceive that the “intensity of other perceptions of beauty is exactly commensurate with the imaginative purity of the passion of love, and with the singleness of its devotion,” however, is colored by his views of morality and the appropriate subject of art.<sup>145</sup> According to Ruskin, Greek tragedies, with their portrayal of such inappropriate subjects as rape and other “states of inferior passion” only demonstrate that the Greeks “were not fully conscious of, and could not therefore either mythically or

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, “Lecture IV. The Relation of Art to Use,” 159.

<sup>141</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 11.

<sup>142</sup> Ruskin, *op. cit.*, “Inaugural,” 54; “Lecture II. The Relation of Art to Religion,” 86 ff.

<sup>143</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 11.

<sup>144</sup> Ruskin, *op. cit.*, 88; Pshibyshevskii, *ibid.*, 6, 8-9.

<sup>145</sup> Ruskin, *op. cit.*, “Lecture III. The Relation of Art to Morals,” 131.

philosophically express the deep relation within themselves between their power of perceiving beauty, and the honour of domestic affection.”<sup>146</sup> It would take several millenia, and the rise of Christianity, for art to rise to more elevated subject matter, such as the recognition that a “maiden’s purity“ is a “link between God and her race.”<sup>147</sup> For Przybyszewski, love was also a primary subject of art. However, if Ruskin emphasized the progress humanity had made in its artistic portrayal, Przybyszewski acknowledged woman as a “cosmic force,” and, believing that the primal, animal instinct still remained in the male, with all the complexities that this brought to contemporary relations, focused his artistic efforts on the portrayal of its sometimes violent consequences.<sup>148</sup>

Far more numerous are the contrasts between Ruskin’s and Przybyszewski’s views, which most likely caused a period of conflict in Komissarzhevskaja’s aesthetic views. This inner conflict would have occurred even as she digested Przybyszewski’s own eclectic aesthetic views and accepted his denial that he had created a strict, prescriptive method. In the simplest terms, Ruskin advocated the mind over the soul, whereas Przybyszewski advocated the primacy of the soul. Ruskin praised realism as an artistic style, Przybyszewski rejected it as illusory. Przybyszewski’s rejection of Ruskin’s artistic ideal of the combination of proper training and hard work, appears in his continued sarcastic reference to realistic art as a form created by “the good eye

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-132. Original punctuation. Komissarzhevskaja would later confront the theme of rape in Przybyszewski’s drama, *Life’s Banquet*.

<sup>147</sup> Ruskin, *op. cit.*, 132.

<sup>148</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 26, 25.

and true hand.”<sup>149</sup> This conflict is most evident in Ruskin’s belief that the highest art is created when inspiration is restrained by training and “deliberate design.”<sup>150</sup>

Ruskin believed that inspiration, or the “faculty of vision, being closely associated with the innermost spiritual nature,” were “*always the sign of some mental limitation or derangement.*”<sup>151</sup> Such “visionary faculties” could be a “morbid influence” on the artist, preventing him from using his skills to their fullest potential.<sup>152</sup>

In contrast, Przybyszewski elevated the creative process, comparing it to the religious experiences of medieval prophets and hermits.<sup>153</sup> For him, the chaos of the soul’s experiences was the true reflection of reality, not their logical, mathematical reductions.<sup>154</sup> Further conflict arises in Ruskin’s belief that art should be an “exponent of social and political virtues,” as well as an “exponent of ethical life.”<sup>155</sup> This view was anathema to Przybyszewski, who declared that art stood above morality.<sup>156</sup> In summary, while Przybyszewski shared with Ruskin several general views, such as a high estimation of the artist and the power of love and a distrust of the relationship between religion and art, sharp contrasts existed on their view of the relationship between the mind and soul in the creative process, the role of morality and ethics in art, and the estimation of artistic trends such as realism. Komissar-

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<sup>149</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 25, 28.

<sup>150</sup> Ruskin, *op. cit.*, “The Relation of Art to Religion,” 90-91.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>152</sup> Ruskin, *op. cit.*, 91. Ruskin cites Albrecht Dürer as an artist who sometimes succumbed to these influences.

<sup>153</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 28-29, 23.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>155</sup> Ruskin, *op. cit.*, “Inaugural,” 67-68, “The Relation of Art to Religion,” 82;

<sup>156</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 6-8.

zhevskaiia's embrace of Przybyszewski's allegedly morally ambiguous works and her later move toward symbolism as an art form seem to indicate that Przybyszewski's rejection of both realism and moral absolutes superseded the views of Ruskin, although this does not suggest that she embraced all of Przybyszewski's views wholeheartedly.

Our examination of lexical and thematic parallels between Stanislaw Przybyszewski's pamphlet, *Aphorisms and Preludes*, and several paraphrases in Komissarzhevskaiia's letter to Khodotov in April 1902 permit us to identify Przybyszewski's work as a crucial source of her confession of faith: "Art must reflect the eternal, and the eternal is only one thing—the soul." Lexical parallels from Khodotov's memoirs provide further support for this claim. A review of certain issues and events in Komissarzhevskaiia's life, roughly divided into five areas, life experience in both high and low culture, obstacles to personal career growth, religious outlook, self-identification as a member of the intelligentsia, and a developing view of decadence, all helped to create an affinity for the aesthetic views presented by Przybyszewski.

Furthermore, a review of four general concepts, "art," "artist," "soul," and "eternity" in Komissarzhevskaiia's early correspondence, describing a woman with a high opinion of art who strove to serve it, create another foundation for her affinity for Przybyszewski. Komissarzhevskaiia's contrast of the terms "*khudozhnik*" (artist) and "*tvorets*" (creator) in April 1902 are further proof that she is incorporating Przybyszewski's view of the artist and of the creative process. As an unhappy

employee of the Imperial Theatres, Komissarzhevskaja felt that the ideas presented Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms and Preludes* had helped decide her fate ("the moment has come, when my destiny *must* be decided. Yes, this really is my credo: 'Art must reflect the eternal, and the eternal is only one thing—the soul'). Przybyszewski's aesthetic views, articulated in his essay *Aphorisms and Preludes* (1902) concerning the true source of creative inspiration—a focus inward toward the soul, not outward toward external reality, his elevation of the creative individual to an eminent place in society, and his emphasis on the importance of the individual, especially the creative artist—all acted as a catalyst and inspiration to Komissarzhevskaja as she broke from the artistic restrictions imposed by her service to the Imperial stage in St. Petersburg. These views gave her the confidence to embark on an independent journey of creative exploration as an independent entrepreneur. Przybyszewski's slippery "path of the soul" demanded that the creating artist reflect the chaos of the soul in all its forms.

As Komissarzhevskaja chose this path and realized it in her own art, acting, she would look within herself and strive to interpret and project an entire range of emotions and experiences upon the stage. In doing so, she was forced to face not only the emotions associated with the brighter moments in her life, but also the darker ones. The mechanism Komissarzhevskaja used to transform these experiences, both negative and positive, into a successful acting style is the subject of Chapter III.

### Chapter III.

#### PRZYBYSZEWSKI AND KOMISSARZHEVSKAIA: THE NEW DRAMA AS CATHARSIS AND EXPERIENTIAL SPACE

For the artist-elect, love is the painful, anxious cognition of the horrible, still unknown force that throws two souls at each other and desires to fuse them together; it is an intensive suffering, in which the soul breaks into pieces because it cannot fulfill the act commanded by the New Testament: the act of fusing into one, the act of absolute androgyny.

For such an artist, love is the cognition of some terrifying profundity; a presentiment of some abyss in the soul in which the life of thousands of generations, [and] thousands of centuries of their torments and sorrows [all] flow together; [it is] the insanity of their discord and desire for existence.

Przybyszewski, *Aphorisms and Preludes* (1902)<sup>1</sup>

“That means one thing only is important—the life of the soul in all its manifestations.”

Komissarzhevskiaia, “Letter to N. N. Khodotov [April 1902].”<sup>2</sup>

“the ultimate resolution of deep mental conflicts requires an objective setting, the psychodramatic theatre”

J. Moreno, *Who Will Survive?* (1953)<sup>3</sup>

Komissarzhevskiaia’s new-found independence brought with it new challenges as well as artistic freedom. Among those challenges were the need to build a new

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<sup>1</sup> “Для художника-избранника любовь—это болезненное, полное тревоги познание, еще непознанной страшной силы, которая две души бросает друг другу и жаждет их слить воедино; это—интенсивное страдание, в котором разламывается душа, потому что не может выполнить акта, указанного в Новом Завете, акта слияния во-едино [sic], акта абсолютного андрогинизма. / Для такого художника любовь есть познание какой-то страшной глубины, предчувствие какой-то бездны в душе, в которой переливается жизнь тысячи поколений, тысячи веков их мук и скорбей, безумие их раздоров и жажда бытия.” Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 26-27. See Appendix I, text 3.1.

<sup>2</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 116.

<sup>3</sup> Fox, *op. cit.*, 14.

repertoire and the need to raise funds for the private theatre she hoped to build in St. Petersburg. Komissarzhevskaja, in her search for repertory, took the bold step of staging Przybyszewski's drama *The Golden Fleece*, which had only been staged once before, in October 1901, at the Petersburg Theatre. The 1901 production had caused much controversy in the press, and by autumn 1902, Przybyszewski's name was associated with all that was wrong and immoral in the new art. Nevertheless, as an actress striking out on an independent path, Komissarzhevskaja chose to stage the notorious *The Golden Fleece*.

Why would an actress, who in May 1900 professed Ruskin's belief that "the best works of art are created by good people," now begin, in 1902, to perform works by a writer castigated by leading Russian critics as a "decadent" and immoral?<sup>4</sup> Why did Komissarzhevskaja perform works in which her character commits suicide (Bronka in *Snow*; Hanka in *Life's Banquet*)? A partial response to the first question may be found in Komissarzhevskaja's understanding of Przybyszewski's view of art as a non-judgmental, elevated creative activity, a view espoused in *Aphorisms and Preludes*. A response to the second question may be found both in Przybyszewski's comments about love as a proper subject of art and his notion that art must depict the soul "in all its manifestations." According to Przybyszewski, the "artist-elect" recognized the true nature of love as a terrifying, instinctual force, capable of producing immense suffering. As we shall see, Komissarzhevskaja had experienced this suffering in her own life, and, hypothetically, could thus perceive herself as an

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<sup>4</sup> "From a letter to E. P. Karpov [May 1900]." Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 77.

“artist-elect.” Przybyszewski’s appeal for the artist to portray the entire range of the human condition had brought both a cachet of legitimacy to marginalized experiences and emotions and became a clarion call for the “true” or “new” artist to depict them. But how could an artist such as Komissarzhevskaja rise to Przybyszewski’s challenge and endure the reliving of such painful experiences on the stage?

Using Moreno’s theory of the psychodrama as a framework, in this chapter I argue that Przybyszewski’s works served as an intensely personal form of catharsis, permitting the actress to purge herself of the emotional turmoil created by unhappy events in her own life—her parents’ marriage, her own brief marriage, an attempted suicide, and an extended stay at a sanatorium. Intriguing parallels and associations can be found between Komissarzhevskaja’s biography and roles she played in the Przybyszewski dramas. Each play offered Komissarzhevskaja an objective, “experiential space” in which she could externalize tragic events from her own life. Each “experiential space” became an extension of reality, a timeless fantasy in which she could re-enact similar life events, questioning and striving to understand each character’s motivations and reactions. For example, the conscientious father figure of Ruszczyk in *The Golden Fleece* could represent aspects of her relationship with her own father, or the sacrificial figure of Bronka in *Snow*, could allow her to examine the issues of self-sacrifice and suicide. Through psychoanalytical techniques such as self-projection and role-reversal, which are used frequently in psychodrama, Komissarzhevskaja could then begin to heal the emotional scars of her past.

As an introduction to this discussion, it will be well to paint a brief picture of the psychological traumas of Komissarzhevskaiia's early life. Family tragedies, such as her brother's premature death by drowning, Komissarzhevskaiia's own attempted suicide, her father's marital infidelity, her mother's personal sacrifice, her husband's infidelity, and the prospect of illegitimate children, create an image of the Komissarzhevskii family as a dysfunctional family.

Komissarzhevskaiia's life experiences from 1877, the year of her brother's death, to 1902, fit the themes of "The Dance of Love and Death" (*Taniec miłości i śmierci*), the title under which Przybyszewski published his first plays as a dramatic cycle.<sup>5</sup> This title serves as a fitting rubric under which to discuss Komissarzhevskaiia's developing relationship to Przybyszewski's dramas. She appeared in four of them: *The Golden Fleece* (1902), *Snow* (1904), *The Eternal Tale* (1906), and *Life's Banquet* (1909). Although this is not a great number of productions, these plays are significant for several reasons. First, she chose them herself, and, second, they represent the majority of the works Przybyszewski had written at this time.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Irena in *The Golden Fleece* and Hanka in *Life's*

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<sup>5</sup> Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Taniec miłości i śmierci*. Cz. I: *Złote runo. Dramat*. Cz. II: *Goście. Epilog dramatyczny w jednym akcie* (Lwów: Księgar. Polska, 1901). The appellation was later used to describe all four plays written before *Śnieg* [*For Happiness, The Golden Fleece, The Visitors, and Mother*]. Cf. also Przybyszewski's aphoristic "The axis of our life is love and death," the opening sentence of a foreword to his new novella, *Sons of the Earth*, which appeared in *Vesy* in 1904: "Ось нашей жизни это—любовь и смерть." St. Pshibyshevskii, "Syny Zemli. Predislovie k russkomu izdaniiu," *Vesy*, no. 5 (1904): 1.

<sup>6</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia never staged *For Happiness* or *Mother*. *The Guests*, the one-act epilogue to *The Golden Fleece*, could not be staged due to censorship. Compare, for example, works by other well-known dramatists of the modernist school, such as

*Banquet* act as bookends to Komissarzhevskaja's independent career: they represent her very first and last self-chosen roles.

### **The “Dance of Love and Death”: a framework for family and personal tragedy**

According to her biographers, the young Komissarzhevskaja's psychology was strongly formed by her father's departure from the family and her parents' unsuccessful marriage.<sup>7</sup> When her six-year-old brother Grisha accidentally drowned in 1877, Komissarzhevskaja was grief-stricken.<sup>8</sup> Her parents were growing apart at this time as well, and the heavy atmosphere their disagreements created, as Rybakova describes it, was “undoubtedly reflected” in Komissarzhevskaja's later life.<sup>9</sup> By winter 1880-1881 Komissarzhevskaja's parents had separated, and her father was living abroad with his mistress, while her mother and the children remained at Marusino, the small family estate near Vil'no.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, the unpleasant events surrounding the separation of Komissarzhevskaja's parents would be repeated when

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Maeterlinck and the much less-controversial Ibsen. The only Maeterlinck works (3 out of 14 total) that Komissarzhevskaja appeared in are *Monna Vanna* (1903), *Sœur Beatrice* (1906), and *Pelléas and Mélisande* (1907). She did not appear in *The Miracle of St. Anthony* (December 1906). Komissarzhevskaja did not stage Ibsen until 1904, when she appeared in *A Doll's House* (September 1904), which was the second production at her new theatre. She did not appear in *Ghosts* (October 1904) during the same season. She later appeared in *Masterbuilder* (April 1905), *Rosmersholm* (November 1905), *Hedda Gabler* (November 1906), and *Love's Comedy* (January 1907).

<sup>7</sup> “Vera Fedorovna Komissarzhevskaja,” in Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 11. See also Tal'nikov, *op. cit.*, 18: “Семейная драма врезалась навсегда в ее психику.”

<sup>8</sup> “Это было первое тяжелое горе, пережитое чуткой девочкой” Карпов, *op. cit.*, 3. Cited in Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 28; Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> “На впечатлительную детскую душу Верочки размолвки между отцом и матерью ложились неизгладимым, тяжелым гнетом и несомненно отразились на всей ее дальнейшей жизни.” Карпов, *ibid.*, 12; cited in Rybakova, *ibid.*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Rybakova, *ibid.*, 16.

Komissarzhevskaiia herself separated from her husband after only two years (1883-1885).

Fedor Petrovich Komissarzhevskii, Komissarzhevskaiia's father, was a well-known Don Juan, reprising a role in life which he performed on the opera stage.<sup>11</sup> When Komissarzhevskii's mistress, Princess Mariia Kur'iatovich-Kurtsevich, became pregnant, it was necessary for him to receive an annulment and marry the princess in order that her child be born legitimate. Given the social status of the princess, Vera's mother had no choice but to sacrifice her own honor and assume the role of adultress.

It is likely that seventeen-year-old Vera Fedorovna, Komissarzhevskii's oldest daughter, had some knowledge of either her parents' arrangements for annulment or her mother's personal sacrifice as the proceedings continued at the time, for the events of her own annulment parallel those of her father's. Even if she was not informed as these events unfolded, Komissarzhevskaiia may have discussed them with her father when she visited him in Italy in the years after the divorce. Father and daughter remained very close until his death in 1905.<sup>12</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia served as a personal liaison between her father and mother after their formal separation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Borovsky, *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>12</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 65. Komissarzhevskaiia was her mother's material and her father's spiritual support. Describing Komissarzhevskaiia's visits to San Remo in a letter to his first wife, Fedor Komissarzhevskii admitted, "I try to keep my spirits up and I live from year to year in hope and anticipation of Vera's arrival." RGALI, f. 991, op. 1, ed. khr. 1178, 1902, l. 2; *Ibid.*, 65, 71.

<sup>13</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia closes a letter from San Remo to her mother with the endearing words, "Well, Christ be with you, my dear momma. Dad kisses you." ["Ну, Христос с тобой, дорогая моя мамулечка. Папа тебя целует."] *Al'tshuller, op. cit.*, 121.

Curiously, many of these elements, for example, the details of the fabricated act of adultery (in contrast to the real event) presented during the legal hearings, were repeated several years later, when Komissarzhevskaiia sacrificed her own happiness for her sister's future. The construction of such elaborate details only served as proof that, in matters of the heart or sexual relations, men and women could go to extremes to preserve a semblance of respect in the face of society's demands. As Komissarzhevskaiia prepared psychologically for her roles in Przybyszewski's plays, she could draw on her own emotions, or of those close to her, experienced during these past events. For these reasons, it is worth describing these events in some detail.

To bring about an annulment, Komissarzhevskii and his wife, Mariia Shul'gina, fabricated an elaborate adultery case, fit for the stage. It was subsequently presented to the Petersburg Synod beginning on 20 February 1882. Two witnesses, one a friend of the family, happened to venture into the Hotel Moskva on Nevskii Prospekt for a short business meeting on 11 November 1880. While carrying on their conversation, they both overheard laughter coming from an adjacent room. The first witness, curious, walked down the hallway to investigate. Finding the door to the next room unlocked, he walked in unnoticed and found Shul'gina and an unidentified man in *flagrante delicto* behind a partition. Presented with such incontrovertible evidence, the Synod issued a divorce to Fedor Komissarzhevskii on 9 April 1882, leaving him free to remarry. His wife, Mariia Shul'gina, as the guilty party, was

forbidden to remarry and ordered to do seven years of religious penance.<sup>14</sup> According to Rybakova's chronicle, Fedor Komissarzhevskii and Princess Mariia Kurtsevich were married in Florence on 21 May 1882, and Fedor Fedorovich, Komissarzhevskaiia's half-brother and future collaborator at her Dramaticheskii Teatr, was born 23 May.<sup>15</sup>

Komissarzhevskaiia's own marriage shows some parallels with her parents' experience. Count Vladimir Murav'ev, Komissarzhevskaiia's true love and husband for a brief period, is typically described as a "base man," without further explanation.<sup>16</sup> Yet in the early 1880s when Vera Fedorovna first fell in love, he seemed a handsome, talented painter.<sup>17</sup> A member of the nobility, he moved largely within Petersburg social and artistic circles.<sup>18</sup> The young couple were so madly in

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<sup>14</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 35, 69. RGIA, "Sviatishnego Pravitel'stvennogo Sinoda Delo" (Act of the Most Holy Governing Synod) f. 796, op. 169, ed. khr. 1811, l. 69, 70, 71. Rybakova provides varying archive information, which may be due to typesetting errors: f. 796, op. 163, ed. khr. 18. See Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Rybakova, *ibid.*, 18-19. The exact date and circumstances of Komissarzhevskii's second marriage is disputed. Borovsky states official documents exist in Florence dated 21 May 1880, attesting to this marriage. Thus, it seems that Fedor P. Komissarzhevskii was, unbeknownst to all save the closest of friends, a bigamist from 1880-1882. This is perhaps the chief reason Komissarzhevskii spent the last years of his life in Italy, not Russia. See Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 36.

<sup>16</sup> Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Skarskaia, *op. cit.*, 144. "Но нас ждала своя судьба, свои заботы, свои радости. Пришло наконец то, что обычно приходит в жизнь молодых людей. Явился художник. Талантливый. Красивый. Титулованный. И хотя граф не был богат Вера сказала: это он!"

<sup>18</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 76.

love that their feelings for each other survived a voluntary two-month separation some time before their wedding.<sup>19</sup>

Although his passions were strong, Murav'ev had a streak of jealousy and soon showed his true nature. Komissarzhevskaja later related to the actor Aleksandr Mgebrov that jealousy expressed itself: “He was madly jealous... He adored me... He was forever painting my portrait. And he was a beast! One day when he was painting my bare shoulders someone came in... He threw himself at me like a tiger, to hide me from view.”<sup>20</sup> Murav'ev developed other passions, and one September day in 1885 Komissarzhevskaja arrived home to find her husband and her sister Nadezhda together.<sup>21</sup> Turkin obliquely referred to the incident in his 1910 biography, writing that Murav'ev, while loving Komissarzhevskaja, gave his love to another, her “first childhood friend.”<sup>22</sup> Vera Fedorovna's sister, Nadezhda, writes cryptically about the circumstances, sensing that an insurmountable fate hung over Vera and herself.<sup>23</sup> For example, in describing what may have been her first meeting with Murav'ev, she writes, “Once I caught the eye of a young man who should have belonged only to my

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<sup>19</sup> Turkin, *op. cit.*, 22. The dates of this separation are unknown. Rybakova's chronicle lists their wedding as taking place in 1883. Borovsky, citing archival documents from RGIA, states that the marriage took place 30 May 1884. See Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 19; Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 76.

<sup>20</sup> See A. A. Mgebrov, *Zhizn' v teatre*, (Leningrad: 1929), 412-413. Cited in Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 77; Rybakova, *ibid.*, 19. The translation and ellipses are Borovsky's.

<sup>21</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 77.

<sup>22</sup> Turkin, *op. cit.*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Skarskaia, *op. cit.*, 145. “Дни бежали. Из подростка я превратилась в девушку, но по-прежнему жизнь моя определялась замкнутым кругом одних и тех же противоречий, все тем же неизживаемым ощущением рокового гнета, нависшего надо мной и над сестрой грозною тучей.”

sister. My heart sank with a presentiment of misfortune.”<sup>24</sup> Yet, in the end, Nadezhda married him after becoming pregnant.

The events that followed uncannily echoed the legal measures taken before Komissarzhevskaiia’s parents separated. Arrangements soon had to be made in order that Nadezhda’s expected child would be born legitimate. Komissarzhevskaiia assumed her mother’s role and offered to sacrifice her own happiness for that of her sister’s.<sup>25</sup> Murav’ev refused to accept her guilt, possibly due to pressure from his own father, who was devoted to his daughter-in-law. The divorce proceedings finally concluded in September 1890, five years after Komissarzhevskaiia had discovered her husband and sister together. The Count was found guilty of adultery. The details of the new case were familiar: two witnesses, one a family friend (Sergei Ziloti), witnessed Murav’ev committing an “act of sexual intercourse with some unidentified party” at the Hotel Moskva the previous year. As a result, Komissarzhevskaiia was granted a divorce, while Murav’ev was forbidden to remarry and sentenced to seven years religious penance.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Skarskaia, *ibid.*, 145. “Однажды я поймала на себе взгляд молодого человека, который должен был принадлежать только моей сестре. Сердце сжалось предчувствием беды. ...И все же случилось непоправимое. Я стала женой человека, злая воля которого уже надломила жизнь моей сестры.”

<sup>25</sup> Turkin, *op. cit.*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 78-81. According to Borovsky’s account, Murav’ev found a village priest to marry the couple, so that Elena, Skarskaia’s daughter and Komissarzhevskaiia’s niece, was born legitimate. If this is the case, then Murav’ev, like his father-in-law before him, was technically a bigamist for several years. See Borovsky, *ibid.*, 79. The Al’tshuller and Rybakova chronicles leave the exact dissolution of the relationship open to question, stating only that Komissarzhevskaiia’s marriage lasted from 1883-1885, when she left him. Neither source uses the word “*rastorzhenie*” (annulment), although Rybakova uses the term for Fedor

The events surrounding her husband's infidelity caused Komissarzhevskaja to suffer a mental breakdown. One biographer insists that the grief-stricken Komissarzhevskaja tried to commit suicide.<sup>27</sup> Another claims that Komissarzhevskaja's subsequent illness "brought her close to death and to insanity."<sup>28</sup> In any case, Komissarzhevskaja spent time with her sister Olga at a sanatorium.<sup>29</sup> No matter what had occurred in the past, Komissarzhevskaja would still profess a love of her first and only husband throughout her life.<sup>30</sup>

The domestic tragedies did not end with the separation of Komissarzhevskaja and Murav'ev, however. Although dates are again obscure, the fact remains that while Nadezhda and her child were living with the painter, he became an alcoholic and began to abuse her. One night he returned from hunting and threatened to kill mother and child. Nadezhda and the child only survived through the efforts of the local villagers.<sup>31</sup>

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Komissarzhevskii's break in 1882. Al'tshuller states there was a "*razryv*" (break, severance) in relations, while Rybakova quotes a piece from the memorial album *Solntse Rossii*, stating that Komissarzhevskaja "left her husband, never to return to him," and reports nothing about annulment proceedings in 1890. See Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 322, and Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 18, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 11. Rybakov's biography is a little more specific, she claims that Komissarzhevskaja tried to poison herself. Iu. Rybakova, *Komissarzhevskaja* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1971), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 77.

<sup>29</sup> Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 21. In Lipetsk Komissarzhevskaja would meet Sergei Ziloti, who would later become a "witness" at her annulment proceedings.

<sup>30</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 77.

<sup>31</sup> Skarskaia, *op. cit.*, 144-146; Schuler, *op. cit.*, 231. Schuler describes Murav'ev as an "abusive womanizer."

### ***The Golden Fleece* (1902): love and the psychologies of adultery and suicide**

When Komissarzhevskaiia stepped upon the stage of Khar'kov's Diukova Dramatic Theatre (*Dramaticheskii Teatr Diukovoi*) on 17 September 1902, as Irena in *The Golden Fleece*, few members of the audience or even members of the cast could have imagined the intense personal connections the actress certainly found in the role. The choice of Irena was a very bold move for Komissarzhevskaiia to make—it was her first self-chosen role.<sup>32</sup> She had chosen a part in a play by a controversial author, already typecast as a “prophet of free love” (“*prorokom svobodnoi liubvi*”), whose dangerous ideas could poison the masses.<sup>33</sup> In addition, an anonymous correspondent at *Novoe vremia* had complained that all the characters in this play were stock types; they were “psychopaths and neurasthenics.” There was no action *per se* in the play, the characters only talked about how they loved and suffered. Furthermore, the correspondent wrote, no character had the general human characteristics a spectator can identify with.<sup>34</sup> In contrast to the general attitude toward Przybyszewski,

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<sup>32</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia's first performance in Khar'kov was as Natal'ia Petrovna in Potapenko's *Volshebnaia skazka* [*The Enchanted Tale*], a role she had performed since October 1898. On her second night, Komissarzhevskaiia appeared as Klara Spohr in a translation of Faber's *Vechnaia liubov'* [*Eternal Love*], which had premiered back in May, when she was on tour with a group of actors from the Imperial Theatres. See Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 329, 333; Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 196, 197. Komissarzhevskaiia first performed in Khar'kov in May 1900, and was skeptical that the critics of *Iuzhnyi krai* would be kind to her, because its editor, A. Iozefovich, was a good friend of Savina. See Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 75.

<sup>33</sup> Tezi, “Tragediia,” *Novosti dnia*, 14. VI. 1901, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> “Teatr i muzyka. Moskva,” *Novoe vremia*, 14. X. 1901, p. 4. “И никому все эти действующие лица не интересны, потому что никто не видит в них общечеловеческих черт.” The anonymous critic, in suggesting that there was little in the play to which the average “moral” theatregoer could relate, is only taking a morally superior position, dismissing any doubts about the reviewer's own moral

Komissarzhevskaiia enjoyed considerable success in this role. One critic praised Komissarzhevskaiia's performance, which "superbly translated" the psychological struggle within Irena, presenting the "deeply-truthful and strong" emotional moments that troubled the heroine.<sup>35</sup>

A comparison of the dramatic plot of *The Golden Fleece* and Komissarzhevskaiia's own biography reveals parallels that allowed the actress to identify closely with both the characters and the situation, which she could then transform into a successful performance.<sup>36</sup> This three-act domestic drama is a tale of adultery, the pain that derives from a sense of moral responsibility, and the vengeance of fate over generations.<sup>37</sup> Its setting is a sanatorium located at a large spa, and its five main

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principles which could be implied based on the old adage about experiential knowledge, "It takes one to know one." By denying that any "normal" audience member can identify with negative human traits and disagreeing with Przybyszewski's presentation of contemporary moral issues, "Anonymous" also implicitly prescribes the medieval morality play, with its strong moral lesson, as the preferred theatrical form in modern Russian society.

<sup>35</sup> N. Tamarin, "Zolotoe runo. Drama v 3 d. Pshibyshevskago, per. Lebedevoi," *Iuzhnyi krai*, no. 7498, 19. IX. 1902, p. 2. "Г-жа Коммиссаржевская дала несколько глубоко-правдивых и сильных моментов проявлений волнующих героиню чувств; превосходно передана была ее борьба с собою, когда она колеблется: лгать ей, или только молчать." Unlike critics such as Ukrainka, Tamarin admired Przybyszewski's talent and his ability to create "psychological moments." However, he decried the excessive number of "adulterers and catastrophes" in the play.

<sup>36</sup> As Komissarzhevskaiia toured Moscow in February 1904, some critics complained that the actress was not demonstrating her full range of talent. However, she really began to her captivate the audience with her performance in *The Golden Fleece*. See "Teatr i muzyka. Teatr 'Ermitazh'," *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, no. 52, 22. II. 1904, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> The names of characters are given here in their original Polish forms for consistency, and those forms will be used in the English translation for identification purposes. Przybyszewski's characters commonly lack either a given name or surname. The Sablin edition of the *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (PSS)* will be used for textual references. Textual comparisons with the original Polish or German dialogue

characters are all linked to each other by different forms of amorous relationship, licit and illicit. Irena is a young woman, now trapped in a marriage to an older man, Gustaw Rembowski, the director of the sanatorium. Unbeknownst to Irena, her husband Gustaw is actually the illegitimate son of the charitable Ruszczyc, founder of the sanatorium. Ruszczyc's friend, Gustaw's nominal father, shot himself upon hearing that his friend Ruszczyc had had relations with his wife; the gruesome image of the suicide remains etched forever in the conscience of Ruszczyc. The sanatorium is thus partial atonement for his sin.

Meanwhile, Irena yearns for “sunlight, laughter, and dancing” —the “golden fleece” (*zolotoe runo*) of happiness—as her husband yearns for another woman. While abroad, Gustaw carries on an affair with the wife of Łącki, a doctor at the sanatorium, and has now also fathered a child. When the writer Zygmunt Przesławski, a distant cousin and Irena's first love, arrives for a visit, the old flame is rekindled. Ruszczyc counsels Irena not to submit to her yearnings for freedom and love, but in vain. The drama ends with Gustaw's offstage suicide: the sins of the father have been visited upon the son and Ruszczyc's fears have come to pass.

In staging *The Golden Fleece*, Komissarzhevskaja enacted parallels between the work and her personal experiences which allowed her to re-create these painful situations behind the mask of “Irena” and allowed her, simultaneously, to alleviate that pain while exploring the psychology of adultery and its consequences. These

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can be found in Appendix I as noted. Minor inconsistencies in the transliteration of *dramatis personae* were common among the Russian editions of Przybyszewski's works.

parallels appear in three broad areas: setting; motifs, themes, and dramatic plot; and character psychology. Komissarzhevskaja could easily identify with the spa setting, having spent 1886 and 1887 in Lipetsk regaining her health after the breakup of her marriage. The play's general motifs—a personal search for happiness, self-sacrifice, and suicide—developed within a general theme of moral responsibility amidst the realm of marital relations, would also resonate strongly with Komissarzhevskaja. These motifs all occur within a framework of marital infidelity, a major element of Przybyszewski's plot. For example, the adulterous relations between the Ruszczyc and Rembowski families, mirror the same type of relations that occurred in the Komissarzhevskii and Murav'ev families.

A motif of self-sacrifice by a parent for an “innocent” illegitimate child is played out as Ruszczyc raises Rembowski over a period of thirty years, as if he were his legitimate offspring. This effort resonated deeply in Komissarzhevskaja's life: her father had made elaborate efforts to protect the legitimacy of his own son, Fedor, her half-brother, and Komissarzhevskaja herself had been party to efforts to protect the legitimacy of her sister's child. The motifs of illegitimacy and self-sacrifice also resonate in her mother's efforts to support three growing girls after their abandonment by their father. In Act II, scene ii, Łacki, with whose wife Rembowski has had an affair and has now also fathered a child, clearly expresses this sacrificial motif. Łacki reminds his friend that, although he may think he is “free,” he still has obligations, and is not free in relation to innocent children, hinting to Rembowski that he knows his newly born son is not his own. These children have not appeared in the world

through acts of their own, he explains, and did not ask for life.<sup>38</sup> They must be cared for.

The motif of suicide as a response to moral responsibility bookends the action of Przybyszewski's play, first as a philosophical discussion in Act I and then as Rembowski's final action offstage in Act III. In this way the dramatic suspense of the play is closely linked to this motif. Ruszczyc first introduces the motif in a related form, that of assisted suicide. The motif is thus associated to its medicinal context, a means of reducing the physical suffering of terminally ill patients. However, Rembowski, speaking with Ruszczyc, remarks that his own conscience would not allow him to commit such an act.<sup>39</sup>

Komissarzhevskaja, having attempted suicide herself after learning of her husband's infidelities, would have known the psychological struggle involved with choosing to end one's life. She also knew the consequences of those who hear the truth, but are not mentally strong enough to bear its burden, as well as the implications of that act on others. Rehearsing this work and its performance gave Komissarzhevskaja the chance to work through these situations and begin to comprehend them.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Zolotoe runo*, PSS, t. IV, 48. See Appendix I, text 3.38.

<sup>39</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Zolotoe runo*, PSS, t. IV, 16.

<sup>40</sup> The concept of "distancing" is at work here as Komissarzhevskaja underwent her self-induced psychodramatic therapy. Robert J. Landy writes: "Distancing as a theatrical concept is to a great extent centered in the metaphor of the world as stage or the stage as world. The actor and the spectator in the theatre are removed from the everyday world, but paradoxically recreate that world through an identification with and participation in the fictional reality of the characters and scenes presented." Landy suggests that "distancing" is similar to Brecht's *Verfremdungs-Effekt* or

Ruszczyc, the father figure and adulterous husband in Przybyszewski's play who counsels his daughter-in-law Irena to avoid making the same mistake he has made, resonates strongly as a possible representation of the parental role played by Fedor Komissarzhevskii in his daughter's life. Events in Komissarzhevskaiia's biography support this supposition. Vera Fedorovna and her sister Ol'ga were living with their father in Moscow for most of 1890, having moved there sometime before early February.<sup>41</sup>

Even if one argues that Mariia Nikolaevna, Komissarzhevskaiia's mother, took an active role in her daughter's legal affairs or was the stronger parental figure, this supposition only strips the analogy of its gender associations, shifting the gender association from male to female. Meanwhile, the theories of psychological distancing

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“alienation-effect.” Brecht believed that a certain amount of distance or “alienation” was needed in order to separate the actor from the role; this could be done if the actor's intellect was never overwhelmed by the emotions. Sociologist and therapist Thomas Scheff went beyond Brecht in theorizing a model where catharsis occurs “when the participant or viewer relives emotions, but is not overwhelmed by them.” From the essay, “The Use of Distancing in Drama Therapy (1983),” in Robert J. Landy, *Essays in Drama Therapy: The Double Life* (London & Bristol, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1996), 15-17. Theoretically, in the role of Irena, Komissarzhevskaiia was able to distance herself from the life situations that she recreated in her performances. In performance, she was also able to learn about her own motivations for attempting suicide. As Lewis Yablonsky writes, “Acting-out suicide (or homicide) in a psychodramatic context provides the opportunity to perform the act without the horrendous and final consequences of the real life act. The protagonist can learn his motivations in action and, therefore, may be deterred from acting-out destructively in life.” See Lewis Yablonsky, *Psychodrama: Resolving Emotional Problems Through Role-Playing* (New York: Basic Book, Inc., 1976), 81. As we shall see, in the role of Bronka, Komissarzhevskaiia would later act-out a suicide, closing the distance between herself and the act. By choosing to take these roles, Komissarzhevskaiia also was essentially controlling her *Verfremdungseffekt*, or the amount of alienation she felt between her own life experiences and the role she portrayed. She thus acted both as therapist and patient.

<sup>41</sup> Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 26-27; Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 323; Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 81.

(Landy) or alienation (Brecht) hypothesize that Komissarzhevskaiia could situate this relationship in its proper context for her needs. As a result, the image of Ruszczyk as a “father figure” could be either shifted to that of a “maternal figure” or could be generalized to a common “parental figure.” The essence of the parental relationship remains, however, and does not remove the additional argument that many of Ruszczyk’s comments parallel events in Komissarzhevskaiia’s early biography.

In *The Golden Fleece* Ruszczyk is recognized as the “conscience” of the other characters, a fact noted by early Russian critics of the play.<sup>42</sup> Throughout the play Ruszczyk, through the personal experience of his friend’s death, recognizes the possible effect truth has on the weak individual and often counsels others that “truth kills.” It is often better to be silent if one cannot lie.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, Ruszczyk continually reminds the other characters that retribution for past sins will eventually occur, no matter how one tries to atone, even through the performance of charitable activities: “But nothing will come of this. Sin avenges itself by death, torments, [and]

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, F. Kapeliush, “Iz noveishei pol’skoi literatury. 1. *Zolotoe runo*, drama Stanislava Pshibyshevskago,” *Odesskii listok*, no. 188, 22. VII. 1901, p. 2; O. Dymov, “Teatr, muzyka i iskusstvo. Peterburskii teatr. *Zolotoe runo*, dr. v 3 d. St. Pshibyshevskago. *Starshina Burambai*, komediia v 3. d. Petra Rybakova.” *Birzhevyie vedomosti*, no. 278, 12. X. 1901, p. 3. The first review of this work appeared in the Polish-language Petersburg weekly, *Kraj*. “Obserwator,” reviewing the premiere of *Złote runo* in Lwów, did not comment directly on the identification of Ruszczyk (Ruszczyk) as “conscience,” but did consider the theme of vengeance in the play to be only one of several devices used by the “decadent” author to intensify the feeling of menace (*uczucia grozy*) in the spectator. See “Nowy drammat. *Taniec miłości i śmierci*,” *Kraj*, no. 13, 30. III. 1901, pp. 153-154.

<sup>43</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Zolotoe runo*, I: ii, PSS, t. IV, 17, 20.

hell.”<sup>44</sup> While Borovsky does not mention Przybyszewski’s work in this regard, he nevertheless strongly suggests that Komissarzhevskaja was well aware of a personal obligation to atone for past transgressions, writing: “Her parents’ divorce affected her in a singular way: she took upon herself the burden of atoning for ‘the sins of the fathers.’”<sup>45</sup>

Ruszczyc is also fatalistic, saying several times, “I never mess with fate.” To change fate is to bring further misfortune, because fate and misfortune are, according to Ruszczyc, the same.<sup>46</sup> When Rembowski asks Ruszczyc if he believes in the loyalty of his wife, Irena, Ruszczyc responds:

РУЩИЦ: Боже упаси! Я боюсь только потому, что все на свете так страшно мстит за себя, так страшно, безжалостно мстит, люди попадают под колеса судьбы, как под священную индийскую колесницу... Это страшная вещь—судьба....<sup>47</sup>

RUSZCZYC: God save us! I am afraid only because everything in the world avenges itself so terribly. It avenges itself so terribly, to mercilessly, that people fall under the wheels of fate, as under the sacred Indian wheel.... Fate is a terrible thing.

It is the father figure Ruszczyc, who, having succumbed to his own sexual drive is now relentlessly pursued psychologically by the horrific image of his friend’s

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<sup>44</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Zolotoe runo*, II: ii, PSS, t. IV, 47. “РУЩИЦ: Но ничего из этого не выйдет. Грех мстит за себя смертью, терзаннями, адом...”

<sup>45</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 75.

<sup>46</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Zolotoe runo*, I: vii, PSS, t. IV, 38. “РУЩИЦ: Я никогда не мешаю судьбе. ... Желать изменить путь судьбы, это значит увеличивать несчастья, потому что судьба и несчастья это—почти одно и то же.”

<sup>47</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Zolotoe runo*, I: ii, PSS, t. IV, 20-21. See Appendix I, text 3.47.

face, disfigured after the suicide. Ruszczyc often dreams of his friend's eyes fastened in death's suicidal stare, and recognizes that "love is stronger than the voice of conscience."<sup>48</sup> This scene is indicative of Przybyszewski's view that sexual instinct was still a dominant force in human nature, a point which resonated very vividly in Komissarzhevskaja's own life in the examples of her father's and husband's acts of marital infidelity.

Although there are specific details from Przybyszewski's play which contrast with Komissarzhevskaja's own experiences, these do not detract from the striking parallels between play and biography. First, Komissarzhevskaja, unlike Irena, was not trapped in a marriage to an older man: Murav'ev was approximately her own age. And, to begin with, the couple were extremely happy. Nonetheless, Komissarzhevskaja was indeed "trapped" by social mores in a binding union to Vladimir Murav'ev from the time they separated in 1885 until the annulment in September, 1890. For five years the marriage existed only on paper. Second, there is no evidence to suggest that Komissarzhevskaja herself was involved in any extramarital relationships during her short union with Murav'ev, unlike Irena, her character in *The Golden Fleece*. Third, although Komissarzhevskaja's personal search for happiness, like Irena's, did revolve around "sun, light, music and dancing," Komissarzhevskaja's situation was the reverse of Irena's.<sup>49</sup> Irena yearned for lost "sun, light, music and dancing" during her marriage, while marriage opened up these same opportunities for

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<sup>48</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Zolotoe runo*, I: vii, PSS, t. IV, 40. "Положим, любишь жену своего друга, любишь страшно... любовь сильнее голоса совести—и что же тогда?"

<sup>49</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Zolotoe runo*, PSS, t. IV, 28.

Komissarzhevskaja. Although she spent her childhood around artists of every kind, she herself did not display a desire to amuse herself with parties and other entertainment. When she married, the couple took part in the social events befitting their status.<sup>50</sup>

What, then, are the psychological points of contact between Przybyszewski's play and Komissarzhevskaja's biography? Jason and the Argonauts were unable to obtain the golden fleece. Given her husband's infidelity, as well as her own failure to enter into a longtime relationship after her annulment, it seems that the "golden fleece" of love was unattainable for Komissarzhevskaja as well. She could easily have appropriated "Love is stronger than the voice of conscience," the words of warning spoken by Ruszczyk to Przesławski, the writer with whom Irena has an off-stage tryst, in her own attempts to rationalize her father's and husband's adultery. Ruszczyk's comment to Rembowski that "there are no crimes, only punishments," his insistent demand that Rembowski's mother should not be held responsible for her infidelity, and his notion of the sanctity of a mother's memory, all resonated in Komissarzhevskaja's life.<sup>51</sup> Komissarzhevskaja's own mother, of course, was innocent of any wrongdoing, but Komissarzhevskaja knew well the implications of these statements even if the gender identification was reversed, as she continued to visit her father and his second wife even after his abandonment of the family created hardships for her mother and sisters.

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<sup>50</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 75-76.

<sup>51</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Zolotoe runo*, PSS, t. IV. "Ведь преступлений нет, есть только наказания, наказания..." (II: i, 46) and "А память о матери должна быть священна" (III: x, 90)

### Przybyszewski's *Snow* (1904): the psychology of self-sacrifice through suicide

As Komissarzhevskaja performed other Przybyszewski roles, the intriguing parallels to her own experiences continued. These roles enabled her to follow Przybyszewski's "path of the soul" in the most intimate manner and deal with the traumas of her young adult life. The next role Komissarzhevskaja undertook was that of Bronka, in the drama *Snow*, which premiered in Moscow on 23 February 1904. This premiere occurred two days after she performed the role of Irena for the first time before a Moscow audience.<sup>52</sup> Before we examine the parallels between *Snow* and Komissarzhevskaja's life experiences, let us review its brief history in Russian theatres and her efforts to procure rights to its production.

Unlike her debut production of *The Golden Fleece*, Komissarzhevskaja was not the first actress to tackle the role of Bronka in a Russian production of *Snow*.

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<sup>52</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 335; Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 258. Stanislavskii was present at the *Zolotoe runo* performance on 21 February, but does not discuss the work in detail in his diaries. See Konstantin Stanislavskii, *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo K. S. Stanislavskogo. Letopis', t. 1, 1863-1905* (Moscow: Vserossiiskoe teatral'noe obshchestvo, 1971), 456. The production was unsuccessful and received bad reviews. Reviewer of *Russkoe slovo* wrote that Rateeva played Eva like an amateur, acting so melodramatically that it often verged on vulgarity. He was no less kind to Komissarzhevskaja, caustically writing as a parting quip, "The ardent, passionate performance of Mme Komissarzhevskaja sometimes even forced [the spectator] to forget the pompous absurdities of the author, but, alas, only sometimes." К. О. [К. Орлов], "Театр и музыка. Гастроли г-жи Коммиссаржевской" *Russkoe slovo*, no. 55, 24. II. 1904, p. 3. "Горячая, страстная игра г-жи Коммиссаржевской иногда заставляла даже забывать о напыщенных нелепостях автора, но—увы!—только иногда." A planned second performance on 25 February was cancelled and replaced with Ibsen's *Nora*, ostensibly due to the illness of Rateeva. See the announcements in *Russkii golos*, 25. II. 1904, p. 5, and *Kur'er*, 25. II. 1904, p. 3. News of the flop was consequently reported in *Teatr i iskusstvo* as well: "В Москве „Снег“ Пшибышевского вызвал шиканье. Правда, исполнение было, по отзывам газет, ниже среднего." See "Khronika Teatra i iskusstva. Moskovskie vesti," *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 10 (1904): 208.

Meierkhol'd's Association of New Drama (*Tovarishchestvo novoi dramy*) had staged the play in the southern provincial city of Kherson on 19 December 1903.<sup>53</sup> By late January 1904 there were two competing productions in Kiev, one featuring Vera Iureneva under the supervision of Przybyszewski himself, the other a farewell benefit for the provincial actress A. A. Paskhalova (1867-1944).<sup>54</sup> In Moscow, the actress A. I. Kvartalova (b. 1883) had chosen *Snow* for her benefit on 22 January 1904, at the International Theatre (*Internatsional'nyi teatr*).<sup>55</sup>

This chronology of production dates would suggest that Komissarzhevskaiia was only following an established trend, attempting to stage a new play that would draw an audience simply by virtue of its novelty. Private and provincial entrepreneurs had used this strategy to attract new audiences for many years.<sup>56</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia's correspondence, however, provides evidence that the actress was in the vanguard of adherents to the "new art," and more importantly, promoted Przybyszewski's plays through her productions.

Komissarzhevskaiia applied for the production rights to *Snow* as early as July 1903, less than a year after her premiere of *The Golden Fleece*. She wrote a letter to Vasili Bozhovskii, requesting his assistance in gaining Przybyszewski's permission

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<sup>53</sup> N. E. Zvenigorodskaia, *Provintsial'nye sezony Vsevoloda Meierkhol'da. 1902-1905* (Moskva: URSS, 2004), 201.

<sup>54</sup> *Kievskie otkliki*, no. 58, 19. I. 1904, p. 1. Both productions employed Remizov's translation. Although no correspondence between them exists, Przybyszewski would have been acquainted with Remizov's name.

<sup>55</sup> K. O., "Teatr i muzyka. Benefis A. I. Kvartalovoi," *Russkoe slovo*, no. 23, 23. I. 1904, p. 3. Komissarzhevskaiia would later ask Kvartalova to join her company in March, 1906. However, for unknown reasons the actress did not join the troupe. See the letters to N. N. Arbatov, in Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 160, 387.

<sup>56</sup> Schuler, *op. cit.*, 29.

for translation and performance of the play. Bozhovskii had given her a copy of Przybyszewski's new play when she briefly stopped in Warsaw the first week of July on her way to San Remo. On 10 July she telegraphed Bozhovskii from Vienna, asking him to translate *Snow*, because she was enamored of it.<sup>57</sup> Showing her astuteness as an entrepreneur, she asked for exclusive performance rights. Four months later, in a telegraph dated 4 November 1903, she informed Bozhovskii that she had translated *Snow* and asked him to speak with Przybyszewski. Komissarzhevskaiia then asked Bozhovskii to telegraph Przybyszewski's response directly to the censor's office.<sup>58</sup> Przybyszewski refused, citing his authorial right to approve any translation. On, or shortly after 4 November, Komissarzhevskaiia wrote to Nikolai Efros, explaining that Przybyszewski had rejected her request to stage *Snow* in her own translation.<sup>59</sup> Thus, when Komissarzhevskaiia finally staged the play, she used

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<sup>57</sup> Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 241. "Переведите „Снег“—я прочла. Мне страшно нравится." Original document archived at GTsTMB (Bakhrushin State Theatre Museum), R. O., no. 79186.

<sup>58</sup> Letter #35 to V. K. Bozhovskii, (15. VII. 1903), in Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 167-168.

<sup>59</sup> The date is estimated. "Letter to N. E. Efros [4. IX. 1903]," in Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 145. The existing correspondence leaves many questions unanswered about the events surrounding Komissarzhevskaiia's purported translation of this work and her subsequent production, using Efros' translation. For example, in her letter to Efros Komissarzhevskaiia writes that she has telegraphed Przybyszewski in Polish. If we take Komissarzhevskaiia's words literally, then why did she need the assistance of Bozhovskii, a correspondent of *Varshavskii dnevnik*, as intermediary? Did Bozhovskii only introduce the two individuals to one another? Furthermore, the first volume of Przybyszewski's published letters (1879-1906) edited by Helsztyński (1937) contains no correspondence from either Komissarzhevskaiia or Bozhovskii from this period. In the case of Bozhovskii, however, this lack of material evidence may have been because both men were living in Warsaw and had little need for postal services or telegraph when they could communicate personally. Nevertheless, the only known correspondence that exists today between the Polish writer and Russian actress are letters written to Komissarzhevskaiia by Przybyszewski in 1909 concerning

the translation by Efros.<sup>60</sup> With *Snow*, the symbolic setting shifted from the sanatorium of *The Golden Fleece*, where people go to recover from psychological or physical illness, to a cozy cottage during a snowstorm, signifying illusory domestic bliss and the temporary protective winter shroud that melts in the spring, permitting and encouraging new growth.

As in *The Golden Fleece*, in *Snow* Komissarzhevskaja created another role, Bronka, that allowed her to explore personal experience. Symbolically, Bronka is the

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*Life's Banquet*. In addition, no copy of Komissarzhevskaja's translation of *Snow* exists in the archives at RGALI. On the other hand, Kazimir Bravich, who would manage Komissarzhevskaja's winter tour during which she premiered her production in Moscow, was of Polish heritage, spoke Russian with a Polish accent (according to Khodotov), and was knowledgeable enough in the language to publish his own translation of the play, which appeared in the first issue of the literary journal, *Pravda* in January 1904. Moskwin (1998) suggests that Bravich deleted words, not even trying to translate several sections of the text correctly. See Andriy Moskwin, "Dzieje sceniczne dramatu „Śnieg“ Stanisława Przybyszewskiego w Rosji początku XX wieku, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 42, no. 3 (1998): 134. Komissarzhevskaja's elementary reading skills may have been sufficient to allow her to read *Snow* in the original Polish, but insufficient for her to create a workable translation of the play, acceptable to its author. Thus, it seems likely that Komissarzhevskaja did not translate the work herself, but in her correspondence actually refers to the translation of her friend, Bravich. If the Russian reviewer's assessment is correct, Bravich's translation would have been unacceptable to Przybyszewski. Bravich may also have assisted in composing Komissarzhevskaja's second telegram to Przybyszewski in Polish. Moskwin (2007) discusses the correspondence between Komissarzhevskaja and Bozhovskii (160-161) and mentions Bravich several times, including his translation, but never offers this hypothesis. See Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 160-161 (Komissarzhevskaja and Bozhovskii); 26, 29, 69, 156 (Bravich).

<sup>60</sup> In a letter dated 4 April 1904, to director A. P. Zonov, a member of Meierkhol'd's troupe, Remizov informed his friend that he was going to Komissarzhevskaja's performance of *Sneg* in Odessa (7 April). He mentioned that Komissarzhevskaja had turned down his own translation of the play, saying that there was too much "unusual" and "Remizovian" in it. It is unknown if Komissarzhevskaja and Remizov met during or after that performance. See Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 378; cf. Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 161. Zonov's letter is item III-11985, archived at the Kiev Public Library.

silent blanket of “snow” protecting the life of her husband, Tadeusz, whom her fiery rival, Ewa, characterizes as one of “last of the conquistadors.”<sup>61</sup> Bronka’s “melting away” or self-sacrifice will permit Tadeusz to continue living and growing as an artist. The image of snow as a protective cover resonated closely with Komissarzhevskaja, for she had expressed the same sentiments to Khodotov in a February 1901 letter. In figurative language that emphasized the natural duality of life and death occurring in the arrival of spring, she wrote: “The snow is already dying; the sun, needing it, drinks affectionately, and the snow, as it dies, speaks, ‘Help to live what I have preserved just for you!’ The bushes, grass, and streams are already timidly, shyly, trying to begin to live; they feel that one small effort is needed, and their fetters will disappear.”<sup>62</sup>

The plot of *Snow* is constructed around marital relationships, with many of the same motifs as *The Golden Fleece*. Bronka and the artist, Tadeusz, seem to be settled into a quiet, domestic life when Ewa, Bronka’s close friend and an early flame of Tadeusz, arrives for a visit. Also visiting the couple is Kazimierz, Tadeusz’s melancholic brother, an artist who has been wandering about Europe. Within several days, Ewa’s strong personality rekindles the interest of Tadeusz, while Kazimierz, Tadeusz’s brother, becomes attracted to Bronka. Eventually Bronka realizes that she

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<sup>61</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, II: i, *PSS*, t. IV, 281. ЕВА: [...] Ты—последний из той великой, предкрасной породы конквистадоров, для которых был слишком мал этот глупый уголок, называемый Европой.

<sup>62</sup> “From a letter to N. N. Khodotov [Warsaw. 12-14 February 1901],” Altshuller, *op. cit.*, 97. “Снег умирает уже, солнце его пьет, ласково, любя, а он, умирая, говорит: «Помоги жить тому, что я сберег для тебя же!» Кусты, трава, ручьи несмело, робко, но уже пробуют начать жить, чувствуют, что надо одно маленькое усилие и оков не будет.”

cannot struggle against a re-ignited love and decides to commit double suicide with Kazimierz in order that her husband may live with his “true love” and, thus, fulfill his own true calling.

Although the details are dissimilar, analogies to life experience and the emotional and psychological scars associated with them hypothetically allowed Komissarzhevskaja to connect with the character of Bronka. Like Bronka, Komissarzhevskaja experienced the drowning death of a sibling during her childhood.<sup>63</sup> Like Bronka, her domestic bliss is soon destroyed by a friend to whom she is very close: Nadezhda, Komissarzhevskaja’s sister, became her rival, just as Ewa, Bronka’s close friend from the institute, becomes hers.<sup>64</sup> Finally, the object of both women’s affection is an artist: for Bronka, it is Tadeusz, for Komissarzhevskaja, Murav'ev.

As she worked through Bronka’s emotions, Komissarzhevskaja could employ her own personal experiences of sacrifice for her husband’s and sister’s happiness and her struggle with suicide. The motif of sacrifice echoed both in the sacrifices her mother had made for her father, and in the sacrifice Komissarzhevskaja had made for her sister, Nadezhda. Lines of dialogue could easily have resonated in Komissarzhevskaja’s psyche, prompting her to reflect and question the painful experiences she had lived through and her own reactions to them. Several examples will suffice for

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<sup>63</sup> Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 16; Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, II: iv, *PSS*, t. IV, 291-292.

<sup>64</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, II: iii, *PSS*, t. IV, 289. “ЕВА: [То Kazimierz] Бронка рассказывала вам, что я любила ее до безумия, что мы были в пансионе неразлучны? Она рассказывала вам все это?”

this discussion. First, this exchange between Bronka and Tadeusz about Ewa from

Act I:

БРОНКА: Да, об Еве. Чего же мой повелитель так нахмурился?

ТАДЕУШ: Нет, ничего, я только вспомнил, как тебе в первые недели после нашей свадьбы хотелось похвастаться перед нею нашим счастьем... А мне ничего не надо, только бы быть с тобой, с одной тобою, потому что счастье любви – оно такое бесконечное, нежное, хрупкое—какой-нибудь пустяк, мелочь может разбить его.

БРОНКА: (боязливо). Какой пустяк?

ТАДЕУШ: По большей части присутствие постороннего человека. А знаешь, Ева очень изменилась...<sup>65</sup>

BRONKA: Yes, about Ewa. Why did my master frown so?

TADEUSZ: No, it's all right. I only recalled how you liked to boast about our love in front of her in the first weeks after our wedding... But I didn't need anything except to be with you, you alone, because love's happiness is so endless, tender, [and] fragile that any little thing [or] trifle can break it.

BRONKA: (timidly). What kind of little thing?

TADEUSZ: Mostly, the presence of an extraneous person. But you know, Ewa has changed a lot...

In *Snow*, there is no evidence that Tadeusz has been unfaithful to Bronka after their marriage, or that Bronka should question the sentiment Tadeusz is expressing.

However, Tadeusz's words probably rang true in Komissarzhevskia's heart, for she

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<sup>65</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, I: viii, *PSS*, t. IV, 273. See Appendix I, text 3.65.

herself had told others about her newfound happiness.<sup>66</sup> In addition, her own separation from her husband after two years of marriage was proof of their love's fragility, and Tadeusz's words of encouragement to Bronka ("I didn't need anything except to be with you, you alone") surely resonated in her own life as an example of numerous "sweet nothings" spoken by Murav'ev, whose true sentiments, viewed in retrospect, were now debatable.

Comments made by Ewa to Kazimierz during Act II would also have resonated in Komissarzhevskaiia, resurrecting questions of self-doubt and suspicion: why had Murav'ev married her, only later to have sexual relations with her sister?

Ewa confides:

ЕВА: [...] Вы знаете, что он [Тадеуш] меня любит.  
И вы знаете, что такую любовь может  
занести снег, но только для того чтобы  
сделать ее еще более горячей, еще сильной и  
властной?!..<sup>67</sup>

EWA: [...] You know that he [Tadeusz] loves me. But  
do you know that snow can cover such a love,  
but only for the sake of making it even more  
ardent, stronger and powerful?!

Ewa's suggestion that a love for one woman (Bronka, the snow) could just be a temporary stage in the life of a man (Tadeusz), only making his love for another woman (Ewa) grow stronger would have resonated with Komissarzhevskaiia thus:

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<sup>66</sup> *Sbornik pamiati V. F. Komissarzhevskoi*, ed. E. P. Karpov (St. Petersburg: 1911), 18; cited in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 19. Recollections of A. P. Repina, the Komissarzhevskii family nanny.

<sup>67</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, II: iii, PSS, t. IV, 289. See Appendix I, text 3.67.

Was the love Murav'ev felt for her only ephemeral? Did her love only make him want her sister Nadezhda more?

Dramatic dialogue, such as the following exchange between Kazimierz and Bronka, would have allowed Komissarzhevskia to explore issues like the conflicting emotions she must have felt for her sister as the rival for her husband's affections:

КАЗИМИР: (раздражено). Нет, буду говорить.  
Тадеуш улетит от тебя с Евою!  
БРОНКА: С Евою? С Евою? Кто такая Ева? Что она такое?  
КАЗИМИР: Кто она? Что? Она—мой сон, она—твой больной кошмар. [...] Для тебя Ева — страх и ужас, потому что ты чувствуешь, что она толкает тебя в черный омут отчаяния, что она отнимает у тебя Тадеуша... А для него она — мучительный порыв к какой-то великой силе и мощи, для него она неутолимая тоска, которая всегда тянула его в высь, в высь, к небу.<sup>68</sup>

KAZIMIERZ: (irritated). No, I will speak. Tadeusz is leaving you (lit., flying away) with Ewa!  
BRONKA: With Ewa? With Ewa? Who is Ewa? What is she?  
KAZIMIERZ: Who is she? What? She is my dream, she is your painful nightmare, she is Tadeusz's infernal desire. [...] For you, Ewa is fear and terror, because you feel she is pushing you into a black maelstrom of despair, she is taking Tadeusz from you... And for him, she is an agonizing impulse toward some kind of great strength and power, for him she is the unsatiable yearning that always draws him upwards, upwards into heaven.

I suggest that Przybyszewski's dialogue again rang true in Komissarzhevskia's life. Her own sister had become a "nightmare," the object of her

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<sup>68</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, IV: v, PSS, t. IV, 327. See Appendix I, text 3.68.

husband's "infernal desire." The relationship between her sister and husband had not been just a platonic one, it had ended in sexual relations, which Komissarzhevskaja had witnessed. For hours, days, or weeks, Komissarzhevskaja must have personally experienced the "black maelstrom of despair" which eventually led to her suicide attempt. Furthermore, the fact that she had been her husband's model, posing bare-shouldered as he painted her portrait, would likely have sown self-doubt concerning her artistic value as a muse.<sup>69</sup> What could her sister give her husband that she could not?

***The Eternal Tale* (1906): cathartic romance, the role of mentor, and the fusion of life and art**

The plot and characters of Przybyszewski's *The Eternal Tale* created another experiential space, this time for positive emotional release. On one level, the play's lyrical dialogue between the King and Sonka, as well as their relationship, allowed Komissarzhevskaja to relive the amorous and mentoring relationship she had shared with the young Khodotov several years earlier. On another level, it allowed her to live out problems arising along her own artistic path.

*The Eternal Tale*, Przybyszewski's "dramatic poem," takes place "at the dawn of history." The King, raised by the wise alchemist Wityn, is engaged to his daughter, the "luminous and pure" Sonka, and seeks to crown her queen. The Chancellor, who personifies invincible, primordial Evil, plots with members of the King's council to prevent her coronation and to cause Sonka's death. By claiming

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<sup>69</sup> For comments about Komissarzhevskaja posing for portraiture, see A. A. Mgebrov, *Zhizn' v teatre* (Leningrad: 1929), 412-413, cited in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 19.

that Wityn and Sonka are both sorcerers, the Chancellor instigates an uprising among the people. Soon the whole land is in flames, and the King is unable to find the Chancellor, who has fled to the countryside. Believing herself to be the cause of suffering in the kingdom, Sonka convinces the King that she cannot accept a crown stained by blood and violence and threatens to leave him. Just as the King's council seems certain to accede to his demands for peace, he renounces his bloody crown. The play ends as he and Sonka leave their castle for their idyllic "castle in the clouds," leaving their throne empty.

Several motifs in Przybyszewski's play permitted Komissarzhevskaja to re-imagine this work as a personal "psychodrama" of her past romance with Nikolai Khodotov. These are the closely related motifs of "light" and "stars." Interwoven with these motifs is Komissarzhevskaja's status as his former mentor.<sup>70</sup> Both motifs are found in Komissarzhevskaja's numerous letters to Khotodov, which ranged from brief notes to lengthy discussions, often on professional matters, such as acting advice.<sup>71</sup> In this correspondence we find one of the few instances when Komissarzhevskaja took on another epistolary persona, signing her letters with a name other than her own.<sup>72</sup> Only one of those personas appeared before the extended

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<sup>70</sup> Myers, *op. cit.*, 141.

<sup>71</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 140-141.

<sup>72</sup> The most famous instances are her correspondence with Valerii Briusov, *circa* November 1907, when she signed her letters "Béatrice," a reference to her 1906 role in the Maeterlinck drama. On 10 October 1907 she had premiered Briusov's translation of *Péleas et Mélisande*, also by Maeterlinck, whose heroine also became an epistolary persona. See Al'tshuller, *ibid.*, 167, 169, 170, 171, 174. Senelick mentions this correspondence briefly, suggesting that Komissarzhevskaja identified with the "frail victims" of these plays. See Senelick, "Actress as Symbolist Eidolon,"

relationship began between Komissarzhevskaja and Khodotov.<sup>73</sup> Komissarzhevskaja became “Your Light” (“*Vash Svet*”) in her correspondence with Khodotov during the period from July 1900 to September 1902.<sup>74</sup> While staying in Liguria in February 1901, Komissarzhevskaja even suggested that Khodotov could write to her using the phrase “*mio lume*,” the Italian form of this term of endearment.<sup>75</sup>

This persona, “*Svet*,” resonates in Komissarzhevskaja’s correspondence in several ways. First, she took to heart Zarathustra’s words, “My destiny is to be a light,” and made that her mission in art.<sup>76</sup> The image of light as a guiding beacon through the darkness of ignorance also resonates in a literary reference from Ruskin. Khodotov used the following phrase, “Only through a passionate love does the

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484. This comment does not sufficiently explain Komissarzhevskaja’s other uses of an epistolary persona, which indicates an identification with more than just “frail victims.” For example, see the following correspondence: One letter to company member Aleksei Feona, which mentions *The Eternal Tale*, is signed “Teacher” (*Uchitel*’), while two letters to Vladimir Podgornyi, who joined her company in 1908, are signed “Me” (*Ia*) and “Mélisande.” See Al’tshuller, *ibid.*, 131, 161, 176, 272.

<sup>73</sup> Three letters, dated April and May 1900 to Evtikhii Karpov, are signed “Gamaion” “Your Gamaion,” and “Your eternal Gamaion,” a prophetic bird from Russian folklore. *Ibid.*, 75-76.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 80, 94, 99, 104, 105, 107, 108, 111, 122, 123.

<sup>75</sup> “To N. N. Khodotov [Italy. Liguria. Cornigliano. 18 February 1901]. Sunday. (You should also write to me thus, which day),” *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>76</sup> “Мой удел — светом быть.” Rybakova, *Komissarzhevskaja*, 61. Rybakova does not identify the specific source of this phrase, but it is found in Nani’s translation of “The Night Song” from Nietzsche’s *Also sprach Zarathustra*. See Fridrikh Nittshe [sic], *Tak govoril Zaratustra*. Deviat’ otryvkov v perevode S. P. Nani (St. Petersburg: Tip. M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1899), 3. This book was dedicated to Komissarzhevskaja, and she read it sometime in late 1898 or during the first weeks of January 1899. According to Rybakova, Nietzsche’s philosophy forced Komissarzhevskaja to look within herself for strength and hope, but the “proximity of her temper and of her psychological discoveries to Nietzsche” were not a promising area of study. This topic is open for re-evaluation.

darkness become visible,” as an epigraph for his chapter on Komissarzhevskaja.<sup>77</sup> It must have been a favorite of hers, for Khodotov explained that Komissarzhevskaja had inscribed the passage on a photograph to him.<sup>78</sup>

Second, on the romantic level it became a constant symbolic reminder of her relationship with Khodotov. Recalling one of his walks with Komissarzhevskaja in the Ukraine, underneath a quiet sky filled with falling stars, Khodotov wistfully recalled: “In this silence I could very clearly imagine that V. F. was the light, radiating from the heart, from the very center of the world surrounding [us]. I called her “light,” and she called me “Azra.”<sup>79</sup> Komissarzhevskaja thus became the “light of [Khodotov’s] soul and thoughts.”<sup>80</sup>

Curiously, there is also a loose temporal association between Przybyszewski and this period when Komissarzhevskaja used the “Your Light” persona. It encompasses both her first reading of Przybyszewski’s *Aphorisms and Preludes* in April 1902 and her premiere of *The Golden Fleece* in September 1902. This fact, in combination with Khodotov’s role as the person who gave Komissarzhevskaja Przybyszewski’s booklet, created a subconscious link between this persona and the content of *Aphorisms and Preludes*.

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<sup>77</sup> Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1932), 135.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>79</sup> “В этой тишине мне совершенно ясно представилось, что В. Ф. – свет, излучаемый от сердца, от самой сущности окружающего мира. И я назвал ее «светом»; она меня назвала «Азрой».” This fragment: Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1962), 106. Cf. Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1932), 149-150. The two texts vary slightly.

<sup>80</sup> Khodotov, *op. cit.* (1932), 147; *op. cit.* (1962), 105.

In *The Eternal Tale*, Komissarzhevskaja played a character with the symbolic name “Sonka,” a diminutive of Sofia, or “wisdom.” This name can create the expectation that this character will impart knowledge of some kind to another. This expectation is further strengthened by the fact that Sonka is the daughter of the King’s advisor, Wityn. Any job of an advisor, of course, is to impart knowledge, whether gained through experience or education, to the advisee. In her personal life, Komissarzhevskaja, the daughter of a well-known Russian opera star, took on the persona “Svet,” or “Light” in her correspondence with Khodotov. Komissarzhevskaja could thus easily project herself as imparting her father’s wisdom, as well as her own, to Khodotov, her young pupil.<sup>81</sup> In Act I of *The Eternal Tale*, Wityn tells the King that he was “raised in the light,” while the King calls Sonka “my strength, my light, a glistening diamantine rainbow of eternal presentiments.”<sup>82</sup> In this way, the relationship between Sonka and the King, essentially an amorous one, which included an element of enlightenment, comes to symbolically represent Komissarzhevskaja’s relationship with Khodotov, with which it shared these characteristics. The only difference is that the enlightenment that Sonka imparts to her partner is more spiritual, while Komissarzhevskaja’s is more worldly.

The “light” motif in the fictional *Eternal Tale* falls within the semantic field of “light/enlightenment,” to which Przybyszewski opposes the semantic field of

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<sup>81</sup> Stanislav Pshibyshevskii, *Vechnaia skazka. Dramaticheskaja poema*, I: v (Moscow: Skorpion, 1907), 29. “ЖЕГОТА: Ты будешь волею супруга твоего и голосом величайшего мудреца—твоего отца.”

<sup>82</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Vechnaia skazka*, I: vi [sic], 36. “ВИТИН: [...] Ты воспитан в свете....”; *Ibid.*, I: viii, 39. “КОРОЛЬ: [...] Ты—моя сила, мой свет, искрящаяся алмазными радуга вечных предчувствий.”

“darkness/ignorance.” This duality of “enlightenment/ignorance” resonates well both with Zarathustra’s aphorism, “My destiny is to be a light,” Christ’s promise to Thomas, “I am the way, the truth, and the light” (John 14:6), and with Komissarzhevskaja’s status as Khodotov’s professional mentor. One of the best examples of the “light” motif and the imagery associated with its related semantic fields occurs in Act I, scene v. In that scene, The King and Sonka discuss the future of the kingdom and their own future together. The King describes himself as a beacon of light, who, with Sonka, will lead his people out of the darkness to a higher world. He will accomplish this with the light of Sonka’s love:

КОРОЛЬ. [...] Теперь я сильнее, потому что твоя любовь светит мне более ярким светом, чем все солнца [...].

СОНКА. [...] О, волшебные сны, драгоценные сны; когда душа твоя простирает крылья от одного конца неба, до другого, и я плыву на них, простерши руки, в неземном восторге и упоении, возношусь с тобою выше всех земных высот, выше облаков, и плыву, и плыву, вперив взоры в противоположные берега, и упиваюсь красотой этой иной, вечной жизни. Как могуч твой дух! И когда я так плыву и возношусь с тобой все выше и выше, так что, кажется, вот-вот я собрала бы звезды с неба и бросила бы их во мрак, чтоб они слились в нем в одно могучее солнце, тогда, я испытываю такое блаженство вознесения, такое неземное чувство свободы от всяких оков, так охватываю взором все миры и солнца, что наряду со всем этим вот это наше царство кажется мне таким маленьким, таком ничтожным, что блески золота, которыми обсыпано мое платье, кажутся громадным в сравнении с ним....  
Король, король—неужели не

могущественнее вот такое царствование,  
выше земли, выше всех миров?

...  
...

КОРОЛЬ. Я покажу ей [толпе] солнце, я напою ее  
своим светом, я стану для нее светочем,  
который поведет ее туда, куда, знаем путь  
только мы.<sup>83</sup>

KING. [...] Now I am stronger, because your love  
shines for me with a brighter light than all the  
sun....

...  
SONKA. [...] O magical, precious dreams: when your  
soul stretches its wings from one end of the sky  
to the other; and I float on them with  
outstretched arms in unearthly delight and  
rapture; I rise with you higher than all earthly  
heights, higher than the clouds. I float and float;  
my gaze fastened on the opposite shores; I am  
intoxicated by the beauty of this other, eternal  
life. How powerful is your spirit! And when I  
float thus and rise with you higher and higher,  
so that it seems I can gather the stars from the  
sky and throw them into the darkness, so that  
they fuse into one powerful sun, then I  
experience such bliss of elevation, such an  
unearthly feeling of freedom from any chains;  
that I envelope all worlds and suns in my sight,  
that beside all this our kingdom seems so small,  
so insignificant, that the specks of gold with  
which my dress is strewn seem vast in  
comparison with them... King, King, surely  
such a reign, higher than the earth, higher than  
all worlds, is more powerful?

...  
...

KING. I will show it [the crowd] the sun, I will instill  
it with my light; I will become a torch for it,  
which will lead it there, whither only we know  
the path.

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<sup>83</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Vechnaia skazka*, I: v [sic], 32-33. See Appendix I, text 3.83.

The sentiments expressed in this passage thus echo those in the Ruskin passage, inscribed on Khodotov's photograph, about the power of love. There is a further echo of Komissarzhevskaja's past romance with Khodotov in this imagery. Sonka's remark that she will "gather the stars...and throw them into the darkness" conjures images of stars falling through the sky, just as they had when Khodotov and Komissarzhevskaja walked together in the still, Ukrainian summer night.

Here Sonka's sentiments about the soul, wings outstretched, echo a passage Komissarzhevskaja had written to Khodotov in July 1900. At that time she wrote, "Then the sky touched your soul, and you saw the world through it."<sup>84</sup> She again used the image of a soul rising above the earth in a letter dated March 1901: "I want to see you, my Azra; I feel that your soul has risen above the earth and, weary of this effort, awaits me! Right? I will come very soon now."<sup>85</sup> Within the context of their relationship, Komissarzhevskaja could interpret this exchange between the King (Khodotov) and Sonka (Komissarzhevskaja) not only as a symbolic discourse on love and yearning, but the artist's liberation from the chains of tradition, and Komissarzhevskaja's continuing search for artistic perfection. This search was now entering a new stage during the 1906-1907 season with the collaboration of Vsevolod Meierkhol'd as director of her Dramatic Theatre.

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<sup>84</sup> "Вашей души коснулось тогда небо, и Вы глядели на мир сквозь него, ..."  
"From a letter to N. N. Khodotov [3 July 1900]," Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 79.

<sup>85</sup> "Я хочу Вас видеть, Азра мой, я чувствую, что душа Ваша поднялась над землей и, усталая от этого усилия, ждет меня! Да? И я приду теперь уже скоро!"  
"From a letter to N. N. Khodotov [Italy. Liguria, Cornigliano. 5-8 March 1901],"  
*Ibid.*, 105.

The image of light in *The Eternal Tale* also resonated in Komissarzhevskaja's desire, during her relationship with Khodotov, to remove the obstacles barring her artistic progress. In Act II, Sonka describes herself as a "ray of light, torn from the sun," wandering "in the dark, damp cells of prisons." She desires to return to the "kingdom of light, strength and the inextinguishable power" of soul, united in love.<sup>86</sup> After receiving Przybyszewski's booklet from Khodotov, Komissarzhevskaja herself was able to leave the artistic "dungeon" of the Aleksandrinskii Theatre, in order to return to the ideal of the soul, now proclaimed by Przybyszewski.

Several examples from Komissarzhevskaja's correspondence will suffice to illustrate the "star" motif. First, stars represented an ever-present celestial proof of her relationship to Khodotov: "Right before me is the star that I presented to you, and on the left is mine."<sup>87</sup> In the same letter Komissarzhevskaja suggested that from such an elevated vantage point the couple could look down upon the world. In addition, there is a hint here that Komissarzhevskaja felt the relationship should be built not only on physical attraction, but a spiritual one: "Galileo knew only one point of view on the world: standing on the earth. However, Copernicus decided that there was another: one must look at the world from the stars. Well, now we must learn how to

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<sup>86</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Vechnaia skazka*, II: xiv, PSS, t. VII, 188. "СОНКА: [...] блуждаю я, как луч, оторванный от солнца, блуждает в темных сырых подземельях тюрем. [...] Иного царства хочу—вернемся—в царство наших сердец, повитых пламенной порфирию любви, в царство света, силы и неисчерпаемой мощи наших душ...."

<sup>87</sup> "From a letter to N. N. Khodotov [Ialta. End of July 1900]," Al'tshuller, *ibid.*, 85.

find that height. Then we can come back down...”<sup>88</sup> Second, these stars represented a form of celestial communication through which both individuals could remain in spiritual contact over long distances. When Komissarzhevskaja and Khodotov had not seen each other for six weeks in 1901 and she learned that Khodotov’s mother had passed away, she wrote to him: “Last night I bid farewell to the Big Dipper and thoughtfully blessed my lonely little Mohammed.”<sup>89</sup> In summary, the motifs of light and stars that fill Przybyszewski’s *The Eternal Tale* allowed Komissarzhevskaja to turn inward, creating a character which could project the diverse emotions she had experienced both in her romance with Khodotov, in her role as his mentor, and in her mission to enlighten the public through her art.

### ***Life’s Banquet (1909): exploration of the maternal instinct***

The final Przybyszewski drama which Komissarzhevskaja produced was *Life’s Banquet* [*Pir zhizni*] in the fall of 1909; and Hanka became the final new role in her illustrious career.<sup>90</sup> As she had with *Snow*, Komissarzhevskaja devoted much effort to the production of *Life’s Banquet*.<sup>91</sup> This role was far removed from the adolescent types and *femmes fragiles* that she had played in the provinces and at the Aleksandrinskii. On a professional, external level, it allowed Komissarzhevskaja to

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<sup>88</sup> “Галилей признавал только одну точку зрения на мир: стоя на земле. Коперник же решил, что есть другая: надо посмотреть на мир со звезды. Ну вот и мы должны суметь найти эту высоту. Потом можно вернуться вниз, ...” Al’tshuller, *ibid.*, 85.

<sup>89</sup> “To N. N. Khotodov [Znamenskoe. Beginning of July 1901],” Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 109.

<sup>90</sup> Pitoev, *op. cit.*, 105.

<sup>91</sup> Zonov, *op. cit.*, 111; Tal’nikov, *op. cit.*, 368. This fact is mentioned by several memoirists of the period, but scholars have not studied this play or role to the extent of others, such as Nina Zarechnaia in Chekhov’s *The Seagull*.

explore the issue of motherhood in a contemporary society where maternal instinct, personal happiness, and social mores could often clash. Moreover, it allowed her to project herself into a role she had never experienced in life, beyond her role as a surrogate breadwinner for her mother and sisters.<sup>92</sup> On a personal level, *Life's Banquet*, like the other Przybyszewski plays before it, allowed Komissarzhevskaja to explore painful past experiences. In order to understand the full complexity of Komissarzhevskaja's emotional response to this drama, it will help to present a synopsis of its plot.

