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THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ACTIVITY OF THE BELARUSIAN STATE THEATRE – 2 IN VITEBSK

*TSAR MAXIMILIAN – A MASTERPIECE OF THE BELARUSIAN THEATRE
OF THE EARLY 20th CENTURY*

Abstract. The subject of the research is the staging of “Tsar Maksimilian”, realized by students of the Belarusian Theatre Studio in Moscow. It was a period when young students under the direction of teachers of the Moscow Art Theater-2 prepared a repertoire, which they will show in Belarus. The performance was a part of the repertoire of the Belarusian State Theater – 2 in Vitebsk and enjoyed great success. He was shown for three seasons. The director, Valentin Smyshlyaev, had several goals: to use Belarusian folklore, to engage the whole group of actors, and on the example of this drama, raise issues such as good and evil, faith, love, power and duty, loyalty to certain ideas.

The author of the article, based on archival materials, memories of actors and theater reviews, reconstructs the performance that should occupy an important place in the history of Belarusian theatre.

Key words: history of Belarusian theater, Belarusian Theatre Studio, Belarusian State Theater-2 in Vitebsk, “Tsar Maximilian”, reconstruction of the performance.

Introduction. In 1921-1926, a Belarusian Theatre Studio worked in Moscow. The director of the studio, Valentin Smyshalev, in 1924 began to prepare a theatre program that young actors will be able to show in their homeland after returning in 1926 [22, p. 129-321]. One of the first premières was Tsar Maximilian adapted by Alexey Remizov and Mikolai Mickiewicz (directed by Valentin Smyshlyaev, scene design by Leonid Nikitin, music by Alexander Olenin, on 24 May 1924). The performance was prepared for

several months at the end of the 1923/1924 season on stage of the “Ars” cinema (51 Arbat Street). The production was repeated on the 29th of May, and, later on, it was shown to the Minsk theatregoers (the first run took place on the 10th of June). After a pause, the play was shown in Moscow nine times (on the 24th of November in the Second State Circus building, on the 8th of December in the Pillar Hall of the House of the Unions, twice in December of 1924 on the Experimental Theatre stage, five times in April of 1925 in the Aquarium Theatre). After the troupe’s move to Belarus, the play was performed for three seasons until 1929. Should be noted that the Knight Errant’s shield was part of the emblem of the Second Belarusian State Theatre (BST-2). According to Stefania Stanyuta, “Tsar Maximilian was a collective pet project to which each participant gave a bit of his or her heart” [16, p. 40]. At the rehearsals, Smyshlyaev introduced the concept of “roving comedians”, while graduate students had a dream: “When we complete our studies, we shall travel with our theatre around the county [Belarus] making stops in towns, villages, outright in the fields” [10, p. 11].

Known since the 17th century, the play had quite rapidly gained popularity and was often performed in the East Slavic lands. It was supplemented with some fragments and even entire episodes from the folk theatre repertoire (such as “Anika-the-Warrior and Death”, “The Boat”), folk songs, tales about historic events, soldier jokes and many other stage activities. All this rich and diverse material was incorporated into the script, and organically assimilated. Therefore, the main line is the conflict between the pagan Maximilian and the Christian Adolf receded into the background entailing a change in the genre. Due to the preponderance of humorous and musical elements in a number of the play versions, the researcher Petr Bogatyrev has called Tsar Maximilian a comic opera. Today, there are about thirty versions of the text, most of which date back to the second half of the 19th century.

The interpretation of the main material. In Belarus, Tsar Maximilian was popular in the second half of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century (until 1937), in particular, in Minsk and Mogilev Governorates. The oldest performance, in the opinion of Jazep Dyla, took place in approximately 1850 in Slutsk. In the 1860s, performances were also recorded in Vitebsk and in the village of Lastavica (Vilna Governorate, 1867). The play was put on stage most frequently in Slutsk and Rechytsa regions.

