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THE ETHOS OF PERFORMANCE IN REMIZOV

Whenever Aleksei Remizov would leave his apartment in Paris to go on an errand, he pinned a note on the door with the following message: "Alone I go out on the road" ("Vykhozhu odin ia na dorogu"). The use of the opening line from Lermontov's most famous lyric conveniently signals the central premises of Remizov's poetics. The semiotic density of the gesture performed habitually was meant to engage whoever came by in a typically Remizovian manner. The message can be decoded on many levels simultaneously:

- 1) the use of quotation or paraphrase;
- 2) an indirect commentary on the commonly held view of Lermontov as a popular, but unoriginal poet;
- 3) lowering the poetic line: a tendency toward literary parody or purposeful "misapplication," as the "homey" context here;
- 4) the use of a literary reference to formalize or ritualize a routine occurrence, thus rendering it special, mysterious, pregnant with meaning (or the reverse of the "lowering" of the poetic quotation as above);
- 5) mystification: play with the use of a literary reference and with the actual life (*byt*) situation, thus eliciting a number of relevant and irrelevant responses from the audience: "went where?," and "on what road?";
- 6) irreverence: this is not what "our" Lermontov really meant?;
- 7) appropriation of existing literary material as the artist sees fit, just as in another example of a paraphrase of a famous Lermontov opening line in *The Tale of Stratilatov*: "'Tis dull and sad, and there's no one to serve tea to. . .," instead of "to stretch a hand to" ("... i nekomu chiau podat");
- 8) personal mythmaking: here the quote may serve as a confirmation of Remizov's chosen stance of being "alone in all and always" (i.e., in life and in writing, neither faithful to reality, but the "preferred" version of "My Life as a Writer," or "as Remizov");
- 9) finally, this self-conscious act is a dramatic, theatrical gesture without necessarily being a reference to some concrete reality, but rather stemming from a deep need to perform, entertain, and to transform reality into play.

Remizov's biography and writings present a veritable compendium of various forms of "performance," involving the semiotically loaded type of behavior just described. Speech play is inextricably tied to performance behav-

ior. It is central to all that Remizov does, ranging from verbal play and parody to stylized handwriting, and including mystification, fabrication, practical jokes, and "leg-pulling" of friends and readers.¹ In his penchant for theatricality, in not wanting things to be as they are in "respectable" life which bored him,² Remizov was very much a man of his times. There are many well known examples of performance behavior among the Symbolists, as will be demonstrated later. It is also in the first decade of this century that Nikolai Evreinov developed his seminal ideas on the importance of theater in life.³

In a series of essays on theatricality in Russian culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Iurii Lotman writes that there are distinct periods when "art imperiously invades daily life, aestheticizing the everyday course of life."⁴ The early twentieth century is, indeed, such a period. Lotman suggests that literature, at various stages of its history, draws on alternating models of either life or art. Life does the same. The three spheres are seen as interconnected, each system transforming the other according to its rules. Thus we observe a recurrent "'theatricalization' and ritualization of certain aspects of the theatrical world, the situation in which theater becomes a model for actual behavior. . . ."⁵ By contrast, in the age of Realism "art, losing the element of play, does not jump over the ramp" ("ne pereskakivaet cherez rampu").⁶

1. E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959); *idem*, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974). For the theory of play and an extensive bibliography on the subject, see B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ed., *Speech Play: Research and Resources for the Study of Linguistic Creativity* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1976). In the introduction to this volume the editor defines speech play as "any local manipulation of elements and relations of language, creative of a specialized genre, code-variety, and/or style. A key word is, however, 'manipulation.' It implies a degree of selection and consciousness beyond that of ordinary language use" (p. 1).

2. Z. Mintz, "Perepiska s A. Remizovym," in *A. Blok: Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, No. 92, pt. 2 (Moscow: Nauka, 1981), p. 77.

3. N. Evreinov, "Teatralizatsiia zhizni," in *Teatr kak takovoi* (Berlin: Academia, 1923; first ed., St. Petersburg, 1913). There is an English translation of Evreinov's selected writings in A. Nazaroff, trans. and ed., *The Theater in Life* (New York: B. Blom, 1970; rpt. of the 1927 ed.).

4. Iu. Lotman, "Theater and Theatricality in the Order of Early Nineteenth-Century Culture," in H. Baran, trans. and ed., *Semiotics and Culture: Readings from the Soviet Union* (White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1976). The essay originally appeared in Iu. Lotman, *Stat'i po tipologii kul'tury: materialy k kursu teorii literatury*, Vyp. 2 (Tartu: Tartuskii gos. univ., 1973).

5. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

6. Iu. Lotman, "Poetika bytovogo povedeniia v russkoi kul'ture XVIII veka," in *Trudy po znakovym sistemam*, Vyp. 411 (Tartu: Tartuskii gos. univ., 1977), p. 89. Lotman defines the term "behavior in everyday life" (*bytovoe povedenie*) as a systematic, conscious orientation of behavior on the norm and laws of artistic texts, therefore perceived aesthetically. He states that a proof of such behavior for a given period would provide an important typological characterization of culture (p. 65).

The modernist orientation toward performance has serious implications. The esthetization of everyday life is inseparable from the esthetization of writing and the self-conscious attitude toward the act of writing itself. As a result, the boundary between art and life becomes interpenetrable. Decoding of texts is then rendered more complicated as the relationship between literary and non-literary elements enters into the process. Of course, it is important to remember that no performance can take place without an audience. The times provided ample opportunity for both, drawing as they did on a small circle of the initiated. The "esthetization of life," or *zhiznetvorchestvo*, is defined by Lidiia Ginzburg as "a quality of premeditated theatricalization of life."⁷ *Zhiznetvorchestvo* and its relationship to Remizov's writing will be the central concern of this study.

The interpenetration of life and art was the self-professed *dominant* of Symbolist poetics, its *tvorimaia legenda* (the self-wrought legend). We will mention but a few familiar examples of this attitude. Love triangles become a "matter of life and art," as in the case of Briusov, Belyi, and Nina Perovskaia, recreated in fictional form in Briusov's historical novel *The Fiery Angel*.⁸ Most famous is the history of the relationship of Belyi, Blok, and Liubov' Blok as the Beautiful Lady. The worship of the Divine Feminine emerged from the poetry and philosophy of Vladimir Solov'ev and was then recreated in Blok's poetry, Belyi's symphonies and memoirs. Solov'ev's own mystical encounters with St. Sophia took place in significantly dramatic settings: The British Museum, the Egyptian desert, and on the train carrying the feverish Solov'ev back to Russia. One might note here that the "real" woman in the last encounter did not want to participate in the experience, although she was moved by it.

In the case of Belyi and the Bloks, the experience had painful consequences when Liubov' refused to participate in the game. The theatrical representation of the myth of the Beautiful Lady and the debunking of its poetic and life manifestations in Blok's *Balaganchik* (The Puppet Booth) and *Neznakomka* (The Stranger) upset Belyi and created a permanent rift in the friendship. Blok was able to evaluate what had happened in his essay "On the Contemporary State of Russian Symbolism" published in *Apollon* in 1910: "My own magic world became the stage for my personal actions, my 'dissecting auditorium' or . . . the playhouse where I myself was playing a role next to my amazing puppets, . . . In other words, I had transformed my own life into

7. L. Ginzburg, *O psikhologicheskoi proze* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1977), p. 27.

8. A. Lavrov and S. Grechishkin, eds. *Wiener Slavistischer Almanach*, Band I (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978).

art (a tendency very noticeable in the art of all European decadents). Life became art."⁹

Theories of the far-reaching role of the theater were developed by Viacheslav Ivanov, who wanted to revive the Bacchanalias as the ritual of the ancient world capable of transforming present society through group rites. Ivanov's ritual Wednesday's in the Tower, the self-consciously effete bohemian milieu created with his wife, Zinov'eva—Annibal, were performances in themselves, or rather performance-events. Even in the general atmosphere of theatricality of literary life, the dandy-like attire and the effete behavior of Zinaida Hippus and the theatrical make-up and stylized appearance of Mikhail Kuzmin, were remarkable. In this context, Evreinov's ideas of "Theater for oneself" and of "monodrama," calling for the rediscovery of the "theatrical instinct" appear both as a confirmation and a challenge.¹⁰

In recent years, anthropologists and sociologists have taken into consideration the role of theater in daily life. Clearly, Remizov's contemporaries engaged in *zhiznetvorchestvo* and were well aware of the role of frame perspective as defined by Erving Goffman: "A frame perspective allows us to generate crazy behavior and to see that it's not at all crazy."¹¹ Of course, the Futurists knew this as well. Contemporary social sciences seem to have confirmed Evreinov's prediction that life will borrow from the stage, rather than vice versa. Thus, such formulas as "the world is a stage" or "a battlefield," cease to be metaphors. In his *Presentations of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman provides countless examples of "the art of impression management" in a range of real life situations, including medicine, shamanism, and others.

