

Post-symbolist Irony on the Latvian Stage: The Staging of Van Charles Lerberghe's *Pan* and Maurice Maeterlinck's *Le Miracle de saint Antoine*

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Abstract The construction of the Latvian literary space follows many paths; one of the most important of which is the translation of quality literary works into Latvian. Being both the linguistic creation exercise that shapes the literal language and the source of literary culture and inspiration, the reception of works, especially when they are represented on stage, provokes not only literary controversies but also questions the societal order. The study of the staging of van Lerberghe's *Pan* and Maeterlinck's *Le Miracle de saint Antoine* of the 1920s aims to identify and analyze the change of reception of two authors in the Latvian cultural arena.

Key words Van Lerberghe; Pan; Maeterlinck; Le Miracle de saint Antoine; Latvia; irony; symbolism

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Introduction

A translation that offers the reading of foreign literature is not only a work of language, but also a transmission of culture that forms a new system of taste. The job for the translator, the publisher, or the director, when examining theater, would be to maximize the benefits of these translations by referring to Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of culture including the economic capital or the symbolic capital, whose reali-

zation forms two sets of translations: safe values (translation of recognized classics and contemporaries) and literary novelties.¹ The latter is rather risky, but the desire to perceive non-crystallized values that generate noisy discussions and controversial opinions or embarrassments, both in content and form, carries a potential truth of the literary future, which is why this one is even more attractive for the main actors of this transmission exercise.

Five years after the acquisition of state independence of Latvia in 1918, during the 1923 season, the National Theater staged 270 performances among which included 21 original pieces and 15 translations (Anonymous 11). Although the theater pursued national strategies, it declared its second cornerstone to be classic tragedy and comedy, citing such writers as Shakespeare, Moliere, Gozzi, Goldoni, Byron, Holberg, Schiller, and Goethe (Anonymous 13). It should be noted, however, that the theater also directed contemporary foreign plays of the time. After national independence, other theaters in Latvia engaged in the same strategy. In order to accumulate symbolic capital, the interaction of literary, linguistic, and cultural translation takes place, and the product interpreted by the director materializes as the translated text in another language and in another cultural environment. The case of the comical pieces *Le Miracle de saint Antoine* by Maeterlinck and *Pan* by Van Lerberghe, staged in Latvia respectively in 1920 and 1925, is special because the two authors in the 1920s enjoyed a fame acquired by their symbolist works which did not contribute to the understanding of the irony of these, but perplexed both critics and the spectators.

As for Maeterlinck's piece, note that the Latvian public's understanding? Interpretation? waiting horizon² was determined not only by the reputation forged of symbolism but also, by one of Flaubert's works, one of the key works of symbolism, a prototype of dream literature (Müller-Ebeling 18), namely *Le Tentation de saint Antoine*. It was accessible to Latvian readers at the end of the 19th century in

1 On the importance of translations see the article by Jean-Marc Gouanvic, "Les enjeux de la traduction dans le champ littéraire," *Palimpsestes* [En ligne], 11 | 1998, mis en ligne le 30 septembre 2013, consulté le 17 août 2018. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/palimpsestes/1531> ; DOI : 10.4000/palimpsestes.1531

2 The horizon of expectation is a concept of Hans Robert Jauss that he thus formulates: "the system of objectively formulated references which, for each work at the moment of the history in which it appears, results from three main factors: prior experience that the public has of the kind of which it comes, the form and the theme of previous works of which it presupposes the knowledge, and the opposition between poetic language and practical language, imaginary world and daily reality." In Jauss, Hans Robert, *Pour une esthétique de la réception* (Trad. de l'allemand par Claude Maillard, Préface de Jean Starobinskii Paris, Gallimard, 1990) 49.

Russian¹ and German² translations, before being released in Latvian in 1924. The Latvian translation by the Francophile by the name of Edvarts Virza³ came out, in fact, four years after the staging of *Le Miracle de saint Antoine* whose reception is included in our field of research. Latvian critics congratulate the translation of Flaubert's work and formulate the crucial point of it: "the conflict between religious thought and the voice of flesh" (Sūna 439). *Saint Antoine* by Maeterlinck moves away from the flesh to the body⁴ in the light of a theology of incarnation, the body designating the human condition, the only way to be present in this world. The incarnation implies corporal finitude and raises questions about death and fear, which is reminiscent of the "theater of anguish" initiated in 1889 by Van Lerberghe's *Les Fleureurs (The Trackers)* and Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse (Intruder)*. The body with its nakedness is at the center of Van Lerberghe's *Pan*. The piece is dedicated to Camille Lemonnier (1844–1913) naturalist master of Belgian literature, who writes *a posteriori*:

Pan is a drama of ideas rather than facts, a drama as one might imagine a Bjoensterne-Bjornson. It seems that in realizing it the poet wanted to remain close to the deep sources of being that so deliciously illuminate *La Chanson d'Ève*⁵. We feel it, this time again, taken back to the origins, to the exaltation of the beautiful virgin instinct, and it is, through a force where the same comical feeling is revealed as that of Maeterlinck in his *Saint Antoine*, I to mean a mixture of ancient myth and Flemish buffoonery, the praise of the bare and

1 Flaubert Gustave [Флобер Гюстав], *Искушение пустытника* [*Iskouchenie poustynnika*] [litt. La Tentation d'un ermite] [*La Tentation de saint Antoine (1874)*] langue : russe, trad. S. P. Yakoubovitch, Moskva [Moscou], Russie, L. F. Sneguiryov i N. V. Marakouev, 1879.