The principal character is Tsar Maximilian, who decides to marry Venus after the death of his wife, Tsarina Trajana. He attempts to intimidate his

subjects and announce his rights to the marriage regardless of the fact that it will entail a change in faith and introduction of a new cult: “I step on a stone – the stone cracks / I look at water – the water boils / I stomp the earth – the earth shakes, / one my glance at the sea makes the ship sway” [20, p. 5] – he turns to the people, demonstrating his powers. He promises: “I shall set the innocent free, / I shall hold the guilty in prisons” [20, p. 5]. The father sentences to death his son Adolf, who disapproves of the marriage. It gives rise to discontent, and mutiny evolves among Maximilian’s entourage. At first, the Knight Errant refuses to follow his orders; as a result, the hero leaves the country. Dragon makes an attempt to kill Maximilian, he fails though. Anika-the-Warrior tries to use the situation, but he dies, too. Then, Tsar Mamaj attempts to assassinate Maximilian, but he fails, too – the Doctor manages to bring the tsar back to life. The Knight is successful at last: after many years of travels, he comes back and slays Maximilian who has lost all support by then.

The Belarusian version of the play was prepared for the Belarusian Theatre Studio by one of the students, Mikalai Mickiewicz, who had a literary gift. He took Alexey Remizov’s 1919 eponymous text adapted by Vladimir Bakrylov (there are 19 versions in total including the Belarusian one). Mickiewicz cut the number of characters and removed iterations. To bring the text closer to the Belarusian audience, he filled it with some recognizable realia, such as names of cities (Minsk, Mogilev, Slutsk, and Orsha), Minsk districts (the Lower Town, Komarovka, Storozhovka) and rivers (the Berezina, the Dnieper, the Neman). However, more importantly, he added approximately ten brief interludes and replaced Russian folk songs with some popular and readily recognizable Belarusian songs that had been collected by the Studio actors during their summer vacations in Polesia and in Minsk Region (song selection by Tatiana Bondarchyk, Olga Vashkevich and Pavel Malchanau). Most pieces were performed according to the original sound, while several of them received a new adaptation by Alexander Olenin¹ including “A ŭ bary, bary” (“*In the wood, in the wood*”), “Oj, staic biaroza” (“*Oh, the birch tree standing there*”), “Oj, liacieli gusi” (“*Oh, the geese were flying*”), “Šumnyja biarozy” (“*Rustling birches*”), “Anton maladzieńki” (“*Young Antony*”), “Viasiolaja biasiedačka” (“*Merry talk*”), “Što za miesiac” (*Oh*

1 Alexander Olenin (1861-1944) – composer and pianist. In 1884-1889 he lived in St. Petersburg, where he became close to Mily Balakirev, with whom he was friends all his life, and communicated with the composers of the “Mighty Handful”. This communication aroused Olenin’s interest in folk music; he collected and recorded folk songs.

what a Moon!”), “Da ŭžo sonca za bor zajšlo” (“*Well, the sun is behind the wood*”) and “Kalychanka” (“*The Lullaby*”). In the play, Mickiewicz used some Belarusian dances as well, including the Vierabiej (*the Sparrow*)² and the Bulba (*the Potato*)³. Moreover, Olenin added some marches, the Death dance, elaborated the violin, oboe, piano and timpani parts. The play was accompanied by live music. The five-person orchestra played some traditional Belarusian instruments (the hurdy-gurdy, the guile, the fife, the tambourine and the violin), as well as the flute and the guitar.

The leitmotif of the play is the conflict between Maximilian (Konstantin Sannikov) and Adolf (Mikalai Mickiewicz), which was interpreted by actors as having the features of a conflict between generations and a conflict of world outlooks and religions. The son does not want to abandon his religion and embrace another, foreign faith. The father, however, tries to make him do it. At first, he expels his son from the kingdom; then he summons him back and puts him in jail on bread and water; then he chains him to a cell wall and subjects him to tortures. In spite of all that, Adolf sticks to his decision demonstrating tenacity and willpower. To him, consenting to his father's marriage with Venus (Venera) means not only changing his faith, but rather repudiating his history, traditions and culture. Adolf also acts as a champion of truth. This concept is mentioned three times during the play. In the first instance, during the initial meeting of the father and son, Adolf admits: “And I believe not in the gods, / but in the eternal truth of centuries” [20, p. 11]. Then, having returned from a trip, he tells his father mockingly that he dreams of “seating the beautiful goddess on a grey mare, / and some boys should be called in, /and stones should be thrown at her, / so that she would not ignore truth / and deprive the father of his son” [20, p. 19]. And, recounting his trip he emphasizes once again: “And I believe not in the gods, / but in in the eternal truth of centuries” [20, p. 19]. Adolf is guided by the desire to protect certain fixed rules and, at the same time, by an attempt to find the eternal truth.

