

## ALEKSEJ REMIZOV IN PETROGRAD 1919-1921: BARD OF THE PEOPLES' THEATER

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1919-1921, Remizov's last years in Russia, were a time of great excitement. In Petrograd, they saw the high water mark of post-revolutionary avant-garde culture. A sign of the times, Tatlin's model for the monument to the Third International, was put on public display in November 1920. However, these years also saw great chaos, hardship and suffering. The long obituary sections which were then a feature of journals like *Vestnik literatury* bear witness to the toll taken among the intelligentsia by the food and fuel shortages and the typhoid epidemics. Remizov as we see from his memoirs, felt the dark side of the times most acutely. Yet he was also caught up—and even played a prominent role—in the quest for new art forms adequate to the new age.

In these years the theater dominated cultural life. It was a rare intellectual who was not involved in it, whether as a writer, critic, director, actor, set designer or, most likely of all, a theorist. During a dramatic time of revolution there is in any case a closer relation than usual between reality and theater, an obvious symbol for which is the storming of the Winter Palace and its many reenactments. Several other factors conspired to give the theater its dominance in the arts then. For one, this tended to be the case throughout Europe at this time, but for Soviet Russians it was in the cards anyway since Lunačarskij, their very own Commissar of Enlightenment, was himself an aspiring playwright. Also, since one did not have to be literate to get a play's message, the theater was at that time a mainstay of agitation among the masses; itinerant troupes of actors were sent around the front and to the countryside to educate and entertain.

The age's obsession with the theater did not have to be officially fostered. The theater captivated, uplifted and sustained people through these difficult times. In Petrograd, the craze assumed extraordinary proportions. So theatricalized was every aspect of life then, indeed, that in 1921 in the environs of Petrograd, a group of theater people even embarked on a project of theatricalizing military maneuvers.<sup>1</sup> In these years Remizov was, by his own account, involved primarily in the theater.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in his work for the theater he was well implicated in official institutions. From May 1918 until June 1921 he worked on the successive Repertoire Commissions of the Theatrical Department of the Petrograd Commissariat of

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Enlightenment. Remizov's work for these commissions ate up all too much of his time in attending endless meetings, viewing plays, and so on, but he nevertheless found time to write plays as well (on which more later). He also wrote an intermittent column, usually entitled "Repertuar" for *Žizn' iskusstva* (the leading periodical of Petrograd intellectuals in those years), in which he reviewed plays and held forth on the subject of what should be produced in the contemporary theater.<sup>3</sup>

Remizov was even engaged in theater pedagogy. In October 1920 it was announced that the principal instructors for the famous "Kursy masterstva sceničeskix postanovok" would include Adrian Piotrovskij, Sergej Radlov, Vladimir Solov'ev—and Remizov.<sup>4</sup> The colleagues Remizov was to have at these courses, Piotrovskij, Radlov and Solov'ev, more or less comprised (when they weren't fighting each other) a very singular avant-garde school which stood at the center of excitement in the Petrograd theater world of those years.

This group essentially came out of Mejerxoľd's pre-revolutionary work in the theater. Indeed, the Kursy were founded by Mejerxoľd and then taken over by Radlov and Solov'ev.<sup>5</sup> Radlov had worked in Mejerxoľd's studio from 1913-1917. Solov'ev had been an associate of Mejerxoľd's there, and Piotrovskij had contributed to the studio's journal *Ljubov' k trem apel'sinam*. Remizov's pre-revolutionary work in the theater had, of course, also been closely associated with Mejerxoľd (consider, for instance, their joint translation of Rode's "Hauptmann and Nietzsche" of 1902, their collaboration in the Xerson Theater in 1903, and Mejerxoľd's work on the production of Remizov's "Besovskoe dejstvo" at the Kommissarževskij Theater in 1907).

Though less Bolshevik than Mejerxoľd, this group provided a sort of Petrograd counterpart—or even answer—to his experimental work in Moscow at this time. While their approach was generally closer to that of Mejerxoľd's pre-revolutionary period, in its own way their version of the post-revolutionary theater represented a much more curious, less predictable, more eccentric and idiosyncratic response to the challenge of the new times. Remizov, to that extent, as they say, "in step with his times," was in these years also involved primarily in the movement to find a new repertoire and a new theater adequate to the new age (though one can speculate on the extent to which he was coopted into the movement, joined it merely as a way of earning the wherewithall to survive, or was genuinely committed to the cause).

By 1919, Petrograd intellectuals were beginning to talk about a crisis in the theater and the need for a new repertoire which better met the needs of

the post-revolutionary age with its emphasis on mass culture and radical change. It will be recalled that at this time Mejerxoľd was calling in Moscow for a "theatrical October," for a new kind of theater which was revolutionary both in its political message and in its theatrical techniques. Something like this call was echoed by many in Petrograd, although often with less or no emphasis placed on the political aspects of the new theater sought. Primarily, discussion centered around the need for a "peoples' theater," a "*narodnyj teatr*."<sup>6</sup>

The movement for a "peoples' theater" was not a post-revolutionary phenomenon. It had been widespread in both Europe and Russia from early this century. Adherents lamented the fact that "the people" had been excluded from the modern theater, as had not been the case in earlier times, such as Classical Greece or Medieval Europe. The modern theater was attacked as, variously, too dull and museum-like, or too philistine and commercial, or too *recherché*, or too decadent. Critics often contended that its stage was too remote from the audience, and the actors too cut-off. For many, in consequence, the movement for a peoples' theater meant making the theater more accessible to the masses, both physically and financially; for some, this meant staging plays in the open air, à la the ancient Greeks, for others, providing a cheap or free theater for the lower classes, and for others again working up an entirely new repertoire for them.