Hanka Bielska has been living with Waclaw Drwęski for several years. Due to social mores that sanction paternal custody of a child, she has had to abandon her daughter, who still lives with the father, Zbigniew Bielski. Two people, who both come to visit the happily settled couple, try to arouse in Hanka a sense of duty to her daughter. Janota, a "clairvoyant" pianist and composer who plays Schumann, unconsciously makes the first effort as he plays and Hanka listens, enraptured. He moves Hanka to act, as the melodies he plays reach deep into Hanka's soul, causing her involuntarily to remember her abandoned child, almost as a vision.<sup>93</sup> A second,

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<sup>92</sup> "Letter to M. N. Komissarzhevskaja [Italy. San Remo. 21 August 1902]," Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 121. As Komissarzhevskaja had never been experienced maternity, this role became an example of what Moreno has called "expansion" in psychodrama. He believed that experiences in the psychodrama are expanded beyond those of real life by "a frantic desire to make room for numerous other role-aspirations ["unactualized roles"] which were impossible of expression within the bounds of their [the subject's] normal existence." Moreno, *op. cit.*, 229. For a reference to "unactualized roles," see 233.

<sup>93</sup> Hanka calls Janota's music "clairvoyant" (*iasnovidiashchaia*) early in Act I. Pshibyshevskii, *Pir zhizni*, trans. S. Miasnovo, in *PSS*, t. X, *Pir zhizni. Sinagoga Satany. Sumerki* (Moscow: Sablin, 1912), 16. Clairvoyance, according to

more conscious effort to resurrect a maternal instinct in Hanka is made by Orlicz, a friend of both Bielski and Drwęski, who has come to visit. Through expository dialogue the spectator learns that Orlicz was the individual who once introduced Hanka to Waclaw and now has returned to determine whether Hanka is happy now that she has abandoned both her former husband and young child.<sup>94</sup> Through Orlicz, Hanka also learns that her daughter has been told that she is dead. Thus, Hanka's once dormant maternal instinct is reborn through a combination of the subliminal, mystical power of music, working in the soul, and an overt appeal by Orlicz, working on her mind.

By understanding the motivations that would make Hanka leave her husband and join Waclaw, Komissarzhevskaja could project herself into the psyche of her husband and father, investigating the mental conflicts that they both might have felt as they betrayed her and her mother, a technique now commonly referred to as "role reversal."<sup>95</sup> The role of the adulteress, akin to that of Irena in *The Golden Fleece*, is

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Przybyszewski in *On Drama and the Soul*, is one of the traits of a true creative artist and genius. Pshibyshevskii, "O drame," *PSS*, t. IV, 344. Przybyszewski uses Felix Valloton's portrait of Schumann as an example of an artist who is able to express the soul of his model, whose music is itself a synaesthetic expression. See Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 27. Komissarzhevskaja herself was familiar with at least some of Schumann's music, and declaimed Byron's "Manfred" with Shaliapin to the accompaniment of Schumann's music at a concert in Moscow on 14 and 15 December 1902. Komissarzhevskaja was very anxious about her performance there, in front of actors, musicians, and "the whole literary world." See "From a letter to N. N. Khodotov [13 December 1902]," in Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 126, 334.

<sup>94</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Pir zhizni*, Act II: ix, *PSS*, t. X, 50.

<sup>95</sup> "By reversing the roles with them he [the actor/subject] is already learning many things about them which life does not provide him." Fox, *op. cit.*, 15. Role reversal is, according to Moreno, "an attempt to identify with another; this is done more easily

now further complicated by Hanka's reborn maternal instincts. This role thus represented new psychological motivations and emotions to be investigated within this specific type.

In addition, the role of Hanka permitted Komissarzhevskaja to continue her exploration of emotional states and mental catharsis founded in both personal experience and the experiences of her immediate family. Looking back at her own family's history, it was relatively easy for her to imagine the choices that her parents and sister Nadezhda had had to face when dealing with complex amorous relationships. Komissarzhevskaja knew both the stigma of illegitimate childbirth (she had sacrificed own happiness for her sister's child) and the pain of women and children caught in abusive relationships (her sister's relationship with Murav'ev). We can hypothesize that Komissarzhevskaja, able to exploit the experiences of her mother and sister, found special empathy with Hanka, a woman torn between personal happiness and maternal instinct. These associations surely made the role emotionally difficult for the actress to play.

Because these events in Komissarzhevskaja's life are not well-documented, it is difficult to create parallels between dramatic text and correspondence, as has been done in the previous exegeses of Przybyszewski's plays. However, a few passages from Act I will allow us to imagine Komissarzhevskaja's possible thoughts as she rehearsed her role before the play's premiere in November 1909. For example, there were passages that portrayed a person's need to keep painful memories private. This

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between individuals who are intimately acquainted than those 'separated by a wide psychological or ethnic distance'." Fox, *op. cit.*, 63.

particular passage resonated with the secrecy surrounding Komissarzhevskaja's brief marriage and subsequent divorce:

ГАНКА: (раздраженно). Я не имею повода  
сердиться, но не люблю, когда заглядывают  
в мою душу. [...] <sup>96</sup>

HANKA: (irritatedly). I don't have a reason to be  
angry, and I don't like it when people peer into  
my soul. [...]

Or this exchange between Stefa, Janota's wife, and Hanka, concerning Stefa's relationship with her husband, the composer. Komissarzhevskaja would have recited these lines from experience, she had been married two years to a painter herself, and knew how self-involved an artist can get. She had also spent time modeling for her husband, Murav'ev:

СТЕФА: (беспечно). Нет... я только немножко  
ревную его к его работе. [...]

ГАНКА: Вам надо к этому привыкать. (Шутливо).  
Говорят, что судьба жен артистов  
незавидна... <sup>97</sup>

STEF A: (unconcernedly). No... I'm only a little jealous  
of his work.

HANKA: You have to get used to it. (lightheartedly).  
They say that the fate of artists' wives isn't  
enviable.

The following exchange between Hanka's friend, Sofia, and Hanka about a mother's responsibilities to her child and societal expectations would have resonated very loudly in Komissarzhevskaja's memory:

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<sup>96</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Pir zhizni*, Act I: i, PSS, t. X, 17. See Appendix I, text 3.96.

<sup>97</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Pir zhizni*, Act I: ii, PSS, t. X, 20. See Appendix I, text 3.97.

СОФЬЯ: Ты говоришь о муже и ребенке?

ГАНКА: (молчит).

СОФЬЯ: (с горькой усмешкой). Ты не умела устроиться, дорогая—к чему было лишаться ребенка? [...] Главное,—то, чтобы люди тебя уважали, а они уважают тебя до тех пор, пока ты не покинула дома мужа, чтобы закон не мог отобрать у тебя ребенка, а там ты уже могла бы делать, что тебе угодно.

ГАНКА: Зоська, что ты говоришь? Я не узнаю тебя.

СОФЬЯ: (твердо). Это лучше, чем лишиться ребенка, для матери это лучше.

ГАНКА: Это ужасно!<sup>98</sup>

SOF'IA: Are you talking about your husband and child?

HANKA: (remains silent).

SOF'IA: (scoffing). You didn't know how to handle it, dear—why did you forfeit the child? [...] The main thing is for people to respect you, but they respect you only up to the point when you abandon your husband, or the law takes your child from you. But after that, you can do what you want.

HANKA: Zos'ka, what are you saying? I don't recognize you.

SOF'IA: (firmly). It's better than forfeiting the child. It's better for the mother's sake.

HANKA: That's terrible!

Unlike Hanka, the Komissarzhevskii family, father and daughter, *did* know how to arrange their affairs after inconvenient events, like illegitimate children, occurred. I suggest that the elaborate arrangements they made to prepare for both the father's and daughter's annulments prove the Komissarzhevskiiis knew what had to be done to keep the respect of society and were willing to pay the price.

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<sup>98</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Pir zhizni*, Act I: vii, PSS, t. X, 26. See Appendix I, text 3.98.

Finally, a passage that resonated in the lives of both Komissarzhevskaiia and her sister, Nadezhda:

ВАЦЛАВ: [...] Когда я полюбил тебя и вырвал из прежней жизни, я сделал это с полной уверенностью, что беру одну тебя с твоей любовью ко мне—без всякого прошлого— без... без...

ГАНКА: Ну, говори... говори...

ВАЦЛАВ: (порывисто). Без воспоминаний о муже и ребенке!

ГАНКА: Муж давно перестал существовать для меня, —поэтому не горячись.<sup>99</sup>

WACŁAW: [...] When I fell in love with you, I tore you away from your former life; I did it fully confident that I was taking you alone, with your love for me...without any past, without... without...

HANKA: Well, say it... say it...

WACŁAW: (violently). Without memories of your husband and child!

HANKA: My husband ceased to exist for me a long time ago, so don't get excited.

This brief exchange is thematically similar to many conversations that Komissarzhevskaiia may have had during the relationships she had after her divorce. As with any couple whose partners have been in past relationships, doubt remains as to whether the other partner is committed to the new union, or whether some remnant of romantic feeling still exists for the old partner. This is particularly extraordinary in the case of Komissarzhevskaiia, for Murav'ev allegedly continued to attend her performances, even after their divorce.<sup>100</sup> Although Komissarzhevskaiia did not have

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<sup>99</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Pir zhizni*, Act I: xii, *PSS*, t. X, 34. See Appendix I, text 3.99.

<sup>100</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 81. If we are to believe Borovsky's unsubstantiated claim, the two continued to correspond, and Murav'ev sat in the front row at her performances.

children, Nadezhda, of course, did. Komissarzhevskaiia could easily imagine how her sister had tried to handle such conversations with her (Nadezhda's) later suitors, such as the actor P. I. Gaideburov, whom Nadezhda later married. Considering that Murav'ev had threatened to kill Nadezhda and her young daughter in a drunken rage, he probably had "ceased to exist" for Komissarzhevskaiia's sister.<sup>101</sup>

Beyond the psychodramatic aspects of this play, there was an important public aspect to Komissarzhevskaiia's production of this play. In staging *Life's Banquet*, Komissarzhevskaiia continued a form of social dialogue and protest over women's issues that she had established when she first staged Ibsen's *A Doll's House (Nora)* in Moscow in February 1904.<sup>102</sup> These issues united her with the young women who made up a large part of her audiences, and, in the original Aristotelian sense, could provide catharsis for them as well.<sup>103</sup> In fact, judging from the *Russkoe slovo* press release that focused on the conflict between maternal obligation and the desire for personal happiness in *Life's Banquet*, Komissarzhevskaiia herself was interested in promoting open conversation about these issues.<sup>104</sup>

There are two reasons why Komissarzhevskaiia fought so strongly to stage this work: the first is the continued sense of personal catharsis she found in portraying this

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<sup>101</sup> Skarskaia, *op. cit.*, 146-149.

<sup>102</sup> Turkin, *op. cit.*, 133. Komissarzhevskaiia's contemporary calls *Nora* a "decisive protest...against those origins of social morality, which in bourgeois circles of European society lower a woman's character to the level of a doll..."

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Schuler's discussion about Komissarzhevskaiia's image as a "spokesperson for the New Woman in Russian," although she may not have identified herself as a feminist, and her reception by audiences. Schuler, *op. cit.*, 166-168.

<sup>104</sup> "Novaia p'esa," *Russkoe slovo*, 22. IX. 1909, p. 5. "Пьеса Шибышевского «Пир жизни», присланная им В. Ф. Коммиссаржевской, затрагивает тему о конфликте долга матери со стремлением к личному счастью."

new role, the second is the pragmatic function that this work served, as it created a vehicle in which Komissarzhevskaja could further develop her craft as an actress and initiate a newfound calling as a director. This pragmatic function will be the subject of Chapter IV.

Georgii Pitoev's lyrical description in 1911 of the brief scene of *Life's Banquet* just before Hanka's suicide provides further evidence of Komissarzhevskaja's strong personal and emotional bond with her role and the symbolic significance she found in it:

Источник спасения—смерть... Пир жизни...  
Ушла Ганка. Куда? Люди здесь говорят—умерла...  
Последняя роль. Ганка коснулась рукой головы  
Яноты.... Она для него—святое жизни... и  
коснулась головы... и ушла.  
Вера Федоровна говорила:  
—Когда я хочу сказать человеку самое большое  
свое чувство, меня непреодолимо коснуться рукой  
его головы.<sup>105</sup>

The Spring of salvation is death... *Life's banquet*...  
Hanka has left. Where? People here are saying she  
died...

[Her] final role. Hanka touched Janota's head with  
her hand... She was [all that was] sacred in life for  
him... and she touched his head... and left.

Vera Fedorovna used to say:

“When I want to convey my greatest emotion to a  
person, it is irresistible to me that I touch their head  
with my hand.”

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<sup>105</sup> Pitoev, *op. cit.*, 106. It is unclear from the script where Komissarzhevskaja would have performed this gesture, which may be Pitoev's description of a blessing that Janota gives Hanka, after having asked her forgiveness and having denied raping her while she lay almost unconscious and exhausted after a long journey to find her daughter. The blessing thus indicates her purity and continued innocence.

Pitoev's comments are remarkable because they describe Komissarzhevskaja's fulfillment of one of Przybyszewski's major prescriptions to the actor, the embodiment of the character. During her performances of *Life's Banquet*, Komissarzhevskaja did not portray Hanka, but *became* her, to borrow Przybyszewski's admonition to the actor. In order to do so, she reenacted and transformed personal experiences into stage reality and based her choice of motivated gesture not on a literary text alone, but on the observation of what may be called her own "life-text" or psychodrama. In doing so, Komissarzhevskaja symbolically merged her own personality with that of her character. Unfortunately, Komissarzhevskaja's untimely death prevented the world from knowing the full potential of this new method of acting, or how its results might differ from those of Stanislavskii's emerging method of training.

By following Przybyszewski's "path of the soul," Komissarzhevskaja was able to draw on intense personal experiences, and in this way cleanse herself emotionally, as she "embodied" the characters in Przybyszewski's dramas. Thematic parallels found between each of the roles that Komissarzhevskaja played in the Przybyszewski dramas and events in her personal life allowed the actress to re-enact these events psychologically within the "experiential space" of the play in order to find catharsis. Przybyszewski's roles allowed Komissarzhevskaja to examine various aspects of her past experiences, and project herself into roles she was never able to fill.

As Irena in *The Golden Fleece*, Komissarzhevskaja could examine the feelings of guilt and suicide that can accompany the act of adultery. As Bronka in *Snow* again examined suicide, now within the context of a rivalry for love. This situation mirrored her own rivalry for her husband's love, which ended in the sacrifice of her own happiness and an attempted suicide. As Sonka in *The Eternal Tale*, Komissarzhevskaja was able to relive happier events in her past, the short romance with Nikolai Khodotov. Finally, as Hanka in *Life's Banquet*, she could project herself as a mother, a life role she was never to fill. In so doing, she also re-examined the feelings of sacrifice and societal pressure which had caused her own family, father and daughter, to create elaborate schemes in order to protect themselves and the ones they loved from social scorn. In addition, the psychological and emotional investment which Przybyszewski called for in his actors also aided Komissarzhevskaja in her exploration of self. Przybyszewski, in his essay on the drama, had declared that the true actor, the "actor- and-creative artist" (*artist-tvoretz*) is just that person who is able to "be" the character. Seen through the prism of Przybyszewski's essay, we can say that indeed, Komissarzhevskaja "became" her character through the medium of the psychodrama.

#### Chapter IV.

#### PRZYBYSZEWSKI AND KOMISSARZHEVSKAIA: SOUL AND EXPERIMENTAL SPACE

“Sokolov...is cold and quite dense, he doesn't understand the delicate movements of the soul.... *The Golden Fleece* is playing on the 17th and it will certainly flop, thanks to Sokolov.”

Komissarzhevskaja

“Letter to N. N. Khodotov [Khar'kov. 16 September 1902].”<sup>1</sup>

“I imagine the actor-performer's creative process thus: first of all, the actor must read the entire play.... In some degree he immediately becomes all the characters, and, like hallucinations, one scene after another rises before his eyes. Only then can he take his own role into his hands.

He becomes the center of the whole play, enters into known relations with other characters, is reincarnated, becomes [the character he] is playing.”

Przybyszewski

“On Drama and the Stage” (1904)<sup>2</sup>

Having examined Przybyszewski's aesthetic views as a catalyst for personal change at the beginning of Komissarzhevskaja's independent career and the ways in which playing Przybyszewskian roles acted as a personal catharsis, we can now turn to Komissarzhevskaja's professional response at the end of her career, during her final tour of 1909-1910. As we have seen, Komissarzhevskaja staged four

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<sup>1</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 123. “Соколов...холодный и совсем тупой, не понимает тонких движений души.... 17-го идет «Золотое руно» и, конечно, провалится, благодаря Соколову.”

<sup>2</sup> S. Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene.” Trans. V. S., *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 49 (5. XII. 1904): 870. “Творческий процесс у артиста-актера я представляю себе так: актер должен прежде всего прочесть всю драму.... В некоторой степени он становится всеми действующими лицами сразу, и как галлюцинации, перед его глазами встает одна сцена за другой. Только теперь он берет в руки свою собственную роль. / Он становится центром всей драмы, вступает в известные отношения с другими лицами, перевоплощается, становится тем, кого он играет.” Also, Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” *PSS*, t. IV, 343-344. See Appendix I, text 4.2, for the Polish original.

Przybyszewski plays after she left the Imperial Theatres. Although our discussion of these plays within the theoretical framework of the psychodrama sketched possible resonances of Komissarzhevskaja's personal life in these roles, no attempt has yet been made to trace their direct impact on her professional development as an actress.

The events surrounding her production of *Life's Banquet* [*Gody zhiznia*; *Pir zhizni*, 1909], creates an opportunity to investigate this impact. None of the plays that Komissarzhevskaja staged elicited such a negative response from her fellow actors, as did *Life's Banquet*. It is at this time, during her defence of a decision to stage Przybyszewski's drama, that we find the clearest evidence that Przybyszewski's aesthetic views resonated in Komissarzhevskaja's thinking until her death in 1910. An analysis of Komissarzhevskaja's comments, as recorded by troupe members Mikhail Narokov (1879-1958) and Aleksandr D'iakonov-Stavrogin (1882-1963), provides insight into the importance she placed in Przybyszewski's new play and reveals the impact of both *Aphorisms and Preludes* and his later essay "On Drama and the Stage"<sup>3</sup> They illustrate how Komissarzhevskaja understood Przybyszewski's aesthetic and dramatic theories, giving us a retrospective glimpse into her possible pragmatic use of his works in the development of the actor's craft.

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<sup>3</sup> Aleksandr D'iakonov, *Venok V. F. Kommissarzhevskoi* (St. Petersburg: Izd. O. K. Kan, 1913). Chapter originally published in Karpov (1911) as "Poslednii put'," pp. 286-371; M. S. Narokov, *Biografiia moego pokoleniia. Teatral'nye memuary* (Moscow: VTO, 1956), 170-171. Soviet scholar E. Ia. Dubnova identifies D'iakonov's position in the company as Komissarzhevskaja's personal secretary. He was a young actor who joined the troupe in the fall of 1909, having finished his dramatic training in 1908. See E. Ia. Dubnova, "Iz istorii Dramaticheskogo teatra V. F. Komissarzhevskoi (1906 g.)," *Pamiatniki kul'tury. Novye otkrytiia. Ezhegodnik 1980* (Leningrad: Izd. Nauka, 1981), 185.

Before we turn to Komissarzhevskaiia's spirited defense of Przybyszewski's play, *Life's Banquet*, however, it will be helpful to show the continuity of Komissarzhevskaiia's strong interest in him during the intervening seven years and the possible effects of his aesthetic views, as presented in *Aphorisms*, before their final articulation in 1909. Although Przybyszewski's impact on Komissarzhevskaiia's work can be felt by her decision to stage his plays, his name is largely absent from her correspondence.<sup>4</sup> However, in 1909, Przybyszewski suddenly began a brief period of correspondence with Komissarzhevskaiia, encouraging her to stage his new drama. It is therefore also helpful to trace the possible personal connections between these two artists, as represented in their correspondence and in memoirs of the period. In this way we can further contextualize Komissarzhevskaiia's reception of Przybyszewski's works and views.

### **Komissarzhevskaiia's early applications of Przybyszewski's aesthetics of the soul**

Komissarzhevskaiia's close emotional and professional connection with Przybyszewski's views was reflected in her immediate decision to stage *The Golden Fleece* on her upcoming tour, as soon as she was free of the Imperial Theatres in July 1902. In a letter to actor and director Nikolai Popov (1871-1949), dated sometime early- to mid-August, she begged him to stage the play for her.<sup>5</sup> However, for

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<sup>4</sup> The exceptions are the two intriguing mentions of Przybyszewski in July and November, 1903, to V. K. Bozhovskii and N. Efros, both in connection with Komissarzhevskaiia's efforts to stage the first Russian production of *Snow*. See the discussion in this chapter and the discussion on Meierkhol'd in Chapter V.

<sup>5</sup> "To N. A. Popov [Italy. San Remo. Mid-August 1902]," Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 120; cf. *Dramaticheskii teatr V. F. Komissarzhevskoi (po vospominaniiam N. A. Popova)*.

reasons unknown, Popov ultimately rejected Komissarzhevskaja's plea. Ultimately, the play was staged in Khar'kov by actor and director A. M. Zvezdich, whom Komissarzhevskaja had known since her work in Ozerki.<sup>6</sup>

Komissarzhevskaja's early interest in *The Golden Fleece* during the summer of 1902 marks the beginnings of her general interest in symbolist theatre.<sup>7</sup> This early movement beyond the confines of realist theatre should not be overlooked, for Khodotov hints that this was one reason that he and Komissarzhevskaja eventually parted company in 1904, two years before her more public experiments with non-realist theatre began during 1906-1907. Writing of his early walks with Komissarzhevskaja, Khotodov recalled that she aspired to lift art and, especially, theatre to ideal heights (*na ideinye vysoty*).<sup>8</sup> However, he did not follow her there. Schooled in the realism of the Aleksandrinskii, he remained rooted in the earth. In 1932 Khodotov explained his separation with Komissarzhevskaja thus: "The mature roots of realistic theatre turned out to be more stable than the young shoots of a beautiful dream about fragile, symbolic, mystical art, with its world of daydreams..."

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*Glava II.*, GTsTMB, f. 216, no. 493, l. 7; cited by Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 160.

<sup>6</sup> *Iuzhnyi kraj*, no. 7496, 17. IX. 1902, p. 1. Cf. Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 160. For a mention of Zvezdich as director in Ozerki, see Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 38.

<sup>7</sup> Moskwin, *ibid.*, 160. In his monograph, Moskwin suggests that Komissarzhevskaja's interest in this play began as soon as she received a copy, and implies that this occurred as early as January or February, when Erve's translation was published as a supplement to *Teatr i iskusstvo* (no. 2, 1902). However, the play is never mentioned in her correspondence of this period. More likely is the possibility that one of the booklets that Khodotov gave Komissarzhevskaja in early April was a copy of the play, or that after reading *Aphorisms*, Komissarzhevskaja eagerly sought out this recently published play.

<sup>8</sup> Khotodov, *op. cit.* (1932), 148.

and the break with that [woman], who first introduced me to that world, was completed.”<sup>9</sup>

The effects of Przybyszewski’s aesthetics of the soul resonate in two letters Komissarzhevskaiia wrote in September 1902, while she was rehearsing the role of Irena in *The Golden Fleece*. They were reflected in Komissarzhevskaiia’s concern for her own acting and the acting of those she worked with on stage. In a September 1902 letter to her close friend, Mariia Ziloti, Komissarzhevskaiia questioned her decision to leave the Aleksandrinskii and undertake such a difficult role as Irena.<sup>10</sup> Although the fact Irena is on stage for most of Acts I and II may account for some of Komissarzhevskaiia’s self-doubt, the probable nature of her concerns are articulated more clearly in a letter to Khodotov, written on the eve of her premiere in *The Golden Fleece*. In that letter, Komissarzhevskaiia wrote about the cast with which she was working. She found them generally educated (*intelligentnye*), but “spiritually undeveloped” (*dukhovno nerazvity*). This was vexing for her, for she felt that it was not worthwhile to show them anything—they would not understand it anyway.<sup>11</sup>

She especially complained about her partner, S. A. Sokolov (Przesławski), who was so dense he could not understand his character’s “delicate movements of the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 196. “Зрелые корни реалистического театра оказались устойчивее юных ростков прекрасной мечты о хрупком символическом, мистическом искусстве, с его миром грез... и разрыв с той, которая первая ввела меня в этот мир, свершился.” Strictly speaking, it was Khodotov who introduced Komissarzhevskaiia to that world, by giving her Przybyszewski’s booklet. However, she may have placed more import in its contents than her benefactor obviously did.

<sup>10</sup> “Letter to M. I. Ziloti [First half of September 1902,” Al’tshuller, *op. cit.*, 121-122.

<sup>11</sup> According to Moskwin, Komissarzhevskaiia felt this way because she drew close to her characters “spiritually,” and expected other cast members to do the same. See Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 164.

soul.”<sup>12</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia’s concern about “delicate movements of the soul” echoes Przybyszewski’s precept that the artist must strive to reproduce all the intricacies of human emotion, in a manner similar to what William James called “stream of consciousness”:

Метод, которым мы пользуемся в данном случае, это—воспроизведение и раскрытие чувств, мыслей, впечатлений, снов, видений *непосредственно*, так как они дают знать себя в душе, без логических связей, во всех их внезапных скачках и сочетаниях.<sup>13</sup>

The method that we use in this case is the reproduction and disclosing of emotions, thoughts, impressions, dreams, and visions *spontaneously*, just as they make themselves felt in the soul, without logical connections, in all their sudden leaps and combinations.

Komissarzhevskaiia’s comment to Khodotov makes it clear that she was now focusing on creating psychological depth, by concentrating more closely on the full range of a character’s emotional responses, not just a dominant mood which might describe a character’s state of mind.<sup>14</sup> In other words, she was moving from a concept of character behavior that is simple and one-dimensional to one that is complex and

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<sup>12</sup> “Letter to N. N. Khodotov [Khar'kov. 16 September 1902],” Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 123. Due to Sokolov’s inadequate acting skills, Komissarzhevskaiia was forced to cut many of his lines. She hoped that she could perform the play later in its entirety, with Khodotov, at “her theatre.”

<sup>13</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 22. See Appendix I, text 4.13. For a modern literary definition of “stream of consciousness,” described in James’ *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), see Abrams, *op. cit.*, 298-299.

<sup>14</sup> In modern acting terminology, perhaps Komissarzhevskaiia was making a transition to acknowledging the emotions connected with the individual beats of a script, moving from the recognition of a super-objective (in Stanislavskii’s words, what the character “wants”) to ever smaller, minor objectives, each connected to “the soul, the inner life of the character.” James Thomas, *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Focus Press, 2005), 146-147.

multi-dimensional.<sup>15</sup> This method of acting was emotionally draining and frustrating professionally as well. In a letter to Khodotov several days later, Komissarzhevskaiia confessed: “I am just shattered. *The Golden Fleece* is such a horror—to feel so much on stage, while not one note vibrates in response to you.”<sup>16</sup>

In another letter to the young actor in early October 1902, after she had premiered *The Golden Fleece* in Khar'kov, Komissarzhevskaiia gave Khodotov the following advice. Although she does not mention “soul,” her emphasis remains on a internalizing a character’s emotional response:

Работайте, работайте: возьмите роль и *чувствуйте*,  
*чувствуйте*, как будто это все случилось с Вами,  
совсем забыв, что там другой, не такой изображен,  
и когда *совсем уйдете* в эти страдания, радости, в  
хаос или покой, тогда только можете вспомнить,  
что это не Вы, что он был другой, и делайте, что  
хотите и психологией и философией—они уже  
будут на *верной, настоящей, единственной*  
*дороге*.<sup>17</sup>

Work, work: forget completely that someone else is  
being portrayed here —take [your] role and *feel, feel, as*  
*if this all had happened to you*, and when *you sink*  
*entirely* into these torments, joys, into chaos or peace,

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<sup>15</sup> Carl Pritner and Scott E. Walters, *Introduction to Play Analysis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 47.

<sup>16</sup> “Я вся разбита. „Золотое руно” – это такой ужас – столько чувствовать на сцене, когда ни одна нота вибрирует тебе в ответ.” RGALI, f. 901, op. 1, ed. khr. 19, (letter #333). Cited in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 198.

<sup>17</sup> “From a letter to N. N Khodotov [Ekaterinoslav. 1-2 October 1902].” *Ibid.*, 124. Emphases as in published edition. See also Khodotov (1962), 125. This translation borrows from Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 141. Myers cites this passage as evidence that Komissarzhevskaiia mentored young actors such as Khodotov, advising them “against replicating familiar acting models in favor of a personal emotional response.” See Myers, *op. cit.*, 141. She attributes the following comment to Khodotov: “thanks to Komissarzhevskaiia, I began to feel, it seemed to me, the most significant aspects of human experiencing” *Ibid.*, 164.

only then can you remember that this is not you, that he was someone else, and do what you want with both the psychology and the philosophy—they will already be on *the only true, genuine road*.

Here Komissarzhevskaja is again echoing Przybyszewski's admonition to follow the "path of the soul" and the emotions, not the mind. The actor should immerse himself in the emotions of the character, for in these turbulent sentiments are where the actor can identify with the role, and yet remain somehow aloof.

Przybyszewski had written in *Aphorisms*:

In former times the creative artist would reveal 'objects.' The new creative artist reveals his own state of the soul. / The first investigated objects and impressions, as they floated into his brain, believing in their objectivity; the second, to the contrary, investigates only the emotions, such as are summoned by these objects.<sup>18</sup>

In advising Khodotov to "do what you want with psychology and philosophy," Komissarzhevskaja was reminding Khodotov that a role cannot be built from an external examination of the character as proponents of naturalist theatre had done. Rather, it must be created internally, from an emotional core felt by the character over the course of the dramatic action of the play.<sup>19</sup> As we shall see,

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<sup>18</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 17. Previously cited: see Appendix I, text 2.87.

<sup>19</sup> M. Prygunov, describing Komissarzhevskaja's casts and their qualities, claims that one characteristic united all members of her casts, whether they had come from the Imperial stages, the dramatic schools, or the highest ranks of the provincial theatres: "the search for a new form of expression of a character's internal psychology." This was very difficult for those actors trained in the naturalist schools of drama. See "Teatr V. F. Komissarzhevskoi," *Sbornik pamiati V. F. Komissarzhevskoi* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1931), 161-162.

Komissarzhevskaja would again refer to the need for the actor to make connections with a character's "soul"—as reflected by the character's fluctuating emotional states—in her defense of Przybyszewski's play, *Life's Banquet*.

**Komissarzhevskaja's professional relations with Przybyszewski: pragmatics of and personal investment in the soul**

Having looked briefly at how Komissarzhevskaja began to apply Przybyszewski's aesthetic views, we now examine possible personal connections to him, formed through correspondence and meetings. Given the spiritual connection Komissarzhevskaja had shown to Przybyszewski's views in her April 1902 letter and her known penchant for long discussions on art and philosophy with Khodotov, we might expect that these materials would also contain some discussion on subjects they held in common: the artist and the soul. However, evidence found in Komissarzhevskaja's correspondence with others, suggests that these connections could better be characterized only as ones of professional pragmatism, as she mounted efforts to stage his plays. The few existing letters Przybyszewski wrote to Komissarzhevskaja also reflect this pragmatic attitude on his part.

Sometime in 1903, after Komissarzhevskaja had added *The Golden Fleece* to her repertoire, she began efforts to acquire the rights to *Snow*, which Bolesław Bolesławski had staged with his Polish company in St. Petersburg on 3 February.<sup>20</sup> Her interest in decadence, Przybyszewski's aesthetics, and the controversial press which surrounded the production of this poetically written play filled with dark mysticism, psychology, and symbols, all may have contributed to her desire to stage

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix II.

the play.<sup>21</sup> In a letter dated 15 July 1903, written to Warsaw journalist V. K.

Bozhovskii, while *en route* to San Remo to visit her father, Komissarzhevskaiia

emphasized her desire to be the first actress to stage *Snow* in Russia:

Мне пришла в голову мысль, Василий Константинович, и Вы должны мне помочь ее осуществить. Устройте так, чтобы Пшибышевский не позволил бы играть «Снег» никому, кроме меня. Конечно, пока я не сыграю, а там пускай. У меня [есть] такая одна пьеса с немецкого, которую автор дал разрешение перевести только одному переводчику, а тот дал мне право ее играть и передать кому найду нужным. Напишите мне, возможно ли это, и если да, то устройте. Сегодня в 6 ч. я на границе Италии, а завтра в 10 ч. дня на месте.<sup>22</sup>

A thought came to my mind, Vasilii Konstantinovich, and you must help it come to pass. Arrange it so that Przybyszewski will not permit anyone to stage *Snow*

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<sup>21</sup> For example: The reviewer from *Birzhevye vedomosti* described *Snow* as a play in which “a soul strains toward a soul.” He complained that the play left audiences completely bewildered: in his opinion the poet-dramatist’s words were inadequate to express its theme and its symbolic images were difficult to understand. Sometimes, however, Przybyszewski’s writing let a “golden ray of poetry, psychological truth, and a philosophical idea” shine through the play’s “mists of symbols.” L. M. B., “Teatr. Gastrol’i pol’skoi truppy,” *Birzhevye vedomosti*, no. 67 (eve. ed.), 6. II. 1903, p. 3. *Novoe vremia* judged *Snow* a success, given the number of people who crowded into the lobby afterwards and began to suggest alternate endings, evidently dissatisfied with the play’s double suicide. Bronka, the heroine, was described as a “demichild who adored her husband,” while Act IV was “covered by a black, mystical veil.” Khr. [K. I. Khrenevich], “Teatr i muzyka. *Sneg*,” *Novoe vremia*, no. 9671, 5. II. 1903, p. 4; *Peterburgskii listok* described *Snow* as a “superbly written drama” with “marvelous language, a poetic, light style, [and] a somewhat mystical character.” N. O. [N. Ognev], “Teatral’nyi kur’er. Pol’skie spektakli. *Sneg*,” *Peterburgskii listok*, no. 35, 5. II. 1903, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> “To V. K. Bozhovskii [15 July 1903. Friday].” Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 167-168. According to Rybakova’s chronicle, Komissarzhevskaiia spent 4-8 July 1903 in Warsaw, where she met with Bozhovskii, who gave her a copy of *Snow* in Polish. On 10 July Komissarzhevskaiia telegraphed Bozhovskii, informing him that she had read the play and was “terribly pleased” with it (GTsTM, R. O., no. 79186). See Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 241.

except me. Certainly, let them [play it] there [in the Kingdom of Poland], until I stage it. I have one such play in German, which the author gave the permission to translate to only one translator, and he gave me the right to stage it and give to it to whomever I find necessary. Write me if it's possible and if so, then arrange it. Today at 6 I will be on the Italian border, and at 10 tomorrow morning will be in town.

Several months later, in November 1903, Komissarzhevskaiia wrote Bozhovskii saying that she had translated the play and requested him to gain permission immediately from Przybyszewski for its production. She also asked Bozhovskii to telegraph the censor, evidently to inform them that she wanted a quick review of her translation so that she could stage it as soon as possible.<sup>23</sup> Neither of Komissarzhevskaiia's requests was granted. We do not know the exact reason for Przybyszewski's rejection of Komissarzhevskaiia's offer, only that she was unable to obtain permission for "her" translation.<sup>24</sup>

A reference by Khodotov in his memoirs suggests that Komissarzhevskaiia and Przybyszewski may have met. Khodotov speaks of a tour to Warsaw made by members of the Aleksandrinskii Theatre during Lent 1904, in which Komissarzhevskaiia briefly participated. During that tour, an individual described by Khodotov as the "translator and journalist Yorick" introduced him to Przybyszewski, and

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<sup>23</sup> Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 168. "To V. K. Bozhovskii. [4 November 1903]."

<sup>24</sup> "Letter to N. E. Efros. [Petersburg. 4 November 1903]." Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 145, 378. Komissarzhevskaiia, having just spoken with censor I. M. Litvinov (1844-1906), in this letter informs Efros that "there is no hold up at the censor." For comments about Komissarzhevskaiia's alleged translation, see the arguments presented in Chapter III. Of course, by this date Meierkhol'd was already beginning rehearsals for his own production in Kherson. See O. M. Fel'dman, *Meierkhol'd. Nasledie. Tom 2. Tovarishchestvo novoi dramy. Sozdanie Studii na Povarskoi. Leto 1903—vesna 1905* (Moscow: Novoe Izdatel'stvo, 2006), 221.

Khodotov consequently paid him a visit.<sup>25</sup> Yorick or “Poor Yorick” has been identified as the pseudonym of Komissarzhevskaiia’s Warsaw intermediary, Vasilii K. Bozhovskii.<sup>26</sup> Given Komissarzhevskaiia’s previous efforts only four months earlier to obtain the rights to *Snow* through Bozhovskii and her close relationship to Khotodov, there is reason to believe that Komissarzhevskaiia herself could have met Przybyszewski in Warsaw. At the very least, Khodotov may well have spoken to Komissarzhevskaiia at length about his visit with the Polish author if it occurred before her arrival or during her brief stay. The possibility of a meeting between the actress and the dramatist is a tantalizing event for the scholar, because Komissarzhevskaiia was performing *The Golden Fleece* on this tour and had just premiered her production of *Snow* in Moscow on 23 February 1904.<sup>27</sup>

A passing reference in the press release announcing Komissarzhevskaiia’s planned production of *Life’s Banquet* in 1909 supports the possibility of a meeting

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<sup>25</sup> Khodotov (1932), *op. cit.*, 170, 294. The tour lasted a little more than three weeks, from 16 February to 12 March 1904. According to Khodotov, the entrepreneur M. A. Pototskaia felt it her mission to acquaint the Polish public with “genuine Russian artistry.” At the same time, the Russian actors sought to learn the art of light comedy from the Poles.

<sup>26</sup> Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 498. Vasilii K. Bozhovskii (1869-1914) was a correspondent for *Varshavskii dnevnik*.

<sup>27</sup> Before arriving in Warsaw, Komissarzhevskaiia had performed *The Golden Fleece* in Moscow on 21 February, and premiered her production of *Snow* there on 23 February. She was in Warsaw only three days, March 2-4. Curiously, on the last date of Khodotov’s stay in Warsaw, 12 March, Komissarzhevskaiia performed as Bronka in *Snow* in Khar'kov. She then staged *The Golden Fleece* on 19 March in Kiev and *Snow* on 7 April in Odessa. She performed both roles in Saratov, on 1 and 3 May. See Rybakova, *ibid.*, 258-259, 261, 263, 265.

between Komissarzhevskaiia and Przybyszewski in 1904.<sup>28</sup> In an exaggerated fashion, the paper reported that Przybyszewski “promised her this play [*Life’s Banquet*] as long as six years ago, while V[era] F[edorovna] was touring in Warsaw.”<sup>29</sup> This reference to a meeting six years earlier thus would coincide with the possible meetings in either July 1903 or March 1904, linking this encounter with either Komissarzhevskaiia’s frustrated efforts to procure the performance rights to the first Russian production of *Snow* (1903) or the visit described in Khodotov’s memoirs (1904).

Further attempts to gauge the depth of Komissarzhevskaiia’s interest in Przybyszewski or the effects of her reception of his works and views are frustrated by a lack of evidence. While Przybyszewski’s name or works may be absent from Komissarzhevskaiia’s private correspondence, he was very much in the public eye. From 1904 to summer 1909 Przybyszewski’s name remained before the public in performances of his plays, book reviews, and the publication of his collected works by two rival firms in Moscow, Skorpion and Sablin. At the end of 1904, a translation of Przybyszewski’s essay, “On Drama and the Stage,” appeared in *Teatr i iskusstvo*, a trade weekly which Komissarzhevskaiia read.<sup>30</sup> In midsummer 1905, Evgenii Tropovskii, who would later supply the translation of *The Eternal Tale* staged by

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<sup>28</sup> “Teatr i muzyka. Novaia p'esa St. Pshibyshevskago,” *Russkoe slovo*, no. 216, 22. IX. 1909, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> “Пьесу эту Пшибышевский обещал В. Ф. еще шесть лет тому назад, когда В. Ф. гастролировала в Варшаве.” “Teatr i muzyka,” *Russkoe slovo*, no. 216, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> In a letter to Karpov, written from San Remo in summer 1903, Komissarzhevskaiia urges him to read a new play that has appeared as a supplement to the magazine. Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 140.

Komissarzhevskaiia, published an essay in *Vesy*, announcing the new play and providing a synopsis of its plot.<sup>31</sup> When *Vesy* published a version in its March/April 1906 issue, Komissarzhevskaiia had already invited Vsevolod Meierkhol'd, who would later direct her production, to join her company in the position of actor and director.<sup>32</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia finally mentions Przybyszewski in her correspondence of mid-June 1906, when she responded to a cast member's opinion of the play.<sup>33</sup> This brief comment is tantalizing evidence that even at this early stage, Komissarzhevskaiia and Meierkhol'd, as an artistic team, may have discussed the possibility of producing *The Eternal Tale*. Despite all these appearances of Przybyszewski in the press, Komissarzhevskaiia's talks with Meierkhol'd, and her perusal of Przybyszewski's new play, there are no records of any further personal contacts between Komissarzhevskaiia and Przybyszewski during this period. This absence is felt even stronger, since Komissarzhevskaiia produced *The Eternal Tale* in 1906 and should have requested performance rights to the play.

During early 1907, Komissarzhevskaiia was forced to defend her new season, including her production of Przybyszewski's *The Eternal Tale*, against a charge of "decadence." She answered those charges in an interview with N. Tamarin (N.

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<sup>31</sup> E. T. [Evgenii Tropovskii], "Pis'mo iz Pol'shi. (Novaia drama Stanislava Pshibyshevskago)," *Vesy*, no. 8 (1905): 48-54.

<sup>32</sup> St. Pshibyshevskii, *Vechnaia Skazka* [sic]. Drama v 3 deistviakh. Perevod s rukopisi E. Tropovskago, supplement to *Vesy*, no. 3/4 (1906): [2]-59. For information on the negotiations of early February, see Volkov, *op. cit.*, 224; Meierkhol'd, *Perepiska*, 61, 364; Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 314.

<sup>33</sup> "Letter to A. N. Feona [Sweden. 22 Jun 1906]," Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 161. "Вы меня огорчили тем, что... Вам понравилась «Вечная сказка» больше Брюсова." Komissarzhevskaiia had invited Feona to join her company in 1905.

Okulov), published in *Obozrenie teatrov* [*Theatre Review*].<sup>34</sup> In her defense, Komissarzhevskaja asserted that the old methods of reproducing life on stage were “uninteresting and unnecessary,” and therefore demanded a new direction and “new path” in staging.<sup>35</sup> In its rejection of the past, Komissarzhevskaja’s assertion represented an acceptance of Przybyszewski’s call for a new art in *Aphorisms*, and Briusov’s later call in “An Unnecessary Truth,” and echoed in Przybyszewski’s “On Drama and the Stage” for new methods of representing external reality.

Demonstrating the possible lingering effect of Przybyszewski’s *Aphorisms* on her thinking, Komissarzhevskaja reframed her early career in terms of the “eternal” and the “soul.” As an example she described her preparation of the role of Larisa in Ostrovskii’s late drama *The Dowerless Bride* (1879), when she had sought to move beyond the portrayal of a type.<sup>36</sup> In doing so, Komissarzhevskaja explained, she unconsciously searched for what was “eternal” in a woman’s soul.<sup>37</sup> This “soul”

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<sup>34</sup> *Obozrenie teatrov*, 9. II. 1907. Reprinted in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 348-349. In early February, Komissarzhevskaja had begun rehearsals for Hofmansthal’s *Zobeida’s Wedding* (premiered 10 February) and had performed *The Eternal Tale* thirteen times since its premiere in early December.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>36</sup> Larisa Dmitrievna, the daughter of a poor widow, is in love with Paratov, a Volga shipowner, but decides to marry the dull clerk Karandashov when Paratov leaves her. When Paratov returns, she finds she is still in love, but also the target of several businessmen’s ardor. In the dramatic finale, Karandashov mortally shoots Larisa, who forgives everyone. The drama is considered by some to have a “westernized and bourgeois ambience” and psychological complexity not found in other plays of the period. See Terras, *A History*, 374.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 348. “создавая образ Ларисы, не углублялась в житейскую типичность этого образ, а искала в ней женскую душу со всем „вечным“ что в ней есть...” Komissarzhevskaja’s first appearance in the role was in Vil’no in 1895. In 1896, she debuted at the Aleksandrinskii in the role. She performed the role five times in May 1902, after she wrote her letter to Khodotov. In describing Félicien Rops as an artist

motif was also articulated much later by Komissarzhevskaiia's contemporaries. In her discussion of this period in Komissarzhevskaiia's life, writer Aleksandra Brushtein (1884-1968) criticized the new philosophical direction the Dramatic Theatre took after the 1905 Revolution. During those post-1905 seasons, Brushtein suggested, Komissarzhevskaiia's colleagues had lured her away from the "correct" path of realistic theatre by concentrating her attention on the "life of the soul."<sup>38</sup> Writing in 1956, forty-five years after Komissarzhevskaiia's death, Brushtein's negative use of this phrase illustrates that, although this phrase may have been just "in the air" in 1906, it continued to reverberate strongly in an association with Komissarzhevskaiia. Meanwhile, we cannot disregard the fact that this "ethereal" phrase also resonates very physically, as the printed word, in both Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms* and Komissarzhevskaiia's April letter to Khodotov.

Komissarzhevskaiia rejected the claim, made by some of her critics, that this new path she had chosen was decadent, declaring instead, that she was a proponent of "the new" in art. In drawing this distinction, Komissarzhevskaiia perhaps consciously

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who was following the path of the soul, Przybyszewski argued that he portrayed women as "terrifying cosmic force," whose characteristics included the skill to awaken desire in men and lure them with flattery. Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 25. By equating Rops' "terrifying cosmic force" with the eternal quality of the soul which Pshibyshevskii called upon the artist to represent, Komissarzhevskaiia may have then tried to incorporate this quality into her subsequent portrayals of Larisa. Alternately, Przybyszewski's comments may have validated the artistic choices she was making at the time.

<sup>38</sup> "Те люди, с которыми судьба столкнула ее в этот период, когда она болезненно переживала крушение революции 1905 года, увлекли ее перспективой воспарить вместе со своим театром ввысь, на вершины человеческого духа, сосредоточить все внимание на жизни души." Aleksandra Brushtein, *Stranitsy proshlogo* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1956), 132.

made the same comparison as did Przybyszewski in his *Aphorisms and Preludes*, advocating “the new” while finding fault in “the old.” She further explained:

Я протестую против обвинений моего театра в декадентстве. Я сторонница нового в искусстве, но это новое чуждо всяких извращений, которые принято называть декадентством. Я знала, что новые пути моего театра встретят порицания. Я уважаю обоснованную критику, но мне больно, что иные из моих судей не хотят отличить искания новых форм воплощения „вечного“ в искусстве от простого оригинальничанья.<sup>39</sup>

I am protesting against the accusations that my theatre [is mired] in decadence. I am a supporter of ‘the new’ in art, but this new [direction] is foreign to any perversions which are usually called decadence. I was aware that the new paths of my theatre would meet censure. I respect well-founded criticism, but it pains me [to think] that my other judges do not want to distinguish the search for new forms of the embodiment of ‘the eternal’ in art from simple attempts at cleverness.”

Two points in Komissarzhevskaja’s comments echo previous statements she had made about art. First, she continued to believe that “decadence” denotes those forms of art which are distortions of some ideal of “pure beauty.” This is the basic definition she had used when she defended herself against Karpov’s charge in July 1900.<sup>40</sup> In this interview, however, it seems that Komissarzhevskaja has replaced her old ideal of art as a reflection of “pure beauty,” with the stated goal of art as an

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<sup>39</sup> Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 349.

<sup>40</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 86-87. “Как будто я не говорила Вам сто тысяч раз, что декадентство, то, о котором я знаю, то есть заявляющее себя в таких уродливых формах, стремящееся уйти от идеала *чистой* красоты, не может никогда говорить моей душе.”

expression of “the eternal,” founded in a need for innovation. Both of these ideals, of course, stand in opposition to their perceived perversion, “decadence.”

Second, Komissarzhevskaja's remark that she had been trying to embody “the eternal” in art echoed the same sentiments which she had expressed to Nikolai Khodotov in 1902, when she had paraphrased Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms and Preludes*. In 1902 she had written, “Art must reflect the eternal, and the eternal is one thing only—the soul.”<sup>41</sup> Notably, Komissarzhevskaja's concept of art and “pure beauty” dates from 1900, or pre-Przybyszewski, whereas the notion of art as an embodiment of “the eternal” finds its boldest and clearest expression in her statement from 1902. Moreover, the statements which Komissarzhevskaja makes here, combined with the fact that Przybyszewski's play *The Eternal Tale* has been part of the 1906-1907 season she was now defending, are evidence that whatever personal opinion Komissarzhevskaja held of Przybyszewski and his plays, it is clear that she did not find them “decadent.”<sup>42</sup>

In summary, in the years from 1902 to 1909, Komissarzhevskaja began to take a closer look at her roles from a psychological perspective. Przybyszewski's booklet, *Aphorisms and Preludes*, with its exhortation to the true creating artist to portray the “life of the soul in all its manifestations,” probably influenced this professional reflection. As Komissarzhevskaja began to perform roles in Przybyszewski's plays,

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<sup>41</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 116; cf. Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 6. “Art is a reflection of that which is eternal.”

<sup>42</sup> No evidence exists at this time in which Komissarzhevskaja expresses a direct opinion about Przybyszewski and his works. There is much circumstantial evidence, however, that suggests she reacted positively to Przybyszewski and his aesthetics.

she found that not every actor could interact with her heightened emotional connection to the role. It also turned out that these roles, which entailed “delicate movements of the soul” for their proper portrayal, were difficult for other actors to handle. Finally, however Komissarzhevskaiia identified Przybyszewski’s works with a particular artistic movement, it is evident from her defense of her 1906-1907 season that these works did not conform to her vague notion of “decadence.”

In autumn 1909 it was Przybyszewski who actually initiated correspondence with Komissarzhevskaiia. This brief series of letters continued the practical connection between actress and dramatist. In dire need of financial support, Przybyszewski hoped to shop his new play to Komissarzhevskaiia. In a letter dated 12 July 1909 (NS) / [29 June (OS)], Przybyszewski wrote:<sup>43</sup>

Dear Madam,

I have written a new play, extremely lively, with very animated and dramatic plot development. The main role--for a woman of great emotional intensity and strength (*bol'shogo vnutrennego napriazheniia i sily*)—is superbly suited to you.

Therefore, I would like to know, whether you would like to retain the rights to the manuscript of my drama? Then you yourself could stage it with the rights of the original.

I would communicate with you about this question directly, without a translator, and request that you answer me as soon as possible.

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<sup>43</sup> Chronology is important in the following brief discussion. Therefore, dates will be expressed in both New Style (Gregorian) and Old Style (Julian) where necessary. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Russian “Old Style” (Julian) calendar was thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar used in Europe. Brackets will enclose the alternate date.

With deep respect,  
Stanislaw Przybyszewski

Altioch bei Kochel am See, Bayern, München<sup>44</sup>

Komissarzhevskaja probably did not read this letter until her return to Petersburg on [18 August (NS)] / 5 August (OS) after her stay at Bad Wildbad, Württemberg, and a short trip to Paris.<sup>45</sup> Another letter from Przybyszewski followed one month later, dated 20 August (NS) / [7 August (OS)], as Komissarzhevskaja was preparing her next tour to begin in early September. This second letter praised Komissarzhevskaja as a brilliant actress, and this time the Polish dramatist suggested that he had created the role of the female lead in his play, *Life's Banquet*, especially for her.<sup>46</sup> Przybyszewski now asked the actress-entrepreneur for an advance of 500

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<sup>44</sup> Original in Polish. RGALI, f. 778, op. 2, ed. khr. 36. Translated from the Russian text published by A. D'iakonov (Stavrogin), "V. F. Komissarzhevskaja i simvolisty," *Teatr*, no. 2 (1940): 118. Reprinted in Rybakova, *op. cit.*, 447. A re-creation of this text in Polish can be found in Stanisław Helsztyński, *Meteory Młodej Polski* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1969), 291. Helsztyński evidently did not have access to the originals at TsGALI in Moscow. Russian scholar Tamara Agapkina has also published a version. See the appendix in Tamara Agapkina, "Rosyjskie kontakty Stanisława Przybyszewskiego," trans. Ewa Głębińska, in Hanna Filipkowska, ed., *Stanisław Przybyszewski w 50-lecie zgonu pisarza* (Wrocław: Zakład narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo PAN, 1982), 200-201. For a brief excerpt of this letter, see Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 232. See Appendix I, text 4.44, for Russian and Polish versions of this letter.

<sup>45</sup> Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 447-451.

<sup>46</sup> D'iakonov, *op. cit.*, 118. "Горячо желая бы, чтобы драма моя была сыграна такой блестящей артисткой, как Вы, ибо главная роль как будто создана прямо для Вас." Reprinted in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 451. Re-creation of Polish text in Helsztyński, *op. cit.*, 291-292. Przybyszewski did not offer his play only to Komissarzhevskaja in St. Petersburg. In September he also sent a letter to Konstantin Stanislavskii, describing his new play. *Gody žycia*, Przybyszewski wrote, was "lively through and through, [with] a very topical theme [and] quick and energetic plot. There are ten characters, and the setting offers the ability to develop wonderful stage effects." Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 233. The price offered to Stanislavskii, however, was

rubles, to be paid upon the receipt of the Polish manuscript. Komissarzhevskaiia evidently agreed to Przybyszewski's terms, for the Polish author wrote the actress on 15 September (NS) / [3 September (OS)], acknowledging receipt of his advance.<sup>47</sup>

In order to understand properly Komissarzhevskaiia's eventual acceptance of Przybyszewski's offer, it is helpful to provide some biographical context. In autumn 1909 Komissarzhevskaiia had again entered a risky stage of her career. Her American tour in the spring of 1908 had been a commercial failure, and her Dramatic Theatre had spent over 30,000 rubles on a production of Wilde's *Salome*, which the censors closed prematurely.<sup>48</sup> In an interview granted to *Odesskie novosti* [*Odessa News*] in January 1909 Komissarzhevskaiia herself noted that her theatre had lost a large sum of

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1000 rubles, twice the amount proposed to Komissarzhevskaiia. See Helsztyński, *ibid.*, 293. In a letter dated 27 September 1909 (NS), Przybyszewski informed the "genius director" that Komissarzhevskaiia had just bought his play, but offered Stanislavskii the rights to his other new play, *Miasto* [*The City*], in its place. MKhT never staged either work. See Helsztyński, *ibid.*, 294; Konstantin Stanislavskii, *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo K. S. Stanislavskogo. Letopis', t. 2. 1906-1915* (Moscow: Vserossiiskoe teatral'noe obshchestvo, 1971), 202.

<sup>47</sup> In his letter, Przybyszewski asks that Komissarzhevskaiia not publish his play until after September 1910, because he had just concluded a publishing deal with a Polish firm. To offset his own losses with the Polish publisher, he asks for an additional 300 rubles, after the receipt of which Komissarzhevskaiia would be permitted to publish her Russian translation. She would have been able then to recoup her expenses, after the appearance of the play in Polish. Letter of S. Przybyszewski to V. F. Komissarzhevskaiia, (15. IX. 1909). RGALI, f. 778, op. 2, ed. khr. 36, l. 8. Komissarzhevskaiia's response to Przybyszewski's request is unknown.

<sup>48</sup> A dress rehearsal of *Salome* had taken place on 27 October 1908. Censors closed down the performance due to the play's religious content two hours before its opening on 28 October 1908. See Turkin, *op. cit.*, 152-155; Schuler, *op. cit.*, 183. To put this sum in some kind of context, at the turn of the century the average actress might be lucky to earn 4,000 rubles in a year. Komissarzhevskaiia herself earned 9,000 rubles at the Aleksandrinskii in 1899. An actress of rare stature like Savina, working at the Imperial theatres, could earn four times that amount. See Schuler, *ibid.*, 25.

money, and she now found herself in an “almost hopeless situation.”<sup>49</sup> Now she was about to tour the provinces, raising money to alleviate her financial worries.

A letter Komissarzhevskaja wrote from Bad Wildbad in July 1909 to her stepbrother, Fedor, helps us to understand the actress’s state of mind at this time and also contextualizes her decision to produce Przybyszewski’s new play. Although she was still concerned about finances and the necessity of touring, her comments signal a shift in attitude: she now viewed her provincial tours as a space in which to prove to the public that her chosen artistic path since leaving the Imperial theatres had been praiseworthy and commendable in its search, despite its unprofitability (“I want to introduce to the provinces...to the creations of the previous periods--the work of my theatre”). Therefore, her current tour would thus serve not only a purely material function, but also an aesthetic and personal one:

Я разделяю свою 15-летнюю деятельность на три части: 1) работа в провинции, 2) на императорской сцене, 3) у себя в театре. Два года скитания по провинции я считаю потерянными для той работы, которая мне кажется ценной. Рядом созданий первых двух периодов я приобрела веру в себя как в художника и, опираясь на эту веру, я хочу привезти в провинцию равноценное для меня с созданиями прежних периодов—работу своего театра... Все что заставляет особенно тщательно отнестись к художественной стороне постановок театра. Ни одна деталь не должна быть упущена. Когда мы ставили в Петербурге, мы „искали“. Везем же в провинцию лишь то, что кажется более или менее законченным, завершенным.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Odesskie novosti*, 1. XI. 1909. Reprinted in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 469.

<sup>50</sup> “Letter to F. F. Komissarzhevskii [Before 23 July, 1909].” Originally published in E. P. Karpov, ed., *Sbornik pamiati V. F. Komissarzhevskoi* (St. Petersburg: 1911),

I divide my 15-year activity into three parts: 1) [my] work in the provinces, 2) [my work] on the Imperial stage, 3) [my work] in my own theatre. I consider the two years of wandering about the provinces lost for the sake of that work which seemed to me to be valuable. I gained faith in myself as an artist with [this] series of works of the first two periods and, leaning on this faith, I want to introduce to the provinces what for me is equivalent to the creations of previous periods—the work of my theatre.... All this forces me to relate especially carefully to the artistic side of [my] theatre productions. Not one detail must be omitted. When we staged [works] in Petersburg, we were “ searching.” We are taking only what is more or less finished [and] completed.

Komissarzhevskaja signaled an eagerness to showcase new works that built on what she had achieved at her Dramatic Theatre in the preceding five years. This “third period” can be directly linked to Przybyszewski—its impetus is his aesthetic philosophy presented in *Aphorisms and Preludes* and its private articulation originated in Komissarzhevskaja’s confession to Khodotov that she was now “standing on the threshold of [her] soul’s great events.”<sup>51</sup> Komissarzhevskaja’s concern for artistic integrity and attention to detail (“All this forces one to relate especially carefully to the artistic side”) suggests that the actress purchased the rights to *Life’s Banquet* not simply because the Polish author flattered her in his correspondence, but because she viewed this play as an artistic reflection and continuation of her own work. Przybyszewski’s dramas, while not an exclusive part of her artistic repertoire, were nevertheless an important part of that development.

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271-272. Reprinted in Rybakova, *Letopis*, 449. Al'tshuller’s earlier monograph dates the letter to 1908. See Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 175.

<sup>51</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 115-116.

His psychologically complex heroines allowed Komissarzhevskaja to hone her craft as she sought to follow the “path of the soul.” Moreover, Przybyszewski’s works, among others, constituted a valuable artistic alternative to the vaudevilles and popular comedies that filled her first years “wandering” in the provinces, a period she now dismissed as “wasted.” Komissarzhevskaja’s continued commitment to a higher level of art in 1909 thus reflects the values of Przybyszewski’s aesthetics as presented in *Aphorisms and Preludes*.

Komissarzhevskaja must have made final arrangements with Przybyszewski by 5 October (NS) / 22 September (OS) 1909, shortly after her troupe had left Moscow, the first city on their itinerary, to continue their tour in Riga. On that date *Russkoe slovo* [*Russian Word*] published a brief press release stating that Komissarzhevskaja had just received Przybyszewski’s new play. The release also noted that she hoped to premiere the new play in mid-October 1909, while in Kiev.<sup>52</sup> The efforts Komissarzhevskaja made to obtain the performance rights to *Life’s Banquet* would create a strong personal subtext for her defense of this work in the face of cast resistance.

We suggest that Komissarzhevskaja sought to premiere *Life’s Banquet* in Kiev as an exemplary work of “her theatre”—just as much as the role of Irena in

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<sup>52</sup> “Teatr i muzyka. Novaia p'esa St. Pshibyshevskago,” *Russkoe slovo*, no. 216, 22. IX. 1909, p. 5. It is possible that Przybyszewski agreed to write a new play for the actress at that time to make amends for events surrounding the first production of *Snow* but certainly not could not have promised *Life’s Banquet* to her, for the play was based on his recently published novel, *Judgment Day* [*Dzień sądu*, Pol.; *Sudnyi den'*, Rus.]. The novel had just been serialized in the modernist journal *Zolotoe runo*, nos. 1-9 (1909).

Przybyszewski's *The Golden Fleece*, the first new role she created after leaving the Imperial theatres, or the role of Bronka in *Snow*, the rights to which she attempted unsuccessfully to obtain during the summer of 1903. These plays were part of a new repertoire through which she had developed as an actress and moved theatrical art forward, beyond the second-rate repertoire and current performance practices.

Komissarzhevskaja was thus very eager to stage *Life's Banquet*. Her eagerness and personal investment in its production even caused her to act contrary to the statement she had made to her brother earlier, that she was going to tour with "only that which is more or less finished [and] completed."<sup>53</sup> *Life's Banquet*, however, an entirely new production, was neither "finished" nor "completed," and it was completely untested before a Russian audience.

In a September interview conducted in Riga, Komissarzhevskaja provided further evidence of her personal and professional investment in this particular production. At that time, Komissarzhevskaja suggested to the interviewer that Przybyszewski himself would attend the premiere of *Life's Banquet*. She told her interviewer, "It's possible that Przybyszewski, now living abroad, will come to the play's premiere. At least he has already written me, asking when, and where, I am staging *Life's Banquet*."<sup>54</sup> However, as we shall soon discuss, cast members were not

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<sup>53</sup> Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 449.

<sup>54</sup> "Możliwe, że i Przybyszewski, żyjący teraz za granicą, przyjedzie na premierę dramatu, przynajmniej już napisał do mnie pytając, kiedy i gdzie wystawiam *Gody życia*," Ivin, "U V. F. Komissarzhevskoi (Interv'iu)," *Rizhskaia mysl'*, no. 646, 24. IX. 1909, p. 3, cited in Andriej Moskwin, "Recepcja dramatów Stanisława Przybyszewskiego w teatrze rosyjskim początku XX wieku," *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 47, no. 3-4 (1998): 433. This letter to Komissarzhevskaja has not been found.

as excited about staging Przybyszewski's new drama as Komissarzhevskaja was, and made their opposition known. The discussion of that opposition, Komissarzhevskaja's response, and the ways in which her responses, which concern both directing and acting, resonate with Przybyszewski's views on drama, are the subject of the next section.<sup>55</sup>

**Defending *Life's Banquet*: echoes of "On the Drama and the Stage" amidst charges of "decadence"**<sup>56</sup>

Before our discussion continues, it will be helpful to remind ourselves of the plot of *Life's Banquet* and the main points presented in "On Drama and the Stage." First, a brief summary of *Life's Banquet*: Abandoning her child, Hanka Bielska has left her husband to take up with her lover, Waclaw Drwęski. Janota, a composer friend of Drwęski's and secretly in love with Hanka, causes lost feelings of maternal love to erupt from deep within her soul. This love creates an intense desire in Hanka to see her child again. These feelings are intensified by Hanka's other acquaintances.

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Przybyszewski, living in Munich at this time, had many problems with theatres staging his works without asking for performance rights, but at the same time contributed to the problem by distributing the rights to several theatres simultaneously. The fact that the Polish lands were still in the hands of the partitioning powers (Prussia, Russia, Austria-Hungary) probably exacerbated the problem. In a letter to Józef Kotarbiński, an old friend and former Kraków theatre director, Przybyszewski mentions that he has given the rights to *Life's Banquet* to theatres in Kraków, Lwów, Łódź, Poznań, as well as to Komissarzhevskaja in Petersburg. He refers to Komissarzhevskaja's rights as "exclusive" and notes she is taking the play to Siberia. See Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Listy*, tom II, ed. Stanisław Helsztyński (Warszawa: Spółka Wydawnicza Parnas Polski, 1938), 467-468.

<sup>55</sup> Moskvin, while citing the reportage of this event by Komissarzhevskaja's fellow cast members, makes no attempt in his 1998 article to fully investigate this problem.

<sup>56</sup> For an earlier version of material presented here, see Michael D. Johnson, "The Show Must Go On: Komissarzhevskaja's Defense of Her 1909 Production of Stanisław Przybyszewski's *Gody Życia*," *Studies in Slavic Cultures [SISC]*, no. 7 (2008): 64-95.

Hanka leaves Drwęski in search of her daughter, who has been told that her mother is dead. Bielski refuses to let Hanka see her daughter, and she falls ill. Even Wanda, Hanka's sister, takes the side of society, reproaching Hanka for breaking the laws of society. Janota, who has followed Hanka on her journey, rapes Hanka, who had fallen ill, mentally exhausted from her battle for her daughter. Hanka, who now views herself as completely violated, seeks salvation in a mysterious mountain spring at the base of a steep cliff. Attempting to climb down to the spring, she falls to her death.

Przybyszewski's essay "On Drama and the Stage" became a part of the cultural fabric and a topic of discussion in Russian theatre circles for several years after its first appearance. The first Russian translation of Przybyszewski's essay "On Drama and the Stage," appeared in two December 1904 issues of *Teatr i iskusstvo*.<sup>57</sup> Another translation, by V. Vysotskii, appeared shortly thereafter, included in the fourth volume (*Dramas*) of the Sablin edition of Przybyszewski's collected works.<sup>58</sup> This translation subsequently appeared in a separate, ten-kopeck pocketbook edition of 15,000 copies in 1908.<sup>59</sup> Sablin published a second edition in 1909.<sup>60</sup> By 1906

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<sup>57</sup> S. Pshibyshevskii, "O drame i stsene." Trans. V. S., *Teatr i iskusstvo*, 5. XII. 1904, no. 49. 869-878; 12. XII. 1904, no. 50. 891-893.

<sup>58</sup> Stanislav Pshibyshevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. T. IV. *Dramy* (Moscow: Sablin, 1905). For ease of reference, during the following discussion, we will refer to Sablin edition. Komissarzhevskaiia probably first read the serialized version that appeared in *Teatr i iskusstvo*, nos. 49 and 50, in 1904.

<sup>59</sup> Stanislav Pshibyshevskii, *Obruchenie. Dramaticheskaiia poema v 3 d. O drame i stsene*. Trans. V. Vysotskii [Universal'naia biblioteka, 103] (Moscow: Izd. Pol'za, 1908). *Knizhnaia letopis'*, v. 3, no. 44 (8. XI. 1908), item #19936. A second edition, numbering 5,200 copies, appeared in early November 1911. *Knizhnaia letopis'*, v. 12, no. 44 (5. XI. 1911), item #26371.

some critics considered that Przybyszewski's views on theatre were central to performing the new drama. For example, one Kiev critic wrote: "The majority of the [Paskhalova] troupe's actors, despite their apparent intelligence, do not possess, however, that 'specific intelligence' (*ne obladaiut odnako toi spetsificheskaia intelligentnost'*) ... about which Przybyszewski speaks in his article 'On Drama and the Stage,' and which is undoubtedly necessary for performers of the new drama."<sup>61</sup>

There is a strong possibility that Komissarzhevskaja was at least aware of these publications, especially after the opening of her second theatre on Ofitserskaia Street in 1906. She had been interested in Przybyszewski for four years. During this period she continued to stage Przybyszewski's works, for example, *The Eternal Tale* in 1906. She had also developed a professional relationship with Vsevolod Meierkhol'd, who was also vitally interested in Przybyszewski. Finally, Komissarzhevskaja circulated in symbolist literary groups and developed friendships with writers such as Aleksandr Blok and Valerii Briusov, who were keenly interested in European modernist trends.<sup>62</sup>

In "On Drama and the Stage" Przybyszewski divided drama into two periods: pre-Ibsen (old) and post-Ibsen (new). He believed that dramatic action originated not from external factors, but from internal ones—from the soul. He envisioned the play as a series of "living pictures," in which the actor focused on the ever-changing

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<sup>60</sup> Third and fourth editions appeared in 1910, after Komissarzhevskaja's death.

<sup>61</sup> "Provintsial'naia letopis'. Kiev," *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 21 (1906): 335.

<sup>62</sup> For more information on the links between Komissarzhevskaja and the symbolist movement, see Laurence Senelick, "Vera Kommissarzhevskaya: The Actress as Symbolist Eidolon," *Theatre Journal* 32, no. 4 (1980): 475-487.

psychology of his character. Even though this seemed to make the dramatic action more complex, Przybyszewski held that the actor's craft must be driven by sincerity, simplicity, truth, and the courage to break with established theatrical traditions. The actor must also possess intelligence and the mystical quality of "clairvoyance," the ability to envision situations and properly embody a character. Only then could an actor, as a true "creating artist," transform himself from the "performing monkey" of the past.

Opposition from the cast to *Life's Banquet* arose soon after scripts were distributed in Riga.<sup>63</sup> According to Aleksandr D'iakonov, an actor supportive of Komissarzhevskaja's position and her personal secretary, the cast was at first excited about the new work, but after they had read through it, complaints began to arise, and cast members began to attack its author heatedly. Not even comments made by Arkadii Zonov, who would co-direct the play, could calm the angry cast. Passions became inflamed and a "pointed literary argument" arose.<sup>64</sup>

Many cast members considered the play depraved and a prime example of "far-fetched," "unbalanced" decadence. As cast member Mikhail Narokov, an opponent of the production, remembered that its very theme—the power of

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<sup>63</sup> Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 461. Rybakova, citing D'iakonov, provides 22-26 September as the dates when scripts were distributed. However, the exact dates are unclear from D'iakonov's account, which moves from Moscow to events in Vil'no, without reference to Riga. Although these dates may be disputed, the fact that Komissarzhevskaja will call the cast together in Vil'no to discuss the play lends credence to her designation of Riga as the city where scripts were first given to cast members. Actors would then have had several days to read the play and form their opinions. Cf. D'iakonov, *Venok*, 57-58.

<sup>64</sup> D'iakonov, *Venok*, 57-58. Zonov (d. 1922), an old friend of Meierkhol'd's, became the director of Komissarzhevskaja's theatre in 1907-1908, after Meierkhol'd left.

maternity—was presented in a “morbidly perverted” manner, full of “affectation” and “attempts at cheap symbolism.”<sup>65</sup> Komissarzhevskaja instructed the cast members to read the entire play, not just the sides containing their own roles. This decision certainly helped some members form their adverse opinions about the play.<sup>66</sup> In order to counter this opposition, Komissarzhevskaja invited the entire cast to her room when the company reached Vil'no, in order to eliminate dissension between herself and the cast and garner support for the play.<sup>67</sup>

Theoretically representing both Komissarzhevskaja's supporters and detractors, D'iakonov's and Narokov's descriptions of these events touch on several similar themes, such as character interaction and motivation. They provide further evidence of Komissarzhevskaja's further adaptation of particular elements of Przybyszewski's aesthetics, professed in his essays *Aphorisms and Preludes* (1902) and “On Drama and the Stage” (1904). Her comments strongly suggest that she was

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<sup>65</sup> “Многие актеры отдавали себе ясный отчет в порочности надуманной, изломанной, махрово декадентской пьесы. Им ясно было, что самая мысль о силе материнства получила у автора пьесы форму болезненно извращенную, полную кривляний и потуг на дешевую символику.” M. S. Narokov, *Biografiia moego pokoleniia. Teatral'nye memuary* (Moscow: VTO, 1956), 170. Reprinted in Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 257, and noted by Moskwin, “Рецепсја,” 433.

<sup>66</sup> Narokov, *ibid.*, 170; reprinted in Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 257.

<sup>67</sup> “почти все отнеслись к ней [к пьесе] отрицательно ... В защиту выступила Вера Федоровна” “Конечно, она прекрасно знает, что между ею и ее сотрудниками никакого конфликта быть не может,” D'iakonov, *Venok*, 58; cf. Narokov, *ibid.*, 170; reprinted in Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 257. Rybakova dates this event as 29 September. See Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 461. Both D'iakonov (1911) and Narokov (1956) recount Komissarzhevskaja's passionate lecture to the cast, defending her choice of repertoire. In contrast, Zonov recounts only that she functioned as an intermediary between management and company, one whose own enthusiasm for the play would move and inspire the rest of the cast. See A. Zonov, “Vospominaniia o kontse.” *Alkonost. Sbornik, kn. 1* (St. Petersburg: Izd. Peredvizhnogo teatra P. P. Gaideburova i N. F. Skarskoi, 1911), 111.

conceptualizing and actively responding to—if only in the private sphere of her own company—Przybyszewski’s prescriptions for improvements in the acting profession.

When the cast assembled in Vil’no, Komissarzhevskaja, noticeably troubled, but “with great enthusiasm,” quickly improvised a narration of the plot, briefly describing each character and the “psychological moments” of the play.<sup>68</sup> Her description of “psychological moments” suggests that Komissarzhevskaja has synthesized two concepts: the importance of a character’s psychology and concept that this psychology is changing and multifaceted. Both of these concepts can be traced to Przybyszewski and critical commentary about his works.

Komissarzhevskaja’s emphasis in her speech on character psychology mirrors the same emphasis placed on it by Przybyszewski. In *Aphorisms*, Przybyszewski had pronounced the goal of art to be the expression of the chaotic “emotions, thoughts, impressions, dreams, and visions” as they arose in the soul.<sup>69</sup> He had further explained in “On Drama and the Stage”: “The new drama consists of the struggle of the individual (*individuum*) with himself, that is, with psychological categories which, with respect to the deepest and most hidden individual sources composing the essence of that same individual, relate to the essence as the external relates to the internal.” According to Przybyszewski, the psychological struggle within the individual would thus create a “drama of emotions, presentiments, [and] gnawing conscience ... a

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<sup>68</sup> D’iakonov, *Venok*, 58; cf. Moskvin, “Receptja,” 433. Moskvin oversimplifies the situation.

<sup>69</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 22.

drama of anxiety, horror, and fear.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, Komissarzhevskaja recognized the importance and basic connection between psychology and the concept of dramatic action as expressed by Przybyszewski.

In particular, Komissarzhevskaja’s attempt to describe the play’s “psychological moments,” to use D’iakonov’s words, suggests that she may have been familiar with a recently published article by N. Faddeev-Bobyl’, who argued that Przybyszewski’s plays were a “series of moments” that surrender not to practical analysis, but only to emotion.<sup>71</sup> The critic had also paraphrased Przybyszewski’s own

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<sup>70</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” 339-340. “Новая драма заключается в борьбе индивидуума с самим собою, т.-е. с психическими категориями, которые по отношению к самым глубоким и сокровенным индивидуальным источникам, составляющим сущность индивидуума, так к нему относятся, как внешнее относится к внутреннему. Итак, поле борьбы теперь изменилось, мы имеем дело с одною только разбитой, изстрадавшейся душой человеческой. Драма становится драмой чувств и предчувствий, угрызений совести, борьбы с самим собой, становится драмой безпокойства, ужаса и страха.” See Appendix I, text 4.70. Przybyszewski’s use of the term “Individuum” here is ambiguous. He had previously used the term as a synonym for “genius” in his first major work, *Zur Psychologie des Individuums* (1892). Its use here, as well as the use of the possible metaphoric meaning of “istochnik” (Pol. “źródło”; spring, source) and its semantic associations with the notion of art as a cosmic force or current presented in *Aphorisms and Preludes*, invite the possible interpretation of many of his plays as the symbolic or artistic re-creation of the artist’s personal struggle. Three plays, notably *The Golden Fleece*, *Snow*, and *Life’s Banquet*, all include creative individuals (Przesławski, Tadeusz and Kazimierz, Janota, respectively) among the *dramatis personae*. Scholars have not yet fully explored the metaphysical aspects of Przybyszewski’s *oeuvre* beyond the discussion of his “satanic” writings, as presented in *Die Synagoge des Satan* (1897).

<sup>71</sup> N. Faddeev-Bobyl’, “Meterlink i Pshibyshevskii,” *Spolokhi. Al'manakh. kn. 3* (Moscow: Izd. Stozhary, 1908), 170. “There is always pathology in Przybyszewski, but it is not the pathological state of the moment, but an endless series of terrible moments in the past and future, necessary for their extreme reality, of the most profound reality of existence, that, at the same time, does not surrender to practical analysis, but only to emotion.” [У Пшебышевского [sic] все время патология, но это не патологическое состояние момента, а бесконечного ряда моментов в

comments on drama, advising the actor to blur the lines between life and art when expressing those moments. He declared: “Be yourself on stage, experience the moments of suffering and joy of the characters you portray, as if you yourself were experiencing them.”<sup>72</sup> Only then could one stage Przybyszewski’s poetic dramas, by expressing the “profundity and confusion of the experience.”<sup>73</sup>

Komissarzhevskaja further explained to her cast that the goal of the actors was to complete what the author had “left out,” to fill in the character using their own imagination and acting skills.<sup>74</sup> This directorial advice may be considered a direct response to Przybyszewski’s advocacy of the dramatic text as an experimental space or stenogram within which actors were to use their courage, intelligence, and sense of simplicity and truth to recreate (*vossozdat’ ... ili peresozdat’*) a character, which he explicated in “On Drama and the Stage.”<sup>75</sup> It also echoes Faddeev-Bobyl’s exhortation to directors of Przybyszewski’s plays that they must develop the actor’s

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прошлом и будущем, ужасных и необходимых по своей крайней реальности, самой глубокой реальности бытия, не поддающейся в тоже время реальному анализу, а только чувству.] According to Faddeev-Bobyl, Przybyszewski, like Dostoevskii before him, examined the human soul with anatomical precision. This leads him to describe their artistic method as a pathology, and their art, not as realism or decadence, but as “extreme realism.” *Ibid.*, 167-170.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170. “Будь самим собой на сцене, переживи моменты страданий и радостей, изображаемых тобой лиц, как ты их сам пережил бы.”

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>74</sup> D’iakonov, *Venok*, 58; cf. Moskwin, “Рецепсја,” 433.

<sup>75</sup> “драму..., которую актер, если он только действительно артист, должен прочесть, возсоздать ... или пересоздать” (345). Pshibyshevskii, “O drame,” *PSS*, t. IV, 344-345.

own individuality, stimulate by new experiences, and illustrate “the chaos of moments.”<sup>76</sup>

As Komissarzhevskaja continued, her comments belied a tacit acceptance of Przybyszewski’s notion that the artist should follow the “path of the soul,” not “the path of the mind,” the two choices he had contrasted in *Aphorisms*:

--Мы не должны относиться к пьесе предвзято. Будем судить о ней окончательно лишь после того, как отдадим все свои силы, чтобы ее почувствовать... Схватить душою, обнаженным сердцем. Меньше рассудка – и как можно больше внутренних порывов, огня, увлечения!... Я предлагаю работать на этот раз без всякого установленного метода. Пусть на репетиции приходят «без тона», лишь бы у всех было страстное стремление слиться с изображаемым образом. Сделаем ряд опытов, психологических задач. Будем ошибаться, может быть, все это будет иногда смешно, но мы должны искать, искать! И я убеждена, что мы сыграем пьесу! Мы сумеем найти нужного нам Пшибышевского!... Теперь хочу знать ваше мнение. Что вы скажете?<sup>77</sup>

We must not deal with the play in a biased manner. We will judge it in the end only after we give it all our efforts, so that we feel it... One must grasp it with the soul, with bared heart. Less prejudice—and as much gumption, fire, and enthusiasm as possible!... I suggest working this time without any set method. Let them [the actors] come into rehearsals “without a tone”; as long as everyone has a passionate desire to merge with the figure portrayed. We will construct a series of experiments [and] psychological problems. We will make mistakes, [and] perhaps, sometimes all this will

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<sup>76</sup> Faddeev-Bobyl', *op. cit.*, 171. “Задача режиссера в постановках Пшибышевского сводится, таким образом, только к более яркому развитию индивидуальности актера, к толчку на новые и новые переживания, к рисунку хаоса моментов.”