In the early 1950s in the essay entitled "Theory of Play and Fantasy," Gregory Bateson established the importance of "frame" for defining the same action in different ways, depending on the context: "the playful nip among the chimpanzees denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite."¹² It is precisely what Goffman terms "framing practices" that defines an act as crazy, or aggressive, or not. Another helpful term he provides is "keying," analogous to "code" in linguistics: "The set of conventions by which a given activity already meaningful in some

9. A. Blok, "O sovremennom sostoianii russkogo simbolizma," *Apollon*, No. 8 (1910); quoted in O. Raevsky Hughes, *The Poetic World of Boris Pasternak* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), p. 132.

10. The opposite movement, that of life being part of theater in such contemporary theater groups as The Living Theater and La Mama, whose members live as a family and try to obliterate the distinction between their professional and private selves, has been noted by E. Burns, *Theatricality: A Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life* (London: Longman Group, 1972), p. 153.

11. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, p. 246.

12. E. Goffman, "A Theory of Play and Phantasy," in his *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), p. 182.

primary framework is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else. The process of transcription can be called 'keying'.¹³ The fluidity of the boundary between life and art make the resort to "framing" and "keying" indispensable. When either fails, some embarrassing situations can occur, as will be seen in examples from Remizov's life. As we examine the relationship between a literary text and theatrical performance, some possibilities of "keying" between two complex semiotic systems will be defined. The interconnections between the three models of life/text/theater, characteristic for early modernism, should then emerge as a self-conscious stance.

Performance-type behavior was second nature to Remizov long before he met Evreinov in 1908. A cursory examination of Remizov's biography, as well as of some of his autobiographical writings, will be useful in understanding why he liked "tricks," why he insisted on presenting himself as a "holy fool" (*iurodivyi*), or why play was such a serious matter for him in happy and tragic circumstances. In an extensive introduction to the first publication of Aleksandr Blok's "Correspondence with A. M. Remizov," Z. Mintz demonstrated that the attitude of Blok and Remizov to what they perceived as "estheticized behavior" in each other was, apparently, quite complex.¹⁴ Blok's "fiery passions" were foreign to Remizov, just as Remizov's "play" seemed to Blok to be infantile, an expression of the fear of life. Yet Mintz's study shows the depth of understanding between the two artists, who respected their differences and idiosyncrasies.

Remizov makes a revealing statement about his desire for "play" in *Iveren'*, an autobiographical account of the exile years in Northern Russia (1896-1903), in Ust-Sysolsk, Penza, and Vologda:

Jolted from the peace of winter quietude, now, in the unceasing spring light, amidst constant arguments in my ear, I thought of myself, of my accidental being among people, and how I was moved by the desire not to be *myself*.¹⁵

Вытолкнутый из строя зимнего затишья, сейчас, в весеннем, несмеркающем свете, в непрерывных спорах над ухом, задумался я о себе, о своей жизни среди людей, и как захотелось мне быть не самим собой.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

14. In one instance of such behavior, a "game," Remizov took on the role of "a Russian writer leading the half-German Blok-Hermann to Russia" (p. 75). The relationship between the two writers receives some attention in Avril Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, Vol. I: *The Distant Thunder* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), 166-69.

15. Part of the manuscript of "Iveren'" is in the Bakhmeteff Archives, Ms. Collection of A. M. Remizov, Columbia Univ. The work is to be published shortly in the Berkeley Slavic Series, edited by Olga Raevsky Hughes.

This desire "not to be yourself" is precisely what Evreinov considered to be central in the impulse toward theatricality: "what I wish for is not to be myself. . . , not to be yourself—is the first slogan of theatricality."¹⁶ The desire to transform reality permeates everything Remizov did, creating the text of his life and fictions. It is significant to take note of the fact that his first attempt at literary writing took place after his arrest and imprisonment in the Moscow prison fortress,¹⁷ when the wish "not to be myself" needed urgent expression.

