

**The Show Must Go On:  
Komissarzhevskaja's 1909 Production of  
Stanisław Przybyszewski's *Gody życia***

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Speaking from a pragmatic standpoint, before any traditional performance occurs on the stage or in any playing space, certain events must have already taken place. First, the performer(s) will have chosen a piece of repertoire and its method and mode of expression, including, but not limited to, the involvement of other actors. Second, the performer(s) will have also engaged specific personnel to take responsibility for costumes and wigs, properties, sets, and lighting. Third, the performer(s) will have located a space in which to unfold the creative act, preferably before a willing audience that will pay a charge so that the company may recoup any major financial outlays and enjoy a small profit. Russian theatre history is filled with stories of productions that have met, and sometimes surmounted, obstacles such as these during the rehearsal period, and have thus become part of the Russian theatrical canon.

Vera F. Komissarzhevskaja (1864-1910), one of Russia's greatest actresses of the early twentieth century, overcame many such obstacles in her illustrious career. However, perhaps no obstacle prepared her for the rebellion that occurred within her own company as she prepared to stage the premiere of Stanisław Przybyszewski's (1868-1927) *Gody życia* [*Pir zżizni; Life's Banquet*, 1909] in the fall of 1909, seven years after her first acquaintance with his aesthetic views. Tragically, the role of Hanka in this play would become the last new role she was to prepare before her untimely death in February 1910.

The relationship between actress Komissarzhevskaja and Przybyszewski is intriguing, but has received relatively little scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> American scholars devote no more than passing notice to their possible creative relationship.<sup>2</sup> For some theatre scholars, Przybyszewski's plays do not even exist as a part of this actress' notable career.<sup>3</sup> However, as we shall see, Przybyszewski's aesthetics do resonate strongly in Komissarzhevskaja's life and work, dating from early spring 1902 and continuing until her death. An investigation into this

resonance will not only provide a fuller understanding of the movement of modernist aesthetics from Western Europe into Russian theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century, but also the role played by major theatrical figures, such as Komissarzhevskaja, in the acceptance and transference of those aesthetics.

Komissarzhevskaja's reception of Przybyszewski's aesthetics began in 1902 and is associated with his pronouncements on the soul, artist, and art, as expressed in "Aforyzmy i Praeludia" ["Aphorisms and Preludes"], the first section of his collection of essays, *Na drogach duszy* [*On the Paths of the Soul*, 1900]. Her conception of "soul" was not founded on a strict religious interpretation, but rather a psychological one. She eagerly accepted Przybyszewski's view that the true source of creative inspiration was a focus inward toward the soul, not outward toward external reality. This would lead to an interest in a character's psychological and emotional motivation. Moreover, Przybyszewski's belief in the sanctity of both art and the artist would move her to reject artistic mediocrity and set out upon new paths of artistic self-exploration, eventually breaking with naturalist theatrical conventions. The comments that Komissarzhevskaja made in defense of her own production of Przybyszewski's new play, *Gody życia*, provide additional evidence that this actress was conceptualizing and actively responding to—if only on a personal level—the Polish dramatist's prescriptions for improvements in the acting profession. These comments also provide evidence of how Komissarzhevskaja understood Przybyszewski's dramatic theories and gives us a retrospective glimpse into her possible pragmatic use of Przybyszewski's works in the development of the actor's craft, including her own.

The Polish essayist, dramatist, and novelist Stanisław Przybyszewski first gained recognition in Germany, where he popularized both the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and that of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch. After he moved to Kraków to become the editor of the journal *Życie* in 1898, the circle of young Polish writers and artists living there, as well as Russian critics of the period, began to acknowledge him as the head of the artistic current known as *Młoda Polska*, or Young Poland. Contemporary Russian critics, such as Pavel Kogan, soon recognized Przybyszewski as one writer who, along with Oscar Wilde and Maurice Maeterlinck, influenced Russia's young, growing modernist movement (Kogan 98-100).<sup>4</sup> Despite his popularity and notoriety, this prolific Polish writer is almost forgotten today, although his distinctive synthesis of metaphysics, occultism, eroticism,

and aestheticism created great controversy in *fin-de-siècle* Russia.

Przybyszewski's dramas—a transitional blend of naturalism and symbolism—were marked by an absence of external action and a concentration on character psychology. They frequently explored the themes of love and death, guilt and retribution, within the context of the changing sexual mores of the early twentieth century. In his essay *O dramacie i scenie* [*On Drama and the Stage*, 1905], Przybyszewski sketched the major differences between the “old drama” (before Ibsen) and the “new drama” (after Ibsen). This work had originally been serialized in the Warsaw daily *Kurjer Teatralny* in 1902 and was eventually published in a Russian translation. Its first Russian translation appeared as a short serialization in the influential Petersburg journal *Teatr i iskusstvo* in 1904. This leading trade weekly for individuals in the theatre profession, which included articles about actors, dramatists, reviews, and box office reports from throughout the Empire, would have been obligatory reading for all actors, including Komissarzhevskaiia. Rejecting the detailed stage directions of naturalists such as Hauptmann, Przybyszewski preferred to think of the dramatic text as a “stenogram” or outline, within which the actor could explore the battle raging within the soul. It was this battle, and not external events or circumstances, which he believed to be the true source of dramatic action. Przybyszewski also advocated the use of a simple set design and the use of “character-symbols”—an idea also advocated by Maeterlinck. Przybyszewski recognized the need for an “intelligent, clairvoyant, and truthful” actor or “artist-creator” who would be able to “embody” a particular role by understanding all the psychological reactions and character relationships within the play (*O dramacie i scenie* 14-15).<sup>5</sup>

The most important trace of Przybyszewski's impact on Komissarzhevskaiia is found in her correspondence, in a letter dating from late March/early April 1902. By this stage in her career, Komissarzhevskaiia had already weathered the failed first production of Chekhov's *Chaika* [*The Seagull*, 1896] at the conservative Aleksandrinskii Theatre. Komissarzhevskaiia, now a popular actress competing with Mariia Savina for the adoration of the Petersburg audience, was growing dissatisfied with the Aleksandrinskii's staid repertoire and constricting aesthetic environment. In an April 1902 letter to Nikolai Khodotov (1878-1932), her acting partner and confidant at the time, she expressed new hope for a change in her situation. The actress

thanked Khodotov for several booklets he had presented her and professed:

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». Значить, важно только одно – жизнь души во всех ее проявлениях. (“Iz pis'ma N. N. Khodotovu” 115-116)<sup>6</sup>

