

# *Reception of Production Ideas of V. Meyerhold in the Autobiographical Novel "Tyapkatan"*

## *by T. Churilin*

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**Abstract**—The paper is devoted to a problem of literary reception of production ideas of the outstanding Russian Soviet Director V. Meyerhold. It is part of a research project "Interaction of art codes of different types of art in the autobiographical prose of T.V. Churilin". The novel "Tyapkatan" representing the autobiographical prose of T. Churilin is considered from the perspective of the intermedial approach relevant for modern humanities. The intermedial approach to the study of the literary work, giving a chance to go beyond one sign system, provides for cultural and esthetic contextualization of personality and works of a "famous but forgotten" writer of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Archive materials (letters, plans, draft sketches of chapters) taken from the funds of the Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts were used in the study. The materials and results of their judgment described in the paper are designed to enrich scientific ideas of creative identity of the writer, indicate versatility of his art talent, width of his cultural competences.

**Keywords**—*creative reception; intermedial approach; T. Churilin; V. Meyerhold; autobiographical prose; novel chronicle*

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### 1. Abbreviations and Acronyms

Until recently the legacy of a writer, a poet and a playwright Tikhon Churilin (1885-1946) was only known to a very limited number of Russian wordlovers. Having brightly declared himself with the edition of a poetic book "Spring after Death" (1915), soon he was withdrawn from the literary process and doomed for many years of dark oblivion. S. Karlinsky had all reasons to state in his article of 1967: "Tikhon Churilin's person and poetry might possibly be the single most thoroughly forgotten phenomenon in the whole history of Russian letters" [1]. The full understanding of T. Churilin's works was complicated due to lack of the necessary source base: books, which appeared during the lifetime of T. Churilin as well as magazines, almanacs and anthologies where his works were published, became a rare book, and prosaic, poetic and drama hand-written and typewritten texts prepared by the author for printing were kept under archival load for a long time. Almost until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century T. Churilin remained "a white spot" on the map of the Russian literature. Lifetime editions of his works were not fully

studied, the volume and nature of his literary heritage were not specified, many features of his creative identity were not revealed and, at last, his role in literary and cultural life of the country was not defined.

The interest of scientists to Churilin's works, which increased in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, was materialized in republications of his lifetime books [2] and publications of works stored in public archival funds [3-6].

Having returned to an orbit of research and reader's interests, the literary heritage of T. Churilin may and shall become a subject of scientific reflection in such aspects as creative identity of the writer, specifics of his world creation, genre and art originality of his works, features of his individual style, etc.

#### 2. Problem Statement

One of the priorities is consideration of diverse and multidimensional relations of the literary heritage of T. Churilin with modern art is to reconstruct that sociocultural background of the writer's creative works. It is especially important that the system consideration of his prosaic, lyrical and drama works gives the grounds to speak about the intermedial nature of T. Churilin's creative thinking, about the reception of the most significant phenomena of cultural life of the country, about pronounced aspiration to assimilate the languages of different types of art. Certainly, such task cannot be solved within one article, therefore the novel "Tyapkatan", a literary work, which most brightly represents picturesque, musical, cinema and theatrical allusions, became a subject of special consideration.

The novel "Tyapkatan" having genre subtitles "The Russian comedy" and "The chronicle of one city and its people" was written by T. Churilin in the first half of the 1930s. This is authentically demonstrated by the following dates: "February – 1933, March"; "chapter 8-9-10 – 1934, February, March"; "13. III. 1935" in draft sketches of chapters of the work and epistolary evidence provided by T. Churilin.

The novel, in the name of which the author makes a hidden ciphered reference to the name of his hometown, reflected not only the merchant life of Lebedyan, but also the drama of

Churilin's illegitimacy and the continuous search of his national, social and mental identity. The chronicle of individual human destiny is included here into the chronicle of the city and in the chronicle of historical development of the country. According to its genre and composite characteristics, the novel by T. Churilin represents an art retrospection, materialized in a flashback from positions of completely changed personal self-assessment and similar historical and social-political situation.

