

Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

TCLC 221

Volume 221

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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**Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol.
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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)* has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” *TCLC* “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
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In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

Leonid Andreyev 1871-1919	1
<i>Russian short story writer, playwright, novelist, journalist, photographer, and painter</i>	
Simone de Beauvoir 1908-1986	63
<i>French philosopher, novelist, nonfiction writer, essayist, autobiographer, short story writer, and playwright</i>	
<i>Entry devoted to the nonfiction work The Second Sex (1949)</i>	
Elmer Rice 1892-1967	306
<i>American playwright, novelist, autobiographer, nonfiction writer, scriptwriter, essayist, short story writer, and director</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 377

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 489

TCLC Cumulative Nationality Index 505

TCLC-221 Title Index 511

Leonid Andreyev

1871-1919

(Full name Leonid Nikolaevich Andreyev; also transliterated as Leonid Nikolayevich Andreev; also wrote under pseudonym James Lynch) Russian short story writer, playwright, novelist, journalist, photographer, and painter.

The following entry provides an overview of Andreyev's life and works. For additional information on his career, see *TCLC*, Volume 3.

INTRODUCTION

At the height of his literary career in the early 1900s, Leonid Andreyev was one of the most popular and widely discussed Russian authors of the period. Known for his dark, tortured, and somewhat nihilistic plays, novels, and short stories, Andreyev exemplified the intellectual pessimism of Russian culture in the early twentieth century. Throughout his career he addressed existential and metaphysical themes, exposing the anguish, cruelty, and chaos of modern society in his writings. As such, he is often compared to such writers as Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Anton Chekhov, and Edgar Allan Poe. In some of his best-known works, including the novel *Krasnyi smekh* (1905; *The Red Laugh*), the short story *Gubernator* (1906; *The Governor*), and the play *K zvezdam* (1906; *To the Stars*), Andreyev also examined themes related to war and revolution.

Andreyev has been described as a quintessential modernist for his experimentations with narrative form and his use of symbolism and expressionist techniques. Although some scholars have questioned the lasting significance of his literary achievements, others view Andreyev's work as a unique expression of the tumultuous emotional landscape of Russian culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. As critic Thomas Seltzer observed in 1920, Andreyev is "a child of civilization, steeped in its culture," and "his art is the resultant of all that the past ages have given us, of the things that we have learned in our own day, and of what we are just now learning. With this art Andreyev succeeds in communicating ideas, thoughts, and feelings so fine, so tenuous, so indefinite as to appear to transcend human expression."

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Andreyev was born on August 9, 1871, in Orel, Russia. His father, Nikolai Ivanovich, was a land surveyor and

bank clerk who inspired his son's love of nature. His mother, Anastasiia Nikolaevna, born of noble but impoverished Polish lineage, encouraged her son's interest in drawing and theater. Andreyev read voraciously as a boy but was subject to extreme mood swings. While in high school he purportedly attempted suicide on several occasions, and after his father's death in 1888 he adopted an atheistic and pessimistic philosophy of life, which critics partially trace to his early interest in the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Andreyev enrolled in law school at St. Petersburg University in 1891 but was forced to withdraw because of his family's financial difficulties. After receiving financial aid he attended Moscow University in 1893. The following year Andreyev again attempted suicide but was thwarted when the bullet deflected off one of his copper buttons, leaving him wounded but alive. Shortly thereafter his life regained some stability when his mother sold the family home and moved to Moscow with her children. While in school Andreyev earned money for his family by tutoring and selling portraits, and he began writing as much as he could, publishing his first story, "On, ona i vodka," or "He, She, and Vodka," in 1895 in his hometown newspaper.

In 1897 Andreyev passed the bar exam and took a job in a criminal defense practice. He also wrote court reports for local publications, including *Kur'er*, where his editor, Isaak Danilovich Novik, took note of his talent and made him a columnist. Novik asked Andreyev to write a traditional Easter story in 1898, the result of which, "Bargamot i Garas'ka," attracted the attention of writer Maxim Gorky, who helped to spark the young author's literary career. Gorky marked Andreyev as an important new talent in Russian literature and arranged to have him join the writers circle of Nikolai Dmitrievich Teleshev, known as "Sreda" ("Wednesday"), where he met Anton Chekhov. In 1901 Andreyev published his first collection of stories, *Rasskazy*, which was followed by *Novye rasskazy* in 1902. Controversy surrounding two of his stories published during this time, "Bezдна" ("The Abyss"), collected in *Novye rasskazy*, and "V тумane" (1906; "In the Fog"), which were deemed "sex stories," brought him the attention of both critics and general audiences.