The textual origin of Komissarzhevskaiia's credo, or “confession of faith,” signaled by her quotation that “art must reflect the eternal, and the eternal is only one thing—the soul,” can be traced to Przybyszewski's collection of essays, *Na drogach duszy*. The first section of that collection, “Aforizmy i Praeludia,” had recently appeared in a Russian translation by Aleksandr Kursinskii (1873-1919) under the title *Aforizmy i preludy* [*Aphorisms and Preludes*, 1902] (Pshibyshevskii 6-7).<sup>7</sup> Among other things, this work proclaimed the elevated roles of art and artist in society and the need for the true artist to reject the advantageous “path of the mind,” or the “path of the pitiful senses” (8), in order to follow the “steep and slippery path of the soul,” which is inaccessible to the mind (23). By the end of June, only two months after confessing that the true creative artist must “reflect ... the soul,” Komissarzhevskaiia made the momentous decision to leave the Aleksandrinskii and strike out on her own as an independent entrepreneur (“Iz pis'ma N. N. Khodotovu” 116-119).<sup>8</sup> Her fate, as she had suggested to Khodotov in April, had been decided irrevocably.

From the time she left the service of the Imperial Theatres in 1902 until her death in 1910, Komissarzhevskaiia undertook several Przybyszewski roles. Those roles included that of Irena in a 1902 production of *Zolotoe runo* [*Zlote runo; The Golden Fleece*, 1901] and of Bronka in *Sneg* [*Śnieg; Snow*, 1904].<sup>9</sup> Two years later she appeared as Sonka in *Vechnaia skazka* [*Odmieczna baśń; The Eternal Tale*, 1905-1906]. The latter work premiered in St. Petersburg on 4 December 1906 and has created an intriguing association of Przybyszewski's work with the third, historic season of Komissarzhevskaiia's Dramaticheskii Teatr, when Komissarzhevskaiia and Vsevolod Meierkhol'd (1874-1940) joined artistic forces, she as owner-entrepreneur and he as her chief director. That season is noted for a turn from realist productions imitative of the Moscow Art Theatre to innovative productions marked by Meierkhol'd's bold experiments in non-representational staging and

greater theatricality (*uslovnost'*). These productions were accompanied by a move toward a repertoire that was more accepting of works by the rising Russian symbolists, such as Blok and Andreev.<sup>10</sup> However controversial some of these plays might have been, none elicited such a negative response from her fellow actors as did *Pir zhizni* in 1909.

Evidence suggesting that Komissarzhevskaiia and Przybyszewski met in July 1903 and later in March 1904 provides further substantiation that the Russian actress was aware of, or had an affinity for, the aesthetic notions that Przybyszewski articulated. This evidence also creates a strong personal subtext for Komissarzhevskaiia's later defense of *Pir zhizni* in the face of cast resistance against its purported "decadence," as she sought to exploit a play to which she thought she had obtained exclusive performance rights. Therefore, before reviewing the charges that Komissarzhevskaiia's cast leveled against her choice of repertoire, let us first examine the possibility that there was more that linked these two creative individuals than just a 1902 booklet, a brief meeting in 1903/1904, or an association of Komissarzhevskaiia's name with several Przybyszewski heroines.

First, let us re-examine the context of a possible meeting between this Russian actress and a foreign dramatist. There is a passing reference to a purported previous meeting between Komissarzhevskaiia and Przybyszewski in a press release that appeared in *Russkoe slovo* in September 1909 ("Teatr i muzyka" 5).<sup>11</sup> This reference to a meeting six years earlier, thus, would link this encounter with Komissarzhevskaiia's frustrated efforts to procure the performance rights to the first Russian production of Przybyszewski's *Śnieg*. Komissarzhevskaiia most likely became aware of this play when a Polish troupe, headed by Bolesław Bolesławski, staged the work in St. Petersburg during January-February 1903. Przybyszewski directed the production himself, and the press widely reported the event.<sup>12</sup> On 15 July 1903, Komissarzhevskaiia wrote a letter to journalist V. K. Bozhovskii (1869-1914) in Warsaw while she was on her way to San Remo, Italy, to visit her father. She asked her friend to assist in procuring the rights to *Śnieg* so that she might be the first Russian actress to stage this play:

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. Жму Вашу руку.

В. Комиссаржевская (Rudnitskii, V. K. Bozhovskomu [15 iulia 1903 g.]” 167-168)<sup>13</sup>

Several months later, in November 1903, Komissarzhevskaiia wrote Bozhovskii again, informing him that she had translated the play. She 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 begin staging it immediately (Rudnitskii, “V. K. Bozhovskomu. 4 noiabria 1903 g.” 168). Neither of Komissarzhevskaiia’s requests were 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>14</sup> Thus, when Przybyszewski himself contacted Komissarzhevskaiia in 1909 with the chance to stage a new play, the actress, perhaps remembering the frustration she must have felt during her attempts to obtain the performance and translation rights to *Śnieg*, was already in a frame of mind to accept the playwright’s offer eagerly.

The second piece of evidence suggesting professional contacts between Komissarzhevskaiia and Przybyszewski is a reference made by Nikolai Khodotov in his memoirs. 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 Khodotov paid him a visit (*Bliżkoe-dalekoe* [1962] 170-171 and 294).<sup>15</sup> This individual has been identified as “Poor Yorick,” the pseudonym of Komissarzhevskaiia’s Warsaw intermediary, Vasilii K. Bozhovskii (Rybakova 498). Therefore, given Komissarzhevskaiia’s previous efforts only four months earlier to obtain the rights to *Śnieg* through Bozhovskii and her personal and professional relationship to Khotodov, there is reason to believe that Komissarzhevskaiia herself could have met Przybyszewski at this time. At the very least, Khodotov could have spo-

ken to Komissarzhevskaiia at length about his visit with the Polish author if it occurred before her arrival or during her brief stay. However, the fact that on her own tour Komissarzhevskaiia only performed in Warsaw for three days (March 2-4) before continuing on to Khar'kov may explain why other scholars have not considered the possibility of this meeting.<sup>16</sup>

Komissarzhevskaiia's active reception of Przybyszewski's aesthetic views, even before she had any personal contacts with the Polish author, has already been suggested in our brief comments made about her letter to Khodotov in April 1902. Echoes of Przybyszewski's booklet seem to resonate even in Komissarzhevskaiia's later correspondence from that year. In another letter to the young actor in early October 1902, Komissarzhevskaiia gives Khodotov the following advice:

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*. [emphasis mine] (“Iz pis'ma N. N. Khodotovu” 124)  
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In this letter, Komissarzhevskaiia is again echoing Przybyszewski's admonition to follow the “path of the soul,” not the mind. She advises Khodotov that 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 expressed similar ideas in *Aforizmy* when he noted that:

Прежний творец раскрывал «вещи», новый творец раскрывает свое состояние души.