<sup>77</sup> D'iakonov, *Venok*, 58-59.

seem absurd, but we must seek, seek! I am convinced that we will perform [this] play! We will be able to find the Przybyszewski that we need!... Now I want to know your opinion. What do you say?

Although D'iakonov's account emphasizes the prejudice and discontent voiced by the cast, Komissarzhevskaiia's stress on "feeling" the play, understanding it not with the mind, but with the "soul," her stress on seeing the play as a "series of psychological problems" and finally, the need for the actor to "merge" with the character (*slitsia s izobrazhaemym obrazom*), are all themes found in Przybyszewski's article, "On Drama and the Stage."<sup>78</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia's advice to "feel" echoes the advice she had given to Khodotov in October 1902, as well.<sup>79</sup> In addition, Komissarzhevskaiia's intention of beginning rehearsals "without a tone," by which she meant without a preconceived idea of how each actor should portray his or her specific character, indicates her willingness to allow each character to grow naturally out of personal psychological and emotional reflection.

Eschewing the strong director model used by Meierkol'd and Stanislavskii, this innovative rehearsal process can be viewed as a natural extension of Przybyszewski's contention that a truthful characterization is based on the "struggle of the individual with himself."<sup>80</sup> The creation of a character that has at its very core personal experience becomes an intensely personal and individualistic creative act.

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<sup>78</sup> Przybyszewski speaks of "being" and "embodying" the character: "актер... сумеет перестать на время быть самим собой и воплотится в того человека, которого он изображает" and "он [actor] не должен изображать на сцене того или другого человека, а быть им на самом деле." Pshibyshevskii, "O drame," *PSS*, t. IV, 341.

<sup>79</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 124.

<sup>80</sup> Pshibyshevskii, "O drame," *PSS*, t. IV, 339.

Writing in 1911, D'iakonov felt that many of Komissarzhevskaiia's contemporaries would envy her ability to direct performers and preserve a balance between a play's internal motivations—its “psychology”—and the external gestures of the actor. He notes in his memoirs, “In comparison to them [other directors and innovators] she [Komissarzhevskaiia] possessed a rare, precious quality: she did not strive to diminish the psychology of the play with plastic forms, preserving the image of each performer's soul in purity and clarity.”<sup>81</sup>

Narokov, who numbered among the majority of cast members opposed to the play, offered another variant of Komissarzhevskaiia's speech to her cast. He remembers how Komissarzhevskaiia listened to the cast denounce the play's perceived weaknesses, including its “decadent” subject matter and “cheap symbolism.”<sup>82</sup> Then the actress began to speak, quietly weighing her words, as if possessed by “some kind of inner resistance”:

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<sup>81</sup> D'iakonov, *Venok*, 71. “И в сравнении с ними она обладала редким, драгоценным качеством; пластическими формами не стремилась приуменьшить психологии пьесы, сохраняя в чистоте и ясности образ души каждого исполнителя.” The comment about “plastic forms,” i.e., the setting of gestures and placement of the body on stage, can be seen as a partial rebuke of Meierkhol'd's experiments as he grappled with the problem of dimension and stylization: his productions at the Dramatic Theatre were noted for the distorted, flattened stage space, the use of elaborately painted drops for scenic purposes, and the arrangement of actors into tableaux or bas-reliefs. For a general discussion of Meierkhol'd's efforts at this time, see, among others, Jonathan Pitches, *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (London: Routledge, 2003), 12ff. In contrast, Faddeev-Bobyl' advocated, “as far as possible,” the absence of movement and gesture in the “ideal” Przybyszewski production. See Faddeev-Bobyl', *op. cit.*, 171. Komissarzhevskaiia, as both an actress and director, may have tried to follow a happy medium between the two approaches.

<sup>82</sup> Narokov, *op. cit.*, 170; reprinted in Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 257. For Narokov as representing the views of the majority, see D'iakonov, *Venok*, 60.

Может быть, то, что вы говорите вообще о пьесе, верно. Но не будем судить ее только по тому, что дано автором. Мы видим в пьесе пока то, что ясно выражено. А может быть, тут есть нечто, чего мы пока еще не видим и не чувствуем, а почувствуем потом. И я советую каждому из вас отнестись к своей роли так, чтобы, кроме текста, кроме данного отношения к общему содержанию пьесы, вы обдумали еще самостоятельную драму своего героя.<sup>83</sup>

Maybe what you say in general about the play is true. But we will not judge it only by that which is given by the author. For the time being we see what is clearly expressed. But perhaps there is something that we don't yet see and don't yet feel, but will feel later. I advise each of you to deal with your role in such a way so that aside from the text, aside from the given attitude to the play's general content, you also consider the independent drama of your own character.

Recognizing this account as the view of the “spokesman for the opposition” and analyzing the comments that Komissarzhevskaja makes in defense of Przybyszewski's play permits us to extrapolate beyond the arguments that Narokov makes against it. According to him, the cast had found the play objectionable because of its decadent subject matter. Yet Komissarzhevskaja's response does not directly rebut that charge. Instead, she answers diplomatically (“Maybe what you say ... is true”) and then suggests that their point of view originates from an inadequate understanding of the play (“But perhaps there is something....”).

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<sup>83</sup> Narokov, *ibid.*, 171; reprinted in Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 257. Narokov is most likely familiar with D'iakonov's narrative, since the latter published his account of this period shortly after Komissarzhevskaja's death (1911/1913), while Narokov's monograph did not appear until 1956.

In many ways, her response says much about her own progress as an actress, the state of the acting craft in 1909, and the play itself. By explaining to her cast that they must not judge the play “by that which is given,” Komissarzhevskiaia is both acknowledging that the text seems obscure to those who do not know how to read beyond its “cheap symbolism,” and recognizing that the cast has been unwilling to delve beyond the superficial into the deeper meaning of the play. Her cast cannot react intuitively and emotionally to the text. They do not know how to work within Przybyszewski’s “stenogram.”

Komissarzhevskiaia’s emphasis on “feeling” the play or role indicates the cast’s unwillingness to identify emotionally with the character, which, according to Przybyszewski, is a requisite for the actor in the new drama.<sup>84</sup> Finally, by suggesting that each person should “consider the independent drama of your own character,” Komissarzhevskiaia is following Przybyszewski’s explication of the new drama as the drama of the “individual’s struggle with himself.” Her advice hints at the inability among cast members to re-create motivations for a particular character’s actions.<sup>85</sup>

Cast members’ inability to recognize a character’s motivations, to react intuitively to the “psychological moments” presented in Przybyszewski’s dramatic text and their designation of the play as “decadent” —the subject of the next discussion— may be partially explained by their relative lack of experience in

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<sup>84</sup> Today directors speak of making an “emotional investment” in the character.

<sup>85</sup> The character’s motivation, what Stanislavskii would call “super-objective” or “through line of action,” would become a central concern in his development of “the System.” See Sonia Moore, *The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of an Actor*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., rev. (New York: Penguin, 1984), 46-51.

Komissarzhevskaiia's company. She was training many new cast members during this tour.<sup>86</sup> Meierkhol'd, an influential supporter of the "new art" which Przybyszewski represented, was now gone, and several actors whom he and Komissarzhevskaiia had hired from the "Association of New Drama" (*Tovarishchestvo novoi dramy*) troupe had left with him. Two cast members, the actress N. A. Budkevich and Komissarzhevskaiia's former partner, Kazimir Bravich, both translators of Przybyszewski's work, were also now gone from the company.

Neither D'iakonov's nor Narokov's account describes Komissarzhevskaiia's defense against the company's charge that *Life's Banquet* was "decadent." If the matter was so important and had caused so much distress among cast members, why did Komissarzhevskaiia not answer the attack directly? A probable answer seems to lie in the fact that the cast was new and that, for some reason, Komissarzhevskaiia saw no need to answer a charge she had defended many times in the past. It seems evident from the memoirs that some cast members, including Narokov, were at least

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<sup>86</sup> Dubnova, *op. cit.*, 185, mentions D'iakonov (see above). Rybakova lists the cast assembled in August 1909 as follows: N. I. Liubavina, O. P. Narbekova, V. M. Polevaia, V. O. Tizengauzen, E. L. Shlovskaiia, A. I. Arkad'ev, A. Ia. Zakushniak, A. P. Zonov, A. A. Mgebrov, M. S. Narokov, V. A. Podgornyi, A. A. D'iakonov-Stavrogin, and A. N. Feona. See Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 452. Besides D'iakonov, Arkad'ev, Zonov, and Feona may be the only three members who can be recognized as confirmed followers of "the new art." Zakushniak, a university student, was also a devotee of "decadent-symbolist" and "mystical" drama, especially Maeterlinck. Meierkhol'd hired the student while TND was on tour in Poltava in spring of 1906, shortly before he left the troupe to join Komissarzhevskaiia's Dramaticheskii Teatr in St. Petersburg. See Narokov, *op. cit.*, 149-150. Arkad'ev was an older member of the troupe who supported Komissarzhevskaiia's and Meierkhol'd's efforts to reform art. See A. A. D'iakonov, "Dramaticheskii teatr V. F. Komissarzhevskoi. Ch. II. Teatr na Ofiterskoi," *Pamiatniki kul'tury. Novye otkrytiia. Ezhegodnik 1980* (Leningrad: Izd. Nauka, 1981), 186. Further citations of this memoir appear as "Dramaticheskii teatr."

indifferent, and in some cases openly hostile, to Komissarzhevskaiia's past efforts as an evangelist for the new art, which, at least in this case, they considered "decadent." Narokov writes, "It was evident that Vera Fedorovna did not yet have the strength to free herself from the binding fetters of decadence and by inertia forced herself to believe in some kind of imaginary inner merits of the play."<sup>87</sup> However, Narokov's opinion that Komissarzhevskaiia was bound by the "fetters of decadence" contradicted her own views, which she had already expressed in *Obozrenie teatrov* in 1907.<sup>88</sup> In that interview she had defended her theatre and its current season, including her production of Przybyszewski's *The Eternal Tale*, against that same charge.

Komissarzhevskaiia's new cast members may not have known her opinions on the subject, however, even though they were well known among her circle of friends. Her colleagues, and therefore, older cast members, knew that her theatre had nothing in common with "decadence," but had instead led "the struggle for the ideas of symbolic art, for the new drama, for a unity of style in its scenic transmission."<sup>89</sup> Thus, when cast members opposed *Life's Banquet* because of its "decadence," Komissarzhevskaiia would have been responding to old arguments and defending an old position, which she probably felt her cast should have already known. For this

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<sup>87</sup> "Видимо, Вера Федоровна еще не была в силах освободиться от связывавших ее пут декадентства и по инерции заставляла себя верить в какие-то мнимые внутренние достоинства пьесы." M. S. Narokov in Rudnitskii, *op. cit.*, 257.

The problem of Komissarzhevskaiia and her relationship to the various strains of modernism in drama (symbolism, "decadence") has not been fully explored in monograph form, although scholars have long regarded the actress as a promoter of modernist trends, such as symbolism, especially during the 1906-1907 season with Meierkhol'd. Cf., for example, Schuler, *op. cit.*, 174.

<sup>88</sup> *Obozrenie teatrov*, 9. II. 1907. Reprinted in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 348.

<sup>89</sup> D'iakonov, "Dramaticheskii teatr," 188.

reason she saw no need to answer their attacks directly, and instead, concentrated on the rehearsal process.

After Komissarzhevskaja's defense of Przybyszewski's new drama, daily rehearsals for the new play began. Because the production was not ready when the troupe arrived in Kiev, where Komissarzhevskaja and Zonov had hoped to premiere the work before an adoring audience, the opening had to be delayed until the troupe arrived in Odessa.<sup>90</sup> *Life's Banquet* premiered on 1 November 1909 and, despite bad reviews, Komissarzhevskaja had faith in the play and continued to stage it in Khar'kov, Poltava, Ekaterinoslav, and Baku.<sup>91</sup> Only Komissarzhevskaja's untimely illness on 27 January, and finally, death on 10 February 1910, prevented a scheduled performance in Tashkent.

### ***Life's Banquet as experimental space***

As we have seen, Komissarzhevskaja found in Przybyszewski's plays not only an "experiential space" for personal catharsis, but also an "experimental space" in

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<sup>90</sup> D'iakonov, *Venok*, 64. One Odessa critic wrote after Komissarzhevskaja's 1902 benefit: "'When I think of my vocation, I am not afraid of life'—let this motto of a talented actress be her motto forever." See St. T. [I. M. Kheifets], "Teatr i muzyka," *Odesskie novosti*, no. 5814, 26. XI. 1902, p. 3. More than three dozen articles about Przybyszewski and his works appeared in the Odessa press from 1901-1909. Przybyszewski visited the city in November 1904 at the invitation of Aleksandr Voznesenskii and Vera Iureneva. There he twice presented his lecture, "The New Drama and Symbolism," and also lectured on his novel, *Sons of the Earth* [*Synowie ziemi*]. See Agapkina, *op. cit.*, 191-192, or Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 195.

<sup>91</sup> *Odesskie novosti*, no. 7956, 3. XI. 1909, p. 3; *Odesskii listok*, no. 251, 3. XI. 1909, p. 4; *Odesskoe obozrenie*, no. 563, 3. XI. 09, p. 4. Rybakova's early biography of Komissarzhevskaja mistakenly identifies Ekaterinoslav as the city where Komissarzhevskaja premiered her last production, a fact contradicted by her own 1994 chronicle. According to Al'tshuller, the troupe visited Ekaterinoslav from 24-28 November. See Iu. P. Rybakova, *Komissarzhevskaja* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1971), 186; Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 340. Cf. Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 468.

which to hone both her art and her ideas about theatre.<sup>92</sup> In this way, Komissarzhevskaja's use of Przybyszewski's works created another form of personal investment. This situation was the culmination of many years of personal artistic frustration: as early as autumn 1902, when she began preparing the role of Irena in *The Golden Fleece*, Komissarzhevskaja became aware of the difficulty in portraying a Przybyszewski role. She herself had struggled and been forced to cut lines of acting partners who could not adapt to his psychologically complex characters.<sup>93</sup> Later, Przybyszewski's *The Eternal Tale* had served as a medium for Meierkhol'd's experiments during the 1906-1907 season.

In retrospect, we see that important stages of Komissarzhevskaja's professional career after leaving the Imperial theatres coincide with her production of Przybyszewski's works. Her first Przybyszewski drama, *The Golden Fleece*, had marked the beginning of her career as an independent actress in 1902. A Przybyszewski drama, *Snow* had marked Komissarzhevskaja's first endeavor to acquire the rights to a non-Russian play, in the summer of 1903.<sup>94</sup> A Przybyszewski drama, *The Eternal Tale*, became part of the monumental season of 1906-1907, when her Dramatic Theatre began its explorations of "non-representational theatre" (*uslovnost'*), stylization, and symbolism under Meierkhol'd's co-leadership.

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<sup>92</sup> The idea of "experimental space" is explored further in the chapters on Meierkhol'd.

<sup>93</sup> Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 122, 123.

<sup>94</sup> Turkin considered *Sneg* to be a part of the first season (1904-1905) of the Komissarzhevskaja's Dramatic Theatre, as it responded "to the questions of young Russia" with the plays of Ibsen, Gor'kii, Naidenov, and, of course, Przybyszewski. See Turkin, *op. cit.*, 132.

Comments made by Zonov with respect to *Life's Banquet* allow us to suggest that not only did Komissarzhevskaiia begin to use Przybyszewski's ideas on the drama actively in the development of her own acting skills, but that they now became part of an experiment connected with a future theatre school she dreamed of establishing. In fulfilling that dream, Komissarzhevskaiia hoped to be true to the commands of the "artist" (*khudozhnik*) within her.<sup>95</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia, in her letter to her stepbrother Fedor in July, had divided her career into three periods. We suggest a fourth period was now beginning, again connected with Przybyszewski.

In autumn 1909, while in Moscow, Komissarzhevskaiia had spoken of those dreams for a theatre school to several individuals, including the writer Andrei Belyi and the actor Aleksei Zheliabuzhskii.<sup>96</sup> According to Belyi, the actress was already tired of theatre before she began this tour. She believed that the current actor could not survive in contemporary theatre, that what was needed was a "new life." From this new life would arise new people (*novye liudi*), and from them, new actors. The way to create the new actor was just as one raises a child, from birth. Therefore, she

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<sup>95</sup> "Letter to O. F. Komissarzhevskaiia [End of 1909-beginning of 1910]," Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 177. "Я пришла к большому решению и, как всегда, верная велениям в себе художник, подчиняюсь радостно этому решению."

<sup>96</sup> Andrei Belyi, "Stranitsy vospominanii," in Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 135; Rybakova, *Komissarzhevskaiia*, 187; Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 458-459; Belyi's reminiscences of Komissarzhevskaiia originally appeared in his memoirs, *Mezhdv dvukh revoliutsii* (Leningrad: 1934). Zheliabuzhskii's reminiscences, "Poslednie gody," were written for the 1964 volume. See Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 293.

envisioned a whole educational system, whose end product would be the cultured, educated, trained actor.<sup>97</sup>

Recalling his conversation with Komissarzhevskaiia more than fifty years earlier, Zheliabuzhskii echoed Belyi's emphasis on the "new." He recollected that she had said that the old ways were finished, and, in many respects, actors had caused the failures of new dramatic works. However, in the future, after they received a multifaceted, physical and spiritual education, actors would be quite different.<sup>98</sup> Then the actor and theatre could progress. What Komissarzhevskaiia had envisioned was a not just one school of drama, but a series of institutions that would educate the new human being (*novyi chelovek*), a system in which an understanding and love of beauty

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<sup>97</sup> Belyi, in Rudnitskii, *op. cit.*, 135. "театр в условиях современной культуры – конец человеку; нужен не театр, нужна новая жизнь; и новое действие возникает из жизни: от новых людей, а этих людей – еще нет, вот почему устремления театральных новаторов обрываются недоуменным вопросом; актера – еще нет: его надо создать." See also Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 211. In "On Drama and the Stage," Przybyszewski also speaks of the "new human being" (*novyi chelovek*), in reference to the new drama. In the soul of the "new human being" a struggle rages among "irreconcilable elements" creating a "fragile, complex mechanism" (339). Przybyszewski described his creation of a character thus: "I fish out all that makes up life's tragedy in the soul of the human being, and create a new human being, I create a projection of [his] inner struggle and discord" (355). ["Я вылавливаю в душе человека, все что составляет трагедию его жизни, и создаю нового человека, создаю проекцию внутренней борьбы и разлада."] Original punctuation. Pshibyshevskii, "O drame," 339, 355.

<sup>98</sup> Zheliabuzhskii, in Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 293. "Старому, Паоло, конец! ... Наши неудачи, во многом и от актеров. Актер будущего театра должен быть совершенно другим! –С увлечением она стала говорить о том, каким всесторонне развитым — духовно и физически – должен быть актер." Also quoted in Resing, *op. cit.*, 88. Resing finds the origins of Komissarzhevskaiia's desire to start a school in her new, developing acting style: "In order to accomplish a radical change in theatre through *uslovnaia* acting, she [K] felt that an ensemble of equals trained in a similar manner and working towards the same goal was necessary."

and God would be taught.<sup>99</sup> The students would be well-rounded in the fine arts: genuine artists in their fields, such as Briusov, Belyi, and Isadora Duncan, would teach subjects such as the history of Russian and European literature, drama, painting, and music.<sup>100</sup>

Now, as Komissarzhevskaja began another season without Meierkhol'd, and Przybyszewski offered her a new play, the opportunity arose to use *Life's Banquet* as a medium in which to work. Whether or not the cast of *Life's Banquet* knew it, they had become part of a grand experiment, a workshop where Komissarzhevskaja could experiment with ideas she wanted to teach in her future theatre school. Zonov suggests this was the case:

Подходить в работе над пьесой с предвзятыми приемами, тем более навязывать исполнителю что либо [sic], было опасно, задача режиссера рисовалась—быть ближайшим помощником актера, проверяя достигнутое, согласовать с общей картиной. Вполне соглашаясь с планом работы над пьесой, Вера Федоровна хотела сделать из нее «опыт будущей школы», о которой мечтала тогда.<sup>101</sup>

To approach work on the play with preconceived notions, especially, to thrust something upon the performer, was dangerous. The director's goal was laid out—to be the actor's closest aide, checking up on what had been accomplished, so that it agreed with the general picture. Agreeing fully with the play's work plan, Vera Fedorovna wanted to make from it an

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<sup>99</sup> Al'tshuller, *ibid.*, 177. For Komissarzhevskaja's use of the phrase “new human being,” see Belyi, *op. cit.*, 135.

<sup>100</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 211; Tal'nikov, *op. cit.*, 366-367. Tal'nikov suggests that the goal of this tour was to raise funds for the future school.

<sup>101</sup> Zonov, *op. cit.*, 111. Scholars have neglected to investigate Zonov's comment in the context of discussions about Komissarzhevskaja's planned school. See Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 206-212; Schuler, *op. cit.*, 183-184; Tal'nikov, *op. cit.*, 376-378.

‘experiment of [her] future school,’ about which she was dreaming at that time.

It is clear from D'iakonov's account that Komissarzhevskaiia's personal investment in this play as “an experiment of her future school” grew stronger as the play went into rehearsals. Although Zonov was nominally the director of this production, Komissarzhevskaiia, perhaps for the first time in her career, began to perform more directorial functions: she led each actor through his or her role, trying to find new, original methods of portrayal.<sup>102</sup> In doing so, she surprised all the cast members in this new capacity. Not only did the actress work with individual actors, but she also began to take personal interest in various elements of the *mise-en-scène*, choosing costumes, makeup, and working on the set design.<sup>103</sup>

Now Komissarzhevskaiia was using a Przybyszewski drama as she sought to extend her expertise into the major areas of directing. Moreover, she sought to give her production of *Life's Banquet* a “strictly symbolic character.”<sup>104</sup> She denied that her new path was a continuation of “Meierkhol'dism,” but, in her words, also believed deeply that the future of theatre belonged to non-representational (*uslovnyi*) forms:

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<sup>102</sup> D'iakonov, *Venok*, 64. Liubov' Gurevich, a longtime friend of Komissarzhevskaiia, describes the actress' efforts in this way: “One may find perhaps only several examples in the history of art where such serious internal work was completed in the human soul under such conditions...” See her memoir, “Na putiakh obnovleniia teatra,” in *Alkonost*, 192.

<sup>103</sup> D'iakonov, *Venok*, 64, 71. Unfortunately, no records or photographic evidence of this production exist today.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 71. Tal'nikov, echoing Pitoev, also describes *Life's banquet* as a “symbolic play..., staged again in 'uslovnyi' devices in both conception and performance.” The biographer rightly notes this staging as a continuation of the style begun in the 1906-1907 season. See Tal'nikov, *op. cit.*, 368.

Я глубоко верю в то, что будущее все-таки  
принадлежит условному театру – театру,  
свободному от фанатических крайностей, но твердо  
ищущему сценической гармонии, театру  
драматических символов, тихими и простыми  
тонами выявляющему сокровенное биение  
души...<sup>105</sup>

Still, I deeply believe that the future belongs to  
*uslovnyi* theatre--to a theatre, free of fanatic extremes,  
but firmly seeking scenic harmony, to a theatre of  
dramatic symbols, revealing, in quiet and simple tones,  
the intimate beating of the soul.

Here Komissarzhevskaja's unusual trope, "beating of the soul" (*bienie dushi*), provides another lexical association to Przybyszewski. This phrase echoes the metaphoric, syncretic language in *Aphorisms and Preludes*, where Przybyszewski had described the soul as "an organ embracing infinite and immeasurable things, an organ in which heaven and earth merge," as well as that of *Totenmesse*, where the soul takes on fetal attributes, as it is nourished from the "heart of Universal Being."<sup>106</sup> In using

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<sup>105</sup> *Odesskie novosti*, 1. XI. 1909. Reprinted in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 471. This interview with N. Inber appeared on the day of the premier of *Life's Banquet*.

<sup>106</sup> "Душа есть орган, обнимающий вещи бесконечные и неизмеримые, орган, в котором сливаются небо и земля." Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 24. Cf. the imagery in an early passage from *Totenmesse* (1893): "Das war die Geburt der Seele. / Das Geschlecht liebte die Seele. An seiner hermaphroditischen Brust ließ es die Gehirnseele erstarken; es war für sie die Aorta, die von dem Herzen des Allseins ihr das Lebensblut zuführte; es war für sie die Nabelschnur, die sie mit der Allgebärmutter verband; es war der Linsenfokus, durch den die Seele sah..." [Thus *the birth of the soul came to be*. / And Sexuality fell in love with the soul. It allowed the mind-soul to grow stronger on its hermaphroditic breast; it was to the soul as an aorta, providing the lifeblood to it from the heart of universal being; it was for it as an umbilical cord, connecting it with the universal womb; it was for the soul as the focal point of a magnifying glass...] Przybyszewski, "Totenmesse," 11. See Appendix I, text 4.106, for Polish and Russian texts.

this expression, Komissarzhevskaja unconsciously indicates the catalyst which had set her on her path of searching in April 1902, Przybyszewski's booklet.

In continuing the exploration of the intersection of realities which the aesthetics of symbolism permit and encourage, Komissarzhevskaja had consciously decided to follow a particular aesthetic course despite the criticism which Petersburg critics had showered on her productions during the 1906-1907 season. Thus, a Przybyszewski play again helped provide a foundation for Komissarzhevskaja's further artistic development.<sup>107</sup>

#### **“Creativity's Last Chord”: Komissarzhevskaja's decision to leave the theatre**

Even Komissarzhevskaja's decision to leave the theatre, expressed in a farewell letter to her cast, became associated circumstantially with Przybyszewski. Only two weeks had passed between the premiere of *Life's Banquet* in Odessa on 1 November and its third performance on 15 November 1909 in Khar'kov. Some cast members

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<sup>107</sup> On its surface, *Life's Banquet* does not have the appearance of a symbolist work. Unlike *The Eternal Tale*, whose ambiguous temporal setting, “at the dawn of history,” combined with the author's description of Gothic scenic elements, invites a symbolic interpretation, *Life's Banquet* lacks such strong interpretative hints. Nor does the play carry strong symbolism in characterization in the same way that the character of Bronka in *Snow* or Sonka in *The Eternal Tale* do. There is, however, a mysterious old woman who appears in the final act, much in the Maeterlinckian tradition, who tells Hanka of a sacred “spring of salvation” located at the base of a wall of high cliffs. A symbolic personage such as this is also found in both *The Golden Fleece* and *Snow*, and Przybyszewski explains the function of this type of character, as well as his understanding of the “character-symbol” in his essay “On Drama and the Stage.” See Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene” 355-357. Therefore, despite the lack of overt signs pointing to *Life's Banquet* as a “symbolist” play, there are several dramatic and stylistic elements that encourage a symbolic interpretation of this work.

noticed this strange coincidence.<sup>108</sup> Odessa critics had been less than kind, and cast members noticed how the play and its bad reviews affected Komissarzhevskaiia. The actress had grown noticeably more reserved after the failures of both Hebbel's *Judith* and *Life's Banquet*.<sup>109</sup> That night in Khar'kov, after the performance, Komissarzhevskaiia wrote a farewell letter to her cast, and summoned one cast member, Aleksandr Mgebrov, to her room in the early morning hours of the 16 November to read her draft.<sup>110</sup> In her letter, she explained her decision to leave the theatre after the current tour:

То большое волнение, какое переживаю я, касаясь того, о чем скажу сейчас, помешало бы мне говорить и потому пишу. С теми из вас, кто работал и работает со мной, веря в меня —я должна, я хочу поделиться своим решением: по окончании этой поездки я уйду совсем из театра. Надолго ли, навсегда ли — зависит это будет не от меня. Я уйду потому, что театр в той форме, в какой он существует сейчас—перестал мне казаться нужным,

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<sup>108</sup> Narokov, *op. cit.*, 171.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 171; reprinted in Rudnitskii, *ZN*, 257. “Неудача «Пира жизни» внешне была еще менее ощутима, чем провал «Юдифа», но Вера Федоровна после этого спектакля еще больше замкнулась.” In Narokov's opinion, Komissarzhevskaiia's decision to leave the theatre matured after she “sober[ed] up from the intoxication of decadence.” [“В мыслях ее насувало отрезвление от декадентского угара и окончательно решение, о котором она сообщила нам только недели две спустя.”] This sentence does *not* appear in the Rudnitskii anthology. Given that cast opposition to the play was founded on its alleged “decadence,” Narokov's comment would point to the cast's partial role in effecting Komissarzhevskaiia's decision.

<sup>110</sup> A. A. Mgebrov, *Zhizn' v teatre* (Leningrad: 1929), 312-314; cited in Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 217. Mgebrov described Komissarzhevskaiia: “I was shocked by her appearance: her hair was in great disorder, her face was deathly pale and her eyes shone as never before with a feverishly intense brightness.” The decision was not a marketing ploy to improve tickets sale, for the decision remained a private one. Komissarzhevskaiia's adoring public was not directly informed. Vl. Podgornyi, “Pamiati,” in *Sbornik* (1931), 95.

и путь, которым я шла в исканиях новых форм, перестал мне казаться верным. Тем из вас, кому дорог во мне художник, я хочу сказать еще, что художник этот уходит из театра с душой, полной и больше чем когда-либо ясной, твердой веры в неиссякаемость и достижимость истинно прекрасного, и когда и как бы тихо вы ни постучались в эту душу – она услышит вас и откликнется на зов ваш.<sup>111</sup>

The great anxiety that I am experiencing touches on what I am going to say right now, [and] it would hinder me were I to speak [to you], that is why I am writing. I must—I want—to share my decision with those of you who have worked and are working with me: at the end of this tour I am leaving the theatre for good. Whether for a long time or forever doesn't depend on me. I am leaving because theatre in that form in which it exists right now—it seems to me, has ceased to be necessary, and the path, on which I walked in search of new forms, it seems, has ceased to be the right one. To those of you who appreciate me as an artist, I also want to say that this artist is leaving the theatre with a soul filled more than ever with the clear, steadfast faith in the inexhaustibility and attainability of the truly sublime, and when- and however quietly you knock at the door of this soul—it will listen to you and answer your summons.

This letter of resignation is a final piece of evidence illustrating Przybyszewski's impact on Komissarzhevskaja between 1902 and 1909. Even if we accept the premise that Komissarzhevskaja had decided to leave the stage before her tour even began, her declaration that she was leaving “because theatre in that form in which it exists right now...has ceased to be necessary,” is a direct, but long-festering, response to her cast's rejection of her attempt to fuse Przybyszewskian ideas on acting—the need for the actor to delve into the soul, while exploring emotional and

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<sup>111</sup> “To the theatre cast [15 November, 1909].” Al'tshuller, *op. cit.*, 177.

psychological motivations—with a Meierkhol'dian, symbolic approach to staging. This rejection had led her to believe that Przybyszewski's agonizing “path of the soul,” which had served her well since 1902, was no longer defensible in the face of trusted individuals who refused to see beyond the superficial content of a play to the deep truths which lay hidden beneath its surface. The inability and unwillingness of her cast to adopt new methods of acting and staging became the “straw that broke the camel's back.”

Just how did the critics in Odessa react to Komissarzhevskaja's bold experiment and first attempt at directing? How did these reviews drive Komissarzhevskaja to announce her decision to leave the stage when her tour had just begun? Critics attacked on all fronts, essentially attacking Komissarzhevskaja and her artistic vision. Many of these comments confirm the hypothesis that Komissarzhevskaja was either continuing in the tradition of Meierkhol'd, or was reacting to Faddeev-Bobyl', whose less radical ideas resembled those of Meierkhol'd. Faddeev-Bobyl' had advised directors: “The ideal stage production of Przybyszewski is a canvas in place of scenery, only the most necessary furniture, an absence of movement and gesture as far as possible, and, if one could emote and communicate only with the eyes, then even the absence of speech.”<sup>112</sup>

Critics first found fault with the play itself, thus indirectly criticizing Komissarzhevskaja's choice of repertoire. P. T. Gertso-Vinogradskii (pseud.

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<sup>112</sup> Faddeev- Bobyl', *op. cit.*, 171. “Идеальная постановка Пшибышевского на сцене это сукно, вместо декораций, только самая необходимая мебель, по возможности отсутствие движений и жестов и, если бы можно было его пережить и передать только глазами, то даже отсутствие звуков речи.”

Lohengrin), the reviewer of *Odesskie novosti* [*Odessa News*], was especially sarcastic in his review.<sup>113</sup> He was not necessarily a fan of Przbyszewski in the first place—five years earlier he had called *Snow* an “immoral” work.<sup>114</sup> Critiquing another troupe’s production of Przybyszewski’s drama *Mother* [*Matka*, Pol., *Mat*,’ Rus.] five weeks earlier, however, he had described that play positively.<sup>115</sup> Now he began his attack of *Life’s Banquet* with this brief, sarcastic introduction: “Stanislav Przybyszewski has written an unsuccessful play. ... Even the participation of V. F. Komissarzhevskaja did not save the play from its too evident failure. The only plus of this performance was its full house. 2000 [rubles] are certainly not scattered about on the street.”<sup>116</sup> However, I. Aleksandrovskii of *Odesskii listok* disagreed. He considered *Life’s Banquet* to be a “rapturous hymn to maternity.”<sup>117</sup>

The cast might have expected a kind review from *Odesskoe obozrenie* [*The Odessa Review*], which had reprinted the announcement from *Russkoe slovo* that

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<sup>113</sup> Loengrin [P. T. Gertso-Vinogradskii], “Teatr i muzyka. Sibiriakovskii teatr. *Pir zhizni*,” *Odesskie novosti*, no. 7956, 3. XI. 1909, p. 3-4. Gertso-Vinogradskii criticized the play’s combination of the traditional *piece à thèse* form (a “problem play” which propagandizes an idea and proposes its solution) with “modernist and symbolist” themes of redemption and fatalism as ultimately unsuccessful. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>114</sup> Loengrin, “Zigzagi. Stanislav Pshibshevskii,” *Iuzhnoe obozrenie* [Odessa], no. 2643, 24. X. 1904, p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> Loengrin, “Teatr i muzyka. Gorodskoi teatr. *Mat’ Pshibshevskago*,” *Odesskie novosti*, no. 7925, 26. IX. 1909, p. 4. The reviewer found the play to be a “special genre” akin to modernized melodrama, which deserved an intimate hall and refined acting.

<sup>116</sup> Loengrin, “*Pir zhizni*,” *Odesskie novosti*, no. 7956, 3. XI. 1909, p. 3. “Станислав Пшибышевский написал неудачную пьесу. [...] И даже участие В. Ф. Комиссаржевской не спасло пьесу от слишком очевидного провала. Единственный плюс спектакля – это полный сбор. Две тысячи, конечно, не валяются на улице.”

<sup>117</sup> I. Aleksandrovskii, “Teatr i muzyka. Teatral’nyia zametki. (Gastroli g-zhi Kommissarzhevskoi),” *Odesskii listok*, no. 251, 3. XI. 1909, p. 4.

Komissarzhevskaiia had obtained the rights to Przybyszewski's new play.<sup>118</sup> Despite this early publicity, critic V. Vorovskii, in noting the play's theme of maternity and love, opined that it was only a modernized version. Moreover, he complained that the play's "primitive" episodic structure, consisting of a series of scenes between paired characters, its "confused" finale, and "heavy, tiring (*utomliaiushchii*) language" only contributed to its failure.<sup>119</sup>

Gertso-Vinogradskii pointed out that the bad, stylized (*uslovnaia*) acting contributed greatly to the failure of the play, and that it looked unnatural in its funereal artificiality.<sup>120</sup>

Причиной неуспеха пьесы послужила, между прочим, и плохая игра актеров. [...] стилизованная игра участвующих была совсем неудачна и смахивала на скверную манерность, являлась лубочной подделкой под тонкость и художественность, звучала фальшиво. Не было искренности и была неестественность позировок, жестов, интонаций. И среди этой всеобщей антихудожественной, не проникнутой, не согретой искренностью обстановки игра г-жа Комиссаржевской терялась и расплывалась. [...]

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<sup>118</sup> "Novaia p'esa St. Pshibyshevskago," *Odesskoe obozrenie*, no. 532, 26. IX. 1909, p. 3.

<sup>119</sup> V. [V. Vorovskii], "Teatr i muzyka. Gastrol'i V. F. Komissarzhevskoi. *Pir zhizni S. Pshibyshevskago*," *Odesskoe obozrenie*, no. 563, 3. XI. 09, p. 4.

<sup>120</sup> Resing provides a simple definition of *uslovnaia* acting as "stylized" or "conventional." ("conventional" does not adequately interpret this sense, see the discussion of *uslovnost'* in the Introduction). According to Resing, this style combines the "emotional impact of *prostaiia* acting with the self-conscious theatricality of *effektnaia* acting." Resing, *op. cit.*, 193-194. See her brief discussion on Komissarzhevskaiia's developing use of an *uslovnaia* style during the 1906-1907 season, pp. 83-92.

Но почему пьеса названа «Пир жизни», когда ее положения и ее смысл дают ей бесповоротное заглавие «Пира смерти»?<sup>121</sup>

The bad acting, by the way, also served as a reason for the play's failure. [...] the stylized acting of the participants was completely unsuccessful and resembled bad affectation, [it] appeared like a cheap dime-store imitation of refinement and artistry, [and] sounded artificial. There was no sincerity and there was an unnaturalness in the poses, gestures, and intonations. Mme Komissarzhevskaiia's acting was lost and diffused amidst all of this general anti-artistic surroundings, neither penetrated nor warmed by sincerity. [...]

But why was the play called *The Banquet of Life*, when its attitude and sense give it the irrevocable title *The Banquet of Death*?

Aleksandrovskii described a number of problems with the acting. For example, Komissarzhevskaiia shouted “at one level (*po odnomu slovu*)—without flashes of living emotion, without hints of animation.” According to the critic, the other women in the cast performed in much the same manner, and the men fared just as badly: Feona, who had been a member of Komissarzhevskaiia's troupe for several years, was derided for his “passionate babbling for some-kind of ‘unearthly love,’” Narokov didn't move from his place, and Zakushniak howled as if in a frenzy (*neistovo*).<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Loengrin, “*Pir zhizni*,” *Odesskie novosti*, 3. XI. 1909, no. 7956, p. 4. Partially reprinted in Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 468-469.

<sup>122</sup> I. Aleksandrovskii, “Teatr i muzyka. Teatral'nyiia zametki. (Gastroli g-zhi Kommissarzhevskoi),” *Odesskii listok*, no. 251, 3. XI.1909, p. 4. D'iakonov, who briefly mentions both the *Novosti* and *Listok* reviews, erroneously states that the reviews were contradictory (!?), a circumstance, he says, that often happened when Komissarzhevskaiia toured. Such conflicting reviews, according to D'iakonov, were the actor-reader's destiny. A phrase he attributes to *Odesskii listok*, that the actors

Vorovskii noted that the play left the audience dissatisfied. Komissarzhevskaiia's acting talent, inspired as it was, "could not raise the dead" ("*Vsia sila ee vdokhvennogo talanta ne mogla ozhivit' mertvogo.*") Vorovskii noted that her voice and fluidity of gesture almost made the shouts and poses of the rest of the cast seem artistic.<sup>123</sup> However, he added, "It is impossible to say anything good about the other performers."<sup>124</sup> These comments about acting thus highlighted the difference in styles between that of her company, whose style Gertso-Vinogradskii had already called "artificial," and her own, presumably mature, post-Meierkhol'dian, *uslovnyi* ("stylized") style. It is hard to imagine that Komissarzhevskaiia, who had invested so much energy and effort into so many elements of this production, did not take these comments personally.

The Odessa reviewers also criticized the stylized set design, the creation of which Komissarzhevskaiia had taken an active part. Gertso-Vinogradskii, for all his complaints about the stylized acting, had actually liked the scenery of the last act. He thought it had been "conceived and executed with undoubtedly artistic taste."<sup>125</sup>

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walked around "as if spectres," (*kak privedeniia*), was actually made by F. M., the critic of the Khar'kov newspaper *Iuzhnyi krai*, on 12 November 1909. That review is generally positive. See D'iakonov, *Venok*, 71-72. Unfortunately, none of the reviewers identified an actor with his role. Feona probably played the role of Waclaw. See the program of the Novyi dramatičeskii teatr in *Obozrenie teatrov*, no. 1267, 20. XII. 1910, p. 32.

<sup>123</sup> "Только пластика ее жеста, благородный, волнующий душу тембр ее голоса могли сделать художественными те движения, крики, позы, которые у других участников подчас граничили с комизмом." V., *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>125</sup> Loengrin, "Pir zhizni," *Odesskie novosti*, 3. XI. 1909, no. 7956, p. 4.

Aleksandrovskii framed his criticism in the context of a designing challenge, which this production had failed to meet. He admitted that this play by the “respected Polish dramatist” lacked stage action and its episodic, narrative form created special problems for directors. Komissarzhevskaiia’s stylized technique, however, created a “special boredom, deadly boredom,” the sets were “monotonous,” and the critic was amazed by the minimal set furnishings— only “two or three chairs, and nothing more!” he wrote.<sup>126</sup> Vorovskii agreed with Aleksandrovskii that the sets were boring, but offered advice to the company’s directors. In sarcastically suggesting that the sets—or lack of them—did not “strike the eye,” the critic of *Odesskoe obozrenie* acknowledged that the monochromatic cloth that substituted for walls and draped the furniture might be appropriate for other plays where the action takes place beyond time and space.<sup>127</sup>

How are we to interpret this criticism? How did Komissarzhevskaiia respond to it personally? We have suggested that these reviews hastened her decision, or at least, the announcement of it, to leave the theatre. Although we shall never know exactly how she and the other cast members responded to these scathing reviews, we do know that Komissarzhevskaiia did read some provincial newspapers during this tour.<sup>128</sup> However, it is highly unlikely that a cast of 15 or 16 actors were entirely divorced from the publicity which surrounded the tour. We also know that Komissarzhevskaiia was extremely fatigued during this tour, although it is impossible

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<sup>126</sup> Aleksandrovskii, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>127</sup> V., *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>128</sup> D'iakonov, *Venok*, 79.

to tell whether this weariness was due to the mental stress of this particular role or the physical stress of a demanding rehearsal and performance schedule.<sup>129</sup> This fact was acknowledged retrospectively by audience members such as Vera Iureneva, who described Komissarzhevskaiia as looking pale as she left the theatre.<sup>130</sup> No photographs exist of *Life's Banquet*, so we must rely on memoirs for evidence of cast response to these overtly negative reviews.

Actor and Przybyszewski translator Georgii Pitoev called *Life's Banquet* “creativity’s last chord.”<sup>131</sup> Zonov respectfully only concentrated on Komissarzhevskaiia’s role as director and her attempt to make this play “a test of the future school” (*opyt budushchei shkoly*) which she was planning.<sup>132</sup> In eulogizing Komissarzhevskaiia’s abilities, Zonov echoed Przybyszewski by noting that her work was a result of her “deepest knowledge of the human soul and a prophetic gift of clairvoyance.”<sup>133</sup> D’iakonov, a company member, certainly could not blame Komissarzhevskaiia’s and Zonov’s direction, or the cast’s performance. Instead, he blamed the Odessa audience for not understanding the play, stating that Komissarzhevskaiia’s brand of theatre did not need the usual display of approbation –

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<sup>129</sup> D’iakonov, *ibid.*, 69. Komissarzhevskaiia performed ten nights straight (24 October-2 November), with rehearsals for *Life's Banquet* in the mornings.

<sup>130</sup> Vera Iureneva, *Zapiski aktrisy* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosizdat Iskusstvo, 1946), 83.

<sup>131</sup> Pitoev, *op. cit.*, 106. “Последний аккорд творчества—«Пир жизни».”

<sup>132</sup> Zonov, *op. cit.*, 111.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 111. “В общей работе, вместе с ее глубочайшим знанием души человеческой, вместе с каким то пророческим даром ясновидения, невольно поражало в Вере Федоровне неисчерпаемое богатство приемов сценического выражения в переживаниях действующих лиц.” Cf. Przybyszewski on clairvoyance, Pshibyshevskii, “O drame,” *PSS*, t. IV, 344.

her goal was only to convey both an author's and director's ideas. Soon, however, according to D'iakonov, there would be an audience who would understand.<sup>134</sup> In declaring that Komissarzhevskaja did not necessarily seek public acclaim, D'iakonov was echoing Przybyszewski's 1902 description of the true artist.<sup>135</sup>

Komissarzhevskaja next staged *Life's Banquet* in Khar'kov on 10 November 1909, after a short run of two days in Kishinev. Reviews of this first performance thus appeared three days before Komissarzhevskaja gathered her cast together to announce her fateful decision. This time critics were kinder, and F. M., the critic of *Iuzhnyi krai*, generally praised both the play and the production. Although it covered the "usual" themes such as individual weakness in the face of instinct and the revenge of conscience, Przybyszewski's play was written "delicately, elegantly, symbolic in places, artistically." "Each character," he continued, "is a bundle of bared nerves, some kind of embodiment of strained emotions, moods, [and] conscience."<sup>136</sup> F. M. further recognized the spirit of the "modernized" staging, but opined that the play did not necessarily require it.<sup>137</sup>

Unlike the Odessa critics, the Khar'kov reviewer found the acting style not monotonous, but "melodious" (*vse artisty igrali v odin napevnyi ton*). The actors'

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<sup>134</sup> D'iakonov, *Venok*, 71. Writing with the benefit of hindsight, D'iakonov alludes to the audience and critics in Khar'kov, where the drama was more successful.

<sup>135</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 11.

<sup>136</sup> F. M., "Teatr i muzyka. Malyi teatr. Gastrol'i V. F. Komissarzhevskoi," *Iuzhnyi krai*, no. 9837, 12. XI. 1909, p. 6. "Пьеса Пшибышевского написано [sic] тонко, изящно, местами символично, художественно, и каждое действующее лицо является к ней комком обнаженных нервов, каким-то вплющением обостренных чувств, настроений, совести."

<sup>137</sup> F. M., *ibid.*, p. 6. "Такая пьеса не требовала, конечно, особо модернизированного исполнения, ...."

passionate, strong style, “with sorrow in [their] voices and suffering in [their] faces,” he thought, made them seem not like people, but spectres. Thus, unlike the Odessa critics, F. M. recognized that these characters, through stylized declamation and gesture were portraying more than individuals in this plane of reality. F. M. also found Komissarzhevskaja's acting to be fitting to the production. Her voice was “versatile,” showing nuances of emotion, and her gestures and poses communicated Hanka's suffering well. However, although Komissarzhevskaja had made a captivating impression, the critic believed that the actress “really had abused modernism too much.”<sup>138</sup> The critic levelled the same complaint at the other cast members, who also overindulged in “modernism,” but not to the same degree. On the other hand, Narokov, who had spoken against the play, and who *Odesskii listok* had described as rooted to one spot, now acted more simply and naturally.<sup>139</sup> Perhaps buoyed by such a review, the company staged *Life's Banquet* once more in Khar'kov, on 15 November. It was that day that Komissarzhevskaja wrote her farewell letter.

Despite the harsh Odessa reviews and the mixed criticism from Khar'kov, Komissarzhevskaja persisted and continued staging *Life's Banquet*, in contrast to her production of Friedrich Hebbel's *Judith*, which she dropped after eight performances.<sup>140</sup> The next performance of *Life's Banquet* was in Poltava, where her

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<sup>138</sup> F.M., *ibid.*, p. 6. “...и хотя производила сильное, захватывающее впечатление, но все же слишком уж злоупотребляла модернизмом.”

<sup>139</sup> F.M., *ibid.*, p. 6; cf. Aleksandrovskii, *op. cit.*, p. 4. Perhaps someone had read the Odessa review and decided to change Narokov's “static” blocking.

<sup>140</sup> Hebbel's Romantic tragedy opened in Moscow on 10 September 1909, in a translation by Fedor Komissarzhevskii. This production also met with some sarcastic questioning by critics. *Russkoe slovo* asked, “What does she [VFK] want to say?”

production of Przybyszewski's new play grossed more than both Ibsen's *Nora* and Maeterlinck's *Sœur Beatrice*.<sup>141</sup> A brief review in Ekaterinoslav's *Iuzhnaia zaria* [*Southern Dawn*] praised Komissarzhevskaja's acting, which drew the crowd's attention to Hanka's experiences, but hinted that the last act may have been unsatisfactory due to a lack of "vital drama."<sup>142</sup> Sometimes critics seemed perplexed by *Life's Banquet*, but still greeted Komissarzhevskaja warmly.<sup>143</sup>

No matter what the press, audiences still flocked to see Komissarzhevskaja in Przybyszewski's new play. In Baku, *Bakinets* reported on 28 December that no tickets remained for either performance of *Life's Banquet* (30 December) or Ibsen's *Nora*.<sup>144</sup> After performances in Ashkabad (9-11 January, 1910) and Samarkand (13-15 January) the troupe arrived in Tashkent. In Samarkand members of the troupe had visited a local carpet bazaar; after the troupe arrived in Tashkent it became evident that several members were ill. Sickness quickly overtook four members of the cast. Komissarzhevskaja ministered to the ill. On 20 January 1910, she herself fell ill, and on 22 January typhus was mentioned as the possible cause of the outbreak among the

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and *Iuzhnyi krai* commented, "It is impossible to consider Mme Komissarzhevskaja's Iudif as one of her best." See Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 454, 466.

<sup>141</sup> "Teatr i muzyka," *Poltavskii vestnik*, no. 2102, 25. IX. 1909, p. 3. The receipts for shows up to that date were as follows: *Pir zhizni*, 1292 r., *Boi babochek*, 1285 r., *Nora*, 1163 r., and *Sestra Beatrisa*, 679 r. Komissarzhevskaja's total box office in Poltava was reported at 5310 r. 05 k. for five productions.

<sup>142</sup> [Illegible (L. Georgievich?)], "Teatr i muzyka. Zimnii teatr," *Iuzhnaia zaria*, 1. XII. 1909, no. 1058, p. 3.

<sup>143</sup> D'iakonov, *Venok*, 98.

<sup>144</sup> Grigorii Dze, "Teatr i muzyka. U V. F. Kommissarzhevskoi," *Bakinets*, no. 58, 28. XII. 1909, p. 4.

company members.<sup>145</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia performed Ostrovskii's *Dowerless Bride* [*Bespridannitsa*] on the 24th with a fever, but the performance of *Sœur Beatrice* was cancelled the following evening. Although she was feeling worse, Komissarzhevskaiia managed to perform Sudermann's *Die Schmetterlingsschlacht* on the 26th. A doctor now diagnosed smallpox, not typhus, as the cause of the outbreak among her actors.<sup>146</sup> The scheduled performance for the 27th was *Life's Banquet*, but it had to be cancelled when Komissarzhevskaiia, now also stricken with smallpox and lying in bed, was too weak to perform. On 10 February 1910, she died.<sup>147</sup>

Georgii Pitoev offered a fitting eulogy to the actress à la Przybyszewski:

...What will be? Everthing in life's past is smashed, everything is destroyed, and what lies ahead?... The unknown.

And a thousand times the thought will stop her, it will not allow her to destroy so horribly everything that is life. But Hanka walks on.—Faith... No. Hope?.. No... There are no words—the Banquet of Life. A banquet—humanity is celebrating. A banquet! The human spirit is carried by the wind toward heaven and

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<sup>145</sup> D'iakonov, *Venok*, 113-114.

<sup>146</sup> Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 492.

<sup>147</sup> Borovsky, *op. cit.*, 218-219; D'iakonov, *Venok*, 113-114, 120. Turkin's account is slightly different, stating that the actress had a headache in the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup>, but went out to dinner in the afternoon with a childhood friend, A. A. Frei, who was now living in Tashkent. Two hours before the performance she asked tour manager P. A. Rudnev that the play be changed to Sudermann's comedy, something easier to perform. If this is indeed the case, Komissarzhevskaiia would have performed that play two nights in a row, possibly acknowledging the immense strain that the role of Hanka had on the actress. See Turkin, *op. cit.*, 170-171. Zonov's personal account, on the other hand, states that Komissarzhevskaiia's temperature on the 27<sup>th</sup> was 41° C (105.8°F). If this was her temperature on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup>, rather than in the evening right before *Life's Banquet* was cancelled, it is a medical condition under which few but the strongest would have been able to carry on normal activities, such as going out for dinner or visiting the bazaar as Turkin claimed. See Rybakova, *Letopis'*, 492.

into the depths of the earth! Humanity is celebrating!..  
There is life here—life for the Sublime, for Happiness  
and Woe, Light, Suffering... and now—The  
Banquet!!.<sup>148</sup>

In 1909, seven years after her first acquaintance with Przybyszewski's aesthetic views, Komissarzhevskaja rose to defend his drama, *Life's Banquet*, against cast opposition. During those intervening years Komissarzhevskaja had created a form of personal investment in Przybyszewski, as she privately interpreted Przybyszewski's "path of the soul" as a call for the actor to focus not on a character's external physical characteristics, but on internal, emotional features. Przybyszewski's dramas marked Komissarzhevskaja's introduction to symbolist theatre and presented her acting challenges with their psychologically complex characters. The need for a new type of actor and a new school to train that actor was thus born as Komissarzhevskaja faced her own challenges, and she realized that her acting partners also needed to develop their skills in the same way.

The possibility that Komissarzhevskaja and Przybyszewski may have personally met in Warsaw and discussed drama or aesthetics in 1904 remains unconfirmed. However, there were other forms of communication between the two. Unfortunately, personal connections between the actress and the dramatist, as

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<sup>148</sup> Pitoev, *op. cit.*, 105. "Что будет? В жизни прошлого все разбито, все уничтожено, а что впереди?.. Безвестное... / И тысячи раз мысль остановит, не даст так страшно убивать все, что есть жизнь. Но Ганка идет. — Вера... Нет. Надежда?.. Нет. Нет слов — Пир жизни. Пир – пирует человек. Пир! Несется вихрем к небу и в глубины земли дух человека! Пирует человек!.. Есть жизнь здесь—жизнь для прекрасного, для счастья и горя, света, страдания... а вот — Пир!!."

evidenced by correspondence, indicate that these relations always remained on the level of professional dealings. Komissarzhevskaja needed new plays to perform in, and Przybyszewski needed the income from production rights.

Although Przybyszewski's name may have been absent from Komissarzhevskaja's correspondence, he was very much a part of the cultural fabric and of her life as an independent actor. When Przybyszewski's essay "On Drama and the Stage" appeared in 1904 and 1905, there is good reason to believe that she read the work, although it is not mentioned in her correspondence. Komissarzhevskaja staged *The Eternal Tale* in 1906, and in early 1907 was forced to defend that work, as well as the rest of her 1906-1907 season, against a charge of decadence, an accusation she adamantly rejected. Comments Komissarzhevskaja made at that time about searching for the "eternal" characteristic in her character's soul hint at the lingering influence of Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms and Preludes*.

Now, in 1909, Komissarzhevskaja was again forced to defend Przybyszewski's work against charges of "decadence." She defended her choice of new repertoire because of her continued strong personal investment in the play, as well as because of pragmatic considerations. This argument is based on three facts: first, that she had tried to obtain the performance rights to another Przybyszewski drama, *Snow*, in 1903; second, her belief that Przybyszewski had written the main female role in *Life's Banquet* especially for her; and third, the recognition that she had paid the Polish dramatist 500 rubles or more to perform the new play in Russia, at a time when she was suffering financial hardship herself.

The comments she made at that time, as recorded by two cast members, one, a supporter of her choice (D'iakonov) and the other (Narokov), an opponent, provide strong evidence of Przybyszewski's continued presence in Komissarzhevskaja's view of art and a heretofore unrecognized resonance in her approach to acting during the last years of her life. Many of these notions resonate from Przybyszewski's 1904 essay "On Drama and the Stage," with which Komissarzhevskaja was certainly familiar.

Komissarzhevskaja's advice, urging her cast to look inward, and to feel the play not with the mind, but with the soul as she herself had done, mirrors Przybyszewski's own explication of the old art as "the path of the mind" and the new art as "the path of the soul." Her emphasis on the need both to understand a play's psychological moments, reverberates in its general emphasis on psychology with "On Drama and the Stage," while the phrase "psychological moments" echoes specific comments made by Faddeev-Bobyl' in his 1908 article, "Maeterlinck and Przybyszewski." Komissarzhevskaja's call for the actor to "merge" with the character resonates harmoniously with similar ideas found in "On Drama and the Stage." According to Przybyszewski, emotional identification with a character was a requisite for an actor in the new drama, in order to create truthful characters. In these ways, Przybyszewski's notions of art became a catalyst which moved Komissarzhevskaja forward in her artistic development, while the soul became an experimental space within which the actress could investigate both the self and the portrayed character.

Komissarzhevskaja's production of *Life's Banquet* became a workshop or experimental space in which she could apply Przybyszewski's ideas about acting, and possibly those of Faddeev-Bobyl'. Had she not died in February 1910, Komissarzhevskaja would probably have erected a physical representation of that experimental space in St. Petersburg, a future school where she sought to educate "new people." In turn, these new people would grow to be the "new actors," able to perform in the non-representational (*uslovnyi*) theatre of the future, revealing the "intimate beating of the soul."

In the following two chapters, we shall examine how Meierkhol'd used Przybyszewski's works not as an "experiential space" to confront personal demons, but as an "experimental space" within which to create "new forms" for the new art which Przybyszewski and others were advocating. As we shall see, these experiments also involved Przybyszewski's "path of the soul."

**Chapter V.**  
**PRZYBYSZEWSKI AND MEIERKHOL'D:**  
**SOUL AS EXPERIMENTAL SPACE**

—I am now under the hypnosis of aesthetic passions—I  
am engrossed in reading Przybyszewski....

Vsevolod Meierkhol'd, November 1901<sup>1</sup>

Who can forget those, for example, like ...Przybyszewski  
and his aristocratic understanding of art in general  
and of the theatrical [art], in particular.

Vsevolod Meierkhol'd, "On the Theatre," (1908)<sup>2</sup>

These two entries, the first of which appeared in Meierkhol'd's notebooks, and the second, which appeared in his essay on theatre, provide only a hint of the impact which Przybyszewski had on Meierkhol'd in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Superficially, they seem unimportant and hold little promise for scholarly discussion.

However, if we examine Meierkhol'd's biography and his development as a creative artist and director during this period, we find these simple entries begin to describe a path of exploration and experimentation closely associated with Przybyszewski's works and aesthetic views. Moreover, this biographical examination points to the probable source or sources of Przybyszewski's hypnotic attraction.

This chapter briefly outlines events in Meierkhol'd's life which anticipate his affinity for Przybyszewski and his views. Elements in Meierkhol'd's early biography,

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<sup>1</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 430. RGALI, f. 998, op. 1, ed. khr. 766, l. 76-76 ob.

<sup>2</sup> "Да и можно ли забыть таких, например, как [Антон Крайний, который в заметках своих о театре («Вопросы жизни», «Новый путь») смело порвал со старыми театральными традициями и свободно направил взор на новые предвидения в области драматического искусства, или] Пшибышевский с его аристократическим пониманием искусства вообще и театрального в особенности." V. E. Meierkhol'd, "O teatre," in *Stat'i, pis'ma, rechi, besedy, ch. I (1891-1917)* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1968), 124. Future references will be appear as "Stat'i."

as in Komissarzhevskaja's, such as their interest in the psychology of their character, suggest that their affinity for Przybyszewski arose from the same circumstances. The current discussion will continue under that assumption. However, the re-creation of Meierkhol'd's affinity presents several difficulties. As demonstrated, Nikolai Khodotov introduced Komissarzhevskaja to Przybyszewski and his aesthetic views by giving her a copy of *Aphorisms and Preludes*. In contrast, there are several possible agents who could have introduced Meierkhol'd to Przybyszewski's work, and the exact work which so "hypnotized" Meierkhol'd in 1901 remains obscure.

This chapter examines both the sources for Meierkhol'd's "hypnosis" and members of his circle who may have influenced his reaction. At the risk of forcing Meierkhol'd into the same biographical rubric as Komissarzhevskaja, this chapter then traces the possible impact of this "hypnosis" as a contributing factor in Meierkhol'd's departure from the Moscow Art Theatre in early 1902. In a discussion of one of Meierkhol'd's early pronouncements on the "new art" in September 1902, we reject the argument that Briusov's well-known essay "An Unnecessary Truth" was his only possible source, hypothesizing that Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms and Preludes* is also a contributing, and, more likely, source for Meierkhol'd's developing interest in the soul. Close attention is paid to the concepts of "synthesis" and "symbolization" in Meierkhol'd's framing of a new artistic vision for his new company, The Company of Russian Dramatic Artists. In December 1903 this company, now renamed the Association of New Drama [*Tovarishchestvo Novoi Dramy*], would mark a significant stage in the development of non-representational theatre with

Meierkhol'd's production of Przybyszewski's *Snow*. A close examination of that production will be the subject of Chapter VI.

### **Formative years: building a susceptibility to hypnosis**

Although Meierkhol'd was born outside the cultural capitals of Moscow and St. Petersburg, his background created a foundation for strong interest in non-Russian culture. Lutheran by heritage, the Meyergold family spoke German in the home and maintained ties to Prussia and its culture. Meierkhol'd's father, a vodka distiller who spoke Russian poorly, was drawn more to life abroad than to merchant interests in Penza. As a consequence, even before he moved to Moscow, Meierkhol'd's heritage and family life provided possible access to German-language newspapers and journals in which articles by or about Przybyszewski, a major figure in *Junges Deutschland*, appeared.<sup>3</sup>

Like Komissarzhevskaja, Meierkhol'd's childhood was filled with music and theatre, and he emphasized many elements of this environment in his 1913 biography. For example, as a young boy, Meierkhol'd spent much of his free time in Penza visiting circuses and *balagany* (puppet shows).<sup>4</sup> Almost everyone in the family studied music, and his parents were frequent visitors to the local theatre, where they

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<sup>3</sup> Fel'dman, *ibid.*, 25. For Przybyszewski's first critical essays in German, see, for example, the essays "Psychischer Naturalismus" in *Freie Bühne* 5, nos. 1 and 2 (1894), "Mysterien" in *Die Zukunft* 8, no. 105 (1894), "Notturmo" in *Die Gesellschaft* 11, no. 9, (1895), "In hac lacrymarum valle..." in *PAN* 2, no. 2 (1896), "Ein Unbekannter" in *Die Kritik* 3, nos. 83, 85, 86, 87 (1896) or "Conrad Ansorges Liederdichtungen" in *PAN* 3, no. 1 (1897). See the bibliography of Przybyszewski's German works in Klim, *op. cit.*, 336-337.

<sup>4</sup> A common event at Russian fairs.

rented a box during the winter season. According to Meierkhol'd, the children often watched melodramas there, and at home, they often staged masquerades and plays.<sup>5</sup>

Certain painful events of Meierkhol'd's youth remained untold in the 1913 biography, but were hinted at in later versions. Such is the case with Meierkhol'd's treatment for neurasthenia. As in Komissarzhevskaja's life, an adolescent love affair strongly affected Meierkhol'd psychologically and likely contributed to his later affinity for Przybyszewski's theories and works, with their themes of morality, guilt, and suffering. Although the facts are unclear, Meierkhol'd admitted in a 1921 biography that his "period of sexual maturity," age 17-18, was not only an "agonizing, but tragic" time.<sup>6</sup> He had fallen deeply in love with a factory girl, who "awakened his flesh," leaving him psychologically scarred.<sup>7</sup> In the summer of 1892 he traveled to Riga to receive treatment.<sup>8</sup> In his 1921 biography Meierkhol'd bitterly reflected on his stay. He wrote, "The psychiatrists (*psikhiatry*) to whom I turned

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<sup>5</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 25, 26, 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 45. A biography prepared for the Communist Party, which was then purging its ranks.

<sup>7</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 45. "А работница с завода, бессоновская крестьянка, разбудившая мою плоть, та, по следам которой я ходил и в дождь, и в холод за три версты, в пригород. Тут ставлю точку. Не рассказать в пяти строках той большой драмы, которая разыгралась в жизни моей в этот период половой зрелости, да и не нужно это знать Комиссии по очистке партии." The details of their relationship remain unknown. According to Fel'dman, here Meierkhol'd alludes to a drama which he had begun writing in mid-1899, in which Aleksei Mikhailovich Alëshin, the son of a vodka dealer, falls in love with Masha, a factory girl. When the relationship becomes serious, Masha asks the boy for a note, guaranteeing that he would not leave her if a child were born. This devastates Alëshin, who believed their love was only on a platonic level. See the drafts and Fel'dman's notes, published under the title "Alëshin liubit Mashu" ("Aleshin Loves Masha"), in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 257-262.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

didn't understand anything. They received their fee from me and prescribed bromide.”<sup>9</sup> Soon after his stay in Riga and during his confirmation studies, Meierkhol'd underwent a religious crisis. After a brief interest in Catholicism, he chose to convert to Orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup> In honor of his favorite author, Vsevolod Garshin (1855-1888), Karl-Kazimir-Teodor took the writer's first name as his own, and became known thereafter as Vsevolod Meierkhol'd.<sup>11</sup> Meierkhol'd later considered these actions to be an attempt to avenge himself on a pastor who filled his mind with “false morality” and to vex his brothers and sisters, who showed him no compassion as he suffered.<sup>12</sup>

Meierkhol'd's interest in the connection between psychology and acting began as early as 1895. This interest in psychology would become especially apparent in his correspondence with Chekhov several years later. While there is some doubt as to the exact method Meierkhol'd used to create a character in his declamation of A. N. Apukhtin's verse monologue “The Insane Man” (*Sumasshedshii*, 1890), on 24 August

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<sup>9</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 46.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. Meierkhol'd claimed he was drawn to Catholicism by the organ music and bells. In his 1921 biography, Meierkhol'd does not mention his interest in Catholicism. *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 46. Przybyszewski was also familiar with this Russian author through his close association with the Swedish writer Ola Hansson, who considered Garshin's works to be “the Russian soul in its noblest expression.” Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Moi Współcześni. Wśród Obcych* (Warsaw: Inst. Wydaw. Biblioteka Polska, 1926), 84. It is unknown at this time exactly which order Meierkhol'd's given names follow, or why the discrepancy over this fact exists between the subject and his later biographers. I follow the use of Feldman, *op. cit.*, 25. However, following Volkov's (1929) example, both Hoover (1974) and Leach (1989) state that the boy was christened Karl-Teodor-Kazimir Meierkhol'd. See Volkov, *op. cit.*, 7; Hoover, *op. cit.*, 5; Leach, *op. cit.*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 46.

1895, there can be no doubt that Meierkhol'd became aware of the intimate relationship that can be created between actor and a role. Przybyszewski would later advocate methods to achieve this type of intimate relationship in his essay, "On Drama and the Stage." Apukhtin's monologue was popular among both amateurs and stars of the popular stage thanks to the "abrupt psychological shifts" (*rezkie psikhologicheskie perepady*) required for its proper declamation.<sup>13</sup> At that time, Meierkhol'd wrote to his future wife, Ol'ga Munt, that preparing for the role literally almost drove him to insanity. Meierkhol'd recounted his experience:

Да и не мудрено, каждую строчку я переживал.  
 Одним словом, я чувствовал себя сумасшедшим.  
 Дал себе слово никогда больше не читать этого  
 стихотворения... Слава богу еще, что публика  
 хорошо меня приняла. Встретила с  
 аплодисментами; были овации, говорят, и потом, я  
 их не помню. Все как в тумане.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This poem originally appeared in *Vestnik Evropy*, no. 12 (1890), and later was published in a collection in 1893. Aleksei Apukhtin (1840-1893) was a classmate of Petr I. Chaikovskii (1840-1893) at the St. Petersburg School of Jurisprudence. Apukhtin's poems are known today chiefly through the efforts of Chaikovskii, who set some of his poems to music, as did Rakhmaninov and Arenskii. See A. N. Apukhtin, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1991), 32, 249-252, 404. The inclusion of excerpts from Przybyszewski's prose poems in *Chets-Deklamator*, a popular collection of "poems, stories, and monologues" aimed at actors and amateurs for "reading in variety shows, in drama courses, literary evenings and so forth." See *Chets-Deklamator*, t. II, izd. 2-e, (Kiev: 1907), which includes "V doline slez" (207, trans. unknown), "Iz 'Belykh nochei'" (329, trans. M. N. Semenov), "Introibo" (353, trans. V. Vysotskii), and "U moria" (402, trans. M. N. Semenov); and *Chets-Deklamator*, t. III, izd. 3-e (Kiev: 1913), which includes "Izvechnyi istochnik" (539, trans. E. Tropovskii) as well as the previously published excerpts "Introibo" and "U moria." The inclusion of three excerpts from Przybyszewski's "By the Sea" ("Nad morzem," 1899, Pol.) in the 1907 edition and their use six years later are proof of the continued popularity of that work.

<sup>14</sup> Volkov, *op. cit.*, 41-42. "Этот случай с чтением „Сумасшедшего“, вызванный переживанием каждой строки, впоследствии отразился на будущем отрицании

It's really no wonder I experienced every line. In a word, I thought I was insane. I promised myself I would never again read this poem... Still, thank God the public received me well. They greeted [me] with applause; they say there were ovations, but then, I don't remember. Everything was in a fog.

Scholars generally accept Volkov's opinion that Meierkhol'd's comments foreshadow his rejection of this particular element of the naturalist method of acting in favor of later, non-representational methods.<sup>15</sup> If this claim is true, this rejection of the naturalist method could suggest that Meierkhol'd created his character based on the close observation of other neurasthenics in Riga while he was a patient. As a result, the created character was closer to life than the young actor could tolerate. However, it is unclear just what Meierkhol'd meant by his comment, "I experienced every line," or by what means the nineteen-year-old amateur provincial actor could have arrived at such a strong, psychological commitment to his character. This type of inner, emotional attachment to the role was unheard of even among the progressive companies in Moscow, such as the amateur Society of Art and Literature.

A comparison with another, more experienced actor's abilities will serve to highlight the problem of defining Meierkhol'd's acting method at this time. Even Konstantin Stanislavskii, a member of the Society, writing in 1924 of his own acting abilities during the 1890s, recognized the lack of a genuine *psychological* connection between the actor and character and the actor's dependence on external factors to

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Мейерхольдом системы натуралистического переживания, как системы пригодной для игры на сцене."

<sup>15</sup> Hoover, *op. cit.*, 5-6; Leach, *op. cit.*, 4. Volkov's claim is also paraphrased in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 109.

build a character. Stanislavskii himself would not make that complete psychological connection until 1906, when he began to develop “the system.” At first, Stanislavskii relied on what he called an “external truth” (*vneshniaia pravda*). Describing the first dramatic production he ever directed, Tolstoi’s *Fruits of Enlightenment* [*Plody prosveshcheniia*, 1891], Stanislavskii explained: “But this external truth I was searching for helped me to create a true, interesting *mise-en-scène*, which touched on the truth: the truth excited feeling, and feeling stimulated creative intuition.”<sup>16</sup> This search for external truth, Stanislavskii argued, resulted in the use of aristocrats, servants and peasants to play characters related to their own social *milieu*. By employing amateurs to recreate their own social positions on the stage, Stanislavskii artificially created “actors” for their “embodied roles.” Although this strategy turned out to be a successful, it was, in Stanislavskii’s words, an indirect path to the “artist’s soul—from the external to the internal, from the body to the soul, from embodiment to the experience (*ot voploshcheniia k perezhivaniuu*), from form to content.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> K. S. Stanislavskii, *Moia zhizn' v iskusstve* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1972), 166. Cf. the 1924 English translation by J. J. Robbins, Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life In Art* (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts, 1952), 208. Further citations appear as “*My Life*.”

<sup>17</sup> Stanislavskii, *Moia zhizn'*, 166, 167. Cf. Stanislavskii, *My Life*, 208, 210. Several concepts here, i.e., “soul of artist,” and “from form to content,” point to the later possible influence of Valerii Briusov (1873-1924) on Stanislavskii sometime after 1902, at least in the use of aesthetic vocabulary with which he explained his searching at this time. See also Stanislavskii’s unpublished essay, “The Art of Experience” (*Iskusstvo perezhivaniia*, c. 1909-1910), in K. S. Stanislavskii, *Stat'i. Rechi. Besedy. Pis'ma* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1952), 461-476, 753-754, in which the director describes the acting as a “creative process of a spiritual and physical nature” where each role consists of “the living ... organic elements of soul and body” (462). However, Stanislavskii’s emphasis on a “living creation,” and characters, each with their own history and life, echoes Przybyszewski’s own mystical view of a dramatic scene as a

Stanislavskii's emphasis on the external, physical would continue even into the first years of the Moscow Art Theatre (MKhT), when Meierkhol'd joined the company in 1898 and became an important member of the cast.<sup>18</sup> As far as Stanislavskii was concerned, interest in a character's internal, psychological state was not even a consideration for the actor or director; only the external, physical image of the character was important: "If we can find the image, all the rest will come of itself. / 'What do you feel? The physically outward image or the fundamental spiritual feeling of the role? The idea for the sake of which the poet wrote the play?' / *We did not yet put such questions to ourselves.*"<sup>19</sup> Thus, Stanislavskii's assertion that there was little emphasis placed on the internal qualities of the character should cast doubt on any assumption that Meierkhol'd, an amateur provincial actor, was moving too far beyond the naturalistic method of portraying a character through the imitation of physical characteristics in his portrayal of Apukhtin's madman.

In the fall of 1895 Meierkhol'd moved to Moscow, where he entered Moscow State University to study law.<sup>20</sup> While at university Meierkhol'd began keeping a

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"*tableau vivant*," and similar notions presented in the 1904 essay "On Drama and the Stage."

<sup>18</sup> In *My Life in Art*, Stanislavskii divides his work at MKhT into two periods, from the founding of the theatre in 1898 until 1906, and from 1906 to the writing of his memoirs in 1924. He felt the first period was a continuation of his work with the Society of Art and Literature. According to Stanislavskii, 1906 is the date he began actively creating "the system," spurred on by the "[d]issatisfaction and anxiety after the failure of the Maeterlinck plays and the catastrophic demise of the Studio on Povarskaya." See Stanislavski, *My Life*, 458. For Meierkhol'd's status as cast member, see Stanislavskii, *Moia zhizn'*, 243. Cf. Stanislavski, *My Life*, 329.

<sup>19</sup> Stanislavskii, *Moia zhizn'*, 248. The quote is cited in Stanislavski, *My Life*, 333. My emphasis.

<sup>20</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 26.

notebook in which he listed the journals he was reading, notices of book publications and the addresses of local booksellers, theatrical performances he attended, and citations on art.<sup>21</sup> His passion for theatre grew. Meierkhol'd, after some hesitation, finally made the decision to become a professional actor and applied to the Philharmonic Society (*Moskovskoe filarmonicheskoe obshchestvo*) in Moscow, where his sister-in-law, Ekaterina Munt, was already studying acting.<sup>22</sup> Returning to Penza during the summer of 1896, the tall, skinny, rather long-nosed student took on comedic roles in several productions at the local provincial theatre.<sup>23</sup> In the fall the Society's instructors, Vladimir I. Nemirovich-Danchenko (1858-1943), already a well-known dramatist, A. A. Fedotov, and F. A. Akimov, accepted Meierkhol'd into their program as a second-year drama student, on the basis of his previous acting experience and the year spent studying law.<sup>24</sup>

Returning to Penza again in April 1897, Meierkhol'd met Aleksei M. Remizov (1875-1957), a young philosophy and history student, who later became his collaborator and a translator of Przybyszewski's prose poems and plays. Remizov had been exiled to Penza at the very end of 1896 for participating in student demonstrations in Moscow. In his 1913 *Autobiography* Meierkhol'd credits Remizov with introducing him to socialist thought, especially the philosophy of Marx and

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<sup>21</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 120.

<sup>22</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 119; Robert Leach, *Stanislavsky and Meyerhold* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 22. Meierkhol'd married Ol'ga Munt in Penza on 17 April 1896. Further citations appear as "Leach, *Stanislavsky*."

<sup>23</sup> K. Rudnitskii, *Rezhisser Meierkhol'd* (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), 9. Hereafter cited as Rudnitskii, *RM*.

<sup>24</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 26; Rudnitskii, *RM*, 9.

interest in the “workers’ question.”<sup>25</sup> The two friends would remain in contact even when Remizov was arrested a second time for revolutionary activities in spring 1898 and sentenced to exile in the Vologda district in late spring 1900.<sup>26</sup> There they would meet again in late 1901, when Meierkhol'd was introduced to Przybyszewski's works.

Meierkhol'd moved back to Moscow in fall 1897 to continue his education, where his growing interest in theatre soon overshadowed, but did not extinguish, the interest in politics enflamed by his close friend, Remizov. Meierkhol'd claimed that he never missed a performance at the Malyi Theatre while studying in Moscow. He also considered A. P. Lenskii (1847-1908), the chief actor there, to be the major influence on his acting skills during his early years as a student.<sup>27</sup> Before we continue with our discussion of Meierkhol'd's second period and his discovery of Przybyszewski, it is worthwhile to discuss A. P. Lenskii's impact on the young actor at this time. That impact came on two levels, an inspirational and a pragmatic one. In March 1897 the first All-Russian Conference of Stage Artists was held in Moscow. In his conference presentation, “Reasons for the Decline of the Theatre Business” (*Prichiny upadka teatral'nogo dela*), Lenskii felt that the worsening financial

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<sup>25</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 27. Remizov had spent the summer of 1896 abroad in Germany, Switzerland and Austria, and may have become acquainted with Przybyszewski's works at this time. Upon his return to Russia, he smuggled in illegal socialist literature, but was arrested in conjunction with demonstrations on 18 November 1896.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. The handsome, blue-eyed Aleksandr Lenskii (Verviziotti) was, according to Ostrovsky, “probably one of the most influential actors at the end of the century,” whose acting style influenced even Stanislavskii. He founded the short-lived Novyi Teatr, an affiliate of the Malyi, in 1898. See Ostrovsky, *op. cit.*, 230-231. It was at this theatre that Przybyszewski's plays *For Happiness* and *The Golden Fleece* were produced, before its closure in 1907.

situation of actors was directly related to their qualifications, which in turn led to the low artistic level of repertoire and lack of professionalism in attitude and discipline. Eighty percent of Russia's acting companies, Lenskii reported, consisted of untalented actors, unsuited for work. In his opinion, the answer to this problem was education, and a call for companies to be headed not just by anyone, but by a director-artist (*rezhisser-khudozhnik*), who would coordinate the work of the "enlightened actor." Meierkhol'd took Lenskii's admonitions seriously, and was inspired throughout his career to encourage professionalism by putting great emphasis on dramatic training.<sup>28</sup>

On the pragmatic level, Lenskii influenced Meierkhol'd, as he did many other actors at this time, through his book, *Actor's Notes and Notes about Facial Expression and Make Up*, which Meierkhol'd almost certainly read.<sup>29</sup> This claim is supported by the fact that Meierkhol'd mentioned Lenskii's article of almost the same title, "Notes on Facial Expression and Make Up," in an introductory lecture on makeup technique and the proper creation of older characters at the Art Theatre in late November 1901.<sup>30</sup> As we shall see, Lenskii would have a further influence on Meierkhol'd in 1903, when Meierkhol'd would imitate Lenskii's combination of music and drama in his own production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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<sup>28</sup> Volkov, *op. cit.*, 76-78; Varneke, *op. cit.*, 427-428.

<sup>29</sup> Ostrovsky, *op. cit.*, 230. Ostrovsky refers to this book as "essential reading for anyone interested in theatre at the time."