Besides the conflict of generations, world outlooks and religions, an essential place in *Tsar Maximilian* belongs to the social conflict. Smyshlyaev's production vividly articulates that Maximilian is in opposition to his son, as well as to his inner circle and the entire people. The literary critic Michail Petuhovich wrote in the playbill: “The oppressed masses have long tolerated

2 Sparrow – Belarusian folk dance, usually performed at a wedding.

3 Potato – Belarusian folk dance. He is accompanied by a song.

Tsar Maximilian's absolutism; they have even sincerely accepted it. However, like a spider, he twines everyone with his cobweb and presses his despotism over them, just to satisfy his personal interests and desires. Time – years and centuries – pass, one historical cycle replaces another, and the oppressed keep tolerating and seeking the ‘eternal painful truth’” [13, p. 14]. In this regard, we can say that Adolf along with Dragon, Anika-the-Warrior and the Knight Errant fight against slavery, for justice and a better future. It should also be emphasized that the image of a rebel, who has plucked up his courage to start fighting against the conservative and backward world, is key to Smyshlyaev's art of that period.

The image of Maximilian as a bloodsucker tsar was represented with a relevant structure made by Leonid Nikitin. It resembled a spider with long legs: the head was the throne, the body – the midstage, and the sprawled legs were the catwalks, ramps and handrails. In the centre of the middle catwalk, there was a trapdoor, and a devil used to leap out from it. A small orchestra was located on the side below. The action took place on all three levels. This highly functional structure allowed Smyshlyaev to make a diverse composition with individual scenes. Maximilian sat on the throne all the time with the people equally spread around the structure, able to move about freely: as an expressive stage movement or having fun and dancing, or wearily drifting off to sleep. When someone dared to step out from the crowd, they would be drawn back at once, once again losing their individuality. It was meant to underscore the spontaneity and naturalness of the people striving for freedom and independence, emphasizing its artistic potential and imagination, and, at the same time, its passivity and fear of the personalized power and aggression. The scenography, as proposed by Nikitin, was a chef d'oeuvre of functionality: the pieces of scenery could be easily folded, disassembled and transported. Besides, it provided the maximum space possible to the actors.

The strict geometrical scenery components could be installed on an open platform as well as in the house. However, in the latter case, according to the researcher Tatyana Kotovich, a member of the audience would find himself or herself in the centre of the action. From any spot, one could observe every fragment of the scenography and each *mise-en-scène*, there was no border between the stage and the house, and the perspective changed. As a result, the audience had an opportunity to “join” the actors and become prospective participants of the joint play (and ritual), as it was offered by the actors [11, p. 40].

The production, which was stylized as a folk theatre, lasted for two and a half hours and consisted of 23 episodes divided into two parts: 16 episodes in the first and 7 in the second part. All 27 actors (four of whom – Mikalai Mickiewicz, Vasily Rogovenko, Joseph Tchaikovsky and Ivan Kotovich – played two roles each, and the audience assumed the device was a natural tradition of the folk theatre) had to stay on the stage all the time and take part in the action. At the rehearsals, Smyshlyaev applied the *étude* technique, which facilitated the learning of such volumes of text. It resulted in a synthetic performance full of humour, jokes, stunts, mockery, music, songs, dances and ballet acts. As noticed by Ivan Ivin, the stage turned into a “kaleidoscope of sounds, colours and movements” [7, p. 4].