In 1902 Andreyev married Aleksandra Mikhailovna Veligorskaia, who helped edit his work and, according to the author, saved his life by inspiring him to quit drinking. During this time Andreyev became increasingly

preoccupied with ideas related to war and revolution. *The Red Laugh* was written in response to the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), while the short story *The Governor* and his first play, *To the Stars*, both treated revolutionist themes. In 1905 Andreyev was targeted by the Black Hundred, a monarchist group that attacked individuals it deemed to be unpatriotic, and he was forced to leave the country. He settled with his family in Berlin for a brief time and wrote his second play, *Savva*, which was first performed in 1907. In July 1906 the Andreyevs went to Finland, where the author spoke out forcibly against Nicholas II's government in Russia at a large rally in opposition to the tsar's recent dissolution of the State Duma. When Finnish troops loyal to the tsar arrived and crushed the demonstration, Andreyev went into hiding for two weeks. He reunited with his family in Stockholm, where they stayed for a time before returning to Berlin.

Despite his anti-tsarist rhetoric, Andreyev remained ambivalent towards revolution, questioning the readiness of the working class and peasants in Russia to overthrow the tsarist regime and achieve true democracy. These thoughts permeated his work of the period, including the play *Zhizn' cheloveka* (1907; *The Life of Man*), considered one of his most controversial works; the novel *Iuda Iskariot i drugie* (1907; *Judas Iscariot*); and the novella *T'ma* (1907; *The Dark*). In November 1906 Andreyev's wife died in Berlin, and the author began drinking again. He considered suicide but immersed himself in his work to overcome his thoughts of despair. In 1908 Andreyev remarried and moved to Vammelsuu, Finland, where he continued writing. During this period he produced a number of notable plays and works of fiction, including the story *Moi zapiski* (1908; *The Man Who Found the Truth*), the novella *Rasskaz o semi poveshennykh* (1908; *The Seven That Were Hanged*), and the plays *Tot, kto poluchaet poshchечiny* (1915; *He, the One Who Gets Slapped*) and *Tsar' Golod* (1921; *King Hunger*). During World War I Andreyev returned to Russia and in 1916 became the literary editor of a new Petrograd newspaper, *Russkaia volia*, where he produced editorials sharply criticizing Bolshevism and, ironically, strongly supporting the Russian government in its battle against "German imperialism." After the Bolshevik takeover in 1917, however, he returned again to Finland. While preparing for a lecture tour in the United States, Andreyev died of a heart attack on September 12, 1919.

MAJOR WORKS

For some critics, Andreyev's short stories are among his most important literary contributions. In "The Abyss," one of his most widely read and translated stories, he treats such themes as sexuality, brutality, and

repression. In the narrative two lovers on a hike are attacked by robbers. The robbers brutally rape the young woman. Her boyfriend, who had always acted honorably with the woman, is transformed by the event. He falls into an "abyss," in which he is tempted by primal urges. Although the end of the story is somewhat ambiguous, the text implies that the boyfriend ultimately succumbs to his urges and rapes his girlfriend.

In a tale often linked to the Old Testament story of Job, *The Life of Father Vassily* examines themes of human suffering and religious faith. In this story Father Vassily is a village priest who endures tremendous suffering and faces a crisis of faith. After the death of his son, his alcoholic wife forces a sexual encounter with him, in an effort to "resurrect" the young boy. The liaison results in a mentally impaired child. During confession Vassily listens to the sufferings and afflictions of his congregation and is tempted by his own feelings of despair and doubt. When his wife dies the priest suggests that the sufferings of the village are a sign from God. Later, a workman dies in a construction accident, and Vassily demands that God bring him back to life. When no miracle takes place, the priest renounces God and ultimately succumbs to insanity.

In *The Governor* Andreyev confronts political issues, such as justice, revolution, and the responsibilities and consequences associated with leadership. In this story the author chronicles the thoughts of a town governor, who in a moment of panic orders the massacre of a group of protestors. Although the governor regrets his decision, he realizes that his act can only result in his assassination, which he comes to regard as both inevitable and divinely just. Critics have connected this story with the events surrounding the assassination of the Moscow governor, Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, in February 1905. Writing in 1924, Alexander Kaun emphasized the story's universal themes and concerns, asserting that in this work Andreyev adroitly combines "fleeting modernity with a contemplation of questions deep and eternal."