Despite all efforts of T. Churilin and his support group in the name of O. Brik, V. Shklovsky, B. Eykhenbaum and other writers and scientists, the novel "Tyapkatan" was not published during lifetime, not after the death of its author. This final work of a forgotten writer was published in 2013/2014 upon hand-written chapters of the novel prepared for reprinting, which are stored in the Churilin's fund of the Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts with orientation to typewritten copy of the novel, which is stored in the funds of the Literary and Art Museum of Old Crimea. However, beyond this text unity there was a large amount of hand-written materials including complete and even repainted chapters of the novel, and chapters being at the development stage. They include "The Aesthetes" – an extremely interesting chapter in terms of its thematic and genre format. Some pages of the draft sketches reflect the extended titles of this chapter: "Esthetes, or a Story about people in live and dead Panopticon in Tyapkatan" and "Esthetes, a story about people like rolls and pies with Chetyi-Minei filling" [7]. The chapter, not included by the author in the composite novel "Tyapkatan" for some reason, is critically important for the solution of the task under study. Theatrical impressions of T. Churilin received while talking to V. Meyerhold and from the acquaintance with his director's methodology found reflection in it. The materials of this hand-written chapter are actively used in the analysis.

### 3. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to consider the issue of the influence of Meyerhold's methodology and practice on creative consciousness of T. Churilin. Obviously, this purpose requires the introduction of new data and facts concerning the biography and Churilin's creativity into the reader's and literary use. During the study we aim to answer the following questions: why Churilin was interested in acquiring languages of different types of art; what drives theatrical intensions of the author of the epic work; what forms does Churilin's "magnetization" take through creative ideas of Meyerhold; what is the nature and function of theatrical figurativeness implemented in the novel chronicle "Tyapkatan".

### 4. Literature Review

The study of the literary heritage of T. Churilin, an unfairly forgotten poet, a writer, a playwright of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is only at its initial stage, therefore the amount of works devoted to his life and creativity is very limited. These are mainly biographic and historico-literary comments to publications and republications of Churilin's lyrical works in the Sumerki and Futurum ART magazines and in anthologies of the Russian poetry of the first quarter of

the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in the opening article by O. Bayburtskaya preceding the publication of a fragment from the Churilin's "Tyapkatan" in the collection of materials of the Fifth Gertsykovsky Readings "'The Silver Age" in the Crimea. A glance from the 21<sup>st</sup> century". It is worth noting an extremely serious, conceptually rich and a very useful opening article by N. Yakovleva to the publication of memoirs of T. Churilin "Meeting on my road" in the tenth issue of the biographic almanac "The persons". The works of the Belgrad scientists of Slavic studies M. Yovanovich "Tikhon Churilin's poetry (Preliminary notes)", published in the book by M. Yovanovich "Selected works on Russian poetics", and K. Ichin "Spring after death" by Tikhon Churilin: Dialogue with Edgar Poe and Andrey Bely", published in the book by K. Ichin "Etudes on Russian literature", made a serious contribution to the study of biography and creative heritage of T. Churilin. The outstanding events of the last years in the study of Churilin's legacy include the book by T. Churilin "Poems" published by A. Mirzayev, publication of Churilin's books "The last visit", "The infant March" and reprinting of the book "The end of Kikapu" by D. Beznosov, publication of a two-volume collection of poems by T. Churilin, publication of the "Tyapkatan" novel by T. Churilin, publication of prosaic poem "From the farthest Childhood" and chapters of the story "The secret". The article "Recovery from genius. Tikhon Churilin – a swan and Lebyadkin" by S. Yuryev containing extremely interesting concept of creative evolution of the writer was published in 2013 in two issues in the Lekhaim magazine. In 2015 the Yelets scientific magazine "Filologos" in the selection of materials devoted to the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the birth of T. Churilin published the articles by A. Mirzayev ("Tikhon Churilin and Vladimir Mayakovsky (To the question of influence, repulsion and opposition)", O. Kramar ("Episode from the creative history of the novel chronicle "Tyapkatan": Chapter "Van-Van-Van – and Timka"), Yu. Orbitsky ("From a free verse to a sonnet: Verse rarities in Tikhon Churilin's creativity"), A. Sobolev ("Tikhon Churilin in work on his book "Citizen of the Universe"), N. Yakovleva ("To the reception of "Spring after death" (About a half-forgotten review by V. Shershenevich)").

### 5. Research Methods

The study was based on the statement of a famous scientist Omri Ronen: "The creativity sketch will never be full if the unrealized is not considered" [8]. For this reason in the uniform conceptual field the paper considers chapters being part of the novel chronicle and chapters, which remained in the manuscript.

The "Tyapkatan" novel chronicle by T. Churilin and its archive materials are considered through the methodological prism of the intermedial approach understood as a special type of intertextual relations in a literary work based on interaction of art codes of different types of art as a mechanism of cross-cultural diffusion.