<sup>30</sup> "Zametki o mimike i grime," *Artist*, no. 5 (1890). Fel'dman reproduces this entire lecture as "Printsipy khudozhestvennogo grima (Vstupitel'naia leksiia k prakticheskim klassam grima)," see pp. 409-414.

The receipt of a First prize for acting at the Philharmonic Society in 1898 and an invitation to join the newly formed Moscow Art Theatre gave Meierkhol'd a reason to stay in Moscow after graduation.<sup>31</sup> During his four seasons at MKhT, Meierkhol'd developed further as an actor, increasing his interest in building a character through the use of psychology. It is also safe to conclude that by sometime in 1901 Meierkhol'd was circulating among individuals, outside his immediate circle of friends in the theatre, who were interested in Przybyszewski's works and who were actively engaged in transmitting them to the Russian public. In 1900-1901 he made the acquaintance of Vladimir Sablin (1879-1916), whose family owned a publishing house.<sup>32</sup> Through Sablin he became friends with the Lithuanian poet and translator Jurgis Baltrušaitis (1873-1944) and Russian writer Valerii Briusov (1873-1924), both members of the young literary group, Skorpion.<sup>33</sup> Conversation between Meierkhol'd and Briusov probably touched on Przybyszewski at some time during the fall 1901: one of Briusov's new acquaintances, Mikhail Semenov, was preparing his translation of Przybyszewski's novel, *Homo sapiens*, for Skorpion in September 1901, as a part of a proposed collection of his works.<sup>34</sup> Another good friend of Briusov's, Aleksandr

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<sup>31</sup> Leach, *op. cit.*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Aleksandr Gladkov, *Meierkhol'd*, t. 1 (Moscow: STD, 1990), 220. Cited in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 39. Meierkhol'd met Jurgis Baltrušaitis at the home of Sablin, and through the former, met Briusov. Sablin's publishing house would begin publication of a collection of Przybyszewski's works in 1905 in direct competition to the collection proposed by Skorpion, the publisher with which both Baltrušaitis and Briusov collaborated.

<sup>33</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Valerii Briusov, *Dnevnik. Avtobiograficheskaia proza. Pis'ma*, foreword by E. V. Ivanova, comp. (Moscow: OLMA-PRESS Zvezdnyi mir, 2002), 124. In fall 1902 Briusov would assist Sergei Poliakov, Skorpion's patron, in obtaining permission

Kursinskii, had recently submitted his translation of *Aphorisms and Preludes* to the Moscow censors in late August or very early September 1901 as well.<sup>35</sup>

Meierkhol'd developed artistically in several ways during the years he spent at MKhT. In his 1913 autobiography, Meierkhol'd emphasized his turn toward “new forms,” and credited his new friends, Baltrušaitis and Briusov for this interest. In contrast, he described his own development as an actor in general terms, giving due credit to his teacher, Stanislavskii.<sup>36</sup> However, Meierkhol'd probably exaggerates the credit due Baltrušaitis and Briusov during the period 1898-1902. Written after several years of a close working relationship with Briusov, Meierkhol'd's mention of “new forms” is certainly an acknowledgement of Briusov's “An Unnecessary Truth,” which did not appear in print until spring 1902, after he left MKhT.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, in

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from the censors in Moscow, and then in St. Petersburg, for the release of its edition of *Homo sapiens*. The novel finally appeared in January 1903, after the correction of thirty-one pages.

<sup>35</sup> The Moscow censors approved the work on 7 September 1901. See the censorship statement in Kursinskii, *op. cit.*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> “[u]nder the intellectual influence of these remarkable people [Baltrušaitis and Briusov], the necessity first arises of searching for new stage forms and theoretically grounding the teaching of a new theatrical school.” “During the course of four seasons Meierkhol'd continuously improves in the study of that actor's technique, which the excellent acting teacher, K. S. Stanislavskii, conveyed to his actors with great skill.” Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 27. “Под умственным влиянием этих замечательных людей впервые возникает у Мейерхольда потребность искать новые сценические формы и теоретически обосновать учение новой театральной школы.” “В течение четырёх сезонов Мейерхольд неустанно свершенствуется на изучении той актёрской техники, какую с большим мастерством передавал своим актёрам превосходный учитель актёрской игры К. С. Станиславский.” Meierkhol'd would also use the phrase “the search for new theatrical forms” in his description of the Theatre-Studio of 1905. *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>37</sup> Briusov served as literary advisor at the Theatre-Studio in 1905, and worked with Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd in 1906-1907, providing the translation of Maeterlinck's *Péleas et Mélisande*, which premiered in October 1907.

the last months of 1901 Meierkhol'd had also come under the “hypnosis” of Przybyszewski.

Volkov, on the other hand, provides a more objective summary of these early years. According to Meierkhol'd's biographer, first, Meierkhol'd learned the Art Theatre technique of preparing a role and creating a character. Second, by observing the directing of both Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavskii, he learned how to create a unified, dramatic whole, a valuable process Stanislavskii had learned from the Meiningen troupe. In contrast to the elevated, independent status of the leading actor who “starred” at theatres such as the Malyi in Moscow or Aleksandrinskii in St. Petersburg, the actor now became an ensemble member and an artistic element equally under the supervision of the director, just as the scenic design or lighting. Third, Meierkhol'd participated in a company in which the director alone was privileged to create a general “idea” for each particular production.<sup>38</sup> Meierkhol'd would later experiment with the conception of a director's artistic vision and the creation of a unified whole in his production of Przybyszewski's *Snow* in 1903.

While Meierkhol'd did not define what he meant by “new forms” in his 1913 autobiography, comments in his correspondence provide some hints as to the direction in which he was moving. Three general, interrelated concepts interested Meierkhol'd at this time: “contemporaneity” (*sovremennost'*), the difference between ideal and tendentious theatre, and the individuality of the artist and character. First, Meierkhol'd was concerned that the actor should be “contemporary.” At this time

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<sup>38</sup> Volkov, *op. cit.*, 149.

Meierkhol'd associated the vague term “contemporaneity” with the new German plays that dealt with ideas and psychology, more than the current Russian repertoire that the Art Theatre staged.<sup>39</sup> Although Meierkhol'd's term, “contemporaneity,” is vague, we suggest that for him, its meaning combined elements of psychology and social relevance, especially concerning the problems of individuality and morality. In a letter to Chekhov written in September 1899, Meierkhol'd expressed his joy at the upcoming premiere of Hauptmann's *Einsame Menschen* [*Lonely People*], because the play was “contemporary”: “I haven't been in such high spirits for a long time, as last night, and now I know why. Our Theatre has understood, and openly declared, that its whole power [lies] in the dependence on a close connection with the greatest dramatists of our time. I am happy that my secret dream is finally coming true!”<sup>40</sup> Reflecting on this period from 1902, Meierkhol'd felt that he was looking for something else, for change, and wanted to be a part of it. An undefined “new wave”

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<sup>39</sup> The first two years of MKhT productions included Aleksei Tolstoi's historical dramas *Tsar' Fedor* and *Death of Ivan the Terrible*, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and *Enemy of the People*, Chekhov's *Seagull* and *Uncle Vania*, and Hauptmann's *Fuhrmann Henschel* and *Einsame Menschen* [*Lonely People*].

<sup>40</sup> V. E. Meierkhol'd, *Perepiska. 1896-1939* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), 22-23. “Letter #11 to A. P. Chekhov. [29. IX. 1899. Moskva].” Cited further as *Perepiska*. See also Zvenigorodskaja, *op. cit.*, 12-13. In his conversations with Aleksandr Gladkov in the 1930s, Meierkhol'd would express similar views. He declared that theatre was neither “yesterday” nor “tomorrow,” but an ephemeral event, as the living, breathing artist translates the dramatic text for an expectant public. Theatre is, in Meierkhol'd's words, the “ideal art of the present.” See Aleksandr Gladkov, *Meyerhold Speaks/Meyerhold Rehearses*, trans. and ed. Alma Law (New York: Routledge, 2004), 132.

was carrying him along, and he believed his work carried an “imprint” of the troubled times and society around him (*otpechatok smuty sovremennosti*).<sup>41</sup>

For Meierkhol'd, the relevance or contemporaneity of a play was also connected with its “idea.”<sup>42</sup> Judging from Meierkhol'd's use of this term in a letter to Nemirovich-Danchenko in January 1899, “idea” seems to be associated with social commentary and thematic content. In that letter Meierkhol'd commented on the theatre's production of *Hedda Gabler* and suggested that plays should be staged not for the roles they provide the actors, but for their “ideas,” because the director who stages a Ibsen play for the actors' pleasure only “can produce an impression on the public, opposite to the author's plan.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, in his new emphasis on the “idea” of a dramatic work, Meierkhol'd may have been reflecting the populist mood of such critics as Nikolai Mikhailovskii (1842-1904), as much as the more radical views of his friend Aleksei Remizov.<sup>44</sup> Meierkhol'd's interest in the “idea” also coincided with Stanislavskii's directorial emphasis on the theme of the individual in *Einsame Menschen*, which stressed the conflict between the stifling bourgeois mentality and the intellectual's desire for freedom and self-expression.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 467.

<sup>42</sup> Zvenigorodskaia, *op. cit.*, 13. The Russian scholar concludes that Meierkhol'd was attracted to Hauptmann because of the “idea” of his dramas.

<sup>43</sup> “Кто ставит пьесу Ибсена для ролей, а не ради ее идеи, тот может произвести на публику впечатление, обратное замыслу автора.” See Meierkhol'd, *Perepiska*, 22. “Letter #10 to V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko. [17. I. 1899].”

<sup>44</sup> Remizov's influence as literary advisor to the Association of New Drama will be discussed in further detail in chapter V.

<sup>45</sup> Nick Worrall, *The Moscow Art Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 119. Osbourne's estimation of Hauptmann seems to support both supposition that “contemporaneity” combines the notions of social commentary, psychology, and

Meierkhol'd's embrace of the "idea" and social engagement is not to be confused with his acceptance of tendentious theatre. In April 1901 Meierkhol'd expressed his belief that the individual should "burn with the spirit of his times" and that theatre had the ability to "reconstruct" the existing social order, thanks to its status as a public event that forced people of all classes and political views to unite in the reception of common emotions.<sup>46</sup> In the theatre, Meierkhol'd wrote to Chekhov, all spectators "suffer the same woe, express the same rapture, [and] protest against that which angers everyone equally."<sup>47</sup> Even in November 1901 he believed Ibsen's plays could instill a sense of humanity and civic spirit (*grazhdanstvennost'*) in the spectator. However, Meierkhol'd was opposed to the idea that one class could impose

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individuality. He believes that Hauptmann's use of language reveals "complex psychological motivation," while the theme of *Einsame Menschen* (1890), the conflict of the individual with the demands of the traditional middle-class family, is "probably the most important theme" in Hauptmann's dramas. See John Osbourne, *Gerhart Hauptmann and the Naturalist Drama*, rev. ed. (Amsterdam: OPA, 1998), 62, 92. If this work does mark the "beginnings of a decisive retreat" from positivism and a "collapse of the provisional alliance" between Hauptmann and organized socialism, as Osbourne claims, then Meierkhol'd's high estimation of the work may signal a weakening in his socialist views, albeit, perhaps only with respect to the problem of the individual vs. the collective. See Osbourne, *op. cit.*, 119. This newfound interest in the notion of the individual could partially explain his undocumented attraction to Przybyszewski's elevated view of the art and the artist in society.

<sup>46</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 400; Zvenigorodskaia, *op. cit.*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 400. OR RGB, f. 331, k. 51, ed. khr. 49, l. 12-15. "Театр объединил в себе все классы, различные партии, заставляя всех страдать одним горем, выражать один восторг, протестовать против того, что всех одинаково возмущает." This letter also appeared in *Perepiska*, 29-30. Meierkhol'd's idea of theatre as a unifier of classes through emotion may have its origins in notes written in early 1897, citing a letter of Gogol' to Tolstoi: "в нём [театр] может поместиться вдруг толпа из пяти-шести тысяч человек, и что вся эта толпа, ни в чём не сходная между собою, разбирая её по единицам, может вдруг потрястись одним потрясением, зарыдать одними слезами и засмеяться одним всеобщим смехом." Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 136. RGALI, f. 998, op. 1, ed. khr., 765, l. 12-12 ob.

its values on another, as he believed was happening with the creation of the popular theatres.<sup>48</sup> In his view ideology, used in this way, could turn the “Temple of Melpomene” into a platform for propaganda.<sup>49</sup>

The concept of “individuality” and egoism, especially as it concerns both the creation of a distinct character and the identity of the creative artist, was also piquing Meierkhol'd's interest.<sup>50</sup> This interest can be traced to his reading of Nietzsche, among others, during these years. Meierkhol'd's first mention of Nietzsche, in his notebooks from September 1898 to April 1899, is associated with Albert Rode's 1897 monograph *Hauptmann und Nietzsche*, a book he would translate with Remizov.<sup>51</sup> This work presented Meierkhol'd with such ideas as the artist's elevated position in society and his wrongful subordination to morality, religion and philosophy, notions which Przybyszewski would echo in *Aphorisms and Preludes*.<sup>52</sup>

Meierkhol'd also noted the issues of *Russkie vedomosti* that contained articles on Nietzsche's death in August 1900.<sup>53</sup> This interest also led Meierkhol'd to identify perceived Nietzschean features in his characters. After reading a Nietzschean

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 22; Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 420.

<sup>49</sup> Fel'dman, *ibid.*, 420.

<sup>50</sup> Late in his life Meierkhol'd would remark, “The most valuable quality for an actor is individuality. ... It seems to me that individuality exists as a starting point for everyone. ... Any kind of upbringing erases individuality, of course, but an actor must defend his individuality and develop it.” See Gladkov, *MS/MR*, 109.

<sup>51</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Hamburg: Verlag Jean Haring, 1897. Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 182, 383, 659. Meierkhol'd's translation was published by Sablin in early 1902, reprinted in Fel'dman, *ibid.*, 659-669. Meierkhol'd also knew that Remizov was also working on a translation of *Also sprach Zarathustra* in March-April 1900, which he had hoped to publish in *Zhizn'*. See Meierkhol'd's note, *ibid.*, 359.

<sup>52</sup> “Gauptman i Nitshe,” in Fel'dman, *ibid.*, 660-661. Meierkhol'd and Remizov trace the latter idea of subordination to Nietzsche's *The Geneology of Morals*. *Ibid.*, 661.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

interpretation of Hauptmann's *Die versunkene Glocke*, he noted the following: "features of a Nietzschean sick soul: 'a feeling of agonizing compassion for people, shamefully hidden under a veil of 'Superhuman' indifference, reaching extreme egoism and hardheartedness; aspirations moving beyond the bounds of human strength, both a confidence in one's calling, and a doubt in it, and finally, the fall itself.'"<sup>54</sup>

The influence of Nietzsche continued. For example, April 1901 Meierkhol'd confided to Chekhov that he had been thinking about suicide, but found consolation in Nietzsche's admonition of self-realization, "Werde der du bist."<sup>55</sup> Nietzsche's philosophy also influenced his Meierkhol'd's views on morality. Meierkhol'd especially voiced a hatred for "the lie--not from the point of view of generally accepted morality (which itself is constructed on lies), but as a person who is striving for the purification of his own personality."<sup>56</sup> This questioning of social mores would parallel those of Przybyszewski and the characters of his novels.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 351-352. "В «Потонувшем колоколе» — черты больной души Ницше: «чувство мучительного сострадания к людям, стыдливо скрытое под покровом "сверхчеловеческого" индифферентизма, доходящего до крайнего эгоизма и жестокосердия, и переходящие за пределы человеческой силы стремления, и эта уверенность в своём призвании, и сомнение в нём, и, наконец, само падение» (Гринеvская)." See I. A. Grinevskaja, "Gergard Hauptman i motivy ego dram," *Zhurnal zhurnalov*, nos. 13-16 (1898).

<sup>55</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 400. A paraphrase of Nietzsche's aphorism: "Was sagt dein Gewisse? — 'Du sollst der werden, der du bist'." Drittes Buch, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*.

<sup>56</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 400. Letter to A. P. Chekhov, 18 IV. 1901. "Ненавижу ложь не с точки зрения общепринятой морали (она сама построена на лжи), а как человек, который стремится к очищению собственной личности."

Meierkhol'd admitted the connection between “individuality” and his creation of roles during these years. The role of Johannes Vockerat in Hauptmann’s *Einsame Menschen*, a biologist who seeks intellectual companionship in another woman after his wife shows little interest in his pursuits, Meierkhol'd wrote, “coincided with my passions for individualistic tendencies.”<sup>57</sup> As related to character, this interest in individuality is important for two reasons. First, it represents Meierkhol'd’s movement away from Stanislavskii’s concept of the “external truth” and his association of a character with social type. Second, this movement would signal Meierkhol'd’s recognition of the basic value of a dramatic symbol or symbolic character, creating a foundation for the later acceptance and artistic exploitation of symbolic characters in the plays of Przybyszewski and Maeterlinck. A character was now no longer only a social “type”: it could reflect universal values, yet remain an individual person.

Meierkhol'd’s description of *Hedda Gabler* is a good example of this shift in thinking. In January 1899 he wrote Nemirovich-Danchenko and explained that the character of Hedda acted like a “focus,” in which “all the negative sides of our many high society ladies are reflected”: the smart ones, the kind, but egotistical ones, the ones who are capable of love, but not sacrifice.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, in creating the character of Hedda, Meierkhol'd believed, Ibsen had achieved more abstract goals: he

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<sup>57</sup> Feldman, *Nasledie*, 1, 466-467. “Исполнение роли Иоханнеса совпало с моими увлечениями индивидуалистическими тенденциями.”

<sup>58</sup> Meierkhol'd, *Perepiska*, 21. “Гедда – преувеличенный тип, тип, отразившей в себе, как в фокусе, все отрицательные стороны наших многих светских дам, умных, но бессознательно относящихся к жизненным явлениям, добрых, но эгоистичных, способных на любовь, но не на жертву ради нее своей свободой.”

had been able to outline the moral foundations of society.<sup>59</sup> This type of thinking about character had ramifications in Meierkhol'd's later work. In the case of his production of Przybyszewski's *The Golden Fleece* in 1902, this meant that Meierkhol'd could appreciate the fact that the character Ruszczyc is more than just a director of a sanatorium, he symbolizes human conscience in general, and Rembowski's (Meierkhol'd's character) conscience, in particular.<sup>60</sup>

During the period from 1899 to November 1901 Meierkhol'd was struggling with ways—psychologically and physically—to create a distinct, individual character. Comments from Meierkhol'd's correspondence with Chekhov about the character of Johannes in *Einsame Menschen* illustrate the nature of this struggle. It also provides further evidence that Stanislavskii's understanding of character in late 1899 was still based on external physicality, rather than originating within, as Przybyszewski would later advocate in 1902.

In response to Meierkhol'd's question as to how to approach the role of Johannes Vockerat, Chekhov advised him to de-emphasize the physical nervousness, or “neuropathological nature” (in Chekhov's words), that Stanislavskii felt was the core of Johannes' character. For Chekhov, it was more important that Meierkhol'd emphasize a quality of loneliness. Moreover, this quality was not to be overemphasized, it was only to be suggested:

Теперь о нервности. Не следует подчеркивать нервности, чтобы невропатологическая натура не заслонила, не поработила того, что важнее, именно

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>60</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Zolotoe runo*, II: i, PSS, 45.

одинокости, той самой одинокости, которую испытывает только высокие, притом здоровые (в высшем значении) организации. Дайте одинокого человека, нервность же покажите постольку, поскольку она указана самим текстом. Не трактуйте эту нервность как частное явление....<sup>61</sup>

Now, about the nervousness—one must not emphasize the nervousness, in order that [Vockerat's] neuropathological nature does not push into the background, [or] enslave that which is more important, namely, the loneliness, that very loneliness which only lofty beings—and besides, those with healthy (in the higher sense, both physically and psychologically) constitutions – experience.<sup>62</sup> Create a lonely person, and portray nervousness, only as much as it is indicated by the text itself. Don't interpret this nervousness as a separate phenomenon....

The MKhT production of *Einsame Menschen* premiered 16 December 1899.<sup>63</sup>

Despite Chekhov's clinical advice, Meierkhol'd went on to perform the role as Stanislavskii had directed, “with an exaggeration of neuro-pathological characteristics.”<sup>64</sup> *Russkie vedomosti* noted in its review the young actor's broadening *emploi* and ability to play the role of “neurasthenic,” while *Russkoe slovo*, commenting on what certainly must have been a neurotic performance by Meierkhol'd in the first act, commented that the character of Johannes deserved to be

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<sup>61</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 305-306. Scholars date this letter to the beginning of October 1899. A partial excerpt appears in Volkov, *op. cit.*, 130.

<sup>62</sup> Chekhov is clearly using “*organizatsiia*” in the medical sense of an individual's “psycho-physiological character” or “constitution.” See the entry “*organizatsiia*” in B. M. Volin and D. N. Ushakov, eds., *Tolkovyii slovar' russkogo iazyka*, t. II (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo inostrannykh i natsional'nykh slovarei, 1938), 844. “3. Psikhofizicheskoe stroenie ot del'nogo sushchestva (knizhn.).”

<sup>63</sup> Worrall, *op. cit.*, 118.

<sup>64</sup> Volkov, *op. cit.*, 130.

“shackled right away or put in a strait jacket.”<sup>65</sup> As a result of Stanislavskii’s directorial emphasis on “trifles,” audiences failed to sympathize with Meierkhol’d’s character.<sup>66</sup>

The lessons learned from undertaking the role of Johannes would not be forgotten. In a letter to Stanislavskii’s wife, the actress M. P. Lilina, several months later, Meierkhol’d confided that the actor’s art lies in the portrayal of everyday reality, not through the use of physical trickery, but through a more refined style. “In Russia,” he wrote, “actors ‘act’ by producing something passing for reality—it’s an operation of rogues! True acting is not a storm, but the calm.... [...] Reform is needed, revolution.”<sup>67</sup>

Meierkhol’d was also moving toward the creation of distinct, individual characters through physical means. In a lecture on makeup, given in November 1901, Meierkhol’d declared that the goal of the true actor’s development was to move beyond the creation of types. The actor’s goal was to create an individual character formed by a combination of creative fantasy, observations of reality, and studies of artistic representations.<sup>68</sup> Meierkhol’d was echoing comments by theatre critic V. P.

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<sup>65</sup> Volkov, *ibid.*, 131. Kicheev, the critic for *Russkoe slovo*, had written that Vockerat “вышел с места в карьер не только уж просто нерврастеником, а человеком, которого в первом акте нужно прямо сажать на цепь или вязать в горяченную рубашку.”

<sup>66</sup> Worrall, *op. cit.*, 118-119.

<sup>67</sup> Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 347. “У нас актёры ‘играют’,—выдавая нечто мнимое за действительность, — операция фокусников! Верная игра—не буря, а затишье.... [...] Требуется реформа, революция.” Przybyszewski would complain of the same, comparing actors to jugglers and acrobats. See Pshibyshevskii, “O drame,” 341.

<sup>68</sup> Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 411.

Preobrazhenskii, who had argued in 1897, “the true artist...will achieve the ability to detect and embody *the individual features of each separate role*. [...] Complete individualization, external and internal, of each separate role—this is the third, the highest moment of artistic development.”<sup>69</sup>

### **“I am under the hypnosis”: sources of an aesthetic passion**

In mid- to late November or December 1901, after a trip to Vologda, Meierkhol'd wrote the following brief observation in his notebook, listing Przybyszewski among his latest “aesthetic passions.” This observation marks Meierkhol'd's first mention of Przybyszewski by name in any of the surviving archival materials:

—Теперь я в гипнозе эстетических увлечений —  
зачитываюсь Пшибышевского, Тетмайера,  
Альтенберга, словом, так называемых  
«модернистов», слушаю музыку Грига и  
Чайковского. А когда меня приводит и литература,  
и музыка в экстаз, тогда я презираю тех, кто  
говорит мне о любви своей.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> [V. P.], “Dva ‘Goriachikh serdtsa’,” *Novosti dnia*, 6. XI. 1897. Emphasis in the original. Cited in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 411, 414. According to Preobrazhenskii, the least developed actor forms a character around his/her own thoughts or emotions; in the second stage the actor seeks to express the “more objective,” universal norms of the character, such as national characteristics.

<sup>70</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 430. RGALI, f. 998, op. 1, ed. khr. 766, l. 76-76 ob. Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer (1865-1940) was one of the most popular poets of his time, having published four volumes of poetry by 1900. Like Przybyszewski, the cults of art and erotic love served as major themes in his lyrical, impressionistic work. Meierkhol'd probably had read some of Peter Altenberg's (pseudonym of Richard Engländer, 1859-1919), impressionistic miniatures from his third work, *Was der Tag mir zuträgt* (1901). A “decadent par excellence,” but not a dramatist, Altenberg was a central figure of Viennese literary life at the turn of the century. N. Suvorovskii draws parallels between the works of both Przybyszewski and Chaikovskii in his essay, “Chaikovskii i muzyka budushchego.” According to the critic, both men are “poets of *toska*.” See *Vesy*, no. 8 (1904): 10-20.

—Now I am under the hypnosis of aesthetic passions  
—I am engrossed in reading Przybyszewski, Tetmajer,  
Altenberg—in a word, the so-called “modernists.” I am  
listening to the music of Grieg and Chaikovskii. When  
both literature and music lead me to ecstasy, then I  
scorn those who speak to me of their love.

The passion with which Meierkhol'd began reading Przybyszewski's works and their evident attraction are indicated by his lexicon: he is “under the hypnosis” (“*v gipnoze*”), “engrossed in reading” (“*zachityvaius*”) these works, and drawn to their new aesthetics. Furthermore, the timing of this statement is significant. It comes at a time of personal crisis, when Meierkhol'd was questioning the direction of his own personal life, professional career, and the state of theatre in general.<sup>71</sup> From this observation we may then hypothesize that Przybyszewski's notions of art had some—as yet unidentified—influence on the young actor.

Meierkhol'd's 1901 declaration leaves several questions unanswered. First, the exact works to which Meierkhol'd refers in his notebooks remain obscure. In order to identify the work (or works) which so hypnotized the young actor, we must seek further evidence both in Meierkhol'd's writings and in a reconstruction of the publications about Przybyszewski and his works which had appeared in the Russian press by this time in late 1901. Second, the question whether Meierkhol'd came to Przybyszewski's works alone or through an intermediary is raised. A reconstruction of the chronology of Meierkhol'd's biography will demonstrate that his circle of friends, both in Moscow (Sablin, Briusov, and Baltrušaitis) and in the provinces

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<sup>71</sup> Meierkhol'd would assert in his later years, that “there are no artists who do not experience crises, declines, doubts.” See Gladkov, *MS/MR*, 95.

(Remizov, in exile), would soon become interconnected. These people were, or soon would be, actively engaged in either the discussion or translation of Przybyszewski's works. Therefore, Meierkhol'd's friends in Moscow, as well as his new acquaintances he would meet through Remizov, probably influenced his newfound interest in Przybyszewski. Let us first examine the role that Meierkhol'd's circle of friends played in his attraction to Przybyszewski. Then we will examine the possibility that Meierkhol'd, a voracious reader, came to Przybyszewski's works alone, without an intermediary.

Meierkhol'd's Moscow friends, especially Briusov and Baltrušaitis, could easily have directed him to Przybyszewski and his works through casual exchanges. Briusov had reasons to touch on Przybyszewski during his conversations with Meierkhol'd during the fall 1901: one of Briusov's new acquaintances, Mikhail Semenov, was preparing his translation of Przybyszewski's novel, *Homo sapiens*, for Skorpion in September 1901, as a part of a proposed collection of his works.<sup>72</sup> Another good friend of Briusov's, Aleksandr Kursinskii, had recently submitted his translation of *Aphorisms and Preludes* to the Moscow censors in late August or very early September 1901 as well.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Valerii Briusov, *Dnevnik. Avtobiograficheskaia proza. Pis'ma*, foreword by E. V. Ivanova, comp. (Moscow: OLMA-PRESS Zvezdnyi mir, 2002), 124. In fall 1902 Briusov would assist Sergei Poliakov, Skorpion's patron, in obtaining permission from the censors in Moscow, and then in St. Petersburg, for the release of its edition of *Homo sapiens*. The novel finally appeared in January 1903, after the correction of thirty-one pages.

<sup>73</sup> The Moscow censors approved the work on 7 September 1901. See the censorship statement in Kursinskii, *op. cit.*, 4.

Meierkhol'd's friend, Vladimir Sablin, fortuitously connected him with another group of intellectuals who were then intensely interested in Przybyszewski and his extreme views. This was the Vologda circle, a member of which now was Meierkhol'd's old friend, Remizov. Meierkhol'd became an assistant to, and intermediary for, Sablin, who wanted to begin publication of a new journal to be called *Maiak* [*The Beacon*].<sup>74</sup> In early November Sablin sent Meierkhol'd to Vologda to pick up materials destined for publication in the journal.<sup>75</sup> Meierkhol'd's own records and a claim by Gladkov allow us to approximate the days of the trip as 3-6 November 1901.<sup>76</sup> It was Meierkhol'd's responsibility to invite his friend Aleksei Remizov, now living in exile in Vologda, and others in that close-knit circle of political exiles to contribute to the new journal, especially literary historian and Pushkinist, Petr Shchëgolev (1877-1931), and the young critic and philosopher,

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<sup>74</sup> According to Fel'dman, after the closure of *Zhizn'* in the summer of 1901, Meierkhol'd and Baltrušaitis both actively assisted Sablin in the organization of *Maiak*, with editorial assistance from A. P. Zonov, Meierkhol'd's old friend, who would join TND in its second season in Kherson 1903/1904. Fel'dman also suggests that Vladimir Friche, the Marxist literary critic, was to head the political section of the journal. See Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 408. Friche's later essays, like those of other members of the left, are critical of Przybyszewski. According to Friche, Przybyszewski's character Fal'k, a neurotic representative of the "new art," is an example of that part of the "educated proletariat" which is attracted to the democratic movement but soon leaves it, suffering under the "mania of self-deification" and "psychological consumption." See Friche's article "Psikhicheskaia chakhota," *Kur'er*, 31. XII. 1903, no. 302, p. 3, and the chapter "Modernizm (apogei kapitalizma)" in his later book *Poeziia koshmarov i uzhasa. Neskol'ko glav iz istorii literatury i iskusstva na Zapadie* (St. Peterburg: Knigoizdatel'stvo "Sfinks," 1912), 195-343.

<sup>75</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 39.

<sup>76</sup> Meierkhol'd's note: Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 445; this note (dated 3 November) reflects the day he crossed the Volga on his way to Vologda; Fel'dman's comments: *ibid.*, 408. See Gladkov, *Meierkhol'd*, t. 1, 220.

Nikolai Berdiaev (1874-1948).<sup>77</sup> It is probable that Meierkhol'd returned to Moscow from Vologda with a translation of *The Golden Fleece* by Vera Tupchapskaia. A letter written by Shchëgolev from October 1902, asking about the status of the manuscript, which she had readied for publication in *Maiak* and given to Meierkhol'd the previous year, is proof of this claim.<sup>78</sup>

The works and ideas of Przybyszewski became a topic of discussion among the Vologda intellectuals, including Remizov, most likely through the activities of the Socialist-Revolutionaries Boris Savinkov (1879-1925) and Ivan Kaliaev (1877-1905).<sup>79</sup> Both men had gone to school in Warsaw together, and Kaliaev, now a proof

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<sup>77</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 39, 408; Gladkov, *Meierkhol'd*, t. 1, 220. Remizov recounts his time in exile in his memoir, *Iveren'* [*Splinter*], in the section "Northern Athens" ["Severnye Afiny"]. Other Vologda exiles included Anatolii Lunacharskii (1875-1933) and P. P. Rumiantsev. Aleksandr A. Malinovskii (pseudo. Bogdanov, 1873-1928), Lunacharskii's brother-in-law and a physician, was also a member. Bogdanov developed, according to Terras, a "quasi-humanist version of Marxist theory" known as "god-building" (*bogostroitel'stvo*) that viewed working people as a theurgic force for societal change. Bogdanov's concept of the proletarian as a more evolved individual, and proletarian culture as a higher form which would supersede bourgeois culture, shares certain elements with Przybyszewski's notion of the genius as an evolved individual. For general comments on Bogdanov, see Victor Terras, *A History of Russian Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 381.

<sup>78</sup> "Есть и небольшое дело до Вас. Вера Григорьевна поручила мне спросить у Вас, в каком положении обстоит вопрос о «Золотом руне» Пшибышевского, где находится рукопись и т.д. Ведь в прошлом году она так спешила [?] кончить перевод, чтобы передать его Вам и ждать его помещения. Не откажите сообщить мне об этом переводе всё, что нужно знать." Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 535-536. Shchëgolev, still in Vologda, wrote this letter on 10 October 1902, within weeks of Meierkhol'd's 24 October 1902 premiere of *The Golden Fleece* in Kherson.

<sup>79</sup> Nadezhda Tkachik, "Aleksi Remizov i pol'skaia literatura," *Przegląd Rusycystyczny* 4, no. 92 (2000): 6, or her earlier article under the name Nadezhda Gergalo, "K probleme Aleksi Remizov i Stanislav Pshibyshevskii" in *I. S. Shmelev i literaturnyi protsess nakanune XXI veka. 125 let so dnia rozhdenia I. S. Shmeleva* (Simferopol'; Alushta: Tavriia-Press, 1998), 96. See also Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 92. Savinkov and Kaliaev are better known today as revolutionaries than

reader for the newspaper *Severnyi Krai* [*Northern Region*] in Iaroslavl', came to Vologda often to visit his exiled friend.<sup>80</sup> As politically active students in Warsaw, they probably were familiar with the legacy of Przybyszewski, who had been the editor of the Berlin-based, Polish-language socialist paper, *Gazeta Robotnicza* [*Workers' Daily*], from June 1892 until September 1893.<sup>81</sup>

In his memoirs Remizov cryptically describes a particular literary evening when his friends gathered together to read their translations and discuss literature. Remizov then quotes the opening lines of Przybyszewski's new prose poem

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writers. In March 1903 several of Kaliaev's translations of Przybyszewski's prose poems appeared in *Severnyi kraï* under the pseudonym of "I. K." See I. K., "Stikhotvoreniia v proze, St. Pshibyshevskago. (Perevod s pol'skago)" [I. Nad fiordom. II. Prosiianie dushi. III. Toledo. IV. Pamiati Shopena], *Severnyi kraï*, 6. III. 1903, no. 60. p. 2. All these prose poems had appeared earlier (in late 1901 or early 1902) in the collection *Poezje Proza* (Warsaw: Jan Fiszer, 1902). Censors authorized the publication on 16 October 1901. Kaliaev assassinated Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich Romanov on 17 February 1905, and was hanged in May.

<sup>80</sup> Aleksei Remizov, *Iveren'* (Berkeley: Berkeley Slavic Specialists, 1986), 199; Tkachik, *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>81</sup> Evgenii Degen noted Przybyszewski's position as editor in his lengthy essay on the writer that appeared in *Russkoe bogatstvo* in 1902, only five months after Meierkhol'd's trip to Vologda and the beginning of his interest in Przybyszewski. Degen is critical of Przybyszewski's vacillation between his early socialist views and his later "extreme individualism." Meierkhol'd himself may have suffered from the same mental conflict; he later paid for his esoteric artistic path with his life. Degen writes "...он некоторое время колебался между социал-демократией (даже редактировал первый польский партийный орган) и крайним индивидуализмом, который тогда проник в немецкую литературу под влиянием Ницше. Колебание эти, конечно, должны были разрешиться в смысле полного торжества индивидуализма." See Evgenii Degen, "Stanislav Pshibyshevskii," *Russkoe bogatstvo*, no. 4 (1902): 129-130. Although Degen states that *Gazeta Robotnicza* was a "party organ," Przybyszewski denied any formal party ties, writing in his memoirs that the paper was subsidized by the German Socialist Party, but had complete autonomy. See Rogacki, *op. cit.*, 23.

“Tęsknota” (“Toska”), as translated and read by Kaliaev.<sup>82</sup> Remizov’s reminiscence may be somewhat symbolic, but is significant because he mentions “*toska*” (yearning, *Sehnsucht*) as a special characteristic of the Polish soul that distinguishes it from the Russian. According to the Polish scholar Nadezhda Tkachik, this particular poem became “a symbol of the literary salon” to the Vologda intelligentsia.<sup>83</sup> This insight into Przybyszewski’s importance to the exiles assembled in Vologda permits us to hypothesize about his growing importance even at the end of 1901, especially among Meierkhol’d’s new acquaintances there. Both the literary tastes of Savinkov and Kaliaev, both born in Warsaw, and their radical political views suggest that they followed trends in Polish literature and were familiar with Ukrainka’s article on Przybyszewski that had appeared in the January 1901 issue of the Marxist journal *Zhizn’*. Thus, the Vologda circle’s enthusiasm for Przybyszewski probably colored Meierkhol’d’s new interest in Przybyszewski.

Having spent three days in Vologda in conversation with Remizov and members of the Vologda circle, it is unlikely that Meierkhol’d returned to Moscow

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<sup>82</sup> Remizov, *Iveren’*, 200. “Вокруг твоей головы венки из увядших цветов – корона из черных солнц, а лицо завяло трауром оледенелых звезд. У ног твоих умирает буря моей жизни, угасающей волной обливая стопы Твои – измученный плод моей души. Серыми крыльями окружена Ты, безумством моих темных годов, – колыбель Ты моя, гроб Ты мой.” See Appendix I, text 5.82 for the Polish text. This work appeared, serialized, as an untitled section of “Z cyklu Wigilii,” in *Życie*, no. 40/41 (1898): 524, it was later published in Lwów in 1899.

<sup>83</sup> Tkachik, *op. cit.*, 7. Curiously, in *Samopoznanie* (1949), Berdiaev names one section of chapter two “Toska.” In Berdiaev’s brief biography, “Avtobiografia,” included in a 1991 edition of this work, the philosopher notes the influences of Schopenhauer, Ibsen, and Maeterlinck, (the “new artistic literature”), but does not mention Przybyszewski. See N. Berdiaev, *Samopoznanie. Opyt filozofskoi avtobiografii* (Moskva: Kniga, 1991), 352-353.

without having discussed Przybyszewski to some degree or having read Tupchapskaia's translation of *The Golden Fleece*, which he was now transporting to Sablin. The unpublished play would have attracted him for several reasons. Its setting, a present day sanitorium, was familiar to him from his own stay in Riga. Its broad theme, morality and the consequences of one's actions in the sphere of love, was of interest from his readings of Nietzsche. Finally, the concept of the character Ruszczyc as a representation of conscience would have appealed to Meierkol'd's deepening interest in psychology.

Several other articles and translations about Przybyszewski had appeared in the Russian press at the time of Meierkol'd's conversations with Briusov and his trip to Vologda in November 1901. All, or some, may have contributed to Meierkol'd's "hypnosis."<sup>84</sup> The merits of each will be discussed below. Listed in descending order from the most to least probable sources, these are:

1. *Homo sapiens. 'Na rasput'i,'* trans. Erve, *Vestnik vsemirnoi istorii*, nos. 10-12 (1901).
2. *Gosti*, trans. A. Damanskaia, *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901).
3. "Noveishaia pol'skaia literatura," *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901).
4. "Peterburgskii teatr," V. Linskii, *Teatr i iskusstvo*, 14. X. 1901, no. 42.
5. *Aforizmy i preliudy*, trans. A. Kursinskii.

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<sup>84</sup> Several newspaper articles, which were appearing in the St. Petersburg press at this time (Burenin, Damanskaia), are excluded from this discussion. However, Meierkol'd did read the Petersburg press infrequently and these pieces may have had some impact on him at this time. I have chosen to discuss his most likely sources.

1. Erve's serialized translation of the first part of *Homo sapiens*.

For several reasons, Erve's three-part serialization of *Homo sapiens* is the most likely literary candidate to have engrossed Meierkhol'd, after *The Golden Fleece*. In a letter to A. N. Tikhonov dated 28 November 1901, Meierkhol'd asked his friend to read *Sfinks*, a one-act play by Tetmajer, a writer whose name is also mentioned in the November quotation.<sup>85</sup> This "dramatic fantasy" had recently been published in the November issue of *Vestnik vseмирnoi istorii* [*World History Herald*] and given prominent placement in that journal.<sup>86</sup> It is notable that this issue also featured the second installment of Erve's translation of "At the Crossroads" ["*Na rasput'i*"], from Przybyszewski's novel *Homo sapiens*.<sup>87</sup> Thus, given this work's serialization in an issue of a journal to which Meierkhol'd has referred in his surviving correspondence, we can be relatively certain that he was either reading this work, or at least, was aware of it, at the time he came under the "hypnosis" of Przybyszewski.

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<sup>85</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 418-419. RGALI, f. 2163, op. 1, ed. khr. 66. This letter has also appeared in *Perepiska*, 31-33.

<sup>86</sup> "*Sfinks*. Dramat. fantaziia v odnom akte. K. Tetmaiera. Perv. K. A—na," *Vestnik vseмирnoi istorii*, no. 11 (1901): 22-34. The play is much in the style of Maeterlinck, filled with a sense of anxiety and fear of death. Meierkhol'd never staged the play, although he planned to workshop the piece at the Theatre-Studio in 1905, when he had also planned to restage *Snow*.

<sup>87</sup> "*Homo sapiens*. 'Na rasput'i.' Rom. S. Pshibyshevskago. Per. s pol. Erve," *Vestnik vseмирnoi istorii*, no. 10 (1901): 222-245, no. 11 (1901): 126-153, no. 12 (1901): 132-186. The English version was published as "Overboard," a direct translation of the German "Über Bord." Audiences may have seen a dramatization of *Homo sapiens* in 1909. See Elizaveta Boretskaia's manuscript, *Razumnoe zhivotnoe*, #37928, at SPbTB. Censors received the script on 31 October 1909 and authorized the text on 9 November, with minor revisions.

Meierkhol'd's use of the term "modernist" to describe the literary tendency of the authors he is reading, also points to Erve's serialization as a possible source of this early interest in Przybyszewski. Erve identifies Przybyszewski as a member of the "school of modernism" in his brief comments accompanying his translation of "At the Crossroads." According to Erve, the "school of modernism" does not have sharply defined characteristics, but, rather, is a syncretic movement, combining elements of Ibsen, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche.<sup>88</sup>

We may identify the Vologda circle, particularly its two Russian members who were educated in Warsaw, Savinkov and Kaliaev, as a possible second, non-literary, source of the "modernist" epithet. "Modernist" was the preferred epithet used by the writers of *Kraj* to describe Przybyszewski and the Kraków poets, and Vologda circle members may have used this term in Meierkhol'd's presence when he visited them in early November.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, this usage by the Vologda circle does not necessarily preclude Meierkhol'd's acquaintance with the term in Erve's translation, but, rather, reinforces it.

Erve's mention of Nietzsche would certainly have caught Meierkhol'd's attention, as well as Przybyszewski's style of writing, which focuses attention on a character's thoughts through the extensive use of inner monologue.<sup>90</sup> Meierkhol'd, a

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<sup>88</sup> Erve, *op. cit.*, no. 10 (1901): 222. Erve does not elaborate his claim further.

<sup>89</sup> Świadek, "Echa Zachodnie (Kraków, 4 marca)," *Kraj*, 26. II (10 III). 1899, no. 9, 22-23; Świadek, "Echa Zachodnie (Kraków, 7 kwietnia)," *Kraj*, 2 (14). IV. 1899, no. 14, 13; M. Winiarski, "Przybyszewski o Kasprowiczu," *Kraj* (pril. *Dział ilustrowany*), 16. VI. 1900, no. 24, 326.

<sup>90</sup> For a few comments in English on Przybyszewski's style, see Eile, *op. cit.*, 183-184. Stylistically, Przybyszewski's use of such narrative modes mark him as a

Russian of German heritage, who had studied at a Russian university, could easily identify with the young writer Erik Falk, a student of “Russian” heritage studying at a German university.<sup>91</sup> They were both young artists living between two cultures, Slavic and Germanic. Przybyszewski’s characterization of Falk would have also attracted Meierkhol’d, who was now familiar with the characteristics of the so-called “Nietzschean sick soul” as described in Grinevskaia’s earlier essay on Hauptmann.<sup>92</sup> This broad characterization is clarified for the reader at the end of “At the Crossroads” (Chapter XVII), when Przybyszewski directly associates Falk’s character with that of a Nietzschean Superman.<sup>93</sup>

Meierkhol’d’s vague notions of “idea,” “contemporaneity,” and the desire for “new forms” that he was expressing from 1899 to 1901 all resonate in the first part of *Homo sapiens*. In the opening chapters of the novel, Falk goes to the Green Nightingale, a café frequented by anarchists and “individualists” (*individualisty*).<sup>94</sup>

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member of the “modernist” school (Abrams, *op. cit.*, 167). If Meierkhol’d noted this style, Przybyszewski would have filled his need for “new forms.” Matuszek has summarized the use and function of selected rhetorical figures (metaphor, simile) and other stylistic elements in the late novel *Krzyk* [*The Scream*, 1917]. See Gabriela Matuszek, “Próba analizy stylu powieści Stanisława Przybyszewskiego (na przykładzie powieści „Krzyk”),” *Ruch Literacki* 20, no. 3 (1979): 201-211.

<sup>91</sup> Erve, *op. cit.*, no. 10 (1901): 234, 236. Despite his non-Slavic surname, new acquaintances believe Falk is Russian. Actually a Pole born on the Russian border, Falk considers his own character to be a combination of both Slavic and Germanic features. Russian censors deleted this information, as well as a brief discussion of the Germanization efforts in the Polish lands, most likely because it obliquely criticized their own efforts at Russianization (236). The Sablin edition of 1905 reinstated these paragraphs. Cf. Pshibyshevskii, *Homo sapiens*, *PSS*, t. I, 32-33. For the original German text, see Appendix I, text 5.91.

<sup>92</sup> Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, I, 352.

<sup>93</sup> Erve, *op. cit.*, no. 12 (1901): 185.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 10 (1901): 238.

There, he discusses art with one of the patrons, nicknamed “The Suckling” (*der Säugling*, Ger; *Sak*, Rus.). A new, popular book of verse has captivated the Suckling with its pastoral images of nature and spring. The anonymous writer’s technique especially strikes him, and the Suckling asks for Falk’s opinion. Falk adamantly disagrees. Art must have more than perfect or beautiful form, and, according to Falk, art that dwells on form is useless and “atavistic.”<sup>95</sup> Falk explains what qualities he seeks in an art that is relevant to contemporary society:

Чего я хочу? Чего я хочу? Я хочу жизни, с ее неизведанными глубинами, с ее страшными безднами. Искусство для меня самый глубокий инстинкт жизни, святой путь к будущему, к вечности, и поэтому я требую великих плодоносных идей, которые подготовят новый половой подбор, создадут новый мир, новое понятие о вселенной... Искусство для меня не кончается с ритмом, с музыкальностью, для меня оно—воля, которая вызывает из ничтожества новые миры, новых людей...

Нет, нет, милейший, мы требуем великого чреватого идеями искусства, в противном случае искусство—вообще не нужно, не имеет смысла.<sup>96</sup>

What do I want? What do I want? I want life, with its unexplored depths, with its terrible abysses. For me, art is life’s most profound instinct, the sacred path to the future, to eternity; therefore I require great, fertile ideas, which prepare a new sexual selection, create a new world, [and] a new understanding of the universe.... For me, art does not end with rhythm, with musicality; for me it is the will that calls forth new worlds and new people from nothingness....

No, no, my dear fellow, we require a great art, pregnant with ideas; otherwise art is meaningless, it is altogether unnecessary.

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 10 (1901): 240.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 10 (1901): 241. See Appendix I, 5.96, for the German text.

Falk had earlier explained that life's "unexplored depths" are the depths of the soul:

Вся эта живопись настроений – это так плоско, так неважно.... [...] Если бы это были такие настроения, которые хоть немного приподняли бы завесу над тайнами и загадками человеческой души; если бы это были настроения, которые хоть несколько открыли бы нам эту неведомую темную душу, за пределами этого глупого сознания....<sup>97</sup>

This whole description of moods is so trivial, so unimportant.... [...] If only these were moods that would lift, just a little, the curtain from the mysteries and riddles of the human soul; if only these were moods that would reveal to us, just a bit, the mysterious, dark soul beyond the bounds of this foolish consciousness.

Not only was art meant to reveal the soul and create a "new understanding of the universe," declared Falk, but this revelation was truer than any depiction of the artist's surroundings, because this earthly reality was only a reflection of a Platonic "ideal." Falk explained: "He [Plato] considers earthly life to be only a reflection of the life which at one time existed as an Idea. Everything that we see is only a recollection, an anamnesis of what we saw long ago, before we appeared in the world."<sup>98</sup> Like Falk, Meierkhol'd felt that the old forms of art were somehow false, they were insufficient to describe the reality he was seeking within himself. In Meierkhol'd's case, these old forms expressed types, while he sought to express the singular personality of one character.

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 10 (1901): 239. See Appendix I, text 5.97.

<sup>98</sup> Erve, no. 11 (1901): 148. "Он считает земную жизнь только отражением жизни, которая уже существовала когда-то как идея. Все, что мы видим, это только воспоминание, анамнеза того, что мы уже давно видели, прежде чем явились на свет."

Finally, it is intriguing to conjecture what influence the following short exchange between Mikita and Falk may have had on Meierkhol'd's thinking about physical movement, his creation of bas-relief mis-en-scènes during 1906/1907, and possibly, his later development of biomechanics:

Никита описал в воздухе рукой большой круг.  
Фальк усмехнулся.  
—У тебя новый жест.  
—Видишь, словами выразить не все можно. Все эти тонкости, неуловимые оттенки могут быть переданы только жестом.  
—Да, ты прав.<sup>99</sup>

Mikita circumscribed a large circle in the air.  
Falk smiled.  
“You have a new gesture.”  
“You see, you can't express everything in words. All these subtleties, [these] elusive nuances can only be communicated through gesture.”  
“Yes, you're right.”

Or Falk's interrupted response several paragraphs later, after Mikita asks him how he is:

Неважны. В последнее время я много выстрадал. Эти тысячи неуловимых впечатлений, для которых нет еще слов, эти тысячи настроений, которые, как молния, рождаются в душе и бесследно исчезают...<sup>100</sup>

Things aren't going too well. I've been through a lot lately. These thousands of elusive impressions for which there are no words, these thousands of moods, which arise in the soul and disappear without a trace like lightning....

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<sup>99</sup> Erve, no. 10 (1901): 230.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 231. Meierkhol'd's staging of *Sœur Beatrice* in 1906, with its use of a narrow space and grouped figures, recalls both painting and sculpture. The implications of this exchange in Meierkhol'd's later work is a topic open for research.

These comments resonate strongly in Meierkhol'd's 1908 essay "On Theatre": "The essence of human relationships is determined by gestures, poses, glances and silences. Words alone cannot say everything."<sup>101</sup> The fact that the topics of sculpture and the importance of negative space also arise during Falk's and Mikita's conversation strongly suggest that these notions of gesture and form supplemented or helped form Meierkhol'd's artistic views on staging at this time.

2. A. Damanskaia's translation of *The Visitors* and an accompanying essay titled, "The Newest Polish Literature," both which appeared in *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*.

Another Przybyszewski work, *The Visitors* [*Goście*, 1901], is the third likely candidate for Meierkhol'd's November reference. This short work had just appeared in the October 1901 issue of another thick journal, the monthly *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury* [*Foreign Literature Herald*], in a translation by A. Damanskaia.<sup>102</sup> Both its appearance in October and a consideration of Meierkhol'd's voracious reading habits

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<sup>101</sup> "Жесты, позы, взгляды, молчание определяют истину взаимоотношений людей. Слова еще не все говорят." Italics in Russian original. Meierkhol'd, *Stat'i*, 135; Edward Braun, trans. and ed., *Meyerhold on Theatre*, rev. ed. (London: Methuen, 1998), 56.

<sup>102</sup> "Gosti. Dramaticheskii epilog v odnom deistvii Stanislava Pshybyshvskago [sic]. Perevod s pol'skom A. Damanskoi," *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 77-88. This journal also featured the article, "The Newest Polish Literature" [*Noveishaia pol'skaia literatura*] which reviews Przybyszewski's aesthetic views. According to the anonymous author, *The Visitors* is "a little thing, in which a gradual, intense building of mood paints a picture of spiritual torments and strengthening pangs of conscience, culminating in suicide" ("это небольшая вещь, в которой постепенное, напряженное нарастание настроения рисует картину душевных мук и усиливающихся угрызений совести, разрешающихся самоубийством"). See pp. 341-342.

at this time make this journal likely to have attracted Meierkhol'd's attention.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the play's genre—a one-act “dramatic epilogue”—would have been of interest to Meierkhol'd as a budding actor. However, its brief length—eleven pages—makes it unlikely that it was the only source of Meierkhol'd's infatuation with Przybyszewski, since he wrote that he was “engrossed” in reading Przybyszewski. Thus, we should consider the possibility that Meierkhol'd's introduction to Przybyszewski came through *The Golden Fleece*, the serialization of *Homo sapiens*, and the one-act epilogue, *The Visitors*.

If Meierkhol'd did read *The Visitors*, it is likely that he also read the accompanying essay on new trends in Polish literature. The author of that article seemingly equates the terms “decadent” and “modernist,” writing: “The group of poets and prose-writers, which this generation has singled out from itself, has conferred upon itself the nickname of decadents [and] modernists as a *nom de guerre*.”<sup>104</sup> Thus, this equation of “decadence” and “modernism,” without giving either term precedence, suggests that the writer in *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury* is following the same practice as Lesia Ukrainka, who had also written an article about Polish literature nine months earlier in the journal *Zhizn'*.

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<sup>103</sup> Among the newspapers that Meierkhol'd was reading from 1898-1901 are *Kur'er*, *Russkoe slovo*, *Russkie vedomosti*, and *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*.

<sup>104</sup> “Noveishaia pol'skaia literatura,” *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 340. “Группа поэтов и прозаиков, которую выделило из себя это поколение, присвоило себе, как *nom de guerre*, клички декадентов, модернистов.”

3. V. Linskii's article, "Petersburg Theatre," in *Teatr i iskusstvo*.

Linskii's article, a review of the first Russian production of Przybyszewski's *The Golden Fleece*, must be considered an additional source of attraction for Meierkhol'd due to its appearance in *Teatr i iskusstvo*, the widely-read trade weekly.<sup>105</sup> The fact that Meierkhol'd brought back Tupchapskaia's translation to Moscow from Vologda makes it very likely that he sought out this critique of the play, which had appeared only three weeks earlier, if he had not already read it. Even if Meierkhol'd himself did not buy copies of *Teatr i iskusstvo*, it would have been available at the Moscow Art Theatre and among members of the Moscow theatrical circles.

Linskii did not identify Przybyszewski as either a "modernist" or "decadent," but noted the strong impression that the work left on the audience. According to Linskii, this "mood play" told the story of a search for love which brings with it transgressions and retribution. This was done "brilliantly and unusually simply, despite the [use of] symbols and allegories, and perhaps, thanks to them."<sup>106</sup> The play's strengths were its dialogues and the mood that pervaded it. However, Linskii suggested that these positive attributes were undercut by the actors' performances, which were weak and tended toward the melodramatic. Linskii further argued that, while some critics might hold Przybyszewski's use of symbolic characters against him, "Perhaps this must be. Perhaps each of us is really a half-symbol, a half-riddle which you can't solve, even having taken, according to the saying, 'three poods of

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<sup>105</sup> V. Linskii, "Peterburgskii teatr," *Teatr i iskusstvo*, 14. X. 1901, no. 42, 748-749.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 748.

salt.”<sup>107</sup> As described by Linskii, Przybyszewski’s *The Golden Fleece*, then, was a strong work that presented a challenge to actors through the use of symbolic, or “half-symbolic,” characters. *The Golden Fleece* and *The Visitors*, correctly titled as the cycle, *Dance of Love and Death*, both would appear in Meierkhol’d’s notebooks in spring 1902 as part of a list of suggested repertoire for his new company in Kherson.<sup>108</sup>

Read in the context of *Homo sapiens*, Meierkhol’d may have conceived Linskii’s article on *The Golden Fleece* as a indirect confirmation of Falk’s declarations on art, giving him ways to interpret the work artistically and critically: Falk had called for a new art that would “prepare a new sexual selection,” Linskii had written that the play’s theme was love, with its complexities.<sup>109</sup> Falk had called for moods that would lift the veil of reality to reveal the soul; Linskii wrote about Przybyszewski’s “mood play” and its use of “half-symbols” that presented the human character as an enigma, a confirmation of Plato’s conception of reality as something more than what we can perceive.<sup>110</sup>

4. *Aforizmy i preliudy*, trans. A. Kursinskii.

Kursinskii’s translation of the first section of Przybyszewski’s collection of aesthetic essays, *Na drogach duszy* [*On the Paths of the Soul*, 1900], should be

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<sup>107</sup> “Но, быть может, так и следует. Быть может, каждый из нас действительно полусимвол, полузагадка, которую не разгадаешь даже скушав, по пословице, «три пуда соли».” Linskii, *ibid.*, 749. A Russian pood was equivalent to approximately 36 pounds.

<sup>108</sup> Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 479.

<sup>109</sup> Erve, *op. cit.*, 241; Linskii, *op. cit.*, 748.

<sup>110</sup> Erve, *op. cit.*, 239; Linskii, *op. cit.*, 749.

considered a possible source in light of Kursinskii's close friendship to Briusov, whom Meierkhol'd had recently met. While Komissarzhevskaja did not discover this work until April 1902, censors had granted permission for publication in September 1901. Both Briusov and Baltrušaitis, as members of Skorpion's editorial staff, would have been aware of its publication, since it carried an advertisement for other Skorpion publications on its back cover.

During the four years he spent at the Moscow Art Theatre, Meierkhol'd became disillusioned with his creative environment and began searching for a new path. Like Komissarzhevskaja, Meierkhol'd was drawn to the psychology of his characters and consumed by a desire to be "contemporary." Besides the general notion of "newness," Meierkhol'd associated this quality of "contemporaneity" with the plays of Hauptmann, whom he greatly admired for their "ideas" and the psychology of their characters. However, by the end of 1901 it was not only the works of Hauptmann that captivated him, but also the works of Przybyszewski.

Meierkhol'd's quest to create a more refined character through his rejection of types and his interest in psychology and a play's "idea," however vaguely he defined it, conflicts with Hoover's suggestion that Meierkhol'd left because his "gifts as an actor were proving less than they had at first promised," a claim to which Braun generally agreed.<sup>111</sup> While Meierkhol'd's questioning of the old methods of characterization and goals of theatre may have frustrated those who chose to stick with tradition, his desire to progress held promise for later innovation. If any

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<sup>111</sup> Hoover, *op. cit.*, 22; Braun, *op. cit.*, 14.

objective critique of Meierkhol'd's acting style can be made at this time, absent visual and written evidence to the contrary, it is that he was in a period of transition and growth. However, it was a growth occurring within the limitations placed on him by the demands of his director, namely "pre-method" Stanislavskii.

Two intriguing parallels now become apparent between the lives of Meierkhol'd and Komissarzhevskaja and their reception of Przybyszewski. First, both artists were undergoing a period of crisis and searching when they discovered Przybyszewski's work. Second, Przybyszewski's works made a strong enough impression on each of them that both Meierkhol'd and Komissarzhevskaja noted that impact in their personal correspondence. Meierkhol'd, in his own words, wrote in November or December 1901 that he had been "hypnotized" by the works of this modernist, while Komissarzhevskaja five months later, in April 1902, perceived her own artistic credo, her "faith," in Przybyszewski's writings and was now, she reported, "on the threshold of great events" in her life. Those great events, it turns out, included her departure from the Imperial Theatres and the beginning of a career in her own independent theatre. This is the same path that Meierkhol'd would take. Thus, Przybyszewski's works had the power to effect strong, personal responses in two creative individuals who could not find the answers to their needs in the immediate artistic environment around them, either in the stifling atmosphere of the Imperial Theatres or the naturalistic realism of the Moscow Art Theatre.

### **Meierkhol'd's break with MKhT: a soul “at the crossroads”**

The 1901/1902 season became critical for the Moscow Art Theatre: it had been losing money and a decision was made to form a joint-stock company. Even though Meierkhol'd had been with the company since 1898, he was not invited to become a member.<sup>112</sup> On 21 February 1902, Meierkhol'd sent a letter to the directors of MKhT informing them that he would not remain with the company.<sup>113</sup> Looking back at the event in 1913, Meierkhol'd wrote that he had decided to leave his “second theatre school” and strike out on an “independent path in theatre and in the area of theoretical thought.”<sup>114</sup> What were the reasons behind Meierkhol'd's decision to embark on an independent artistic path? Are Meierkhol'd's 1913 comments about possible theoretical conflicts with the Art Theatre somehow be related to his “hypnosis”?

In fact, views associated with Meierkhol'd's state of “hypnosis,” directly attributed to his new fascination with Przybyszewski, but indirectly induced by his interest in Nietzsche, do reinforce the “difference in artistic principles” or, in Meierkhol'd's words, theoretical considerations, upon which Meierkhol'd based his departure. Hoover does not fully consider these artistic differences.<sup>115</sup> According to

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<sup>112</sup> Rudnitskii, *RM*, 24-25; Braun, *op. cit.*, 14.

<sup>113</sup> Zvenigorodskaja, *op. cit.*, 17. See Fel'dman, *ibid.*, 456-471, for the correspondence which surrounds Meierkhol'd's break with MKhT.

<sup>114</sup> See Fel'dman, *ibid.*, 27. “В 1902 г. Мейерхольд оставляет свою вторую театральную школу – Московский Художественный театр и стремится к выбору самостоятельного пути в театре и в области теоретической мысли.”

<sup>115</sup> Hoover, *op. cit.*, 22. For the purpose of argument, we shall consider that Meierkhol'd's notion of “the area of theoretical thought” is equivalent to Hoover's “difference of artistic principles.” Hoover, *op. cit.*, 22. Hoover had concluded that

an article appearing in the April 17 issue of *Moskovskie vedomosti* [*Moscow News*],  
Meierkhol'd and others left

вследствие принципиального несогласия со строем и характером ведения дела, мотивируя особенно свой отказ недовольством «ограниченностью и односторонностью репертуара и принижением и давлением на свободу развития артистической личности у членов труппы».<sup>116</sup>

as a consequence of a disagreement, on a matter of principle, with the structure and character of the conduct of business; especially motivating their refusal was the dissatisfaction “with the narrowness and one-sided nature of the repertoire and the disparagement of and the trampling on the company members’ freedom of individual artistic development.”

Another announcement appeared the following day in *Kur'er*, further emphasizing their dissatisfaction with the Art Theatre’s repertoire: “the Art Theatre cannot blaze its path with only the repertoire of Ibsen and Chekhov.”<sup>117</sup> Although the group’s stated desire for “freedom of individual artistic development” sounds like a cliché today, this stress on the artistic individual reflects Meierkhol'd’s own thinking at the time, echoing both the Nietzschean stress on self-realization and the Przybyszewskian stress on the artist, in particular.

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Meierkhol'd left MKhT “more for practical or personal reasons than for differences of principle with its artistic tendencies.”

<sup>116</sup> See “Teatr i muzyka,” *Moskovskie vedomosti*, 17. IV. 1902, reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 471. Emphasis in original.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 471. “одним ибсеновским и чеховским репертуаром Художественный театр и пробиваться не может.” Fel'dman refers to a similar charge which had appeared in newspapers (*Kur'er*?) on 24 February, but does not provide documentation. Of the eighteen plays which MKhT premiered from 1898 to 1902, seven, or almost 40%, were by Ibsen and Chekhov. Three more were by Hauptmann, creating a repertoire 55% of which were works by only three dramatists.

Comments appearing in the little known programmatic fragments from late 1901 or early 1902, “The Ferment of Contemporary Theatre,” provide a fuller picture of Meierkhol'd’s frame of mind at this critical stage in his life, when he was on the verge of leaving Stanislavskii and the Moscow Art Theatre.<sup>118</sup> These comments also demonstrate that Meierkhol'd was drawing close to basic aesthetic principles voiced by Przybyszewski, creating an affinity for Przybyszewski’s works and strengthening the hypothesis that Przybyszewski’s views reinforced Meierkhol'd’s decision to leave. Five main ideas in “Ferment” parallel those of Przybyszewski. These are: 1) a belief in a “true” or higher form of art; 2) an opposition to tendentious art; 3) a questioning of moral codes; 4) a focus on art as an expression of the emotions; 5) a general belief that art must reflect reality. While the last idea seems to contradict Przybyszewski’s metaphysical notion that art must express the soul, this does not preclude Meierkhol'd’s acceptance of it. Because Meierkhol'd did not profess a purely materialist conception of reality, his desire to recreate “life in all its depth,” combined with his interest in psychology and his desire to express human emotions, easily

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<sup>118</sup>“Brozhenie sovremennogo teatra,” in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 418-425. RGALI, f. 998, op. 1, ed. khr. 382. Previously published in part in *Teatr*, no. 2 (1974): 28-29. This article consists of two complementary variants, with a brief outline of argumentation and unfinished fragments. The later date can be established by the existence of an autographed picture, inscribed “in memoriam of the defunct (*potukhnuvshii*) *Maiak*,” which Meierkhol'd sent to Vladimir Sablin in April 1902. For evidence of this inscription, see Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 471. These fragments share the motif of “ferment” with comments that appeared in *Kur'er* on 22 February, the day before Meierkhol'd and Kosheverov denied they had left MKhT for financial reasons: “Something bad is brewing in the company of the Art Theatre. Schism and ferment reign in the company.” “В труппе Художественного театра творится что-то неладное. В труппе царит раскол и брожение.” *Kur'er*, 22. II. 1902, in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 465.

accommodated Przybyszewski's view that the true expression of reality was, in fact, the "life of the soul in all its manifestations."<sup>119</sup>

Intended for *Maiak*, Meierkhol'd's drafts are an attack on the establishment of the popular theatres during the 1890s, but they also attack some of the repertoire, such as Ibsen's social dramas, which the Art Theatre had been staging. Meierkhol'd viewed popular theatres as a vehicle for propagandizing the morality of one class, the intelligentsia, over others, by means of tendentious art. He distinguished tendentious works from those which were ideological (*ideinye*), that is, those that presented ideas subjectively. In a tendentious work, the author deliberately manipulated characters and conflicts in order to prove a thesis. This resulted in a false depiction of reality: "In such works reason always dominates over emotions, problems over life, paradoxes over truth."<sup>120</sup> The domination of tendentious art in theatres consequently resulted in a deterioration in the quality of the repertoire and a movement away from true art. He credited the Deutsches Theater in Germany and the Moscow Art Theatre in Russia with leading the revival of the "true artistic theatre."<sup>121</sup> Only when tendentious art was thrown out could a new art dawn, which would focus on "abstraction, grace, beauty, and poetry."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> "Brozhenie," in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 422. " оно [*iskusstvo*] должно воспроизводить жизнь во всей её глубине и силе." Cf. Pshibyshevskii, "Na putiakh dushi," *MI*, 101: "Искусство поэтому является воспроизведением жизни души во всех ее проявлениях."

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 423. This does not mean that MKhT did not stage tendentious works. Meierkhol'd cites Ibsen's social drama, *Enemy of the People* as an example of such a work. That work premiered at MKhT on 24 October 1900.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 424.

In general, Przybyszewski's attack on tendentious art and paralleled Meierkol'd's. This paragraph from *Aphorisms* expresses Przybyszewski's basic point of view:

Искусство тенденциозное, искусство-поучение, искусство-забава, искусство-патриотизм, искусство, имеющее какую бы то ни было общественную или нравственную цель, перестает быть искусством, а становится „biblia pauperum“ для людей, которые не умеют мыслить или недостаточно образованы, чтобы прочесть надлежащее руководство.<sup>123</sup>

Tendentious art, art as instruction, art as entertainment, art as patriotism, art having any kind of social or moral goal, ceases to be art, and becomes a *biblia pauperum* for people who do not know how to think or are insufficiently educated to read the appropriate handbook.

Both Przybyszewski and Meierkol'd showed a fundamental disdain for tendentious art and moral instruction. Their goal was the same: an art free from both concepts. In the broadest sense, Meierkol'd's view that tendentiousness was the primary danger to "true" art, whose goals should be "abstraction, grace, beauty, [and] poetry," moved him close to Przybyszewski's own, more extreme, view, which Russian critics equated with the motto "art for art's sake" (*iskusstvo dlia iskusstva*).<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 8. Paraphrased by Ukrainka, *op. cit.*, 116-117: "Искусство, сколько-нибудь служащее общественности или морали, не есть искусство, --это „biblia pauperum“, заменяющая учебники недомысленным и необразованным людям." Similar sentiment is expressed in *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 342, as "Вчерашнее искусство было на услугах у так называемой нравственности. Искусство не должно иметь никаких принципов, ни нравственных, ни общественных...."

<sup>124</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 424. Meierkol'd speaks of "*istinnoe iskusstvo*" on p. 423. For the summary of Przybyszewski's views as "art for art's sake," see Ukrainka, *op. cit.*, 116, and *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 342. Przybyszewski

Meierkhol'd's failure to define such terms as "beauty" and "grace" leads to a conclusion that the two writers could have disagreed on a basic definition of "true" art, but their concern about the danger of "moralizing art" is a point on which both writers would agree.

Meierkhol'd diverges from Przybyszewski in his framing of the problem of tendentiousness and morality in art. Whereas Przybyszewski's attack on tendentiousness was apolitical, Meierkhol'd framed the problem in socio-political terms, placing the blame for the dominance of tendentious art squarely on the intelligentsia. According to Meierkhol'd, it was the intelligentsia who had been responsible for establishing the popular theatres. These theatres belied an aspiration to create "class theatre." Now it was the intelligentsia, who, in their hasty, but noble, desire to enlighten the masses, were now seeking to inspire Christian morals so unambiguously.<sup>125</sup>

Meierkhol'd and Przybyszewski both shared a Nietzschean concern for a subjective definition of morality. It was Przybyszewski, rather than Meierkhol'd, however, who expressed his rejection of moral absolutism more clearly. Again, Meierkhol'd framed the problem of morality in socio-political terms. Meierkhol'd wrote that tendentious art was showing "good" and "evil" "in the clearest terms."<sup>126</sup>

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himself writes: "Sztuka niema żadnego celu, jest celem sama w sobie...." Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 15. Cf. Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 8: "У искусства нет цели: оно цель само в себе...."

<sup>125</sup> "Brozhenie," in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 421-422.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

Furthermore, his Marxist leanings lead him to assert that the class struggle creates a mistrust of any one particular view of morality: “the critical class struggle has shown that the ‘goodness’ of some is the ‘evil’ for others.”<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, Przybyszewski flatly declared that the artist is subject neither to social nor ethical laws, and that therefore, art should “recreate the soul in all its manifestations, independent of whether they are good or bad, beautiful or ugly.”<sup>128</sup> According to Przybyszewski, art need not recognize any “accidental” classifications such as “good” or “evil” at all.<sup>129</sup>

The anonymous reviewer of Przybyszewski’s works in the October 1901 issue of *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury* had brought this notion to the attention of readers in his discussion of “On the Paths of the Soul.” He wrote that, in contrast to “yesterday’s art,” which had been in service to morality, Przybyszewski aspired to an art free of moralizing principles.<sup>130</sup> Przybyszewski’s opinion on this topic was not new. Without elaboration, Ukrainka had introduced this general concept of Przybyszewski’s aesthetics to the reading Russian public nine months previously.<sup>131</sup> Finally, the report that Przybyszewski’s dramas *The Golden Fleece* and *The Visitors*

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<sup>127</sup> Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, I, 425.

<sup>128</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 6. Meierkhol’d also expresses an opinion that the nature of the soul is complex, although this seems to be a corollary of his negative view of tendentious art, which inherently simplifies reality. Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, I, 426. Meierkhol’d mentions “the possibility of comprehending the complex soul of humanity” in notes, written sometime after 12 December about Hauptmann’s new (1901) drama *Der Rote Hahn* [*Krasnyi petukh*]. There is no evidence at this time to suggest, however, that Meierkhol’d’s understanding of the concept of “soul” carries the metaphysical connotations which the term bears in Przybyszewski’s works.

<sup>129</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 7.

<sup>130</sup> *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10: (1901): 342.

<sup>131</sup> Ukrainka, *op. cit.*, 116-117.

had been withdrawn from the Kraków stage for “immoral situations” would have given these works a certain cachet of validity with respect to the gradients of morality that Meierkhol'd was seeking portrayed on the stage.<sup>132</sup>

Both Meierkhol'd and Przybyszewski sought an art that truthfully expressed human emotions. For Meierkhol'd, this art did not exist because the writer's desire to instruct had overwhelmed the impulse to depict reality in a truthful manner.<sup>133</sup> In the end, this led to an art that could not properly be called artistic.<sup>134</sup> In contrast, Przybyszewski's more extreme view held that the very goal of art was to depict reality by reflecting not objects, but the whole range of human emotions.<sup>135</sup>

Finally, both men held the basic conviction that true art must reflect reality. However, each artist arrived at this conviction from different points of view. For Meierkhol'd, a representation of reality (*deistvitel'nost'*) “must recreate life in all its depth and force.”<sup>136</sup> However, unlike Przybyszewski, this belief did not cause him to reject completely a materialist understanding of reality. It led Meierkhol'd to reject a particular representation of reality—tendentious art—as false, as well as the carriers of that art, the popular theatre, and that part of the moralizing intelligentsia who had

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<sup>132</sup> Reported in passing in *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 341.

<sup>133</sup> “Brozhenie,” in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 422. “В таких произведениях [tendentious works] всегда рассудочность доминирует над чувством, проблемы над жизнью, парадоксы над истиной.”

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 422. “Тенденциозные произведения – не художественны по форме.”

<sup>135</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 17; *Ukrainka*, *op. cit.*, 117.

<sup>136</sup> “Brozhenie,” in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 422. “А всякое художественное произведение должно прежде всего быть верным отражением действительности: оно должно воспроизводить жизнь во всей её глубине и силе.”

created these works. In the end, it also led him to seek new writers who would create a new, more objective repertoire.<sup>137</sup>

Przybyszewski's rejection of not only tendentious art, but also the current trend in artistic representation—realism—was founded in the mystical belief that this reality itself was false. Therefore, any representations of it were imperfect and incomplete. Only through the exploration of the subconscious, or the very depth of the soul, could the artist hope to uncover the veil of illusion that hid true reality from our perception. For Przybyszewski the urge to “recreate life in all its depth and force,” to use Meierkhol'd's words, was expressed as the need for art “to reflect the life of the soul in all its manifestations,” without regard for moral, social, or aesthetic preconceptions.<sup>138</sup>

In summary, in the months before his departure from the Moscow Art Theatre, while he was “hypnotized” by Przybyszewski, Meierkhol'd struggled with many different problems facing the actor, artist, and society. He was interested in the creation of individual characters and a theatre that presented ideas relevant to contemporary society, but was free of tendentiousness and moral absolutes. At the same time, his interest in psychology was growing, and he was now familiar with some elements of Nietzschean philosophy. While none of these elements have a unique source in Przybyszewski's works and aesthetic views, many of them resonated

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 423-424.

<sup>138</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 6-7. Cf. Ukrainka, *op. cit.*, 116, *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10: (1901): 342.

in various combinations in *Homo sapiens*, *The Golden Fleece*, and *Aphorisms*, explaining why Meierkhol'd fell under Przybyszewski's hypnosis at the end of 1901.

Meierkhol'd's publicized dissatisfaction with MKhT's repertoire ("the narrowness and one-sided nature of the repertoire") and his warning that it could not focus entirely on the works of two dramatists ("only the repertoire of Ibsen and Chekhov") suggest that Meierkhol'd had approached the theatre with a proposal to stage works by other contemporary playwrights.<sup>139</sup> His new interest in Przybyszewski, combined with his interests in psychology and morality, create a factual foundation for a hypothesis that Stanislavskii and Nemirovich-Danchenko may have rejected a suggestion by Meierkhol'd in November or December to stage *The Golden Fleece*, which he had recently read. No evidence exists to prove or disprove this hypothesis. The fact remains, though, that the Moscow Art Theatre never staged a Przybyszewski drama, while Meierkhol'd's new company staged *The Golden Fleece* a little more than a month after his first production in Kherson.

### **Kherson and *The Golden Fleece***

Even as Meierkhold and Kosheverov were touring in St. Petersburg with the Art Theatre, they were finalizing negotiations for the leasing of a theatre in the southern city of Kherson.<sup>140</sup> The new company also needed a repertoire, and the repertory system then prevailing in the provinces meant that Meierkhol'd would have

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<sup>139</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 471.

<sup>140</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 465-466. The MKhT tour began on 4 March 1902. N. E. Savinov, a former student in the directing program at MKhT and future member of the acting collective, acted as Meierkhol'd's and Kosheverov's representative in Kherson.

to stage several new plays each week. Meierkhol'd thus set about preparing a list of potential works that the new company could stage.

Circumstantial evidence suggests that Meierkhol'd had been doing further reading about Przybyszewski in late 1901 or early 1902, as he prepared to leave MKhT. In his notebooks of spring and summer 1902, Meierkhol'd listed both Przybyszewski's drama (*The Golden Fleece*) and its epilogue (*The Visitors*), on a page marked "suggested repertoire." He not only noted their separate titles, but also the name by which they are known as a dramatic cycle, *The Dance of Love and Death*.<sup>141</sup> Neither Erve's published translation of *The Golden Fleece* nor Damanskaia's version of *The Visitors* had noted this fact.<sup>142</sup>

Meierkhol'd's identification of the cycle at a time when it was noted by few Russian critics suggests several possible explanations. First, he may have discovered this information through independent inquiry. Second, he may have been in contact with others who were more knowledgeable about Przybyszewski. In Moscow, Meierkhol'd's possible contacts were Briusov and Baltrušaitis. Outside of Moscow these contacts may have been either Remizov or Tupchapskaia, whose translation of *The Golden Fleece* he had conveyed back to Moscow from Vologda in early

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<sup>141</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 479-480.

<sup>142</sup> S. Pshibyshevskii, "Gosti. Dramaticheskii epilog v odnom deistvii Stanislava Pshybyshvetskago [sic]," trans. from the Polish, A. Damanskaia, *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 77-88; *Zolotoe runo. Drama v 3-kh deistviiakh*, trans. from the Polish, Erve (St. Petersburg: Teatr i iskusstvo, 1902).

November 1901.<sup>143</sup> Third, he may have read A. Damanskaia's 1901 article on Przybyszewski in the St. Petersburg newspaper, *Rossia* [*Russia*]. This was the first Russian-language article to identify these two works as a cycle.<sup>144</sup>

Damanskaia's translation of Przybyszewski's *The Visitors* had appeared in the October 1901 issue of *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*. The anonymous critical article, "On the Newest Polish Literature," which also appeared in that issue of the journal, did not mention the cycle by name, although it mentions both plays in conjunction with the theme of retribution, which is strongly expressed in both works.<sup>145</sup> Whatever date Meierkol'd became familiar with Przybyszewski's plays as a dramatic cycle, we can be certain that, as early as spring or as late as summer 1902, Meierkol'd, now "hypnotized" by Przybyszewski, and his new partner, A. Kosheverov, intended to stage these works.

Meierkol'd now became not only an actor, but a director and entrepreneur. The "Company of Russian Dramatic Artists, under the direction of A. S. Kosheverov and V. E. Meierkol'd" (the official name of the troupe), arrived in Kherson in mid-

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<sup>143</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 535-536. However, this letter mentions *The Golden Fleece* only, not both plays. The Theatre Library in St. Petersburg does not hold a manuscript of the Tupchapskaia translations for possible reference.

<sup>144</sup> A. D—skaia, "Stanislav Pshybysheskii [sic]," *Rossia*, no. 915, 11. XI. 1901, p. 2.