The desire to transform reality seems to go back to the particular conditions in Remizov's family. In her recent biography of the writer, entitled *Ognennaia pamiat'* (Fiery Memory),¹⁸ Natal'ia Reznikova, his friend, translator, and literary executor in emigration, described the relations of the young Remizov and his brothers with their mother. The picture that emerged was that of a mother, a well-educated and politically active young woman, who married a much older, dull man she could not love (she could not marry the man she was in love with). She then had five children. When the youngest, Aleksei Remizov, was still small, she left her husband and settled into an outbuilding on her brothers' property. She was treated as a dependent, and lived in a state of seclusion and depression. She developed an artificial relationship with her sons, based on a particular formal polite language contrived to keep a distance between them. Being the youngest, Remizov was always aware of the mother's unhappiness and of her ambivalence toward him. In his helplessness, he tried to distract and amuse her with childish pranks.

Reznikova also provides invaluable insight into Remizov's subsequent relationship with his wife, Serafima Dovgello, who as a young girl was marked by ardent spirituality. Told by a sectarian prophetess (*skopcheskaia prorochitsa*) that she was fated to devote herself to God, she pledged to do just that. But she broke her promise and married Remizov. He could never forget this. His sense of guilt, stemming no doubt from early feelings for his suffering, rejecting mother, informs much of his fiction. The female characters in Remizov's early novels, particularly in *Krestovye sestry* (Sisters in the Cross), are innocent victims, often spiritual beings who are raped, or married against their will.¹⁹ A more direct connection between life transformed in

16. *Teatr kak takovoi*, pp. 36, 41.

17. Remizov described the moment when he was first moved by the impulse to write his narrative "In Captivity," in which he perceived prison not as a realistic experience in Dostoevskian terms, but rather in the symbolic, Maeterlinckian terms of "our whole life is a prison": "Avtobiografiia 1913 goda," typescript, the Archive of A. M. Remizov, fund 634, No. 1, the Herzen Public Library, Leningrad.

18. Published in the Berkeley Slavic Series with an introduction by Olga Raevsky Hughes.

19. This is also true of a later work, particularly in the two narratives in *Besnovatyie* (Paris: Opleshnik, 1952).

art appears in the trilogy of novels containing a fictionalized biography of his wife: *Olia*, *In the Field of Azure*, and *In a Rosy Shimmer*, which impose a "plot" scheme on a life.

As Remizov fictionalized characters from personal life (wife, mother, friends), he behaved in actual life as if it were a book. His home life, such as the daily schedule, or entertaining guests, was conducted according to a strictly ritualized sense of time and place. Reznikova reports that the husband and wife addressed each other with the polite *vy*. Guests were welcome after five. There were definite prohibitions in the household: no smoking near the icons, no criss-cross conversations on several topics at once, guests were to arrive in "flocks." Reznikova comments further that the lack of simplicity pushed away some of their friends, but that others accepted it as a "game." Remizov treated his wife with utmost delicacy and an almost neurotic protectiveness of her sensibilities, although she was a very strong, high strung woman. Their physical appearance, he small, hunchbacked, gnome-like, near-sighted, and Serafima enormous, incredibly white skinned and imposing, provided quite a contrasting image.²⁰ Remizov's work room, the legendary *kukushkina* (from the cuckoo clock) where he worked and received guests, and where his collections of toys and objects were displayed hanging on strings, left an indelible image on many contemporaries.²¹ Remizov's tendency to "transform" reality, to erase the boundary between life and fiction, is particularly striking in the autobiography *Iveren'*. The chapter headings describing in vivid detail the living situation and encounters with prominent personalities in exile, sound like names of stage sets: "V kuriatnike," (In the Chicken Coop), "V stoile" (In the Stall), "Rozovye liagushki" (Pink Frogs).

Remizov often took on roles. In his relations with other writers, particularly with Blok, who on occasion was made uncomfortable by it, Remizov played a poor, despised, unfortunate writer, or a "poor clerk." The stance was sustained into old age when, after the war in Paris, Remizov went to see the editor of the influential *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Michel Arland, who was interested in his work. Arland later described the diffident, mincing, stooped, strange creature almost unable to speak, and behaving with such extreme reverence as to make the Frenchman quite uncomfortable, confused, and embarrassed.²² This is a good example of a lack of "keying,"

20. V. Shklovskii, in *Zoo ili pis'ma ne o liubvi* (Berlin: Gelikon, 1923), describes her appearance as so striking that she stood out in Berlin as "some negro in Moscow during the reign of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, so white and Russian was she" (p. 28).

21. Reznikova provides descriptions of his rooms in her memoirs. See also M. Osorgin (Il'in), *O t'me i prosvetlenii* (München: n.p., 1959.).