2 Flaubert, Gustave. *Die Versuchung des heil. [heiligen] Antonius*. Aus dem Französischen mit einem Vorwort und erläuterten Anmerkungen von Dr. Bernhard Endrulat. Strasbourg: Wolff, 1874.

3 The work is published in French in 1874, in Latvian in 1924: Gustavs Flobērs. Svētā Antonija kārdināšana, tulk. Ed. Virza. Rīga: Leta, 1924.

4 This change is legitimate, because as noted by Fabrice Van de Kerckhove, Maeterlinck deceives the viewer from the beginning: "Maeterlinck has fun deceiving expectations [...] it is another Antoine that is Antoine de Padua, dear to the 'humble' more than to the literati. And the genre chosen is not that of miracle or mystery, but the equally medieval one of farce." Kerckhove, Fabrice Van de, "Le Rire de Maeterlinck" in Maeterlinck, Maurice, *Le Miracle de saint Antoine* (Bruxelles: Editions Labor, 1991) 58.

5 *The Song of Eve (La Chanson d'Ève)* is the collection of poetry of symbolic inspiration by Charles van Lerberghe published in 1904.

initial soul among the conflict of morals and theologies. (Lemonnier 263)

During the Symbolist period, in search of new sources of inspiration, Maeterlinck and Van Lerberghe were passionate about Pre-Raphaelite paintings, “eager to stand out from French influences, judged to be so contrary to this Flemish temperament that they wish to put forward” (Brogniez). Thus, for their comic pieces, they followed the Flemish tradition and also drew on “the soul all naked and initial” which was in line with the Latvians’ search of their national and literary individuality.¹ Based on these deep sources, was the comedy of Maeterlinck and Van Lerberghe striking for the Latvian viewer? How is social satire supported by irony received in a cultural area that is not his, and in what way is meaning built? In this perspective, I will examine the change of reception of the work of two authors produced by the staging of *Le Miracle de saint Antoine* and *Pan*.

Latvian Literary Context

Latvian literature, whose beginnings date back to the 17th century, encouraged by national awakening, accelerated its development in the second half of the 19th century and made remarkable progress in literary evolution. This ongoing process of the formation of a Latvian literary and cultural space was one of the essential factors leading to the proclamation of an independent national state after the First World War. Although the inclusion of Latvian territory in the Russian Empire and the political and economic domination of the German nobility before state independence had created a number of restrictions, particularly with regard to linguistic usage, this situation nevertheless opened the way two important cultural spaces, and through them, also allowed access to the achievements of other cultures. Indeed, translations and adaptations abounded.

The new Latvian nation was dynamic and curious; young intellectuals traveled to study at foreign universities and gained important cultural experiences. At the turn of the century, the quest for a literary identity tended to transcend the boundaries of the two cultural areas, which was stimulated not only by discontent with the dominant power, but also by the search for a broader perspective. Thus, Edvards Virza, whose literary activity begins with erotic poetry of symbolic inspiration

1 Latvian literary mythology emerges from the folklore that supplies the material to the literary Andrejs Pumpurs for the creation of the epic *Lāčplēsis* reflecting the struggle of the pagan hero against the conquerors and the Christian bearers and also marks the opposite of the mystical knowledge and Christianity institutionalized and hypocritical. This epic was written between 1872 and 1887 and published in 1888. *Lāčplēsis* is considered a national epic. His motifs are repeated in Latvian literature, in the fine arts and in music. *Lāčplēsis* has been published 17 times.

Biķeris (*The Chalice*, 1908)¹, and who is also an important translator of French poetry² in a pathos that is undoubtedly slightly hyperbolized, testifies to the need for new horizons:

All that we have been able to take to the Germans in art, public opinion and other cultural fields, we have already taken. Guarantees and commitments for the future development of our people consist only in seeking to free us from these impressions. What we have to return to and whose culture is inexhaustible to us is France. (Virza 267)

Nevertheless, the Russian cultural and literary space seems more attractive because it opens up more to other cultures, particularly to French and Belgian symbolism, and thus this intermediary literary reception contributes to the development of Latvian modernism.