Of Andreyev's longer works of fiction, the novel *The Red Laugh* and the novella *The Seven That Were Hanged* are among his best known and most respected. Andreyev wrote *The Seven That Were Hanged* in response to the widespread hangings of revolutionaries that occurred in 1905. In the story two "common" criminals, as well as five would-be assassins, face trial and, ultimately, execution. The author sharply criticizes capital punishment in the work and investigates various psychological effects of impending death in each of the seven prisoners. One of the seven, a conspirator named Werner, has a prophetic vision before he is executed, in which he understands that he is about to be freed from the "prison" of his mortal life.

The Red Laugh, Andreyev's response to the Russo-Japanese war, depicts war as a disease that quickly spreads and affects the whole of society. Using expressionist techniques, Andreyev details the atrocities of war, including hunger, injury, and death, but also demonstrates the psychological damage of war's violence and how psychosis moves beyond the individual soldier to society at large. Kaun declared that "nowhere in literature is the horror of war presented as amply as in *The Red Laugh*," concluding that "for sheer horror, for the cumulating effect of howling, shrieking horror," the novel "has no equal."

Some critics regard Andreyev's plays as equal, and in some cases superior, to his fiction in terms of artistic achievement. In the play *To the Stars* the author explores themes related to revolution, as well as universal questions of the nature of existence. The protagonist, Ternovsky, is a Russian astronomer, detached from the concerns of the world, whose reality centers around the cosmos. His son, Nikolai, and his son's fiancée, Marusia, however, are revolutionaries. The play takes place in Ternovsky's observatory and consists mostly of dialogue between the astronomer and Marusia, who visits him to inform him that his son has been arrested. Ternovsky and Marusia are depicted as kindred spirits, acting in harmony despite their different perspectives. As many critics have noted, the play is one of the most optimistic and hopeful of Andreyev's major works.

In *The Life of Man* Andreyev presents stages of life in the character of "Man," an everyman figure, and examines various themes, including human suffering, religious faith, ambition, and vanity. After a humble birth and a youth spent in poverty Man finally achieves financial success as an architect. Following this pinnacle of happiness, however, Man suffers, experiencing financial ruin, the murder of his son, and finally death. During the play a figure named Someone in Gray is an ongoing presence in a corner of the stage. Man senses this presence, which he calls "god, devil, fate, or life," and after his son's death curses him.

King Hunger (also translated as *Tsar Hunger*) is an ambiguous portrayal of revolution, in which "have-nots," led by a demonic personification of hunger, Tsar Hunger, revolt against the "haves." While some of the have-nots are upstanding, though impoverished, citizens, many others are criminals, who wreak havoc, destroy institutes of culture, and harm innocents. The revolt is overcome and the have-nots are destroyed, but their ghosts occupy the stage at the end of the play, proclaiming that they will return.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Much of Andreyev's initial critical success stemmed from his association with Maxim Gorky, who proclaimed the young writer an important emerging voice

in Russian literature. Subsequently, his first published work, *Rasskazy*, was favorably received, but it was not until the publication of "The Abyss" and "In the Fog" that he achieved wide recognition as a writer. Much of this new-found fame, however, stemmed from the controversial nature of his early work. For instance, "The Abyss" and "In the Fog," and to a lesser extent the story "Stena," generated a heated debate in the press over the merits of Andreyev's style and subject matter. Sofia Andreyevna Tolstoy, Leo Tolstoy's wife, wrote a letter to *Novoe vremia* in support of the newspaper's critic, Viktor Petrovich Burenin, who had earlier denounced these stories as "in need not of a critic but a clinic." The letter elicited responses from numerous readers, many of whom defended Andreyev and compared him to other important writers, including Gorky, Chekhov, and, ironically, Tolstoy himself. This debate resulted in record sales of Andreyev's short story collections and brought the author unprecedented fame.

Although Andreyev remained a popular, best-selling author in the years that followed, his writings were often overshadowed by rumors regarding his private life and, especially, his mental health. Indeed, the hostility towards Andreyev's work intensified following the publication of *The Red Laugh* and *To the Stars*, when the author turned his attention to the subjects of revolution and the atrocities of war. For many Russian critics these writings depicted a dark, horrifying, even nihilistic vision of the world, and they declared Andreyev "reactionary" and "unstable." At times his work was censored or banned in Russia, and the author himself was often described as the personification of the degeneracy of the Russian intelligentsia. A few commentators, however, spoke out in defense of Andreyev's work. In 1913 Herman Bernstein characterized Andreyev as "the most modern of modern writers in Europe" and proclaimed that, "next to Tolstoy," he was "the most gifted of all Russian writers. If his work, which is in every respect original, must be likened to the work of another Russian, it would come nearest to that of Dostoyevsky." At the end of his literary career Andreyev's reputation was negatively affected by his anti-Bolshevik sentiments, and his work was largely ignored until the mid-twentieth century.