The visual dimension of the play was exceptionally important. Leonid Nikitin proposed some vibrant costumes of different styles, which corresponded to the folk performance concept. Tsar Maximilian, who was dressed in richly decorated garments that reached his heels, and a turban, resembled an Assyrian ruler. Knight Errant wore a silver shirt; he had a shield with a golden star and a helmet with a rosy feather. In addition, the character's costume included golden epaulettes and a blue cape with black lining. In his hands Knight Errant held an enormous sword. Tsar Mamaj, who was dressed in the Eastern manner, in a shimmering suit, was waving a curved crescent sabre all the time. The Messenger/Field Marshal (Janina Lobanovskaya) with a ribbon over the shoulder and a star on his chest, had huge gauntlets and magic boots. The costumes of the Harlequin and the Gravedigger were sewn from colourful squares: the first was in black and white, the second was in black and yellow. The servants were dressed in colour-woven shirts with black, green and violet stripes, bright striped trousers and black waistcoats.

Queen Venus (Stefania Stanyuta) and the Death (Tatiana Bondarchyk) were set against each other: the former was happy and expressive in her feelings towards Maximilian, the Queen occasionally sang songs, while the Death, hiding behind her mask, laughed and all the time spun in a dance. Moving closer to the other characters, she intimidated them by attempting to kiss them. Venus was dressed in a white tutu with a wide golden belt, a red bodice, deep red shorts and golden shoes on high heels. On her head, she wore a fiery red wig and a golden diadem⁴. The Death, in turn, wore a silver tutu, while her stockings, shorts, gloves and mask were black. Many critics (Pavel Markov [12, p. 8], Khrisanf

4 According to the S. Stanyuta's memoirs, at first Smyshlyaev wanted to present Venus as an ordinary, simple girl, but once he saw her in motion, during a dance, he changed his mind.

Khersonsky [19, p. 7], Dmitry Chuzhoy [21, p. 7], Vladimir Blyum [15, p. 3], Sergey Grigoryev [13, p. 2]) emphasized that the “modernized” representation of Death – her costume and mode of existence on the stage – departs from the tradition and may be incomprehensible for the audience.

Their participation in Tsar Maximilian play was an important experience for young actors. Playing the above-mentioned characters (e.g., the tsar, his son, the doctor, the executioner, the blacksmith, the gravedigger, the knight) they had to manifest an ironic, almost grotesque attitude to the image. Creation of a symbiotic persona-mask was the most important task during the work on the play. The performer of the Blacksmith role, Timofey Sergeychik, makes a clear statement about it: “In my small role, I have learnt how to act and stay in character for two and a half hours non-stop, without words, remaining within it, taking part in all events, staying always in focus and evaluating the developments. I have learnt how to identify my different attitudes to each acting person, how to listen to my partners. Due to this wordless role specifically, I began learning the acting basics. It set me on my feet. [...] In this role I learnt how to move to different rhythms and tempos, feel my partners, appreciate and assess what they are saying and doing” [17, p. 102]. According to Stanyuta, the actors were thrilled with the rehearsals: “We saw ahead of us more than plays alone; we saw a life completely different from the current one, a life of strolling actors”. It is no wonder that the play was designed for performance in different prospective conditions: in unsuitable locations, among others, in a town square during a fair, or on a meadow behind a village⁵.

The servants present on the stage (most often, they stood on the steps) carried out several functions. First, they represented ordinary people engaged in a dialogue with their sovereign, carrying out his orders, though sometimes they regard him with humour, and at a certain point, they attempt to counter him. Besides, the servants functioned as a choir. They commented on the developments behind the stage, they vocalized the inner feelings, emotions and doubts of the heroes (e.g., Adolf’s). Mikhail Petuhovich wrote in the playbill that the servants’ representation methods linked the play with the antique tragedy [12, p. 14]. Thus, during duels, some of them surrounded Maximilian on all sides, supporting him and at the same time relying on protection from

5 Alexander Geirat proposed to establish a theater “Green Van”, which will travel around the city and show short performances in different places: in the yards, parks or squares.

him, while others moved as far away from the throne as possible, climbing the handrails, implying that they did not want to have anything to do with him. Another objective of the servants was to imitate various sounds (such as the sounds of an automobile, an airplane, a train, legcuffs, the wind and the sea). When the Tsar expelled Adolf from home, the servants followed him for some time, singing, "I am Banished to the Desert". During the Polish representative's (Vasily Rogovenko) narrative about the search for Adolf with various means of transportation, the choir imitated their sounds, showing everything additionally with their hands, as would normally be done by children.