The movement for a peoples' theater was, then, far from homogeneous. For simplicity's sake, I will identify two main, though not mutually exclusive trends within it to be found in post-revolutionary Petrograd. The first, which can be associated with Lunačarskij, Gorkij, and to some extent Blok, essentially took its cue from ideals which informed the French Revolution but were translated into a modern context in Romain Rolland's *Le théâtre du peuple*. This book, which was published in Russian as *Narodnyj teatr* in 1910, had an enormous influence on Russian thinking around the time of the Revolution. Rolland saw the theater primarily as a source of enlightenment which should "maintain and exalt the soul."<sup>7</sup> As he put it, "The world is more stupid than it is evil, and it is evil above all out of stupidity. The great task is to introduce more air, more light, more order into the chaos of the soul."<sup>8</sup> In the interpretations of people like Gorkij and Lunačarskij, this meant staging plays which would both educate mass audiences and instil in them a revolutionary consciousness. They favored plays of action which raised important social issues. Such plays should have inspiring heroes and characters which are clearly delineated as black and white so that their moral and political messages could readily be grasped. But they should not "preach."<sup>9</sup>

Gorkij and Lunačarskij agitated for contemporary revolutionary plays written to meet this need. They even instituted prizes to induce people to write them, but the results were disappointing. In practice, therefore, the main contribution of the Commissariat of Enlightenment to the Peoples' Theater movement was to promote and subsidize free productions of some of the great classics, and especially of the Greeks, Shakespeare, Schiller, and plays about the French Revolution. Lunačarskij also wrote several plays himself to meet the need. *De rigueur*, one or other of the state theaters would feel obliged to stage one of them from time to time, and especially around November 7 or when one of his visits from Moscow was imminent, but these were dull, heavy pieces, full of philosophical dialogue.

Adherents of this trend, then, believed that "the people" should have Culture and Light. By contrast, adherents of the second, which can be associated especially with Radlov, Solov'ev and Piotrovskij, that is with Remizov's colleagues in the "Kursy masterstva sceničeskix postanovok," started with the premise that of late the theater has become too dull and *literary*, not sufficiently *theatrical*. Rather than "enlighten," they sought to entertain, but to entertain with the idea of changing people. They called the theater they ran in Petrograd from January 1920 until January 1922 the Teatr narodnoj komedii and declared that their approach would "Get a full response from the broadest possible masses of the people."<sup>10</sup>

Like Mejerxoľd, Radlov and company rejected the theater of the nineteenth century with its increasing emphasis on realistic depictions of everyday life, psychological portraiture and dialogue. Instead, they wanted a theater of action, movement, and what Eisenstein has called "attractions." They looked to slapstick, diversions, and sheer physical feats, to verbal humor and the grotesque to entertain their audience and shock them out of any bourgeois complacency. They experimented with melding the theater with the circus, a practice then modish and borrowed by Mejerxoľd and others from Max Reinhardt in Germany, but Radlov took it to an extreme and hired for his theatrical troupe several of the best-known acrobats of the Petrograd circus.<sup>11</sup> They also saw the way forward for the peoples' theater in reviving that favorite of Mejerxoľd, Evreinov and others in pre-revolutionary times, the Commedia dell'arte with its masks, buffoonery, grotesque characterization and improvisation. Radlov maintained that the Commedia, as a theater of the marketplace which freely used the vernacular and in which so much was "improvized," could prove a particularly fruitful model for the theater of a post-bourgeois society.<sup>12</sup>

As followers of Mejerxoľd, these directors might be seen as part of that avant-garde movement known as "left art." But there was a crucial differ-

ence between their position and that of most representatives of "left art." As Radlov put it, "I am not a Futurist, not against the past."<sup>13</sup> This claim is something of an understatement for what was most quirky about this group of directors was not their posturing with circus folk and other such salvos at the traditional theater, but their firm belief that the way to serve the Communist future is to revive the spirit and theatrical forms of the past.

In their case, the past they looked to was far from just that of Italy in the seventeenth century when the Commedia dell'arte was in its heyday. They looked particularly to Hellenic Greece, and to the Renaissance as well, which they saw as a time of Hellenic revival. As Piotrovskij put it in a speech for the fourth anniversary of the Revolution in November, 1920: ". . . the new generation of the October Revolution will arise with its loud voice, unbounded ideas and a will which cannot be broken. This is a generation of giants who have crossed the chasms of timelessness to link up with their forebears in Greece and the Renaissance. The twenty-fifth of October has given Aeschylus and the Renaissance back to the world, it has given birth to a generation with Aeschylus' fiery soul."<sup>14</sup>