The diversity of translated literature and the development of Latvian literature is favored by the high level of education of the population. Thus, the report of the Latvian Delegation to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference states:

[...] among Latvians there is a very rich original literature and many classical translations. There are no illiterates among Latvians. [...] There is a secondary school in Latvia for 26,000 inhabitants and in Germany there is a secondary school for 51,000 inhabitants.³

1 The collection of poems was published in 1908 and aroused a sharp criticism for the daring to reflect nudity, passion and intimate relationships, as well as the appreciation of talent, certainly, still immature, as retrospectively recognizes the literary Latvian Viktors Eglītis in the criticism of the third book of poetry Virza *The era and the read* (*Laikmets un lira*, 1923). V. Eg. [Viktors Eglītis], Edvarta Virzas dzejas, Latvijas Kareivja Literariskais pielikums, Nr. 44 (04.11.1923.): 8. sk. 18.07.2018. https://periodika.lndb.lv/periodika2-viewer/view/index-dev.html?lang=fr#issue:/p_001_iklp1923n44|issueType:P

2 Virza brilliantly translates the poems of the French authors, these translations are published in two collections *French Lyric Poetry of the 19th Century* (*Franču lirika XIX gs.*, 1921), *French Lyric Renaissance Poetry* (*Franču renesanses lirika*, 1930).

3 Memorandums par Latviju, *Valdības Vēstnesis* 1 (1919): 4. Sk. 18.07.2018. https://periodika.lndb.lv/periodika2-viewer/view/index-dev.html?lang=fr#issue:/p_001_wawe1919n001|issueType:P Before the First World War, there were 2.55 million people in Latvia and 1.6 million in 1920. In 1925, after the return of refugees, the population of Latvia reached 1.85 million, but in 1935, this number reached 1.95 million. Tautības un etniskās grupas 1918-1940, Iedzīvotāji, "Tilides Datorenciklopēdija Latvijas Vēsture" © Tilde, 1998-2012.

Latvian translations of the works of two Belgian authors, Maeterlinck and Van Lerberghe, appeared in the columns of the literary press at the turn of the century, during a period of 1 to 13 years after the release of the original texts.¹ The recognition of our authors is undoubtedly supported by the appreciation of the literary milieu of Paris, as in the article by Mirbeau² on Maeterlinck, and by the aura of the northern exoticism of the Belgians (Denis 106-107).

Latvian literary tastes are influenced by two major cultures: German and Russian³; however, the literary press is open to foreign currents and interested by critics of this literature, judging by the number of articles, whose translations appear in literary journals or in columns of literary sections of newspapers from the time. Russian symbolism (Valeri Briussov, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Andrei Bely, Alexander Blok, Constantin Balmont and others), inspired by French symbolism, becomes an intermediary and popularizer of texts in Latvian literary space. The symbolism of which Mallarmé expresses is captured in this reference: “to suggest, here is the dream,” and it is a challenge, for the Latvian literary language for the tradition is relatively recent and new. The translations of exquisite analogies, transfer of one cultural area to the second, is not an easy task, but it opens up an infinite space of literary creation, which extends beyond the rational, and that is why, for Latvian writers, this is even more interesting, not only in terms of lexical creation and innovative syntactic, but also from the point of view of the exploration of literary creativity and an expanding worldview.

In Latvia, there is not a consolidated symbolic current, so it is important to only mention certain authors who temporarily turned to symbolism during their literary career.⁴ Certainly, there are common trends, but the absence of unity is not

1 The only exception is Maeterlinck's play *The Blue Bird* (*L'Oiseau bleu*) because the play is translated from Russian and published a year before the French publication. For translations of Maeterlinck's pieces see Valke, Simona Sofija, “Maurice Maeterlinck dans la réception lettone.” Simona Sofija (sast.). *Morisa Māterlinka ideju transfēr /Transfert d'idees de Maurice Maeterlinck* (bilingvāls zinātnisku rakstu krājums/recueil bilingue d'articles scientifiques. Rīga: Zinātne, 2014) 66.

2 Mirbeau, Octave. “Maurice Maeterlinck.” *Le Figaro*, (1889). <http://www.scribd.com/doc/7617742/Octave-Mirbeau-Maurice-Maeterlinck-> [sk. 09.08.2018.].

3 The territory of Latvia is part of the Russian Empire, but the German-Baltic nobility retains a notable influence, not only economically and politically, but also as a cultural bearer.

4 We can cite the collection of poems already mentioned *The Chalice* (*Biķeris*, 1908), the novel by Haralds Eldgasts *Starry nights: the Story of a Soul* (*Zvaigžņotās naktis: kādas dvēseles stāsts*, 1905), the poem of Rainis *Ave Sol!* (1910). On Latvian symbolism see chapter “Symbolisms” in Tabūns, Bronislavs, *Modernisma virzieni latviešu literatūrā*, Rīga: Zinātne, 2008: 37-47.

surprising because French and Belgian writers take the same path, as noted by Paul Aron: “Most writers who claim it are never granted a common literary position, an aesthetic, or technical choices” (Aron 19).