Первый разбирался в вещах и впечатлениях, как они вливали в его мозг, веруя в их объективность; последний, наоборот, разбирается только в чувствах, какие вызываются этими вещами. (Przybyszewskii 17)<sup>18</sup>

In advising Khodotov to “do what you want with psychology and philosophy,” Komissarzhevskaiia is reminding Khodotov that a role

cannot be built solely from an external observation 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. As we shall see, Komissarzhevskia 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, *Pirzhizni*.

Although Przybyszewski is artistically present in Komissarzhevskia's work during these productive professional years, his name is largely absent from her correspondence.<sup>19</sup> However, Przybyszewski's epistolary presence is again felt suddenly in late 1909, when the Polish author began a brief period of correspondence with the actress. Yet, unlike six years earlier, when Komissarzhevskia sought to obtain the performance rights to *Śnieg* from its author during the summer of 1903, there is evidence that Przybyszewski himself now initiated correspondence with the actress, encouraging her to stage his newly written drama. At this time Komissarzhevskia was again entering a risky stage of her career. Her spring tour of America in 1908 had been a financial disaster, as had the premature closing by the censors of her production of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. Now she was again touring the provinces, raising money to alleviate her financial worries.

Meanwhile, in dire need of financial support himself, Przybyszewski hoped to shop his new play to the actress. In a letter dated 12 July 1909 (NS),<sup>20</sup> Przybyszewski wrote to Komissarzhevskia:

Милостивая государыня,

Я написал новую пьесу, чрезвычайно жизненную, с весьма одушевленным и драматическим развитием действия. Главная роль — женщина, 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: Альтгоф у Кохельского озера  
(Бавария, via Мюнхен). (RGALI, f. 778, op. 2, ed.  
khr. 36)<sup>21</sup>

Komissarzhevskaiia could not answer Przybyszewski's request promptly, however, as she was resting at Bad Wildbad, Württemberg, during the month of July. In fact, she probably did not read this letter until her return to Petersburg on 18 August (NS)/5 August (OS) after her stay at that spa and a short trip to Paris (Rybakova 447-451).<sup>22</sup> Another letter from Przybyszewski, dated 20 August (NS), subsequently followed one month after his first, and probably arrived as Komissarzhevskaiia was preparing her next tour, set to begin in early September.<sup>23</sup> This second letter praised Komissarzhevskaiia as a brilliant actress, and the Polish dramatist now suggested that he had created the female lead in his new play, *Gody życia*, especially for her (D'iakonov, "V. F. Komissarzhevskaiia i simvolisty" 118).<sup>24</sup> Przybyszewski asked the actress-entrepreneur for an advance of 500 rubles to be paid upon the receipt of the Polish manuscript. Komissarzhevskaiia evidently agreed to Przybyszewski's terms sometime in late August after thinking Przybyszewski's offer over for less than three weeks, for on 15 September 1909 (NS)/3 September (OS) the Polish author wrote to the actress, acknowledging receipt of his advance.<sup>25</sup>

Komissarzhevskaiia must have made final arrangements with Przybyszewski by 5 October (NS)/22 September (OS), shortly after her troupe had left Moscow—the first city on their itinerary—to continue their tour in Riga. On that date (22 September) *Russkoe slovo* ran its brief press release stating that Komissarzhevskaiia had just received Przybyszewski's new play. This release also noted that the actress hoped to premiere the new play in mid-October 1909 while on tour in Kiev ("Teatr i muzyka" 5).<sup>26</sup>

A letter written by Komissarzhevskaiia from Bad Wildbad in July to her brother Fedor helps us to understand the actress' state of mind at this time and contextualizes her eventual decision to produce Przybyszewski's new play. Komissarzhevskaiia wrote sometime in July 1909:

Смотреть на поездку будущего сезона как на неизбежность в материальном отношении я не хочу и не могу. Провинция была для меня до

сих пор средством. В этой поездке она должна быть целью. Я ездила туда всегда лишь с желанием набрать денег для моих художественных целей. Незаметно образовалась какая-то связь. Родилось желание показать не только образы, созданные в различных стадиях работы, но и самое дорогое – работу последних лет, работа театра. 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. (qtd. Rybakova 449)<sup>27</sup>

Although Komissarzhevskaiia emphasizes the artistic side of her decision to tour, the necessity of raising funds after the closing of *Salome* exists as a strong subtext to her letter (D'iakonov, "V. F. Komissarzhevskaiia i simvolisty" 118).<sup>28</sup> It would be impossible to deny the fact that she was in extreme financial straits at this time. Her American tour had been a commercial failure, and the Dramaticheskii Teatr had spent over 30,000 rubles on the Wilde production (Schuler 183).<sup>29</sup> In fact, in an interview granted to *Odesskie novosti* [*Odessa News*] Komissarzhevskaiia herself noted that her theatre had lost a large sum of money, and she now found herself in an "almost hopeless situation" (Rybakova 469).<sup>30</sup> However, Komissarzhevskaiia's letter to her brother does signal a crucial shift in her state of mind. She now views her provincial tours as a space in which to prove to the public that her chosen artistic path since leaving the Imperial Theatres has been praiseworthy and commendable in its search, despite its unprofitable nature. This new tour served not only a purely material function, but

also an aesthetic and affirming one.

Furthermore, Komissarzhevskaiia demonstrated an eagerness to showcase new works that would build on what she had learned at her Dramaticheskii Teatr in the years from 1904-1909, identified in this letter as the third period of her career. Komissarzhevskaiia's concern for artistic integrity and attention to detail suggests that the actress has purchased the rights to Przybyszewski's *Gody zhycia* not simply because the Polish author flattered her in his correspondence, but because she saw 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. Moreover, they constituted an aesthetic balance to the vaudevilles and popular comedies that had filled her first years of "wandering" in the provinces—a period she later decried as "lost."

We may hypothesize, thus, that Komissarzhevskaiia sought to premiere her production of *Pir zhizni* in Kiev as an exemplary work of "her theatre"—just as much as the character Irena in *Zolotoe runo*, the first new role she created after leaving the Imperial Theatres, or Bronka in *Sneg*, the rights to which she attempted to obtain during the summer of 1903. These plays were part of a large repertoire through which she had gained faith in herself as an actress and moved the theatrical art forward, beyond the strict confines of naturalism, toward a deeper, emotionally and psychologically connected characterization. Decisions such as these must have swayed the actress into staging this new play by Przybyszewski, which, contrary to her own statement to Fedor that "[w]e are taking only that which is more or less finished [and] completed" (Rybakova 449), was completely unrehearsed and untested before a Russian audience.