There are biographical reasons why Radlov and Piotrovskij looked to ancient Greece. Both sons of eminent classical scholars (Piotrovskij was the illegitimate son of F. F. Piotrovskij, Radlov the son of Ernest Radlov), and with training in the classics themselves, they sought to attain an ideal with which Zelinskij had inspired pre-revolutionary students and writers for at least two decades, that is the revival of Hellenic Greece so that it should become a "living force" in the modern day.<sup>15</sup> Thus they served two masters, classical scholarship and revolutionary culture, believing that both could be fused into one. They continued to produce fine, scholarly translations from the classics (indeed, Piotrovskij in his incarnation as "classical scholar" was even a member of the Petrograd OPOyaz), at the very time they were running theatrical groups for illiterate Red Army men.<sup>16</sup>

The case of Radlov and Piotrovskij is not really an example of what is commonly called "retrospectivism," that is the vogue in Russia of early this century for reviving cultural traditions of the past (seen in, for instance, Evreinov's Starinnyj teatr of the 1907/8 and 1911/12 seasons). They did not believe so much in reviving the old culture as was (that was more the ideal of Lunačarskij) but in reviving the spirit of certain great ages in the past. Radlov always said that the new culture could not and should not be as in ancient Greece, for the new technology and social order should facilitate something even better, but done in the same spirit.<sup>17</sup> Thus I prefer the term "radical retrospectivism" to describe their work. There is something

very futurist about it—indeed almost all cultural movements at this time were almost inevitably in some way futurist—but it defines the future by reference to the past. A similar problem exists of course in trying to define Remizov's work. Although so much of his published writing consists of reworkings of old Russian lore (folk tales, apocrypha, and so on) in which Remizov used archaic language and often appended an extensive list of sources he used, yet many like to call Remizov a “modernist” writer, and with reason. Indeed, in the initial post-revolutionary years he was to have a tremendous influence on experimental fiction; Remizov provided new modes of writing by rejecting the then conventional modes and reworking earlier ones.

Piotrovskij and Radlov are perhaps best known today for their role as directors of some of those famous revolutionary mass spectacles. On June 20, 1920, for instance, Radlov together with Xodasevič directed the spectacular “Blockade of Russia” in a natural amphitheater with a cast of 10,000 and an audience of 75,000. Then, on July 19 that year, N. Petrov, Radlov, Solov'ev and Piotrovskij directed “Toward a Worldwide Commune” on the steps of the old Stock Exchange, using a more modest cast of 4,000 and an audience of 45,000.<sup>18</sup> What is less well known is that even these propagandistic pieces were examples of their radical retrospectivism. Piotrovskij, Radlov, and many others at this time looked to the mass spectacle as an expression of the Greek ideal in part because of such surface similarities as the fact that they used an outdoor arena and a chorus, but largely because they believed the mass happenings broke away from the stultifying conventional theater and realized something which was more “democratic.”

In this most ecstatically internationalist period of Soviet history, most of the kinds of drama advocated as models for the peoples' theater came from elsewhere in Europe (Greek drama, medieval mystery plays, Shakespeare, Commedia dell'arte, the theater of the French Revolution, Schiller). There was, however, also a lobby for finding models from Russia's folk traditions. Their influence was particularly felt in the mass agitational work of the day. Symptomatically, when in 1920 the Political Department of the Red Army organized a travelling theater to agitate among the soldiers at the front, they equipped it with marionettes and harmonicas and called it “*Petruška*.”<sup>19</sup> Also, for the 1919 celebrations of May Day in Petrograd at which many actors from the state theaters were coopted to perform, a conscious attempt was made to “form a close relationship between actor and audience” in the spirit of the old “*narodnoe guljanie*.” Actors were to wander around among the people, performing puppet plays, *častuški*, and improvisations.<sup>20</sup> For the following year's May celebrations, a mass hap-

pening, “A Hymn to Liberated Labor,” was organized in front of the Stock Exchange. This extraordinary event included not only such dramatic, but by now expected components as masses of soldiers in czarist uniform, artillery, a canon and circus horses, but even the audience, which had to surge forward to the steps of the Exchange for the finale, thus demonstrating how truly “collective” the performance was. And throughout, Ju. Annenkov, one of the directors, dressed in yellow pyjamas and a top hat, led a motley crew of assorted “bourgeois and aristocrats” as a “*skomorox*.” The reviewer for *Žisn' iskusstva* concluded on cue that this year's effort was truly a “*prazdničnoe narodnoe zrelišče*.”<sup>21</sup>

Such attempts at integrating the folk into the culture of the new age were by no means intended merely to legitimize public ceremonial by suggesting the new regime's links with THE PEOPLE. That sort of thing was more a phenomenon of the Soviet thirties and beyond. At this early stage in Soviet history, use of folk forms and motifs was really to perform quite the opposite function. The prevailing sense of the role of folk culture was in fact closer then to that later advanced by Baxtin, who was himself, incidentally, not merely a contemporary of Radlov and Piotrovskij, but also a fellow disciple of Zelinskij. Baxtin, ironically, elaborated his sense of folk culture and its role in society not so much in his writings of this period, but rather in those of the thirties and early forties, that is, of precisely the time when a pseudo folklore was cultivated by the Stalinist regime and “folk” bards were set to write works legitimizing the leadership. In various of his works such as his dissertation “*Rable v istorii realizma*” of 1940, Baxtin spoke of “the folk” and above all of its great weapon, “folk laughter,” as providing a healthy antidote to official culture, to all that was heavy, stultifying, or laid claim to absolute authority.<sup>22</sup>