Damanskaia identifies Przybyszewski as a "poet-modernist" whose views on art may not be original, but are passionate and sincere. She notes several of those, such as his view that art reflects life [sic] in all its manifestations, and his view that the *narod* needs bread more than art. She also comments on the novel *Homo sapiens*, the prose-poem "Nad morzem" and *Zolotoe runo*. In March/April 1901 a Polish-language article had already discussed the cycle, but does not mention its epilogue. See *Obserwator*, *op. cit.*, 153-154.

<sup>145</sup> "Noveishaia pol'skaia literatura," *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 341.

August 1902 and soon began its rehearsals.<sup>146</sup> On 15 August 1902, an article appeared in *Iug* that introduced the new company to its future patrons, the citizens of Kherson.<sup>147</sup> The openly supportive column noted several qualities of the company that the audience should expect. First, the company was not formed around several “stars,” but rather had the goal of creating an *ensemble*.<sup>148</sup> Second, the repertoire of the company would be very similar to that of the Moscow Art Theatre. This effort to create an ensemble would necessarily mean the movement away from the traditional troupe and its reliance on *emploi*, which, according to the author of the column, only created adversaries among cast members as they each vied for audience acclaim.<sup>149</sup> Thus, each actor would be expected to perform any role required by the director. Third, the company would refrain from holding benefits, the pitiful “tips” from which only offended cast members who did not enjoy the greatest support of the public.

Most importantly, the new company promised changes in repertoire. This decision marked the first attempt to exemplify the exact nature of Meierkhol'd's previously announced dissatisfaction with the Art Theatre's repertoire and the ideas

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<sup>146</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 527, 531.

<sup>147</sup> “Teatral'nye besedy. K predstoiashchemu teatral'nomu sezonu,” *Iug*, 15. VIII. 1902. Reprinted with commentary in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 524-526.

<sup>148</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 524. Emphasis in the original. “...цель: создать дело, построенное не на двух-трех «китах», а на ансамбле.”

<sup>149</sup> While Meierkhol'd may have dismissed the adversarial aspects of the *emploi* tradition early in his career, he did not dismiss the recognition of character types or “set roles” later. In his brochure *Amplua aktera* [*The Actor's Emploi*], commissioned by the State Graduate School for Theatre Directors (GVyRM) in 1921, Meierkhol'd identifies 21 male and female roles, describing the physical qualifications necessary for each, their dramatic functions, and examples from the classical repertoire. See Appendix 2, “Amplua aktera. The Set Roles of the Actor's Art,” in Hoover, *op. cit.*, 297-310.

he had explored in his unpublished article for *Maiak*.<sup>150</sup> The new entrepreneurs refused to stage adaptations of literary works, which could be profitable at the box office. On the contrary, Meierkhol'd and Kosheverov considered these popular adaptations a “profanation of great works.”<sup>151</sup> In this public stance against the degradation of art, Meierkhol'd, at least superficially, upheld Przybyszewski's elevated view of “art for art’s sake.”

On 22 September 1902 the Company premiered its production of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* [*Tri sestry*] at the Kherson Municipal Theatre, taking full advantage of all the current acting and staging techniques which Kosheverov and Meierkhol'd had learned as members of the Moscow Art Theatre.<sup>152</sup> Although a production of *Three Sisters* the previous season by the Malinovskii company had left audiences “disenchanted with the play,” by mid-afternoon of the performance, people remained standing around the ticket office, offering to pay double for added seats.<sup>153</sup>

One month later, on 24 October 1902, Meierkhol'd premiered a production of Przybyszewski's *The Golden Fleece*, only the second Russian troupe to stage this controversial drama and place it in repertory. It came a year after the Shabel'skaia production in St. Petersburg, which had caused such a furor in the press the previous

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<sup>150</sup> “Teatr i muzyka,” *Moskovskie vedomosti*, 17. IV. 1902, reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 471; “Brozhenie,” in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 418-425.

<sup>151</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 525-526.

<sup>152</sup> The Company would eventually re-create thirteen productions of MKhT: Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vania*, and *The Seagull*; Hauptmann's *Fuhrman Henschel*, *Einsame Menschen*, *Michael Kramer*, and *Die versunkene Glocke*; Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, *Wild Duck*, and *Doctor Stockman (Enemy of the People)*; Aleksei Tolstoi's historical dramas *Death of Ivan the Terrible* and *Tsar Fedor Ioannovich*; and Gor'kii's *Philistines (Meshchane)*.

<sup>153</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 546.

fall.<sup>154</sup> Meierkhol'd's 19 productions which preceded *The Golden Fleece* were varied in artistic quality and origin.<sup>155</sup> Four productions, Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vania* and *The Seagull*, as well as Hauptmann's *Fuhrman Henschel*, were all faithful re-creations of Art Theatre productions. These productions, as well as the other imitations of MKhT repertoire, served as a "school of practical directing" through which Meierkhol'd, as a novice director, could find his own voice.<sup>156</sup> Three productions were repertory pieces which accompanied their actor-directors: Savikov (N. E. Sadko) directed both Ostrovskii's comedy *Artists and Admirers* [*Talanty i pokloniki*] and Naidenov's drama *Ivanushka's Children* [*Deti Ivanushki*]; while Kosheverov directed the comedy *The Marriage of Belugin* [*Zhenit'ba Belugina*] by Ostrovskii and Solov'ev. One night each week was devoted to light fare: comedies, genre plays such as Trofimov's *The Queen Bee and Drones*, *Scenes of Everyday life in*

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<sup>154</sup> V. Burenin, writing about *The Visitors*, wondered if "this nonsense represents the new direction in art," in "Kriticheskie ocherki," *Novoe vremia*, no. 9198, 12. X. 1901, p. 2; "[*The Golden Fleece*] is one long, boring proceeding, which, moreover, the neurasthenics drag out," "Teatr i muzyka. Moskva," *Novoe vremia*, no. 9200, 14. X. 1901, p. 4; meanwhile, L. B—t declared that Przybyszewski, although he demonstrated the influence of both Ibsen and Maeterlinck, also showed "an undeniable originality in [his] grasp of 'the demonic power of love,'" in "Z chwili biezącej. «Złote runo» w Petersburgu," *Kraj* (pril. *Życie i sztuka*), 19. X (1.XI). 1901, no. 42, p. 495; cf. also V. Linskii, "Peterburskii teatr," *Teatr i iskusstvo*, 14. X. 1901, no. 42; [O. Kapeliush], "*Zolotoe runo*. Drama Stanislava Pshibyshevskago," *Nuvelist*, no. 11; and A. D—skaia, "Stanislav Pshibyshevskii," *Rossia*, 11. XI. 1901, no. 915. A Russian, (i.e., non-Polish) view of Przybyszewski's notoriety also began to circulate in the southwestern provinces in late 1901. See the article in the Zhitomir daily "Stanislav Pshibyshevskii," *Volyn'*, 6. XII. 1901, no. 266, a reprint of Damanskaia's column in *Rossia*.

<sup>155</sup> For a listing of productions, see "Prilozhenie 1 [Sezon 1902/1903]" in Zvenigorodskaia, *op. cit.*, 185-196, or Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 542-546. Appendix II in Leach, *VM*, 194-204, is a listing of all Meierkhol'd's productions from 1902-1939.

<sup>156</sup> The term is Rudnitskii's, who uses it in reference to Meierkhol'd's entire experience in Kherson. See Rudnitskii, *RM*, 29.

*3 Acts* [*Pchela i trutni, kartiny budnichnoi zhizni v 3 d.*] or vaudevilles, such as I. Shcheglov's *A Woman's Trifles* [*Zhenskaia chepukha*].

On 20 October 1902 *Iug* published a column, introducing the public to Przybyszewski and his play.<sup>157</sup> Although the drama was to premiere on the 22nd, *Henschel* was staged instead. There are two possible reasons for this delay. First, Meierkhol'd may not have had a workable script, although it seems unlikely that he would have premiered Przybyszewski's play with only a few rehearsals, considering that he held the rehearsal process in high regard. Therefore Meierkhol'd's staging was entirely new and the most likely reason for the postponement was a lack of preparation by the small cast.

There is no indication that the production was as innovative as some scholars would suggest.<sup>158</sup> Meierkhol'd's set designs, preserved in a booklet, are the only evidence we have of his artistic intentions.<sup>159</sup> The box sets of his sketches are not radically different from any others of this period and create naturalistic stage

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<sup>157</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 554. The exact content of this piece is unknown.

<sup>158</sup> Schmid, *op. cit.*, 427-431.

<sup>159</sup> Reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 592, 581. RGALI, f. 998, op. 1, ed. khr. 5. No page numbers. Fel'dman's notes read: "Act I. Box set #2. Leather couch, smoking table, two leather chairs, dinner table, six oak chairs, sideboard (yellow), small table, curtains. On the draft: Box set #2. Sideboard [RC], [long] window [LC]. Acts II & III. Box set #3, box set #2 (portals taken from *Potemkin*). On the playing area: all blue (furniture), oval table, rugs. First room, Couchette and all furniture, leather. Bookcase, average-sized round table, polished table. Clock in a case, curtains. On the draft: Box set #3, playing area [UC], clock [ULC], arch [LC], holes [in the ceiling for chandelier][DC], column [R], column [L]. Moskvin has suggested that these properties are scattered about on stage to give a semblance of chaos. See Moskwin, "Recepja," 413.

spaces.<sup>160</sup> Furthermore, the notation of general properties on these drafts do not suggest that Meierkhol'd understood the symbolic significance of the play's setting, a sanatorium, at this time.<sup>161</sup> Nor is there any indication that Meierkhol'd used lighting, especially the chandelier noted in the draft, in any manner that moved beyond a naturalistic style.<sup>162</sup>

The single review of this performance ignored Meierkhol'd's staging, and instead, praised the acting.<sup>163</sup> There was no mention made of either the set design or lighting. "V. L." did not waste print by providing a synopsis of the plot, but praised the actors, especially Natal'ia Budkevich, who played Irena, for their conscientious and well thought-out acting. The reviewer noted that she fulfilled the role "simply,

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<sup>160</sup> Moskvin suggests that Meierkhol'd is significantly opening up the stage space in this production. Although this may be true, the set does not seem to differ greatly from others of this period. See, for example, the designs for *Seagull* and *Einsame Menschen*. See Moskwin, "Recepja," 413; Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 591, 595.

<sup>161</sup> Although Przybyszewski often changed the names of characters in his translations, the setting remained the same. Thus, in the original Polish version (1901) of *The Golden Fleece*, the five characters are named Gustaw Rembowski, Irena, Ruszczyc, Łacki, and Zygmunt Przesławski. The setting is a "sanatorium lecznicz[e] wielkiego miejsca kąpielowego." In the German edition (1902), these characters become Gustaw Forster, Irena, Demby, Unruh, and Otman. The setting is not specifically noted in the stage directions, but Forster/Rembowski remains "Direktor einer grossen Anstalt für Nervenkrankheiten." This setting is alluded to numerous times in the dialogue of the first scene.

<sup>162</sup> Schmid claims that the stage lighting in *The Golden Fleece* "does not depend on the actual time of day, but comments on the development of the action." This claim is only partially correct, contradicting Przybyszewski's own stage directions that the action occurs over a period of three days, Act II occurring "toward evening" and Act III occurring in the very early morning. Her example, the growing darkness enveloping Irena and Przesławski, can be explained naturalistically, i.e., night has arrived. Cf. Schmid, *ibid.*, 429, and Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 593. Schmid seems to be suggesting that Meierkhol'd had already attempted the lighting experiments that occurred in the production of *Snow* one year later.

<sup>163</sup> V. L., "Gorodskoi teatr. *Zolotoe runo*, drama v 3-kh d., Stanislava Pshebyshevskago [sic]," *Iug*, 26. X. 1902, no. 1331, p. 3.

without any affectation.” Meierkhol'd, in the “undoubtedly difficult” role of Rembowski, was gently admonished for overacting: he could have been better if he had “expended his energies” more “economically.” In V. L.’s opinion, Meierkhol'd played Rembowski so emotionally high-strung at the beginning of the performance that the character could not develop further. The writer Przesławski (played by Kosheverov), was identified with the popular Nietzschean type of the strong personality, who would crush the weak in the search for his own personal happiness. However, Przesławski’s profession as an artist meant that he was “not only not devoid of temperament,” but consequently “able to deeply feel, and therefore, reflect everything happening around him in himself.”<sup>164</sup>

**The second provincial season (1903/1904): the “new art” as a new direction and a “very bold step”**

If the Company of Russian Dramatic Artists had had a successful first season in Kherson from September 1902 to February 1903, their return the following fall would be marked both by a move in a bold, new direction, characterized by a change of name, a further change of repertoire, attempts at innovative staging, and growing dissatisfaction among theatergoers with that direction.<sup>165</sup> During Meierkhol'd’s second provincial season, Przybyszewski’s influence, which could only be hypothesized during the discussion of events at the end of 1901 and beginning of 1902, would find clearer articulation. Meierkhol'd would indirectly note that influence, as well as the significance of the 1903/1904 season, by heralding the

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>165</sup> Volkov, *op. cit.*, 170.

premiere Russian production of Przybyszewski's *Snow* as a "very bold step" for his fledgling company of actors.<sup>166</sup> Within the tight-knit company, however, this new direction also left its mark by encouraging or hastening the departure of Kosheverov and several others, who left sometime in mid-June or July to join another troupe in Kiev.<sup>167</sup> In his account of this period, Volkov observed that the notions of "new art," "new theatre," and "new drama" began to echo more and more in Meierkhol'd's thoughts, this, in turn, caused him to require a company of actors that was not only new in name, but also "in essence."<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. "очень смелый шаг"

<sup>167</sup> O. M. Fel'dman, *Meierkhol'd. Nasledie. Tom 2. Tovarishchestvo novoi dramy. Sozdanie Studii na Povarskoi. Leto 1903-vesna 1905* (Moskva: Novoe, 2006), 32. Further citations abbreviated as "Nasledie, 2." Zvenigorodskaiia (2004) suggests, without further explanation, that Kosheverov left because he did not share Meierkhol'd's enthusiasm for the new art, which was becoming the focus of the company's repertoire. See Zvenigorodskaiia, *op. cit.*, 93. Kosheverov's decision had to be made sometime before 5 August 1903, when an announcement in the Odessa newspaper *Iuzhnoe obozrenie*, stated that he would not be with the troupe when it returned to Kherson. The company's final date in Sevastopol', where they had been performing since 7 April, was 6 June. Rudnitskii (1969) avoids the problem of Kosheverov's departure altogether by stating only that Meierkhol'd led the company alone the following season, after broadening the repertoire while engaged in Sevastopol'. See Rudnitskii, *RM*, 34. Leach (1989) and Braun (1995) take the same approach, while Hoover (1974) erroneously conflates the travels of Meierkhol'd's company, stating that "the cooperative of young actors" spent "the first year...in Kherson, the second in Tiflis," thus obscuring the fact that the company started their second season in Kherson as well. Although Hoover admits that Meierkhol'd "co-directed" the new company, she conceals both the name of the other co-director and the fact that Kosheverov left after the first season. See Hoover, *op. cit.*, 6, 22. For the record, Kosheverov's and Meierkhol'd's company performed in Kherson, Nikolaev and Sebastopol' during their first season, and Kherson and Nikolaev during the winter of the second season. In late summer 1904 TND performed in Penza, Tiflis, and Nikolaev before Meierkhol'd left to help create the Theatre-Studio in Moscow in May 1905.

<sup>168</sup> Volkov, *op. cit.*, 170, 171.

Externally, Meierkhol'd signaled this move by renaming the company the “Association of New Drama” [*Tovarishchestvo Novoi dramy*, “TND”], but the true “essence” of the enterprise was to be found in a new repertoire, founded on a growing interest in aesthetic theory, especially regarding theatre, the “idea,” and the exploration of self. One of the initiators of that change in repertoire was Aleksei Remizov, whose name began appearing on the posters announcing the new company. Although Remizov had no formal duties, he worked closely with his friend, Vsevolod Meierkhol'd, as a literary advisor to the Association.<sup>169</sup>

In the interview “The Association of New Drama. (Letter from Kherson),” published in *Iuzhnoe Obozrenie* [*Southern Review*] on 11 September 1903, correspondent V. Lenskii interviewed Meierkhol'd and presented both the goals of the new company and the reasoning behind its name change.<sup>170</sup> The new season, Lenskii writes, would feature not only new plays, but also the revival of old repertoire, searching “in it for that *new* thing, which has *always* composed its quintessence, but until now, through myopia or simply incomprehension, has not been revealed in it or has remained in shadow.”<sup>171</sup> Meierkhol'd’s search for the “*new* thing” was a new

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<sup>169</sup> Volkov, *ibid.*, 169; Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 16; Zvenigorodskaiia, *op cit.*, 94.

<sup>170</sup> V. Lenskii, “Tovarishchestvo Novoi dramy. (Pis'mo iz Khersona),” *Iuzhnoe obozrenie*, 11. IX. 1903. Reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 46-47, with a variant text, reprinted from *Iuzhnaia Rossiia* in Nikolaev on 13. IX. 1903, on pp. 47-49. Lenskii was a correspondent for *Iuzhnaia Rossiia* at the time and the article appeared over the pseudonym “Optimist.” *Teatr i iskusstvo* picked up the story and ran quotations from it in issue no. 39, p. 710. See the commentary in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 47, 49.

<sup>171</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 46. “Здесь подразумевается не только постановка новых драм, но, так сказать, возрождение старой драмы, отыскивание в ней

articulation of his concern for the “idea” of the drama, which had bothered him since the MKhT productions of *Hedda Gabler* and *Einsame Menschen* in 1899, and his differentiation of tendentious and ideological art in the “Ferment” drafts of 1901/1902.

In his column *Lenskii* placed major emphasis on Meierkhol'd's definition of “new drama,” which broke with naturalism and explored the inner self. A review of his comments will aid in our understanding just how Przybyszewski's aesthetics complemented and even helped to create a philosophical foundation for Meierkhol'd's own innovations. Developing the theme that Meierkhol'd's company is “searching for the ‘new,’” *Lenskii* presented Meierkhol'd's definition of the “new drama”:

Помимо возрождения старой драмы, г. Мейерхольд полагает в будущем уделить много внимания новой драме, вылившейся из литературных направлений, «разрывающих с натурализмом, и раскалывающих скорлупу жизни для обнажения её ядра – души», идейность новой драмы выражается связью повседневности с вечностью, то есть отдельного с целым.<sup>172</sup> [Emphasis added.]

Besides the revival of old drama, Mr. Meierkhol'd is proposing to devote a great deal of attention to the new drama sprung from the literary trends [that are] “breaking with naturalism, and splitting the shell of life to lay bare its core—the soul.” The fundamental idea of the new drama is expressed as the connection between the everyday and the eternal, i.e., the separate with the whole.

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того нового, что всегда составляло её сущность, но до сих пор по близорукости или просто непониманию не было в ней открыто и оставалось в тени.”

<sup>172</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 46.

The central position which the soul holds in Meierkhol'd's conception of the “new drama,” echoes Przybyszewski's chief assertion in *Aphorisms and Preludes*. The new art shifts from an illusory, external reality to the higher reality within, that is, the soul. This approach would now become the central focus for a revival of older works. Lenskii continued:

Всё то, что являлось необходимыми элементами старой драмы, как то: интерес к реальному изображению души, к внешней оболочке жизни (характер, тип, социальное положение и национальность героя, искания смысла и цели жизни) — всё это в новой драме уступает место более важному—душе. Главную роль здесь исполняет душа.<sup>173</sup> [Emphasis added.]

Everything that has appeared to be necessary elements of the old drama —like the interest in a realistic representation of the soul, [the interest in ] life's external shell (disposition, type, social position and nationality of a [dramatic] character, the searchings for the meaning and goal of life)—all this concedes its place to something more important in the new drama—the soul. Here the soul plays the main role.

Here Lenskii presents Meierkhol'd's views, explaining the differences between the “old” and “new” drama. The “realistic representation of the soul” and “life's external shell,” is here defined as “disposition, type, social position and nationality.” These given circumstances are all external features that actors and directors of the naturalist school strove to emphasize in a production, whether it was the ethnographic authenticity of Sanin's production of *Antigone* (1899) or Stanislavskii's re-creation of Russian provincial life in Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1898). No actors could give proper

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

attention to the internal peripeteia of a character—no matter what the plot was--if they were constantly worried about the physicalization of either these sudden psychological changes as nervous tics, dialectical subtleties, etc., or the character’s interaction with the environment (swatting flies, scratching one’s back against a stove, blowing one’s nose, wiping away sweat) within the context of a specific time and place.

In Meierkhol'd’s opinion, what types of drama fit under this rubric of “new drama”? Lenskii continued:

Под такие литературные направления подходят: синтетическая драма Пшибышевского (познание сущности бытия путём синтезирования и символизирования рассматриваемого случая жизни), драма духа Габриэля Д’Аннунцио (борьба индивидуума с самим собой), символическая драма Ибсена, «роковая» драма древних, драмы Метерлинка (первого периода, до «Монны Ванны» и «Жуазель») и Стриндберг.<sup>174</sup> [Emphasis added.]

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<sup>174</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 46. Maeterlinck’s “first period”: even at this time, critics discerned differences between the Belgian dramatist’s new historical drama, *Monna Vanna* (1901), and the plays which had gone before. The characters, setting, and plot of *Monna Vanna* are more clearly drawn, and Maeterlinck uses historical sources for his plot. According to literary historian W. D. Wells, Maeterlinck “finally rejects Symbolism” with this work. Maeterlinck’s “first period” works include the “dramatic trilogy of death” (*L’Intruse*, *Les Aveugles* (both pub. 1890), *Les Sept Princesses*, 1891) and the “puppet dramas” (*Alladine et Palomides*, *L’Intérieur*, *La Mort de Tintagiles*, all 1894)). See H. D. Halls, *Maurice Maeterlinck: A Study of His Life and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 72, 33, 41. Russian companies performed none of these works to the extent as those of Przybyszewski, and only *Monna Vanna* became a permanent part of Russian repertoire at this time. The Association of New Drama (TND) would premiere *Monna Vanna* on 22 January 1904. In “An Unnecessary Truth” Briusov posits both the plays of Maeterlinck and the latest plays of Ibsen as the most notable attempts of plays that “reject the superfluous and unnecessary” and allow the actor “to express the corporeal in the spiritual.” See Briusov, *Sochineniia*, t. 2, 66.

The synthetic drama of Przybyszewski (the cognition of the essence of existence as a path of synthesizing and the symbolizing of an examined life event), Gabriel D'Annunzio's drama of the spirit (the struggle of the individual with self), the symbolic drama of Ibsen, the "fateful" drama of antiquity, the dramas of Maeterlinck (the first period, before *Monna Vanna* and *Joyzelle*) and Strindberg all fit under such literary trends.

How was the actor or director to accomplish this redirection inward in the new drama? What did Meierkhol'd mean when he referred to Przybyszewski's works as "synthetic drama"?

We will propose answers to these questions in the following two sections. We offer now a brief review of Briusov's remarks about art and the soul. Then, in the following section, we will analyze several motifs and lexical choices in Lenskii's interview with Meierkhol'd and examine their thematic links to Przybyszewski's essays, suggesting that Przybyszewski is a direct source for Meierkhol'd's thoughts on art and soul.

Let us first examine Briusov's well-known essay "An Unnecessary Truth" (1902), which appeared several months after the publication of *Aphorisms and Preludes*, as the only possible source of Meierkhol'd's developing interest in the soul. Briusov's essay was an attack on the Moscow Art Theatre and its external truths. Like Przybyszewski before him, Briusov felt that the subject of art was the artist's soul and feelings, but also took the artist's subjective opinions into account, by allowing the artist to express a "worldview."<sup>175</sup> He believed that the audience received artistic and aesthetic pleasure not from the play's thematic content, but from

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<sup>175</sup> Briusov, *Sochineniia*, t. 2, 56.

the actor's skill.<sup>176</sup> Because Briusov assumed that theatre, as an art form, was inherently non-representational (*uslovnyi*), he decried the unnecessary hyper-imitation of reality in which the Art Theatre had been engaging. Briusov indirectly links MKhT's mistaken efforts at re-creating reality to the efforts of the "realist novelists" (*romanisty-realisty*) who attempt to record and duplicate nature with the detail of a photograph. In Briusov's opinion this is a mistaken goal, for the duplication of reality can only have a scientific, not artistic, aim.<sup>177</sup> In its place, Briusov called for "conscious theatricality (or non-representation)" which would allow the actor to express his soul freely upon the stage.<sup>178</sup>

In our discussion of Komissarzhevskaja's discovery of Przybyszewski we discussed the basic concept explicated in *Aphorisms and Preludes* – that the "new art" reveals the soul, defined by Przybyszewski as "the absolute." Critics who might argue that the true origins of Meierkol'd's comments lie in Briusov's essay are easily led astray by such aphoristic phrases as "the soul of the artist is revealed before us"

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 59. Curiously, Przybyszewski had also attacked naturalism for its verisimilitude to the photograph five years earlier. See for example, his comparison of the artistic approaches of "the pope of the naturalists," Max Liebermann (1847-1935) and Edvard Munch (1863-1944) from 1897: "Kurz: Liebermann malt die Natur sans phrase, deskriptiv, pedantisch, ohne sich um den »Sinn« zu kümmern. Er ist eben ein Naturalist, aufgewachsen in der Zeit des Amerikanismus, der Ideenlosigkeit, des Mangels an Zeit und vor Allem der Zeit der Photographie. Er ist kalt, ohne unnütze Gedanken, begeht nie den Unfug, in Ekstase zu kommen und seine Devise, das ist das Famoso: Phantasie ist Notbehelf! / Nun malt Munch Fieber und Vision. Er malt die Natur, wie sie sich in bestimmten Stimmungen der Seele darbietet." In the Polish and Russian translations, only Liebermann's motto of "Fantasy is makeshift (i.e., unreal)" remains. Przybyszewski also asserts that naturalism merges two dangerous trends, the destruction of individualism and militaristic uniformity. Cf. Przybyszewski, "Auf der Wegen der Seele," 18, and "Na putiakh dushi," *MI*, 108.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

and “all this is only a means for the artist to express his soul.”<sup>179</sup> Briusov, however, fails to explain what forms the artist’s “soul” may take, and thus fails to provide explicit direction for the actor or director who wishes to express that “soul.”

Differences in vocabulary point to Przybyszewski as a complementary, or even, more likely, source for these comments. In his interview with Lenskii, Meierkol'd expresses the view that art, which expresses the soul, as both Briusov and Przybyszewski suggest, is also associated with the notion of the eternal and eternity (*vechnost'*) (“The fundamental idea of the new drama is expressed as the connection between the everyday and the eternal”). This association of the new drama with “soul” and “the eternal” is similar to that made by Komissarzhevskaiia in April 1902. As we have found, in Przybyszewski’s essay the association of art and “the eternal” is expressed in such nebulous phrases such as “art is the re-creation of that which is eternal” and “art is the manifestation of the soul in all its states; [art] observes [the soul] on all its paths, follows it into eternity and space.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, 58. There is evidence to suggest that Meierkol'd, through Remizov, may have read or re-read Briusov’s essay in September 1903. The essay was certainly in Remizov’s mind at this time, although he does not identify it by name. In a letter to Briusov dated 1 October 1903, Remizov remarks, “In no way will I recall the title of the play about which you speak in your article on the Art Theatre.” See E. R. Obratina, N. N. Panfilova, O.M. Fel'dman, “A. M. Remizov i Tovarishchestvo novoi dramy. Iz perepiski A. M. Remizova s V. Ia. Briusovym, O. Madelungom, Viach. I. Ivanovym, L. D. Zinov'evoi-Annibal, G. I. Chulkovym, M. A. Mikhailovym. 1903-1906,” *Teatr*, no. 2 (1994): 107. Further citations will be noted as “Obratina, et al., “Remizov i TND”, *Teatr*, no. 2 (1994).

<sup>180</sup> “Na putiakh dushi,” *Mir iskusstva*, 101, 102. “Искусство,—это воспроизведение того, что вечно” and “Искусство—это проявление души во всех состояниях, оно наблюдает ее на всех путях, следует за ней в вечность и пространство, ...”

In contrast, for all his discussion of the soul, art, and the artist, especially in the first section of “An Unnecessary Truth,” Briusov uses the word “eternal” only once, in the second section, his attack on staging at the Moscow Art Theatre. In addition, Briusov’s use of the term “eternal” refers not to “soul” (which he does not attempt to define), but to the concept of theatrical convention (*uslovnost’*) and the spectator’s ability to adapt to each new innovation brought before it on the stage. In Briusov’s metaphorical language, wild, untamed theatrical conventions, such as the overuse of artificial trees, naturalistic lighting, and other scenic devices, become an elemental beast that must be tamed by the new scenic designer who wishes to avoid the pitfalls of staging as exemplified by the Moscow Art Theatre. He writes: “Is it not better to leave the pointless and fruitless battle with invincible scenic conventions, *eternally* arising in new strength, and attempting not to kill them, [but] to try to subjugate, tame, bridle, and saddle them?”<sup>181</sup>

In Przybyszewski’s worldview it is art itself that is an elemental, cosmic force, not the materials by which the artist transmits it from the absolute to the world of reality. In its elevated position, art metaphorically becomes a religion and the artist, its priest and prophet. Thus when the artist, “*ipse philosophus daemon Deus et omnia,*” functions as the priest of that highest religion—art—he becomes a conduit

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<sup>181</sup> Briusov, *Sochineniia*, t. 2, 63. My emphasis. “Так не лучше ли оставить бесцельную и бесплодную борьбу с непобедимыми, вечно восстающими в новой силе сценическими условностями, и, не пытаясь убить их, постараться их покорить, приручить, взнуздать, оседлать.”

for art, and shares in its cosmic, metaphysical qualities.<sup>182</sup> Meierkhol'd had even proclaimed this aristocratic view against a perceived threat from populist critics. In a letter to Tikhonov in mid-December 1901, several months before the appearance of Briusov's article, Meierkhol'd exclaimed: "‘Art is religion!’ So shout to our newspapermen, ‘You, moneylenders and petty merchants, away from the temple!’"<sup>183</sup> This discussion supports a hypothesis that it is Przybyszewski, not Briusov, who serves as a source for Meierkhol'd's early comments about soul and art.

A further analysis of several motifs and Lenskii's lexical choices in these two extracts (underlined above), however, connects these notions of art and soul even more closely to those presented in Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms and Preludes*. These links are found in Przybyszewski's concepts of "synthesis" and "symbolization," which Meierkhol'd mentions. Moreover, these two concepts create a proper framework for reflecting the states of the soul, a prescription lacking in Briusov's essay, which the actor-director Meierkhol'd could then apply to the creation of the "new" art and drama.

Before we continue our analysis of Przybyszewski's possible impact on Meierkhol'd's conception of these new forms, however, it is important to consider which version of Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms and Preludes* was a more likely source.

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<sup>182</sup> "Na putiakh dushi," *Mir iskusstva*, 103, 102. "Основным положением всего, так называемого „нового“ искусства, всех течений и направлений в искусстве является, следовательно, понятие души, как огромной силы, переходящей из одной вечности в другую..." and "Он [художник] является космической, метафизической силой, через которую проявляются абсолют и вечность." See Appendix I, note 5.182, for the complete Polish texts.

<sup>183</sup> "«Искусство—религия!» А нашим газетчикам кричите: «Вы, менялы и торгаши, долой из храма!»" Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 429.

By this time in autumn 1903 there were three possible versions of *Aphorisms* available to Meierkhol'd. The first is Aleksandr Kursinskii's translation published in Moscow, which we have discussed in connection with Komissarzhevskaiia. We have also mentioned the possibility that Briusov and Baltrušaitis could have introduced Meierkhol'd to this work either at the end of 1901 or the beginning of 1902. The second translation was V. Peremilovskii's excerpts, which had appeared in the May issue of *Mir iskusstva* [*World of Art*] of 1902. The third is a summation given by Evgenii Degen in his article about Przybyszewski that appeared in *Russkoe bogatstvo* [*Russian Wealth*], also in April 1902. Degen's article in *Russkoe bogatstvo* does not mention the concepts of synthesis or symbolization, both of which occur prominently in Meierkhol'd's interview. Instead, Degen emphasized such themes as the "extreme individualism" and the "Übermensch" (*sverkhchelovek*), both of which Degen considers a result of Nietzsche's influence on Przybyszewski.<sup>184</sup> Thus we can delete Degen's article from the list of possible sources for this particular discussion.

One fact and one supposition direct us to *Mir iskusstva* as the most likely source of Meierkhol'd's inspiration. First, in his 1913 autobiography Meierkhol'd recalls that *Mir iskusstva* was a favorite journal of his troupe in 1903.<sup>185</sup> This well-known thick journal, as well as others, would have been available in the company library, whose replenishment was the duty of Aleksei Remizov. He did this by keeping in contact with booksellers in the capital.<sup>186</sup> This information, as well as the

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<sup>184</sup> Degen, *op. cit.*, 129, 133.

<sup>185</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 27.

<sup>186</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 41.

presumption that a small booklet such as Kursinskii's was unlikely to be readily available in the provinces, directs us to *Mir iskusstva* as the more probable source for our investigation of the concepts of "synthesis" and "symbolization."<sup>187</sup>

### **"Breaking with naturalism and splitting life's shell"**

In the two extracts from the interview with Meierkhol'd cited above, Lenskii reported that the new drama was born of literary trends that were "breaking with naturalism, and splitting the shell of life to lay bare its core—the soul."<sup>188</sup> Furthermore, he had described Przybyszewski's art both as "synthetic" and "the cognition of the essence of existence as a path of synthesizing and the symbolizing of an observed life event."<sup>189</sup> Meierkhol'd's conception of the new art as a "break" with naturalism is understandable given the complementary sources of Briusov's "An Unnecessary Truth" and Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms*, as well as his own experiences at MKhT.<sup>190</sup> Although Meierkhol'd had already used the term "new art" in the drafts for his essay "Ferment," he had not really explained its meaning. His departure from

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<sup>187</sup> Valerii Briusov, "Nenuzhnaia Pravda (Po povodu Moskovskogo Khudozhestvennogo teatra)," *Mir iskusstva*, no. 4 (1902); S. Pshibyshevskii, "Na putiakh dushi," trans. V. Peremilovskii, *Mir iskusstva*, no. 5-6, (1902): 100-109. This translation of Przybyszewski's essay will hereafter be referenced as "Na putiakh dushi, *MI*." We should not overlook the possibility that either Remizov or Meierkhol'd possessed a copy of Kursinskii's translation in their personal libraries.

<sup>188</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 46.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>190</sup> The following argument is based on the premise that Meierkhol'd has not read the original 1897 German edition of Przybyszewski's essay, which does feature a polemical attack on the naturalist representation of life. See Stanislaw Przybyszewski, "Auf der Wegen der Seele. Gustav Vigeland" in *Werke. Band 6: Kritische und essayistische Schriften* (Paderborn: Igel Verlag, 1992), 17-45.

MKhT and his discussion of its repertoire suggests that the term “new art” may stand in opposition to the naturalist repertoire staged there.

If we search for further elaboration of this claim in Briusov’s and Przybyszewski’s essays, we do not find direct evidence of this association, but several hints pointing in that direction. For example, Briusov’s essay did not directly attack any particular literary trend by name, but couched its attack on MKhT as a theatre that fit the tastes of both the “supporters of the new art and defenders of the old.”<sup>191</sup> However, Briusov did not define what exactly he meant by these appellations of “new” and “old,” but had indirectly associated the Art Theatre’s “unnecessary truth” with their naturalistic set designs.<sup>192</sup> In contrast, the second section of Przybyszewski’s essay, “On the Paths of the Soul,” was an extended description of the “new art” and its characteristics, which he opposed to the old art, realism, in all its forms. Przybyszewski also described the genius, the inspired artist who was able to create the new art, and suggested a method for the artist to create the “new art.”<sup>193</sup>

The second part of Meierkhol’d’s description of the “new drama” consists of an unusual, multivalenced trope (the “new drama” “split[s] the shell of life”) which allows the reader of *Iuzhnoe obozrenie* to metaphorically understand the “new drama” with rebirth or transfiguration. According to Lenskii, in his interview Meierkhol’d had suggested that the “new drama,” in breaking with naturalism, “split[s] the shell of life” for the purpose of “laying bare its core—the soul”:

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<sup>191</sup> Briusov, *Sochineniia*, t. 2, 61.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>193</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 103-106.

Besides the revival of old drama, Mr. Meierkhol'd is proposing to devote a great deal of attention to the new drama sprung from the literary trends [that are] “breaking with naturalism, and splitting the shell of life to lay bare its heart—the soul.”<sup>194</sup>

Lenskii extends this trope in his reportage with the comment that the “old drama” is interested in “life’s external shell” (*interes k vneshnei obolochke zhizni*):

Everything that has appeared to be necessary elements of the old drama –like the interest in a realistic representation of the soul, [the interest in ] life’s external shell (disposition, type, social position and nationality of a [dramatic] character, the searchings for the meaning and goal of life)<sup>195</sup>

Metaphorically, Meierkhol'd is speaking of the physical characteristics, such as character type and social position, which predominated in the naturalist theatre. However, in a materialist understanding of this phrase, the concept of soul loses all metaphysical trappings, as it is associated lexically with mundane objects such as shelled nuts (*skorlupa orekha*—‘nutshell’; *raskalyvat' orekhi*—‘to crack nuts’) waiting to be cracked.<sup>196</sup> Yet Przybyszewski’s multivalenced lexicon permits these

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<sup>194</sup> “Помимо возрождения старой драмы, г. Мейерхольд полагает в будущем уделить много внимания новой драме, вылившейся из литературных направлений, «разрывающих с натурализмом, и раскалывающих скорлупу жизни для обнажения её ядра – души», идейность новой драмы выражается связью повседневности с вечностью, то есть отдельного с целым.” Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 46.

<sup>195</sup> “Всё то, что являлось необходимыми элементами старой драмы, как то: интерес к реальному изображению души, к внешней оболочке жизни (характер, тип, социальное положение и национальность героя, искания смысла и цели жизни)” *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>196</sup> It is doubtful that Lenskii meant this sarcastically, because the press in Kherson, including Lenskii, supported the company fully during the first season and gave it glowing reviews at the end of the season. They were thus eager for the second season

associations. The individual elements of the semantic field of this trope dealing with botanical germination (“shell” (*skorlupa*) and “kernel, seed” (*iadro*)) or anatomy (“membrane” (*obolochka*) and “nucleus” (*iadro*)) are not found in Briusov’s “An Unnecessary Truth.” However, these motifs can be traced directly to Przybyszewski’s essay, *On the Paths of the Soul*, where the lexicon of symbolism, combined with Przybyszewski’s background as a medical student, permits multiple, that is, denotative and connotative, associations.

First, Przybyszewski uses the Polish word “*jądro*” (“kernel,” “core,” “nucleus,” or fig., “heart”) in its figurative meaning in an attempt to describe the very essence of the being, where soul resides. The Russian cognate of this word, “*iadro*,” also shares these figurative meanings, so there is no problem in associations. Thus, Przybyszewski writes that, in its attempt to reveal the soul, “[a]rt, in our metaphysical understanding of it, creates new syntheses, reaches to the heart of all things, [and] penetrates into all the inmost recesses and depths.”<sup>197</sup>

In the further presentation of his view of the soul as an absolute and cosmic force, Przybyszewski explains that this force moves between the eternal and the earthly, gradually incarnating itself in greater and greater richness within the artist,

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to begin. For comments about the end of Meierkhol'd’s first season, see Volkov, *op. cit.*, 165-167.

<sup>197</sup>“На путиах души,” *MI*, 103. “Искусство, в нашем понимании его, метафизично, создает новые синтезы, добирается до ядра всех вещей, проникает во все таиники и глубины” Cf. Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 17. See Appendix I, text 5.197.

endlessly, until it is incarnated in the person of the genius. When this final incarnation occurs, art-soul reveals itself in all its fullness and “nakedness.”<sup>198</sup>

Until this happens, however, we, as individuals who perceive these lesser forms of the art-soul, must be satisfied with ordinary, everyday life. However, our satisfaction with the ordinary, which is the consequence of the logical associations we make to adapt and accommodate ourselves “to the external conditions of life,” obscures the fact that “a huge transcendental consciousness of all states [of the soul] lies hidden” beyond our petty “conscious Self.”<sup>199</sup>

In order to explain further this hidden, transcendental consciousness and its relation to the consciousness of our observed reality, Przybyszewski resorts to the unusual metaphor of a fragile crust of ice (*po cienkiej skorupce lodu*), whose thin layer covers the “mystical sea of shadows” (*mare tenebrarum*) of the soul. He continues:

Но редко, редко раскрывается эта глубь перед  
очами человека; мы скользим дальше по тонкой  
скорлупе льда, под которым покоится мистическое  
*mare tenebrarum* и не присматриваемся к этим  
каким-то далеким и непонятым воспоминаниям и  
предчувствиям, какие, словно тени заморских  
кипарисов, передвигаются по стекливой  
поверхности нашего сознания.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 103-104. “пока наконец [душа] не доходит до сознания всей своей силы, проникает в сокровеннейшие вещи, охватывает отдаленнейшие и скрытнейшие звенья, т. е. пока не становится гением, и не разверзается в своем абсолюте, во всей роскоши своей „наготы“.” Cf. Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 18. See Appendix I, the latter half of the first text, 5.182.

<sup>199</sup> “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 103-104.

<sup>200</sup> “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 104. Cf. Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 19. See Appendix I, note 5.200.

But rarely, only rarely is this depth revealed before human eyes; we slide further along the thin crust of ice, under which reposes a mystical *mare tenebrarum*; nor do we peer into these such distant and incomprehensible memories and presentiments, which, like the shadows of Mediterranean cypresses, move along the glassy surface of our consciousness.<sup>201</sup>

Both Russian translators, Peremilovskii (here) and earlier, Kursinskii, choose the Russian false cognate “*skorlupa*” for the Polish word “*skorupka*” to translate “crust of ice.” In Polish “*skorupka*,” the diminutive of “*skorupa*,” can mean both “crust” (“*skorupa ziemska*,” as in the phrase “the earth’s crust”) and “shell” (as in “*skorupa jaja/jajka*” or “egg shell”). In Russian, however, “*skorlupa*” is the word used to describe the shell of an egg or nut, whereas “*zemnaia kora*” is preferred for “the earth’s crust” and “*korka*,” its diminutive, having a primary meaning of “peel” or “rind,” is used in describing a layer of ice. Thus, the Russian translation, especially in Meierkhol’d’s articulation of it—“splitting the shell of life to lay bare its heart—the soul”—shifts the metaphor from a symbolic level and concretizes it: the reader, most likely unfamiliar with Przybyszewski’s aesthetics or metaphysical and psychological

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<sup>201</sup> The phrase “*teni zamorskikh kiparisov*” literally means “the shadows of ‘overseas,’ (i.e., foreign) cypresses.” It is an example of the lyrical symbolism that permeates even Przybyszewski’s theoretical writings. Noted for its scented wood, the cypress is a symbol of the underworld in Greek mythology. Przybyszewski’s use thus points both to the themes of death and immortality, two of the eternal themes of artists, including Przybyszewski. See Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. John Buchanan-Brown, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Penguin, 1982), 271. Przybyszewski was familiar with the *Cupressus sempervirens*, or Mediterranean cypress, from his travels to Spain, where he completed his prose poem “Am Meer” (1897) and memorialized his visit in the prose poem “Toledo” (1902). The final line of this prose poem reads “But there was no one who could show him the way, because the city was dead.” Cf. Przybyszewski, *Poezye proza*, 84.

concepts in general, is now able to grasp the simple metaphor of a shell and the kernel or core inside.

The concretization of this image of “shell” continues as Lenskii conveys Meierkhol'd's explanation of the difference between the “old” and “new” drama. According to Lenskii, the focus on elements of the old drama, such as type or a character's disposition, social status or nationality, must forfeit their place of importance to that of the soul. These elements make up the “realistic representation of the soul” (*real'n[oe] izobrazhen[ie] dushi*). They are not found in Przybyszewski's discussion of art, which focuses on art in general, not on drama. However, Przybyszewski does speak of “types of people” within the context of realistic art.

As Przybyszewski explained, two paths lie before the artist: one is the path of the soul, which focuses inward toward the eternal. The second path, the path of the mind, focuses outward toward external reality. Realism is that artistic trend which recreates this “fictitious” reality, and artists who follow this trend focus, among other things, on physical features and physical objects. These painters portray “types of people with well-drawn noses, laundresses at the well, ... wolves on the steppe, sometimes with snow, sometimes without.”<sup>202</sup> Briusov, in his rejection of the “false path” of the Moscow Art Theatre, had argued that the actor must look within and express “the impulses of his soul” in a tangible form.<sup>203</sup> However, he did not mention social status, nationality or type as false elements that the actor should avoid in his portrayal of a character. Nor did he mention these elements in his comments directed

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<sup>202</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 107.

<sup>203</sup> Briusov, *Sochineniia*, t. 2, 59-60.

toward authors. Therefore, we should conclude that Meierkhol'd's rejection of such external elements as "disposition, type, social position and nationality of a [dramatic] character" is an indication that he is internalizing and synthesizing both the Przybyszewski and Briusov texts, developing his own concept of the "new drama."

Two more links exist between Lenskii's exposition of Meierkhol'd's concept of the "new drama" and the Przybyszewski text. The first link is the direct reference to his works to exemplify that trend. Among the "new" dramatists, it is significant that Lenskii mentions Przybyszewski first, and the features of his work are described more fully than those of D'Annunzio, Ibsen, Maeterlinck, or Strindberg. We can assume that Lenskii, as a seasoned correspondent writing from the notes of his interview, is relating these examples in the same order in which Meierkhol'd mentioned them.

There are several possible reasons for giving Przybyszewski's name prominence. As we have shown, Meierkhol'd's concept of the "new drama" is informed by a reading of Przybyszewski's essay "On the Paths of the Soul," which had appeared in *Mir iskusstva* in 1902. It is logical that he would list the author of his source first: the name "Przybyszewski" was present in his subconscious as he attempted to describe basic ideas from "On the Paths" to his interviewer and future audiences. In addition, the prominence given to Przybyszewski may reflect the tastes of Remizov, who had just joined the company as literary advisor of Association of New Drama and had been translating Przybyszewski's works the past year. Finally, the primary placement given to Przybyszewski in his list may reflect the fact that

Meierkhol'd intended to produce his plays earlier in the season than those other dramatists. In fact, rehearsals for *Snow* began at the beginning of October, but the premiere, probably set for late October or early November, had to be postponed due to Meierkhol'd's illness. Meierkhol'd notes the time for a discussion of the play, a review of the play's scenery and time set aside for blocking all on the back of a draft letter to Komissarzhevskaja from this time.<sup>204</sup> Despite its delay, *Snow* premiered 19 December 1903, while Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna* and Ibsen's *Ghosts* did not premier until January 1904.

Another link between Meierkhol'd's text in the Lenskii interview and Przybyszewski can be found in the answer to the question: Why does Meierkhol'd-Lenskii describe Przybyszewski's drama as "synthetic"? As we shall see, the source of this description will also be found in Przybyszewski's aesthetics, as presented in the *Mir iskusstva* excerpts of "On the Paths of the Soul." On a practical level, the so-called "synthesis" of Przybyszewskian drama refers to Przybyszewski's own admission in his preface that the aphorisms on art and the artist that follow may not original, but represent a sincere effort to come to terms with those concepts by combining various notions on art into some kind of coherent whole:

—я писал все эти афоризмы и наблюдения без всяких претензий, со всей искренностью человека, дошедшего после долгого размышления до, *хотя-бы и ошибочного, синтеза*, одним словом, я пробовал смотреть на художника, откинув все

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<sup>204</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 221. Remizov's correspondence confirms these plans. In a letter to P. Shchëgolev dated 31 October 1903, Remizov wrote that rehearsals for *Snow* would start in several days. Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 221, 85.

случайные и второстепенные факты, проникнуть в его глубочайшее существо.<sup>205</sup>

—I have written all these aphorisms and observations without any pretenses, with all the sincerity of a person who has come to what is, perhaps, *a mistaken synthesis* after long meditation. In a word, having abandoned all incidental and secondary facts, I have attempted to look upon the artist [and] to penetrate his most profound being.

This admission by Przybyszewski that he has drawn his worldview from various sources should not be denigrated, but, rather, accepted as the natural outcome of a writer who lived during a period of numerous competing aesthetic trends. In their discussion of Przybyszewski within the context of the new trends in Polish literature, both Ukrainka and Damanskaia had noted the great intellectual ferment occurring in *Młoda Polska*, even identifying notions with specific authors. Thus “pantheism” is associated with the works of Shelley, “demonism” and “satanism” are associated with the works of Byron and Baudelaire, arrogant contemptuousness stemming from a sense of superiority (*sverkh-chelovecheskaia prezritel'nost'*) with Nietzsche, and “suffering aestheticism” with D'Annunzio.<sup>206</sup> By acknowledging Przybyszewski as the head of this movement, these critics invited their readers to discover elements of these trends in his works as well.

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<sup>205</sup> “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 100. My emphasis.

<sup>206</sup> Ukrainka, *op. cit.*, 112; “Noveishaia pol'skaia literatura,” *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 340. These characteristics, as well as others, are described as “dark” and “pessimistic” world trends by Ukrainka, but Damanskaia, presenting a more objective view, describes these same trends as “independent variants” that have found “sympathetic echoes” in the circle of Kraków writers headed by Przybyszewski. For a contemporary review of the general trends present in Polish literature of this period, see Hutnikiewicz, *op. cit.*, 22-29.

On a more abstract level, Meierkhol'd's description of Przybyszewski's dramas as "synthetic" shows a basic understanding of the Polish writer's aesthetic views. Stylistically, however, this working definition sounds unduly formal and poses a great contrast to the rest of the interview. It begs for an examination of its sources.

In Lenskii's interview, Meierkhol'd suggests that Przybyszewski's drama presents "the cognition of the essence of existence as a path of synthesizing and the symbolizing of an examined life event," or, in simpler terms, an understanding of the eternal nature of life experience through these particular intuitive qualities which the soul possesses. Meierkhol'd's understanding of Przybyszewski's "synthetic drama" anticipates that of Szczygielska, who has interpreted the notion as an attempt to reveal the universal Absolute and human soul through the use of symbolic characters.<sup>207</sup> Although this seemingly obtuse phrase is not explained further, Meierkhol'd gave no other author's aesthetics this highly descriptive treatment in his interview. Only a description of D'Annunzio received slightly more emphasis ("D'Annunzio's drama of the spirit (the struggle of the individual with self)").<sup>208</sup> Meierkhol'd referred to Ibsen's drama only as "symbolic," while Greek and Roman drama—a form highly regarded by Briusov in "An Unnecessary Truth," is only described as "fateful." How was Przybyszewski's art—and by association, his drama—"the cognition of the essence of existence"? How was it a both a "path of synthesizing" and the symbolization of "an examined life event"?

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<sup>207</sup> Szczygielska, *op. cit.*, 17.

<sup>208</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 46.

We have generalized Przybyszewski's view that art is a reflection of the states of the soul, which is eternal and “absolute.” In Przybyszewski's all-encompassing synthesis, soul is another name for what idealist philosophers might call the “essence” (*sushchnost'*). In Peremilovskii's translation this excerpt reads as follows:

Искусство,—это воспроизведение того, что вечно, воспроизведение, независящее [sic] от всяческих перемен или случайностей, независимое ни от времени, ни от пространства, а следовательно: *воспроизведение сущности*, т. е. души.<sup>209</sup>

Art is a reproduction of that which is eternal; a reproduction, not depending on any changes or chance incidents, [is] not dependent on either time or space, and consequently: *a reproduction of the essence*, i.e., the soul.

Przybyszewski uses the metaphor of “the path” to describe his method for comprehending reality and translating it through art. The first path is “the path of the intellect” (*put' uma*), the second is “the path of the soul” (*put' dushi*).<sup>210</sup> It is Przybyszewski's contention that the first method, whose current incarnation as an aesthetic tendency is realism, is manifested by the comprehension of life in its mundane form primarily through the senses and logic, with a concomitant focus on the re-creation and re-duplication of external characteristics.<sup>211</sup>

The second path, however, delves deeper within life, into the soul, which is bound neither by logic, time, space, nor the senses. Thus:

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<sup>209</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 101. My emphasis.

<sup>210</sup> “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 106-107. Przybyszewski originally began to set forth his theory of “two paths” in the essay “Auf der Wegen der Seele. Gustav Vigeland,” which was written in November 1895 and published in Berlin in 1897.

<sup>211</sup> “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 106.

Для ума—дважды два—четыре, для души, может быть, миллион, ибо она не знает интервала ни во времени ни в пространстве. Для ума предмет существует лишь во времени и пространстве, для души существует безпредметная, внепространная вневременная сущность вещей.<sup>212</sup>

For the intellect two times two is four; for the soul perhaps [it is] a million, for it [the soul] knows neither an interval of time nor space. For the intellect an object exists only in time and space, for the soul there exists the abstract *essence* of the thing, outside of time and space.

Because the soul is unified and indivisible, the artist cannot approach its true representation through logic or the restraints of the five senses. The artist who follows the “paths of the soul” must strive to perceive that hidden,

нераздельный орган, в котором действуют миллионы чувств, в котором каждое явление объявляется во всех своих ценностях, объявляется, как единство и абсолют.  
Звук там в то-же время и краска, и запах, и все то, чему нет выражения в речи.<sup>213</sup>

indivisible organ, in which millions of senses function, in which each manifestation appears in all its values; [each] appears as a unity and absolute.

Sound there is both color and fragrance, and all that for which there is no expression in speech.

Przybyszewski's description of synaesthesia, or the mixing of sensations (“sound...is both color and fragrance”), as the inherent modality of the absolute, or soul. His description echoes the “correspondences” which Baudelaire had described in his eponymous poem of 1857 from *Les Fleurs du Mal*. However, Przybyszewski

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<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 107. Emphasis in the original, Polish “*istota*.”

<sup>213</sup> “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 106. Cf. *Totenmesse (Requiem Aeternam)*, 1893).

moves beyond Baudelaire's simple use of synaesthetic effects as the sign of poet's talent and intuitions of the unknown, but as a prescribed method the artist must use in order to represent the eternal. Przybyszewski summarizes:

В душе такого художника-избранника нет границ между тоном и звуком. Совершенно разнородные ощущения сливаются в один равноценный отзвук, музыка становится линией, звук запахом: „Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se repondent.“ [sic]<sup>214</sup>

In the soul of such an artist-elect, there are no borders between color and sound. Completely heterogeneous sensations merge into one equivalent echo, music becomes lines; sound –fragrance: “Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.”

Peremilovskii translates several paragraphs which remain in the Polish edition from a lengthy attack on naturalism. In that attack Przybyszewski equates the modern “artist” to a person who needs nothing more than stupidity to “report” reality, which the contemporary “artist” falsely calls an act of creation. In addition, the contemporary “artist” is one who prostitutes himself in the pursuit of monetary gain and fame.<sup>215</sup> This portrayal of the modern artist is compared with the artist of the Middle Ages, who began to create only after a period of fasting and prayer, or the

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<sup>214</sup> “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 108. Przybyszewski identifies himself as an heir to the French symbolist tradition by quoting the final line of the second quatrain of Baudelaire’s well-known sonnet “Correspondances” (1857). Knowledgeable readers of *Mir iskusstva* would have recognized the reference.

<sup>215</sup> Przybyszewski treats this theme in his novella, *Synowie ziemi* [*Sons of the Earth*], which Skorpion published in 1904 as part of Przybyszewski’s collected works. The forward to that work appeared in *Vesy* in 1904. The editors of *Vesy* (Briusov, et al.) demonstrated their esteem for the writer and his views by giving the short piece initial placement on its pages. See S. Pshibyshevskii, “Syny zemli. Predislovie k russkomu izdaniiu,” *Vesy*, no. 5 (1904): 1-3.

anchorite who ensconced himself in a cave in order to submit to the “terrifying visions of a liberated soul.”<sup>216</sup>

In the final paragraph of Peremilovskii's translation which appeared in *Mir iskusstva*, Przybyszewski reiterates his position that there are a select number of artists who consider themselves “priests” and “prophets” of the new, higher art who are turning inward toward the soul and re-creating the mysteries found there through means which move beyond the limits created by the five senses:

Но независимо от этого *profanum vulgus*, идут жрецы, приносящие жертвы—душе, горсточка, в которой традиции прошлых времен о святости мышления и святости искусства живут сильнее, чем когда-либо, горсточка, творящая только в мгновения интенсивнейшего подъема души и мучительнейшей ее вспышки, новые пророки, проповедующие вечное возвращение души, преисполненные милости мистики, объемлющие мир не глазом и ухом, но таинственным органом души, синтезирующим органом, который видит лишь вечные, неизведанные вещи и добирается до их сердцевины.<sup>217</sup>

But independent of this *profanum vulgus* walk priests, bearing sacrifices to the soul, —a handful, in whom the traditions of past times and the sanctity of meditation and art live stronger than ever, —a handful, creating only in the most intense moments of the soul's animation and its most excruciating outbursts; new prophets, advocating the eternal return of the soul, filled with the grace of the mystic; comprehending the world not with eye or ear, but with the mysterious organ of the soul, the synthesizing organ, which sees only the eternal and unexplored; and reaches to their very heart.

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<sup>216</sup> “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 108.

<sup>217</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 109. See Appendix I, text 5.217.

Thus, Meierkhol'd's description of Przybyszewski's works, as reported in Lenskii's interview, as those which lie on the "synthesizing path" of the prophets and priests of the soul, creates an association between Meierkhol'd's company of actors and the new movement described by Przybyszewski, placing them among the elect. Here, in Przybyszewski's essay, lies the esoteric meaning of the company's new name, "The Association of New Drama." Through drama, Meierkhol'd's company would seek to practice an art that combined all the senses in order to lay bare the universal, eternal truths hidden in the soul.

Meierkhol'd's description of Przybyszewski's path of the soul as a "path of symbolizing" (to use Lenskii's words), in the sense that it strives to reflect the eternal, not the illusory reality of mundane life through the use of characters who represent general types, was his acknowledgement that this idea would also serve as a conceptual foundation, supporting his goal of laying bare the soul.<sup>218</sup> This designation of Przybyszewski's path as such marks a certain level of internalization of the concept of the "symbol" and "symbolic" by Meierkhol'd. Neither Przybyszewski nor Briusov mention the notion of "symbol" directly in their respective essays.<sup>219</sup> However, the association of Przybyszewski with the term

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<sup>218</sup> "Под такие литературные направления подходят: синтетическая драма Пшибышевского (познание сущности бытия путём синтезирования и символизирования рассматриваемого случая жизни)," Feldman, *Nasledie*, 2, 46.

<sup>219</sup> Briusov speaks of "stylization" and "types of settings, understood by all," as well as simplicity. It is Przybyszewski, who, in "On Drama and the Stage," (1902, Pol./1904 Rus.) did call for the use of character-symbols. Of course, Maeterlinck's early plays feature such characters, but these works were not widely produced in Russia, whereas Przybyszewski's plays were. The subject of symbolism was not unknown to Przybyszewski, however. In 1904 of the following year (24 Oct –13 Nov

“symbol” had been in the air for several years. Several Russian critics had used the term “symbol” in association with Przybyszewski’s works two years earlier, during the controversy which surrounded the first performance of *The Golden Fleece* in St. Petersburg in 1901. In this respect, the identification of Przybyszewski with this movement likely signals a refinement of the term in Meierkhol’d’s mind and an acceptance of its artistic potential over the course of two years.

Now, in 1903, by accepting the “path of symbolizing,” Meierkhol’d, man who had described himself as having “individualistic tendencies,” picked up the gauntlet thrown down by critics such as V. Burenin, Osip Dymov and Vl. Linskii in late 1901.<sup>220</sup> While some hostile critics, such as Burenin, had used the term “symbolic” in a pejorative manner, others, such as Linskii, did not. Burenin, the critic of *Novoe vremia*, had attacked Przybyszewski and his work *The Visitors* [*Gosti*] in an article which appeared on 12 October 1901, the morning after the premiere performances, and two days before his review of *The Golden Fleece*. According to Burenin, *The*

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(OS)), Przybyszewski would travel to Odessa, Elisavetgrad, and Kherson, where his plays would be performed. Several times he would also deliver a lecture, “The New Drama and Symbolism.” *Odesskii listok* printed an outline of this lecture on 23 October 1904. Kornei Chukovskii disputes Przybyszewski’s views in his essay about these events, “Pshibyshevskii o simvole. (Pis'mo iz Odessy),” *Vesy*, no. 11 (1904): 33-37. According to Chukovskii, Przybyszewski sees the root of the new drama as hopelessness (*bezyskhodnost'*). In order to liberate ourselves from this state, the dramatist resorts to the use of the symbol. “The symbol is that which is eternal, which the artist (*khudozhnik*) sees in the temporary and transitional ‘formulas of life.’” See Chukovskii, *ibid.*, 34. For a short discussion on Chukovskii’s reception of this lecture, see Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 51-52. Many of these concepts can be traced to comments originally appearing in his essays in *Teatral'ny Kurjer*. Cf. “Teatr i muzyka. Lektsiia St. Pshibyshevskago,” *Odesskii listok*, 23. X. 1904, p. 4; Rogacki, *op.cit.*, 195; Agapkina, *op cit.*, 191.

<sup>220</sup> For Meierkhol’d’s comment, see Feldman, *Nasledie*, 1, 466-467.

*Visitors* was actually nothing more than a “scholastic exercise in imitation of the so-called ‘symbolic’ plays of Maeterlinck.”<sup>221</sup>

Dymov, writing in *Birzhevye vedomosti*, described the characters of *The Golden Fleece* as “almost not people—almost symbols, almost enigmas.” Furthermore, in a play that strived to show the “life of the soul amidst the infinite world” and the “dialogue of man with his fate,” Dymov stated that it was extremely difficult for an actor to play such “half-symbols” (*igrat'... takikh polusimvolov*).<sup>222</sup>

Vi. Linskii, whose review of *The Golden Fleece* appeared in *Teatr i iskusstvo* on 14 October 1901, called the play a “mood play” (*p'esa nastroeniia*), written in “half-tones.”<sup>223</sup> This evocation of Chekhov’s style would have appealed to Meierkhol'd, who admired the playwright very much. Linskii also wrote that there were many symbols, allegories, and “half-symbols” in the play, but did not discuss them in great detail.<sup>224</sup> Therefore, even if Przybyszewski himself did not mention the use of symbols in “On the paths of the soul,” the notion that he was using objects and characters to represent a higher reality, such as a transcendent value or abstract notion

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<sup>221</sup> V. Burenin, “Kriticheskie ocherki,” *Novoe vremia*, no. 9198, 12. X. 1901, no. p. 2. “...представляется польской критике удивительным образчиком новой символической драматургии; ...” “В «Гостях» при внимательном рассмотрении можно «открыть» только одно: самое курьезное, почти гимназическое упражнение в подражании так называемым «символическим» пьесам Метерлинка.”

<sup>222</sup> O. Dymov, “Teatr, muzyka i iskusstvo,” *Birzhevye vedomosti*, no. 278, 12. X. 1901, no. 278, p. 2-3. “Эту «жизнь души среди беспредельного мира» и «диалог человека с его судьбы» силится показать С. Пшибышевский” (2); “Это—почти не люди, почти символы, почти загадки.”

<sup>223</sup> Vi. Linskii, “Peterburgskii teatr,” *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 42, (14. X. 1901): 748. This topic is open for further research.

<sup>224</sup> Linskii, *ibid.*, 748-749.

—e.g., the golden fleece represents “love,” or the character Ruszczyk represents “conscience”—was well established and discussed in the press. These notions most likely also circulated within artistic circles and among informed theatre patrons.

### **Before the break: obstacles on and preparation for “the path of the soul”**

Critics are correct that Briusov influenced Meierkhol'd, especially in his later experiments with theatrical convention (*uslovnost'*).<sup>225</sup> However, they have bypassed Przybyszewski as the possible source for Meierkhol'd's fundamental understanding of “soul” and its relation to this reality, that is, the metaphysical dichotomy of the noumenal and phenomenal worlds, or even how this concept may work in relation to a developing synthetic, “symbolist,” method of representing transcendental concepts on the stage.<sup>226</sup> We can move further in recognizing Przybyszewski's aesthetic

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<sup>225</sup> Writing about the Theatre-Studio in 1905, Meierkhol'd himself credits his colleague Briusov in the pamphlet, “On the Theatre.” See Meierkhol'd, *Stat'i*, 126. Cf. Rudnitskii, RM, 66, and Braun, op. cit., 30-31.

<sup>226</sup> For critical reviews discussing Przybyszewski as an emerging representative of the symbolist trend in modernism, see: “Przybyszewski's *Epipsychidion* is a colossal symbolist phatasmagoria (*simvolisticheskaia fantasmogoriia*), “Epipsikhidion,” trans. V. Lavrov, *Kur'er* [Moscow], no. 325, 25. XI. 1898, p. 1; *The Visitors* pretends to be “a surprising little example of the new, symbolic dramatic art” (*udivitel'nym obrazchikom novoi simvolicheskoi dramaturgii*), V. Burenin, “Kriticheskie ocherki,” *Novoe vremia*, no. 9198, 12. X. 1901, p. 2. In 1904: *Snow* is a “tragedy of symbols,” Iz. Al-skii [I. V. Aleksandrovskaia], “Teatr ‘Solovtsov’. (*Sneg*, drama Pshibyshevskago, per. Serafimy i Alekseia Remizovykh),” *Kievskie otkliki*, no. 61, 22. I. 1904, p. 4; D. N. Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii, “K kharakteristike sovremennago simvolizma v iskusstve. I. *Sneg* Pshibyshevskago,” *Iuzhnye zapiski*, no. 15-16 (1904): 81-90. In his critique of Przybyszewski's work, Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii acknowledged that the symbol, as a literary device, had a long history. He recognized that “comtemporary symbolists are really a new psychological type,” but that contemporary problems, such as those presented in *Snow*, were too complex to be symbolized (88, 89).

theories as a possible foundation for Meierkhol'd's later experiments in the areas of lighting, music, and stage design and the representation of "reality" on the stage.

It is quite evident from Lenskii's interview that in late 1903, Meierkhol'd *was* still "under the hypnosis" of Przybyszewski and his non-realist aesthetic. Noticeably absent from Meierkhol'd's definition of the "new drama" that was "breaking with naturalism" was a mention of the works of Hauptmann and Chekhov. On the other hand, he had given Przybyszewski's name prominence in his listing of new repertoire and mentioned the "symbolic" works of Ibsen.<sup>227</sup> We can conclude that even in late 1901 and early 1902, when Meierkhol'd mentioned to Tikhonov that he had been hypnotized by the works of Przybyszewski, Tetmajer, and Altenberg, that these works contained some elements not found in Chekhov's "theatre of mood." This attraction to Przybyszewski is even more intriguing, given Meierkhol'd's close association with Chekhov and Ol'ga Knipper, his wife, as well as his continued correspondence with the Russian author until his death in 1904. Meierkhol'd's production of Przybyszewski's drama *Snow* would be proof of his maturing view of the "new drama." In order to understand what a bold step this premiere was, we must survey the events that preceded the performance in December.

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<sup>227</sup> According to one generally accepted contemporary periodization of Ibsen's works, the "late period" works, which include *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Rosmersholm* (1886), *Master Builder* (1892), and *The Lady from the Sea* (1898), are still today recognized for their increased use of symbolism within a realistic setting. These plays stand in contrast to the social dramas or "problem plays," such as *An Enemy of the People* (1882) and *Hedda Gabler* (1891) of the middle period. See Wilson and Goldfarb, *op. cit.*, 404-405.

In *Aphorisms*, Przybyszewski had written that the steep “path of the soul” would be difficult, full of dangers.<sup>228</sup> While not fatal, the events of late 1903 seemed to confirm his warning, as some members of the Kherson public rebelled against the new repertoire and Meierkhol'd himself fell ill, delaying the premiere of *Snow*. On 15 September 1903, four days after the appearance of Lenskii's interview with Meierkhol'd and the declaration of the company's high goals, The Association of New Drama premiered its first production of the new season, Gor'kii's *The Lower Depths* (*Na dne*). At first, it seemed that the company was not adhering to its own lofty goals of presenting “new drama” to the Kherson public. In the first week there were six premieres, two of which were French comedies (Dumas-père's *Kean* and Mirbeau's *Business is Business*), as well as Gogol's comedy *Marriage* (*Zhenit'ba*); a foundation of the German naturalist canon, Hauptmann's social drama *Vor Sonnenaufgang* (*Do voskhoda solntse*, Rus.), followed on 28 September, in Meierkhol'd's own translation.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “Na putiakh dusy,” *MI*, 106-106.

<sup>229</sup> Wilson & Goldfarb, *op. cit.*, 406. According to his memoirs, Przybyszewski attended the Berlin premiere of this work in 1889, although this may be a fabrication on Przybyszewski's part. See Klim's comments about fact and fiction in *Moi współcześni* in Klim, *op. cit.*, 175. Writing at the end of his life, Przybyszewski showed disdain for both the “*konsequenter Realismus*” (“consistent realism”) that *Vor Sonnenaufgang* exemplified and the “naively transparent symbolism” of *Die versunkene Glocke* (1896). Przybyszewski considered the latter drama to be the work of a man whose mind was too weak to be a true symbolist. See Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni*, I, 69-70. Przybyszewski's opinion in 1926 is much harsher than Remizov's, his Russian enthusiast, who finds in *Vor Sonnenaufgang* a combination of extreme realism in the familial situation of Krause and “head-spinning idealism” in the character of Loth, the socialist. See Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 207-208

When Meierkhol'd's company did start offering its "new drama," some segments of the public, including the rich and influential, turned against it.<sup>230</sup> At a Kherson city council meeting in late October 1903, although the formal agenda included discussion of a municipal subsidy for heating Meierkhol'd's theatre, his productions became the subject of conversation. Some council members were glad to have the Kherson public introduced to the new artistic trends, such as the "theatre of mood." According to these supporters, the public had really enjoyed seeing boiling samovars on the stage during the previous season. Now, however, some audience members objected to the extreme psychological types they saw portrayed. The new plays were "incomprehensible and unpleasant" with their "sick" characters, acting as if they had escaped from the madhouse.<sup>231</sup> No audience, Meierkhol'd's detractors continued, especially families, could stand such characters day in and day out. These patrons soon would be forced to go the circus for their entertainment needs.<sup>232</sup> Other council members found no problem with the current choice of repertoire. They believed that the Association was fulfilling its contract by presenting wonderful, artistically performed productions of the best plays, representing the newest trends in art.<sup>233</sup>

In a letter to the editors of *Iug* published 31 October 1903, Meierkhol'd assured his audience that he was "responsible to that public, which sees, is

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<sup>230</sup> Zvenigorodskaia, *op. cit.*, 104-105; Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 216.

<sup>231</sup> An obvious reference to the setting of *The Golden Fleece*.

<sup>232</sup> *Iug*, no. 1615, 26. X. 1903. Zvenigorodskaia, *op. cit.*, 104; Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 213-214. Meierkhol'd's chief opponent on the city council was A. Z. Riabkov.

<sup>233</sup> Zvenigorodskaia, *ibid.*, 104-105; Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 216. Kherson mayor M. E. Bekker represented this view.

accustomed to seeing, and wants to see the theatre as a kind of temple.”<sup>234</sup> He concluded his letter by acknowledging that appreciative segment of the public that “listens intently to the tears and laughter of the characters portrayed, to the surges and yearning of the soul.” Meierkhol'd continued: “Truly, it is only to this public that I will show the theatre of Shakespeare, Maeterlinck, Przybyszewski and Strindberg, and it will not go to ‘seek’... seek ‘entertainments.’”<sup>235</sup> Meierkhol'd's remark that Przybyszewski's work was an example of drama that reflects the “yearning of the soul” is further circumstantial evidence that the ideas expressed by Meierkhol'd in his letter—his elevated regard for art, his persistent view of art as more than just entertainment, and his view that drama reflects the “impulses and yearning of the soul”—all have parallels in Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms and Preludes*.<sup>236</sup>

The premiere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on 7 November 1903 marked a significant event in his experimentation with synthetic staging. During rehearsals for

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<sup>234</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 210-211. Letter dated 28 October. Meierkhol'd had made that declaration in his September interview with Lenskii (“Pis'mo iz Khersona” (“Letter from Kherson”)), which appeared in the Nikolaev newspaper *Iuzhnaia Rossiia* (Southern Russia) on 13 September: Lenskii writes, “here is the “New Drama” which has conquered the love and respect of the public and transformed our theatre into a true temple of Melpomene.” See Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 49.

<sup>235</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 212. “та [публика], которая чутко прислушивается к слезам и смеху представляемых лиц, к порывам и тоске души. / Ей, только этой публике, я покажу театр Шекспира, Метерлинка, Пшибышевского и Стриндберга, и она не пойдёт «искать»... искать «развлечений»...” Meierkhol'd would premiere *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a week later, on 7 November 1903. Rehearsals for Przybyszewski's *Snow* were just beginning. The company would not premiere its new production of Maeterlinck, *Monna Vanna*, a historical drama, until January 1904, and only premiered a Strindberg work, *The Father*, during its third season in Tiflis.

<sup>236</sup> See, for example, the rejection of art as entertainment and the reference to art as the “highest religion”: Pshibyshevskii, “Na putiakh dushy,” *MI*, 102.

this production, Meierkhol'd was able to analyze the interaction of music, movement, and dramatic dialogue, using a previously composed work and a well-known play.<sup>237</sup>

While several other productions of the season had featured some musical accompaniment, this production was the first to feature a complete score, and Meierkhol'd took full advantage of it. In his sketch book he listed every musical number in Mendelssohn's score, tempi, leitmotifs, the characters in each scene, and important fragments of dialogue.<sup>238</sup> This preparation would be invaluable when Meierkhol'd created his own synthesis of music and drama with his production of Przybyszewski's *Snow*.

It should be noted that Przybyszewski's dramatic epilogue, *The Visitors*, is also accompanied by music, and could be an early source for Meierkhol'd's interest in staging drama with a musical score. Nor should we overlook the fact that Meierkhol'd had included Przybyszewski's dramatic cycle, "The Dance of Love and Death," in his list of proposed repertoire for his newly formed company in the summer of 1902. In that proposed repertoire, the only Shakespeare play listed was *The Merchant of Venice*, not *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.<sup>239</sup> As the authorial remarks to *The Visitors* show, Przybyszewski intentionally used music to transport the audience to a different sphere: "Soft music is heard from the palace. Saint-Saëns'

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<sup>237</sup> Further discussion of Meierkhol'd's use of music will follow in Chapter VI.

<sup>238</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 164-168.

<sup>239</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 479. Meierkhol'd also included Przybyszewski's *The Guests* in his original proposed repertoire published in *Iug* on 5 September, 1903, the only Shakespeare work proposed at that time was *The Merchant of Venice*. See Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 30.

‘*Danse macabre*’ is playing.”<sup>240</sup> A person with Meierkhol'd's extensive musical and acting background would recognize that this musical choice was not a case of a composer writing a series of programmatic pieces to accompany a previously existing dramatic work as with Mendelssohn's score, but a conscious choice by a dramatist to use an existing work of music to create a sustained mood at the beginning of his work. In the period under discussion, Meierkhol'd would experiment several times with music as an enhancement of the synthetic dramatic experience. In *Snow* it would enhance the dramatic sense of impending fate and death during the intermissions. In his production of Maeterlinck's *Sœur Beatrice* (1906) it would set a religious mood.

Several days after the November premiere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Meierkhol'd was overcome by exhaustion. A local doctor ordered him to rest, so directorial duties were handed over to other members of the company, N. F. Kostromskoi and M. P. Sazonov.<sup>241</sup> According to Zvenigorodskaia, Meierkhol'd's illness had at least one positive result—he could now spend some time collecting his thoughts and preparing future productions. The immediate result of these meditations was the first production he appeared in after his recuperation, Przybyszewski's *Snow*, which will receive detailed treatment in the next chapter.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 77.

<sup>241</sup> Zvenigorodskaia, *op. cit.*, 109. An announcement of Meierkhol'd's illness appeared in *Iug* on 11. XI. 1903.

<sup>242</sup> Zvenigorodskaia, *ibid.*, 110.

In conclusion, when, at the end of 1901, Meierkol'd wrote that he was under the hypnosis of Przybyszewski, he had entered two circles of young literati and members of the intelligentsia, among whom Przybyszewski was already quite popular. Whether through his acquaintance with Valerii Briusov in Moscow or Aleksei Remizov in Vologda, Meierkol'd received reading materials by Przybyszewski that soon engrossed him. Several themes that Przybyszewski addresses, such as the role of art in society and a general focus on the inner self, piqued Meierkol'd's interest. By February 1902, Meierkol'd had made the decision to leave the Moscow Art Theatre and its naturalist approach to staging. Drafts of an article he was writing at that time, intended for the journal *Maiak*, echoes some of the same concerns as Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms and Preludes*: the need for a new art free from tendentiousness and a concept of art as free of a dominating morality. By early summer he had already planned to stage Przybyszewski's cycle, *The Dance of Love and Death*. On 23 October 1902 the Company of Russian Dramatic Artists staged *The Golden Fleece*, the second Russian troupe to place it in its repertoire.

Remizov's oft-quoted review of Meierkol'd's first provincial seasons, "The Association of New Drama. Letter from Kherson," which appeared in the April 1904 issue of the new modernist journal *Vesy*, offers his assessment of Przybyszewski's contribution to the company's artistic growth during its first season of 1902-1903:

Первое время и репертуар и тон пьес целиком представляли из себя копии школы. И лишь в самое последнее время постановкой "Золотое руно" (Ст. Шибышевского) и "Втируши" (М. Мэтерлинка) намечен был свой путь. Быть может, надо было пройти железный режим

Станиславского, возбудиться его огромным художественным чутьем, усвоить себе его метод, чтобы, преоделев школу, открыть в себе нечто свое—не родное рутине академизма, а углубление и расширение пройденного.<sup>243</sup>

At first, both the repertoire and tone of plays they [Kosheverov and Meierkhol'd] staged were wholly copies of [the Stanislavskii] school. Only recently with the production of *Zolotoe Runo* (St. Przybyszewski) and *L'Intruse* (M. Maeterlinck) was his [Meierkhol'd's] path outlined. Perhaps, one had to pass through the iron regime of Stanislavskii, to awaken his huge artistic flair, to adapt his method for himself, so that, having overcome the school, he could discover something original in himself—not the familiar routine of the academy, but the intensification and expansion of that regime.

Remizov thus emphasizes Meierkhol'd's early artistic growth in terms of choice of repertoire, and Remizov considers Przybyszewski's *The Golden Fleece* a major component of Meierkhol'd's personal development. By presenting the works of Przybyszewski and Maeterlinck as the chief contrast in repertoire to the “iron regime of Stanislavskii,” Remizov hints how difficult it was for Meierkhol'd to disassociate the works of other modernist playwrights, such as Ibsen or Chekhov, from the hyper-naturalistic production values that the Moscow Art Theatre represented. Thus, in the case of Meierkhol'd, the challenges of new repertoire drove the search for innovative approaches to staging first, not a rethinking of old repertoire.

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<sup>243</sup> A. Remizov, “Tovarishchestvo Novoi Dramy. Pis'mo iz Khersona,” *Vesy*, no. 4 (1904), 36. Partially reprinted in Volkov, *op. cit.*, 172-173. Kosheverov and Meierkhol'd premiered Maeterlinck's play at the end of their first season in Sebastopol', on 18 May 1903. Further citations will be noted as “Remizov, ‘TND.’”

Przybyszewski's influence on Meierkhol'd took two forms, both as artistic material with which to work and as an aesthetic philosophy which provided inspiration for new paths of experimentation. His works filled the material necessity for new repertoire. However, Meierkhol'd was also seeking ways in which to present that repertoire. If the naturalist productions of Stanislavskii were not sufficient to present the new drama, how was one to proceed? Here Przybyszewski's synthetic view of drama, with its emphasis on the soul and emotion as a reflection of the eternal, and his conviction that a combination of many different arts could bridge the gap between the ordinary and eternal, filled that philosophical necessity and pointed Meierkhol'd in a new direction.