22. M. Arland describes the meeting in his introduction to the French edition of *With Clipped Eyes* (*Les yeux tendus*, trans. N. Reznikova [Paris: Gallimard, 1958], p. 11).

for how could the French *homme de lettres* have related this behavior to the Russian "poor clerk" tradition?

Another of Remizov's *personae* was that of a *very Russian* writer. In the context of the highly cosmopolitan, Westernized culture of the Russian intelligentsia of the time, this stance acquired a quality of performance. This is all the more clear if we take into account the evidence of both Mintz and Reznikova that Remizov was, in fact, well-versed in European culture, had traveled, knew languages, and kept abreast of current artistic trends. At the same time, Remizov's assumed Russianness was deeply felt and important to him, as well as extremely effective in his relations with other writers. Blok was much influenced by it, particularly in his cycle of poems about Russia, *On the Field of Kulikovo*, and later in *The Twelve*. Indeed, it seems that Remizov enjoyed this influence very much. He used the device of "dreams" for a similar purpose. When he reported to Blok that he had a dream of Leskov who told him that he liked Blok, Remizov thus conveyed his own sentiments to the poet.²³

Remizov was well-known, feared, loved, and despised for his practical jokes. In *Vstrechi* (Meetings), the autobiography dealing with both the pre-revolutionary period and the emigration years,²⁴ Remizov described a particularly amusing "mystification." When a swarthy friend of his, Totesh, arrived from the southern city of Kherson, Remizov presented him in various homes as a celebrated Turkish poet, Fuad Namyka. Totesh was feted wherever Remizov took him, and in return for hospitality he performed the only Turkish ditty he knew: "aida, yilda bir barym/ akla uima dzhibigim." Remizov supplied a translation: "at least once a year, or a month, do not listen to reason, my baby chick."²⁵ Remizov writes with glee: "For about a month I tricked them all." Part of the amusement came from his play of words in this statement: "ia vsekh turechil," or "I turked them," close to the Russian *durachil*, or "tricked." Remizov claims that Blok, present at some of the gatherings, saw through this but did not say anything, except smile at the innocent fun. All this "fell through" when Remizov made the mistake of taking Totesh to the house of a scholar and linguist, Harold Williams. Here Remizov describes the richly laden table, with especially prepared Turkish delicacies awaiting them. When the host addressed his distinguished guest with some Turkish phrases, however, embarrassment followed. In another situation Remizov

23. Mintz, "Perepiska s A. Remizovym," p. 69.

24. The memoir *Vstrechi* (Paris: Lev, 1981) contains two collections: "Shurumburum," devoted to the years of prison and exile (1897-1900); and "Peterburgskii buerak," dealing with the years spent in St. Petersburg until the emigration (1905-21), as well as memoirs of the postwar period.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200. A Turkish speaker confirmed the translation, as well as the suggestive overtones of the ditty.

played with his knowledge of French during a trip to Paris when he responded to all inquiries with "Je suis, je suis, je suis."²⁶

Sometimes Remizov's games backfired, but he carried them out with great zest and without regret. In *Meetings*, in the chapter titled "The Statuette," he describes a secret gathering of a few initiated literati (including Rozanov and Kuzmin) at the house of Somov, whose father was a curator at the Hermitage. The purpose for the occasion was to view a precious wax model of Potemkin's phallus (called *khobot*), which Catherine the Great had made as an example for Russian males. Remizov describes in detail the atmosphere of awe and veneration of the object, as it was removed with great care from a violin-shaped case. Confusion broke the spell as the beauty spot, glued onto the object was lost and all the assembled guests began to look for it under the table. As if telling the ribald tale was not enough, Remizov provides a follow-up, a situation he creates in response to the occasion. He attempts to "demystify" the occasion in a sort of gesture of "baring the device" (*obnazhenie priema*). He, then, felt called upon to astound his friends by providing a "live" example of the object in the person of an unsuspecting university student, who immediately became popular in this circle. Soon after that, Remizov ran into him and seeing him in make-up he understood that he "had gone around" (*zataskalsia*). This account turns upside-down the veneration of an *objet d'art* by presenting a "realized," literal version of it. The performance "jumped" over the ramp back into life.