This particular conception of folk culture—as a playful and even iconoclastic force—was very popular in the twenties and informed many of the attempts at infusing folk elements into the theater and other kinds of public performance. Even Lunačarskij, that staunch advocate of Culture and Enlightenment, also spoke of the value of “folk laughter.”<sup>23</sup>

The trend accounts for much of the considerable prominence Remizov enjoyed in Soviet literary and theatrical circles of these years. His “folk” writings, with their humor, blasphemy, pithiness, playfulness and substandard speech, were widely perceived as answering the needs of an age bent on dismantling bourgeois, “*meščanskij*” culture which was considered straight-laced and pretentious. Even Lunc, usually associated with the cry “To the West!” recommended Remizov's plays as a remedy for the “crisis in the theater.”<sup>24</sup> Remizov's works were also seen as a way to bridge the

much-lamented gulf between the culture of the intelligentsia and that of the masses. When in October 1920 some worthy people organized a special matinee for the masses at the Malj zal of the Conservatory, they included some of Remizov's *skazki* on the program (together with an edifying essay of his on the matchless rewards to be gained only by reading a great book); the reporter for *Žizn' iskusstva* noted triumphantly that the audience laughed at the *skazki* as they otherwise do only in the movies.<sup>25</sup>

It was Remizov's plays rather than his *skazki*, however, which were generally regarded as having the greatest potential for helping the fledgling Soviet society develop a new, "*narodnyj*" culture. Remizov was working at this time on several new plays, most of which were based on folk legends about figures like Kaščej, Sten'ka Razin and Kitovras.<sup>26</sup> Few of these plays were published, and those which were staged were frequently for children. However, the Repertoire Commission of the Petrograd Narkompros (on which he, of course, sat) took a particular interest in his work and in 1919 published editions of two of his pre-revolutionary plays with their press ("*Besovskoe dejstvo*" and "*Tragedija o Ijude iskariotskom*"). The Commission was also closely involved in Remizov's most famous theatrical undertaking of this period, a reworking of the *narodnaja drama* "*Car' Maksimilian*" (or "*Komedija a care Maksimiliane i nepokornom syne ego Adol'fe*")

"*Car' Maksimilian*" had for a century been the most popular folk drama in Russia. Consequently, it had attracted the attention of many of those in the Russian theater earlier this century who wanted to revamp the conventional theater by giving it a transfusion from folk culture. Mejerxo'ld, for instance, is said to have seen a production of the play and to have been impressed by its "original devices."<sup>27</sup> This interest probably played a role in the chain of events which led to Remizov's publishing a version of the play. When a certain V. V. Bakrylov, who had served briefly as Commissar with the Petrograd State Theaters but appears to have fallen out with Narkompros, joined the "*Kursy masterstva sceničeskix postanovok*" in October 1918 (they were then still directed by Mejerxo'ld), he undertook as his assignment in the courses the task of making a *svod* (compilation) from the 19 extant versions of "*Car' Maksimilian*," a task he completed in 1919.<sup>28</sup>

Bakrylov, when Commissar of the State Theaters, had acted to quell resistance to Bolshevik power there by purging its bureaucracy of almost all its pre-revolutionary personnel. This assignment should not be seen as defining of Bakrylov, however. A man with an anarchist and socialist revolutionary past, Bakrylov served for some time after leaving Narkompros as secretary of the Petrograd Free Philosophical Association (*Vol'fila*). Thus his outlook was probably closer to that of people like Ivanov-Razumnik

and Blok than to that of the Bolsheviks. Indeed, Ivanov-Razumnik was to write a laudatory foreword to the Bakrylov compilation when it was published.

In 1919, when Bakrylov was trying to get his compilation published, he seems to have sought the help of Blok, who was then prominent on the Petrograd Narkompros Repertoire Commission. On September 2 that year Blok gave a report to the Commission recommending Bakrylov's compilation, and noting that it was to be performed by sailors around the building of the Baltic Fleet. The Bakrylov compilation was passed by the Repertoire Commission and recommended for publication, though it did not appear until 1921.<sup>29</sup>

Remizov's version of the play, which was also written in 1919, was based on Bakrylov's compilation. It was performed in March 1921 at the Dom prosveščeniya of the Railway Workers' Club and, Remizov claimed in a later letter, had a tremendous impact on the audience, whom it moved to tears.<sup>30</sup> Gratifying though this story is, the reality is that Remizov's play aroused more interest in intellectual circles than among the masses. It was given several readings at such places as the Dom literatorov and the Studio of Vse-mirnaja literatura,<sup>31</sup> and Radlov, Solov'ev and Piotrovskij put it in the repertoire for the Teatr narodnoj komedii for the 1920/21 season. Though it was announced several times that the play would open soon, it seems it was never performed there, but was produced at one time in the "*Kursy masterstva sceničeskix postanovok*," in which Remizov himself taught in 1920/21.<sup>32</sup>

"*Car' Maksimilian*" has a curious plot which seems to disregard all laws of chronology and geography but has no obvious reference to the theme of revolution. The play concerns a confrontation between Maksimilian, czar of the "Roman" city Anton and his son Adol'f. Maksimilian is remarrying and converting to the idols of his bride, but Adol'f refuses his father's entreaties to renounce the Christian religion. At first, the czar imprisons his son and attempts to starve him (incidentally, Remizov reported that his audiences in Revolution-torn Petrograd were always amused to hear that the pound of bread Adol'f was allowed daily was "starvation" rations<sup>33</sup>). When this fails to shake Adol'f, Maksimilian has him executed. The executioner, Brambeus, feels he cannot disobey the czar, but is so appalled by the sentence that after carrying it out he falls on his sword. A series of single combats between warriors follows, each one largely instigated by the czar, and thus one by one are the other brave warriors of the court killed. In the end, the czar is challenged by Mamaj, but by now he has no brave warriors left to defend him for his oppressive rule has led to the deaths of all of them, and Maksimilian falls to Mamaj.