In recent years scholars have seen in Andreyev a reflection of the general mood and attitudes of his time. For the most part he is considered a minor literary figure, whose writings failed to achieve the lasting significance and influence of the major Russian authors, such as Chekhov, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky. Some admirers, however, have praised Andreyev's examination of the individual's struggle within a corrupt and ailing society and have identified him as an important forerunner of the existentialist movement. Still others have lauded his innovative formal experiments and emphasized his contribution to the modernist trend in Russian literature.

According to Stephen C. Hutchings, Andreyev's expressionist plays "were genuinely innovatory," and his experimental narrative and semantic elements in his shorter fiction place him "at the heart of the radical processes that shaped Russian literary modernism." Even the assumption of Andreyev's pessimistic philosophy as a writer has been questioned. J. B. Woodward has claimed that Andreyev was not merely the "arch-pessimist" portrayed by his contemporaries and most critics since, stating that even in his darkest plays and fiction he offered an optimistic vision of life. "It must be emphasized that those works . . . which breathe the most chilling scepticism and disillusionment offer paradoxically the most striking evidence of [Andreyev's] refusal to submit to the horrifying picture of life" on which he elaborates, Woodward asserts. "It is in his steady refusal to submit and his struggling optimism that the continuity of his thought must be seen, not in the gloom which threatens their survival."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Rasskazy (short stories) 1901
Novye rasskazy (short stories) 1902
Rasskazy. 4 vols. (short stories) 1902-07
 **Zhizn' Vasiliia Fiveiskogo* (short story) 1904
Krasnyi smekh [*The Red Laugh*] (novel) 1905
Eleazar [*Lazarus*] (novel) 1906
 †*Gubernator* (short story) 1906
K zvezdam [*To the Stars*] (play) 1906
Iuda Iskariot i drugie [*Judas Iscariot*] (novel) 1907
Savva (play) 1907
T'ma [*The Dark*] (novella) 1907
Zhizn' cheloveka [*The Life of Man*] (play) 1907
Chernye maski (play) 1908
Dni nashei zhizni (play) 1908
 ‡*Moi zapiski* (short story) 1908
Rasskaz o semi poveshennykh [*The Seven That Were Hanged*] (novella) 1908
Anatema [*Anathema*] (play) 1909
A Dilemma (novella) 1910
Sashka Zhegulev [*Sashka Jigouleff*] (novel) 1911
Sobranie sochinenii. 13 vols. (short stories, plays, novellas, and novels) 1911-16
Ekaterina Ivanovna [*Katerina*] (play) 1912
Kainova pechat' (*ne ubii*) (play) 1913
Korol' zakon i svoboda [*The Sorrows of Belgium*] (play) 1914
Mysl' (play) 1914
Tot, kto poluchaet poshchechiny [*He, the One Who Gets Slapped*] (play) 1915
Rekviem (play) 1916
The Crushed Flower and Other Stories (short stories) 1917

Milye prizraki (play) 1917
Okean (play) 1918
Sobachii val's (play) 1920
When the King Loses His Head, and Other Stories (short stories) 1920
Dnevnik Satany [*Satan's Diary*] (novella) 1921
Tsar' Golod [*King Hunger*] (play) 1921
The Abyss (short story) 1924
The Little Angel and Other Stories (short stories) 1924
The Letters of Leonid Andreev (letters) 1977
Visions: Stories and Photographs by Leonid Andreev (short stories and photography) 1987

*This story was translated and published as *The Life of Father Vassily*, in *When the King Loses His Head, and Other Stories*.

†This story was translated and published as *The Governor* in *Harper's Weekly*.

‡This story was translated and published as *The Man Who Found the Truth* in *The Crushed Flower and Other Stories*.

CRITICISM

Herman Bernstein (essay date 1913)

SOURCE: Bernstein, Herman. "Leonid Andreyev." In *With Master Minds: Interviews*, pp. 156-70. New York: Universal Series Publishing Co., 1913.

[In the following excerpt, Bernstein calls Andreyev "the most modern of modern writers in Europe" and praises his artistic craftsmanship and "keen psychological insight."]