Komissarzhevskaiia was very eager to stage Przybyszewski's new play, which Arkadii Zonov (d. 1922), its nominal director, later described as "full of the cry and disharmony of a pained soul" (111).<sup>31</sup> In an interview given while the company was in Riga, she even suggested that Przybyszewski himself would attend its premiere. She told her interviewer: "Możliwe, że i Przybyszewski, żyjący teraz za granicą, przyjedzie na premierę dramatu, przynajmniej już napisał do mnie pytając, kiedy i gdzie wystawiam *Gody zhycia*?" (Ivin 3).<sup>32</sup> However, as we shall see, cast members were not as excited to stage Przybyszewski's new drama as Komissarzhevskaiia was, and soon made their opposition known. Before examining this issue, however, let us present a brief synopsis of the simple plot, which still resonates

strongly in contemporary society:

Hanka, the heroine of *Gody życia*, has left her husband, Zbigniew Bielski, and is now living in a cabin with her current boyfriend, Waclaw Drwęski. She is depressed at the loss of her child, whom she was forced to abandon when she left her husband. When Janota, a friend staying with Waclaw, plays several Schumann pieces at the piano, Hanka's maternal instincts are passionately aroused and she decides to visit her daughter. Hanka leaves Waclaw and heads to Warsaw and Kraków. There she learns that her daughter, now five years old, has been told by her nanny that her mother is dead. Hanka meets her sister, Wanda, who admonishes her sister for abandoning both husband and child. Wanda refuses to help Hanka, as does Zbigniew, her former husband. Hanka leaves heartbroken, but not beaten. However, Janota, who has been following Hanka for the last several days and is insanely in love with her, rapes her while she is sleeping. Hanka, now robbed of even a basic notion of purity, loses the last bit of humanity she possesses. She seeks absolution in the waters of a mysterious fountain, high in the mountains, surrounded by steep cliffs and accessible only by a slippery footpath. The play ends as a villager announces that a woman has fallen from the cliff. Waclaw and Janota stand dumbstruck.

According to the play's foreword, written after the play received harsh criticism in Kraków, Łódź, and Lwów, Przybyszewski wrote *Gody życia* not to explicate a thesis of "lover or child," but to illustrate the intense, "hellish torment" to which a woman who breaks societal mores may be subjected. Even though that woman may seek kindness and goodness from society, the only fate that awaits her is destruction. With this simple story, Przybyszewski added, he would invite the public to "life's banquet," presenting it "in all its majesty and Satanic irony" (Przybyszewski, "Pro domo" VIII-IX and Pshibyshevskii, "Pro domo" 4-5).

Why, then, did Komissarzhevskaiia's troupe oppose her choice of repertoire, and how did the actress react to this disapproval of her artistic choice?<sup>33</sup> Comments made by members of Komissarzhevskaiia's troupe at this time, actors Mikhail Narokov (1879-1958) and Aleksandr D'iakonov-Stavrogin (1882-1963), who also served as the actress' personal secretary, describe the intense opposition that Komissarzhevskaiia encountered from the cast and provide further insight into the importance the actress placed in Przybyszewski's new play.<sup>34</sup> According to witnesses, opposition to *Pir zhizni* from the cast

arose soon after scripts were distributed in Riga (Rybakova 461).<sup>35</sup> According to Narokov, the cast read the entire play, not just their own roles. This situation certainly helped some of them form their adverse opinions to the play (Narokov 170).<sup>36</sup> According to D'iakonov, the cast was first very excited about the new work, but after they had read it, complaints began to arise. Cast members began to attack its author heatedly. Not even comments made by Zonov, who would co-direct the play, could calm angry company members. Passions soon became inflamed and a “pointed literary argument” arose (D'iakonov, *Venok* 57-58).<sup>37</sup>

Many cast members considered the play depraved and a prime example of “far-fetched” and “unbalanced” decadence. These opinions may have been based on Przybyszewski’s brutal but truthful illustration of modern sexual mores, including the tacit acceptance of infidelity and veiled discussion of rape. Narokov, who numbered among the majority of cast members opposed to the play, believed that even its very theme—the power of maternity—was presented in a “morbidly perverted” manner, full of “affectation” and “attempts at cheap symbolism” (Narokov 170).<sup>38</sup> He added: “Видно, 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” (qtd. Rudnitskii 257).<sup>39</sup>

In order to counter this opposition, Komissarzhevskaiia invited the entire cast to her room when the company reached Vil'no in order to eliminate dissension and garner support for the play (D'iakonov, *Venok* 58).<sup>40</sup> Fortunately, Komissarzhevskaiia’s lecture defending her choice of repertoire was passionate enough that both D'iakonov (1911) and Narokov (1956) recount a version in their recollections of Komissarzhevskaiia and personal memoirs. Zonov, meanwhile, recounts only that Komissarzhevskaiia functioned as an intermediary, whose own enthusiasm for the play would move and inspire the rest of the cast (111).<sup>41</sup> The comments of D'iakonov and Narokov touch on several similar themes, such as character interaction and motivation, and provide further evidence of Komissarzhevskaiia’s appropriation of particular elements of Przybyszewski’s aesthetics, professed years earlier in his essays *Aforizmy i preludy* and “O dramacie i stsene.”

When the cast assembled in Vil'no, D'iakonov recounts that Komissarzhevskaiia, noticeably troubled, but “with great enthusiasm,” retold the plot of Przybyszewski’s play, briefly describing each character and the “psychological moments” of the play. According to Ko-

missarzhevskaiia, 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 (qtd. D’iakonov, *Venok* 58).<sup>42</sup> This directorial advice may be considered a direct response to Przybyszewski’s advocacy of the dramatic text as a “stenogram,” outline, or experimental space, within which actors were to use their courage, intelligence, and sense of simplicity and truth to reconstruct a character (Pshibyshevskii, “O drame i stsene” 344-345).

Furthermore, Komissarzhevskaiia’s emphasis on a character’s psychology, or a series of “psychological moments,” mirrors the same emphasis placed on them by Przybyszewski. In fact, the Polish writer had further noted in “O dramacie i stsene”:

Новая драма заключается в борьбе индивидуума с самим собой, 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” (Pshibyshevskii 339).<sup>43</sup>

According to Przybyszewski, the psychological struggle occurring within the individual would thus create a “drama of emotions, presentiments, [and] gnawing conscience, [...] a drama of anxiety, horror and fear” (“O drame i stsene” 339-340).<sup>44</sup> Komissarzhevskaiia knew that this new play was such a work and that an audience could be drawn into it if they could follow each character’s struggle with his/her own conscience and emotions, the very material that made each person on stage an individual, not a type.