This tragic plot is relieved periodically by "intermedii," or comic interludes, in which an old gravedigger and his wife are summoned by the czar to bury the latest harvest of bodies. Somewhat in the tradition of the gravedigger of "Hamlet" (a parallel Remizov liked to point out), the gravedigger is earthy and irreverent and these scenes contain a great deal of black humor, slapstick, repartee and verbal play.

Clearly these sections, together with the play's many irreverent verses and its obvious potential for pyrotechnics on stage, made it most appealing to directors like Radlov, Piotrovskij, and Solov'ev. Bakrylov, in an article on "Car' Maksimilian" of 1921, insisted that it belongs to that line of "folk" theater which includes improvisation, masks and characters like Pierrot and Harlequin (i.e. the sort of theater they loved).<sup>34</sup> And, indeed, a bastardized version of the folk original, "Car' Maksimilian, ili goneie na xristian v Vizantii," was incorporated in the balagan repertoire in 1886. Also, the original versions were rather pantomime-like and included singing and dancing.<sup>35</sup>

These features also appealed to Remizov.<sup>36</sup> For him the main attraction of the play, however, was what he perceived as its essential Russianness. As he himself admitted, it probably originated in Western Europe somewhere; after all, the principal characters both have non-Russian names.<sup>37</sup> Remizov maintained, however, that it had been russified in Russia and totally imbued with the Russian spirit. To him, and to certain of his friends of generally Scythian orientation, such as Blok, its central plot, the father/son conflict ending in the son's death, was a version of the traditional Russian theme of the *strastoterpec*. In this instance, the young hero Adolf is not merely a *strastoterpec*, a saintly victim who stands firm in the faith, but somehow a wild outlaw as well. The play mentions that he spent some time with the *razbojniki* in the Volga region. This aspect of Adolf is, by the way, present in only a minority of the recorded versions of the play.<sup>38</sup> Remizov, however, found it defining, and moreover a sign that Adolf represented "the spirit of Razin."<sup>39</sup> In an article on the play, "Portjanka Šekspira" (later published as an afterword to the 1920 edition), he iterates the common, if questionable, interpretation whereby the relationship of the czar to his son in the play is as Peter the Great to Aleksej, and even as Ivan the Terrible to his son; or, according to Remizov, Adolf/Aleksej stands for "the entire Russian people."<sup>40</sup>

The appeal of the play for the Soviet establishment was less predictable. It would seem unlikely that in the early post-revolutionary years a play which placed so much emphasis on standing by one's Christian beliefs no matter what would be considered ideal fare for the masses. But a striking

feature of this work, and one to which Bakrylov alluded in his article, is that over time it has meant different things at different times to different people. Moreover, since each of its many versions contains a different selection of scenes, it has been possible each time the play is performed to select or add particular scenes to give the play a particular coloring. In the versions of 1919-21 its anti-czarist and anti-clerical aspects were stressed; Bakrylov then declared it "revolutionary."<sup>41</sup> In effect, then, "Car' Maksimilian" is rather like the Javanese gamelan, another well-known folk drama form, in that at each performance the players (or author, or narrator) can slot in material of contemporary relevance, new speeches, or satiric sections so that in that version the play can serve one particular patron or point of view, and in another performance or version quite another.

We see this zigzagging in the changing identity of the folk drama ever since its first authenticated Russian performance in 1855. During the mid-nineteenth century, when "Car' Maksimilian" became very popular, it was performed among soldiers and sailors and was distinctly a patriotic piece. In many versions then a scene was interpolated in which a Hussar told of the Russian army's victories over Napoleon, of its valor at Sevastopol.<sup>42</sup> Before long, the play became popular in reactionary circles also, and in the second half of the nineteenth century it was performed in front of the czar's court for many years.<sup>43</sup> Gradually, however, it spread from soldiers' circles to peasant and worker groups and the provincial towns of Russia. By the late nineteenth century, it had begun to attract the attention of scholars and left wing intellectuals as a major example of mass culture (many scholarly works on this play were published at the turn of the century). As socialists began to take an interest, the play began to change its function from that of patriotic piece, to a text to be used in rousing the consciousness of the masses. In many "revolutionary" versions of "Car' Maksimilian," the workers in the audience were expected to rush onto the stage at the end and drag the czar off the throne. Not surprisingly, the play was by then having trouble getting performed due to official disfavor.<sup>44</sup> During the First World War, however, it was frequently performed as a patriotic piece, once again. In fact in December 1914 Evreinov staged a parody of the play, "Predstavlenie o care Vasil'jane, o tom, kak on zadumal ves' svet pokorit' i v svoju veru obratit'", in his "Krivoe zerkalo" theater as an attack on Kaiser Wilhelm II.<sup>45</sup>