In the press at the turn of century, the translations of the pieces, poems, and essays of Maeterlinck were published along with surveys and articles covering his work. Van Lerberghe, who did not possess the brilliant aura of Maeterlinck, rarely appeared in the press—the translations of his works were published, but there are no articles evaluating his contribution; he is only mentioned in global overviews.

From Symbolism to Irony

The contemporaries Van Lerberghe and Maeterlinck, who have friendly relations and a literary proximity, were born in Ghent, and, at the age of adolescence, attend the Jesuit college of St. Barbara with an interest in literature and its current trends.

In the 1890s, Van Lerberghe wrote the drama *Les Flaireurs* (1889) and, a little later Maeterlinck wrote his drama *L’Intruse* (1890). The two pieces have interesting similarities in this period before death as a sign of human vulnerability. Van Lerberghe is even criticized for his plagiarism which Maeterlinck refutes publicly. The Latvian reader did not miss the similarities between the two stories if he read the story of Van Lerberghe *Sélection surnaturelle* (*Supernatural Selection*, 1905) translated by A.A. in 1911. The footnote of the translation highlights the similarity already mentioned and sketch a short biography of the Belgian writer (Van Lerbergs 113-114).

The importance of Flaubert’s *Le Tentation de saint Antoine* to Van Lerberghe’s eyes reveals a letter, which he wrote in 1893 with vague dates:

Maeterlinck told me one day that he wanted to move away from symbolism to get closer to reality and to make ‘life’. I know he is happily unable to do it, and I told him I was enjoying it. It is always a little for the bourgeois that one writes *Madame Bovary* or *L’Éducation sentimentale*. There will always be enough of these books, while the *Tentation de saint Antoine* of the *Légende de Saint Julien hospitalier* are rare. These books are obviously written for poets. And we are poets, is not that your opinion? (Van Lerberghe 57)

Symbolism, including painting, focuses on the past, myth, religion and the spiritual world, and its instrument of the afterlife is mainly poetry, but it is also present in theater and prose, which translate through symbols the revelations of transcendent reality.

The vertical analogies that Charles Baudelaire describes in *Correspondances* (1857) verbally creates complex images that, according to Stéphane Mallarmé, should not say, but suggest Sense production also explodes in the sound of the text, creating an unexpected mix of music, creating a mood and suppressing the routine of words, accentuating the possibility of simultaneous polysemy and connotations. In the movement of the hereafter, a religious note echoes, where corporeal reality and the material world are exposed to the spiritual space. In the symbolic theater of Maeterlinck, human bodies tend to fade, leaving puppets carrying ideas and senses in their place.

One of his books is titled *Three Little Puppetry Dramas* (*Aladine et Palomides, Intérieur* and *La Mort de Tintagiles*, 1894), but this is also characteristic of Van Lerberghe, because his drama *Les Fleureurs* is dramas for puppets (Otten 315). The disembodiment of the dramatic characters, the literary phenomenon entering the final phase, fades away gradually as the characters become more carnal, but the tendency to the transcendental world is preserved.

In addition, at the turn of the century, innovative symbolism techniques became obsolete and transformed into parodied material, including characters disembodied from symbolism. At the publication of Maeterlinck's *Le Miracle de saint Antoine*, which the author defines as a farce, the perception of his symbolic work changes, leading to a divided vision of the totality of the seriousness of certain symbolic poetic techniques and a different reading. One example is the disembodiment produced by the repetition of words, their semantic exhaustion, when they lose their meaning in the monotonous sonority, preserving only the function of maintaining communication.

The authors themselves also turn to a down-to-earth reflection, experimenting with the intrusion of the transcendent reality (mythical) on a daily basis, to specify — the intrusion of Greek and Christian mythical reality, but the same transcendent reality. It has become tangible, and it is no longer the third invisible figure of Maeterlinck.

To bodies in flesh are added the words in flesh bringing the everyday, clarifying contextually the meaning of words and attributing to communication another dimension of the beyond, which is no longer perceptible intuitively. As it was in the text of the symbolism with its rich range of polysemy, connotations, and allusions, but intellectually — intellectually and through the comic prism. The mechanism of the comic, which foresees the distancing of reality, to set in motion another point of view distinct from the norm, is akin to the distance of outmoded literary phenomena. I want to emphasize that this is the situational irony, based on the hierarchy of

values intrinsic to the time and culture.

Situational Irony

In these two pieces, the tool for overcoming bourgeois dogma is irony. In the irony that “not only does reading give meaning to a second degree, but this second degree is indispensable to avoid misguidance of understanding” (Hellégouarc’h 69). In this case, the object of interest is the phenomenon of imitation and the ironic distance of the source text or, in this case of social criticism, along with the ironic vision of particular groups in society.