Meierkhol'd began to enunciate the characteristics of that new path in his public interviews. Parallels found in an interview published in the Kherson newspaper, *Iuzhnoe Obozrenie*, on 11 September 1903, and Przybyszewski's *Aphorisms and Preludes* prove that Przybyszewski's impact on Meierkhol'd was growing. Meierkhol'd now identified Przybyszewski with the "new drama," the performances of which he had set as a goal for his new company. Noticeably absent from this identification were the names of Hauptmann and Chekhov. Furthermore, Meierkhol'd suggested that the focus of the new drama was the soul, which lay beneath an "external shell" of realistic devices, such as the extreme representation of a character's physical features. By "breaking the external shell" of naturalism with the use of synaesthesia and symbols, one could express the eternal through the

medium of the soul. As we shall see, Meierkhol'd's production of Przybyszewski's *Snow* would test his hypothesis.

**Chapter VI:  
MEIERKHOL'D'S PRODUCTION OF PRZYBYSZEWSKI'S *SNOW*:  
REMOVING THE SHROUD OF NATURALISM**

BRONKA: Tell me, tell me, who am I?

KAZIMIERZ: You are the white, pure snow, which falls upon the frozen breast of the earth and warms it, shrouds this corpse until it revives, begins to awaken; and from the now-warmed bosom, from seeds that appeared frozen, new, young shoots begin to sprout...<sup>1</sup>

Meierkhol'd's performance as Tadeusz in *Snow* [*Sneg*] on 19 December 1903, marked his first time on stage since falling ill from over-exhaustion.<sup>2</sup> With his return to the stage, Meierkhol'd boldly chose a role in an untested play that would mark a shift in Russian theatrical representation. *Snow* had little or no "performance history" which Meierkhol'd could rely on for inspiration: no Russian troupe had staged the work, and no company had performed the work at all since Bolesławski's production, under Przybyszewski's nominal direction, in St. Petersburg on 3 February 1903. However, Remizov's conception of Tadeusz as a symbolic character, combined with Przybyszewski's simplified dramatic elements, such as ambiguously drawn characters, simplified setting, and enigmatic lines of dialogue allowed Meierkhol'd to use this play as a performance space within which to begin experimentation with non-realist methods of representation.

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<sup>1</sup> Przybyszewski, *Śnieg*, Act III: iii (Warsaw: Stefan Demby, 1903), 82.

BRONKA. Powiedz mi, powiedz, czym jestem?

KAZIMIERZ. Białym, czystym śniegiem, który na zmarzłą grudę ziemi opadnie, ugreje, otuli tego trupa, dopóki nie odżyje, budzić się nie pocznie, i z ciepłego już łona, z ziarn, zda się zmarzłych ziarn, nowe, świeże kiełki puszczać pocznie...

<sup>2</sup> Zvenigorodskaia, *op. cit.*, 109.

Both Remizov and Meierkhol'd considered *Snow* an important production for a company in its infancy. Remizov associated its importance to the new artistic values evident in the production.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, some theatre historians, following Remizov's 1904 assessment, regard this production as a significant move for Russian drama, although the play was a commercial failure.<sup>4</sup> The importance of this production has even become associated with myth, as it has even been claimed that Przybyszewski was present at this premiere.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Remizov, "TND," 38.

<sup>4</sup> Braun, *op. cit.*, 22; Zvenigorodskaia, *op. cit.*, 110. The Soviet historian Rudnitskii, writing in 1956, emphasizes the failure of this performance, but notes Remizov's effusive praise of the production in *Vesy*. See Rudnitskii, *RM*, 37. Hoover does not mention the work at all, emphasizing instead the production of von Schönthan's *The Acrobats*, which premiered during the first season in Kherson on 26 January 1903. See Hoover, *op. cit.*, 22-23.

<sup>5</sup> The misconception of a meeting between Przybyszewski and Meierkhol'd probably originates with Helsztyński's 1956 biography. In that work Helsztyński quotes a 1934 article in which the writer claims that the two individuals met in Kherson in October 1904, while Przybyszewski was on his lecture tour, sponsored by the poet and translator Aleksandr (Brodskii) Voznesenskii (his pseudonym; Helsztyński incorrectly identifies his surname as "Schulman"). After Voznesenskii was accused of underpaying Przybyszewski for his lectures, several directors of the public library stepped in to assist, and "Meierkhol'd, the director of the local theatre, [and] later director of a theatre in Moscow, informed of the incident," proposed to stage *Snow* "at his own initiative." According to the 1934 account (and repeated by Helsztyński), Przybyszewski was present at rehearsals, and on the day of *Snow*'s premiere Meierkhol'd formally introduced the Polish dramatist to the audience. See Stanisław Helsztyński, *Przybyszewski* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1958), 293-294. Helsztyński cites an article by Ewelina Wołk-Łaniewska, "S. Przybyszewski w Chersoniu," in *Ilustrowany Kurjer Codzienny*, no. 227 (1934). In October 1904 Meierkhol'd and his company were in Tiflis, not Kherson. Przybyszewski was present as "director," however, at the premiere of the play when the Bolesławski troupe, not Meierkhol'd's, had staged the work in St. Petersburg on 2 February 1903. The relations between Przybyszewski and Voznesenskii and his wife, the actress Vera Iureneva, are worthy of further research. For current state of research on this topic, see Moskwina, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 44-51, 97-98, 169-173, et al.

In this chapter we will contextualize and examine several documents connected with this production. Because no record exists of Meierkhol'd's artistic intentions, save his sketches for the set design, we will closely analyze what Remizov wrote about the play and its production in two publicistic essays, the first, a press release for the Kherson newspaper, *Iug*, and the second, his 1904 essay published in *Vesy*. In this way we hope to gain insight into the mechanisms Meierkhol'd used to reject "life's external shell" and lay bare the soul. These conclusions will further explain Przybyszewski's deepening impact on Meierkhol'd as a director.

In his 1913 biography Meierkhol'd himself deemed the staging of *Snow* a "very bold step."<sup>6</sup> However, the original historical context demonstrates exactly how bold this step was. In the Kherson city council there had been complaints about the company's new repertoire, and one councilman had called for plays that were comprehensible and pleasant, with proper heroes and heroines.<sup>7</sup> In his September 1903 interview, Lenskii had assessed the probable success of Meierkhol'd's new direction as very "risky," given the public's penchant for mocking everything they did not understand.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Meierkhol'd certainly knew that by staging such works as *Snow*, he was facing an uphill battle against conventional public taste.

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<sup>6</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 27. Meierkhol'd states that his production of *Snow* was the first, a claim that Remizov makes as well in his "Letter from Kherson." This is not entirely true, for the Bolesławski troupe had staged the play previously in St. Petersburg. However, his may have been the first Russian troupe to produce the drama.

<sup>7</sup> Zvenigorodskaia, *op. cit.*, 104; Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 213-14.

<sup>8</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 47.

According to Remizov's 1904 essay, "The Association of New Drama. (Letter from Kherson)," Meierkhol'd's new company had set as its goal the search for new forms, in order to express "the eternal mysteries and the sense of our life and the sense of the earth":

„Новая драма“ ставит своей задачей создание такого театра, в рядах движений, взбурливших области философии и искусства, шел бы с ними, охваченный проступающей жаждой, в поисках новых форм для выражений вечных тайн и смысла нашего бытия и смысла земли, вынянчившей человека на крестные страдания, беды и небесный восторг.<sup>9</sup>

The "new drama" has set as its goal the creation of a kind of theatre, seized by an emerging desire, which would progress with the series of movements that have seethed up in the sphere of philosophy and art; it would progress in the search for new forms for the expression of eternal mysteries and the sense of our existence and the earth, which has nursed humanity on the sufferings of the cross, misfortunes and celestial rapture.

Those goals were finally being realized: according to Remizov, Przybyszewski's *Snow* was both an example of the company's new direction and a production in which Meierkhol'd finally showed his "great artistic flair."<sup>10</sup>

A further review of Remizov's essay supports the hypothesis that the combination of this "bold step" and "great artistic flair" created change on two artistic levels, in both thought and deed. In the first section of his essay, Remizov alludes to both the real events that took place (the disagreement within the Kherson city council

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<sup>9</sup> Remizov, "TND," 36. In his essay, Remizov uses "Novaia Drama" when speaking of the company, and "novaia drama" when speaking of the artistic trend.

<sup>10</sup> Remizov, "TND," 38-39.

and the decision to stage *Snow*) and the company's philosophical links to Przybyszewski. In his explanation of the new company's goals Remizov couched its "aristocratic" notion of art in the metaphor of art as a cult or religion:

Theatre is neither a game nor entertainment; theatre is not a copy of human mediocrities; no, theatre is a cult, a mass, in the mysteries of which are hidden, perhaps, Redemption... "The [Association of] New Drama" dreams of such theatre.<sup>11</sup>

The new theatre that the Association of New Drama was establishing, Remizov suggested, was not entertainment, as Riabkov had demanded, but a communal religious rite offering a hope of transcendence for its participants.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> "Театр—не забава и развлечение, театр не копия человеческого убожества, а театр—культ, обедня, в таинствах которой сокрыто, быть может, Искупление... О таком театре мечтает „Новая Драма“." Remizov, "TND," 37; Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 214. Riabkov had complained, "One must not allow [TND] to treat the public with the kind of repertoire they are selecting for our stage, [the kind] that forces families to seek entertainment (*iskat' razvlecheniia*) at the circus."

<sup>12</sup> Remizov, "TND," 36, 37. Remizov's (or Meierkhol'd's) early goal of synthesizing theatre and religion anticipates the efforts of N. N. Vashkevich. In early 1906, Vashkevich, the director of the Theatre of Dionysus, sought to realize the metaphor of "theatre as religious experience" with his staging of Bal'mont's ill-fated poetic allegory of love, *Three Blossomings* (*Tri rastsveta*). In an essay dated 20 August 1905, Vashkevich echoed Remizov's sentiments in the second part of an article, "The Dionysian Act," which appeared in *Teatr i iskusstvo* in autumn 1905. Vashkevich declared that "The actor must be interested only in his religion" and likens the action of the drama to an actor's prayer, faithful and sincere. Vashkevich bases his arguments on a belief that drama should be based on the ancient idea of tragedy as a sacred act. He mentions Przybyszewski in passing in part one, in reference to his definition of tragedy, and echoes Przybyszewski's call for emotions to become the originating source for dramatic action. According to Vashkevich, tragedy is "the effective depiction of life under the control of fate. It must depict man doomed to the arbitrary nature of the elemental vortices, when his passions are transformed by fate into weapons of destruction." ("Трагедия есть действительное изображение жизни в областной атмосфере судьбы. Она должна изображать обреченного человека в произволе стихийных вихрей, когда страсти его превращаются ею в орудия разрушения.") Nik. Vashkevich, "Dionisovo deistvo," *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 35

high priest officiating at that mass, penetrating into the “deepest mysteries” of life and channeling the transcendental and eternal to a waiting congregation was, of course, Meierkhol'd. In Remizov's metaphor, Meierkhol'd had been transformed into both Przybyszewski's neo-romantic image of the artist, expressed in *Aphorisms and Preludes* (“art becomes the highest religion, and its priest, the artist”), and the evangelist of his (Meierkhol'd's) own December 1901, “post-hypnotism” declaration, “Art is religion!”<sup>13</sup> Consequently, in staging *Snow*, Meierkhol'd, as a priest of art, was not only conforming to a new, elevated view of art and artist, but he was also upholding Przybyszewski's view that the artist was not a public servant; the artist's intentions and goals stood beyond public opinion, whether approving or disapproving.<sup>14</sup>

Just as Komissarzhevskaja had proclaimed Przybyszewski's aphorism on art a “credo” or “confession of faith” to Khodotov, Meierkhol'd also proclaimed his personal belief in Przybyszewski. He did this in several ways, both privately. First, Meierkhol'd sent his good friend and confidant in artistic matters, Anton Chekhov, a copy of Remizov's translation of *Snow* on 19 November 1903, hoping that the new

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(1905): 559, and no. 36 (1905): 578. Kalbouss describes Bal'mont's work as “the first mystery-play to receive production.” See Kalbouss, *op. cit.*, 54.

<sup>13</sup> Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 16; Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, I, 429;

<sup>14</sup> “Художник не является слугой, ни путеводителем, не принадлежит ни народу, ни миру, не служит никакой идее и никакому обществу” (102); “Художник, склоняющийся к требованиям отдельного общества, поддакивающий ему, предлагающий ему разжеванный и легкий для пищеварения корм...—но это не художник, а послушный рабочий” (103). Pshibyshevskii, “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 102, 103; See Appendix I, texts 6.14.

play would please Chekhov.<sup>15</sup> Second, he hung a portrait of Przybyszewski in the director's room (*rezhisserskaia*).<sup>16</sup> These actions both symbolize the high regard that Meierkhol'd personally held for Przybyszewski at this time.

Remizov's efforts to educate the Russian public about Przybyszewski's new play were most unusual in the annals of both Russian theatre history and literature. Critics often made comments about characters or plot within the limitations of a brief review that usually appeared several days after a theatrical performance. Critical articles also appeared in the thick journals as well. However, the article which appeared in *Iug* on 19 December 1903, *before* the production of *Snow*, demonstrated

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<sup>15</sup> “Скоро я пришлю Вам новую пьесу Пшибышевского «Снег» (перевод моего друга Ремизова). Вам пьеса очень понравится. Мне кажется.” Meierkhol'd, *Perepiska*, 43-44; GBL f. 331, k. 51, d. 49; first published in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, t. 68, 446. Chekhov's immediate response, as reported by B. A. Lazarevskii, was, “He doesn't need to read Przybyszewski and Bal'mont.” According to Zvenigorodskaia, Lazarevskii then communicated this response to Meierkhol'd in a letter. See *Perepiska*, 360; Zvenigorodskaia, *op cit.*, 110.

<sup>16</sup> Zvenigorodskaia, *op cit.*, 110. Remizov offers to send his friend, the Danish writer Aage Madelung, a portrait of Przybyszewski “in that doleful pose which so pleased us” in a letter dated 12 October 1903. See Obratina, et al., “Remizov i TND,” *Teatr*, no. 2 (1994): 108. It is unknown at this time exactly which portrait of Przybyszewski Remizov may have owned. There are at least three photographs in circulation at this time in Russia, all taken in connection with Przybyszewski's visit to St. Petersburg as director with the Bolesławski troupe. The first, which appeared in *Birzhevye vedomosti* on 29 January 1903, is titled “Stanislav Pshibyshevskii. Famous Polish writer, standing at the head of the troupe touring in Petersburg” (reproduced in *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 29. I. 1903, no. 51, p. 1). The second and third photographs were taken during the same sitting by the firm IaK, probably of St. Petersburg. The second shows Przybyszewski seated, with hands folded in his lap (reproduced in *Novyi zhurnal inostranoi literatury*, no. 3 (1903), p. 293); the third shows the writer in a more pensive pose, left elbow resting on the arm of his chair, hand at his chin (IMLI, f. 228, op. 1, ed. khr. 12). The third photograph is sepia-colored, printed on a postcard. There is a manufacturer's inventory number 116 printed in the bottom left-hand corner, with “S. Pshibyshevskii” printed in the bottom right-hand corner. None of these poses seems particularly “doleful,” as Remizov describes his portrait.

an intent on Meierkhol'd's part to guide the public's understanding of the play toward a conception that approximated or matched Remizov's and his own.<sup>17</sup> Meierkhol'd had hinted at the need for this kind of instruction even in his interview with Lenskii in September, when he suggested that the "unusual construction of the new drama" demanded it.<sup>18</sup> This "guided reading," combined with the performance itself, became a form of "visual primer" for an audience that had little exposure to works outside the realist canon.

Meierkhol'd himself would express this view in a stronger manner later in the summer of 1904. In a letter to the actor I. N. Pevtsov dated 26 July 1904, after listing the first four productions for a two-week stay in Penza, Meierkhol'd writes, "Whether they understand us or not, we will have our way."<sup>19</sup> The tour in Penza also included a performance of Przybyszewski's *Snow* on 7 August and *The Golden Fleece* on 11 August 1904.<sup>20</sup> For this reason this announcement in the Kherson newspaper marks a

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<sup>17</sup> This attempt to mold public opinion does not seem unusual to contemporary audiences, who are buffeted by informational commercials, talk shows, and newspaper interviews that provide "insight" on a particular production. However, this effort was significant at a time when acting companies produced a new play once or twice a week.

<sup>18</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 47.

<sup>19</sup> Meierkhol'd, *Perepiska*, 49; cited in Zvenigorodskaia, *op. cit.*, 136.

<sup>20</sup> Zvenigorodskaia's chronicle of productions does not list the performance of *Snow*, but a review of the TND production appeared in the local newspaper. See –Skii, "Gorodskaia khronika. Teatr sel'sko-khoziaistvennoi vystavki," *Penzenskii spravochnyi listok*, no. 18, 11. VIII. 1904, p. 1. The review of *The Golden Fleece* appeared several days later. See –e, "Gorodskaia khronika. Teatr. „Zolotoe runo” — drama v 3 aktakh, soch. S. Pshibyshevskago," *Penzenskii spravochnyi listok*, no. 20, 15. VIII. 1904, p. 2. These items are not listed in Kurant's extensive bibliography, nor does Moskvin review this performance in the numerous productions of *Snow* he cites in his 1998 article. See Andriiej Moskwin, "Dzieje sceniczne," 133-147.

significant milestone in the ways in which modernist plays were introduced to the general public beyond the pages of the thick journals and thus deserves our attention.

**Remizov's press release in *Iug*: "A connection of the everyday with the eternal"**

During the winter season of 1903-1904 in Kherson, Meierkhol'd and Remizov placed three pre-performance announcements on the pages of *Iug*.<sup>21</sup> The first two, which appeared on 1 and 14 October 1903, announced the first performances of Hauptmann's *Vor Sonnenaufgang* and *Kollege Krampton*, respectively.<sup>22</sup> Both are surprisingly brief when compared to the lengthy commentary that *Snow* receives, especially given Meierkhol'd's fondness for Hauptmann.<sup>23</sup>

The two pre-performance announcements about the Hauptmann plays abound in factual information: the date of the German premiere, the identification of literary influences on Hauptmann, or how the play relates to the rest of the German writer's works. In addition, the authors, Remizov and Meierkhol'd, describe how each particular work differs from the other plays in Hauptmann's *œuvre*. Thus, *Vor Sonnenaufgang*, according to the announcement, is an example of realism "leading to

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<sup>21</sup> Fel'dman, in his commentaries, attributes the authorship of the Hauptmann previews to both men. See Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 64, 70; Remizov seems to have authored the column on *Sneg* alone. Zvenigorodskia is noncommittal, writing that either Meierkhol'd or Remizov could have authored the article of 19 December. See Zvenigorodskia, *op. cit.*, 111.

<sup>22</sup> Reprinted from the original texts in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 207-209 (Hauptmann) and 226-228 (Przybyszewski).

<sup>23</sup> For Meierkhol'd's interest in Hauptmann, see the letter to Chekhov previously cited in Zvenigorodskia, *op. cit.*, 12-13. The Hauptmann previews run 20-24 lines in contemporary font and 57 lines for the Przybyszewski preview in the Fel'dman volume.

[its] very ends,” with its depiction of ugly social realities such as incest, while *Kollege Krampton* is a comedy of morality transformed into one of psychology.<sup>24</sup>

Remizov took a completely different approach in his column about *Snow*, and his efforts to explain this play placed him in the vanguard of Russian critics who sought deeper meaning in Przybyszewski’s work.<sup>25</sup> Remizov’s column is as informative as his previous two brief articles about Hauptmann. Unlike those two pieces, however, this one features a short series of similes mimicking Przybyszewski’s own florid style. This use of poetic language invites the reader to make associations with other works by Przybyszewski, as well as those by other contemporary writers. How does Remizov’s press-release contribute to his reader’s understanding of the play?

First, as he had with the Hauptmann articles, Remizov situated the new drama within the context of Przybyszewski’s other works. *Snow*, Remizov explained, marks

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<sup>24</sup> Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 207, 209.

<sup>25</sup> “Teatr i iskusstvo. „*Sneg*,” (“Gorodskoi teatr”), *Iug*, no. 1657, 19. XII. 1903 p. 2; reprinted in its entirety in Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 226-228. Neither Moskwin nor Fel’dman comment fully on this text, aside from several very brief references. Cf. Moskwin, “Dzieje sceniczne,” 135. Further citations will note the title “Gorodskoi teatr,” used in Fel’dman. The first lengthy review of Przybyszewski’s drama was P. Iartsev, “Novaia drama: (*Sneg* Pshibyshevskago),” *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 50 (7. XII. 1903): 964-967. Columns and articles later appeared in literary journals and newspapers as well. See the expansive column in Nikolaev by an anonymous author, “Novye zhurnaly. (*Pravda*, ianvar’),” *Iuzhnaia Rossiia*, no. 41, 13. II. 1904, pp. 2-3, or D. N. Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii, “K kharakteristike sovremennago simvolizma v iskusstve. I. *Sneg* Pshibyshevskago,” *Iuzhnye zapiski*, no. 15-16 (1904): 81-90. A small cottage industry may have grown up around Przybyszewski’s works, as writers sought to provide “interpretations” of these new works to a public unfamiliar with the strategies required to understand them. See, for example, I. Bezdomnyi’s pamphlet, *Podrobnoe izlozhenie i smysl p’esy St. Pshibyshevskago ‘Sneg’ (Dramaticheskoe libretto)* (Odessa: Poliatius, 1904).

the beginning of a new cycle of dramas, which will describe the “lá-haut” (heaven, the transcendental elements) of humanity, in contrast to Przybyszewski’s previous cycle, “The Dance of Love and Death,” which had explored the “lá-bas” (hell, the mundane elements) of humanity, its “vale of tears.”<sup>26</sup> By referring to this world as a “vale of tears,” Remizov also alluded to another work by Przybyszewski, the 1896 prose poem “In hac lacrymarum valle.”<sup>27</sup>

Remizov thus invited a comparison of Przybyszewski’s older works to the novel, *Lá-bas*, by Huysmans, the “decadent” French writer. In doing so, Remizov may have been countering those critics who would characterize Przybyszewski as a

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<sup>26</sup> “Gorodskoi teatr,” reprinted in Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 226. For the “lá-haut-“lá-bas” duality as “heaven-hell,” see Brendan King’s introduction to his translation of the novel, J. K. Huysmans, *Lá-bas*, trans. Brendan King (Sawtry: Dedalus, 2001), 8.

<sup>27</sup> “In hac lacrymarum valle...” *PAN* 2, no. 2 (1896): 113-9. A section of this work, under the title “Ametysty,” appeared in the Fiszer edition (Warsaw) of Przybyszewski’s prose poems in 1902. The first appearance of this prose poem in Russian seems to be “V doline slez. («In hac lacrymarum valle»). Razskaz Stanislava Pshibyshevskago. (S nemetskago),” *Novyi zhurnal inostrannoi literatury*, no. 5 (1904): 1-7. The translator is uncredited. Remizov’s own translation of another prose poem from the Fiszer collection appeared on the pages of *Iug* in early August 1903, at the same time he was translating *Snow*. See “Malen’kii fel’eton. ‘Pamiati Shopena’. Stikhotvoreníe v proze. S. Pshibyshevskago. (Per. Alekseia Remizova),” *Iug*, 9. VIII. 1903, no. 1556, pp. 2-3. Scholars have not given Przybyszewski’s prose poems the attention they deserve, and little attention has been paid to their resonance in Russian literature. Adrian Wanner’s recent monograph on this synthetic form mentions Przybyszewski only in the context of Remizov, citing the latter’s creative interest in the prose poem as a possible method of translating his dreams into literary form. Wanner admits only that Remizov possibly became interested in the form through his translations of Przybyszewski. He does not mention that Remizov succeeded in publishing at least one of these (“Pamiati Shopena”), nor does he mention that Remizov was unsuccessful in publishing others. See Adrian Wanner, *Russian Minimalism: From the Prose Poem to the Anti-Story* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 91.

“decadent,” like the hero from Huysmans’ notorious Satanist novel.<sup>28</sup> In addition, Remizov’s characterization of the main theme of *Snow* as “lá-haut” suggests that he identified Przybyszewski’s art and exploration of the soul as a move toward the same aesthetic form as Huysmans’ own “spiritual Naturalism,” which the French writer defined as “absolute realism combined with flights of the soul.”<sup>29</sup>

Remizov also described *Snow* as a type of “symphonic poem,” which may help explain why the drama was presented in conjunction with performances of several works during the interludes, including a fantasia based on *Evgenii Onegin* by Chaikovskii and Beethoven’s *Sonata Pathétique*.<sup>30</sup> In addition, Remizov argued that

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<sup>28</sup> Remizov, in a letter to Briusov in August, declared that the people of Kherson reacted to the word “decadence” (*dekadentstvo*) as they would to a prostitute’s “yellow ticket.” Briusov, perhaps trying to raise Remizov’s spirits, replied that decadence was becoming the fashion in the capitals, and that to reprove it was now seen as provincial. See Obratina, et al., “Remizov i TND,” *Teatr*, no. 2 (1994): 107.

<sup>29</sup> Huysmans, *op. cit.*, 13. The subtitle of *Lá-bas* is “voyager en soi-même,” or “voyage into the self.” According to Durtal, Huysmans’ alter ego in the novel, spiritual Naturalism, while preserving the “documentary truthfulness, the precision of detail, the rich sinewy language of Realism,” would “be nobler, more complete, and more formidable” by combining its concerns for both the body and the soul. Huysmans, *ibid.*, 20. The first scholar to discuss the problem of Przybyszewski and Huysmans is Maxime Herman, “Huysmans et Przybyszewski,” *Le monde Slave*, mars (1935): 357-367. Herman discusses two general characteristics uniting the two authors, their struggle against naturalism and materialism and their aesthetics, which leads them back to the Medieval period in search of a higher spirituality. Herman finds two major differences as well. First, Przybyszewski views woman as a spiritual complement to man, not an inferior counterpart, as does Huysmans. Second, Przybyszewski’s view of art is more elevated than Huysmans’, who contrasts art as an artificial recreation of nature. Przybyszewski, however, views art as the highest expression of the soul.

<sup>30</sup> See the copy of the program reprinted in Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 87. Remizov would return to a similar musical metaphor in his “Letter from Kherson” which appeared in *Vesy* in 1904. In that essay Remizov, describing the production of *Snow*, states that the combination of Meierkhof’s conception of the work’s symbolism and the actors’ close connection to their roles “played a symphony of snow and winter,

the drama is “symbolic,” which he describes as a type of art form which “strives toward synthesis, toward the symbol (conjunction); from the separate to the whole.”<sup>31</sup> This synthesis and desire for unity, Remizov maintained, is the “fundamental idea” of symbolic drama.<sup>32</sup>

Remizov invited his prospective audience to view Przybyszewski’s new play on two levels. The first is on the level of the everyday, the mundane. He first warned his readers, however, that such an attempt to describe the “real plot” (*real'nyi siuzhet*) of the play could bore those viewers who were unwilling to examine the work further, on a symbolic or metaphysical plane. This “mundane” level is the level on which audiences, accustomed to viewing vaudevilles, light comedies, and the naturalist dramas would normally react. Remizov related the simple plot: Tadeusz, a happily-married man who happens also to be an artist, falls in love with an old flame [Ewa], despite attempts to fight this fatal attraction.

Remizov then challenged his audience to view the play on a second, symbolic level, where eternal themes replace those of the mundane. In doing so, Remizov provided a concrete example of what Meierkhol'd may have meant with his enigmatic September statement, that “the ‘fundamental idea’ (*ideinost'*) of the new drama is

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tranquility and indomitable thirst, portrayed the worn out soul and trembling-audacious heart of the creator of “Toska.” See Remizov, “TND,” 38.

<sup>31</sup> “Gorodskoi teatr,” reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 227. “Символическая драма как один из главных побегов искусства стремится к синтезу, к символу (соединению), от отдельного к целому.”

<sup>32</sup> “Gorodskoi teatr,” reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 227. “В этом и вся идейность такой драмы....”

expressed as a connection of the everyday with the eternal.”<sup>33</sup> According to Remizov, readers who look beyond the play’s simple plot would recognize an attempt to “break down the walls of the everyday and to present the beating soul of humanity.”<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, Remizov found “the beating soul of humanity,” or, as Meierkhol’d had previously remarked in his September interview with Lenskii, the “connection of the everyday with eternity,” in the yearning of the artist to create. Remizov explained that beneath this mundane, superficial plot lies “Przybyszewski’s tempestuous, purely exotic symbolism. Creativity and art are the great pining of the spirit, a yearning for the unknown, the unexplored; a yearning, kindled in excruciating flashes of creation.”<sup>35</sup>

According to Remizov’s suggested interpretation, Tadeusz now became a symbol of the Artist, who strives to reveal “new worlds.” He is content in his quiet earthly existence (i.e., his life with Bronka) until he recalls the beauty of a forgotten ideal, symbolized by Ewa, and is drawn inexorably into a union with his desire. Consequently, Ewa became, in Remizov’s interpretation, the “creative yearning” of Tadeusz.

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<sup>33</sup> *Iug*, 11. IX. 1903, reprinted in Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 46.

<sup>34</sup> “Gorodskoi teatr,” reprinted in Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 227. “...разбить стены повседневности и представить бьющую душу человеческую...” Here “soul,” not “heart,” is the proper translation of “dusza.” Remizov implies Przybyszewski’s synthesis of physiological and metaphysical imagery. Cf. Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 15, and “Totenmesse” (in Przybyszewski, *Werke, Band 1*), 11.

<sup>35</sup> “Gorodskoi teatr,” reprinted in Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 227. “Под такой внешностью раскинулась буйная, чисто экзотическая символика Пшибышевского. / Творчество, искусство – это великое томление духа, тоска о неведомом, неизведанном, тоска, разжигающаяся в мучительных вспышках созидания.”

Remizov, in closing his introduction to the new play, mimicked the hyperbolic style characteristic of Przybyszewski. He wrote that art itself is “yearning”; yearning is that “terrible beauty, that is higher than any beauty” and yearning is “all the creative work and all the strength of Stanislaw Przybyszewski.”<sup>36</sup> In presenting this interpretation, Remizov urged the audience to consider the deeper meaning of the work, even more than Przybyszewski himself, who frequently “bared the symbols” of his works through dialogue, thus both educating his audience and assisting in their interpretation of his work.<sup>37</sup>

Not all members of the reading or theatregoing public needed such urging from Remizov. Some were already prepared to accept the company’s shift of focus to more serious fare, as was the critic “A. W.” in Nikolaev, reviewing the company’s debut performance of *Snow* there on 16 February 1904.<sup>38</sup> A. W. wrote, “Indeed, you see before you a temple of art, as it were. Every movement is a religious rite, demanding more nervous enthusiasm and no less intense restraint. One must note the attentive, thoughtful attitude toward the performance, which the actors’ work characterizes.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “Gorodskoi teatr,” reprinted in Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 227-228. “Тоска—это искусство. / .../ Тоска – это «страшная красота, что превыше всякой красоты». / Тоска – всё творчество и вся сила Станислава Пшибышевского.”

<sup>37</sup> In *The Golden Fleece*, Ruszczyc identifies himself as “conscience,” in *Snow*, Bronka is compared to “snow.” The characters themselves discuss this symbolism.

<sup>38</sup> A. W., “Teatr i muzyka. Gastrol’i «Tovarishchestva novoi dramy» pod upravleniem V. E. Meierkol'da,” *Iuzhnaia Rossiia*, no. 46, 18. II. 1904, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> A. W., *op. cit.*, p. 3. “Действительно, вы видите перед собой, как бы храм искусства, в котором, каждое движение—священнодействие, требующее большого нервного подъема и не менее сильной выдержки. Нужно отметить внимательное, вдумчивое отношение к исполняемому произведению,

A. W.'s comments also mark a recognition of particular characters as symbolic. He described Makryna as a figure who “strengthens the general illumination of the play as a symbolic work, personifying the power of forces hanging over our consciousness.”<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, A. W. also recognized a link between the snow in the play’s setting, the character of Bronka, and a motif of awakening.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to earlier Kherson audiences who became so enamored of the scenic effects of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, A. W. found that a lack of effects in *Snow* helped focus attention on the characters’ internal drama: “There are none of the usual dramatic accessories; [but] strength and beauty predominate in the internal, profound psychic struggle that is felt.”<sup>42</sup> Through the efforts of Meierkhol’d’s Association of New Drama (TND) and aided by informed provincial critics, Przybyszewski and his works thus become even more closely linked to an active comprehension of modernist sensibilities in Russia at the turn of the century.

Remizov’s press-release served several purposes. First, it invited the public to recognize the existence of several levels of meanings in Przybyszewski’s play, the

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характеризующее игру артистов.” A. W.’s comments about a “temple of art” echo similar comments that appeared in the Nikolaev version of Lenskii’s September interview with Meierkhol’d, published under the by-line, “Optimist.” See Optimist [VI. Lenskii], “Pis'mo iz Khersona,” *Iuzhnaia Rossiia*, 13. IX. 1903, reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 47-49.

<sup>40</sup> A. W., *op. cit.*, p. 3. “Она усиливает общее освещение пьесы, как символического поризведения, олицетворяя собой власть сил, лежащих над нашим сознанием.”

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. “За окном дома, где живут новобрачные, виден снег,—один из художественных символов той чистоты, той теплоты, которую дает ему Bronka, отогревающая остывшее зерно жизни на дне его души, которое еще способно к пробуждению.”

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. “В драме нет обычных драматических аксессуаров, чувствуется внутренняя, глубокая, душевная борьба, в которой господствуют сила, красота.”

real and the symbolic. Fundamentally, these levels represented a connection of the “everyday” to the “eternal.” Second, it suggested that three of the main themes of the play were “yearning,” “art,” and “death.” Third, it suggested that the characters were allegorical. Fourth, it linked the drama with music, thus realizing the Association’s use of Przybyszewskian synaesthesia and synthesis in their staging of the new drama.

In order to understand how Meierkhol'd began his theatrical experimentation, especially in light of his pronouncements about the “new drama,” it will help to provide a fuller presentation of Remizov’s insight into Przybyszewski’s dramatic text, to which Meierkhol'd certainly subscribed. In order to do so, we can examine the second section of Remizov’s essay, “The Association of New Drama. Letter from Kherson,” which appeared in 1904 in *Vesy*. An analysis of that work will allow us to move beyond the preliminary character sketches and illustrate just how deeply Remizov’s symbolic interpretation of *Snow* as a drama about creativity and death affected Meierkhol'd’s production in Kherson.

### **Remizov’s impressions of *Snow (Sneg)* in *Vesy***

The lack of archival material such as correspondence or detailed director’s notes in which Meierkhol'd makes descriptive references has compelled scholars to quote Aleksei Remizov’s 1904 impressionistic article in *Vesy*.<sup>43</sup> Only recently have

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<sup>43</sup> Scholars acknowledge Remizov’s own evaluation of this production as one in which Meierkhol'd continued to find his own voice as a director and generally accept this production as a major event in the move toward symbolist or non-representational theatre. Recent scholarship has seemed to place increasing importance on this production. Thus, Soviet historian Konstantin Rudnitskii admitted in 1969: “The director’s new ideas were clearly revealed—as we will now see—only in the productions of *Snow* and *Monna Vanna*.” Rudnitskii, *RM*, 36. Braun (1995) writes,

scholars attempted a fuller discussion of Meierkhol'd's aesthetic aims in connection with this particular production.<sup>44</sup> Oleg Fel'dman, in his recent commentary to Meierkhol'd's notebooks, directs us to Remizov's article as a point of departure, especially in light of Remizov's position as literary advisor to the Association and Meierkhol'd's close friend. Fel'dman further proposes that Remizov's actor and character descriptions must be read as a "compact exposition of Remizov's suggestions to the director and actors" during the Kherson rehearsals, and as "the advice of the 'eccentric tuner' and those 'dreams,' with which he [Remizov] knew how to captivate his co-workers in the hope of making the symbolic 'symphony of tranquility and indomitable desire' come to life on the stage."<sup>45</sup> Moskwin, like

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"It was with Przybyszewski's *Snow* ... that Meyerhold took his first tentative steps away from the verisimilitude of the Moscow Art Theatre." Braun, *op. cit.*, 22. Russian scholar Andrei Moskwin (1998) states firmly, "Making the decision to choose *Snow*, Meyerhold the director tried for the first time in his apprenticeship to stage a vision of 'uslovnii' theatre and to create a theatrical program of symbolism." ("Podejmując decyzję o wyborze *Śniegu*, Meyerhold-reżyser próbował po raz pierwszy w swojej praktyce przedstawić wizję „umównego“ teatru oraz stworzyć teatralny program symbolizmu.") See Moskwin, "Dzieje sceniczne," 135.

<sup>44</sup> For example: Zvenigorodskaia (2004), *op. cit.*, 113-114. Cf. the history of this discussion: Braun (1995), *op. cit.*, 22; Rudnitskii (1969), *RM*, 37; Volkov (1929), *op. cit.*, t. 1, 172-173.

<sup>45</sup> "Характеристику персонажей и исполнителей «Снега» в этой статье следует читать как сжатое изложение подсказов Ремизова режиссёру и актерам на херсонских репетициях, как советы «настройщика с вывертом» и те «мечты», которыми он умел увлечь своих сотрудников в надежде осуществить на сцене символистскую «симфонию успокоения и неукротимой жажды»." Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 85-86. Remizov referred to himself as a "tuner" several times during his life. First, in his article "Theatre" in the journal *Zhizn' iskusstva* [*A Life of Art*; no. 318, 16. XII. 1919] Remizov declares that he did not tune "string instruments, but people." Fel'dman cites other examples of this unusual metaphor: "I served Meierkhol'd in the position of a 'theatrical tuner' or, more precisely, a trainer" ("na dolzhnosti 'teatral'nogo nastroishchika' ili, tochnee, navodchika," *Podstrizhennymi glazami*, Paris, 1951; p. 189), and "In the first independent year of the 'Meierkhol'd

Fel'dman, agrees that Remizov's participation in the company must be considered. He claims that Remizov provided "significant assistance" in preparing the *mise-en-scène* and taking over rehearsals after the onset of Meierkhol'd's illness.<sup>46</sup> This claim leads Moskwin to conclude that the Remizov's characterizations in the *Vesny* article should be interpreted as the "hints" Remizov gave to the actors during rehearsals.<sup>47</sup>

It is difficult to understand, however, how Meierkhol'd's actors, who were accustomed to performing in naturalistic productions, were supposed to react to Remizov's cryptic, figurative "hints," such as "Bronka ... is a pure, white snowflake," "Kazimierz ... is a transparent-blue ice-floe," or "Ewa... is too iron-willed, only an apparition of a woman."<sup>48</sup> How did all these symbolic images create a coherent whole, for Remizov, Meierkhol'd, or the cast? We suggest that a textual analysis of Remizov's essay will reveal an underlying artistic unity, which will create a foundation for further interpretation and aid in our understanding of Meierkhol'd's vision for this work. By describing Meierkhol'd's production as a "symphony of snow and winter landscape," Remizov painted an intricate picture of possible connotative, symbolic choices which Meierkhol'd could exploit in the areas of scenic design and character development. In this way, Remizov's impressionistic, non-

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Theatre' in Kherson, 1903-1904, I defiantly served as 'eccentric tuner'" (Iu. B. Elagin, *Dark Genius*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: 1982, p. 418). Cited in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 39.

<sup>46</sup> Moskwin, *SP w kulturze rosyjskiej*, 143.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 143. "Przedstawione w jego recenzji *Śniegu* wskazówki udzielane aktorom podczas prób."

<sup>48</sup> Remizov, "TND," 38, 39.

realist imagery will help us understand how Meierkhol'd himself broke the “shell” of naturalism in his quest to connect the everyday with the eternal.

As a preface to our interpretative analysis, it is best to review Remizov’s general comments about the company’s goals and this particular production. Remizov’s “Letter from Kherson” had described the 1903/1904 season as a “search for new forms,” through which Meierkhol'd had moved beyond the confining methods of Stanislavskii in his attempt to express the “eternal mysteries.”<sup>49</sup> In this production of *Snow*, in Remizov’s opinion, Meierkhol'd had also shown his directorial expertise by combining the “symbolism of the drama with its realistic plot and the devoted, loving relationship of the actors toward their roles, in [the production’s] tone, colors, and plasticity.”<sup>50</sup> Remizov then continued: “It was as if a snow-white blizzard was rocking a little cradle like the hand of fate; it lulls [one to sleep], it awakens [one], it doctors wounds with its fluffy flakes; it opens wounds, carries [them] off into the kingdom of dreams; it remembers, tears at any edges, ruptures the edges of the horizon; the celestial light shines... the black cavity of a pond... ‘It is as if the yearning of autumn has raked the yellowed leaves from the chestnut paths’....”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Remizov, “TND,” 36.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 38. “в тоне, красках и пластике символику драмы с ее реальным сюжетом, желанное, любовное отношение актеров к своим ролям...” Excerpted in Braun, *op. cit.*, 22.

<sup>51</sup> Remizov, “TND,” 38. “Будто метель белоснежная роковою рукою колыбельку качает, усыпляет, пробуждает, пушистыми хлопьями раны врачует, раны раскрывает, уносит в царство мечтаний, вспоминает, порывает за всякия грани, разрывает небосклоны, свет горний светится... черная впадина пруда... „То будто осени тоска с каштановых аллей сгребала желтые листья”...” Ellipses in

We suggest parallels exist between Remizov’s impressionistic description and Przybyszewski’s narrative. These phrases reflect the thoughts coursing through Bronka’s mind as she makes her fatal decision to sacrifice herself for her husband’s creative realization. Like flashes of verbal lightning, they express Bronka’s backstory concisely, spontaneously, and with immense energy. On a superficial level, there seem to be few logical connections between Remizov’s chain of phrases (someone awakens from sleep, wounds are attended; there is a pond), yet close analysis suggests that his style parallels Przybyszewski’s. As a translator of Przybyszewski’s plays and prose poems, Remizov was aware of Przybyszewski’s style, and, as literary advisor, would have also been aware of Peremilovskii’s translation of “On the Paths of the Soul” which had appeared in *Mir iskusstva*. Przybyszewski had advocated in *Aphorisms*, that the “new art” would transmit and recreate “the sensations, thoughts, impressions, dreams and visions *spontaneously*, as they appear in the soul, without logical connections, in all their sudden leaps and associations.”<sup>52</sup> In light of these

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original. Remizov quotes Bronka's line from Act II:v. The phrase “black cavity of a pond” signifies death. It is a foreshadowing reference to the hole through which Bronka and Kazimierz later will commit suicide by drowning. In Przybyszewski’s text, this image is connected to the notion of “the bottom of eternity.” In this piece of dialogue Bronka laments to Ewa how their relationship has now changed. Formerly, Ewa had been happy to see Bronka wed to Tadeusz, now she seems intent on winning him back. Bronka [to Ewa]: “И так безрадостно и с таким страхом смотрю я на дно этой вечности. Вот видишь, видишь, потому-то и припоминалось мне то черное озеро.” See Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, 294.

<sup>52</sup> “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, no. 5-6 (1902): 106; Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 22. “Метод, каким мы пользуемся в данном случае, это передача и воспроизведение ощущений, мыслей, впечатлений, снов, видений, н е п о с р е д с т в е н н о так, как они проявляются в душе, без логических связей, во всех их внезапных прыжках и сцеплениях.” Emphasis in the original. See Appendix I, text 6.52 (reference 4.13).

considerations, we offer the following interpretative analysis of Remizov's essay. This interpretation will suggest ways in which Meierkhol'd may have used Przybyszewski's lyrical text and imagery to create these roles and outline general character motivations within a larger symbolic framework.<sup>53</sup>

The blizzard is a reference to the setting of the opening scene of Act I, as Bronka anxiously waits at the window, wondering about Tadeusz.<sup>54</sup> The domesticity of her relationship with Tadeusz has lulled them both into a metaphoric "sleep"; now the arrival of Ewa awakens Tadeusz's old love. Remizov's image of the "doctored wound" resonates in two ways. First, it refers to the physical injuries that Bronka had received early in her life, when a fall from a horse brought her together with Tadeusz for the first time.<sup>55</sup> Second, it resonates on a psychological level for both Tadeusz and Bronka. Tadeusz's yearning to create (his "wound"), formerly cooled by comfortable domesticity, is now remembered and warmed by Ewa's visit (it is "ministered to"), just as Bronka remembers the former warmth of the friendship between Ewa and herself (another "wound").<sup>56</sup> For Bronka, this psychological wound also represents the memories of her sister, who had drowned in a pond ("it

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<sup>53</sup> Existing press reviews of Meierkhol'd's productions in Kherson and Nikolaev, before the *Vesy* article appeared, or Penza and Tiflis, after it appeared, do not provide enough commentary to confirm or refute this hypothesis.

<sup>54</sup> See Appendix I, text 6.54.

<sup>55</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS, T. IV*, I: iv, 266.

<sup>56</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS, T. IV*, III: i, 299 (Tadeusz's urge to create "something great"); I: i, 259 (Bronka's former friendship with Ewa).

tears at the edges, ruptures...”).<sup>57</sup> As these psychological wounds fester, Bronka now realizes that she cannot compete with Ewa’s beauty or her influence on Tadeusz, and decides to sacrifice herself (“the celestial light shines”) for the sake of Tadeusz and his art by committing suicide in the same way her sister had died (“the black cavity of a pond”).<sup>58</sup>

Remizov’s description of the *dramatis personae* continued in this same elliptical manner. According to Remizov, Bronka, as played by Ekaterina Munt, was

a white, pure snowflake, so tightly nestled up to the emerald-hued fiery, lively winterscape that had only dozed off to sleep; [she was] a white, pure, bird, [who has] warmed a powerful, wounded mate with the blood of its fostering lullaby so that it could fly away; [so] white, pure... a bird, which, having recovered its sight, and having begun to yearn [for something more], wants to fly, to fly, but only beats its wings against the earth and so yearns and desires [to fly]... its wings are filled with lead. “You are the only one, my dearest, dearest beloved, Bronka... You are my God...”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS, T. IV, II: v, 292; 295-296*. Bronka: “Что-то рвет мне на части всю душу, рвет мозг, но я не знаю, что это такое...” (295), “и я в это время думала о черном озере” (296).

<sup>58</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS, T. IV, II: v, 295-296*. “Bronka: Нет, нет, я не ревную, но правда, я боюсь... Ewa: Чего? Bronka: Твоей красоты...” (295); Bronka: “...и я в это время думала о черном озере и о том, что его глубина может сделаться безконечной, и тогда – то, что было его дном, сольется с небом. *Задумчиво*. Куда? Или в черную глубину озера или высоко, высоко, к величественному небу...” / “Bronka: ... И во мне начинается просыпаться какая-то тоска... А может быть, я слишком слаба, чтобы тосковать? Чтобы переносить муки этой тоски? Ewa: О чем тебе тосковать? Разве все твои желания уже не исполнились? Bronka: Одно—нет еще... Ewa: Какое же? Ты знаешь его? Bronka: Нет, еще, нет еще. *Пауза*” (296).

<sup>59</sup> Remizov, “TND,” 38. “Бронка—Мунт—белая, чистая снежинка, так крепко прижавшаяся к изумрудного-огненной, живой, лишь задремавшей озими; белая чистая птичка всею кровью своего колыбельно-лелейного пенья отогревшая могучую раненую птицу, чтобы та могла улететь; белая чистая... прозревшая, затосковавшая птичка, которая лететь, лететь хочет, а крыльями только бьется о

Readers of Przybyszewski's drama would recognize Remizov's introduction of the avian metaphor not as an unusual, original trope, but as a further delineation of Bronka's symbolic nature using Przybyszewski's own imagery. Here Remizov elaborates on four lines of Bronka's dialogue from Act II, as she voices her first doubts of her own adequacies and desires, while intimating that Tadeusz might be better off with Ewa:

БРОНКА: Ах, я хотела бы лететь!.. Высоко-высоко, как птица, но только все бьюсь крыльями о землю... И такая тоска, так страстно хочется взлететь, а крылья – будто свинцовые... *Еве*. Ева, Ева, какая ты счастливая...<sup>60</sup>

BRONKA: Oh, I would like to fly!.. High like a bird, but I only beat my wings against the earth... And there is such a yearning; so passionately would I like to fly up, but my wings are leaden... *To Ewa*. Ewa, Ewa, how happy you are...

Remizov also extends the avian image to Tadeusz, played by Meierkhol'd, who now becomes a "wounded mate." In the play, this association occurs in Act IV, when Kazimierz, Tadeusz's melancholy brother, perceives his brother this way. Kazimierz, played by I. N. Pevtsov, links the "snow" metaphor with the avian

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землю и так тоскует и так жаждет... крылья свинцом полны. „Моя ты единственная, самая, самая любимая Бронка... Бог ты мой...“ Ellipses in original.

<sup>60</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, PSS, T. IV, II: ii, 286. This image of a bird unable to fly echoes a similar scene in the third section ("Helle Nächte") of the prose poem "By the sea" ("Am Meer". Cf. the original German version, "Helle Nächte," in Przybyszewski, *Werke. Band 1*, 87; or a Russian translation, "Rapsodiia II. Belyia nochi," in PSS, T. I, 3-e izd., (Moscow: Sablin, 1910), 103-104. An atmosphere of death and *toska* (*Sehnsucht*) surrounds both works. Intratextuality in Przybyszewski's works is still a subject ripe for research.

metaphor used by Bronka earlier in Act II. The following dialogue takes place after he enters and speaks with Bronka, just after she has spoken with Makryna, her old nanny, and a character representing death:

БРОНКА: А ты знаешь, почему бросил меня Тадеуш?

КАЗИМИР: Знаю.

БРОНКА: И я знаю. Ведь да, Казя, ведь это правда?

КАЗИМИР: Что?

БРОНКА: Я была снегом, таким хорошим белым снегом, который нежит бедную землю, согревает ее, разве нет? Скажи, Казя.

КАЗИМИР: *задумчиво*. Да... Может быть, ты была доброю, нежною рукою, которая приголубила раненую птицу. Так ей было хорошо подле тебя, пока она была больна, а теперь крылья обросли у нее новыми перьями, окрепли и готовятся к полету... Нет, и готовиться нечего—она уже расправила свои крылья... Она уже улетает...

БРОНКА: *с ужасом*. Не говори, не говори этого!

КАЗИМИР: *раздраженно*. Нет, буду говорить.

Тадеуш улетит от тебя с Евою!

БРОНКА: С Евою? С Евою? Кто такая Ева? Что она такое?

КАЗИМИР: Кто она? Что? Она—мой сон, она—твой больной кошмар, она—адская жажда Тадеуша. Вот что такое Ева! *Усмехается*. [...]<sup>61</sup>

BRONKA: And do you know why Tadeusz has left me?

KAZIMIERZ: Yes.

BRONKA: I do, too. Isn't it so, Kazia, isn't it true?

KAZIMIERZ: What?

BRONKA: I was the snow, just like the nice, white snow that caresses the poor earth [and] warms it, right?

KAZIMIERZ: *pensively*. Yes... Perhaps you were the kind, gentle hand that caresses the wounded

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<sup>61</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, T. IV, IV: v; 326-327. See Appendix I, 6.61, for the original Polish text.

bird. It felt so good beside you, while it was sick, but now its wings have grown new feathers, they are stronger and ready for flight... No, there is nothing to prepare for—it has already spread its wings... It is already flying away...

BRONKA: *with horror*. Don't, don't say that!

KAZIMIERZ: *annoyed*. No, I will say it. Tadeusz will fly away with Ewa!

BRONKA: With Ewa? With Ewa? Who is Ewa? What is she?

KAZIMIERZ: Who is she? What? She is my dream, she is your sick nightmare; she is Tadeusz's infernal desire. That's what Ewa is! *Grins*. [...]

This perception of Tadeusz as “wounded” reflects Bronka’s—and probably Ewa’s— perception of her domesticated artist-husband, not Tadeusz’s perception of himself. He does not consider himself “wounded,” but rather, only weakened. He confides as much to Bronka in one of the final scenes of Act I, when he describes Kazimierz and himself as “the last, weak, autumnal shoots upon the old, one-time powerful tree of our race.”<sup>62</sup> Similarly, early in Act II Ewa identifies Tadeusz as “the last of that great, wonderful race of conquistadors,” a characterization with which Tadeusz agrees.<sup>63</sup> That “race,” to which Tadeusz refers, is the artist, and Tadeusz is still tormented by an intense desire, apparent even from his childhood, “to create

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<sup>62</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, T. IV, I: viii; 270. (Tadeusz, to Bronka): “Да, да. Наш род исчезает. Он и я—мы последние, слабые, осенние ростки на старом, когда-то таком могучем дереве нашего рода.”

<sup>63</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, PSS, t. IV, II: i, 281, 284. (Ewa): “Ты –последний из той великой, прекрасной породы конквистадоров” (281); (Tadeusz): “Ведь я создан конквистадором...” (284).

something great, powerful, [and] beautiful that no other person has yet created.”<sup>64</sup>

Evidence of Tadeusz’s creative power is lacking in the play, however, save for his study, which, in Ewa’s words, is a temple to her memory.<sup>65</sup> This sterility can be attributed to the calm, domestic life he has led with Bronka.

Like the snow or an avian nurse, Bronka has served her purpose as a loving protector of her mate, Tadeusz. However, now it is time for him to leave the protective, and, in Przybyszewski’s view, stifling atmosphere of the nest. This desire by Tadeusz to free himself from such a situation, together with the intense desire to create, would resonate strongly in Meierkhol’d, who played the role. He had broken away from the nurturing care of Stanislavskii’s MKhT in early 1901, lured away from that comfortable setting by the dream and beauty of his own Ewa, the ideal of true art. Now liberated, the indefatigable Meierkhol’d had set himself the goal of creating “something great,” his own theatre of the “new drama.”

Remizov describes the character of Kazimierz next, curiously depicting him as a “transparent-blue ice-floe, carried away into from the polar storms into the warm sea.”<sup>66</sup> Again Remizov introduces imagery that seems to be associated less with the play, *Snow*, than with the elemental imagery of fire and ice found in another of

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<sup>64</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, PSS, t. IV, III: i, 299. (Tadeusz): “...меня мучило желание создать что-то великое, могучее, прекрасное, чего еще не создавал ни один человек!”

<sup>65</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, PSS, t. IV, II: i, 277-278.

<sup>66</sup> Remizov, “TND,” 38. “Казимир—Певцов—прозрачно-голубая льдина, унесенная в теплое море от полярных бурь.”

Przybyszewski's works, the prose poem, "By the Sea" ["Am Meer," 1897].<sup>67</sup> The image of Bronka as a bird, and now, this image of Kazimierz as an ice-floe, both point to Meierkhol'd's use of Przybyszewski's prose poem, which Remizov had been translating in September, as a possible aid in directing *Snow*.<sup>68</sup>

Remizov's unexpected image of Kazimierz, who commits suicide with Bronka, as an ice-floe functions in two ways. First, it associates him with Bronka. Being forms of frozen water, "ice-floe" (Kazimierz) and "snow" (Bronka) are both part of the same semantic field and thus related. This relationship on the metaphoric level reflects the relationship that both characters share on the dramatic level. In Przybyszewski's play, Bronka and Kazimierz are bound together by loneliness and unrequited love; they also commit double suicide.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the two characters seem to be linked spiritually: Kazimierz characterizes Bronka as "snow" and

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<sup>67</sup> "Und auf mein Machtwort wälzen alle Gletscher der Erde ungeheure Eisfladen herab, und in trüben Opal grünt das Eis über den Schnee. / Denn wieder hat mir die Sehnsucht gesagt, daß ich in der schwarzen Nacht sehen mußte, wie über dem leuchtenden Eise eine Flamme aufblüht, wenn noch ich Herz für mich schlägt. / Und sieh: eine feine Feuerflamme züngelt auf, breitet sich, wie Lauffeuer wälzt sie über die Eisflächen — und Schnee und Eis in einem Nu ein Feuermeer; das Erdenherz erhebt von Neuen und wirft sein heiliges Blut empor." Przybyszewski, *Werke. Band I*, 101. Cf. "Rapsodiia III. U moria," in *PSS, t. 1*, 3-e izd., (Moscow: Sablin, 1910), 128.

<sup>68</sup> Remizov mentions translating "Nad morzem" in a letter to Madelung. See Obratina, et. al., *op. cit.*, 107. The motivic parallels between *Snow* and "Nad morzhem" are a topic for further research, as well as further investigation of this work's possible impact on Meierkhol'd's production.

<sup>69</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS, t. IV, IV: v*, 328, 333. (Kazimierz, to Bronka): "О, для меня ты прекрасна, для меня ты прекрасное, великое, святое успокоение" "Я хочу быть тебе братом, другом, чем хочешь..."; (Bronka, to Kazimierz): "Я одна, совсем одна на свете, и ты тоже один, совсем один..." "Я не люблю тебя, но я люблю твою хорошую, прекрасную любовь..." (328).

describes his own soul as “cold, white, [and] pure as snow.”<sup>70</sup> Second, the ice-floe imagery is related to the character of Kazimierz by an association to “wandering,” moving from one point to another. The ice-floe wanders; it is tossed by the sea, an elemental force of nature, into calmer, warmer waters where it will eventually meet its destruction. Similarly, Kazimierz has also wandered. Now, as if by fate, he is lured into the sentimental domesticity represented by Bronka:

КАЗИМИР. [...] Довольно этих горбатых ведьм,  
которые пляшут на Лысой горе науки,  
знаний и общественного служения.<sup>71</sup>

KAZIMIERZ. ...I've had enough of these hunchbacked  
witches who dance on the Bald Mountain of  
science, knowledge and service to society.

And:

КАЗИМИР. [...] Все чаще мне начинают сниться  
какие-то сентиментальные идиллии, грезится  
какое-то уютное гнездышко и в нем –  
любящая, нежная, заботливая женщина, при  
которой я могу так спокойно работать. Ах,  
надоело мне, измучило меня это вечное  
скитание по белу свету. Все эти

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<sup>70</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, III: iii, 310, 306.

<sup>71</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, I: i, 257. Appendix I, text 6.71. The reference to witches is not out of place for Kazimierz. In Act I, scene iii, Tadeusz hints that his brother is interested in metaphysics, but this idea is not developed further (*Sneg*, 262). It is unclear at this time whether Przybyszewski knew of Orest Somov's (1793-1833) short story, “The Witches of Kiev” (*Kievskie ved'my*, 1833), which depicts a witches' Sabbath that takes place on Bald Mountain in the Ukraine. As an amateur musician, he would likely have been familiar with Musorgskii's program music on the same theme, “Night on Bald Mountain” (1867). In the very least, he knew the legend from his work in the occult as he was writing *The Synagogue of Satan* (1897). The theme of artist and society is developed more fully along similar lines in the novella *Sons of the Earth* [*Synowie ziemi; Syny zemli*, 1904].

произведения искусств,<sup>72</sup> все эти музеи,  
театры, ипподромы, Париж, —все это ложь,  
ложь, ложь... Как все это опротивело! Везде  
одно и то же, одно и то же. И всюду  
таскаешь с собой все ту же вечную скуку...<sup>73</sup>

KAZIMIERZ. [...] More and more often I begin to  
imagine some kind of sentimental idylls, I  
dream of some kind of comfortable little home  
and in it—a loving, tender, caring woman,  
beside whom I can quietly work. Oh, it has  
tired and tormented me—this eternal wandering  
around the world. All these works of art, all  
these museums, theatres, hippodromes, Paris—  
it’s all a lie, lie, lie. How loathsome it all is!  
It’s all the same everywhere, all the same. And  
you drag the same eternal boredom with you...

Kazimierz’s lines provide an explanation for his arrival at his sister-in-law’s home. He has not been cast there by fate, but by the “polar storms” of a cold disenchantment with science (“the Bald Mountain of science, knowledge, and service to society”) and society’s commodification of art (“All these works of art, ... it’s all a lie, lie, lie. How loathsome it all is!”). However, Remizov’s depiction of Kazimierz as an “ice-floe,” also hints at his tragic fate, his eventual destruction in the warmth of Bronka’s domesticity.

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<sup>72</sup> Przybyszewski, in his use of the unusual trope “*proizvedenii iskusstv*”, lit., “works of the arts,” purposely broadens his scope to include all forms of art—visual, literary, musical, etc.—not just the visual arts, as might be inferred by Kazimierz.

<sup>73</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, I: i, 256. Appendix I, text 6.73. Remizov paraphrases a single line from this monologue in the *Vesy* article: “Oh it exhausted and wearied me—this eternal wandering around the world. It’s all nonsense...” “Изнурило, опостылело мне это вечное скитание по целому свету [sic]. И все это вздор...” Remizov, “TND,” 38.

Now Remizov turns his attention toward a brief characterization of Kazimierz's soul, again interpolating lines from the play. The "snow" metaphor returns, but only briefly:

Душа, отшатнувшаяся от жилищ—гробов и людей—пружинных скелетов, душа, которой внятны самые скрытые звуки и зримы туманные дали, душа, познавшая высший закон в неумолимой гибели, в аде и в воскресении... Брат Макрины. „Медленно в течение долгих недель полюбил тебя моей первой любовью, потому что никогда, Бронка, до сих пор не любил. А душа моя была холодная, белая и чистая, как этот снег там на поле. Почему полюбил тебя, почему любовь моя углублялась и сильнее, сильнее росла во мне... Да, да – поздно – поздно.“<sup>74</sup>

[He is] A soul, which has staggered away fearfully<sup>75</sup> from abodes —graves and people—springly skeletons; a soul to which the most hidden sounds are intelligible and the misty distances are visible; a soul which has known the higher law in inexorable destruction, in hell and in resurrection... Makryna's brother. "Slowly, in the course of long weeks, I fell in love with you, Bronka, as my first love, because I never loved until now [sic]. My soul was cold, white and pure like the snow there on the field. That's why I fell in love with you, that's why my love deepened and grew stronger, grew stronger within me... Yes, yes, it's too late—too late."

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<sup>74</sup> Remizov, "TND," 38-39. Remizov's citations are taken from Act III: iii and Act I: ii.

<sup>75</sup> Remizov's image of Kazimierz here echoes Burenin's sarcastic complaint in *Novoe vremia* about Damanskaia's translation of *The Visitors*, as Adam, having entered the palace, and received a toast to his health, comes face to face with the consequences of his own actions, "the visitors." He reappears "staggering" (*poshatyvaiias'*), ostensibly from drink, but more from his recognition of man's existential guilt. Przybyszewski has motivated the actor's movement in the plane of reality, but it also carries meaning in the symbolic. Cf. "Gosti. Dramaticheskii epilog," *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 85; Burenin, *op. cit.*, 2.

Remizov's comparison of Kazimierz to Makryna, Bronka's former nanny, is curious, and Przybyszewski's dramatic text offers no similar allusion. However, this comparison is not without foundation. It is clear that Kazimierz is not Makryna's brother in the genetic sense, but in the spiritual sense. In the play, both individuals are linked through an attribute of "coldness." Kazimierz's soul is "cold" because his love is unrequited; Makryna's hands are cold because she symbolizes death.<sup>76</sup> The identification of Kazimierz as an artist is also strengthened: he is described as one who hears "hidden sounds" and sees "misty distances."

Both individuals also contribute in some way to Bronka's decision to sacrifice herself for her husband Tadeusz's sake. In Act III Kazimierz confronts Bronka with the realization that it is Tadeusz's fate to be with Ewa, and that it is Bronka's fate, as "snow," to melt away so that Tadeusz may be reborn.<sup>77</sup> In Act IV, Makryna reminds Bronka of her sister's premature death by drowning. Just as she had closed the eyes of the dead child years ago, Makryna now announces that she has come to "close

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<sup>76</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, T. IV, IV: iv, 323; (Bronka, to Makryna): "в ужасе. Какая у тебя холодная рука, какая холодная..." Remizov had prepared his audience for this symbolism in his pre-performance article, "Gorodskoi teatr," reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 227. "и в доме остаётся одна старая нянька Макрина-смерть"

<sup>77</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, III: iii; (Bronka, to Kazimierz): "Он пошел к Еве, к Еве, к Еве! *Молчание*. / Неужели все это должно так быть?" (Kazimierz, to Bronka): "Такова уже судьба человека, которого захватит в свои руки страшная тоска, которого мучит желание уйти от себя, от всего" (304); (Kazimierz, to Bronka): "...Ева и есть та самая тоска" (305); (Kazimierz, to Bronka): "Ты белый, чистый снег, который ложится на замерзшую грудь земли..."(310-311).

those same eyes which I opened to life with my kiss...But not with a kiss, but with these fingers, these very..."<sup>78</sup> Now it is Bronka's fate to die by drowning as well.

Remizov emphasizes this tragedy by quoting Kazimierz's line, "Yes, yes, It's too late—too late," out of context. In Przybyszewski's text, Kazimierz whispers this phrase in Act I, scene ii, as a response to Bronka's joyful cry that Tadeusz, having braved the blizzard, has arrived home safely. Kazimierz's line of dialogue is one of the first to build the atmosphere of suspense and tragedy that continues throughout the drama, beginning with Bronka's anxious waiting at the window in the opening scene. By linking this line to Kazimierz's declaration of love for Bronka, rather than Tadeusz's return home, Remizov tightens the chain of consequences, emphasizing the Kazimierz-Bronka bond and deemphasizing the Bronka-Tadeusz relationship. It also serves to comment on Kazimierz's own fate: he has sought escape from the petty demands which society places on art, but also has been denied the love he seeks from Bronka. His fate is sealed; he has no choice but to join Bronka in death.

We recognize the soul that has "staggered away from abodes—graves and people—springly skeletons" as the liberated soul of the artist, who is able to transmit the transcendental truths ("the higher law") of love, death, and immortality. This is the hidden reason why Remizov has described Kazimierz as Makryna's brother. The special powers of perception which Remizov attributes to Kazimierz ("a soul to which the most hidden sounds are intelligible and the misty distances are visible")

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<sup>78</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, PSS, T. IV, IV: iv, 323; (Makryna, to Ewa): "А теперь вот пришла чтобы закрыть те самые глаза, которые я открыла для жизни своим поцелуем...Но уже не поцелуем, а вот этими пальцами, вот этими..."

echo the same qualities of heightened perception which Przybyszewski had assigned to the creative genius in *Aphorisms and Preludes*. Przybyszewski had written:

Существуют люди, пред очами которых обнажается все, что пережила душа их, существуют люди, в которых абсолютная душа гораздо сильнее сознается, нежели в других, которые в безмерном самоуглублении видят волшебные картины и раи не от мира сего, слышат мелодии и звуки, о каких не грезило ухо людское, разливы красок, каких обыкновенный глаз не может подметить.<sup>79</sup>

There exist people, before whose eyes is bared all that their soul has experienced; there exist people in whom the absolute soul is realized more powerfully than in others, who, in [their] immense self-knowledge, see magical images and unearthly paradises, hear melodies and sounds, which the human ear has not dreamed, [and] a flood of colors that the normal eye cannot notice.

Here Remizov substitutes the metaphor “misty distances” (“*tumannye dali*”) for Przybyszewski’s phrase, “magical images and unearthly paradises” (“*volshhebnye kartiny i rai ne ot mira sego*”), which appears in Peremilovskii’s translation of “On the Paths of the Soul” in *Mir iskusstva*. This metaphor directs his audience not only to Peremilovskii’s translation, but also to Georgii Chulkov’s recently published essay, “The Distances Grow Bright,” which had appeared the previous month in *Vesy*, in which Chulkov had quoted this same paragraph.<sup>80</sup> In his reference to Chulkov’s

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<sup>79</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “Na putiakh dushi,” *MI*, 104. See Appendix I, text 6.79.

<sup>80</sup> Georgii Chulkov, “Svetleiu dali,” *Vesy*, no. 3 (1904): 13-16. Przybyszewski’s original Polish metaphors are similar: “czarowne obrazy i raje nie z tego swiata.” Cf. Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 19. Remizov’s correspondence with Briusov offers circumstantial evidence for this claim. Writing from Odessa, Remizov asked Briusov on 25 February 1904 to send him copies of *Vesy*. In two letters dated 1 and 2 March 1904, Remizov was still promising to send Briusov his essay on Meierkhol’d.

essay, Remizov points to the central issue of artistic representation of reality that had defined the “Association of New Drama,” the representation of the eternal.<sup>81</sup>

Remizov’s reference to Chulkov also provides further insight into why he had identified “*toska*” (*Sehnsucht*) and “art” as the main themes of *Snow* in his article that had appeared the day of the performance.

Remizov devotes little attention to the characters of Makryna and Tadeusz in his “Letter from Kherson.” However, the points he highlights were most likely those which Meierkhol’d chose to emphasize in the production. Remizov makes no direct reference to Makryna as a symbolic figure representing death, but instead, only alludes to it. In Przybyszewskian fashion, he repeats Makryna’s attributes, “calm, kind, and silent,” as a refrain, leaving the reader to create the association.<sup>82</sup> It is possible that Meierkhol’d himself told Narbekova, the actress playing Makryna, to stress these qualities in her portrayal of this symbolic character.<sup>83</sup> In the dramatic

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Therefore, Remizov may have been able to read Chulkov’s article, or at least a draft, before finishing his own piece for the journal. See the letters in Obratina et al., *ibid.*, 110.

<sup>81</sup> Chulkov had written: “In our soul lies the aspiration (*zalozheno stremlenie*) for a higher synthesis, for the Eternal” See Chulkov, *ibid.*, 13. Chulkov’s opening argument in “The Distances Grow Bright,” describing the state of synaesthesia in the soul when it is in direct communication with “the Mystery,” echoes Przybyszewski’s own declarations presented in *Aphorisms*.

<sup>82</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, IV: iv, 324; (Bronka, to Makryna): “Ах, Макрина, ты—такая спокойная, добрая, тихая...” The dactylic trimeter of the Russian phrase is particularly effective allusion to a lullaby sung by a grieving mother to her dead child. Cf. (Bronka, to Kazimierz): “Я ничего не видела, ничего не слышала, только чувствовала, что там сидит моя мать и качает на коленях мертвого ребенка...” Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, IV: v, 325.

<sup>83</sup> The reviewer in Nikolaev wrote that Makryna “artistically represented” the “mysterious forces [and] mystical elements that hold sway over people’s unconscious lives.”

text, this refrain poetically envelops and cradles Makryna's own words to Bronka, as she states the purpose of her arrival—to close Bronka's eyes in death. Echoing the finality of death and futility of struggle with which he had closed the description of Kazimierz (“Yes, yes, it's too late—too late”), Remizov closes his description of Makryna with her lines from the final scene of the play, “My harvest...my harvest”:

Макрина—Нарбекова—спокойная, добрая, тихая.  
„Прижимала тебя, баловала, целовала, чтобы к  
жизни тебя пробудить. Теперь прихожу, чтобы те  
самые веки, которые моим поцелуем к жизни  
будила, замкнуть, замкнуть...“ Спокойная, добрая,  
тихая. „Моя жатва, моя жатва...“<sup>84</sup>

Makryna—Narbekova—is calm, kind, silent. “I held you, pampered you, kissed you, so that you would awaken to life. Now I have come to close, close those same eyelids, which I awakened with a kiss.” Calm, kind, silent. “My harvest, my harvest...”

Remizov does not describe the character of Tadeusz, played by Meierkhol'd, in any great detail. In fact, he devotes only two sentences to Tadeusz. The very sentence that Remizov quotes in his description continues the theme of Death to which he had alluded in his brief description of Makryna. Remizov concentrates his attention on the moment when Tadeusz announces Makryna's arrival: “Meierkhol'd's acting in Act III, scene ix, was unusually successful. An incomprehensible horror pounded [and] scratched at the heart: ‘Your nanny has arrived.’”<sup>85</sup> Tadeusz's line functions essentially as a formal introduction of Death into a household filled with

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<sup>84</sup> Remizov, “TND,” 39.

<sup>85</sup> Remizov, “TND,” 39. “У Мейерхольд (Тадеуш) необыкновенно удалась IX сцена III акта. Непонятный ужас колотился, царапался в сердце: „Нянька твоя пришла.“”

troubled amorous relationships and unfulfilled (Tadeusz) or disenchanting (Kazimierz) artists. Remizov's attention to this single line in his essay, permits us to understand just how important the theme of death was in Meierkhol'd's conception of *Snow*. It also provides further support that the theme of death is, indeed, a unifying feature in the discourse of drama and music that Meierkhol'd created for this production.

The final character whom Remizov describes is Ewa:

Ева—Будкевич—слишком стальная, только женщина-призрак. Она не гонит человека слепо по трупам, по жертвам своих преступлений, через себя вперед... Не влечет темно-фиолетовым тоном своих напевов: „Надо прежде море укротить, горы раскопать, пройти все мучения и все наслаждения, чтобы открыть глазам тот новый мир, а если случайно такой конкистадор железной стопой наступит на какой-нибудь цветок, что из того?... Что из того...”<sup>86</sup>

Ewa—Budkevich—is too iron-willed, only an apparition of a woman. She does not drive a man forward blindly over corpses, the victims of her crimes... She does not attract [men] with the dark violet tone of her refrains: “One must first tame the sea, excavate mountains, pass through all torments and all pleasures in order to reveal to the eyes that new world, and if such a conquistador tramples accidentally on some flower with his iron step, what of it? What of it...”

In Remizov's account we have a glimpse of what Meierkhol'd probably expected from his cast. However, it is unclear from Remizov's description whether he is criticizing the character of Ewa, Przybyszewski's antagonist, to Bronka, or Natal'ia Budkevich's portrayal of her. The latter choice seems more likely.

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<sup>86</sup> Remizov, “TND,” 39.

Remizov's reproach that Ewa-Budkevich "does not drive a man forward blindly over corpses, the victims of her crimes," and his citation of Ewa's advice to Tadeusz that he must be strong, even ruthless, in his quest to "discover new worlds" may indicate that Meierkhol'd desired a stronger delivery of these lines, and that the actress did not respond strongly enough to his directorial suggestions.<sup>87</sup> In trying to create the character of Ewa, who carries a very symbolic name, Remizov and Meierkhol'd may have been reacting to Przybyszewski's description of woman as a "terrible, cosmic power," who awakens a man's passion, then lures him into painful, monogamous relationship.<sup>88</sup> In Meierkhol'd's view, Budkevich's portrayal of Ewa as a simple "vamp" may have been too simple for the complex, crafty image of womankind ("the dark violet tone of her refrains") which Przybyszewski describes in *Aphorisms*.

Furthermore, by also noting that Ewa-Budkevich is "too iron-willed" and "only an apparition" Remizov seemed to rebut A. Nadezhdin, the reviewer of *Iug*. Nadezhdin had accepted Remizov's symbolic interpretation of *Snow*, noting the contrast between Tadeusz's yearning for creation and conquest, and that of Kazimierz, who yearned for beauty. Nadezhdin had found Budkevich's Ewa to be

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<sup>87</sup> —Skii, *op. cit.*, 1. The Penza reviewer described Ewa as a heartless, "fatal" (*fatal'naia*) woman, searching for beauty in life, ready to destroy anything that stood in her way. Mel'gunova played the role well, "without exaggeration," easily filling the role with its "decadently-Nietzschean nuance." Whether Meierkhol'd specifically asked Mel'gunova to play Ewa as a "Nietzschean" character is unknown.

<sup>88</sup> "Kobieta Ropsa, to straszliwa, kosmiczna potęga. Jego kobieta, to kobieta, która w mężczyźnie obudziła chuć, przykuła go do siebie podstępna a fałszywą pieśczołą, wychowała go na jenożeńca, wydelikaciła jego instynkty, ujęła żywioł jego żądy w nowe formy i wszczepiła mu w krew jad szatańskiego bólu." Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy*, 26; cf. Pshibyshevskii, "Putiami dushi," *PSS*, t. V, 107. Félicien Rops (1833-1898) was a Belgian artist much admired by Przybyszewski and the French Symbolists.

“one of the most interesting characters,” who personified “all the power and force of Tadeusz’s ‘yearning for yearning.’”<sup>89</sup> Contrary to Remizov’s opinion, Nadezhdin believed it was Meierkhol’d himself who did not express enough of “that force and power, which makes him beautiful in the eyes of Ewa.”<sup>90</sup> Remizov thus seemed to shift the blame for what may have been an average performance from the troupe’s director, Meierkhol’d, to a fellow cast-member and acting partner, Budkevich. The important matter is that Remizov’s argumentation is founded on a belief that there must be *interaction* between the characters. Moreover, the recognition that one actor reacts and responds *truthfully and sincerely* to the words and gestures of another is a basic tenet of Przybyszewski’s thoughts on the “new drama.”<sup>91</sup>

As in his previous descriptions, Remizov mixed direct characterization from the drama with lines of dialogue. Thus, his reference to Ewa as “only an apparition of

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<sup>89</sup> A. N—n [Nadezhdin], “Gorodskoi teatr: *Sneg*,” no. 1660, *Iug*, 23. XII. 1903, p.3. In his use of the phrase “*toska po toske*,” Nadezhdin echoes the theme of Remizov’s press release.

<sup>90</sup> A. N—n, “Gorodskoi teatr: *Sneg*,” *ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>91</sup> Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene,” *PSS*, T. IV, 343. Remizov notes toward the end of his article that the role was played by the “young, beginning actress” Stepnaia in Nikolaev, perhaps signaling that Meierkhol’d himself was unhappy with Budkevich’s performance in Kherson. In fact, all four women mentioned by Remizov, E. M. Munt, O. A. Narbekova, N. A. Budkevich, and E. A. Stepnaia, had been members of the TND during the previous season, and were therefore relatively seasoned actresses. Furthermore, Meierkhol’d had enough trust in Munt, Budkevich and Stepnaia to cast them in the roles of the three sisters in his production of Maeterlinck’s *L’intruse*, which premiered in Sebastopol’ on 18 May 1903. See Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 47, 44. Remizov’s mild reproach of Budkevich may be an indication of the difficulty of Przybyszewski roles, even for actors in progressive troupes such as Meierkhol’d’s.

a woman” may, in fact, echo Kazimierz’s opinion of her: “She is my dream, I needed her so that I would wake up and see you [Bronka] in all your strength and beauty.”<sup>92</sup>

Remizov’s reference thus directed the reader’s attention to Ewa’s function in the dramatic text as a muse for both brothers, Tadeusz and Kazimierz, as an unreal force that drives them on their journey to create. As Przybyszewski’s drama illustrates, an artist may react differently to that creative urge: some, like Kazimierz, may be driven to their deaths; others, like Tadeusz, may survive, with only the hope that their insatiable yearning to create will lift them higher toward immortality.<sup>93</sup>

Remizov’s description of *Snow* as presented in *Vesy* is more coherent than appears on the surface. We can trace this coherence in the way Remizov’s metaphoric descriptions reflect the interactions of Przybyszewski’s characters, as well as the themes, such as Bronka’s and Tadeusz’s yearning, death, art, which surface upon closer examination of this essay. How did Meierkhol’d’s production enact the themes which Remizov, in his pre- and post-production articles, claimed were prominent in Przybyszewski’s play? In order to answer this question, we must first review the events leading up to its premiere in December, as well as some of the problems that Przybyszewski’s dramatic text, as an example of the “new drama” posed for the director.

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<sup>92</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, T. IV, IV: v, 327; (Kazimierz, to Bronka): “Ну, слушай: Ева—мой сон, она была мне нужна для того, чтобы я проснулся и увидел тебя во всей твоей силе и красоте.”

<sup>93</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, T. IV, IV: v, 327; (Kazimierz, to Bronka): “А для него [Tadeusz] она [Ewa] —мучительный порыв к какой-то великой силе и мощи, для него она неутолимая тоска, которая всегда тянула его в высь, в высь, к небу.”