The most intricate and famous of Remizov's creations was his secret literary society, "The Great Free Order of Monkeys" ("Obezvelvolpal"). The tsar of the monkeys, Asyka, another persona of the writer, presided over this masonic-like order. Remizov referred to it as "a theater without make-up and masks," which began as a game for children.²⁷ Members of the order, comprising most of the known writers and literary personalities, bore mock titles of rank: monkey knights, elders, cavaliers of the monkey order, with Rozanov as the phallus bearer. Fleishman saw in the society a "theatricalized equivalent of the 'worldly' social hierarchy,"²⁸ yet another example of the "the text crossing over the boundary of literature." They were also the recipients of personalized "charters" (*gramoty*), made by Remizov in the form of collages with writing in old script.

Remizov described his order in *Kukha* (Berlin, 1923), a book dedicated to the then dead Rozanov and addressed to him: "... the order of the monkeys

26. Mintz, "Perepiska s A. Remizovym," p. 92.

27. *Kukha* (Berlin: Izdatel'stvo Z. I. Grzhebina, 1923; rpt. New York: Silver Age Publishers, 1978), p. 189. Remizov's *Posolon* begins with a similar introduction, stating that the Märchen began as stories told by Remizov to his daughter.

28. L. Fleishman, "Iz kommentariiev k *Kukhe*. Konkretor Obezvelvolpala," *Slavica Hierosolymitana*, No. 1 (1977), p. 189.

destroyed all the borders, border posts, and visas—go, wherever you wish, live just as you like. And how limitless is this order, not having limits, it has no significance in the limited (circumscribed) world.”²⁹ The recurrent word “limits” or “boundaries” (*granitsa*), is played with in various forms (*bez-granichnyi*, *ogranichennyi*), and multiple meanings in this example. The desire to escape limitations imposed by life and society, to allow the play of creativity and imagination reign, as well as an inborn irreverence towards all institutions, including literature, and people who take themselves seriously—this was the impulse that moved Remizov. The testimony of one well-known contemporary, also a member of the society, Viktor Shklovskii, confirms its philosophy: “We (i.e., monkeys—G.S.) play holy fools in the world in order to be free.”³⁰ For this freedom of imagination Remizov also turned to dreams where the usual “boundaries” of possible and impossible did not matter.

The impulse to go beyond the bounds of the ordinary and the acceptable is strikingly close to Victor Turner’s definition of *communitas* as “a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals. These individuals are not segmented into roles and statues. . . . Along with this direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities, there tends to go a model of society as a homogeneous, unstructured *communitas*, whose boundaries are ideally coterminous with those of the human species.”³¹ Turner specifies that: “the attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”³² Shklovskii echoes Remizov’s strong sense of difference, of being outside of the accepted norm of place and time, when he says in *Zoo*: “The monkey army does not sleep where it had supper, not does it drink its morning tea where it has spent the night. It is always homeless.”³³

The consequence of this homelessness of the spirit, its freedom and theater was, for Remizov, one of its best vehicles. In the chapter of *Meetings* titled “Besovskoe deistvo” (The Acts of the Demons—the name of his first play), Remizov writes the following: “My passion for the theater, just as my unsurmountable desire to draw—without them I am not I.”³⁴ Remizov’s passion

29. *Kukha*, p. 66.

30. Shklovskii, *Zoo ili pis'ma ne o liubvi*, p. 29. Reznikova reports in her memoirs that members of the society were people capable of passionate love for something without self-interest (p. 23).

31. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969), pp. 131-32.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

33. Shklovskii, *Zoo ili pis'ma ne o liubvi*, p. 28.

34. *Kukha*, p. 183.

for theater was channeled not only through his writing of plays, or his games. It enabled him to undergo various "transformations": he "became" Avvakum in *Podstrizhennymi glazami*, or the legendary dancer Lifar and the spirit of dance in *Pliashushchii demon*, and a medieval scribe, the writer of the first Russian Primer who burned the first printing press in *Krashenye ryla*. The ability to be "transformed" enables him to communicate with the spirits of the dead, who themselves had been "liminal" personalities, or writers. He does so in the already mentioned *Kukha*, addressed to Rozanov, and in *Akhru*, dedicated to Blok on his death.