As this fact suggests, the play had also begun to attract the attention of people in the experimental theater. In fact in 1911 a performance of the play was put on in the Moscow studio "Tragičeskij-balagan," directed by M. M. Bonč-Tomaševskij and with sets by Tatlin. Evreinov himself reports

having seen the play in the same year at a Petrograd production organized by the avant-garde "Sojuz molodeži."<sup>47</sup>

Remizov's version of 1919 was, then, but one in a long series of adaptations. He made remarkably few changes to the Bakrylov version, but in the main they were designed to make the play closer to what contemporary thinking believed a *narodnaja drama* should be. In "*Portjanka Šekspira*" he states that he tried to rid the play of elements he saw as undesirable, and in particular to streamline it by eradicating many of the endless repetitions, and to excise those locutions he saw as coming from the language of the "*kazarma*," which had of course colored the play in earlier, nineteenth-century versions. He also edited the humorous sections involving the common folk so that they emerged less as simpletons and more as repositories of that much-valued "folk laughter," and gave more prominence to the chorus (a move of which Piotrovskij and Radlov no doubt approved), assigning it a lot of the dialogue spoken in the Bakrylov version by one or other of the protagonists.<sup>48</sup>

The biggest single change Remizov made is that he omitted much of the pomp and ceremony of the court. This includes descriptions of court dress, court rituals, and the longwinded and conventionalized forms of address with which the czar's subjects initiate any conversation with him. With these changes Remizov has shortened the play, and focussed it more as a tragi-comedy. The changes have also diminished the aura of the czar which is quite marked in the Bakrylov version (there he is admired by his courtiers in the opening scenes as truly "*groznyj*" in the old sense).<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, some of the passages Remizov has added reinforce this anti-authoritarian trend. These include a lyrical lament from the chorus following Adolf's execution where they remark how piteous it is to see his white kaftan stained with blood and are outraged at "the kind of justice a czar metes out to his only son."<sup>50</sup> He also made some additions to the anti-clerical humorous passages.

These various changes were relatively minor. Indeed, Lampl in his article on Remizov's drama points to that fact in questioning whether "*Car' Maksimilian*" can be called Remizov's play in any real sense.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the play was given very few performances (possibly only one), and was hardly exposed at all to the masses, the audience for which it was intended. Yet "*Car' Maksimilian*" is generally considered one of Remizov's major works of this period. Certainly it has attracted the most attention from critics and commentators. Why so? An answer must be sought, I believe, in the fact that both Remizov himself, and "*Car' Maksimilian*" as well, were such important symbols to those Russian intellectuals trying to institute a truly

"*narodnyj*" theater in post-revolutionary Russia. The above-mentioned changes, though minor, can be seen as making the play more pleasing to the two camps which were its chief patrons, that of the Repertoire Commission, and that of Radlov and company. Thus it is not surprising that his version was published in two editions in the one year (1920), one official (with Gosizdat), the other from the side of the intelligentsia (in Alkonost, and with an illustration by Annenkov).

The changes did not, however, endear Remizov's efforts to most contemporary critics. Such unlikely allies as the Scythian Ivanov-Razumnik, the Marxist critic P. Sakulin, and the former Formalists Jakobson and Bogatyrev writing from Prague, all deprecated Remizov's achievement. Most of the critics felt that Remizov should not have cleaned up and streamlined the Bakrylov compilation, that he should have, in the words of Ivanov-Razumnik, left the "*loxmatyj, vz'erošennyj*," but "*narodnyj*" "*Maksimilian*" as it was. Ivanov-Razumnik made in this connection the extravagant claim that all true folk forms are more stageworthy than any written, literary work, and that moreover, no play of the Russian theater (that is, no literary drama) has ever surpassed "*Maksimilian*."<sup>52</sup> Jakobson and Bogatyrev put it, rather, in terms of Remizov's not having understood the basic techniques of folk drama. But they (like Sakulin) were also scathing about the scholarly merits of Bakrylov's compilation which they dismissed with the pronouncement "*Naučnogo značeniya rabota Bakrylova ne imeet*."<sup>53</sup>

Of course the "left art" movement to which Jakobson and Bogatyrev were linked, would have preferred to see as a *narodnaja drama* something more like Majakovskij's "*Misterija buff*" (which Mejerxold himself directed for its highly controversial short run in 1918). Even though that play was incomparably more "revolutionary," (and in more than one sense) than this folk revival of Remizov, however, it had proved less popular with the Soviet cultural establishment. Jakobson's erstwhile fellow Formalist, Šklovskij, drew a weighted comparison between the plays in an earlier article "*Kryžovennoe varen'e*" (1919) in which he declared that *Misterija buff* was "10,000 times more '*narodnyj*' than Remizov's '*Car' Maksimilian*'." Remizov, he said, had in his attempt to create such a work seized on what was purely superficial, the traditional plot, whereas Majakovskij had grasped "intuitively" what is at the heart of all folk forms . . . play on words.<sup>54</sup>

Šklovskij's attack on the play, while characteristically hyperbolic and controversial, alerts attention to an issue which was at the heart of all the various efforts to create a "peoples' theater," namely, does the term "*narodnyj*" mean? Does it mean folk? Does it mean popular? Mass? Of the people (and if so, who are they—the workers and peasants?)? Does it mean good

for the people, educative—or providing a cheap or free theater which is accessible to the masses? Or perhaps it means national—and then, again, in what sense? . . . or even state? In those heady years of 1919-1921 Petrograd, which marked a high point for post-revolutionary experimentalism, many were engaged in the effort to find truly “*narodnyj*” forms but few cared, or perhaps dared, to spell out exactly what “*narodnyj*” meant. Later it was to be spelled out in all too precise detail.