According to D’iakonov, Komissarzhevskaiia then continued her defense:

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 разсудка – 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 Пшибышеского! ... Теперь хочу знать ваше мнение. Что вы скажете? (*Venok* 58-59).<sup>45</sup>

Although D'iakonov's account emphasizes the prejudice and discontent voiced by the cast at this time, 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, are all themes found in Przybyszewski's aesthetics, presented in his works of 1902 and late 1904 as outlined above. Komissarzhevskaiia's advice to "feel" echoes the advice she had given to Khodotov in October 1902 as well. In addition, Komissarzhevskaiia's intention of beginning rehearsals "without a tone"—i.e., without a preconceived idea of how each actor should portray his/her specific character—indicates her willingness to allow each character to grow naturally out of personal psychological and emotional reflection. Moreover, 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. Thus, the creation of a character that has at personal experience at its very core becomes an intensely personal and individualistic creative act. 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:

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" (D'iakonov, *Venok* 71).<sup>46</sup>

Narokov's opinion that Komissarzhevskaiia was bound by the "fetters of decadence" is contrary to her own views, which she had already expressed during an interview with N. Tamarin and published in an issue of *Obozrenie teatrov* (*Theatre Review*) in 1907. In that interview she defended her theatre and its current season, including her production of Przybyszewski's *Vechnaia skazka* against that same

charge of decadence. At that time the actress-entrepreneur noted that the old methods of reproducing life on stage were “uninteresting and unnecessary,” and therefore demanded a new direction and “new path” in staging (Rybakova, *Letopis'* 348). She rejected the claim by some of her critics that this new path was “decadent,” declaring instead that she was a proponent of “the new” in art. In making this distinction, Komissarzhevskaiia was making the same comparison, perhaps consciously, as had Przybyszewski in his *Aforizmy i preludy*, advocating “the new” while finding fault in “the old.” She expressed her view thus:

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. (qtd. Rybakova 348)<sup>47</sup>

Two similarities appear in Komissarzhevskaiia's 1907 comments that echo previous statements she has made about art. First, she continues to assert that “decadence” denotes those forms of art which are distortions of some ideal, which she does not define in this interview. Such an opinion reflects her beliefs as she described them to Evtikhii Karpov in July 1900. In that letter, she had described the ideal of art as one of “pure beauty” (Komissarzhevskaiia 86-87). In these remarks, however, it seems that Komissarzhevskaiia has replaced her old ideal of art as a reflection of “pure beauty,” with the stated goal of art as a reflection of “the eternal.” Both of these ideals, of course, stand in opposition to their perceived perversion—“decadence.”

Second, Komissarzhevskaiia's remark that she has been trying to embody “the eternal” in art echoes the same sentiments that she had expressed to Nikolai Khodotov in 1902, almost five years before, when she had paraphrased Przybyszewski's *Aforizmy i preludy*. At that time she had written that “art must reflect the eternal, and the eternal is one thing only—the soul” (Komissarzhevskaiia, 116). Notably, Komissarzhevskaiia'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 that Komissarzhevskaiia makes here, combined with the fact that Przybyszewski's play *Vechnaia skazka* had been part of the 1906-1907 season she was currently defending, are evidence that whatever personal opinion Komissarzhevskaiia held of Przybyszewski and his plays, it is clear that she did not find them "decadent."<sup>48</sup> Moreover, according to D'iakonov, among her circle of friends, Komissarzhevskaiia voiced the opinion that her theatre had nothing in common with "decadence," but instead led "the struggle for the ideas of symbolic art, for the new drama, for a unity of style in its scenic transmission" (D'iakonov, "Dramaticheskii teatr" 188). Thus, when cast members opposed *Pir zhižni* on account of its "decadence," Komissarzhevskaiia was responding to old arguments and simultaneously defending an old position. She did not feel the need to address this petty issue when there were more important artistic considerations at stake.

Narokov's own 1956 account supports this claim. He himself does not directly address the issue of how Komissarzhevskaiia reacted to this specific charge of "decadence" but, rather, offers this version of her conversation with the cast. According to Narokov, Komissarzhevskaiia began to speak, quietly weighing her words, as if possessed by "*kakoe-to vnutrennee soprotivlenie*" ["some kind of inner strength"]:

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. (Narokov 171)<sup>49</sup>

Recognizing this account as the view of the "spokesman for the opposition" and analyzing the comments that Komissarzhevskaiia makes in defense of Przybyszewski's play permit the scholar to extrapolate beyond the charges of "decadence" that Narokov hurled against it. According to Narokov, the cast had found the play objectionable due to its decadent subject matter. Yet Komissarzhevskaiia's response, at least as recorded by Narokov, does not directly rebut that charge.

In many ways, Komissarzhevskaiia's response says as much about her own progress as an actress as it does about the state of the acting craft in 1909. First, by explaining to her cast that they must not judge the play "by that which is given," Komissarzhevskaiia is acknowledging that the written text seems obscure to those who do not know how to read beyond its "cheap symbolism" and recognizing that the cast had been unwilling to delve beyond the superficial into the deeper meaning of the play. For the actress-director, her cast was unable to react intuitively and emotionally to the text. They did not know how to work within a "stenogram."

Second, Komissarzhevskaiia'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>50</sup> Finally, by suggesting that each person should "consider the independent drama of your own character," Komissarzhevskaiia follows Przybyszewski's explication of the new drama as the drama of the individual's struggle with himself. Her advice hints at the lack of ability among cast members to recreate motivations for a particular character's actions.<sup>51</sup> Thus, in defending Przybyszewski's play and her choice of repertoire against the charge of "decadence," Komissarzhevskaiia relied on aesthetic concepts she had been incorporating from Przybyszewski's works for the last seven years.

Why did this particular cast rebel against a new play by Przybyszewski, a recognized, albeit controversial, Polish dramatist, whose plays Komissarzhevskaiia had been staging since her departure from the Aleksandrinskii? Komissarzhevskaiia's defense of *Pir zhiżni* infers that her cast members lacked the ability to recognize a character's motivations or react intuitively to the "psychological moments" presented in this dramatic text. A second possible reason that Komissarzhevskaiia faced such an insurrection over aesthetics and pragmatics in 1909 is the fact that she was working with many new cast members, including D'iakonov, her secretary.<sup>52</sup> Meierkhol'd, an influential supporter of the "new art" that Przybyszewski represented, was now gone, and several actors whom he and Komissarzhevskaiia had hired from the *Tovarishchestvo Novoi Dramy* (TND, Association of New Drama) troupe had left with him. Two cast members of the Dramaticheskii Theatr troupe, both translators of Przybyszewski's work, the actress Nataliia Budkevich and Komissarzhevskaiia's former partner, Kazimir Bravich, were also now absent from the company.