It is hardly suprising that Remizov ends the *Meetings* with a chapter dedicated to Evreinov, entitled "Potikhon'ku skomorokhi igraite" (Play quietly, minstrels). The affinity between the two artists is clear. Both believed their instinct for theatricality to stem from the medieval Russian tradition of entertainers, or minstrels, the *skomorokhi*.³⁵ Remizov recalls the circumstances of their meeting in 1908, the year of his unsuccessful attempt at staging "Besovskoe deistvo," and the launching of Evreinov's career at the same time with the "Miracle of Theophile." For Remizov, Evreinov was "a born *skomorokh*" ("prirozhdennyi skomorokh—teatr ego priroda"). Evreinov could not have agreed more. Years later the two men were neighbors in Paris, on the rue Boileau. Remizov described Evreinov's funeral in 1953 in theatrical terms, as a procession of various stage hands: "The 'Poloviets' princess in Spanish mourning—E. D. Unbegaun, the 'Papillion' E. P. Ripple, also in mourning, like a monkey get-up—Evreinov had the title of 'The Comedian of Obezvelvolpal,'—and after them, a head taller than the concierge, like a tall candle walked Berlioz—N. D. Ianchevskii—and then a whole bunch of figures, and following the stage hands, two toy prop cars. . . ."³⁶ The friends described here bear nicknames as if they were stage names. The medium is indeed the message. This is not only a gracious realization of Evreinov's vision of life as theater, but of Remizov's own.

It is the same theatrical instinct that informs the introduction to another autobiography, *Myshkina dudochka* (The Mouse's Reed), devoted to the war years spent in Paris: "Intermezzo—a funny act in the midst of tragic storms. The place of action—our house on rue Boileau. . . .Dramatis personae—our neighbors. The intermezzo consist of short scenes—'courts métrages. . . .'"³⁷ The driving impulse to "transform" the tragic reality of war-time deprivation, compounded by the loss of his wife after a prolonged illness, makes this account into a masterpiece, uplifting rather than depressing. The make-believe

35. On the *skomorokhi* in English, see R. Zguta, *Russian Minstrels: A History of the Skomorokhi* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).

36. *Vstrechi*, p. 287.

37. *Myshkina dudochka* (Paris: Opleshnik, 1953).

forms the basic frame of *The Mouse's Reed*. Reality is broken by play, as if by a spell, when a mysterious visitor, a mouse-player appears in the apartment. The last chapter (note the frame introduction and finale), is called "Igra veshchei" (The Play of Things), in reference to the mysterious and the unexplainable in life, to the "transformation" of things as they come alive. It refers to the performance of mysterious actions, or to "playing tricks" which interfere with the rational faculties and perception of reality, making it bearable. The Hoffmannesque reference to the "coming alive" of things—(toys) makes sense when we know of Remizov's love for toys, which he collected with a passion all his life. In an earlier work with an appropriately romantic title *Po karnizam* (Along the Eaves), referring to sleepwalking, Remizov supplies his list of toys:³⁸ Among them are imaginary folk tale characters and puppets, as for example Baba Iaga, the Teddy bear, a winged lizard, a gnome in a red cap, a black flying cat, hampelmann, etc.

. . . остов елки—самое видное—хвост бабы Яги, миша-Медведь, крылатая ящерица, в красном колпаке цверг, куры и курицы клюют, унтергрудник, летучая черная кошка, колокольчик-эвончик, чортуик-голорыжник белый прыпун—хампельман лягушатый. . . .

The constantly shifting frames and reference, the fluid boundary between physical reality and creative imagination, contribute to the "liminal" or "threshold" genres of Remizov's writing. The answer to the question of how the orientation toward play and performance affects writing, is manifold. The writing calls attention to itself in "ornamental prose" where the form contains much, if not all, of the message. It affects the nature itself of the written text, its very status among other artistic texts. This is particularly direct in the collection of Märchen, *Posolon'* (1907), supplied with copious notes at the end of the book. The notes contain explanations of neologisms and ancient words derived from pagan Slavic rituals, children's folklore and games.³⁹ But most remarkably, the notes provide directions for the reading and performance of the miniatures. Each tale is a syncretic form whose reading is meant to be a "total experience," utilizing rhythm, movement, dance, gesture, and verbal expressiveness. For example, the "Bear Lullaby" ("Medvezhia kolybelnaia") is to be read "gravely, slowly" (*s vazhnostiū, medlenno*). In another, "Krasochki," children-flowers, adults-devils, and an angel are to loll and tumble in a heap when the children begin to laugh.

38. *Po karnizam* (Belgrad: Russkaia tipografiia, 1929), pp. 20-21.

39. For a study of the Märchen, see C. Rosenthal, "Remizov's *Sunwise and Leimorium*: Folklore in Modernist Prose," in a forthcoming collection of essays on Remizov to be published by Ardis.