During work with archive materials we followed the principles of textual analysis implying comparative study of various options of the same work, a fragment, a sketch. They play an important role in establishing the dynamics of development of images, narrative schemes and finally allow

defining the vector of development of the writer's creative concept.

## II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Continuous change of approaches "ars poetica" followed by language acquisition of different types of art, so typical for T. Churilin, in many respects was defined not only by time of its entry into literature, but also by specific features of his art talent. Belonging to the category of writers whom V.G. Belinsky called "ordinary talents", T. Churilin felt the invariable need to interact with outstanding figures of literature and art: their creative ideas became an object of continuous esthetic reflection. At the same time, he felt special inclination to outstanding non-standard personalities, to rebels who were defiantly encroaching on a settled art forms. In literature such "guiding stars" for T. Churilin were Velimir Khlebnikov and Vladimir Mayakovsky, in painting – Mikhail Larionov and Natalya Goncharova, in music – Mikhail Gnesin, in theater – Alexander Tairov and Vsevolod Meyerhold. It shall be noted that T. Churilin's interest to outstanding contemporaries is explained not by lack or poverty of his creative imagination, but, figuratively speaking, by the coincidence of creative "waves" when personal biographic or art impulses receive a convincing "feed" from the outside. His poetics was the poetics of not spontaneous, but well realized and clearly structured associations. Quite so, not as dependence, but as parity cooperation T. Churilin considered his relationship with famous cultural figures, stating, for example, in one autobiographical reference: "Since 1924 – a colleague of Mayakovsky, Aseev, Meyerhold" [9].

The Churilin's fund of the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art stores many documents confirming the organic implication of the writer to the theater life of Moscow of the 1920s-1930s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of such documents is the contract between the Moscow Chamber Theatre and T. Churilin dated "25 February 1916", according to which he took "the service in Moscow and Petrograd in the trust partnership troupe of the "Moscow Chamber Theatre" from 20 July 1916 to Lent 1917" [10]. In 1915-1916 several Moscow periodicals published information that the play of T. Churilin "The last visit" is accepted as a pilot in the Chamber Theater. T. Churilin remembered this important event in his memoirs "Meetings on my road". The greeting message of the staff of the theater to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of creative activity of T. Churilin signed by A. Tairov on 16 March 1933, which is also stored in the archive, indicates the existing relations of the writer with the Moscow Chamber Theatre. In particular, it says: "It is a pleasure for us to celebrate your important date since we remember your early poetic performances in the first years of work of our theater". The printed text in the address is signed by A. Tairov: "Accept the best and warmest wishes from Alica Georgiyevna (actress A.G. Koonen – O.K.), myself and the entire team of our theater. Yours sincerely, A. Tairov" [11].

T. Churilin did not become an actor of the Moscow Chamber Theatre, and the play "The last visit" was not put on its stage. Most likely, this happened because in May 1916 T.

Churilin went to the Crimea where he was mobilized and served in the army until October. The relevant documents (a book for regimentals and salary of "the soldier of the 12<sup>th</sup> troop, 2 platoon, 1 division") are stored in the Churilin's fund of the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art. (which was damaged). Being caught by the civil war after the revolution, T. Churilin stayed in the Crimea until the end of 1922.

Soon after his return from the Crimea to Moscow T. Churilin begins to look for creative contacts with V. Meyerhold who had the reputation of the "ingenious master of visual performance" [12]. Obviously, the reason, which induced T. Churilin to make it, is that he cherished an idea of his play "Hello, Caesars!". In any case, he writes about it in the two first letters to Meyerhold dated 1923 and 1924 respectively: "Dear companion Vsevolod Emiliyevich, having begun work after a disease, the first I would like to do is to see your performances in your theater – this is the most critical impairment. I would like to ask you for help with passes (if possible for 2 persons). Though rather late I would like to congratulate you on a great event for all of us – the celebration of the Red Army and the youth in your honour. Unfortunately, I was not able to be present there due to illness. I live on Novinsky 109, apt. 14. T.V. Churilin. Yours sincerely, poet Tikhon Churilin. 26. XI. 23. M."

Soon he sent another letter: "Vsevolod Emiliyevich, thank you for passes – I spent this week in your theater. I took a lot from Tarelkin, the Cuckold and the Wood (it refers to performances "Tarelkin's Death", "Generous Cuckold" and "The wood" – O.K.). Now I began to work on a play for which I have been collecting the necessary material for quite a long time. If possible, could you spend half an hour with me for a business conversation and recommendations on drama work. Be so kind and let me know when, where, and what time we could meet for this purpose. I really need this. One more thing – it would also be good if you could prolong my passes for Tarelkin, the Cuckold, and the Wood at least one more time each. I also really need this. Yours sincerely, Tikhon Churilin. Novinsky 109, apt. 14. 29 II. 24" [13].