Furthermore, it seems evident from Narokov's comments that some cast members, including himself, were openly hostile, or at least indifferent, to Komissarzhevskaiia's past efforts as an evangelist for a new art, which, at least in this case, they considered "decadent." Thus, more members of this cast were unfamiliar with both the subject matter and aesthetics of the "new drama," that Komissarzhevskaiia had been promoting since her departure from the Imperial Theatres in 1902. Furthermore, Komissarzhevskaiia was now forced to defend her position alone, without the support of Meierkhol'd, who had been at her side throughout the controversial 1906-1907 season.

Komissarzhevskaiia was adamant that the new production would continue. After her defense of Przybyszewski's drama, daily rehearsals began. However, despite their hard work, the production was not ready when the troupe arrived in Kiev, where Komissarzhevskaiia and Zonov had hoped to premiere the work before an adoring audience. The opening, therefore, had to be delayed until the troupe arrived in Odessa, after their first performance on 24 October (D'iakonov, *Venok* 64).<sup>53</sup> *Pir zhibizni* finally premiered on 1 November 1909 to bad reviews.<sup>54</sup> However, Komissarzhevskaiia had faith in her choice of repertoire and continued to stage the new drama in Khar'kov, Poltava, Ekaterinoslav, and Baku. Only her untimely illness on 27 January and, finally, death from smallpox on 10 February 1910, prevented another scheduled performance of *Pir zhibizni* in Tashkent.

In retrospect, we find that the "steep and slippery path of the soul" advocated by Przybyszewski impacted Vera F. Komissarzhevskaiia from the beginning of her independent career until its very end. Przybyszewski's notions of art became a catalyst that moved Komissarzhevskaiia forward in her artistic development; the soul became the proper focal point from which the actress could investigate the portrayed character not as a type, but as an individual, as she explored her character's psychology and emotions.

As we have seen in the discussion above, Komissarzhevskaiia even drew on this idea as she defended *Pir zhibizni* against charges of alleged "decadence." While arguments can be made that Komissarzhevskaiia defended her choice of new repertoire due to a personal interest and financial investment in the play, these arguments, while based in facts (the difficulty in procuring the rights to *Śnieg* in 1903, the supposition that the role of Hanka had been written especially for her, her investment of 500 rubles for performance rights), are not consistent with witness' account of that event. The comments Ko-

missarzhevskaiia made at that time, as recorded by two cast members—one a supporter (D'iakonov) and the other (Narokov) an opponent—provide strong evidence that Komissarzhevskaiia defended her decision not on pragmatic grounds, but on aesthetic grounds. These grounds have parallels in the aesthetic views of Stanisław Przybyszewski, particularly as presented in the Russian editions of both *Aforizmy i preludy* and “O drame i stsene.”

Komissarzhevskaiia's advice urging her cast to look inward, to “feel” the play not with the mind but with the soul, 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 for the actor to understand a play's psychological moments, as well as to “merge” with the character, resonate harmoniously with similar notions found in “O dramacie i stsene.” According to Przybyszewski, emotional identification with a character was a requisite for an actor in the new drama. Only in this way could an actor create truthful characters.

Moreover, Komissarzhevskaiia's paraphrases of Przybyszewski's aesthetic views in 1902, her production of his plays in 1902, 1904, 1906, and 1909, and the comments she made during her defense of *Pirzhiżni*, are strong evidence that Komissarzhevskaiia was conceptualizing and actively responding to Przybyszewski throughout her acting profession after she left the Imperial Theatres. This actress' active response should act as an impetus for further investigation into several areas of theatrical and cultural history. First, on the personal level, there should be further investigation of Komissarzhevskaiia's possible pragmatic use of Przybyszewski's works and theories in the development of her own acting craft. Second, there should be further examination of the role played by theatrical figures, other than noted directors such as Meierkhol'd or Stanislavskii, in the acceptance and transmission of modernist aesthetics, such as Przybyszewski's into Russia. Such investigations would provide a fuller understanding of Russian theatre, the theatrical art, and Russian culture in the early twentieth century.

### Notes

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1. See, for example, Polish scholar Stykowa and Russian scholar Moskwin [Moskwin].
2. For example, Laurence Senelick mentions Przybyszewski only twice: first in the context of Vsevolod Meierkhol'd's choice of new repertoire and then in passing, when describing Komissarzhevskaiia's decision to establish a school for drama (483 and 485). Mary Catherine Resing, who admits that Komissarzhevskaiia had a "more productive relationship with the Polish writer" than with Chekhov, notes her productions of two plays, *Zolotoe runo* [*The Golden Fleece*] and *Sneg* [*Snow*], suggesting that Komissarzhevskaiia chose repertoire as a way to "distance herself from the performances of other well-known actors by creating distinctive performances in little known roles" (51). However, while emphasizing the importance of Przybyszewski to Komissarzhevskaiia's repertoire, Resing does not discuss these roles in any detail. She acknowledges *Pir zhiżni* as one of Komissarzhevskaiia's final productions, but, dismissing the work as a "long, humorless drama," decides that Komissarzhevskaiia's final roles in the last stage of her career are better exemplified by the comedic *Mirandolina* in Goldoni's *La Locandiera* [*The Innkeeper Woman*, 1754](Resing 50-51 and 57-60).
3. See, for example, Borovsky.
4. For more on this see Zieliński, 142.
5. Przybyszewski variously uses the terms "aktor-artysta," "artysta-aktor," and "twórczy artysta" to describe his ideal—the "creative artist."
6. [I am faint-hearted, [but] the moment has come, when my destiny *must* be decided. Yes, this really is my faith: '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.]  
Iu. P. Rybakova dates this letter from the second half of March to 5 April (182). Borovsky offers several sentences of commentary on this letter, but, like Rybakova, does not identify its source (Borovsky 145).
7. The publication date on the cover and title page is 1902; however, Moscow censors passed its contents on 7 September 1901. Komissarzhevskaiia actually summarizes and paraphrases several notions that Przybyszewski presents in his essay. These are (from Kursinskii's translation): "Искусство есть отражение того, что вечно ... / отражение сущности, т.е. души. [...] Значит, искусство есть отражение жизни души во всех ея проявлениях, ..." and "Итак художник отражает жизнь души во всех ея проявлениях." [Art is a reflection of that which is eternal ... / a reflection of the essence, i.e., the soul. [...] That means art is the reflection of the life of the soul in all its manifestations, ... Therefore the artist reflects the life of the soul in all its manifestations.]