Tsar Maximilian was patterned after folk games and amusements. Hence, the actors intended to do everything possible to engage the audience into the amusement, communicate it to them, and engulf them with the atmosphere on the stage. The first such attempt took place at the very beginning of the play, when the characters emerged and the scenery came to life on both sides of the stage to the sounds of a march. The actors sang a mocking tune "The Waspy Trough is Full of Water" that boosted the spirit of the audience and created the air of a carnival. The same song was heard at the end of the play, when the Messenger (Janina Labanovskaya) said good-bye to the audience and invited them to the following performances. The dynamic, spirited and well-built masterpiece with singing, music and dancing had a great impact on the audience who could not remain indifferent. The play comprised a large number of ingenious sketches. Maximilian's very appearance on the stage evoked a smile: he came out, stretched and yawned loudly. At the sight of Venus (S. Stanyuta), he would run up to her at once, grasp her arms and pull her towards the throne. In the Tsar and Venus's wedding scene the drunk Priest (Pavel Malchanau) and the Deacon (Ivan Katovich) can hardly stand. Unable to find the parish register of marriages, they use the register of deaths. During the coronation of the newlyweds, the Deacon chants the praises to beer and vodka, while keeping a deadpan face; and the Priest with his red thinnish hair and red cheeks sings the second voice, shudders, smacks his lips and waives a ball in a mesh instead of the thurible. Another fancy couple, the Doctor (Mikalai Mickiewicz) and the Paramedic (Lyubov Mazalevskaya), are both wearing white aprons covered with pockmark-like speckles. One of the characters has a colourful case, another – an enormous stethoscope and a douche. They try to forcibly cure everyone they meet: for headache, they suggest you "shave your head clean, / take the cranium off, remove the brain, / and pour half a litre of vodka there" [20, p. 33]; they try to open the mouth of a person who has a

toothache, in order to pull his tooth out and substitute it with a ram's tooth; they prescribe dancing until one drops, to treat foot problems.

The audience laughed at the very appearance of the Gravedigger (A. Ilyinsky), with his enormous belly and small thin feet, his shoes with long turned up toes and a small shovel in his hand. The shovel was made in such a manner that it regularly opened, produced a weird sound and hit the arm. The Gravedigger loved to improvise: he would add his own words to the text, crawled to Maximilian on his knees, walked on his hands. In a conversation with the Messenger, he played dumb asking him to help identify the Tsar and asking how he should address him. Prior to lowering Adolf's and the Executioner's bodies down to the grave (Joseph Tchaikovsky), the Gravedigger tries to get the bodies to do physical exercises, and then he checks the contents of their pockets. When the Doctor comes out, the Gravedigger immediately makes him check the teeth, feet and ribs. The admirably fit performer of the part accomplished a great number of acrobatic feats. He seemed to improvise, adding his own words to the text. Alena Lagovskaya recalls that the Gravedigger once went missing after a scene and everyone thought that he had fled from the theatre. The Messenger even notified Maximilian after that. However, the Gravedigger replied from the auditorium in a moment: "I am here!", and he resumed playing his role from there [16, p. 40].