Proceeding from the date of this letter it is possible to assume that T. Churilin actively began to watch the performances since 16 February 1924. This day the Meyerhold's theater showed the only in February the hundred eleventh performance of the "Generous Cuckold" staged by the play of F. Crommelynck. The performances according to the play by A.V. Sukhovo-Kobylin "The Tarelkin's Death" were staged in the theater on February 14, 22 and 28. On February 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, 26, 29 the theater showed premier performances according to the play by A.N. Ostrovsky "The wood" [14].

The following eight letters of T. Churilin stored in the Meyerhold's fund of the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art already belong to the 1930s. In this epistolary block, the following are of particular interest: poem by T. Churilin "The Government Inspector. Gogol – Meyerhold" dedicated to Zinaida Reich and Vsevolod Meyerhold; gratitude for "creative pleasure with the action of your theater, a wonderful actress Z. Reich, for final rehearsal of "The Government Inspector" and the most outstanding performance in the

world”; personal characteristics: “I, a poet and an innovator *ars poetica*”; offer “in the day off of the troupe to address it with reading of selected opuses”; invitation to a “literature ten-day campaign” devoted to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of T. Churilin’s work in literature: “Is it possible that the Meyerhold’s Theatre, which I was and will be an ardent propagandist, will not support me this evening at my event”; gratitude for greetings from the Meyerhold’s theater troupe. As for the greetings signed by V. Meyerhold, Z. Reich and other actors of the theater mentioned by T. Churilin, in particular, it said: “The advantage of his poetry: bright figurativeness, rich word creation, care about verbal instrumentation which is easier for him and his verse quite often grows from sounds and as the most valuable – the extraordinary richness of his rhythm reflected in the form of his poetic unity and in persuasiveness and plasticity of comparisons of polytypic rhythmic structures. It is not accidental that a number of composers, sensitive and demanding to a verse, are willing to use his texts for musical inspiration, which is contributed by emotional and dynamic advantages of his compositions”.

It shall be noted that with each new letter to Meyerhold, not only does stylistic intonation, but also the nature of address to the addressee change: from “Dear companion Vsevolod Emiliyevich” to “Dear Meyerhold”, “Dear, beloved Meyerhold”. However, almost in each letter T. Churilin characterizes himself only as a “younger companion” of Meyerhold.

It is difficult to say whether that “business conversation” took place, about which T. Churilin asked Meyerhold, however it shall be stated that the lessons of the Meyerhold’s methodology are apparently recorded not only in the above play “Hello, Caesars!” by T. Churilin but also in the autobiographical novel chronicle “Tyapkatan”.

Numerous draft sketches to “Tyapkatan” allow confirming that the initial plans of T. Churilin captured by the Meyerhold’s theater were connected with the drama but not the epic work. The arguments in favor of this statement are numerous text fragments, visually and contentively resembling the director’s explications. Here in the beginning of the page the separate lines include: the name of a future work, genre subtitles (“The Russian comedy”, “The semi-mute drama voiced by a song”, “for big spectacular forms”), instructions for the period of action and the scene of action. Further there are notes concerning the arrangement of natural or interior objects in relation to the acting space (“against a forestage”, “almost at a forestage”, “bushes along the forestage”), the list (“catalog”, “type catalog”) of characters indicating the nature of relationship of heroes or their social status. The following text position is nominated as “A requisite and fittings”, “Fittings”, “Life fittings”. There are “plot-abstract-drafts” in the analyzed draft sketches containing instructions on the arrangement of characters in space, on lighting and sound effects. These “dramaturgic” constants of draft sketches of the literary work in total surprisingly remind the basic provisions of Meyerhold’s works on the art of a director. To be convinced, it is enough to read the Meyerhold’s note: “The director receives a text, a play; there is the finest analysis of dramaturgic material; the director builds the dramaturgic scheme; then he builds the graphics of

the scenario; then distributes roles to the characters given by a playwright; then he builds the author’s idea, not the director’s, but the author’s idea, which includes: the list of characters and their characteristic from the point of view of the author, scenes of action, scenery that the author can see on a stage, light according to the author, music, costumes, effects, etc. <...>” [15].