These textual parallels have been discussed in greater detail at this author's AATSEEL presentation. See Johnson.

8. See also Rybakova, 188-191.
9. Komissarzhevskaiia's production of *Zolotoe runo* premiered in September 1902; *Sneg* premiered in February 1904.
10. See, for example, the discussion in Braun (45-78). Edward Braun tends to dismiss the importance of Przybyszewski's works in Meierkhol'd's artistic development. Thus, while acknowledging Aleksei Remizov's own declaration that with his December 1903 production of *Sneg* Meierkhol'd "took his first tentative steps away from the verisimilitude of the Moscow Art Theatre," Braun proclaims the Kherson audience "saw through the fundamental banality" of Przybyszewski's play (22). In a passing mention of *Vechnaia skazka*, Braun declares: "Such inferior works as Iushkevich's *In the City* and Przybyszewski's *The Eternal Fable* hardly justified the care and resources that were lavished on them" (57).  
Of the play, Remizov wrote: "[*Sneg* was] The production, in which Meierkhol'd's great directorial expertise showed itself; he managed to combine, in [the production's] tone, colors, and plasticity, the symbolism of the drama and the devoted, loving relationship of the actors toward their roles, with its [the play's] realistic plot ... " (38). [Постановка, в которой сказалось большое художественное чутье режисера Мейерхольда, сумевшего сочетать в тоне, красках и пластике символику драмы с ее реальным сюжетом, желанное, любовное отношение актеров к своим ролям ...]
11. According to Rybakova's chronicle, Komissarzhevskaiia spent 4-8 July in Warsaw, where she met with B. K. Bozhovskii who gave her a copy of *Snow* in Polish (241). On 10 July, Komissarzhevskaiia telegraphed Bozhovskii, informing him that she had read the play and was "terribly pleased" (GTsTM, R. O., no. 79186).
12. See Khr. [K.I. Khranevich], L.M.B., and Q.
13. [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* 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. / I shake your hand, / V. Komissarzhevskaiia.]
14. See Komissarzhevskaiia, "N. E. Efrosu. [Peterburg. 4 noiabria 1903 g.]" (145 and 378).  
Komissarzhevskaiia, having just spoken with censor I. M. Litvinov (1844-1906), in this letter rightfully informs Efros that "there is no hold up at the censor" (Rudnitskii, "V. K. Bozhovskomu. 4 noiabria 1903 g." 168).

15. 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” (170). At the same time, the Russian actors sought to learn the art of light comedy from the Poles.
16. For more on this see Rybakova (257, 258, 260). Before arriving in Warsaw, Komissarzhevskaiia had performed *Zolotoe runo* in Moscow on 21 February and premiered her production of *Sneg* on 23 February. Curiously, on the last date of Khodotov’s stay in Warsaw, 12 March, Komissarzhevskaiia performed as Bronka in *Sneg* in Khar’kov.
17. [Work, work: take [your] role and *feel, feel, as if this all had happened to you*, having entirely forgotten that there is something else there, not represented that way, and when *you sink entirely* into these torments, joys, into chaos or peace, only then can you remember that this is not you, that he was someone else, and do what you want with psychology and philosophy—they will already be on *the only true, genuine road*.] See also Khodotov, *Blizkie-dalekie* from 1932 (177) and from 1962 (125).
18. [“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 latter, to the contrary, investigates only the emotions, such as are summoned by these objects.”]
19. The exceptions are 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 *Sneg*. She was unsuccessful, however, as Meierkhol’d’s production in Kherson on 19 December 1903 became the first non-Polish production on Russian soil. The letters are found in Rudnitskii (167-168) and Komissarzhevskaiia (145).
20. The recreation of a chronology here is made more difficult by the difference in the calendar used. Przybyszewski, a Pole living in Western Europe, uses the Gregorian calendar, which in the twentieth century was thirteen days ahead of the Julian calendar used in Russia. Following conventional usage, I have noted these dates as New Style (NS) or Old Style (OS). Many Polish-language newspapers, especially those in the Kingdom of Poland, featured datelines in both styles.
21. [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—is superbly suited to you. / Therefore, I would like to know, would you not desire 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. / With deep respect, / Stanislaw

Przybyszewski / 12/VII/1909/ Altioch bei Kochel am See, Bayern, via München] The original was written in Polish. The Russian translation was first published by A. D'iakonov (Stavrogin). See D'iakonov, "V. F. Komissarzhevskaiia I simvolisty" (118). The letter was reprinted in Rybakova (447). A reconstruction of this text in Polish from D'iakonov's translation can be found in Helsztyński (291). For a brief excerpt of this letter, see also Rogacki (232).

22. Unbeknownst to Przybyszewski, Komissarzhevskaiia was actually vacationing at Bad Wildbad for much of July and therefore could have met personally with the writer somewhere in Bavaria or Baden-Württemberg, had they known each other's whereabouts. Kochel am See lies only 70 km south of Munich, while Bad Wildbad lies approximately 115 km east of Strasbourg and 100 km south of Heidelberg. The distance between the two resort areas is approximately 350 km.
23. Due to the difference in calendars, Komissarzhevskaiia should have received this letter shortly after her return from abroad: i.e. in mid-August.
24. "Горячо желая бы, чтобы драма моя была сыграна такой блестящей артисткой, как Вы, ибо главная роль как будто создана прямо для Вас." [I would fervently desire that my drama be played by such a brilliant actress as you, for the main role really was created for you.] Reprinted in Rybakova (451). Re-creation of Polish text in Helsztyński (291), who evidently did not have access to the originals at TsGALI in Moscow.

Przybyszewski did not offer his play only to Komissarzhevskaiia in St. Petersburg. In September he also sent a letter to Konstantin Stanislavskii, describing his new play. *Gody žyvia*, 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" (qtd. Rogacki 233). The price offered to Stanislavskii, however, was 1000 rubles—twice the amount proposed to Komissarzhevskaiia. See Helsztyński (293). In a letter dated 27 September, 1909, 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. МКhТ never staged either work. See Helsztyński (294) and Stanislavskii (202).

25. 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. See "Letter of S. Przybyszewski to V. F. Komissarzhevskaiia (15. Sept. 1909)" (RGALI, f. 778, op. 2, ed. khr.