Maeterlinck announces *The Miracle of St. Anthony* as a farce and thereby refutes another interpretation of genre, that of the miracle, which is what one would expect from the title of the play. Therefore, the miracle here is an extraordinary fact, attributed to the divine intervention and not a genre of medieval theater. The kind of farce whose plot is generally based on deception, evolved considerably during the 17th century thanks to the introduction of dell’arte elements in the mechanism of the piece. One of these elements is the misunderstanding or simply a misunderstanding when someone is taken as someone else.

The plot of *The Miracle of St. Anthony* is quite simple. On the day of the funeral, the saint arrives in a prosperous middle-class house in Flanders belonging to the dead Miss Hortense whose mortal remains are still at home. The old servant Virginia believes in the true sanctity of Antony and consents to his intention to resuscitate the deceased, even if she should give up 3,300 francs, the amount that the mistress bequeathed to her. At this moment, the holy halo is illuminated, and this is repeated whenever something good happens. Another attitude is adopted by Miss Hortense’s family, the nephews, M. Gustave and M. Achille, and the maître-d’hôtel, Joseph, try to get rid of the saint, and two other characters, Cure and the Doctor, also participate in this deterrence. However, they do not succeed in diverting Saint Anthony from his intention, and in the second act, the audience witnesses St. Anthony resurrecting Miss Hortense. The doctor tries to explain it rationally. The resuscitated woman wakes up in a terrible mood and orders Virginia to chase Saint Anthony, who looks like a beggar, away because he stains his carpet with his dirty feet. So St. Anthony deprives her of speech. The family is not happy because they want to recover their aunt without flaws. Meanwhile, the gendarmes arrive to guide Saint Anthony to the police station, and one of them seems to recognize a certain madman who has repeatedly escaped from the hospital, but he is not sure. St. Anthony is taken away, Hortense dies for real, and the public is confused — was it really a maniac or a madman, or was Miss Hortense perhaps never really dead at all?

The characters are comical in their own way, and we can detect two reasons for this: first we laugh at the hypocrisy and reluctance of the rural bourgeois to deviate from the customary order — the rejection of the miracle or the reversal of values.

VIRGINIA: Miss Hortense! ... She lives! Look, she's scratching a spot of candle! ... She's looking for her glasses! ... Here they are! here they are! ... Saint Anthony! ... Saint Anthony! ... O miracle! ... Miracle! ... On your knees! ... On your knees! ...

Mr. GUSTAVE: Come on, come on, shut up! ... Do not talk nonsense, this is not the moment ...

Mr. ACHILLE: There is no need to say, she lives ...

A CONVIVE: But it's not possible! ... What did he do to her? ...

Mr. GUSTAVE: This is not serious; she will fall back ...

Mr. ACHILLE: But no, but no, I assure you ... See how she looks at us ...

Mr. GUSTAVE: I do not believe it yet ... In what world are we? ... There are no more laws ... (Maeterlinck 38)

The second comic group are the characters of St. Anthony and Virginia, the two represent the exposure of the old and poor of the world. St. Anthony is wearing dirty clothes, his feet are bare, which contrasts comically with the halo scintillating occasionally. But here, Maeterlinck's benevolent laughter is lighter than the squeaky parody of the rural bourgeoisie.

The irony of society, as an extra-textual phenomenon, as a recurring spring in comedies is similar to the well-known didactic goal of Molière: “[...] the theater has a great virtue for the correction. The most beautiful traits of a serious morality are less powerful, more often than satire [...] We want to be mean; but we do not want to be ridiculous” (Molière V). If the intention of correction is based on the shame of one's actions taken when one recognizes them publicly as amusing and ridiculous, then the derision, in turn, involving the lowering, provokes a protest because it is not only personal but also a violation of values.

The processes of the farce, the simplistic plot and the characters typified and caricatural, serve to introduce what is characteristic of the comedy register, namely, the reflection on different worldviews — the confrontation of different eras. Indeed, the intentions of St. Anthony in the world of the early 20th century are strange and incomprehensible.

The collision of two different worlds also occurs in Van Lerberghe's *Pan*, but this time it is a clash between Christian bourgeois opinions and paganism centered

on the rhythms of nature. During the creation of his masterpiece of symbolic poetry *The Song of Eve*, Van Lerberghe embarks on a different style of work; he begins to write *Pan*. At this time, in a letter dated August 8, 1903 and sent out from Bouillon in Belgium, Van Lerberghe expresses his feeling towards nature:

And you know that for me, one of the charms of the campaign is to be able to live, as far as it is humanly possible, outside of humanity that I hate. I have nothing human to say either in my verses, in my tales, or even in this play, *Pan*, remained in the state of a formless form. Therefore, nothing better than to remain in the middle of nowhere (Van Lerberghe 292).