The assumption on Churilin’s acquaintance with the theoretical works of Meyerhold develops into confidence when we find the instructions on the arrangement of characters “in the center” and “radially” in one of draft sketches to Chapter 3 of “Tyapkatan” [16]. This instruction could remain unnoticed if not one extremely important circumstance. The action of Chapter 3 happens on a fairground, which description corresponds to the note: “Fires. Roundabout. Trays. Tents. Pond. Earth shaft. Buffoonery circus”. The description of the area at the beginning of the action in one draft sketch looks as follows: “Nuns <...> scurry about, boys shout, invite to the buffoonery circus. <...> Suddenly an advertising is heard from the buffoonery circus”.

The key word concept here is “buffoonery”, which allows correlating T. Churilin’s sketches to the article of V. Meyerhold and Yu. Bondi “Buffoonery” and finding interesting lexical, graphic and semantic similarities. One of them is the scheme of scenic space (concentric circles and beam radiuses crosswisely stretching from the center) described by the authors of the article “Buffoonery” and included in the entire text of the article [17].

In terms of its creativity and biography, the idea of buffoonery so admired by Meyerhold was very close to T. Churilin who spent his childhood, adolescence and youth in Lebedyan, the city known for its fairs with festivities, circus performances, attractions and farcical actions. It is so close to him that in the Chapter “Aesthetes” Meyerhold appears as one of the participants of the fair action.

Playing with Meyerhold’s tendency to acting, T. Churilin makes him the director of the circus, which is going on tour in Tyapkatan. At the same time the writer is not only limited to a turned name of the director (Vilimir (!) Emelyich Mira-Holod instead of Vsevolod Emilyevich Meyerhold), but also enhances the effect of his presence by a number of demonstrative references to his biography and work. Thus, in particular, his “prima” and “donna” “Margarit Nikolavna Gotye, and Kamelina by passport” takes part in one of performances, where we can easily detect the director’s wife, the actress Zinaida Reich who played Marguerite Gaultier in the sensational performance “La Dame aux Camélias” staged by Meyerhold according to the novel by A. Dumas. A number of factual references continues to mention the employment of “madam Gaultier” in “tragicomedy” “Medoved 33 years”. This information from a “poster announcement” is also easy to interpret. In 1935 Meyerhold staged a performance “33 faints” according to A. Chekhov. Three Chekhov’s vaudevilles were united here by a common name “33 faints”: “Anniversary”, “Bear”, “Performance”. Z. Reich brilliantly played the Popova’s role in the vaudeville “Bear”. In one of draft sketches to the chapter the same “poster announcement” refers

to “Historical and Esthetic Grand Guignol”. This mention, which included the colloquial name “Grand Guignol” makes us remember that at the beginning of his career Meyerhold participated in activity of the St. Petersburg Commercial Theater of Miniatures organized as the Parisian Grand Guignol [18]. At last, the name of Meyerhold (Mira Holod) is mentioned in several draft fragments due to the wax museum brought by him to Tyapkatan. Being called “a grandiose, the only waxworks exhibition in the world” the museum is interesting by the fact that its exhibits unexpectedly for visitors represent exact wax similarity, wax twins of the living and well inhabitants of the district town. Such caricatured compliance is the accented reference to a director’s idea of Meyerhold – his well-known “mute scene” in the performance “The Government Inspector”. Instead of actors who “hardened” learning on the arrival of the true inspector, the final episode, which shook the audience, showed papier-mache dolls tall as a man fully recreating a mimicry and plasticity of the characters of the performance. Obviously, needless to say that the grotesque trick of conformation/dissimilation, oxymoron collision of the live and the dead going back to one of the brightest and non-standard ideas of Meyerhold, gave T. Churilin unlimited opportunities to characterize the heroes of the “Tyapkatan” novel and to embody the author’s attitude to the depicted scenes.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

Finishing a conversation on the T. Churilin’s reception of the Meyerhold’s production ideas it is necessary to say that the relations with the outstanding master of a scene gave a lot to the writer in respect of his personal and creative self-determination. The use of director’s discoveries of the outstanding master of a scene allowed T. Churilin avoiding chronicles and shifting to a psychological grotesque, as well as including the novel with autobiographical perspective in a wide historical and cultural context. T. Churilin especially liked the feeling of “plurality of opportunities of theater art” typical for Meyerhold [19], which stimulated personal creative activity of the writer and induced him to search for a synthetic genre form caused by interaction of languages of different types of art.

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