36, l. 8). Komissarzhevskaiia's response to Przybyszewski's request is unknown.

26. This press release, in an exaggerated fashion, states that Przybyszewski "promised her this play as long as six years ago, while V[era] F [edorovna] was touring in Warsaw" ("Teatr i muzyka," *Russkoe slovo* 5). It is possible that Przybyszewski had agreed to write a new play for the actress at that time to make amends for events surrounding the first production of *Sneg*, but certainly could not have promised *Pir zhibzhi* to her, for the play was based on his recently published novel, *Dzhen sadu* [*Sudnyi den'*; *Judgment Day*, 1909].
27. [I do not want to—and cannot—look upon next season's tour as an inevitability in material terms. The provinces were always a means for me up to this time. On this tour they must be the end. I always traveled there only with the desire to collect money for my artistic goals. Some kind of connection was forming imperceptibly. A desire was born to show not only the forms created in various stages of work, but the most precious [thing]—[my] work of the past years, the work of [my] theatre. I divide my 15-year activity into three parts: 1) [my] work in the provinces, 2) on the Imperial stage, 3) 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 that which for me is equivalent to the creations of the previous periods—the work of my theatre ... All this forces one 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 that which is more or less finished [and] completed.] Letter originally published in 1911 in Karpov (271-272).
- Rybakova dates this letter to sometime before 23 July 1909. Al'tshuller's earlier monograph, *Pis'ma aktrisy* [*Letters of an Actress*], mistakenly dates the letter to 1908. The 1908 summer tour was only a month long (30 August-28 September) and Komissarzhevskaiia did not tour the provinces, but Moscow. See Komissarzhevskaiia (175 and 339). It is unknown at this time whether Komissarzhevskaiia dated her letters in OS or NS while abroad.
28. 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 (152-155) and Schuler (183).
29. To put this sum into some 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 Mariia Savina, working at the Imperial Theatres, could earn four times that amount. See Schuler (25).
30. Original from *Odeskie novosti* 1. XI (1909).
  31. [“полной крика и дисгармонии наболевшей души”]  
 Zonov’s description is certainly shaped by Komissarzhevskaiia’s death. Arkadii Zonov, an old friend of Meierkhol’d, became director of Komissarzhevskaiia’s Dramaticheskii Teatr in 1907-1908 when Meierkhol’d left. He co-directed *Pir zhizni* with Komissarzhevskaiia during this tour in 1909.
  32. [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 *Gody zhycia*.]  
 This letter to Komissarzhevskaiia has not been found. 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 himself 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) only 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 *Gody zhycia* to theatres in Kraków, Lwów, Łódź, and Poznań, as well as to Komissarzhevskaiia in Petersburg. He refers to Komissarzhevskaiia’s rights as “exclusive” and notes she is taking the play to Siberia. See Przybyszewski *Listy* (467-468).
  33. Moskvina, while citing the reportage of this event by Komissarzhevskaiia’s fellow cast members, makes no attempt in his 1998 article to fully investigate this problem.
  34. Soviet scholar E. Ia. Dubnova identifies D’iakonov’s position in the company. He was a young actor who joined the troupe in the fall of 1909, having finished his dramatic training in 1908. See Dubnova (185).
  35. 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 Komissarzhevskaiia 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. See D’iakonov, *Venok* (57-58).
  36. Reprinted in Rudnitskii (257).
  37. The cited chapter was originally published in Карпов as “Poslednii put’.”
  38. “Многие актеры отдавали себе ясный отчет в порочность 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” (qtd. Narokov 170). Reprinted in Rudnitskii (257) and noted by Moskwin (433). On Narokov as representative of the views of the majority, see D'iakonov, *Venok* (60).

39. [“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.”]  
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. See, for example, Schuler (174). Furthermore, no single work exists tracing the development of Komissarzhevskaiia's aesthetic views.
40. See also Narokov (170). Reprinted in Rudnitskii (257). Rybakova dates this event as 29 September (461).
41. Zonov, probably paying respect to his fellow director, does not mention any of the particular problems noted by D'iakonov and Narokov, but only that it was necessary to inspire excitement in the performers themselves for the production.
42. See also Moskwin (433).
43. [“The new drama consists of the struggle of the individual (*individuum*) with himself, i.e., 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.”]
44. “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 беспокойства, ужаса и страха.” Przybyszewski's use of the term “individuum” here is ambiguous. He has previously used the term as a synonym for “genius” in his first major work, *Zur Psychologie des Individuums* [*On the Psychology of the Individual*, 1892]. Its use here, as well as the use of the possible metaphoric meaning of “*istochnik*” (spring, source) and its aqueous association with the notion of art as a cosmic force or current presented in *Aforizmy i preludy*, 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 *Zlote runo*,

*Śnieg*, and *Gody życia*, all include creative individuals (Przesławski, Tadeusz and Kazimierz, Janota) 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* [*The Synagogue of Satan*, 1897].

45. ["We must not relate to 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's go into rehearsals "without a tone"; [I wish] only that everyone would have a passionate desire to merge with the figure portrayed. We will make a series of attempts [and] psychological problems. We will make mistakes, but we must seek, seek! And 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?"]
46. ["In comparison to them [other directors and innovators] she [Komissarzhevskaja] 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 [its] purity and clarity"] The comment about "plastic forms"—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 Dramaticheskii Teatr 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, Pitches (12ff).
47. ["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 knew 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."] Originally published in *Obozrenie teatrov* 9 II (1907).
48. 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.
49. ["Maybe that which you say in general about the play is true. But we will not judge it only by that which is given by the author. At the present time 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 us to relate to your role in such a way so that aside from the text, aside from the given relations to the play's general content, you also consider the independent drama of your own character." Reprinted in Rudnitskii (257). Narokov is most likely familiar with D'iakonov's narrative, since the latter published his account of this period shortly after Komissarzhevskaiia's death (1911/1913), while Narokov's monograph did not appear until 1956.

50. Today, of course, directors speak of making an "emotional investment" in the character.
51. Motivation would become a central concern to Stanislavskii in the development of "the System."
52. Dubnova mentions D'iakonov (185). 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. 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 (Narokov 149-150). Arkad'ev was an older member of the troupe who supported Komissarzhevskaiia's and Meierkhol'd's efforts to reform art (D'iakonov, "Dramaticheskii teatr" 186).
53. Komissarzhevskaiia's first performance in Odessa is noted in Rybakova (465).
54. For reviews from 1909 see Aleksandrovskii, Loengrin, and V. (V. Vorovskii).

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