This satirical comedy *Pan* is introduced by Plutarch's citation about Pan's death, and in the epigraph of the second act, a quote from Michelet alleges that Pan lives and reigns over the mystery of life. The action takes place in Flanders, in a shepherd's hut at the seaside. The shepherds Peter, Anna, and their daughter Paniska welcome Pan into their hut. He has been resurrected and emerges from the sea with his entourage of Gypsies. Paniska is chosen to be the bride of Pan; wearing a transparent dress, she goes with him to the orchard. In the hut of shepherds enter the religious and municipal authorities of the commune who try to drive Pan from their communal territory. Pan appears briefly in the room, at first sleeping, wrapped in a cloth that recalls both the tunic and the shroud; when he wakes up, Pan says his name. At other times, there are negotiations about the status of Pan, and about his expulsion or possible integration into the life of the commune. In the third act all these plans fail, and the piece ends with a crazy dance of the naked Paniska singing about the resurrection of Pan.

As in Maeterlinck's play, there are two groups of comic characters—naive shepherds and rural notables. In his satire, Van Leberghe opposes the spontaneity of the rites of living nature to the sclerotic regulation of bourgeois morality and the institutionalized church. The comic borrows, in some places, the form of parody as is the case in this exchange where the process is observed by the character of abbot.

THREE YOUNG GIRLS GYPSIES: [...] Hi, o our sister, O Blessed Virgin.

PANIASKA: Why do you say blessed, sisters?

THE THREE GYSPIES: Because of you / Our God / made choice.

PANISKA: And why do you weave, / In my hair, / These flowers, / Those red flowers, / My sisters?

THE THREE GYSPIES: Because in you / Our King / Has chosen his wife, / And all the flowers / Go open, this night.

PANISKA: I am only his humble servant.

ABBOT: Sacrilege! Parody! (Van Lerberghe 30-31)

The first idea is to consider that both pieces deal with different religious frames. Was not the great Pan killed by Christianity? However, note the important structural similarities of the pieces, namely the introduction of a stranger in a casual and banal environment that upsets the usual order of things. This technique was also used in the dramas of symbolism; however, in symbolism one did not question nature and the identity of the mysterious stranger, because the mysterious one had the right of existence. In both of these comic pieces, the existence of the mysterious is called into question and rational explanation is sought. There is also the integration of undesirable aliens into the established order. If irony as a rhetorical process arises in the interaction of the characters, the irony of situation is directed against the inflexibility of the established order and the inability to break from stagnant forms. The two opposing groups of comic characters may provoke laughter using comic techniques, but the irony of situation against characters representing bourgeois morality whose caricatures appear in the plays of Maeterlinck and Van Lerberghe are more pronounced.

Belgians on the Latvian Stage

The premiere of Van Lerberghe's satirical comedy *Pan* takes place on December 3, 1920 at the National Theater of Latvia. Already before the show, publications on the history of Van Lerberghe appeared in the press. The most detailed and comprehensive article on five pages is published in the magazine *Skatuves Vēstnesis*. The title of the article, "Pan," is accompanied by an explanatory subtitle and instigator, "because of representations of the satirical comedy of Charles Van Lerberghe in the National Theater of Latvia" (Freinbergs 35). Its author, Kārlis Freinbergs, already in the first sentence refers to what a connoisseur of literature and theater would expect from Van Lerberghe, "Pan in the room is a symbolic character." A reference to the past, to the symbolism of the author's work follows from a detailed presentation of Pan mythology and analysis of the play, with references to Spinoza and Nietzsche. On the cover of the magazine we admire the lithography of Pan and Paniska, made by an expressionist painter, the well-known Latvian artist and stage designer of the play, Oto Skulme. On the eve of the first production, the theater office publishes an introductory article in the official journal of the Constituent Assembly of Latvia *Valdības Vēstnesis*, stating that the staging could not be shown because of censorship and welcomes this event despite the opposition of pseudo-moral philistines

(Teātra birojs 3). The National Theater of Latvia was founded in 1919, therefore the commentary on censorship refers to the time when Latvian territory was included in the Russian Empire. In any case, the staging of Van Lerberghe's satirical comedy *Pan* is an important and expected event in the second season of the new theater.

As a first step, the newspaper *Valdības Vēstnesis*, in the "Art" section, reports on the show directed by the talented director Amtmanis-Briedītis and invites viewers to buy tickets on time. But at the beginning of next year, the case comes to the Latvian Constituent Assembly, where a complaint that requires the ban of the show is filed by the Latgale¹ group of deputies. The ruling circles, especially the Catholic clergy, see in this play the propaganda of corporal nudity, the idealization of free love, and the scorn of the Catholic Church. The Minister of Education, Plāķis, is forced to defend himself at a meeting of the Constituent Assembly on February 1, 1921 and to admit that the National Theater did not respect his suggestions to delete the play from the repertoire (*Latvijas Satversmes sapulce* 1). So, a vast controversy comes to life in the press on this subject. Amtmanis-Briedītis always follows the discussions and participates in the Constituent Assembly meetings, which he considers as a direct result of the satirical part of the show.