Remizov emigrated in August 1921, not long after the March production of “*Car' Maksimilian*”. Blok died, Remizov recalls, more or less as he himself was crossing the Soviet border. Gorky was to emigrate in October, and Zelinskij in that year, too. Bakrylov committed suicide in 1922 (apparently over love). Lunačarskij was relieved of his post as Commissar of Enlightenment in 1929, but then took up his old favorite causes of the theater and “folk laughter.”<sup>55</sup> Radlov and Piotrovskij kept their commitment to the Soviet mass theater for the rest of the decade and even identified with some of the more insidious rhetoric of the later cultural revolution. For all their idealism and zeal, however, they were to be rewarded with repression and prison camp in the later years (Piotrovskij perished in camp in 1938 while Radlov was put in camp in the forties). The similar fate of Mejerxoľd, their mentor, is well known.

This is not to suggest that these individual fates had anything to do with the withering away of the peoples' theater in the Soviet Union in 1922. The movement for a peoples' theater was essentially part of the utopian phase in Soviet cultural history, and could not survive the change to NEP reality.

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#### NOTES

1. “Voennye manevry i teatr,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1921, no. 700/1 (March 23/4), p. 2.
2. “Aleksij Remizov,” *Vestnik literatury*, 1919, no. 8, p. 4.
3. See eg. *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1921, nos. 359, 363, 365/6, 367, 382, 389, 559, and 1921, no. 789/803.
4. “Kursy masterstva sceničeskix postanovok,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, no. 589 (Oct. 18), p. 2.
5. S. Radlov, “Obrjad i teatr,” *Stat'i o teatre, 1918-1922* (Petrograd: Mysl, 1923), p. 62.
6. Note: the word “*narodnyj*” is hard to translate. There are many possible interpretations of the word, a problem I take up on page 18. Perhaps when talking about Remizov it would be better to translate it as “folk,” but given that I am discussing him in the context of a movement in Russia of the initial post-revolutionary years I prefer to use “peoples'.”
7. Romain Rolland, *Le théâtre du peuple* (Paris Librairie Hachette, 1933), p. 115.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

9. See eg. A. Lunačarskij, “Kakaja nam nužna melodrama,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1919, no. 58 (Jan. 14), p. 2.
10. “Xronika,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, no. 367, p. 3.
11. See eg. *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, nos. 342, 359/60, 371/2, 400.
12. See eg. Radlov's comments in a discussion following A. A. Mgebrov's paper “Revoljucionnyj teatr”, given at the Proletcult April 11, 1921 (*Žizn' iskusstva*, 1921, no. 721/2/3 (April 20/21/22), p. 1.
13. S. Radlov, “V dvesti pervyj i poslednij raz *O krizise v teatre*,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1921, no. 727/8/9, p. 1.
14. Adr. Piotrovskij, “Četvertyj god,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, no. 602/3/4 (Nov. 6/7/8), p. 1.
15. F. F. Zelinskij, *Žizn' idej* (Petersburg, 1905).
16. “Spektakli Krasnoj Armii,” *Vestnik teatra*, 1919, no. 4, p. 4; “Xronika,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1921, no. 727/8/9 (May 11/12/13); “Xronika,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1921, no. 712/3/4 (April 6/7/8), p. 3; S. Cimbald, “Adrian Piotrovskij, ego epoxa, ego žizn' v iskusstve,” in *Adrian Piotrovskij: teatr, kino, žizn'* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1969), pp. 9-10; OPOYaZ membership for Piotrovskij—“Izučenie teorii poetičeskogo jazyka,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1919, no. 273, p. 2.
17. eg. S. Radlov, “Elektrofikacija teatra,” *Stat'i o teatre 1918-1922*, pp. 17-19.
18. “Imeniny truda,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, no. 439/40/41 (May 1/2/3).
19. “Xronika,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, no. 407 (Mar.), p. 2.
20. “Pervoe maja,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1919, no. 127/8 (May 3/4), p. 3.
21. Aleksandr Belenson, “Birževye vpečatlenija,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, no. 442 (May 4), p. 1.
22. See Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Baxtin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), esp. chapters 12 and 14.
23. eg. A. Lunačarskij, “Teatr i smex,” *Teatr i iskusstvo*, 1918, no. 6-7.
24. L. Lunc, “Teatr Remizova,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, no. 343 (Jan. 15), p. 2.
25. M. “O knige. Utrennik v Malom zale Konservatorii,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, no. 589 (Oct. 22), p. 1.
26. “Čem zanjaty naši pisateli,” *Vestnik literatury*, 1919, no. 4 (April) p. 6; “Aleksij Remizov,” *Russkaja kniga*, 1921, no. 9 (Sept.), pp. 29-30; “Xronika,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, no. 580 (Oct.), p. 2.
27. P. Bogatyrev, “*Car' Maksimilian*” in P. G. Bogatyrev, V. E. Gusev et al, eds. *Russkoe narodnoe tvorčestvo* (Moscow: Ministerstvo vysshego i srednego special'nogo obrazovanija SSSR, 1967), p. 118.
28. All biographical information on Bakrylov comes from Vasilij Bepalov, *Teatr v dni revoljucii 1917* (Leningrad: Academia, 1927), pp. 111-119.
29. Al. Blok, “Komediya o care Maksimiliane i nepokornom syne ego Adolfe,” *Sobranie sočinenij*, VI (Moscow-Leningrad, G. I. X. L. 1962), p. 480.
30. Cited in Horst Lampl, “Aleksij Remizovs Beitrag zum russischen Theater,” *Wiener Slavistisches Jahrbuch*, no. 17 (1972), p. 179.
31. Eg. “Večer A. Remizova i A. Bloka,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1919, no. 265/6, “Xronika,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, no. 392.
32. “Xronika,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, no. 431 (April 23), p. 1; “K otkrytiju teatra narodnoj komedii,” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1920, no. 607 (Nov. 12), p. 1; For reports of other productions of “*Car' Maksimilian*” around this time which may have used the Remizov text see V. N. Vsevolodskij-Gerngross, *Russkaja ustnaja narodnaja drama* (Moscow: Akademija nauk, 1959), pp. 114, 118, and P. Bogatyrev, “*Car' Maksimilian*,” p. 118.
33. A. Remizov, *Vzvizrennaja Rus'*, 2nd. ed. (N. Y.: Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd., 1979), p. 681.
34. V. N. Vsevolodskij-Gerngross, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
35. P. G. Bogatyrev, “*Car' Maksimilian*,” p. 101.
36. A. Remizov, “Sovremennost',” *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1921, no. 789/803.
37. A. Remizov, “Portjanka Šekspira,” *Krašennye ryla: teatr i kniga* (Berlin: Grani, 1922), p. 28. Incidentally, although it is generally agreed that the plot of the play must have originated