### **The search for new forms: *Snow* as experimental space**

Several elements of Przybyszewski's play created an inviting space for Meierkhol'd to experiment with "breaking the chains of naturalism" and "laying bare the soul." The setting of the play is ambiguous, the six characters have very few physical or social characteristics ascribed to them, and realistic details about setting and characters are omitted. *Snow* thus became a challenge for a director who was accustomed to working with naturalist dramas.

Although in his biography Volkov suggested that by 1903 Meierkhol'd had already begun working towards *uslovnost'* or non-representational theatre, it is unclear when exactly this movement away from drama as a complete re-creation of social actuality may have begun.<sup>94</sup> Volkov suggested, during his discussion of Meierkhol'd's preparations for a production of L. M. Mei's *Maid from Pskov'* [*Pskovitianka*], that the director was probably mulling the problem of the dramatic representation of reality as early as the summer of 1902. Meierkhol'd began his plans for his first season while vacationing in Italy, immediately after leaving the Moscow Art Theatre. For example, in Act IV of *Maid from Pskov'*, there is a moment when the stage is temporarily empty. Meierkhol'd became concerned and wrote of the need to draw the audience's attention away from the theatricality ("*uslovnost'*") of the empty space.<sup>95</sup> This comment is evidence that Meierkhol'd was developing an

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<sup>94</sup> Volkov, *op. cit.*, 173.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 158-159. According to Volkov, Meierkhol'd writes, "it is possible to show the bustle of the prince's servants in the gallery. This bustle, by the way, will soften the theatricality of the empty stage."

awareness of the differences between the theatrical space and the reality that is portrayed on it.

Meierkhol'd did not move to reject the naturalist representation of reality at this time. Instead, he often chose to follow the example of the Moscow Art Theatre, striving for naturalistic sound painting with the addition of frogs and bird song or attention to other historical details.<sup>96</sup> Volkov provides an example of Meierkhol'd's attention to the latter: he remarked, at one point, that it is permissible for a window to remain open upstage, "if the glass is Venetian."<sup>97</sup>

How could a director strive for historical detail when the dramatist provided none in the stage directions? In his production of *Snow* Meierkhol'd seemed to approach this problem obliquely first by shifting the audience's attention from the scenic elements of the *mis-en-scène* to other theatrical elements, such as lighting and music. Meierkhol'd's attention to atmosphere was a continuation of Stanislavskii's naturalistic approach, created as a response to the challenges presented by Chekhovian drama. In our discussion of *Snow* we shall notice that Meierkhol'd developed the concept of emotional tone further, as he turned his attention from external reality toward the internal reality of the soul. As we shall see, however,

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<sup>96</sup> "Всюду, где можно, Мейерхольд стремится смягчить сценическую условность, дать иллюзию жизнь." Several pages later, however, Volkov states that this *mis-en-scène* is a clear example of how closely his productions originated in the aesthetic values of the Moscow Art Theatre: "Приведенная нами мизансцена „Псковитянки“ дает ясное представление об исходных точках мейерхольдовской режиссуры, о связи ее с методами Художественного театра." See Volkov, *ibid.*, 158, 160. TND never staged this work.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

Meierkhol'd remained firmly rooted in the naturalism of the “old drama” by designing a stage set that was far more detailed than what Przybyszewski had described.

At least two major elements compose this “bold step” away from the old reliance on the re-creation of reality on stage: the incorporation of music within the production to interact with the dramatic text, and the use of lighting to create moods associated with the psychology of the characters, not necessarily reflective of the natural setting of the play.<sup>98</sup> Meierkhol'd's use of music to create a true synthesis with the dramatic text, thematically and atmospherically, is the subject of the next sections. First, we will consider Remizov's remark that *Snow* resembled a symphonic poem. Then we will consider how Meierkhol'd had used music in previous productions. This will allow us to conjecture how he moved beyond the traditional uses of music in naturalist productions, such as the simple insertion of gypsy songs into vaudevilles and comedies, or the use of single pieces of music to set mood, as in his productions of Filippi's *The Great Stars* and Christiansen's *Dolly*. Finally, we will examine the innovative program of music and drama that occurred during the

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<sup>98</sup> Meierkhol'd's interest in the intersections of theatre and music would continue throughout his life. When Stanislavskii grew ill in 1938, Meierkhol'd assumed the directorship of the Opera Theatre in his stead. Gladkov provides several remarks made by Meierkhol'd about actors and music, among them: “An actor must know how to act ‘with the music’ and not ‘to the music’” and “All actors like music ‘for setting the mood,’ but few understand that music is the best organizer of *time* in a production. ...music is [the actor's] best helper. It doesn't even need to be heard, but it must be felt. I dream of a production rehearsed to music, but performed without music. Without it, yet with it, ....” Gladkov, *MS/MR*, 115. Music would play a large role in creating a heightened emotional atmosphere in the 1906 production of Maeterlinck's *Sœur Beatrice*. By using these particular musical pieces during the intervals, which commented thematically and psychologically on the drama they accompanied, it seems that in this 1904 production of *Snow* Meierkhol'd was already experimenting with dramatic performance that was “with [the music], yet without it.”

premier of *Snow* on 19 December, hypothesizing that this interaction of music and drama expresses an early attempt by Meierkhol'd to express synaesthesia and synthesis, which Przybyszewski identified as features of the “new drama.”

### ***Snow* as “Symphonic poem”: problematic allusions to Chaikovskii**

In his pre-performance article in *Iug*, Aleksei Remizov enigmatically remarked, “*Snow* is Przybyszewski’s best drama, a kind of symphonic poem; there is a reason it was cast (*otilas*) during a performance of Chaikovskii’s *Sixth* (*Pathétique*) *Symphony*.”<sup>99</sup> Why did Remizov want the audience to draw parallels between the two works? Meierkhol'd, as director of the Association of New Drama (TND) and Remizov’s superior, almost certainly approved Remizov’s press release, so the comment should be addressed, even if the discussion becomes speculative.

Intriguing coincidental associations unite these superficially dissimilar works.

Remizov’s comment above suggests that a performance of Chaikovskii’s symphony

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<sup>99</sup> “Gorodskoi teatr,” reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 226. “«Снег» -- лучшая драма Пшибышевского, это какая-то драматическая поэма, недаром отлилась она во время исполнения Шестой («Патетической») симфонии Чайковского.” It is highly doubtful that Remizov means Przybyszewski wrote his drama under the influence of Chaikovskii's symphony. No evidence exists which suggests that Remizov knew anything about Przybyszewski's personal life other than what was reported in the Russian press. Remizov was not the only critic to associate this Chaikovskii symphony with Przybyszewski's works. N. P. Suvorovskii, an old friend of Remizov, takes up Remizov’s theme and develops it further in his 1904 article, “Chaikovskii and the Music of the Future,” combining it with a hint of the Nietzschean Superman. Suvorovskii writes, “Chaikovskii [the “poet-human”] is the poet of human yearning. Its other priest —Przybyszewski [the “poet-Übermensch”]—is erecting a new sacrificial altar to the goddess upon the ruins of his own ‘ulcerous’ soul. / .../ Yearning lures both poets beyond the celestial spheres.” Suvorovskii also cites Remizov’s translation of Przybyszewski’s prose poem, “Toska” (“*Sehnsucht*”). See N. Suvorovskii, “Chaikovskii i muzyka budushchago,” *Vesy*, no. 8 (1904): 10-20. For jottings in Meierkhol'd’s notebooks that link the three men back at least to 1898, see Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 148, 194, 355.

may have inspired Meierkhol'd's initial conception of Przybyszewski's play, although there is no evidence to support this conjecture. Nor did Meierkhol'd's company perform *Snow* in conjunction with a performance of Chaikovskii's symphony. However, a fantasia based on Chaikovskii's *Evgenii Onegin* did serve as the musical interlude between Acts II and III of *Snow* (see Figure 1, below). It is another coincidence that Meierkhol'd's premiere of *Snow* took place a little more than 10 years after the St. Petersburg premiere of Chaikovskii's symphony in 1893. That date gained added importance when the composer died only 10 days after the premiere of the symphony.<sup>100</sup> This anniversary was likely on Meierkhol'd's mind, given his affinity for the composer's work that he had professed in late 1901. In 1902, the third volume of Modest Chaikovskii's biography of his brother, *The Life of Petr Il'ich Chaikovskii*, appeared.<sup>101</sup> In that volume, Modest gave his account of his brother's last years, including the composition of the *Sixth Symphony* and subsequent death. On 10 December 1902 Meierkhol'd had staged his only performance of Modest Chaikovskii's comedy, *Symphony* [*Sinfoniia*, 1889], a work that could easily draw

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<sup>100</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, v. 25, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Stanley Sadie, ed. (New York: Grove, 2001), 168. Chaikovskii premiered his *Sixth Symphony* on 16 (28 October, NS) 1893; fell ill five days later, and died on 25 October (6 November, NS) 1893. Meierkhol'd's rehearsals for *Snow* were set to begin at the end of October (OS) as the tenth anniversary of Chaikovskii's death approached.

<sup>101</sup> Modest Chaikovskii, *Zhizn' Petra Il'icha Chaikovskogo* (Moscow: 1900-1902).

69<sup>th</sup> Performance

**PROGRAM**

Price 10 kop.

**“Association of New Drama”**

Vs. E. Meierkhol'd, mgr.

Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> December

**S  
N  
O  
W**

A drama in 4 acts, by  
Stanisław Przybyszewski  
trans. by  
A. and S. Remizov

Dramatis personae:

Tadeusz	<b>V. E. Meierkhol'd</b>
Bronka, his wife	<b>E. M. Munt</b>
Ewa, her friend	<b>N. A. Budkevich</b>
Kazimierz, his brother	<b>I. N. Pevtsov</b>
Makryna	<b>O. P. Narbekova</b>
Servant	<b>V. A. Rakotov</b>
Director: <b>Vs. E. Meierkhol'd</b>	

**Musical program:**

**Before the performance:**

1) William Tell Overture, by Rossini

**1st interlude:**

2) “Reveries,” Scherzando valse, by Ebban

**2<sup>nd</sup> interlude:**

3) Fantasia on the opera *Evgenii Onegin*, by Chaikovskii

**3<sup>rd</sup> interlude:**

4) Sonata Pathétique, by Beethoven

Curtain at 8 p.m.

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**From the Directors:**

- I. Owing to the public’s demands, we most humbly ask you to take your seat before the curtain opens and to remain seated during the performance
- II. Please refrain from applauding during the performance to preserve the integrity of the experience
- III. Cast members will not enter more than 3 times to acknowledge applause after the end of acts

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**From the Management:**

- ◇
- ◇ I. In order to facilitate the taking of tickets at the entrance, the management asks that you immediately present your ticket stub for tearing
- ◇ II. Tickets for the right to receive additional chairs from the ushers are issued only at the box office
- ◇
- ◇

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Figure 1. Program for *Snow*, 19 December 1903, re-creation<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> My translation of the original in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 87. Formatting has been changed slightly to fit.

allusions to the composer's life.<sup>103</sup> Given the attention this anniversary would have received in 1903, any informed reader would easily have made the following chain of associations: anniversary-death-Chaikovskii's swan-song, the *Sixth Symphony*.

Remizov, in his press release, described the drama *Snow* as a "symphonic poem." Of course, a "symphonic poem," or "tone poem," is a musical—not a dramatic or literary—form, a programmatic orchestral piece "in which a poem or programme provides a narrative or illustrative basis."<sup>104</sup> By applying a musical term to this dramatic form, Remizov thus implied a synthesis of the two arts, music and drama. Before the premiere of *Snow*, Meierkol'd had already made several attempts to synthesize music and drama. However, the production of Przybyszewski's *Snow*, a "symphonic poem," in Remizov's terminology, was to be different. In that production, as we shall see, Meierkol'd exploited one of the themes that unites both Przybyszewski's "symphonic poem" and Chaikovskii's symphony, death.

Meierkol'd's use of music in his production of *Snow* demonstrates a greater understanding of the power of music to create and establish atmosphere or mood. A review of its use in other productions during the season provides evidence for this claim. His use of music at performances varied: the program of Hauptmann's *Vor*

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<sup>103</sup> For the date of the performance, see Zvenigorodskaja, *Provintsial'nye sezony*, 189, or Leach, *VM*, 195. Chaikovskii scholar Alexander Poznansky believes the play can be read as "an exercise in vengeance upon the corrupt and incompetent music critics" of the period, and at whose hands Chaikovskii had suffered. See Alexander Poznansky, "Modest Čajkovskij: In His Brother's Shadow," in Thomas Kohlhase, ed., *Čajkovskij-Studien. Internationales Čajkovskij-Symposium, Tübingen 1993* (New York: Schott, 1995), 238.

<sup>104</sup> *New Grove Dictionary*, v. 24, 802.

*Sonnenaufgang* lists no musical accompaniment, either before, during, or after the play.<sup>105</sup> In contrast, his production of Hauptmann's *Das Friedensfest* (January 1904), after the premiere of *Snow*, was followed by melodeclamation, or dramatic recitations with musical accompaniment.<sup>106</sup> Of twenty production drafts that appear in Meierkhol'd's notebooks from August until December 1903, only five show that music played a significant role during their performance. Two of these productions, F. Filippi's *The Great Stars* [*Velikoe svetilo*, premiered 18 October], and H. Christiansen's comedy, *Dolly* [*Dolli*, premiered 31 October], employ music for naturalistic reasons, either to re-create a desired setting or to satisfy the demands of the script.<sup>107</sup>

As early as the single performance of E. M. Bespiatov's *Swan Song* [*Lebedinaia pesnia*], which premiered 7 October, Meierkhol'd was experimenting with music as a means of creating atmosphere, moving beyond the confines of a

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<sup>105</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 65.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 94. The program of *The Golden Fleece*, which Meierkhol'd staged in Tiflis in 1905, does not mention any musical accompaniment, but does offer a description of the play's setting. *Ibid.*, 427. See also the Tiflis posters for Palerone's *In the Kingdom of Boredom* (1 January 1905), Kosorotov's *Spring Torrents* (28 January 1905). *Ibid.*, 425, 421.

<sup>107</sup> In his draft for *The Great Stars*, Meierkhol'd notes the need for a bell and harmonium in order to re-create the desired setting of a bell-tower platform, where he has set Act IV. He jots in the corner of his sketch, "The sounds of an organ. (A harmonium is obligatory!)" (l. 19, reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 150. Emphasis in the original). In Christiansen's comedy, *Dolly*, Meierkhol'd notes both a guitar, "which is played," and also the need for a guitarist (l. 21 ob., reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 156).

naturalistic aesthetic.<sup>108</sup> In addition to the use of “*Gaudeamus igitur*,” the medieval German student song, to create a university setting in Act II, he chose Chopin’s “Nocturne, no. 13” [Op. 48, no. 1, in c] to set the mood of Act I: a “wild locale” (“*dikaia mestnost*”) near the sea. Some music scholars have called this work a “miniature music-drama,” and indeed, this piece can invoke imaginative images of the sea.<sup>109</sup>

The music that accompanied Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* on 7 November did not represent great innovation or originality on Meierkhol’d’s part, as he used the well-known score by Mendelssohn. In contrast to his previous productions, however, which only featured music during selected moments of the performance, usually in the interludes or as brief accompaniment to a particular scene, Shakespeare’s comedy was filled with music during Acts III, IV, and V.

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<sup>108</sup> Fel’dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 124, 125, 68. Meierkhol’d continues to employ music for naturalist reasons as well. Act II features students who sing the traditional hymn, “*Gaudeamus igitur*,” a piece perhaps suggested by the script.

<sup>109</sup> For Chopin’s nocturne as a “miniature music-drama,” see “The Nocturnes,” introductory comments by James Huneker, in “Compositions for the Piano: Frédéric Chopin” (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc.), 1943, n. p. This nocturne’s simple, melancholic opening melody (A) and homophonic, hymn-like B section, dramatically interrupted by building chromatic octaves in parallel, is followed by turbulent cascades of parallel octaves which accelerate into a return of the first theme (A’). This right-hand theme, now harmonically supported by chords of repeating triplets or sixteenths in the inner voices and accompanied by a left-hand triplet-figure bass line of broken chords, gradually builds to a fortissimo, only to die away quickly into the silent reverance of three C minor chords. The piece easily evokes stretches of moonlit sand or a barren cape as waves crash violently upon the rocky shore.

Meierkhol'd also chose specific movements of Mendelssohn's work for performance during the intermissions.<sup>110</sup>

Finally, Meierkhol'd's musical selections for Ibsen's *Lady from the Sea* [*Ellida / Zhenshchina s moria*], which premiered on 29 October 1903, demonstrate further experimentation in the use of music to create atmosphere beyond the confines of naturalism. Ibsen's work premiered almost at the same time *Snow* was to begin rehearsals, and as we shall see, Meierkhol'd uses music for similar reasons in both productions.<sup>111</sup> On the draft of the Act I set, Meierkhol'd noted that there would be singing and the playing of an unidentified Grieg romance.<sup>112</sup> Meierkhol'd could have chosen another Chopin nocturne or other salon piece to invoke the desired mood as he had done for Bespiatov's *Swan Song*. However, his notes specifically identify a romance by the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg. This choice of music suggests that Meierkhol'd, on some level, felt that only Grieg's music could invoke images relating to a specific national culture, in this case, a northern Norwegian village in the summer, the setting of Ibsen's five-act drama. Thus, Meierkhol'd's equation of a national composer's music with a drama by his fellow countryman still hints that he is following a naturalist aesthetic.

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<sup>110</sup> Meierkhol'd's detailed notes are reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 164-168; RGALI, f. 998, op. 1, ed. khr. 14, l. 1 – 7 ob. and 8 – 8 ob.

<sup>111</sup> Ibsen's drama premiered 29 October; Remizov informed Shchëgolev two days later that rehearsals for *Snow* were going to begin "any day now." Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 85, 221.

<sup>112</sup> l. 20, reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 152. However, Meierkhol'd chose to disregard both Ibsen's directions for folk-singing at the beginning of Act II, perhaps using this device in Act I instead, and his remark that distant brass band music be heard just before the Stranger enters in Act V to find out whether or not Ellida will leave with him.

However, his second musical selection for Ibsen's work demonstrates further experimentation. On the draft for Acts II and III Meierkhol'd simply notes "Music. *Faust*," a work seemingly unrelated to Ibsen's work either by mood or national origin.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, Meierkhol'd moves the folk-singing that is heard at the beginning of Act II, as per Ibsen's instructions, to the beginning of Act I, thus focusing more attention on his unusual choice of musical accompaniment.<sup>114</sup> The association here between music and text is not naturalistic (Ibsen does not call for this work in the script), nor does this selection necessarily evoke a general mood, as does Chopin's nocturne in Bespiatov's *Swan Song*. Liszt's *Faust*, while programmatic in itself and thus similar to Mendelssohn's music for Shakespeare's comedy, was not composed to accompany a performance of Goethe's play, nor does it have the ties of national origin, as does Grieg's romance, the music intended for Act I. What association links these two works artistically in Meierkhol'd's mind?

The association that links the music from *Faust* to Ibsen's *Lady from the Sea* is clearly thematic and abstract. During Act II Ellida, the "Lady from the Sea," recounts the story of her long-lost fiancé, Johnston, a murderer, who once took a ring

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<sup>113</sup> l. 20 ob., reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 153. The two most natural selections for Meierkhol'd would have been either a selection from Charles Gounod's opera, *Faust*, or a movement from Franz Liszt's *A Faust Symphony*. Neither composer is a Norwegian, or even Scandinavian. A third possible choice, selections from Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*, is also possible, but unlikely given the simple notation of just "Faust." In contrast, Grieg's music is recognized for its highly nationalistic character.

<sup>114</sup> Given the lack of specificity in Meierkhol'd's note, in contrast to that of his rather explicit sound design for Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which premiered only a week later, this music was likely intended for the interval between Acts II and III.

from his finger and one from hers, joined them together on a chain, and flung them out to sea as a symbol of their love. Even though Ellida has married, this symbolic compact continues to unite her to Johnston, who returns in Act III to reclaim his fiancée. In Act V Ellida refuses to join her former fiancé, thus resisting temptation and asserting her free will. Therefore, on a fundamental level the compact made between Johnston and Ellida echoes the compact made by Mephistopheles and Faust, for both Johnston and Mephistopheles have designs on the soul of the other character, and it is necessary for both Ellida and Faust to assert their freedom to choose. This abstract, thematic association between music and drama marked a new stage in Meierkhol'd's development of a proper aesthetic for the "new drama." Now, having reviewed Meierkhol'd's prior use of music in his productions, we can continue our discussion of the links between Chaikovskii's *Sixth (Pathétique) Symphony* and Przybyszewski's drama, *Snow*.

Comments made by Meierkhol'd two years earlier illustrate how strongly connected these two works were in his artistic vision. In 1901 Meierkhol'd mentioned that he was listening to the music of Chaikovskii in the same phrase in which he first noted his attraction to Przybyszewski's work. Thus, he may have created subconscious associations between the works of the Russian composer and the Polish dramatist due, in part, to a sense of their simultaneous discovery: "I am engrossed in reading the literature of Przybyszewski, Tetmajer and Altenberg, in short, the so-called modernists, I am listening to the music of Grieg and Chaikovskii." He continued, "And when both literature and music bring me to ecstasy, then I

despise those who talk to me of their love.”<sup>115</sup> Meierkhol'd felt the impact of Przybyszewski's writing and Chaikovskii's music so strongly that the feelings of rapture he experienced separated him from other, more “ordinary” people who found emotional bliss in their amorous relations. In expressing his contempt for others and his own acknowledgement of ecstatic rapture through art, Meierkhol'd may have been echoing a general romantic contempt for the so-called “artist of the masses” (*khudozhnik tolpy*). According to Przybyszewski, such an artist perceives love only as “feeble romanticism” and “boring eroticism,” rather than viewing love as the “artist-elect” (*khudozhnik-izbrannik*) does, as a “painful cognition, full of anxiety, of that as yet unknown, terrible force,” or a “cognition of some kind of terrible profundity (*poznanie...glubiny*), the presentiment of some kind of abyss in the soul.”<sup>116</sup>

Meierkhol'd was not the only person to recognize possible associations between Przybyszewski's dramas and music. Either he or Remizov may have been

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<sup>115</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 430. “зачитываюсь литературой Пшибышевского, Тетмайера, Альтенберга, словом, так называемых «модернистов», слушаю музыку Грига и Чайковского. А когда меня приводит и литература, и музыка в экстаз, тогда я презираю тех, кто говорит мне о любви своей.” See the earlier discussion of this statement in Chapter V. It is doubtful that Meierkhol'd, a trained musician, would have considered the music of Chaikovskii to be “modernist” in the same sense that Przybyszewski was. In Russia Chaikovskii was representative of the conservative, late romantic trend in music, in contrast to the “progressive,” nationalist school represented by Borodin, Rimskii-Korsakov, Musorgskii, Balakirev, and Kui in St. Petersburg. Chaikovskii's harmonic vocabulary is far from the chromatic harmonies of Scriabin, who was also composing at this time. Even today, music scholars refer to Chaikovskii as a “late Romantic.”

<sup>116</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 26. Kursinskii's translation was passed by the censors on 7 September 1901, and could have been available to Meierkhol'd through their mutual friend and acquaintance, Valerii Briusov.

aware of a review from early 1903 by one Petersburg critic, N. Ognev, who already associated the lyrical language of Przybyszewski's new drama with symphonic music. In his review of *Snow* that had appeared in *Petersburgskii listok* [*The Petersburg Flyer*], Ognev declared that the play's "marvelous language, poetic, light style, and a certain mystical character" captivated the audience as if they were listening to a "sweet, dramatic symphony."<sup>117</sup> Ognev's statement thus resonates strongly in Remizov's own assertion that *Snow* is "some kind of symphonic poem."

Most importantly, it seems probable that Meierkhol'd is following Przybyszewski's own prescription for creation of the new drama. In the essay "Aphorisms and Preludes," Przybyszewski had advocated both "synthesis" ("art...creates new syntheses") and synaesthesia ("In the soul of such an artist there is no border between color and sound") as artistic methods of exploring the unknown reaches of the soul.<sup>118</sup> Meierkhol'd, in professing his allegiance to the "new drama" publicly, had chosen Przybyszewski's "path of soul." He experimented in ways Przybyszewski, the acknowledged priest of the new art in Poland, had promoted. Meierkhol'd continued that experimentation in its fullest form with his imitation of Lenskii's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Malyi before he fell ill from exhaustion. Now, upon his return to the stage, he was ready to produce something original.

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<sup>117</sup> N. O. [N. Ognev], "Teatral'nyi kur'er. Pol'skie spektakli. *Sneg*," *Peterburgskii listok*, no. 35, 5 (18). II. 1903, p.4.

<sup>118</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 12, 27.

Significantly, Przybyszewski already had pointed the way toward the next step in the synthesis of music and drama with his one-act “dramatic epilogue,” *The Visitors* [*Goście*, 1901; *Gosti* (Rus.)], a work that Meierkhol'd had probably read. *The Visitors* appeared in Russian translation in the thick journal *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, at the very time when Meierkhol'd first professed his interest in Przybyszewski's works.<sup>119</sup> Meierkhol'd had even included the work in his outline of suggested repertoire for his new company in early 1902.<sup>120</sup> As *The Visitors* begins, Saint-Saens' familiar symphonic poem “*Danse macabre*” (1874) is heard and creates an eerie aural landscape for the entire work. Moreover, its thematic allusion to death becomes an unacknowledged motif underlying the characters' discourse on guilt, conscience, and desire to escape the inexorability of one's fate. The only way to escape fate is through death, the choice made by the main protagonist, Adam, at the end of the work. Saint-Saens' work thus foreshadows the play's finale, and the melody of “*Danse macabre*” hangs in the air just as the threat of death forever hangs over humanity.

Chaikovskii's and Przybyszewski's works share both thematic and atmospheric elements, woven together. One abstract thematic element that unites both works is “artistic creation.” Chaikovskii began work on his sixth symphony in 1891 during his return from the American tour. He originally conceived his next

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<sup>119</sup> “*Gosti*. Dramaticheskii epilog v odnom deistvii Stanislava Pshybyshhevskago [sic]. Pervod s pol'skom A. Damanskoi,” *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, no. 10 (1901): 77-88.

<sup>120</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 479.

symphony as a “programmatic” piece whose narrative was very subjective and would remain a mystery to listeners.<sup>121</sup> However, Chaikovskii scholars generally agree that the secret program of this symphony is really that of “Life,” a symphonic program that Chaikovskii had sketched out first in May 1891.<sup>122</sup> The “Life” program is as follows: “The ulterior [concept]: essence of a sketch for a symphony is *Life!* First part—all impulse, confidence, thirst for activity. Must be short. (Finale *death*—the result of destruction). (2<sup>nd</sup> part love; 3<sup>rd</sup> disappointment; 4<sup>th</sup> ends dying away, also short).”<sup>123</sup> Chaikovskii thus envisioned a programmatic symphony that would musically portray the themes of artistic activity, love—possibly unrequited—and, finally, death. In Meierkhol'd’s interpretation of *Snow*, Przybyszewski’s drama also metaphorically presents a story about an artist’s life-long yearning to create, even when feelings of peacefulness and well-being relieve that painful urge. The motif of unrequited love is present as well, in the love that Kazimierz shows to Bronka, who remains faithful to her husband.

The predominant mood in both works is a presentiment of death. Meierkhol'd noted this mood in his extensive remarks about the beginning of Act I of *Snow* that he

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<sup>121</sup> Timothy L. Jackson, *Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6 (Pathétique)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. Originally intended for an aborted symphony in E<sup>b</sup> Major, Chaikovskii transferred the program to his *Sixth Symphony* as he worked on it during February and March 1893. *Ibid.*, 15, 16.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 14; the Russian text can be found in Iu. Kremlev, *Simfonii P. I. Chaikovskogo* (Moskva: GosMuzizdat, 1955), 245. This translation follows Jackson’s, with several exceptions: “ulterior [concept]” (*dal'neishee*) for Jackson’s “underlying essence” [sic], “impulse” (*poryv*) for “impulsive passion” and “destruction” (*razrushenie*) for “collapse.” Punctuation generally follows the Russian text found in Kremlev.

prepared for his revival of the work at the Theatre-Studio in Moscow in 1905. He writes, “A blizzard howls beyond the windows, *like a person in the throes of death*. It is dark in the drawing room, dark in the hallway.”<sup>124</sup> In this note, Meierkhol'd signals that death, and the fear of it, must infuse the drama from its very beginning, a quality Przybyszewski had suggested through gesture in his original stage directions as Bronka nervously waited by the window for Tadeusz. However, the death's messenger arrives in the form of Makryna, and Bronka begins to understand her fate. In Przybyszewski's drama even love, in its physical form, becomes subservient to the inexorable, higher call of art, fate, and self-sacrifice, leading some individuals eventually to suicide. In Przybyszewski's *Snow*, Bronka sacrifices herself for her husband, the artist Tadeusz, whereas in Chaikovskii's “autobiographical” *Symphony Pathétique*, listeners could understand the work as a “musical suicide note” from the composer to his audience.<sup>125</sup> These interconnected associations of art, fate, and death are certainly what Remizov had in mind when he compared Przybyszewski's drama and Chaikovskii's symphony.

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<sup>124</sup> “Za oknami ręczy zamieć, jak człowiek w przedśmiertnym bolu, W salonie ciemno, w korytarzu ciemno...” My emphasis. Cited in Agapkina, *op. cit.*, 187. RGALI, f. 420, op. 1., ed. khr. 43, l. 7. This archival copy of Meierkhol'd's director's copy is dated “May 1905,” but also carries the designation “19 dekabria 1903 (Kherson)” (l. 1-2). Given the extensive set design found on pp. 5-6 (ll. 5-6) of this script, we believe this to be a reworking of the Kherson script for the production at the Theatre-Studio that was never staged.

<sup>125</sup> Jackson, *op. cit.*, 83. The discussion here need not touch on the issues of Chaikovskii's homosexuality or the exact cause of his death, which is still debated. What is important for our understanding of Meierkhol'd's appropriation of the work for his own use is the fact that sympathetic audiences immediately associated the symphony with the composer's death, or if they believed the rumors, with his suicide.

## The program of the premiere: a new coherence of music and drama

Our discussion of Meierkhol'd's use of music and the associations between Przybyszewski and Chaikovskii informs a hypothesis that the musical pieces played during the interludes of *Snow* on 19 December 1903 created an innovative, coherent synthesis of music and drama, representing Meierkhol'd's overarching artistic vision. When *Snow* premiered it was not paired with Chaikovskii's *Sixth Symphony*, as Remizov's article might have suggested that it would be. Rather, the orchestra played four other works: Rossini's "*William Tell Overture*," "Reveries," a "scherzando-valse" by Ebban (1<sup>st</sup> interlude), a fantasia based on Chaikovskii's *Evgenii Onegin* (2<sup>nd</sup> interlude), and Beethoven's *Sonata Pathétique* (3<sup>rd</sup> interlude).<sup>126</sup> Meierkhol'd's synthesis functioned by uniting these unrelated musical scores in a discourse that both echoes and reinforces the spoken and visual dramatic text in atmosphere and theme.

Rossini's well-known overture expresses several themes and reflects changes in mood that presage the events in *Snow*. The opening "Andante" section, played by a string quintet with cello solo, signifies the domesticity and pastoral happiness that

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<sup>126</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 87. Meierkhol'd uses the Russian cognate "*antrakt*" (entr'acte), rather than the contemporary word "*pereryv*" (intermission). My translation of this term as "interlude," the musical episode between acts of a performance, emphasizes Remizov's conception of *Snow* as a "symphonic poem." A search using the internet search engine Google has not provided further identification of the composer "Ebban." The *New Grove Dictionary* does not list the name, nor is the fantasia listed in the *New Grove Dictionary* as an original work by Chaikovskii; it was probably an arrangement of themes from Chaikovskii's well-known "opera." (Chaikovskii's original generic designation of *Onegin* is "lyric scenes"). The first *pianissimo* measures of Chaikovskii's symphony allude both melodically and rhythmically to Beethoven's *Sonata Pathétique* (op. 13). See *The New Grove Dictionary*, v. 25, 167. Perhaps the symphonic score was not available or the piece was not in the repertoire of the local musicians who accompanied performances at the municipal theatre.

have reigned over the household of Tadeusz and Bronka in the years since their marriage. The following section, marked “Allegro” and featuring the entire orchestra, depicts both the meteorological and metaphorical storm occurring at the beginning of *Snow*, as Bronka anxiously awaits the return of her husband, Tadeusz, during a blizzard. The violent ascending and descending chromatic lines in the strings and brass mimic the howling of the winter wind, which as Meierkhof suggested in his notes for the 1905 production, should be “like the howls of a person in the throes of death.”<sup>127</sup>

The genre description “*scherzando-valse*” of Ebban’s “Reveries” suggests that this piece in triple meter had both playful and dreamlike qualities. Played during the first interlude, “Reveries” unites the dreamlike mood of Act I, scenes 8-9, with the subdued, quiet mood at the beginning of Act II. Act I, scene 8 begins as Bronka tells Tadeusz that Kazimierz seems sad and pensive, thus setting the mood. She and Tadeusz then speak of their love for each other. Act I ends as Bronka calls Ewa to enter the room. As Ewa makes her first entrance at the very end of Act I, Przybyszewski, in his stage directions, notes that Tadeusz “watches as though he sees everything in a dream.”<sup>128</sup> “Dream,” of course, is one of the principle meanings of the French word, “*rêverie*.”<sup>129</sup> The thoughts of Tadeusz, now falling under the allure of Ewa, his first love, thus, are impressionistically portrayed in music. The suspected mute playfulness of “Reveries,” underscores the difference in Bronka’s and Ewa’s

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<sup>127</sup> RGALI, f. 420, op. 1., ed. khr. 43, l. 7; cited in Agapkina, *op. cit.*, 187.

<sup>128</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, 270, 275.

<sup>129</sup> “reverie” in *Grand Dictionnaire Français-Anglais/Anglais-Français*, Faye Carney, gen. ed. (Paris: Larousse, 1993).

personalities. Bronka is warm, maternal, and loving, whereas Ewa is less so; she is more gregarious. The dreamlike atmosphere created by Ebban's work continues into the opening of Act II, which is set at twilight. Both Ewa and Tadeusz enter and begin to talk. Ewa notices the "melancholy fire" in the fireplace, the soft carpet, the glistening snow outside, and tells Tadeusz that she feels anxious. The room, she says, is a copy of her own and rouses a feeling of yearning. It is obvious that Tadeusz, in furnishing the room, has subconsciously proven that he still has deep feelings for Ewa.<sup>130</sup> These emotions, unexpressed by Tadeusz at the end of Act I, have been musically foreshadowed during the interlude by Ebban's "Reveries."

The fantasia on themes from *Evgenii Onegin*, played between Acts II and III, foreshadows the fateful results of the amorous relationships that are developing in *Snow*. The relationships in both works end in the death of a rival as a result of a false love triangle. Thus, at least one suggested thematic association between Chaikovskii's symphony and Przybyszewski's play, death, does not disappear entirely with its replacement by a fantasy based on *Evgenii Onegin*. The tragic death of a fictional poet, Lenskii, now has replaced the death of the composer, Chaikovskii, while the character of Onegin, a dandy who leads an empty and trivial life, contrasts starkly with Ewa's description of Tadeusz as "the last of that great, fine race of

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<sup>130</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, PSS, t. IV, 276-277.

conquistadors, for whom this stupid corner of the world called Europe was too small.”<sup>131</sup>

Meierkhol'd's final selection, Beethoven's *Sonata Pathétique* (*Sonata No. 8, op. 13*), played during the third interlude, is more difficult to place within a direct atmospheric context with Przybyszewski's drama. However, the overall minor tonality of the sonata, C minor in the first movement, A<sup>b</sup> major in the second, and C minor in the final movement, may provide the foundation for the emotionally charged atmosphere that Meierkhol'd desired. Moreover, the opening measures of the sonata's introduction ("Grave") resonate both melodically and rhythmically with the opening of Chaikovskii's final symphony.<sup>132</sup> Meierkhol'd, as a trained violinist, would have recognized this musical reference. The lyric nature of the second movement ("Adagio cantabile") creates a recognizable romantic setting, musically portraying the silent shroud of snow, the glow of the fireplace, and the yearnings of both Tadeusz and Bronka. The restive, driving nature of the third movement ("Allegro") parallels the fiery nature of Ewa, who has come to reclaim her love and rekindle the artistic creativity of Tadeusz, as well as Bronka's anxious thoughts of her sister's early death by drowning, brought on by the arrival of Makryna, her former nanny.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, 281. "Ты – последний из той великой, прекрасной породы конквистадоров, для которых был слишком мал этот глупый уголок, называемый Европой."

<sup>132</sup> *New Grove Dictionary*, v. 25, 167.

<sup>133</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, 319-320.

The premiere of *Snow* marks an attempt by Meierkhol'd to meet the challenges posed by the “new drama,” which sought to connect “the everyday with the eternal.” One of the ways in which Meierkhol'd approached this problem was through the synthesis of music and drama. The musical selections chosen by Meierkhol'd to accompany his production resonate with Przybyszewski's play in two ways, by creating or echoing a particular atmosphere (anxiety, domestic bliss, yearning) and resonating thematically (death/suicide, the yearning for freedom, the urge to create). The symbolic level of discourse thus created by the fusion of musical and dramatic elements in Meierkhol'd's production of *Snow* marks a significant move toward the creation of *uslovnyi*, or non-representational theatre. In the next sections of this chapter we will examine how Meierkhol'd approached the set design and lighting of Przybyszewski's drama.

### **Meierkhol'd's set designs for *Snow***

Przybyszewski's lack of detailed stage directions in *Snow* represents a pragmatic challenge for directors and actors schooled in naturalist drama. His plays had already forced Polish theatre into a period of critical self-examination, leading to reform.<sup>134</sup> Although the influence of Stanislavskii remained strong, and Meierkhol'd's sets for *Snow* and other productions of this period remained rooted in naturalist sensibilities, his attempt at the synthesis of musical and dramatic elements

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<sup>134</sup> Galska, “Teatr Przybyszewskiego jako pierwszy etap,” 154. Without explanation, Galska claims that Przybyszewski's creation of “symbolic characters forced completely new means of expression from the actor and director.” Galska then infers that this innovation played a part in Przybyszewski's fame, as esteem for his dramas spread eastward from the Polish lands to Russia proper.

helped to shift the focus of this production to symbolic levels of discourse. As we shall see in our further discussion, Meierkhol'd also used lighting in symbolic ways, not only to provide illumination for the actors, but also to reflect the psychological state of the characters on stage as he varies the strength of light coming from the fireplace. In this way, the fireplace symbolically comes to represent the “soul” of the characters in *Snow*. As the physical center of warmth and energy in a domicile, it symbolizes the soul, the center of metaphysical, instinctual energy in the individual.<sup>135</sup> The flames of its fire may rise or fall, just as the passions of each character become enflamed or grow dim. The drama thus becomes an experimental space where the shroud of naturalism is lifted to reveal the soul.

The early design sketches of *Snow*, which can be found in the director's notebooks of this period, “Vs. E. Meierkhol'd. Mis-en-scènes. 1903, no. 1,” provide some insight into Meierkhol'd's intentions as he rose to meet the challenges created by the “new art.”<sup>136</sup> In Feldman's view, these existing pages, designated in the archival description as pp. 28 and 28 reverse, represent the first stage in the director's planning, and Meierkhol'd probably began these sketches at the beginning of November.<sup>137</sup> Page 28 illustrates the fact that Meierkhol'd's initial design concept

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<sup>135</sup> For the soul as a “huge force, moving from one eternity to another,” see. Pshibyshevskii, “Na putiakh dushi,” MI, 103; Eile has described this energy as more akin to instinct or libido, that is, “the energy generated by sexual desire.” See Eile, *op. cit.*, 177.

<sup>136</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 172-174, 202-204. RGALI, f. 998, op. 1, ed. khr. 13.

<sup>137</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 109, 172. Pages 27 and 27 rev. are missing from the notebook; Fel'dman suggests that these could have been preparatory sketches, judging from the “clean” look of the final designs shown here. The pages immediately preceding those of *Snow* (25 rev., 26) are sketches for Naidenov's drama *No. 13*,

began with a simple box set.<sup>138</sup> He filled this set with everyday objects, contrary to Przybyszewski's simple, yet suggestively symbolic, stage directions: "A luxurious dining room, from which, through large windows and the glass door of an orangerie, bare trees covered in hoarfrost and a thick shroud of snow are seen."<sup>139</sup> In Przybyszewski's stage directions, this basic setting is used in Act II, with the addition of a change of lighting needed to signify "dusk," but Przybyszewski also notes the detail of glistening snow beyond the window at the beginning of Acts II and III.<sup>140</sup> Przybyszewski thus emphasizes the omnipresent symbol of the snow, seen through the windows of the orangerie, the sun, which melts the snow (Act III, scene i), and the solemn winter landscape beyond, which awaits the melting of the snow, the coming of spring.

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which premiered 2 November 1903 before Meierkhol'd fell ill. The succeeding pages, described by Fel'dman as 31 and 31 rev., contain sketches for Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna*, which premiered later, on 22 January 1904.

<sup>138</sup> Reprinted in Fel'dman *Nasledie*, 2, 172. Fel'dman also provides a complete transcription of Meierkhol'd's comments and identification of set pieces (moving clockwise around the room from extreme downstage right): "Snow. Set, dining room. Corner sofa covered by a Persian rug and carpet (DR). An ottoman and carpet, standing lamp (UR). Sideboard (UC). Table (C). Shelf with vases, old pitchers. Fireplace, carpet (CL). Flowers (DLC, DRC). Comments (reading from upper right): A tall lamp with shade on the table, heavy tablecloth. Dinner table—oak. On the fireplace—busts, candelabra. On the shelf are two blue vases, old pitchers, mounted animals, in the left corner—standards; on the fireplace, a clock under a bell-glass. In front of the fireplace are pokers, a shovel, genuine pine [the word "pine" is circled] logs and spruce branches." This emphasis may indicate Meierkhol'd's recognition of Przybyszewski's own indication that the logs are pine in the original stage directions. Cf. Przybyszewski, *Śnieg*, 7.

<sup>139</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 109, 172. Fel'dman here cites Remizov's translation of Przybyszewski's original stage directions.

<sup>140</sup> Przybyszewski, *Śnieg*, II: i, 33; III: i, 65; Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, II: i. 276, III: I, 298.

The visual image Meierkhol'd first sought to create is based firmly on the naturalist tradition. He adds scenic detail and properties to the interior space, not the background, which carries more symbolic meaning. By adding more detail to the dramatist's own stage directions, Meierkhol'd is continuing to create sets in the manner he had learned while under the tutelage of Stanislavskii at the Moscow Art Theatre.<sup>141</sup> Several details in his set design support this hypothesis.

First, by placing a corner divan covered in Persian rugs downstage right and two planters of flowers downstage on either side of the prompter's box, Meierkhol'd is creating a "fourth wall" in imitation of MKhT productions such as *The Seagull*. Stanislavskii used this device in Act I of that play, when the characters gathered on stage, backs to the audience, to watch Treplev's short piece.<sup>142</sup> Second, the addition of associated properties in front of the fireplace, such as the pokers, the shovel, "genuine pine logs," and spruce branches are reminiscent of the same approach taken by Stanislavskii in his productions. Przybyszewski's original stage directions for the opening scene state only that Kazimierz is nervously throwing pine logs on the fire, implying a fireplace. Meierkhol'd logically adds one, but also adds spruce boughs as stage dressing, as if to answer a spectator's questions: How did they start the fire? What did they use for kindling?

Some of these same properties, such as the flowers, spruce boughs, and Persian rugs described in Meierkhol'd's second draft (*Mis-en-scènes*. 1903, no. 1, p.

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<sup>141</sup> Remizov had alluded to this very fact in his "Letter from Kherson." See Remizov, "TND," 36.

<sup>142</sup> Nick Worrall, *The Moscow Art Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 107.

28 rev.), may have functioned on several levels, both naturalistically and synaesthetically.<sup>143</sup> They are naturalistic details, which aid in the re-creation of Przybyszewski's desired interior space of an elegant dining room with fireplace and *orangerie*. The addition of Persian rugs would have given the room an air of exotic opulence. Although these objects may be considered extraneous, their use can be justified as a logical response to the need to re-create Przybyszewski's "luxurious" setting.

The fragrance emitted by the flowers, pine, and spruce could well demonstrate an attempt by Meierkhol'd to experiment with synaesthesia, which Przybyszewski describes in *Aphorisms and Preludes* as a phenomenon naturally occurring within the soul.<sup>144</sup> This hypothesis helps explain the incongruous location of the plants downstage, closer to the audience, rather than upstage where the *orangerie* should be located, according to both Przybyszewski's original stage directions and Meierkhol'd's preliminary set design.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 173. "Snow. Set, drawing-room upstage, and greenhouse. Flowers, flowers (UR), flowers (UC). Snowy landscape of bright whiteness (UR-UL). Upright piano, small blue sofa (ULC, UL), Table with newspapers; only the edge is visible, small electric lamp (LC), carpet (LC)

<sup>144</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 21-22. If this hypothesis is correct, then the conscious introduction of fragrance as a theatrical effect predates Vashkevich's failed synaesthetic production of Bal'mont's *Three Blossomings*, which Nikolai Efros attacked as a certain desire "to violate theatre." According to the critic, Vashkevich wanted "to foist the role of flowers, wafting [their] caressing aroma, the role of wine's intoxicating feeling and the role of music, raising [its] beautiful, abstract anxieties upon [theatre]." See N. Efros, "Dionisovo deistvo. (Pis'mo iz Moskvy)," *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 3 (1906): 41.

<sup>145</sup> These plants are missing, however, from the elaborate set for *Snow* sketched in the director's notebook for use in the Theatre-Studio production of May 1905. See

The curious positioning of an upright piano (upstage, left of center) may have been as much for pragmatic reasons as it is for creative ones. There is no indication in the script that either Bronka or Tadeusz are musically inclined; at no point in the script does it call for a character to sit down and begin playing. Thus, the placement of a piano on stage cannot be compared to Meierkhol'd's note about the use of a guitar in Christiansen's comedy, *Dolly*. Yet a piano would have been an expected furnishing in a bourgeois household where the wife probably had received a rudimentary musical education as a young girl.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, even though we know little of Bronka's past, we do know that she and Ewa both received an education at an institute for girls where there was probably some musical training.<sup>147</sup> On the same mundane, practical level, with a piano already on stage, there would have been no need to drag it onstage for the third interlude, when Beethoven's *Sonata Pathétique* was played. An onstage piano would have given more prominence to the artist and work than if the performer had played from the orchestra pit. Yet the onstage piano may also serve as a permanent, symbolic reminder of an ephemeral art form, music,

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Remizov's archives, RGALI, f. 420, op. 1, ed. khr. 43, ll. 5-6. This item was available to me only as microfilm.

<sup>146</sup> Muriel Joffe and Adele Lindenmeyr, "Daughters, Wives, and Partners: Women of the Moscow Merchant Elite," in *Merchant Moscow: Images of Russia's Vanished Bourgeoisie*, James L. West and Iurii A. Petrov, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 99.

<sup>147</sup> For evidence that Ewa and Bronka both were educated at an institute, see Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, 289.

to the audience, aided by the fact that both Tadeusz and Kazimierz are both artists of some kind (“We are the last of our race”).<sup>148</sup>

These initial sketches for a set do not yet reveal how Meierkhol'd approached the challenge, in Remizov's words, of smashing “the wall of the mundane,” of portraying “the beating human soul,” or re-creating the spirit of *toska* (*Sehnsucht*) that embodies the play.<sup>149</sup> According to Fel'dman, Meierkhol'd's set design is “recreating and poeticizing” Tadeusz's way of life, not “smashing” it.<sup>150</sup> However, Meierkhol'd's design is much more than this. Fel'dman is correct in making his claim that this set is a “re-creation and poeticization,” but fails to associate this attention to naturalistic detail with Remizov's statement that Przybyszewski's “symbolic” drama hides a “great pining of the spirit” beneath the level of the mundane.<sup>151</sup>

As his choice of musical pieces for the interludes demonstrates, Meierkhol'd does seem to have been aware of the atmosphere of anxiety, fear, and impending doom which pervades Przybyszewski's play. The actions of Bronka, the character whom Przybyszewski symbolically links to the snow both in gesture and dialogue, helps to create this atmosphere in the first scene of the drama, as she watches out the

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<sup>148</sup> Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg, PSS*, t. IV, (Tadeusz to Kazimierz: III: i, 300). Although both brothers are artists, their exact profession is left ambiguous in the drama. Przybyszewski's novellas frequently feature artists of various types as major characters, cf. *Homo sapiens* (1895-1896) and *Synowie ziemi* [*Sons of the Earth*, 1904]. His play, *Gody życia* (1909), features a pianist as a major character. For the notion that a given theatrical sign can be polysemic, *i.e.*, the on-stage piano may signify a “piano” (the denotative meaning), as well as any number of second-order (connotative) meanings (the piano signifies “music,” in the abstract sense), see Elam, *op. cit.*, 11.

<sup>149</sup> “Gorodskoi teatr. *Sneg*,” reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 227.

<sup>150</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 109.

<sup>151</sup> “Gorodskoi teatr. *Sneg*,” reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 227.

window at the swirling blizzard, wondering if her husband will return safely. However, it is unclear whether Meierkhol'd understood the full significance of Przybyszewski's description of this interior space. The luxurious dining room, representing warmth and domesticity, provides stark contrast to the cold, frozen exterior (bare trees, snow), and is a symbolic representation of Tadeusz's comfortable life with Bronka. Thus, it is also symbolically represents the struggles occurring within the soul that, in Przybyszewski's aesthetics, must be the heart of a play's action.<sup>152</sup> The symbolic multivalence of snow is not immediately obvious to the audience. At first, tension is created as the audience responds to Bronka's obvious anxiety during the opening of the drama. In the natural world snow not only signifies the end of one growing season and therefore, death, but also the promise of future rebirth. Without its insulation, plants would freeze in the cold, winter winds and there would be no early nourishment for plants that the spring thaw provides before more abundant, rejuvenating spring rains. Only Kazimierz's dialogue in Act III: iii reminds both Bronka and the audience of this multivalence: "You [Bronka] are the white, pure snow, which falls upon the frozen breast of the earth and warms it, shrouds this corpse until it revives, begins to awaken; ...". Yet even at the play's finale, as Bronka and Kazimierz leave to commit suicide, the audience will again be caught up in the fear of death and forget that her suicide will permit Tadeusz to continue living and move toward self-fulfillment.

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<sup>152</sup> Pshibyshevskii, "O drame i stsene," *PSS*, t. IV., 338.

### **The warmth of the hearth: Meierkhol'd's lighting design for *Snow***

Meierkhol'd's choice of music for this production interacted both in mood and theme. His set designs, although based heavily on naturalist tradition, only begin to take advantage of the symbolism with which Przybyszewski endows his play. It is in the play's lighting design, however, that Meierkhol'd truly begins to move beyond the mundane (denotative) level to signify the symbolic (connotative) level of Przybyszewski's drama. Meierkhol'd's notes for the lighting design are only general in nature, and not linked with particular lines of dialogue, but they are worth citing:

Lighting effects:

Beginning of first act. All [lighting] is extinguished (footlights, battens, orchestra pit and house). The fire in the fireplace only slightly [lit], then the fire gradually grows brighter. Sunset beyond the windows (reddish light). A lamp is carried in, light. It is dark in the drawing room. In the hallway also.

Second act. A fire in the fireplace. A moonlight reflector behind one window, behind the other, a panel. It is dark in the drawing room, dark on stage. Light in the hallway (red light). When the lamp is turned on, the stage is lit. It is dark in the drawing room.

Third act. Early dawn, when the light is still lit. The act begins in semi-darkness on stage. The lamp is still shining. Then the morning light increases in the window. Add light on stage after that to full.

Fourth act. To begin, as the beginning of the first act.

No light in fireplace. Only light behind the window.

Red sunset. Then a fire is lit only in the fireplace.

Twilight on stage. It is dark in the hallway.<sup>153</sup>

Zvenigorodskaja (1991), the first scholar to claim that “the play of light and shade” in *Snow* reflected the psychology of the characters on stage as their relations developed and changed, reviewed this idea again in her 2004 monograph, *The*

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<sup>153</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 202-203.

*Provincial Seasons of Vsevolod Meyerhold, 1902-1905*.<sup>154</sup> Here Zvenigorodskaia hypothesizes that Meierkhol'd's use of lighting as a "fundamental carrier of ideas and atmosphere" originated in the writings of Karl Hagemann, whose 1902 book on lighting was translated and published in Russian in 1903.<sup>155</sup> Hagemann argued that lighting could define an atmosphere, and that a speech declaimed in complete darkness was different from one declaimed downstage in bright sunlight, because sight is "conducive to the correct comprehension of speech."<sup>156</sup> While this article does mention that the correct use of lighting can create atmosphere, it is clear from Zvenigorodskaia's citation that Hagemann had more pragmatic concerns in mind.

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<sup>154</sup> N. E. Zvenigorodskaia, "Igra kolokolov: zagadka odnogo sezona," *Mir iskusstv* (Moskva: GITIS, 1991), 484; "Историю любовного треугольника сопровождала игра света и тени. По мере того, как развивались отношения между героями пьесы, как менялось их настроение, разгорался или угасал огонь в камине, за окном занимался рассвет, или озаряло багрянцем комнату закатное солнце. Иначе говоря, тончайшие нюансы освещения вторили тончайшие нюансы психологического состояния героев." Although Zvenigorodskaia's focus is on the Tiflis productions, the Russian scholar believes the Tiflis production closely followed the Kherson drafts. The sketch of *Snow* included in the director's notebook in the Remizov archive at RGALI supports her hypothesis. Neither Volkov (1929) nor Rudnitskii (1969) discusses this production in detail, although Rudnitskii does note the Tiflis reviews that mentioned that the production began in darkness. See Rudnitskii, *RM*, 41. English translation in Braun, *op. cit.*, 22. Braun does not follow up on Zvenigorodskaia's tantalizing claim, preferring to continue with a discussion of Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* instead. This slighting of the Przybyszewski production may be due, in part, to Braun's mistaken notion that the work received only one performance. This is not true. The Association of New Drama performed *Snow* three times in Kherson: 19 December 1903, 2 January 1904, 5 February 1905; also 16 February 1904 (Nikolaev); 7 August 1904 (Penza); 2 October 1905 (Tiflis); and finally, 27 April 1905 (Nikolaev). Zvenigorodskaia repeats these claims in the monograph previously cited, *Provintsial'nye sezony*, 201-214. Further citations of this work will appear as "PS."

<sup>155</sup> Karl Gageman [Hagemann], *Rezhisser* (Moscow: Biblioteka Teatra i iskusstva, 1903). Zvenigorodskaia, *PS*, 112-113.

<sup>156</sup> Gageman, *op. cit.*, 30-31; cited in Zvenigorodskaia, *PS*, 112.

Moreover, Hagemann's own suggestion that it is easier to comprehend well-lit dialogue than speech declaimed in darkness, contrasts starkly with Meierkhol'd's use of dim lighting during *Snow*. Hagemann had even warned, "The greatest difficulty in directing is to give the correct, suitable lighting to a given scene. A lighting technician's small mistake can ruin not only the impression, but sometimes even destroy the play."<sup>157</sup> Why then, did Meierkhol'd insist in use dim lighting, thereby impeding the spectator's ability to understand the dialogue, as Hagemann had advised? A partial answer can be found in Przybyszewski's one-act epilogue, *The Visitors*.

Meierkhol'd intended to stage Przybyszewski's *The Visitors* after he left the Moscow Art Theatre, and it probably served as a model for the synthesis of music and drama.<sup>158</sup> *The Visitors* appeared at the same time that Meierkhol'd wrote in his notebooks that he was "under the hypnosis" of Przybyszewski.<sup>159</sup> There is good reason to believe that by this time in 1903 Meierkhol'd had either read, or knew of, V. Burenin's review of Przybyszewski's play, which appeared in *Novoe vremia* just after the work was performed at Shabelskaia's Petersburg Theatre in October 1901.<sup>160</sup> Although Burenin treated Przybyszewski's work very sarcastically, considering it a bad imitation of Maeterlinck, he did recognize the essential allegorical nature of the play's setting. According to Burenin, the "terrible guests" who constantly arrive during the play are "pangs of conscience" and the "mansion" which they visit carries

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<sup>157</sup> Gageman, *ibid.*, 31; cited in Zvenigorodskaia, *PS*, 112-113.

<sup>158</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, 479.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 430.

<sup>160</sup> Burenin, "Kriticheskie ocherki," pp. 2-3.

a secondary, connotative meaning, that of the “soul.”<sup>161</sup> Thus, Meierkhol'd's light design for *Snow*, changing to reflect the *psyche* of characters onstage (as Zvenigorodskaiia suggests), is an attempt to represent artistically the interior stage space as a symbolic recreation of the soul, just as Przybyszewski had done in *The Visitors*.

Meierkhol'd's use of darkness on stage also had another Przybyszewskian precursor, the controversial *The Golden Fleece*, also staged in October 1901.

Another anonymous St. Petersburg reviewer at the time noted how the second act of *The Golden Fleece*, also performed at that time, began in complete darkness, until a character turned on an onstage lamp.<sup>162</sup> While there are naturalistic reasons for low lighting in the scene (Przybyszewski's stage directions note simply “twilight”), Meierkhol'd's use of darkness creates foregrounding or estrangement (*ostranenie*) that focuses the spectator's attention on the device itself and its function.<sup>163</sup> In this way, the use of darkness on stage begins to destroy the conservative expectations of lighting design, which in their crudest form could be expressed, in the words of one

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<sup>161</sup> Burenin, *op. cit.*, p. 2. “Прописная мораль заключается вот в чем: за преступлением всегда является «угрызение совести в виде «страшных» гостей», которые и наполняют весь дом», т-е. душу человека.” [sic] Although Burenin does not note its significance, the epilogue's main character is named “Adam,” or the first man in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In this way, Przybyszewski makes it clear that his subject matter, the existential nature of guilt, is a concern for all civilizations. Both Meierkhol'd and Remizov would have recognized this signification easily. The existential nature of evil is one of the themes presented in Meierkhol'd's and Komissarzhevskaiia's joint production of Przybyszewski's *The Eternal Tale* (1906).

<sup>162</sup> “Teatr i muzyka. Moskva,” *Novoe vremia*, 14. X. 1901, no. 9200, p. 4.

<sup>163</sup> Elam, *ibid.*, 17-18. For Przybyszewski's stage directions, see Pshibyshevskii, *PSS*, t. IV, 43.

critic, as “How does one light the stage best of all?... There is only one answer—with as much light as possible.”<sup>164</sup>

### **Popularizing the “New Drama”: Nikolaev, Penza, and Tiflis, 1904**

After the season ended in Kherson, Meierkhol'd and his troupe spent one week in the provincial city of Nikolaev from 16-22 February 1904, where Meierkhol'd made an even bolder statement about the company's artistic goals by opening the tour with Przybyszewski's *Snow*, not with a well-known or popular work. Unlike the season just finished in Kherson, Meierkhol'd chose primarily works of the “new drama”: Przybyszewski, Hauptmann, Ibsen, and Schnitzler. Continuing his bold mission to break with naturalism and expose the public to the connections between the mundane and the eternal, Meierkhol'd only acquiesced to popular taste with three performances of Chekhov's vaudeville, *The Anniversary* [*Iubilei*], and a performance of Faber's drama, *Eternal Love* [*Vechnaia liubov'*], which the company had premiered the previous season.<sup>165</sup>

There are a number of reasons for Meierkhol'd's decision to emphasize the repertoire of the “new drama.” First, Meierkhol'd may have perceived Nikolaev as a more cultured city, whose citizens were more open to the new art. According to this view, the Nikolaev audience would be more receptive to a progressive work such as *Snow* than the “backward” and ungrateful audiences in Kherson. Second,

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<sup>164</sup> *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 31 (1902): 574; cited in Zvenigorodskaia, *PS*, 112. Punctuation as in original.

<sup>165</sup> Faber's play premiered 15 February 1903 in Kherson; Chekhov's vaudeville premiered 17 December 1903, while Meierkhol'd was still recuperating from his illness. See Zvenigorodskaia, *PS*, 193, 201, 204.

Meierkhol'd may have thought that the popularity of the troupe would assure a large or even sold-out audience. Third, by this date in February 1904, the Association of New Drama (TND) was not the only Russian troupe staging Przybyszewski's dramas. Meierkhol'd's might have been the first, but now it was only one production among several. There had been a production of *Snow* in Odessa in late January.<sup>166</sup> By performing the work on their first night in Nikolaev, Meierkhol'd could promote a self-image as a progressive director. He could also elevate the status of his provincial troupe, by reminding the public that TND had been the first Russian company to

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<sup>166</sup> Here is a listing of the numerous productions that arose in January and early February, arranged chronologically, with the actress playing Bronka noted, and performance review, if known. In Moscow, 22. I. 1904, (A. I. Kvartalova), Kur-skii [Aleksandr Kursinskii], "Internatsional'yi teatr. *Sneg*, dr. v 4 d., Stanislava Pshibyshevskago," *Kur'er*, no. 24, 24. I. 1904, pp. 2-3, and K. O. [K. Orlov]. "Teatr i muzyka. Benefis A. I. Kvartalovoi," *Russkoe slovo*, no. 23, 23. I. 1904, p. 3; 23. II. 1904, (Komissarzhevskaiia), P. K., "Teatr i muzyka. Gastroli g-zhi Komissarzhevskoi," *Kur'er*, no. 54, 24. II. 1904, p. 3, and K. O., "Teatr i muzyka. Gastroli g-zhi Komissarzhevskoi," *Russkoe slovo*, no. 55, 24. II. 1904, p. 3. In Kiev, there were two competing productions. The first was staged at the Teatr Obshchestva Gramotnosti, 19 & 22. I. 1904, (Anna Paskhalova's benefit), Ego, "Teatr i muzyka. Teatr obshchestva gramotnosti," *Kievskie otkliki*, no.60, 21. I. 1904, p. 3; M. Iakovlev, "Teatr, iskusstvo i literatura. Teatr O-va Gramotnosti," *Kievskoe slovo*, no. 5764, 21. I. 1904, p. 3. The second production at the Teatr Solovtsov, 20. & 24. I. 1904, was under Przybyszewski's personal direction, in his second, brief tour of Russia: Iz. Al-skii [I. V. Aleksandrovskii], "Teatr 'Solovtsov'. (*Sneg*, drama Pshibyshevskago, per. Serafimy i Alekseia Remizovykh)," *Kievskie otkliki*, no. 61, 22. I. 1904, p. 4; "Teatr i muzyka. Teatr 'Solovtsov'. (*Sneg*, drama S. Pshibyshevskago)," *Kievskaiia gazeta*, 21. I. 1904, p. 3; the third city where a production was mounted was Odessa, with the actress Vera Iureneva: L. T—tskii, "Teatr i muzyka. Teatr Sibiriakova, *Sneg*," *Odesskii listok*, no. 20, 22.I. 1904, p. 3; Molodoi Teatral, "*Sneg*. Pshibyshevskago. (Dram. teatra Sibiriakova)," *Odesskie novosti*, no. 6202, 22. I. 1904, p.3.

premiere Przybyszewski's new drama, which now had recently graced the stages of such cities as Kiev, Odessa, and Warsaw.<sup>167</sup>

Furthermore, the first of several potential competing translations of *Snow* also had appeared recently. The actor Kazimir Bravich, soon to become a shareholder in Vera Komissarzhevskaiia's new Dramatic Theatre in St. Petersburg, had just published his translation of *Snow* in the first (January) issue of the new journal *Pravda*, which received modest press, most recently in Nikolaev's own *Iuzhnaia Rossiia* [*Southern Russia*], only three days before their performance.<sup>168</sup> Meierkhol'd and Remizov could have learned of these productions through notices in either the Odessa newspapers or *Teatr i iskusstvo*, which published news from its provincial correspondents weekly.<sup>169</sup>

By July 1904 Meierkhol'd was investigating the possibility of returning to Moscow and establishing a theatre where he could produce the new art. In a letter to K. M. Babanin, director of MKhT, Meierkhol'd reasserted his search for a new direction in theatre, dreaming of establishing a new theatre in Moscow.

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<sup>167</sup> \* \* \* [sic], "Novye zhurnaly. (*Pravda*, ianvar')," *Iuzhnaia Rossiia*, no. 41, 13. II. 1904, p. 2.

<sup>168</sup> "*Sneg. Drama v 4-kh aktakh*, per. K. Bravich," *Pravda*, no. 1 (1904): 48-107. See previous footnote. Other translations of *Snow* that appeared in 1904 are by Aleksandr Voznesenskii, the husband of actress Vera Iureneva, *Sneg. Drama v 4 d.* (Odessa: 1904), and S. Manina, *Sneg. Drama v 4 aktakh* (Odessa: D. Segon, 1904)

<sup>169</sup> For example, the editors of *Odessie novosti* observed the sudden rash of productions of Przybyszewski's drama and published notices about the others: "*Sneg v Kieve*," *Odesskie novosti*, 23. I. 1904, no. 6203, p. 3, and 24. I. 1904, no. 6204, p. 3 (a correction of the previous day), noted that the performances in Kiev both were sold out; "*Sneg v Moskve*," *Odesskie novosti*, 26. I. 1904, no. 6206, p. 3, announced the failure of Kvartalova's production in Moscow. Theatrical news from the provinces could be found under the rubrik "Provintsial'naia letopis'" in *Teatr i iskusstvo*.

Przybyszewski's dramas remained an element of that search, a part of Meierkhol'd's personal struggle against naturalism:

Скажу Вам под строжайшим секретом: задумал перебраться в Москву, вот эта мечта и отнимает у меня много времени, потому что начинаю её реализовывать. [...] Самое трудное в осуществлении этой мечты – материальная сторона. [...] На устройство в Москве театра – я хочу основать Новый театр – нужны деньги, а вот их-то добыть очень трудно. У меня же личных средств нет. Деньги мои – моя энергия, инициатива, знания, искусство. [...] Театр с совершенно новым репертуаром, театр Метерлинка, Д'Аннузио, Шишневского — найдет для себя большую публику. Следовательно, о риске не может быть и речи. «Театр фантазии», театр как реакция против натурализма, театр условностей даже, но театр духа. Какая красивая задача. Неужели судьба сблизит нас на почве организации нового мира? Пишите Ваше мнение. [...]<sup>170</sup>

I will tell you under the strictest secrecy: I intend to move to Moscow. This dream has taken up much of my time, because I am beginning to implement it. [...] The most difficult thing in the fulfillment of this dream is the financial side. One needs money to construct a theatre in Moscow—I want to found a New Theatre—but it's very difficult to obtain.<sup>171</sup> I have no personal

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<sup>170</sup> Meierkhol'd, *Perepiska*, 48; Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 358. Emphasis in the original. Both men had remained in contact while Meierkhol'd established his new company in the provinces. According to Fel'dman, Meierkhol'd sent Babanin copies of TND's repertoire and reviews of the 1903-1904 season and asked Babanin to read Remizov's piece which appeared in *Vesy*. Babanin's archive at MKhT contains a copy of TND's first season. See Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 225, 352.

<sup>171</sup> The cast at the Novyi primarily consisted of young actors, together with other, seasoned actors of the Malyi, such as Lenskii. Although its repertoire relied heavily on the comedic genres, the Novyi was somewhat more progressive than the conservative Malyi, and it was here that Przybyszewski's *For Happiness* [*Dlia schast'ia*] finally premiered, in Remizov's translation, on 11 January 1906. Probably due to its gloomy tone, *For Happiness* was paired with comedies such as *Because of the Mouse* [*Iz-za myshen'ka*] and *The Farewell Supper* [*Proshchal'nyi uzhin*] as a

means. My money is my energy, initiative, knowledge, [and] art. [...] A theatre with a completely new repertoire, a theatre of Maeterlinck, D'Annunzio, Przybyszewski, will find itself a large public. Consequently, there can be no talk of risk. [It will be] a "Theatre of Fantasy," theatre as a reaction against naturalism, even a theatre of conventions, and a theatre of the spirit. What a beautiful mission. Is it possible that fate will bring us closer owing to the organization of a new world? Write me of your opinion.

Meierkhol'd's dream of organizing his own "New Theatre" may be an ironic allusion to the government's own "Novyi Teatr," established in 1898, which was an affiliate of the Malyi. Its repertoire was far from new, often consisting of melodramas, comedies, and farces that appealed to a broader public.<sup>172</sup> By identifying his proposed "new" repertoire with the works of Maeterlinck, D'Annunzio, and Przybyszewski, the same authors whom he had defined as examples of the "new drama" in his interview for *Iuzhnoe obozrenie* in September 1903, Meierkhol'd continues to stress his turn toward drama that expresses the "link between the everyday and the eternal."<sup>173</sup> As in that interview, here Meierkhol'd also emphasizes his struggle against the current aesthetic, naturalism, by underlining the word "against" for his reader.

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double bill. At the beginning of the following season, 3 October 1906, *The Golden Fleece* premiered in a translation by S. D. Romanovskii-Roman'ko, four years after Komissarzhevskaja's production. The theatre closed the following season. See the section "Repertuar sezona 1905-1906 gg." in *Ezhegodnik 1905-1906*, 109, 111, 113, and comparable pages in the "Repertuar sezona 1906-1907 gg." in *Ezhegodnik 1906-1907*.

<sup>172</sup> I. Petrovskaia, *Teatr i zritel' rossiiskikh stolits. 1895-1917* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1990), 114.

<sup>173</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 46.

Meierkhol'd's quote further concretizes Przybyszewski's works as a principle element in the move beyond naturalism, just as he had suggested in that September interview. It is important to note that while Meierkhol'd continues to produce the plays of Ibsen and Hauptmann, whose works had also featured prominently during the past season in Kherson, he curiously does not mention their names here. This absence can be partly explained by the fact that works by these authors had served as a foundation of MKhT's repertoire since its inception, and MKhT itself had become a bastion of naturalist theatre. If Meierkhol'd were to mention these dramatists, it would only weaken or encourage opposition to his proposal. This opposition could be based on perceived differences in directing, not in choice of repertoire, changes in which Meierkhol'd clearly proposes in his request.<sup>174</sup> By naming Maeterlinck and Przybyszewski, whose works MKhT had not staged at this time, and not Ibsen and Hauptmann, whose works they had, Meierkhol'd also emphasizes the radical nature of his dream.

This letter may mark Meierkhol'd's first use of the term "*uslovnyi*" (non-representational, non-mimetic).<sup>175</sup> Curiously, it is not discussed separately,

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<sup>174</sup> We might also consider the possibility that works by Hauptmann and Ibsen held less promise at this time as spaces for artistic experimentation than they had previously, when Meierkhol'd began his season in Kherson. This would not be the case later in the summer of 1905, when works of Ibsen and Hauptmann, as well as Przybyszewski's *Snow*, were proposed as repertoire for the experimental Theatre-Studio in Moscow.

<sup>175</sup> Although Hoover devotes several pages to the subject of "*uslovnost*," she does not trace its first appearance in Meierkhol'd's correspondence or essays. See Hoover, *op. cit.*, 40-45. "Vexed" by Meierkhol'd's use of the terms "new theater" and "*uslovnyi/uslovnost*," Hoover comes to a conclusion that the terms "new theatre" and "*uslovnyi*" "coincided in meaning with 'immobile' and symbolist theater" when

permitting a better understanding of its meaning for Meierkhol'd, but appears in an aggregate of comments which link the names of Maeterlinck, D'Annunzio, and Przybyszewski with the concepts of "theatre of fantasies," "theatre of conventions" and "theatre of the spirit."<sup>176</sup> As such, these comments may signal Meierkhol'd's recent reception of an essay by V. Peremilovskii, "Maeterlinck and Przybyszewski," which appeared in the May issue of the modernist journal *Mir iskusstva* [*World of Art*], and its synthesis with the 1902 essay by Briusov, "An Unnecessary Truth," which introduced the term "*uslovnyi*" and "*uslovnost*" into the current dramatic discourse.<sup>177</sup>

Briusov had contended that theatre was, by its very nature, "non-representational." Therefore, it was impossible to reproduce reality on stage to a high degree of verisimilitude, as the Moscow Art Theatre was attempting to do. Briusov's solution was to "cease counterfeiting reality" and embrace the "conscious

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Meierkhol'd staged Maeterlinck's *Pelleas et Melisande* for Komissarzhevskai's theatre in October 1907. See Hoover, *ibid.*, 42, 45.

<sup>176</sup> The origins of Meierkhol'd's so-called "theatre of fantasy" are still obscure after futile internet searches in several languages. This concept could be an illusion to Tetmajer's "dramatic fantasy," *Sfinks*, which he had read in late 1901, when he first learned of Przybyszewski. There can be no doubt, however, that its placement in opposition to Naturalism functions in much the same way as Przybyszewski's attack on Liebermann in *Aphorizmy*, who declares, "Die Phantasie ist Notbehelf!" ["Fantasy is makeshift," i.e., not reality or fact], or his defense of spiritualists such as William Crookes (1832-1919; discoverer of thallium, inventor of the cathode ray tube), Alfred Russell Wallace (1823-1913; early evolutionist), and Herman Ulrici (1806-1884; sought to prove the existence of God and soul through scientific means). See Pshibyshevskii, *Aforizmy*, 28.

<sup>177</sup> V. Peremilovskii, "Meterlink i Pzhibyshevskii [sic]," *Mir iskusstva*, no. 5 (1904): 104-108. In his essay Peremilovskii refers both to Burenin's attack on Przybyszewski as a poor imitator of Maeterlinck, which originally appeared in *Novoe vremia* in 1901, as well as to the excerpts from *Aphorisms and Preludes*, which had appeared in his translation in *Mir iskusstva*, no. 5-6 (1902) as "Na putiakh dushi."

theatricality” or non-representational nature that the ritual and devices (masks, chorus, *kothurni*) of Greek theatre represented.<sup>178</sup> However, in Meierkhol'd's first season as an advocate of the “new drama,” he had yet to take Briusov's advice by staging either Greek tragedy or a contemporary drama in the manner of Greek tragedy. On the other hand, he had staged two productions of Maeterlinck, whose works Briusov had described as “the most remarkable attempts” at creating a new drama which would move theatre away from its dependence on an external reality based in verisimilitude, toward a representation of the spiritual, embodied in the corporeal.<sup>179</sup> He had also staged Przybyszewski's *Snow*.

In his essay, Briusov had attacked the representation of life on the stage, not the aesthetic movement, naturalism, that encouraged the representation of it. However, Meierkhol'd, as an actor and director, realized that an attack on the form (the method of artistic representation) also meant an attack on the aesthetics which advocated that particular form. He had already voiced this opinion in his September interview, when he linked the “new drama” with an attempt to tear away from the fetters of naturalism. Now Peremilovskii's essay confirmed his own early experimentation and struggles.

Peremilovskii had described Przybyszewski as Maeterlinck's “most kindred spirit” (“*rodstvenneish[ii] emu po dukhu*”), a man who shared a “surprising spiritual similarity” with the Belgian writer. Furthermore, both authors had “obeyed the law

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<sup>178</sup> Briusov, “Nenuzhnaia pravda,” in *Sochineniia*, t. 2, 63, 66. *Kothurni* are the platform boots worn by actors in Hellenistic theatre.

<sup>179</sup> Briusov, *ibid.*, 66.

of reaction against universal and mass naturalism” and “turned their glances from the visible, but fictitious, reality to the invisible, albeit genuine —soul.”<sup>180</sup> Thus Peremilovskii’s statement that these two authors of the “new art” were part of the struggle against the old naturalism confirms Meierkhol’d’s previous contention. In addition, Meierkhol’d, consciously or not, had already recognized the fundamental thrust of Peremilovskii’s statement that these two men represent a contemporary “reaction against...naturalism,” in his own statements and interviews given at the end of 1903.

Thus, what at first glance seems to be a futile attempt at describing his “Theatre of Fantasies,” Meierkhol’d’s list of separate textual elements (“theatre as a reaction against naturalism, even a theatre of conventions, and a theatre of the spirit”), become a tightly interwoven, both textually and thematically, description of his dream. Meierkhol’d’s future theatre would become the stage for a synthesis of these three ideas in both method and material. First, Briusov’s notions of conscious “*uslovnost*” as an acceptable means of battling the supra-realism portrayed on the stage of the Moscow Art Theatre would continue to provide the intellectual basis for a search for new forms. Second, both Briusov’s suggestion that Maeterlinck’s works are prime examples of a progressive direction in art and Peremilovskii’s notion that Maeterlinck and Przybyszewski are kindred spirits in a battle against naturalism, would identify the proper material with which to experiment. Indeed, Meierkhol’d

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<sup>180</sup> Peremilovskii, “Maeterlinck,” 104. “оба, повинувшись закону реакции против повсеместного и повального натурализма, отвратили взоры свои от видимой, но фиктивной, действительности к невидимой, но подлинной—к душе.”

continued to produce the works of both Maeterlinck and Przybyszewski during the next two stages of his career, as if to validate Peremilovskii's contention that the two authors are similar spiritually.<sup>181</sup> The next major stage in Meierkhol'd's artistic development was his return to Moscow and the experimentation at the Theatre-Studio during the summer of 1905. That stage would be followed by an even more innovative period, his first season at Komissarzhevskaiia's Dramaticheskii teatr in 1906, during which he and Komissarzhevskaiia staged *The Eternal Tale*.

The Association of New Drama disbanded after its tour of Nikolaev. However, Meierkhol'd reformed his troupe in Penza for a two-week stay, 3-15 August 1904. During those two weeks, Meierkhol'd chose to perform both Przybyszewski works in the repertoire, *Snow* and *The Golden Fleece*, before an audience that had not seen him perform since he left for Moscow in 1896. As had been the case with *Snow* in Kherson, these works reflected an "aristocratic" choice of repertoire, for Meierkhol'd was playing again before a provincial audience. However, now he had every reason to present the best he had to offer to the numerous friends and relatives who would be present. Therefore, Meierkhol'd's choice to program these two plays may reflect his proud desire to show the public the direction he was taking Russian theatre. Soon, however, discontent began to appear among the cast members.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> The origin of Meierkhol'd's notion of the "theatre of fantasies" is unclear at this time. The phrase "theatre of the spirit" may refer to the mystical side of both Maeterlinck and Przybyszewski.

<sup>182</sup> Zvenigorodskaia, *PS*, 134-135. Arkadii Zonov was especially gloomy, writing to Remizov that the Penza tour was unsuccessful and had left him nothing (*shish*).

Meierkhol'd persevered, however, and the company began a new season in Tiflis on 26 September 1904.

### **Down with Überdrama! Down with Przybyszewski!**

Meierkhol'd and The Association of New Drama had high hopes for success in Tiflis, a cultured, relatively large city. Unfortunately, Meierkhol'd left few notebooks from this period, although a nineteen page alphabetized notebook exists listing the thirty members of the company and the roles they performed in each play.<sup>183</sup> This lack of primary evidence focuses even more attention on the reviews that were published during this period, although newspapers were devoting less space to events in the theatrical arena and more to major world affairs, such as the Russo-Japanese War, which had begun on 27 January 1904.<sup>184</sup>

From the reviews that do exist we know that Meierkhol'd's production of *Snow* on 2 October 1904 failed miserably, becoming an object of mockery and parody in the local press.<sup>185</sup> In Tiflis, *Sneg* became an immediate example of everything that was bad in contemporary drama. By 28 December Meierkhol'd believed that it had been a mistake to come to Tiflis.<sup>186</sup> Why did this production fail, and how did this failure affect Meierkhol'd in his stated goal of “breaking with naturalism and splitting

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<sup>183</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 371-381; RGALI, f. 998, op. 1, ed. khr. 2742, l. 1-19.

<sup>184</sup> Zvenigorodskaia, *PS*, 136.