The play also had several dramatic scenes concerning the relationship between Maximilian and Adolf. Dressed in a sheepskin and a long curly wig, Adolf was to remind the audience of John the Baptist. Appearing before his father, he raised his hands every time and uttered in a rather pompous and drawling manner: "I do not believe, I do not swear / to the father's fetish gods, / and golden statues" [20, p. 35]. (It must be added that Adolf's role required a typical, exalted and ceremonial declamation of the text.) His three antemortem songs that were full of grief and bitterness (in the first one, he bids farewell to nature – the forest and animals, in the second – to his friends, in the third – to the entire world) held the audience spellbound. Diana Stelmach, the Belarusian folk theatre researcher, emphasizes that, as concerns *Tsar Maximilian*, "the dramatic in the play was inseparable from the comic, intertwining with it in the same episodes and organically blending with the general course of the performance. [...] The ironic subtext removed dramatism from the events and switched the entire performance to a joyful game show" [16, p. 41]. In the preparation of *Tsar Maximilian*, Smyshlyaev strived to make the Studio actors apply the knowledge gained by them during theoretical classes, take an active part in the

rehearsals, not be shy of improvising, suggest their solutions for the scenes, in a word, co-create the play. Moreover, he demanded that everyone should sew his or her own costumes. Here is how Tymofey Sergeychik recalls that period: “How enthusiastically we, the Studio actors, worked on that play! We made all the props, we helped with sewing the garments, we learnt songs and dances, we recalled and recorded the folk puppet plays that we had observed in villages, and we handed them over to Mikolai Mickiewicz, who documented them then” [17, p. 101]. Leonid Nikitin’s duty was to check whether the colour of the procured cloth matched the sketches, whether the costume changed its colours with a change in lighting, whether it fell out of the overall colour scheme of the episode.

The production was favourably received by Moscow-based (Pavel Markov, Nikolay Volkov, Vladimir Blyum and Khrisanf Khersonsky) and Belarusian critics (Jazep Dyla, Tshishka Hartny, Mikhail Gromyko, Zmitser Zhylunovich, Nikolay Kasperovich, Alexander Voznesensky). It was called a manifesto that should pave the way for the Belarusian Theatre Studio activities. The play was perceived as a folk performance full of impulse, temperament and power, in which Smyshlyaev had masterfully synthesized folk tunes, songs and dances with elements of the modern theatre. The play was compared to *commedia dell’arte*. It was emphasized that the performance combined tragic, comic and lyric elements with the “spiteful laughter” in some fragments reaching the level of satire [13, p. 13].

“The young energetic actors in marvellously made costumes come onto the stage in the shine of the lamps. And, when they begin to sing and dance with fervour, it appears that they are capable of winning the hearts of an audience of thousands” [15, p. 3], wrote Vladimir Blyum. The Studio trainees showed their best, they were highly pliable, musical, with a sense of rhythm. Vladimir Lilin called the play straightforwardly “a chef d’oeuvre”, since the director, designer and actors were an ideal unity in the play [8, p. 6]. According to A. Voznesensky, the music imparted a rhythm to all actors’ lines; it stressed the most important, key moments of the action, and pieced together such elements, as the word, movement, light and sound. The precision of the movements and the manifestation of the unlimited potential of the human body became possible owing to Meyerhold’s biomechanics that had been mastered by the actors, as well as their excellent gymnastic and acrobatic proficiency [1, p. 106]. Some Ukrainian writers could not disguise their admiration after watching *Tsar Maximilian*: “We have no doubt that

the Belarusian Soviet theatre has made progress, but we have not expected to come across an artistic development of such degree. It shows to us the substantial cultural level currently achieved by the Belarusian theatre, as well as the richness of the people's art" [18, p. 4].

Suggestions were made to show the play in a circus to augment it with "monumentalism". The actor Alexander Ilyinsky was even compared to Igor Ilyinsky. The aesthetics of the play, as it was observed, had been strongly influenced by the work of Yevgeny Vakhtangov (*Princess Turandot*), Alexander Tairov, Valery Bebutov⁶ and Kasyan Goleizovsky⁷. The scenography, in turn, was compared to the works of Nikolai Sapunov and Konstantin Somov including outline drawings of the curtains for the *Free Theatre* (1913) and sketches for *The Fairground Booth* by Alexander Blok. Some other comments were made as well: the play had to be made even more modern. The critics contemplated whether the Belarusian peasant would recognize representatives of the people among the characters, and whether he would accept them in that "conventional artistic form" [14, p. 2].