According to unanimous critical judgment, Amtmanis-Briedītis found the ideal harmony between unified fantasy and the real world because the fantasy world is generated by human nature and the power of feelings. (*Dzene* 36). The show is significant and influences his creative activity throughout his career; however, the scandal eclipses the artistic value of his show. What is positive is that the scandal raises the debate not only of morality, but also of the right to talk about everything. A few years later, looking back, the remarkable Latvian literary critic Theodors Zeiferts writes on this subject:

The press broke the controversy over the aesthetic and ethical elements of this piece and on the body nudity and on the idea of approaching holiness in works of art in general. If, on the one hand we warned the youth against this piece, on the other hand (from the Social Democrats) it was recommended for the youth, who had to get rid of the pharisaical pseudomorale and led towards the natural beauty of the forms of life (*Zeiferts* 6).

The staging of *Le Miracle de saint Antoine* of Maeterlinck in Latvia is based on the show created by Maeterlinck's first wife, actress Georgette Leblanc — when the two plays, *L'Intruse* and *Le Miracle de saint Antoine*, are played during the same

1 A Catholic region of eastern Latvia.

theatrical evening.¹ This “diptych” does not succeed in European cities. Alfred Kerr, writer and influential German critic, blames Maeterlinck recently discovered, who has already managed to enter the third phase of creativity; in the second phase, with *Monna Vanna*², he abandons form, in the third, with *The Miracle of St. Anthony*, - attempts to destroy mysticism with irony (Van de Kerckhove 73)³. Maeterlinck’s play is performed five years after *Pan* in one of Latvia’s largest cities, Liepāja, staged by Janis Zariņš. The play is presented for the first time on February 8, 1925 in the new Liepāja Theater. The choice of the director to produce this show is the fruit of a quest for theatrical creation, and the theater seeks to accommodate the taste of the public, but it also wants to follow the latest trends in the theater, adapting his repertoire at the time.

After the show, the newspaper *Strādnieku avīze* publishes a criticism (se 4), in which it is recognized that Maeterlinck is not the right author for the Latvian public and our dynamic era. What to do with Maeterlinck?! Exclaims the critic. The beginning is bad because the scandal is half empty. “Anthony could do without spotlights, the sacred halo was more often around his belly than around his head.” Speculators were stunned, the public misunderstood, concludes the critic.

In response, the director Jānis Zariņš expresses, very courteously, his point of view and explains his intentions. Referring to the Russian tradition in staged pieces of Maeterlinck (Komissarzhevskaya, Stanislavski, Meyerhold) and describing the original approach of Vakhtangov in the show of *Le Miracle de saint Antoine*, created in 1920. Fabrice Van de Kerchove notes that, after the symbolism, Maeterlinck returns to traditional theatrical forms, including farce, while the Russian theater masters Meyerhold and Vakhtangov, on the contrary, push their plays to move away from the institutionalized theater. The Latvian director Zariņš is trying to integrate this against movement.

In his article Zariņš regrets that before the show he did not provide the necessary explanations and explains that he was inspired by the original approach of Vakhtangov, in which the Russian director uses the grotesque and caricatural expression form (Zariņš a 4). Separating the two groups of comic characters, Vakhtangov portrays St. Anthony and Virginia as ordinary people, but Miss Hortense’s family

1 This is reported in the Belgian newspaper, which writes about Mme Leblanc’s European Theater Tour. *L’Art Moderne*, Nr. 35, 30 (août 1903) 304.

2 *Monna Vanna* is the play of Maeterlinck, published and staged in 1902. This staging, which is a huge success in Germany, however has a shared opinion of the critics, is no longer a play of the theater of the symbolism of Maeterlinck.

3 All the quote see in the van de Kerckhove’s essay “Le Rire de Maeterlinck.”

in a grotesque manner with caricature characters. This makes it possible to accentuate the opposition and to give the status of reality to the mystic, but to create the bourgeois milieu in an exaggerated, grotesque and caricatural manner. In addition, Vakhtangov plays mainly with a white and black palette in the show (Zariņš b 4). With this reference to the great director Vakhtangov, Zariņš tries to justify his unsuccessful attempt. But on one point the critic and the director agree — Maeterlinck's time was beyond 1914 or he has not yet come, in any case, to the public; this playwright is not interesting. In this case, the discussion with the audience about the ideas of the piece fails.