<sup>185</sup> See, for example, “Teatr i muzyka. Novaia drama,” *Kavkaz*, no 263, 4. X. 1904, p. 3, and S. T. [Sergei K. Mikhailov], “Vmesto retsenzii. *Sneg*, ili Bumaga vse terpit,” *Tiflisskii listok*, no. 236, 5. X. 1904, p. 3, reprinted in Pesochinskii, *op. cit.*, 39-40.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with the reviewer M. A. Dzhabar, reported in *Tiflisskii listok*. See Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 22, 395.

the shell of life to lay bare its heart—the soul,” which he had discussed with Lenskii in his 1903 Kherson interview?<sup>187</sup>

The season opener certainly had not prepared the Tiflis audience for the scandal that was to follow, although the company’s second production began to cause some consternation. Meierkhol’d had opened his new season on 26 September with a production of *Three Sisters* [*Tri sestry*, 1901], partially in tribute to Chekhov, who had died in July.<sup>188</sup> The first, anonymous review to appear in *Kavkaz* on 28 September noted that Meierkhol’d’s company, by introducing Tiflis to its new production values, imitative of those of the Moscow Art Theatre, seemed to signal a shift of importance from the actor to the dramatist and the play itself. Given the artistic excellence demonstrated on the first night, hopes were high that the rest of the season would continue at the same level.<sup>189</sup> *Three Sisters* was followed the next night by Hauptmann’s *Die versunkene Glocke*. Hopes began to dim for a successful season as the critic from *Kavkaz* decried Hauptmann’s play as an “überdrama of the neocharlatan school” (*sverkhp'es[a] neosharlatanskoi shkoly*), despite its painstaking production.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Quotation from the interview by V. Lenskii, “Tovarishchestvo Novoi dramy. (Pis'mo iz Khersona),” *Iuzhnoe obozrenie*, 11. IX. 1903. Reprinted in Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 46.

<sup>188</sup> Zvenigorodskaia, *PS*, 139.

<sup>189</sup> “Novaia drama,” *Kavkaz*, 28. IX. 1904, reprinted in. Pesochinskii, *op. cit.*, 37-39; see also Zvenigorodskaia, *PS*, 140.

<sup>190</sup> *Kavkaz*, 29. IX. 1904, cited in Zvenigorodskaia, *PS*, 143. Zvenigorodskaia’s accounts do not describe exactly what this critic meant by the Nietzschean-tinged term “überdrama,” but a review which appeared later in October contrasted *Die versunkene Glocke* with *Einsame Menschen*, noting that the latter drama was written by “another Hauptmann, the realist writer of the genre play (*na bytovoi podkladke*),

Przybyszewski's drama was an even greater blow to a public still reeling from the "new drama" of Hauptmann. The anonymous critic for *Kavkaz* rejected Meierkhol'd's production of *Snow*. He found the play and its staging to be incomprehensible, its themes immoral, and its author unworthy of international fame. According to *Kavkaz*, although the Hauptmann play had been accessible only for "a few of the elect," Przybyszewski's *Snow* was accessible to no one.<sup>191</sup> This opinion shows that at least part of the educated theatre-going public was not yet accustomed to plays in which the primary action is driven by psychology, not external events. Furthermore, the audience did not know how to respond to the play's unconventional finale, as Makryna is left on stage lamenting the imminent deaths of Bronka and Kazimierz.<sup>192</sup> According to the *Kavkaz* critic, Tiflis audience members almost had to be told from the stage that the play had ended. Some responded angrily, swearing

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the artist mercilessly striking a nerve with a strong, rich brush..." *Kavkaz*, 9. X. 1904, cited in Zvenigorodskaia, *PS*, 143. The use of "über" ("sverkh") in the popular press as a satirical, yet fashionable, prefix dates at least to early 1901. On 3 February 1901 the Russian Theatre Society held a "über-mascarade" at the Mariinskii Theatre. The posters promoting the event promised "über-drama, über-music, über-dancing, and an über-setting (*sverkh-zhivopis*')." In the drama, *Princess Dream and Prince Fantasy* (*Printsess Mechta i Prints Fantaziia*), the prince was scheduled to appear in a bright violet wig, crowned by oranges and dahlias. See "Sverkh maskarad," *Novosti dnia*, vech. list., 26. I. 1901, p. 2.

<sup>191</sup> "Teatr i muzyka. Novaia drama," *Kavkaz*, no 263 4. X. 1904, p. 3. "Не успела еще наша публика, шархнувшаяся в сторону от «Новой драмы» г. Мейерхольда под ударом «Потонувшаго колокола», вполне оправиться и снова начать посещать театр, как г. Мейерхольд счел долгом нанести ей новый удар, навалив на нее, в субботу, 2-го октября, грязный «Снег» г. Пшибышевскаго. «Потонувший колокол» по крайней мере оказался у нас доступным хоть «для немногих избранных», ну, а уж «Снег» г. Пшибышевскаго совсем ни для кого доступным не оказался."

<sup>192</sup> Przybyszewski's stage directions state simply: "She [Makryna] sits down and remains immobile in place." Pshibyshevskii, *Sneg*, *PSS*, t. IV, IV: ix, 333.

they would never set foot in a theatre again.<sup>193</sup> The Tiflis correspondent of *Teatr i iskusstvo* duly publicized the scandal on the national level, suggesting that the audience's response proved how difficult it might be to "acquaint our public with the new trends in contemporary drama" and that in order to be successful one should take "the greatest precautions and, by all means, [one] must not begin with the ultra-violet *Snow*."<sup>194</sup>

Meierkhol'd's failure and the ensuing scandal was now national news. Not only was the play's structure unsatisfactory, but also its odd lighting design. Meierkhol'd's complex lighting and its possible symbolic meaning was lost on a critic who complained only that he could not see who was speaking on stage.<sup>195</sup> Yet such a comment seemed to validate Hagemann's argument that sufficient lighting was needed so that the speaker on stage could be identified.<sup>196</sup>

The immorality of Przybyszewski's play and his modern views was portrayed metaphorically as a disease. In an ironic twist, the conservative Tiflis critic accused Meierkhol'd of misjudging his public and infecting them with the "bacillus of literary charlatanism," a disease already infecting Petersburg:

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<sup>193</sup> *Kavkaz*, 4. X. 1904, no 263, p. 3; Zvenigorodskaja, *PS*, 144. "Некоторые, кто в этот вечер в первый раз пришел «на драму», ругались и отплевывались, утверждая, что ног их больше не будет в этом театре!"

<sup>194</sup> *Teatr i iskusstvo*, no. 44 (1904): 788; cited in Zvenigorodskaja, *PS*, 145. "Этот случай показал, что знакомить нашу публику с новыми веяниями в современной драматургии (намерение, безусловно, похвальное) надо с большими предосторожностями и отнюдь не начинать ультрафиолетовым „Снегом“."

<sup>195</sup> *Kavkaz*, 4. X. 1904, no 263, p. 3. "При этом масса сценического шарлатанства: три акта для чего то начинаются в абсолютной тьме, так что даже нельзя рассмотреть, кто говорит на сцене"

<sup>196</sup> Gageman, *op. cit.*, 30-31; cited in Zvenigorodskaja, *PS*, 112.

Если он задался целью, во что бы то ни стало,  
привить нам бациллы нового литературного  
шарлатанства и заставить нас, на подобие  
мартышек в гетевской кухне ведьмы, захлебываться  
модными столичными восторгами, то пусть он  
убедится, что здесь это не пройдет!.. Нет это не  
пройдет!...<sup>197</sup>

If he [Meierkhol'd] had set himself the goal of  
inoculating us, at any cost, with the bacillus of the new  
literary charlatanism and force us to choke on the  
fashionable raptures as in the capital like the monkeys  
in Goethe's witches' kitchen, then let him be persuaded  
that it won't play here! No, it won't play!

This critic's charge that Przybyszewski was a literary fraud, already leveled at Hauptmann's newest work, echoed V. Burenin's 1901 accusation that the Polish writer was only a poor imitation of Maeterlinck, and the critic takes the same side as the Petersburg critic A. A. Izmailov, who sought to defend a "humble Russia which disdained charlatanism" from the "hydra of decadence."<sup>198</sup> The *Kavkaz* critic, in fact, does charge Przybyszewski with "decadence," echoing attacks that had appeared in the Moscow and St. Petersburg press several years earlier.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> *Kavkaz*, 4. X. 1904, no 263, p. 3. Also cited in Zvenigorodskaia, *PS*, 145. This critic's use of the metaphor of disease to represent the danger of the new drama to the general populace uncannily echoes a similar use in Przybyszewski's 1904 novella *Synowie ziemi*, where, in contrast, a "malaria" motif represents the spiritual infection of mediocrity and the prostitution of art to society's desires for fame and monetary gain threatening the true artist. See Pshibyshevskii, *Syny zemli*, *PSS*, t. II, 157-158, 169-170.

<sup>198</sup> V. Burenin, "Kriticheskie ocherki," p. 2; or A. A. Izmailov, "Vyvikhnutye darovaniia (Novye perevody iz Meterlinka i Pshibyshevskago)," *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 8. IV. 1902, no. 95, pp. 2-3.

<sup>199</sup> Tezi, "Tragediia svobodnoi liubvi," *Tiflisskii listok*, 20. VI. 1901, no. 142, p. 3. Izmailov's article in *Birzhevye vedomosti* was as much an attack on Przybyszewski as it was on the publishing house Skorpion, which had "sold its soul" to the new literary monstrosity. The opening lines in Izmailov's attack reads as follows:

Without the benefit of a pre-performance essay elucidating the symbolic level of *Snow*, the anonymous Tiflis critic could only retreat to what Remizov had identified as the “mundane plot” (*real'nyi siuzhet*) of the play: the rejection of one’s lawful wife for the love of a former flame. Although there is no overt adultery in the play, it was simple for the Tiflis critic to treat the plot of *Snow* as a fictional work based on personal tragedy, of life becoming art. Although he did not express it overtly, this critic was mapping the actions of Przybyszewski’s fictional characters onto real events: Bronka, the rejected wife who dies must be Przybyszewski’s wife, Dagny; Tadeusz, the artist who survives, must be Stanisław. However, whereas critics in 1901 had written that Dagny was the victim not so much of “free love,” but of that ancient “green-eyed monster,” jealousy, this critic scoffed at the very premise of much of Przybyszewski’s writing: that love is a primal emotion which sometimes causes tragic results. In his opinion, Przybyszewski was a fashionable writer, but his themes could be described in only three words, the “lust of unsatisfied desires:”

Что такое Пшибышевский в современной драматургии? Писатель очень тонкий, очень модный, потому что он фундаментом для возведения своих драматических лабиринтов избрал тему, крайне щекочущую современные нервы,

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“Отечественное декадентство, впрочем, всегда бывшее только отечественным обезьянством, значительно, если не вовсе, угомонилось. Московский «Скорпион»,--книжная фирма, продавшая свою душу декадентству, --лежит со свернутым хвостом и, может быть, и таит замыслы, но ничем значительным их не обнаруживает. Но за границами скромной и презирающей шарлатанство России гидра декаданса попрежнему кокетливо морщит склизкое туловище, скалит пожелтые зубы, смеется одним глазом и источает мутную слезу другим.” Izmailov, “Vyvikhnutye darovaniia,” p. 2.

которую можно охарактеризовать тремя словами:  
«сладострастие неудовлетворенных желаний».<sup>200</sup>

What is Przybyszewski in contemporary drama? He is a very refined writer, very fashionable, because he has chosen an extremely ticklish theme for contemporary nerves as the foundation for the erection of his dramatic labyrinths, which can be characterized in three words: “the lust of unsatisfied desires.”

The theme of “unsatisfied lust” is why “estranged wives, unrequited lovers, close relatives suffering from an unnatural love for one another, and so forth” peopled Przybyszewski’s plays.<sup>201</sup> Thankfully, the critic continued sarcastically, this risqué theme was “irritated” by Przybyszewski’s haphazard use of symbolic images and characters, imagery which he considered “incomprehensible, hazy, and third-rate.”<sup>202</sup> Furthermore, Remizov’s unusual, inartistic translation helped to obscure the play’s theme of “decadent love.”<sup>203</sup> Given all these shortcomings, the *Kavkaz* critic could not understand why the Poles respected Przybyszewski as “their symbolist.” Perhaps,

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<sup>200</sup> *Kavkaz*, 4. X. 1904, no 263, p. 3.

<sup>201</sup> *Kavkaz*, 4. X. 1904, no 263, p. 3. “Вот почему во всех его пьесах неизбежно фигурируют жены, отдаляющие от себя мужей, любовницы, любящие, но не отдающиеся, близкие родственники, страдающие от противоестественного влечения друг к другу, и т. п.” The critic’s final comment, about characters “suffering from an unnatural attraction to one another” seems to be a veiled attack, based on knowledge of Przybyszewski’s novella *De profundis*, which features an (imagined) incestuous relationship between brother and sister. The novella had recently appeared in Skorpion’s second volume of Przybyszewski’s collected works.

<sup>202</sup> *Kavkaz*, 4. X. 1904, no 263, p. 3. “К счастью, эту пикантную тему он вередит самым непонятным, туманным и бездарным образом, приплетая к ней ни с того, ни с сего какие то символы: то снег, то золотое руно, то незнакомца в черном, то старуху в черном...”

<sup>203</sup> *Kavkaz*, 4. X. 1904, no 263, p. 3. “язык особенный и переводчики пьесы сочли своим долгом воспроизвести эту особенность, ставя все глаголы на конце, даже в самых простых фразах: «лампу пора зажечь», «Бронку я люблю» и т. д. В общем так несценично и так антихудожественно, что даже основная идея »декадентской любви« ускользает от зрителя.”

he declared, it was the same kind of pride that a mother takes in her child. However, this maternal pride was no reason that his work to be translated and the press in the capitals to fawn over such a writer.<sup>204</sup>

The critic's ability to identify Przybyszewski's elemental, overtly stated symbols—the golden fleece, snow, the “unknown woman in black”—but his inability to recognize the grander theme which Remizov had proposed, demonstrates how even educated Russian readers and audiences were still struggling with the very premises of symbolism. That nascent literary trend, as Remizov had suggested, would seek to create correspondences between reality (“lá-bas”) and the transcendental (“lá-haut”).<sup>205</sup> It was evident in Tiflis that it was easier to perceive reality than the transcendental.

Much of the blame for this intense focus on *realia* could be laid at the footlights of the Moscow Art Theatre. The reviewer for *Kavkaz* suggested as much on 6 October, when he noted the use of a ticking clock in Meierkhol'd's production of Naidenov's *Vania's Children* [*Deti Vaniushina*]. Although the reviewer admired the use of such detail in the production, “one of the hobbyhorses of the Moscow Art Theatre,” he considered its use completely extravagant, because it forced the audience

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<sup>204</sup> *Kavkaz*, 4. X. 1904, no 263, p. 3. “Поляки чтут Пшибышевскаго, как своего символиста. На это можно только сказать что каждая маменька гордится, когда у нея сынок в передовые люди выдвинулся. Но для чего переводить его на русский язык, для чего ставить на нашей сцене и почему столичная пресса считает нужным с ним кокетничать,—этого я никак понять не могу!”

<sup>205</sup> Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 2, 226. As has been discussed earlier, Przybyszewski frequently bared his dramatic symbols during the course of the play. Remizov's interpretation of the text is based on a closer analysis of these symbols and their interconnections, characterizing a more profound grasp of the possibilities of symbolic representation.

to wonder why the clock ticked, but its hands did not move.<sup>206</sup> Such comments help us understand both why Przybyszewski, as theorist of the “new drama,” advocated a simpler set design, and how difficult it would be for the advocates of the “new drama,” such as Meierkhol'd, to wean the public away from such naturalistic detail, with which they had just recently become so enamored.<sup>207</sup>

Three days after the performance, on 5 October 1904, a satirical column by S. T. (Sergei Mikhailov) appeared, providing evidence that the scandal over *Snow* had not yet abated.<sup>208</sup> In his “In place of a review. *Snow*, or Paper endures all,” Mikhailov attacked Przybyszewski’s language, use of symbolism, and Meierkhol'd’s staging, in a manner similar to Burenin’s 1901 column “Critical notes” in *Novoe vremia*. He also took a cue from the Kherson press release, in which Remizov had noted the thematic importance of *toska* (*Sehnsucht*). In this way Przybyszewski’s characters were reduced to such absurd exchanges as:

Мейерхольд. Я тоскую.  
Мунт. И я тоскую.  
Мейерхольд. Я тоскую тоскою.  
Мунт. Что? Ах!  
Мейерхольд. Я тоскую о тоске!  
Мунт. Ах.

Meierkhol'd. I am yearning.  
Munt. I am yearning, too.

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<sup>206</sup> “Театр і музика. Novaia drama,” *Kavkaz*, 6. X. 1904, no. 265, p. 3.

<sup>207</sup> For Przybyszewski’s advocacy of simpler, yet more profound, scenography as the true source of dramatic action becomes internal, not external, see Pshibyshevskii, “О драме і стсене,” *PSS*, t. IV, 340. “Сценический аппарат значительно упрощен, упростилась и в то же время углубилась и наша душа. Душа и то, что в ней происходит, стало сходным пунктом для драматурга.”

<sup>208</sup> S. T. [Sergei K. Mikhailov], “Vmesto retsenzii. *Sneg*,” *Tiflisskii listok*, 5. X. 1904, reprinted in Pesochinskii, *op. cit.*, 39-40.

Meierkhol'd. I am yearning with yearning.  
Munt. What? Ah!  
Meierkhol'd. I am yearning for yearning.  
Munt. Ah.

It was not enough for the critic to parody the theme of *toska* in the play. He also took aim at the finale, as Bronka and Kazimierz leave to commit suicide together. In his parody, Makryna, dressed in symbolic black, now represents only a classic witch figure, not Death, and casts a spell, gratefully ending the audience's suffering, as well as that of the fated couple:

Очень темно. Публика догадывается, что у окна  
стоит Мунт.  
Мунт. Снег, снег, снег.  
Певцов. Разрывай снег!  
Мунт. Да! Разрывай снег, и на груди моей  
прорастет зеленая озимь!  
Зонов (входит). Барыня! Прорубь готова! Снег  
расчищен. Можно топиться.  
Мунт (Певцову). Пойдем топиться!  
Певцов. Я не прочь.  
Мунт. Подожди, я только оденусь!  
(Одеваются, идут топиться. Входит г-жа  
Нарбекова, вся в черном. Публике становится  
опять страшно. Нарбекова произносит заклинания.  
Занавес сдвигается, пьеса кончается. С галереи, из  
партера слышны дьявольский хохот, свистки...)<sup>209</sup>

It's very dark. The audience guesses that Munt is  
standing by the window.  
Munt. Snow, snow, snow.  
Pevtsov. Clear the snow.  
Munt. Yes! Clear the snow, and green shoots will grow  
upon my breast!  
Zonov (enters). Mistress! The hole is ready! The  
snow is cleared. You can drown yourself.  
Munt (to Pevtsov). Let's go drown ourselves!

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<sup>209</sup> S. T., *ibid.*, 40.

Pevtsov. I have no objection.  
 Munt. Wait, I'll just get dressed.  
 (They dress and go drown themselves.  
 Mlle. Narbekova enters, all in black. The audience  
 again becomes terrified. Narbekova casts a spell.  
 The curtain falls, the play ends. Diabolical laughter and  
 whistling are heard from the gallery and floor...)

*Snow* became the work against which to gauge the success of other works in the company's repertoire. The successful second performance of Ibsen's *Enemy of the People* on 3 October 1904 and the public's eager reception of it was viewed as the first step in easing the animosity caused by the previous evening's production of *Snow*.<sup>210</sup> The following evening Meierkhof and his company performed Naidenov's beloved *Vania's Children* to a smaller-than-average house. On 6 October the critic of *Kavkaz* wondered sarcastically if the audience had stayed away because it was afraid of being "snowed" again or spending another evening "in the company of the idiotic characters of contemporary dramatic rubbish."<sup>211</sup> In a parting shot full of culinary metaphors, the critic suggested that the deserving performance had not received full marks from the public because of Meierkhof's mistake of "foisting indigestible dishes of fashionable, literary-culinary art [on them], where, at whatever cost, rubbish is fried in the grease of hopelessness, covered with a sauce of decadence and

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<sup>210</sup> "Teatr i muzyka. Tovarishchestvo 'Novoi dramy,'" *Tiflisskii listok*, no. 236, 5. X. 1904, p. 3. "Публика восторженно приветствовала актеров, и этот спектакль отчасти смягчил то невыгодное для труппы впечатление, которое публика вынесла от постановки пресловутаго «Снега» Пшибышевскаго."

<sup>211</sup> *Kavkaz*, 6. X. 1904, p. 3. "Ведь тут не было опасности получить «снег» Пшибышевскаго на голову, или провести вечер в обществе юродствующих героев современной чепухатургия." "*Chepukhaturgiiia*" is a sarcastic neologism, formed by combining the words "*chepukha*" ("nonsense, rubbish") and "*dramaturgiia*" ("drama").

symbolism, and handed to the public on a plate, mocking good sense and the public.”<sup>212</sup>

Meierkhol'd and the Association of New Drama had premiered *Snow* in Kherson on 19 December 1903 with high hopes. Both he and Remizov considered the work an important step forward in their search for new forms that would express “the eternal mysteries and the sense of our life and the sense of the earth.”<sup>213</sup>

Remizov’s pre-performance press release had sensitized audiences to the company’s conception of the play as a work that should be approached on two levels, the mundane (*la-bas*) and the psychological-mystical (*la-haut*). Although the Kherson public did not applaud *Snow*, Meierkhol'd continued to stage it in Kherson, Nikolaev, Penza, and finally, in Tiflis. During this time, he seemed to be guided by his company’s mission of educating the public about the “new drama.” As he expressed it in a letter to Pevtsov on 26 July 1904, “Whether they understand us or not, we will have our way.”<sup>214</sup>

For several reasons, Przybyszewski’s drama became a challenging experimental space in which to create the new dramatic form. Most importantly, its lack of concrete detail gave Meierkhol'd the freedom in which to create. Second, Meierkhol'd was guided by Remizov’s symbolic reading of the work. According to

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<sup>212</sup> *Kavkaz*, 6. X. 1904, p. 3. “во что-бы то ни стало навязывая неудобоваримыя блюда моднаго литературно-кулинарнаго искусства, где галиматью поджаривают на масле бездарности, прикрывают соусом декадентства и символизма и преподносят на блюде глумления над здравым смыслом и публикой.”

<sup>213</sup> Remizov, “TND,” 36.

<sup>214</sup> Meierkhol'd, *Perepiska*, 49; cited in Zvenigorodskaja, *ibid.*, 136.)

Remizov, Przybyszewski's drama was a "symphonic poem" whose main themes were the artist, the urge to create, and death.

Meierkhol'd's production sought to bring Remizov's vision to reality. Inspired by Przybyszewski's notions of synaesthesia and Remizov's suggestion that the play was a "symphonic poem," Meierkhol'd's first experimentations involved music, drama, and lighting. He created a discourse between the dramatic text and music by programming works between the acts of the play that reflected and commented upon its themes and atmosphere. Meierkhol'd then turned to a lighting design that attempted to illuminate not only the characters on stage, but also their internal psychology. In these ways, Meierkhol'd's production of Przybyszewski's *Snow* should be considered a "bold" and innovative step forward in the history of Russian theatre, not only because he obstinately chose to stage the play in the face of growing public opposition to the new drama, but because his use of music and lighting in an innovative way pointed the direction toward further experimentation in non-representational theatre, and the possible methods which the director could use to stage non-realist drama.

## CONCLUSION

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Russian theatre was primed for change. The state monopoly had ended, and private theatres such as the Moscow Art Theatre were using acting and scenographic methods introduced by the Meiningen company to break away from the stagnant traditions of the Imperial and provincial theatres. State censors tightly controlled the repertoire. A multi-tiered system of censorship was in effect, leading to situations where plays could be read in periodicals, but not seen on stage, or staged only in the major cities. Many plays, including vaudevilles, light comedies, and dramas, staged in the Imperial theatres were by second- or third-rate writers. Actors were employed to play character types, not individual roles. In some cases an actor might continue to play a particular role for many years, even after his/her physical age made portrayal of the character inappropriate.

This dissertation has tried to clarify Przybyszewski's role in the process of revitalizing Russian theater. This role cannot be explained solely by the superficial theory that he was a visible "incarnation" of European modernism, as Ettinger claimed in 1927 with respect to his role in Russian literature.<sup>1</sup> Nor can it be explained by Zieliński's 1982 claim that Przybyszewski's influence on Russian literature derived from the eroticism found in his works.<sup>2</sup> In this dissertation, evidence points to Przybyszewski's aesthetic views as an equally valid explanation for his appeal to members of the Russian intelligentsia, especially members of the creative arts.

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<sup>1</sup> Ettinger, *op. cit.*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Zieliński, *op. cit.*, 140-150.

Przybyszewski's aesthetic views, based equally on metaphysics and psychology, advocated a "path of the soul" as the correct course upon which the new art should embark in order to move beyond the "illusory," mimetic depiction of reality, which the realist and naturalist schools represented. At the same time, his dramas, which contained a synthesis of both naturalist and emerging Symbolist elements, became living laboratories in which to experiment with these aesthetic theories. For several years during the first decade of the twentieth century, Przybyszewski's works and views filled a theoretical and creative need for non-representational drama. The Russian publication of *Aphorisms and Preludes* (1901) and *On Drama and the Stage* (1904) complemented Valerii Briusov's 1902 clarion call for a new art, "An Unnecessary Truth," and his belief that the artist must reflect his/her own soul in the creative act. However, in contrast to Briusov's essay, which had advocated a return to the theatricality of Greek theatre, Przybyszewski's essays provided not only a prescription for the actor, but advocated a contemporary form of theatricality which combined synaesthetic elements and symbolic characters in order to portray universal truths upon the stage.

Two Russian theatre figures, as we have seen, embraced Przybyszewski's idea of the "path of the soul" in a profound and personal way. Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd both reacted dynamically to Przybyszewski's aesthetic views and, within a decade, both had changed the face of Russian theatre, turning from the naturalist devices of theatrical representation to symbolism and non-representational form. In addition, Komissarzhevskaja's early reception of Przybyszewski, a recognized leader

of the “new art,” lends greater weight to Senelick’s 1980 description of her as a “Symbolist Eidolon,” or an apparition which interacted with the writers around her and upon whom they could project their artistic visions.

Specifically, the investigation of textual parallels in Komissarzhevskaiia’s well-known April 1902 letter to Khodotov, which has provided convincing evidence that she is paraphrasing *Aphorisms and Preludes*, a translation of Przybyszewski’s essay on art, *On the Paths of the Soul* [*Na drogach duszy*], introduces a previously unknown aesthetic view upon which to base further investigations of her intellectual and artistic development. This finding is especially welcome, given the lack of detailed information about Komissarzhevskaiia’s known reading habits beyond her recognized affinity for John Ruskin, comments made by Khodotov, and several specific mentions of Nietzsche and Merezhkovskii in her correspondence at the turn of the century.

The context of this identification is also significant. In her April 1902 letter Komissarzhevskaiia herself admitted that she was on the verge of making a major decision in her life. Theatre scholars unanimously believe that this decision was connected with Komissarzhevskaiia’s departure from the Aleksandrinskii Theatre several months later. Thereafter she embarked on an individual journey of creative exploration as an independent entrepreneur. Komissarzhevskaiia’s admission thus invites scholars to contemplate the possibility that the views articulated by Przybyszewski in *Aphorisms and Preludes* influenced her decision in some way. While this association cannot be proven, the influence of the aesthetic views

presented in Przybyszewski's essay should now be admitted as circumstantial evidence: a contributing factor in that decision.

By focusing inward and elevating the creative individual to an eminent place in society, Przybyszewski's work reinforced and refined some of Komissarzhevskaja's previously-held notions. Among these notions were an interest in psychology and a questioning of the goals of naturalism as an artistic trend. As a consequence, I suggest this work acted as a philosophical catalyst and inspiration for change and self-realization. Komissarzhevskaja's reading of *Aphorisms and Preludes* thus became a contributing factor that caused the actress to reevaluate her life at a time when she was dissatisfied with her artistic progress at the Aleksandrinskii.

During the next seven years, the plays along Przybyszewski's "path of the soul" provided not only acting challenges for Komissarzhevskaja in the form of four psychologically demanding roles, but also challenging roles for her fellow actors. During 1902 rehearsals for her first Przybyszewski drama, *The Golden Fleece* [*Zolotoe runo*], Komissarzhevskaja found that other actors also found these roles difficult. I have shown that the frustration Komissarzhevskaja felt by 1909 with other actors' inability to act in such roles contributed to her decision to establish a theatre school where she might train actors to prepare for roles in the new drama, including those written by Przybyszewski.

Furthermore, I have shown the resonance with Przybyszewski's essay, "On Drama and the Stage" of Komissarzhevskaja's belief in the actor's need to understand the psychological moments of a play, to understand the relationship of other

characters to his own, and the need for the actor to “merge” with the character. In many ways, these suggestions anticipate points from Stanislavskii’s System, which had yet to be circulated in a published form, and demonstrate once again that Przybyszewski’s aesthetic views and theories on drama not only had a profound impact on Komissarzhevskaja’s life, but should also be recognized as a theoretical voice, actively participating in the discourse on theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Przybyszewski’s theories and works served two purposes for Meierkhol’d. As Meierkhol’d began a new season in the fall of 1903 with The Association of New Drama, Przybyszewski’s hypnotic “path of the soul,” with its focus on the soul as a reflection of the eternal, prescribed particular methods which Meierkhol’d could use to break from the confining traditions of naturalist drama. Symbolization and synthesis became important artistic goals. Both of these devices—synthesis, recognized both as the mixing of sensory experiences, or synaesthesia, and symbolization—could result in another, higher synthesis on the dramatic stage: the fusion of mundane reality with a higher one. As in the case of Komissarzhevskaja, the identification of suggested parallels between Meierkhol’d’s and Przybyszewski’s writings provides a new foundation for further investigation of Meierkhol’d’s intellectual and artistic development with respect to Przybyszewski. In Meierkhol’d’s case, this is the brief period from early 1902 to 1905 or 1906, before the

acknowledged influence of such theorists as Edward Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia, and Georg Fuchs.<sup>3</sup>

Przybyszewski's plays, especially *Snow* [*Sneg*], provided a suitable experimental space in which to apply these artistic methods. This 1903 production, which Meierkhol'd himself acknowledged as a "very bold step" in Russian theatre, anticipated his later experimentation in *uslovnyi*, or non-representational forms, which began in earnest during the summer of 1905 at the Theatre-Studio in Moscow. That innovation and experimentation in non-representational theatre would become a hallmark of Meierkhol'd's career. With the help of Remizov, Meierkhol'd's first production of this play featured a synthesis of music and drama, as well as an innovative lighting technique which strove not only to illuminate the external features of the characters, but to reflect their internal psychology as well. Furthermore, Remizov's and Meierkhol'd's lengthy description of the play's plot, which appeared the day of the performance, and Remizov's later account, which appeared in *Vesy* in 1904, both suggest that Meierkhol'd considered the symbolic meanings of his characters as he directed *Snow*.

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<sup>3</sup> Leach, *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, 85; Zvenigorodskaia, *Provintsial'nye sezony*, 112. For further mentions of Craig and Fuchs, see Rudnitskii, *RM*, 66, 120, 121, 125, 138, 169, 170 (all Craig); 77 (Fuchs). Meierkhol'd makes a direct reference to Appia's *Die Musik und die Inszenierung* (1899) in his essay "Tristan and Isolde," which originally appeared in *Ezhgodnik Imperatorskikh teatrov*, no. 5 (1910), and later in *O teatre* (1913). According to Braun, Meierkhol'd did not encounter the theories of Georg Fuchs until 1906. See Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, 84, 98. Neither Appia's nor Craig's name appears in the index of Fel'dman, *Nasledie*, 1, which covers the years 1891-1903.

In summation, Przybyszewski's influence on Russian theatre was based on more than just the fact that he was a model of European modernism. His aesthetic views, as understood by Komissarzhevskaja and Meierkhol'd, helped to change their approaches to acting and staging by directing their artistic focus inward, toward the soul, and away from the naturalist concerns for the truthful, yet illusory, representation of reality upon the stage.

Przybyszewski's works became an experimental space in which each could develop his or her craft. For Komissarzhevskaja, Przybyszewski's elevated views of the artist and the "path of the soul" moved her to set out upon a personal journey of self-realization and a refinement of her craft through the psychological identification with her characters. For Meierkhol'd, Przybyszewski's "path of the soul" served more to focus his attention as a director on ways of expressing the eternal through the medium of drama, by using such devices as synthesis and the symbol. Each of these artists, one acknowledged as one of Russia's great actresses and the other, one of its great directors, left a legacy of work which remains with us today. Stanislaw Przybyszewski is a major contributing figure to that historical legacy.

## APPENDIX I ALTERNATE POLISH, RUSSIAN, AND GERMAN TEXTS

### Introduction:

- 0.1. Scena przestała być mistrzynią życia, przestała być tanią kazalnica, z której aktor tak niezmiernie napuszone, a w gruncie rzeczy czcze tyrady deklamował lub wygłaszał mniej lub więcej głupie sentencje, ale za to stała się widownią krwawych walk, jakie się w duszy człowieka staczają, wahań i porywów, rozkoszy i boleści, nieokiełznanych pragnień i zaledwie przeczutyh żądz, Scena dzisiejsza wydłużyła się, że tak powiem, otwiera nowe horyzonty, nowe perspektywy życiowe, tłumaczy ukryte zjawiska na dnie duszy ludzkiej i roztwiera przed oczyma widza całą jej głębię.

*Kurjer Teatralny*, 18. IX. 1902, no. 1, 4.

*O dramacie i scenie*, (Warszawa: Księgarnia Naukowa, 1905), 10.

### Chapter I:

- 1.48 Здесь впервые нашел себе выражение тот arrière-fond души человеческой – область, до сих пор еще неисследованная,-- в котором сознаваемое составляет только бесконечно малую часть, та вторая жизнь, которая проявляется только рефлексивно, но в которой мы должны искать основу и причины всех внешних проявлений нашего духа.

“Shopen i Nitsche”

*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, t. V, *Kritika* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Moscow: Sablin, 1910), 18.

- 1.65 Dusza jest organem obejmującym rzeczy nieskończone i bezobszarne, organem, w którym spływają się ze sobą niebo i ziemia – dusza to ustawicznie do wnętrza skierowany wzrok, to stan, w którym całe na milionowe cząstki rozbite życie jenoczy się w jedno wielkie słońce, milionowe czlonki jednoczą się w jedno olbrzymie ciało, a miliony stuleci stapiają się w jednej sekundzie.

*Na drogach duszy*, (1900), 26

- 1.73 Основным принципом так называемого „нового“ искусства, всех направлений и течений его, является понятие души, как индивидуальной силы, — души гонимой, возвращающей в лоно вечности и снова воплощающей, но уже более обогащенной, более сильной и более знающей, чем в первый раз, — и так без конца, пока она не дойдет до сознания всего своего могущества, не проникнет в самые сокровенные вещи, не обнимет самых отдаленных и скрытых связей, т.-е. не станет гением или не обнажит своего абсолюта, всего великолепия своей „наготы“.

“Aforizmy i preliudi”

*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, t. V, *Kritika* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1910), 97.

- 1.74 Душа едина и нераздельна, ее сознательная частичка нуждается в этих жалких пяти чувствах, на за этими чувствами кроется один нераздельный орган, в котором тысячи чувств взаимно проникают друг друга, в котором каждое явление проявляется во всех своих ценностях, проявляется — как абсолютное и единое.

“Aforizmy i preliudi”

*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, t. V, *Kritika* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1910), 103.

- 1.83 Aktor dzisiejszy musi mieć jeden warunek, a tym jest inteligencja: oczywiście specyficzna inteligencja na tle owego tajemniczego zmysłu, za pomocą którego aktor umie się wcielać w daną indywidualność.

*O dramacie i scenie* (1905), 11.

- 1.92 С помощью сочетания впечатлений, основанного не на внешнем, а на вунтреннем чувстве, мы стремимся раскрыть новые горизонты, раскрыть вещи тайные, до сего времени не выраженные словами. / Метод, которым мы пользуемся в данном случае, это—воспроизведение и раскрытие чувств, мыслей, впечатлений, снов, видений, *непосредственно*, так как они дают знать себя в душе, без логических связей, во всех их внезапных скачках и сочетаниях.

*Aforizmy i preliudy* (1901), 22.

- 1.93 bo prawie każda strona nowoszesnego dramatu odbija się echem w duszy aktora i budzi w niej wspomnienia rzeczy przeżytych, jeżeli nie tych samych, so w tworze autora, to w każdym razie bardzo przybliżonych,,,,,

*O dramacie i scenie* (1905), 12.

- 1.99 Proces twórczy u *artysty-aktora* wyobrażam sobie tak: aktor powinien przedewszystkim przeczytać sobie cały dramat i czytać go nie raz, nie dwa, ale tak długo, dopóki nie ogarnie całości do tego stopnia, że to, co co dotychczas było martwą literą, stanie się dla niego naoczna wizją, że widzi wokół siebie postaci, że z całą intensywnością uświadamia sobie choćby

najdrobniejszy szczegół dramatu. A więc poniekąd staje się on wszystkimi razem. Jak we wizji [sic], rozgrywa się przed jego oczyma scena za sceną. Teraz dopiero bierze do ręki własną swą rolę.

*O dramacie i scenie* (1905), 14.

- 1.228 Народ это частица вечности, и в нем таятся корни художника; из него, как из родной почвы, художник извлекает свои живительнейшие соки. Да, в народе корни художника, но не в его политике, не в его внешних изменениях, а лишь в том, что есть вечного в понятии народа; в том, что отличает его от других народов, в вечном и неизменном понятии—расы.
- Aforizmy i preliudy* (1901), 11-12.

## Chapter II:

- 2.62 Artysta, który pragnie poklasku, a skarży się na małe uznanie tłumu, stoi jeszcze w przedsionku sztuki, nie czuje się jeszcze panem, który łask nie zebrze, tylko hojną ręką je na tłum rzuca, i nie pragnie podzięków—tej pragnie tylko plebejusz w duchu, tej pragną tylko dorobkiewiczze.
- Na drogach duszy* (1900), 17.
- 2.76 sztuka jest odtworzeniem tego, co jest wiecznym, niezależnym od wszelkich zmian lub przypadkowości, niezawisłym ani od czasu, ani od przestrzeni, a więc:  
odtworzeniem istotności, t. j. duszy. I to duszy, czy się we wszechświecie, czy w ludzkości, czy w pojedynczym indywiduum przejawia.  
Sztuka zatem jest odtworzeniem życia duszy we w s z y s t k i c h jej przejawach, niezależnie od tego, czy są dobre lub złe, brzydkie lub piękne. To właśnie stanowi zasadniczy punkt naszej estetyki.
- Na drogach duszy* (1900), 13-14.
2. 84 Są ludzie, przed których oczyma przesuwają się to wszystko, co dusza ich przeżyła, [,,] którzy w niezmiernym pogłębieniu widzą czarowne obrazy i raje nie z tego świata, słyszą melodye i dźwięki, o jakich ludzkie ucho nie śniło
- Na drogach duszy* (1900), 19.

Dusza jest jedyna i niepodzielna, ..., ale po za zmysłami tkwi jeden niepodzielny organ, w którym miliony zmysłów się przenikają, ...  
Dźwięk jest tam równocześnie barwą i wonią i wszystkim tem, na co w mowie niema wyrażenia.

...

W tej głębi, w absolutnej świadomości tracą wartość wszystkie assocyacje myślowe, stworzone za pomocą zmysłów, a kojarzą się nowe, jedynie rzeczywiste związki i połączenia uczuciowe.

*Na drogach duszy* (1900), 23.

- 2.87 Twórca z n a n y odtwarzał »rzeczy«, twórca n o w y odtwarza swój stan duszy; tamten porządkował rzeczy i wrażenia, tak jak do jego mózgu wpływały, wierząc w ich obiektywność, ten przeciwnie odtwarza tylko u c z u c i a, jakie te rzeczy wywołują.  
*Na drogach duszy (1900), 21.*
- 2.94 Dalej musiał rozerwać wszystkie rzeczy w przestrzeni, bo zmysł wyrokowy również niezmiernie ograniczony – musiał rozerwać całość na części. Bo mózg za słaby, by mózdz [sic] cośkolwiek w całej jego nierozzerwalności objąć --gdy słyszał dźwięk, nie czuł równocześnie jego woni, nie widział jego kształtów.  
I to porozrywanie, przekształcenie, wykoszlawienie wszystkich zjawisk nazwał realnością.  
a wierne odtworzenie tej fikcyjnej realności w tym samym porządku, systemie, szeregach, przekształceniach w niedołącznym mózgu, nazwał r e a l i z m e m.  
Cała dotychczasowa sztuka z małym wyjątkiem tej, którą tworzył geniusz, była sztuką realną.  
Podział jej na idealną i realistyczną opiera się li tylko na pewnych danych etycznej i religijnej natury.  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
Sztuka jest objawieniem duszy,  
Cała dotychczasowa sztuka – sztuka realistyczna—była bezdrożem duszy.  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
*Na drogach duszy (1900), 22-23.*
- 2.122 A więc w pojęciu naszym jest dusza ludzka absolutną świadomością, pozostaje nią i nadał po swem wcieleniu się, ale drobna tylko czastka tej absolutnej świadomości przejawia się w mózgu jako osobiste Ja, drobna część przejawia się rzadko w snach, wizjach, w chwilach niezwykłych a potężnych napięć ducha, jeszcze drobniejsza wyłania się z uświadomienia najtajniejszych a dawniej znanych tajemnic jako cud, ...  
*Na drogach duszy (1900), 18-19.*
- 2.127 Różne są te drogi, bo mózg to dzień powszedni, dzień pracy i znoju, to matematyka, to logika, a dusza to rzadki dzień świąteczny, coś, czego ani regułą ani logiką objąć nie można, to chwała i wniebowstąpienie rodu ludzkiego.  
*Na drogach duszy (1900), 25.*

### Chapter III:

- 3.1 Dla artysty-wybrańca miłość to bolesna, pełna trwogi świadomość nieznannej strasznej siły, która dwie duszy rzuca na siebie i pragnie je złąć w jedno, to intensywne cierpienie, w którym dusza się łamie, bo czynu Nowego Testamentu, czynu tego stopienia się w jedno, czynu absolutnego androgynizmu dokonać nie może. Dla takiego artysty miłość to niesłyszana świadomość strasznej jakiejś głębi, przecucie jakiegoś otchłannego dna w duszy, na którym życie tysiąca generacji się przelewa, tysiące wieków ich mąk i udręczeń, ich szłał rozrodczy i żądza bytu.  
*Na drogach duszy* (1900), 27.
- 3.38 РЕМБОВСКИЙ. (Смущенно.) Конечно, конечно... вы вполне свободны. ЛОНЦКИЙ. По отношению к вам—да! По отношению к детям—нет, они невиноваты, что появились на свет, они не просили о жизни...  
*Zolotoe runo*  
*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, t. IV, *Dramy* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1910), 48.
- РЕМБОВСКИ (bardzo zmieszany). Oczywiście, oczywiście... nie jesteś pan niewolnikiem.  
ŁАЌКИ. W stosunku do pana –nie! wobec dzieci, kochany panie – one niewinne, że na świat przyszły – nie prosiły o życie...  
*Złote runo (Taniec miłości i śmierci)*; Lwów: Księgarnia Polska, 1901, 44.
- 3.47 RUSZCZYC: Niech Bóg zachowa. Tylko się lękam, bo tak się wszystko mści na świecie, tak strasznie, bezlitośnie się mści, a koła przeznaczenia miażdżą ludzi, jak ten święty wóz indyjski... To piekielna rzecz – przeznaczenie...  
*Złote runo* (1901), 15.
- 3.65  
BRONKA.  
Tak, o Ewie. Co się pan mój tak zachmurzył?  
TADEUSZ.  
Nie, tylko mi się przypomniało, że już w pierwszych tygodniach po ślubie chciałaś się przed nią pochwalić naszym szczęściem, a ja niczego nie pragnę, tylko żyć z tobą, jedynie z tobą, bo szczęście w miłości jest niezmiernie delikatne i może być zakłócone lada drobnostką.  
BRONKA (lękliwie).  
Jaką?

TADEUSZ.

Najczęściej atmosferą obcego człowieka. A ty wiesz, że Ewa bardzo się zmieniła...

*Śnieg* (Warszawa: Stefan Demby, 1903), 30.

3.67

BRONKA.

[...] Pan wie o tem, że mnie kochał. Pan wie również, że taką miłość śnieg przypuszyć może, ale na to, by ją ogrzać, silniejszą i namiętniejszą jeszcze uczynić.

*Śnieg* (1903), 51.

3.68

KAZIMIERZ. (rozdrażniony.)

Otóż właśnie będę o tym mówił. Tadeusz odleci od ciebie z Ewą.

BRONKA.

Z Ewą? Z Ewą? Kto to jest Ewa? Czym ona jest!

KAZIMIERZ.

Kto to jest, czym to jest? Moim snem, twoją bolesną zmorą. [...] Dla ciebie jest Ewa lękiem i przerażeniem, bo czujesz, że cię w czarną otchłań rozpacz prowadzi, czujesz, że ci porywa Tadeusza, dla którego jest piekielnym pragnieniem jakiejś wielkiej mocy i potęgi, jest niepokojącą tęsknotą, która go zawsze rwała wzwyż – wzwyż ku niebu.

*Śnieg* (1903), 103.

3.83 Król.

[...] Jam silniejszy teraz, bo twoja miłość płonie mi światłem jaśniejszym, jak wszystkie słońca [...].

Sonka.

[...] Och te sny czarowne, te sny najkosztowniejsze: gdy dusza twa skrzydła rozpostrze od jednego krańca niebo do drugiego, a ja na nich płynę z rękoma w krzyż w niezemskim zachwycie i upojeniu, wzbijam się z tobą ponad szczyty ziemi, ponad obłoki i płynę i płynę i oczy wlepiam w przeciwległe brzegi i chłonę piękno tego innego, wiekuistego Bytu. Jak potężny duch twój! A gdy tak wybijam się wraz z tobą wyżej i wyżej, tak, że mogłabym, zda się, gwiazdy z nieba zgarniać i rzucać je w ciemności, by w nich się w słońce jedno stopiły, wtedy czuję takie rozkosze wniebowzięcia i takie niezemskie wyzwolenie i tak ogarniam wszystkie światy i słońca, że wobec tego to królestwo nasze wydaje mi się tak małym, tak nikłym, że ogromem przy niem jest ten pyłek złota, jakim ma szata obsypana... Królu, królu – czyż nie potężniejsze takie panowanie ponad ziemią – ponad światami?

...  
...

Król.

Ja mu [ludu] słońce pokażę, ja go mem światłem przepoję, ja dlań się stanę pochodnią, która go zawiedzie tam, dokąd my tylko drogę znamy.

*Odwieczna baśń* (Lwów: Księgarnia H. Altenberga, 1906), 55-56.

3.96

HANKA (rozdrażniona).

Powodu do gniewu nie mam, ale nie lubię, by mi do duszy zagładano. [...]

*Gody życia* (Warszawa: Nakładem Kasy Przeworności i Pomocy Warszawskich Pomocników Księgarnich, 1911), 25.

3.97

STEFA (lekkko).

Ależ pani—jestem tylko zazdrosną trochę o jego pracę. [...]

HANKA

Będzie się pani musiała do tego przyzwyczaić. (żartem) Mówiono mi, że los żon artystów nie do pozazdroszczenia...

*Gody życia* (1911), 30.

3.98

ZOFIA

O mężu I dziecku mówisz?

HANKA (milczy).

ZOFIA (z szyderstwem gorzkim)

Nie umiałaś się urządzić, moja droga – poco było dziecko tracić? [...]  
Chodzi o to przedewszystkiem, by cię ludzie szanowali, a szanują cię, dopóki domu męża nie opuścisz, by ci prawo dziecka nie mogło odebrać – a pozatem mogłaś była robić, co ci się podobało.

HANKA.

Zośko, co ty mówisz? Nie poznaję cię.

ZOFIA (twardo).

Lepsze to, jak dziecko stracić, dla matki lepsze.

HANKA.

To straszne!

*Gody życia* (1911), 38-39.

3.99

WACŁAW.

[...] Gdym cię pokochał I wyrwał z dawnego życia, to z tem  
przeświadczeniem, że cię biorę samą tylko z twoją miłością ku mnie – bez  
wszelakiej przeszłości – bez... bez...

HANKA

Powiedz wreszcie.

WACŁAW (wybucha).

Bez wspomień o mężu I dziecku!

HANKA.

Mąż dla mnie przestał dawno istnieć... Więc nie unosź się.

*Gody życia* (1911), 53.

#### Chapter IV:

- 4.2 Proces twórczy u *artysty-aktora* wyobrażam sobie tak: aktor powinien przede wszystkim przeczytać sobie cały dramat i czytać go nie raz, nie dwa, ale tak długo dopóki nie ogarnie całości do tego stopnia, że to, co dotychczas było martwą literą, stanie się dla niego naoczną wizją, że widzi wokół siebie postaci, że z całą intensywnością uświadczenia sobie choćby najsłabszy szczegół dramatu. A więc poniekąd staje się on wszystkimi razem. Jak we wizji, rozgrywa się przed jego oczyma scena za sceną. Teraz dopiero bierze do ręki własną swą rolę. Wiele trudu już teraz mieć nie będzie. Staje się centrum całego dramatu, wchodzi w stosunek do spółgrających, przeistacza się, staje się tym, kogo grać ma, a wtedy będzie się tak śmiał i tak płakał, jak bohater, którego przedstawia, i tak będzie szarpał się, cierpiał i konał, jak on, i to, zaręczam, bez studjów anatomicznych, jeżeli jakakolwiek sztuka, to sztuka aktorska jest par excellence wizjonerską. Być aktorem-artystą znaczy posiadać możność miewania wizji. „„

*O dramacie i scenie*, 14-15.

- 4.13 Metoda, jaką się na razie posługujemy, to oddawanie i odtwarzanie uczuć, myśli, wrażeń, snów, wizji, b e z p o ś r e d n i o jak się w duszy przejawiają, bez logicznych związków, we wszystkich ich gwałtownych przeskokach i skojarzeniach.

*Na drogach duszy* (1900), 24.

- 4.18 See previous citation, 2.87

Милостивая государыня,

Я написал новую пьесу, чрезвычайно жизненную, с весьма одушевленным и драматическим развитием действия. Главная роль—женщины, большого внутреннего напряжения и силы, превосходно подойдет для Вас.

Поэтому я хотел бы узнать, не пожелали бы Вы приобрести мою драму в собственность в рукописи, а тем самым Вы могли бы поставить ее на сцене на правах оригинала.

Хотел бы снестись с Вами по этому вопросу непосредственно, без переводчика, и прошу Вас по возможности ответить мне поскорее.

С глубоким уважением  
Станислав Пшибышевский

12/VII 1909

Адрес мой: Альтйох у Кохельского озера (Бавария. via Мюнхен)

D'iakonov, "V. F. Komissarzhevskaja i simbolisty," (1940), 118.

Szanowna Pani,

Napisałem nowy dramat, na wskroś życiowy, z bardzo ożywioną i dramatyczną akcją. Główna rola kobieca o wielkim napięciu i sile doskonale dla Pani się nadaje.

Otóż zapytuję się Pani, czyżby Pani nie zechciała tego dramatu kupić na własność w manuskrypcie, a więc grałaby go Pani jako oryginał.

Chciałbym się zatem w tej sprawie wprost z Panią, a nie za pośrednictwem tłumacza porozumieć i proszę Panią o możliwie szybką odpowiedź.

Z głębokim szacunkiem  
Stanisław Przybyszewski

12. VII, 1909.

Adres mój: Altjoch bei Kochel am See  
(Bauern via München)

Agapkina, "Rosyjskie kontakty Przybyszewskiego" (1982), 200-201.

- 4.70 Nowy dramat polega na walce indywiduum ze sobą samym, t. j. z kategorjami psychicznymi, które w stosunku do najgłębiej ukrytych źródeł indywidualnych. Stanowiących rdzeń jaźni w obrębie samego indywiduum, tak się mają do niego, jak zewnątrzność do wewnątrzności; pole walki jest tu zmienione, mamy do czynienia, z jedną rozłamaną, rozbolełą duszą ludzką. Dramat staje się dramatem uczuć i przeczuc, wyrzutów sumienia, szamotania się z sobą samym, dramatem niepokoju, lęku i strachu.  
*O dramacie i scenie* (1905) 8-9.

- 4.106 Tak się dusza porodziła,  
A siła wiecznych przemian i rozrodów ukochała duszę. Siła ją karmnym mlekiem swej piersi, była dla niej tętnicą, przez którą krew wszechbytu silną falą się przelewała, tysiącem spójni przywiązała ją do wszechłona matczynego, była dla duszy ogniskiem soczewnym...  
*Requiem Aeternam*  
(Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1966), 39.

Так произошло рождение души.  
А стихия вечных превращений и вечных размножений возлюбила душу.  
На груди своей она дала укрепиться душе; она была для души аортой, проводившей ей жизненную кровь из сердца всеобщего бытия; она была для нее пуповиной, связующей ее со всеобщей маткой; она была для души фокусом собирательного стекла....  
*Requiem Aeternam, PSS, t. VII, 69.*

## Chapter V:

- 5.82 Wokół Twej głowy wieniec zwiędłych kwiatów gdyby korona czarnych słońc,  
a Twe oblicze płonie żalobą zastygłych gwiazd.  
U nóg twych kona burza mego żywota, gasnącą falą oblewa Twe stoóy chory płód mej duszy—  
Szaremi skrzydły okraża Cię obłęd mych ciemnych przeznaczeń – kolebko Ty moja, grobie Ty mój!  
“Tęsknota,” *Poezye Prozą* (Warszawa: Jan Fiszer, 1902), 21.
- 5.91 —Verstehen alle Russen so schön zu höhnen?  
Sie [Isa] sah ihn mit großen, herzlichen Augen.  
—Nein, Fräulein, ich bin kein Russe. Ich bin nur an der russischen Grenze geboren. Aber durch die enge Berührung mit den Slaven, die katholische Erziehung und dergleichen schöne Dinge bekommt man vielleicht Etwas in seinen Charakter, das die Deutschen sonst nicht haben. Dann—ja, wissen Sie, man bekommt dort so interessante Eindrücke...  
Falk fing an, mit einer Wärme von seinem Geburtsort zu sprechen, die seltsam von dem leise höhrenden Zug abstach, den er in seiner Stimme hatte.

—Prauchtvolle Menschen! Auf ein Hundert können kaum zweie lesen, weil sie Polen sind und in der Schule gezwungen werden, dem süßen Wohlklang einer fremden Sprache zu lauschen.

Ja, man wolle durchaus die polnischen Kinder zu ehrsamem deutschen Bürgern erziehen, und Alles, was ehrsam sei, müsse sich bekanntlich der deutschen Sprache bedienen. Man prügeln den Kindern mit einer echt preußischen Energie die wonnesame deutsche Sprache bei und die Fortschritte seien auch ganz eklatant.

*Werke, Band III. Homo sapiens, Über Bord, (1898), 25-26.*

- 5.96 —Was ich will? Was Ich will? [sic] Leben will ich haben, das Leben mit seinen furchtbaren Untiefen, mit seinen schauerlichen Abgründen... Die Kunst ist für mich der tiefste Instinkt des Lebens, der heilige Weg zur Zukunft, zur Ewigkeit des Lebens, und deswegen will ich große zeugende Gedanken haben, die eine neue Zuchwahl vorbereiten, einer neuen Welt, einer neuen Weltanschauung zur Geburt verhelfen... Die Kunst soll mir nicht im Rhythmus, im Fluß, im Gesang bestehen, sie soll mir der Wille werden, der neue Welten, neue Menschen aus dem Nichts ruft...

*Werke, Band III. Homo sapiens, Über Bord, (1898), 30-31.*

- 5.97 —Diese ganze Stimmungsmalerei sei so flach, so nichtssagend... [...] Wären es noch Stimmungen, die auch nur ein Quentchen von dem Furchtbaren, Rätselhaften, an dem der Mensch übervoll sei, offenbarten; wären es Stimmungen, die doch wenigstens, so belanglos sie auch sonst sein mögen, etwas von dem nackten Seelenleben, ja — etwas von der unbekanntenen Seele geben...

*Werke, Band III. Homo sapiens, Über Bord, (1898), 29.*

- 5.182 Zasadniczą podstawą całej tak zwanej »nowej« sztuki, wszystkich prądów i kierunków w sztuce, jest zatem pojęcie duszy, jako potęgi osobistej, duszy kroczącej od jednej wieczności do drugiej, duszy, która raz poraz nieznaną potęgą zmuszona idzie na ziemię, wraca z powrotem na łono wieczności, i znowu się ucieleśnia, bogatsza, silniejsza, więcej uświadomiona niż pierwszym razem, i tak bez końca, aż wreszcie dochodzi do świadomości całej swej potęgi, przenika najtajniejsze rzeczy, obejmuje najodleglejsze i najskrytsze związki, t. j. staje się geniuszem, t. j. odsłania się w swoim absolutnie, w całym przepychu swej »nagości«.

*Na drogach duszy (1900), 18.*

Tak pojęta sztuka staje się najwyższą religią, a kapłanem jej jest artysta. Jest on osobisty tylko wewnętrzną potęgą, z jaką stany duszy odtwarza, poza tem jest komiczną, metafizyczną siłą, przez jaką się absolut i wieczność przejawia.

Był on pierwszym prorokiem, który wszelką przyszłość odsłaniał, a tłumaczył runy zapleśniałej przeszłości, był magiem, co przenikał najgłębsze tajemnice, obejmował tajne związki wszechświatów, przeczuwał i odkrywał ich wzajemne na siebie działanie, a z wiedzy tej tworzył sobie moc, co gwiazdy w niebie w ich biegu zastanawiała, był wielkim mędrcom, który wiedział najtajniejsze przyczyny i tworzył nowe, nigdy nie przeczuwane syntezę: artysta ten, to »ipse philosophus, Daemon, Deus et omnia«.

*Na drogach duszy* (1900), 16.

- 5.197 Nedorzecznnością jest zarzucać artyście »mglistą mistycyzność«. Sztuka w naszym pojęciu jest metafizyczną, tworzy nowe syntezy, dociera jądra wszechrzeczy, wnika we wszystkie tajnie i głębie...

*Na drogach duszy* (1900), 17.

- 5.198 See first text, 5.182.

- 5.200 Ale rzadko, rzadko roztwiera się ta głębia przed oczyma człowieka; ślizgamy się dalej po cienkiej skorupce lodu, pod którym spoczywa mistyczne *mare tenebrarum* i niezważamy na te jakieś dalekie a niepojęte wspomnienia i przecucia, co gdyby cienie zamorskich cyprysów po szklistej powierzchni naszej świadomości się przesuną.

*Na drogach duszy* (1900), 19.

- 5.217 Abseits von diesem »profanum vulgus« gehen die Ausgestoßenen, die heiligen Agni-Priester, die der Seele opfern, die Wenigen, in denen die Tradition vergangener Zeiten von der Heiligkeit des Denkens und der Kunst stärker als je lebendig ist, die Wenigen, die nur in Momenten des intensivsten Seelenaufschwunges, des schmerzhaftesten Durchbruchs der fremden Seele schaffen: die neuen Propheten, welche die ewige Wiederkunft der Seele verkünden, die gnadenreichen Mystiker, welche die Welt nicht durch das Auge und das Ohr, sondern durch das geheimnisvolle Organ der Seele perzipieren, das synthetisierende Organ, das nur das Ewige und Unvergängliche sieht und das Wesen der Dinge erfaßt.

*Werke, Band VI. "Auf der Wegen der Seele"* (1897), 22.

## Chapter VI:

- 6.14 Artysta nie jest sługą ani kierownikiem, nie należy ani do narodu, ani do świata, niekielznany żadnym prawem, nieograniczany żadną siłą ludzką.

*Na drogach duszy* (1900), 16.

Artysta, który nagina się do wymagań poszczególnego społeczeństwa, pochlebia mu, podaje mu przeżuty i lekki do strawienia obrok – (zapomniałem, że mówię o artyście, zacząłem mówić o pokornym wole roboczym).

*Na drogach duszy* (1900), 16-17.

6.52 See 4.13.

6.54 Widz patrzy na wytworny pokój jadalny, z którego poprzez wielkie, wysokie okna i przez oszkloną, zimową oranżeryję widać nagle, szronem okryte drzewa ogrodu i płaty gęste śniegu. W kącie wielki, staroświecki komin, obok polana sosnowe, które Kazimierz dorzuca nerwowym ruchem raz po raz do ognia. Bronka stoi przy oknie, niespokojnie zapatrzona w śnieżycę.

*Śnieg* (Warszawa: Stefan Demby, 1903), 7.

6.61

BRONKA.

A wiesz ty, dlaczego mnie Tadeusz opuścił?

KAZIMIERZ.

Wiem.

BRONKA.

I ja też wiem. Wszak tak, Kaziu, nieprawdaż?

KAZIMIERZ.

Co?

BRONKA.

Ja byłem śniegiem, takim dobrym białym śniegiem, co tuli biedną ziemię, rozgrzewa ją, czy nie tak, Kaziu?

KAZIMIERZ. (*zamyślony*).

Tak... A może byłaś dobrą, kojącą ręką, co przytuliła jakiegoś zranionego ptaka... tak mu było dobrze przy tobie, dopóki był chory, a teraz mu skrzydła nowym pierzem porosły,--mięśnie wzmocniały I gotuje się do lotu... gotować się nie potrzebuje, bo już strzepnął swoje skrzydła...

BRONKA.

Nie mów, nie mów tego!

KAZIMIERZ.

Otóż właśnie będę o tym mówił. Tadeusz odleci od ciebie z Ewą.

BRONKA.

Z Ewą? Z Ewą? Kto to jest Ewa? Czym ona jest!

KAZIMIERZ.

Kto to jest, czym ona jest? Moim snem, twoją bolesną zmorą, a piekielnym pragnieniem Tadeusza. Tym, otóż tym jest Ewa (*uśmiecha się*).

*Śnieg*, IV:v, 102-103.

6.71

KAZIMIERZ.

[...] Dosyć tych zgarbionych wiedźm, co się rozbijają na łysej górze nauki, wiedzy i pracy społecznej.

*Śnieg*, I: i, 9.

6.73

KAZIMIERZ.

[...] Coraz częściej śnia mi się sentymentalne idylle o jakimś zakątku, gdziebym przy ukochanej, pieszczonej i pieszczącej kobiecie mógł swobodnie pracować. Znużyła, znudziła mnie ta wieczna włóczęga po całym świecie. Zresztą to wszystko blaga. Wrażenie artystyczne, muzea, teatr, cyrk, Włochy, Paryż—to blaga, blaga, blaga, Tylko co raz większa nuda. Wszędzie jedno i to samo, i tak człowiek wlecze się z kąta w kąt z tą samą ustawiczną nudą...

*Śnieg*, I: i, 8-9.

6.79

Są ludzie, przed których oczyma przesuwa się to wszystko, co dusza ich przeżyła, są ludzie, w których daleko potężniej absolutna dusza się uświadamia, aniżeli w innych, ludzie, którzy w niezmiernym pogłębieniu widzą czarowne obrazy i raje nie z tego świata, słyszą melodye i dźwięki, o jakich ludykie ucho nie śniło, roztopy barw, jakich zwykle oko dostrzedz nie może.

Ten człowiek to twórca.

*Na drogach duszy (1900)*, 19.

**APPENDIX II**  
**KNOWN PRODUCTIONS**  
**OF PRZYBYSZEWSKI'S WORKS in RUSSIA, 1901-1912<sup>1</sup>**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>PRODUCTION CITY</b>	<b>COMPANY or ENTREPREUR/THEATRE</b>
<b>1901</b>		
10, 11 Oct	<i>Zolotoe runo</i> <sup>2</sup>	St. Petersburg E. A. Shabel'skaia; Peterburgskii Teatr
<b>1902</b>		
~15 Mar	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	St. Petersburg Boleslaw Boleslawski
17 Sep	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Khar'kov VFK <sup>3</sup> on tour
6 Oct	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Ekaterinoslav VFK on tour
24 Oct	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Kherson VEM; Company of Russian Dramatic Artists
25 Nov	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Odessa VFK on tour
<b>1903</b>		
31 Jan	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	St. Petersburg Boleslaw Boleslawski; w/ SP Imperial School of Dramatic Art; SP in attendance
1 Feb	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	St. Petersburg Boleslaw Boleslawski; w/ SP
2 Feb	<i>Dlia schast'ia</i>	St. Petersburg Boleslaw Boleslawski; w/ SP
3 Feb	<i>Sneg</i>	St. Petersburg Boleslaw Boleslawski; w/ SP
7 Feb	<i>Mat'</i>	St. Petersburg Boleslaw Boleslawski; w/ SP
8 Feb	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Khar'kov unidentified Polish company
16 Feb	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Tiflis VFK on tour

<sup>1</sup> Some performance dates have been approximated from dates of reviews or reports of tentative repertoire appearing in issues of *Teatr i iskusstvo*. Dates of Komissarzhevskaja's performances have previously appeared in Rybakova (1994); Meierkhol'd's performances appear in Zvenigorodskaia (2004). Because critics were unlikely to review successive performances of a production by a particular company, the actual number of performances of Przybyszewski's dramas is probably much greater than indicated here.

<sup>2</sup> *Zolotoe runo*- *The Golden Fleece*; *Sneg*- *Snow*; *Mat'*- *Mother*; *Dlia schast'ia/Radi schast'ia* – *For Happiness*; *Obruchenie*- *The Betrothal*; *Vechnaia skazka* – *The Eternal Tale*; *Gosti*- *The Visitors*; *Pir zhizni*- *Life's Banquet*

<sup>3</sup> VFK- Vera Komissarzhevskaja; VEM- Vsevolod Meierkhol'd; SP- Stanisław Przybyszewski

23 May	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Sevastopol'	VEM; Company of Russian Dramatic Artists
14 Dec	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Baku	VFK on tour
19 Dec	<i>Sneg</i>	Kherson	VEM; Assoc. of New Drama
21 Dec	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Rostov	VFK on tour
<b>1904</b>			
2 Jan	<i>Sneg</i>	Kherson	VEM; Assoc. of New Drama Teatr Obshchestva Gramotnosti; benefit for A. A. Paskhalova
19, 22 Jan	<i>Sneg</i>	Kiev	A. Paskhalova
20, 24 Jan	<i>Sneg</i>	Kiev	Teatr Solovtsov; w/ SP Internatsional'nyi Teatr; benefit for A. I. Kvartalova
22 Jan	<i>Sneg</i>	Moscow	VEM; Assoc. of New Drama
5 Feb	<i>Sneg</i>	Kherson	Sibiriakov
7 Feb	<i>Sneg</i> (matinee)	Odessa	Sibiriakov
7 Feb	<i>Sneg</i> , Act III, (eve)	Odessa	Sibiriakov
8 Feb	<i>Sneg</i> , Act III, (eve)	Odessa	Sibiriakov
16 Feb	<i>Sneg</i>	Nikolaev	VEM; Assoc. of New Drama
21 Feb	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Moscow	VFK on tour; Ermitazh Teatr
23 Feb	<i>Sneg</i>	Moscow	VFK on tour; Ermitazh Teatr
25 Feb	<i>Sneg</i> (canc.- illness)	Moscow	VFK on tour Iurenev; Sibiriakov's company on tour
25 Feb	<i>Sneg</i>	Kishinev	VFK on tour
12 Mar	<i>Sneg</i>	Khar'kov	VFK on tour
19 Mar	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Kiev	VFK on tour
7 Apr	<i>Sneg</i>	Odessa	VFK on tour P. Vul'f; unknown company; Rizhskii Russkii Gorodskoi Teatr
11 Apr	<i>Sneg</i>	Riga	VFK on tour
1 May	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Saratov	VFK on tour
3 May	<i>Sneg</i>	Saratov	VFK on tour
10 May	<i>Sneg</i>	Kazan'	VFK on tour M. F. Andreeva; unknown company
Late Jul/mid Aug	<i>Sneg</i>	Staraia Russa	VEM; Assoc. of New Drama
7 Aug	<i>Sneg</i>	Penza	VEM; Assoc. of New Drama
11 Aug	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Penza	VEM; Assoc. of New Drama
2 Oct	<i>Sneg</i>	Tiflis	VEM; Assoc. of New Drama
27 Oct	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Odessa	Iureneva; SP lecture tour

mid-Oct/early Nov	<i>Sneg</i>	Simbirsk	K. E. Oligin i A. L. Miroljubov's Enterprise <sup>4</sup> Dramaticheskii Teatr; benefit for Smoliakov
5 Nov	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Khar'kov	
15/21 Dec	<i>Sneg</i>	Kishinev	SP on tour

## 1905

10 Feb	<i>Sneg</i>	Nizhnii Novgorod	Gorodskoi Nikolaevskii Teatr
13 Feb	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Tiflis	VEM; Assoc. of New Drama Dir. A. I. Tunkov's drama company <sup>5</sup> ; Teatr Ia. Ia.
15 Feb	<i>Gosti</i>	Nikolaev	Sheffer P. Vul'f; Odessa drama company under the direction of A. I. Dolinov, artist of the Imperial Theatres; Novyi Teatr Ochkina
22, 26 Feb	<i>Sneg</i>	Saratov	Iureneva; Novyi Teatr L. B. Iavorskoi
13 (?) Mar	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	St. Petersburg	VEM; Assoc. of New Drama
31 Mar	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Nikolaev	"Assoc. of Russian Dramatic Artists"; <sup>6</sup> Semchenko; "municipal club"
Apr (?)	<i>Sneg</i>	Simferopol'	Tinskii on tour
mid-Apr/mid-Aug	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Pskov	VEM; Assoc. of New Drama
27 Apr	<i>Sneg</i>	Nikolaev	Unnamed summer theatre
22 May	<i>Dlia schast'ia</i>	Kuokkala	
late May/early Jun	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Kiev	Pawlikowski on tour
Jun/Aug	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Simferopol'	municipal summer theatre
21 Sep	(2x) <i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Rostov	Iureneva; Rostovskii Teatr Tinskii; N. I. Sobol'shchikov- Samarin's drama company;
24 Sep	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Saratov	Gorodskoi Teatr
27 Sep	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Rostov	Iureneva; Rostovskii Teatr

<sup>4</sup> "antepriza"

<sup>5</sup> The generic "truppa dramaticheskikh artistov" and "dramaticheskaiia truppa" have been translated as "drama company."

<sup>6</sup> "Tovarishchestvo russkikh dramaticheskikh artistov"

Sep/Oct	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Kazan'	N. I. Sobol'shchikov-Samarin's company
Sep 1905/May 1906	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Narva	M. N. Preobrazhenskaia; G. N. Grishin's company
Oct 1905/Mar 1906	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Penza	K. E. Oligin i A. L. Miroljubov's drama company S. Z. Kovaleva's company;
Dec 1905/Jan 1906	<i>Sneg</i>	Tiumen'	Tob. Gub. Teatr A I. Tekut'eva
<b>1906</b>			
Jan 1906	<i>Sneg</i>	Poltava	G. P. Rostov's drama company
Jan/Apr 1906	<i>Radi schast'ia</i> <i>Dlia schast'ia</i>	St. Petersburg	Tinskii; Teatr Nemeti
11 Jan (prem) 13, 17, 24, 26, 31	(AR)	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
Jan	<i>Dlia schast'ia</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
10 Feb	<i>Dlia schast'ia</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr "Novaia Drama"; A. A. Paskhalova; Teatr Solovtsov
Mar/Apr 25 Apr	<i>Obruchenie</i> <i>Dlia schast'ia</i>	Kiev Moscow	Novyi Teatr
20 Apr/14 May	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Ekaterinodar	N. I. Sobol'shchikov-Samarin's company g-zha Arnol'di, g. Narskii; unidentified company
May	<i>Dlia schast'ia</i> <i>Zolotoe runo</i> ;	Gomel'	
May/June (tent.)	<i>Radi schast'ia</i> <i>Sneg</i> ; <i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Ufa	P. P. Struiskii's company
May/June (tent.)	<i>Sneg</i>	Izmail	Borisova's company
11 Jul	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Smolensk	Kvartalova, A. V. Rudnitskii; Teatr Lopatinskogo Sada
8 Aug	<i>Mat'</i>	Smolensk	Kvartalova, A. V. Rudnitskii; Teatr Lopatinskogo Sada
31 Aug	<i>Dlia schast'ia</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr Iureneva; Duvan-Tortsov's company; Teatr Solovtsov
2 Sep	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Kiev	Novyi Teatr
6 Sep	<i>Dlia schast'ia</i>	Moscow	
Sep-Oct 1906/Jan 1907	<i>Sneg</i>	Verkhneudinsk	M. A. Makarov and O. S. Lunina-Vekshchina's company

Sep-Oct/4 Mar 1907	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Minsk	unidentified company; Lit.- artisticheskoe obshchestvo Gorodskoi Teatr; Kazanskii's Enterprise
Oct/Dec	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Zhitomir	
early Oct	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Nizhnii Novgorod	Kvartalova, A. V. Rudnitskii
2 Oct	<i>Dlia schast'ia</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>		
3 Oct (prem.)	(RR-B)	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
5, 7, 12, 14 Oct	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
19, 27 Oct	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
30 Oct	<i>Dlia schast'ia</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
3 Nov	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
19 Nov	<i>Dlia schast'ia</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>		Komissarzhevskaiia; Dram.
4 Dec (prem.)	(Tropovskii)	St. Petersburg	Teatr
6, 10, 12, 14 Dec	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK
10, 14 Dec	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
21 Dec	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
22, 26, 29 Dec	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK
<b>1907</b>			
1, 7, 12, Jan	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK
24 Jan	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
28, 31 Jan	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK
			Iureneva; benefit Teatr
31 Jan	<i>Sneg</i>	Kiev	Solovtsov
5 Feb	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK
10 Feb	<i>Dlia schast'ia</i>	Moscow	Novyi Teatr
13 Feb	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK
15 Feb	<i>Sneg</i>	Kiev	Iureneva; Teatr Solovtsov
			Rizhskii Russ. Gor. Teatr; K.
19 Feb	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	Riga	N. Nezlobin, mgr.
3 Mar	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK
			"Cooperative Association of Dramatic Artists"; summer
late Apr/June	<i>Sneg</i>	Mogilev-Podol'skii theatre	
			"Dram. Assoc."; K. F.
6 May/26 Aug	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Belev	Baianov, mgr.

14 May/3 Sep	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Barnaul	Baroness A. N. Rozen's Enterprise
Jun/mid-Aug	<i>Sneg</i>	Luga	Sovremennyi Teatr
25 Sep 1907/1908 (tent.)	<i>Gosti</i>	Penza	P. O. Zarchnyi's Enterprise
1, 5 Sep (season prem.)	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	Odessa	V. N. Nikulin's Enterprise; Gorodskoi Teatr
3, 4, 6, 9 Sep	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	Moscow	VFK on tour; Ermitazh Teatr
26 Sep	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Orel'	Gorodskoi Teatr unidentified company;
15 Sep/1 Nov	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Saratov	Sobol'shchikov?
26 Sep/Jan 1908	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Tambov	unidentified company
Oct/Jan 1908	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	Kishinev	A. P. Smirnov's company
27 Oct	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK
1, 7, 18 Nov	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK
23 Nov	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK
17 Dec	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK
30 Dec	<i>Sneg</i>	Smolensk	A. V. Rodzevich's drama company
<b>1908</b>			
(incomplete)			
2 Jan	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK
22 Jan (4 Feb, NS)	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	Warsaw	VFK on tour
28 Jan (10 Feb, NS)	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	Vil'no	VFK on tour
19 Sep	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Khar'kov	Khar'kovskii Goroskoi Teatr
21 Sep	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	Khar'kov	Khar'kovskii Gorodskoi Teatr
23 Sep	<i>Zolotoe runo</i>	Khar'kov	Khar'kovskii Gorodskoi Teatr
17 Oct	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Khar'kov	Khar'kovskii Gorodskoi Teatr
19 Oct ( <i>Mat.</i> )	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	Khar'kov	Khar'kovskii Gorodskoi Teatr
21 Oct	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Khar'kov	Khar'kovskii Gorodskoi Teatr
4 Nov	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Khar'kov	Khar'kovskii Gorodskoi Teatr
<b>1909</b>			
3 Jan	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	St. Petersburg	VFK D. I. Basmanov's Drama Company
13 Jan	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	Poltava	

Mar/Apr	<i>Gosti</i>	St. Petersburg	M. A. Sukennikov's Chamber Productions; <sup>7</sup> Ekaterinskii Teatr; Zonov (dir.?) Iureneva on tour; Teatr
9 Mar	<i>Sneg</i>	Kiev	Begron'e
1 Aug	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Tomsk	Teatr Bouffe
25, 30 Sep	<i>Mat'</i>	Odessa	Gorodskoi Teatr; M. F. Bagrov, mgr.
Oct/early Jan 1910	<i>Radi schast'ia</i> <i>Pir zhizni</i>	Nikolaev	Iureneva; V. I. Nikulin's company
1 Nov (prem.)	(Pitoev)	Odessa	VFK on tour
10, 15 Nov	<i>Pir zhizni</i>	Khar'kov	VFK on tour
21 Nov	<i>Pir zhizni</i>	Poltava	VFK on tour
27 Nov	<i>Pir zhizni</i>	Ekaterinoslav	VFK on tour
2 Dec	<i>Pir zhizni</i>	Rostov	VFK on tour
12 Dec	<i>Pir zhizni</i>	Tiflis	VFK on tour
30 Dec	<i>Pir zhizni</i>	Baku	VFK on tour
<b>1910</b>			
13 Jan	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	Poltava	D. I. Basmanov's Drama Company; Gorodskoi Teatr
27 Jan (canceled)	<i>Pir zhizni</i>	Tashkent	VFK on tour
15 Nov	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Nizhnii Novgorod	benefit for the Society of the Relief of Students of the M. M. Milov Real School
18 Nov	<i>Mat'</i> (Efros)	Nizhnii Novgorod	Benefit for D. S. Orskii; Gorodskoi Teatr
9 Dec	<i>Vechnaia skazka</i>	Vologda	A. P. Viakhirev's Enterprise; benefit for Mariia Charskaia; Gorodskoi Teatr
20, 21, 22 Dec	<i>Pir zhizni</i>	St. Petersburg	Novyi Dram. Teatr im. V. F. Komissarzhevskoi Teatr "Komedii"; Tenishevskii zal; N.
28 Dec	<i>Sneg</i>	St. Petersburg	Evreinov, dir.
29 Dec	<i>Pir zhizni</i>	St. Petersburg	Novyi Dram. Teatr

<sup>7</sup> "Kamernye spektakli M. A. Sukennikova"

**1911**

7, 12, 16, 19 Jan	<i>Pir zhizni</i>	St. Petersburg	Novyi Dram. Teatr Teatr "Komediiia"; Polish troupe, J. Popławski, dir.
28 Jan	<i>Sneg</i>	St. Petersburg	Iureneva; Teatr Nezlobina
6 Sep	<i>Sneg</i>	Moscow	Iureneva; Teatr Nezlobina
~4 Oct	<i>Mat'</i>	Iaroslavl'	Teatr im. V. G. Volkova
23-26 Oct	<i>Sneg</i>	Moscow	Iureneva; Teatr Nezlobina
6 Nov	<i>Sneg</i>	Moscow	Iureneva; Teatr Nezlobina

**1912**

3., 4, 10 Jan (prem.)	<i>Pir zhizni</i> (Bravich)	Moscow	Malyi Teatr; w/ Bravich
29 Jan	<i>Sneg</i>	Moscow	Iureneva; Teatr Nezlobina
~22 Oct	<i>Pir zhizni</i>	St. Petersburg	Teatr "Komediiia"; Evreinov, dir.
~22 Nov	<i>Radi schast'ia</i>	Iaroslavl'	Teatr im. V. G. Volkova

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Re: The drama *Obety* and Przybyszewski's health
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