The conflict, as presented in the play, provided ample opportunities for interpretation. Some would see it as the struggle of the ordinary Belarusian people against Tsarist autocracy [9, p. 132], and the fight of a tyrant with a revolutionary (3: 4), others – the clash of Ivan the Terrible with his son Ivan, or Peter the Great with his son Alexei. Both Ivan and Alexei, same as Adolf, paid the ultimate price for their outstanding views on the ways of ruling the country⁸. Some spoke about the associations with Mathilde Kschessinska, who had an affair with the would-be tsar Nicholas II, and then with two representatives of the Romanovs – the Grand Dukes Sergey Mikhailovich and Andrey Vladimirovich [13, p. 13].

Tsar Maximilian had some opponents, too. The Moscow critics Grigoryev and Volkov disapproved of the eclecticism, the mix of various manners, styles and epochs in the play [14, p. 2]. A reviewer from Vitebsk characterized the production as "formal" and "aesthetically overloaded" [2, p. 6]. A.

6 Valery Bebutov (1885–1961) – theatre director. He worked at the Moscow Art Theater (1912–1917), and collaborated with Vsevolod Meyerhold, Fyodor Komissarzhevsky.

7 Kasyan Goleizovsky (1892–1970) was a Russian dancer and choreographer. In 1918 he organized an experimental dance studio.

8 Alexei Petrovich Romanov, Tsarevich of Russia, died in unknown circumstances (on 26 June 1718) in prison. After his forced return from Austria (on 3 February 1718), a lawsuit was filed against him. Tsarevich Ivan Ivanovich of Russia, in turn, was severely wounded by his father Ivan the Terrible (on 14 November 1581) and died five days later.

Voznesensky believed that the play could be considered accomplished, and that it had to be restructured in order to merge the dominant and subordinate story lines including interludes and sketches of historical, social and general nature. In his opinion, it would enhance the play with a rhythm and create the impression of an integral, powerful and energetic composition [1, p. 106]. I. Ivin emphasized that, though *Tsar Maximilian* holds a special place in the company's repertoire, it should not define the image of the modern theatre: "One should show on the stage such works, in which the real life is throbbing, and that could make the audience rave about it for a long time" [7, p. 4].

In spite of such views, the play enjoyed great popularity among the theatregoers, and some people watched it several times. It is no wonder that it held for three full seasons in the theatrical announcements and was one of the most frequently performed plays. Jazep Dyla left interesting evidence of the critics' response. In his article "Criticism Comes Down!" he noticed that after watching *Tsar Maximilian*, critics "grumble" and state that the Studio actors have swerved from the right path; they were forced to acknowledge the "pure aestheticism" and "art for art's sake", thus rending the Belarusian theatre from life and instilling the extrinsic constructivism in it, though, they themselves, in fact, "still need to learn how to walk on the stage". These critics threatened to put the entire management of the Studio along with the play director in their place. Dyla noted that such "pedagogues" had not grown up yet, they had stuck in the past and therefore they simply turned a deaf ear to the pursuits and experiments of the Russian theatre. They were not prepared for the idea that *Tsar Maximilian* delivers no sermon to anyone, and the play characters do not demonstrate their suffering as it normally happens in a theatre. The play merges reality with convention, it utilizes new means of artistic expression, it has a relevant rhythm, musicality, architectonics, it relates to both history and contemporaneity. However, the opponents were not prepared for all that, and therefore they were unhappy. They suffered from the "indigestibleness" that prevented them from appreciating the high artistic level of the play. In Dyla's opinion, a tough hand-to-hand skirmish had started about the then young Belarusian theatre... And, it was much better than the official tranquillity. The "pedagogues", according to Dyla, forgot that "the theatrical realism gave off a more than ample odour of true 'dead meat' around the entire BST, and, unless Mirovich had begun his "surgical" work, the entire Belarus would be reeking of the dead body of amateurishness" [5, p. 6-7]. One can also assume that many critics have refrained from formally voicing their views.