The typographic layout of the tales confirms the role of intonation in their performance.

In notes to the collection of Zyrian tales, *Chortov Log*, (The Devil's Lair, 1908) Remizov provides a detailed description of ancient Zyrian beliefs in spirits and in duality of the world, likened by the author to the Bogomil heresy, which relates to the *skomorokhi*. In the preface to *Rusalia*, Remizov explains the ancient, pre-Christian mid-summer ritual that was suppressed after Russia adopted Christianity. Again, the *skomorokhi* appeared as entertainers on such occasions. Remizov's interest in the minstrels, mentioned earlier in their connection to Evreinov, is tied directly to his fascination with shamans. Russell Zguta, in his book on the Russian minstrels, reminds us that the cult goes back to ancient customs and rituals; that it bears direct affinity with magic, particularly through the use of musical instruments (*gusli*, horns), and masks which were "essential for performance of various pagan rites, including magic, conjuration, divination, healing, and the casting of charms or spells."⁴⁰ The shamans and minstrels, the ancient healers and entertainers, had the ability to facilitate contacts with other worlds through ceremony, ritual, and transformations. They performed important functions in the community and were harshly suppressed by religious authorities, either Christian Orthodox or Moslem.

Remizov identifies with the suppressed but vital entertainers and magicians, just as he identifies with Avvakum, burned at the stake for his faith. The unique role and position of the writer in society is, in Remizov's view, no less hazardous and essential. One particular example will help clarify and focus these connections. The shaman is the hidden hero, the subtext of Remizov's programmatic short novel *The Tale of Stratilatov*.⁴¹ This subtext co-exists with such literary ones as the "poor clerk" tales of Gogol' and Dostoevskii, and Pushkin's forbidden libertine mock-epic *The Cavriliad*. The fact that it is hand-copied in notebooks and preserved despite risk is an allusion to the Old Believers who preserved apocryphal texts in a similar manner. What all of these literary and non-literary, written and oral texts have in common is that they are threatened by authority, yet "irrepressible" as signaled in the subtitle of Remizov's tale, *The Irrepressible Drum*. They are part of the "liminal" activity present in all societies, what Turner terms "anti-structure."

The set of assumptions about the writer surfaces in the text in various ways. It is best illustrated by the hero, Stratilatov, a master of oral recitation. He tells stories, ritually, when walking back home from the office as he has

40. Zguta, *Russian Minstrels*, p. 8.

41. G. Nachtailer Slobin, "Writing as Possession: The Case of Remizov's 'Poor Clerk,'" in N. A. Nilsson, ed., *Studies in 20th Century Russian Prose* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1982).

been doing for forty years. The reader and the listeners in the story become one with the performance. The clerks' response is conveyed through the sound imagery of the onomatopoeic words: *Khokh, sop, vzvizg, kriak*. The physical aspect itself of the recitation, as the secret reading of *The Gavriliad*, is depicted as a state of possession, in which the teller is "no longer intoning, but as if beating the drum." The phrase has a regular, drumlike rhythm in the original. "i ūzh ne pri/she/pe/ty/va/et, a slov/no v bu/ben/byet." The use of the shaman-story teller imbues all aspects of the text with the quality of performance, uniting the form and the content until they become inseparable.

The writer's identification with "marginal," liminal characters, such as shamans and minstrels, and his myth of himself as a lonely unrecognized writer, a holy fool, allows him to be irreverent and irrepressible. He is subversive, creating another "version" of the *skomorokhi* performance, and playing with literary and social conventions. This places a great burden on written texts. Whether they are *Märchen*, legends, fiction, or fictional autobiographies, they are syncretic texts eluding a normative genre definition or expectation. The written page, moreover, is made to convey intonation through the use of typography, punctuation, and manipulation of syntax so that, in Remizov's words, the page looks like a "musical score." He insisted that the written text must be read out loud, that words and their aural arrangement (*lad*) must thus be tested.

Enormous demands are made on the reader, who must be able to follow the writer's intent, or participate in the "performance" of the written text, as was observed in our analysis of the Lermontov quotation at the beginning of this article. Remizov prided himself on never yielding to the temptation to make things easier for the reader. The constant manipulation of the reader's attention and expectations is part of the orientation on performance as an attitude that dominates the life and art of Remizov and other modernists. His work confirms his profound belief that "Reality is created by art."

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