in Western Europe, and many scholars have ventured their own theories as to its possible source or sources (including Jakobson who in an article of 1938 proposed that it might be the Czech writings on St. Dorotě; see "Význam ruské filologie pro bohemistiku," *Slovo a slovesnost. List Pražského lingvistického kroužku*, ročník IV [Prague: Melantricha, A. S., 1938], pp. 228-232), no one has been able to ascertain its origins incontrovertibly.

38. B. N. Aseev, *Russkij dramatičeskij teatr XVII-XVIII vekov* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1958), p. 65.

39. A. Remizov, "Portjanka Šekspira," p. 30; cf. A. Blok, "Komediya o Care Maksimiliane," p. 482.

40. A. Remizov, "Portjanka Šekspira," p. 29.

41. A. Blok, "Komediya o care Maksimiliane," p. 481.

42. Józef Gołębek, *Car Maksymilian (Widowiske Ludowe na Rusi)* (Kraków: Nakładem Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności, 1938), pp. 63-64.

43. V. N. Vsevolodskij-Gerngross, *Russkaja ustnaja narodnaja drama*, p. 101.

44. Ibid., p. 114; Józef Gołębek, *Car Maksymilian*, p. 15.

45. P. G. Bogatyrev, "'Car' Maksimilian'," p. 117; Spencer Golub, *Evreinov: The Theater of Paradox and Transformation* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), p. 233.

46. D. Zolotnickij, *Budni i prazdniki teatral'nogo Oktjabrja* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1978), p. 28.

47. N. N. Evreinov, *Istorija russkogo teatra* (New York: Čexov Publishing House, 1955), p. 118. Note: Lampl in "Aleksiej Remizovs Beitrag zum russischen Theater" reports another experimental production in the Petersburg Dom intermedii of 1912 (p. 178).

48. A. Remizov, "Portjanka Šekspira," pp. 33-34.

49. *Car' Maksimilijan. Teatr Alekseja Remizova* (Peterburg: Alkonost', 1922), p. 1.

50. Ibid., p. 50.

51. Host Lampl, "Aleksiej Remizovs Beitrag zum russischen Theater," pp. 145, 179.

52. Ivanov-Razumnik, "Maksimilijan," in *Komediya o care Maksimilijane i nepokornom syne ego Adolfe. Svod VI. Bakrylova* (Moscow: Gos. izd., 1921) pp. 8, 9.

53. R. Jakobson and P. G. Bogatyrev, "Slavjanskaja filologija v Rossii za gg. 1914-1921," *Slavia*, ročník I, Prague 1922-23, p. 269; P. Sakulin, "Komediya o Care Maksimiliane i nepokornom syne ego Adolfe," *Pečar' i revoljucija* 1921, no. 3, pp. 265-7; A. Pribylovskij, "Car' Maksimilijan," *Russkaja kniga*, 1921, no. 6, pp. 12-13.

54. V. Šklovskij, "Kryžovennoe vareně," *Žizn' iskusstva*, 1919, no. 282/3 (also included in his *Xod konja*).

55. See eg. A Lunačarskij, "O smexe," *Literaturnyj kritik*, 1935, no. 4, pp. 3-9.