Conclusion. After the presentation of “Tsar Maximilian” on the stage of BST-1 in Minsk, a discussion took place (on 30 June 1924), which was aimed at hearing out a variety of voices and opinions on the theme of the play. And, though the hall was packed with people, only a few wanted to speak out. The opening remarks were made by Jazep Dyla, who presented a brief outline of the history of the Belarusian theatre from 1920 until 1923, he underscored the success achieved by BST-1 and compared the latest theatre’s premiere, *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, with *Tsar Maximilian*. According to his opinion, one could notice in both plays that the theatre had “announced the first, still awkward step away from the habitual realistic and psychological direction of its academism” [4, p. 2]. Dyla expressed a concern that certain political circles in Belarus were trying to make the young troupe change its direction. The head of Glavpolitprosvet Semuyon Lysov supported J. Dyla upholding that “the old theatre forms have outlived themselves, that the new revolutionary theatre is fully focused on the quest”. He also added that he was happy to see the general public interested in the theatre lately. *Tsar Maximilian*, in Lysov’s opinion, was a well-conceived, well-composed and highly successful play [4, p. 2], which may be certainly shown both in a village and in a city.

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Andrey Moskvín (Polşa)

Vitebskdə 2-ci Belarus Dövlət Teatrının fəaliyyətinin başlanğıcı

“Çar Maksimilian” – XX əsrin əvvəllərində Belarus teatr sənətinin incisi kimi

Tədqiqatın predmeti - “Çar Maksimilian” pyesinin Belarus teatr studiyasının tələbələri tərəfindən Moskvada tamaşaya qoyulmasıdır. Bu, gənc belorusların 2-ci Moskva Akademik Bədaye Teatrının (MABT) müəllimlərinin rəhbərliyi altında Belorusda göstərəcəkləri repertuarın hazırladığı dövr idi.

Tamaşa Vitebskdə 2-ci Belarus Dövlət Teatrının repertuarına daxil edildi və böyük müvəffəqiyyət qazandı. O, üç mövsüm ərzində göstərildi. Rejissor Valentin Smişlyayev qarşısına bir neçə məqsəd – Belarus folklorundan istifadə edilməsi, bütün aktyor qrupunun cəlb olunması və bu dram əsəri nümunəsində xeyir və şər, inam, məhəbbət, hakimiyyət və borc, müəyyən ideyalara sadıqlıq kimi məsələlərin qaldırılması məqsədini qoymuşdu.

Məqalə müəllifi arxiv materiallarına, aktyorların xatirələrinə və teatr rəylərinə istinad edərək Belarus teatrı tarixində mühüm yer tutmalı olan bu tamaşanı yenidən qurur.

Açar sözlər: Belarus teatrı tarixi, Belarus teatr studiyası, Vitebskdə 2-ci Belarus Dövlət Teatrı, “Çar Maksimilian”, tamaşanın yenidən qurulması.

Андрей Москвин (Польша)

Начало деятельности Белорусского Государственного театра - 2 в Витебске

«Царь Максимилиан» - шедевр белорусского театрального искусства начала 20 века

Предмет исследования – постановка пьесы «Царь Максимилиан», осуществлённая студентами Белорусской театральной студии в Москве. Это был период, когда молодые белорусы под руководством преподавателей МХАТ-2 готовили репертуар, который они покажут в Беларуси. Спектакль вошел в репертуар Белорусского государственного театра-2 в Витебске и пользовался большим успехом. Он был показан в течение трех сезонов. Режиссер Валентин Смышляев ставил перед собой несколько целей: использовать белорусский фольклор, привлечь всю группу актеров и на примере этой драмы поднять такие вопросы, как добро и зло, вера, любовь, власть и долг, верность определенным идеям.

Автор статьи, опираясь на архивные материалы, воспоминания актеров и театральные рецензии, реконструирует спектакль, который должен занять важное место в истории белорусского театра.

Ключевые слова: история белорусского театра, Белорусская театральная студия, Белорусский государственный театр-2 в Витебске, Царь Максимилиан, реконструкция спектакля.