The nuance of Maeterlinck's theater and the passivity of Van Lerberghe's prose, and, to a lesser extent, the symbolist period, undoubtedly shaped literary tastes in Latvia. This was encouraged by interested writers, apologists of Belgian symbolism, and their opponents at the beginning of the 20th century. The sharp attacks to the "sickly" expression of symbolism, the questioning of the valorization of unspeakable sensations and silence go beyond the borders of the literary domain, so it drives even more discussions, counter-attacks, maintaining popularity, as well as marking a turning point in the history of literature. Symbolism also inspires parodies and contributes to the development of the understanding of a new comic style. The two pieces imbue irony with the reception on the mysterious message in the bourgeois milieu. The challenge is clearly expressed verbally and is the opposite by means of symbolic expression. The opponent of the mystery is thus eradicated by his own means — irony and mockery. The dramatic action, rooted in the scenery with the traditional and recognizable characters, provokes and is perceived not only as a criticism, but also as the caricatures of the values. Emotional anger keeps interest, but not necessarily gravity, and the scenic expression of the 1920s in Latvia raises the question not only of morality, but also of the possibility of criticism and the limits of satire in a democratic country where religion is separated from the state.

Putting their pieces among the comic works, Maeterlinck and Van Lerberghe can afford to say what in serious speech would not be possible because it is too unacceptable. This aspect of comedies often attracts directors, because, given that the theater is a public forum, the general audience is at the disposal of a message that does not correspond with current conventions. The lightness of the comedy uniting people with laughter as a reducing agent of tension, confers an aura of non-seriousness, while, at the same time, providing the capacity of the spectator to understand the cause of their own laughter. Thus, the spectator is subject to a test, or the test of his capacity, one tests not only sense of humor, but also one evaluates the intellec-

tual capacity. In light of the serious reputation of the two authors in the literary field of Latvia, the latter is particularly important, all the more because of the intellectual tactics (on which are also based scientific and research activities) there is a tendency to question what is considered the norm, and the departure from the norm is the basis of development and prospective thinking.

Conclusion

Symbolism, with its intrinsic values, exhorted Latvian writers to fight for independence of the literature of ideology and public utility. The battle was tough and undeniably contributed to the creative freedom, literary development, and self-confidence of Latvian authors, which is a *sine qua non* for the future of national literature. An attachment to universal human values that transcends national consciousness and do not serve the validity of the principle in order to achieve important national or ideological goals, paradoxically, is at the root of national literature. National identity that requires national literature is an essential goal to which ideologues attempt to subjugate literature. Human values and literary aesthetics are clothed in the affirmation of the nation and express its inherent original characteristics, environment, traditions, situations, etc. At that time, Latvia gained its national independence and national literature and theater art are officially recognized as important cultural sectors and can identify literary achievements, including that of symbolism whose contribution to literature came as early as 1911 by André Barre. “Symbolism attempted a quadruple reform: poetic reform, prosodic reform, syntactic reform, lexicographic reform” (Barre 390). Yes, every writer contributes in his own way. This learning has also taken place in Latvia.

The analogy favors not only language, but also the system of literary images that can integrate references, allusions, and connotations, drawn and translated from the world heritage of cultural and literary values. Symbolism, besides the great themes of literature, like love and death, introduces another subject — the Unknown. But in the 1920s, the challenge is increased by the interpretation on the stage. This wish is undoubtedly inspired by the Russian success of the directors Stanislavski, Meyerhold, and Vakhtangov, especially with the plays of Maeterlinck, who with their shows demonstrate a further degree of reliability and talk to the public. The directors are also attracted by the plays of this post-symbolism movement, as interesting and stimulating dramaturgic material. The two plays, before being staged in Latvia, have acquired a shocking reputation, and this fact attracts directors; it also seduces their apparent simplicity — the farce and satirical comedy. The comedy is in contrast to the preceding plays, but the main contradiction lies in the

fact that the preceding principle, which postulated the autonomy of literature and the daily tragedy, has radically changed in form and content. The introduction of the unknown into everyday life is not transformed into tragedy but generates comedic situations. Although the mystic is always present, he is challenged in his very nature, which forces us to consider other explanations to an inexplicable presence, rationally acceptable explanations, that is to say, madness or dream or nightmare.

In the volumes of the history of the Latvian theater, without fail, the episodes with Van Lerberghe's *Pan* is always mentioned. On the other hand, *Le Miracle de saint Antoine* of Maeterlinck hardly appears. Can we draw parallels between Maeterlinck's and Van Lerberghe's plays in Latvia? I would answer that it is possible only if one takes into account their common literary past. The characteristic irony of modernism is capable of appealing to the Latvian viewer, if it has a strong voice, that is, courageous and provocative means of artistic expression. On the social level, the spectacle of *Pan* brings up the debate still current on frontiers of derision, the slow *Saint-Antoine* de Maeterlinck is aware of the dynamism of the new nation-state of Latvia after the war. In the creative field, at that time, the works of the Belgian authors pass from the status of innovative reading material to another group of texts, namely, ones that interest the directors to speak to the Latvian public and, along the same lines, use the mechanism of irony to reveal what the foreign text pretends to hide.

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