Leonid Andreyev is the most modern of modern writers in Europe, the author of the great war story, *Red Laugh-ter*, and of the remarkable morality play entitled *The Life of Man*. The most popular writer in Russia to-day, his popularity having outshadowed that of Maxim Gorky, Andreyev is also, next to Tolstoy, the most gifted of all Russian writers. If his work, which is in every respect original, must be likened to the work of another Russian, it would come nearest to that of Dostoyevsky. His keen psychological insight, as revealed in his later works, may be compared with the best work of the author of "Crime and Punishment."

Andreyev's first steps in literature, his first short stories, attracted but little attention at the time of their appearance. It was only when Countess Tolstoy, the wife of Leo Tolstoy, in a letter to the *Novoe Vremya*, came out in "defense of artistic purity and moral power in contemporary literature," declaring that Russian society, instead of buying, reading, and making famous the works

of the Andreyevs, should “rise against such filth with indignation,” that almost everybody who can read in Russia turned to the little volume of the young writer.

In her attack upon Andreyev, Countess Tolstoy said as follows:

“The poor new writers, like Andreyev, succeeded only in concentrating their attention on the filthy point of human degradation and uttered a cry to the undeveloped, half-intelligent reading public, inviting them to see and to examine the decomposed corpse of human degradation and to close their eyes to God’s wonderful, vast world, with the beauties of nature, with the majesty of art, with the lofty yearnings of the human soul, with the religious and moral struggles and the great ideals of goodness—even with the downfall, misfortunes, and weaknesses of such people as Dostoyevsky depicted. In describing all these every true artist should illumine clearly before humanity not the side of filth and vice, but should struggle against them by illumining the highest ideals of good, truth, and the triumph over evil, weakness, and the vices of mankind. I should like to cry out loudly to the whole world in order to help those unfortunate people whose wings, given to each of them for high flights toward the understanding of the spiritual light, beauty, kindness, and God, are clipped by these Andreyevs.”

This letter of Countess Tolstoy called forth a storm of protest in the Russian press, and, strange to say, the representatives of the fair sex were among the warmest defenders of the young author. Answering the attack, many women, in their letters to the press, pointed out that the author of “*Anna Karenina*” had been abused in almost the same manner for his “*Kreuzer Sonata*,” and that Tolstoy himself had been accused of exerting just such an influence as the Countess attributed to Andreyev over the youth of Russia. Since the publication of Countess Tolstoy’s condemnation, Andreyev has produced a series of masterpieces, such as *The Life of Father Vassily*, a powerful psychological study; *Red Laughter*, a war story, “written with the blood of Russia”; *The Life of Man*, a striking morality presentation in five acts, and, finally, his latest, and perhaps, also, his most artistic work, *The Seven Who Were Hanged*, in which the horrors of contemporary life in Russia are delineated with such beautiful simplicity and power that Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, or Tolstoy himself would have signed his name to this masterpiece.

Thomas Seltzer (essay date 1920)

SOURCE: Seltzer, Thomas. Introduction to *Savva; The Life of Man: Two Plays by Leonid Andreyev*, translated by Thomas Seltzer, pp. vii-xv. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1920.

[In the following excerpt, Seltzer describes Andreyev as a philosophical and metaphysical writer, claiming that if “there is one idea that can be said to dominate the author of *The Life of Man*, it is the idea of death.”]

For the last twenty years Leonid Andreyev and Maxim Gorky have by turns occupied the centre of the stage of Russian literature. Prophetic vision is no longer required for an estimate of their permanent contribution to the intellectual and literary development of Russia. It represents the highest ideal expression of a period in Russian history that was pregnant with stirring and far-reaching events—the period of revolution and counter-revolution. It was a period when Russian society passed from mood to mood at an extremely rapid tempo: from energetic aggressiveness, exultation, high hope, and confident trust in the triumph of the people’s cause to apathetic inaction, gloom, despair, frivolity, and religious mysticism. This important dramatic epoch in the national life of Russia Andreyev and Gorky wrote down with such force and passion that they became recognized at once as the leading exponents of their time.

Despite this close external association, their work differs essentially in character. In fact, it is scarcely possible to conceive of greater artistic contrasts. Gorky is plain, direct, broad, realistic, elemental. His art is native, not acquired. Civilization and what learning he obtained later through the reading of books have influenced, not the manner or method of his writing, but only its purpose and occasionally its subject matter. It is significant to watch the dismal failure Gorky makes of it whenever, in concession to the modern literary fashion, he attempts the mystical. Symbolism is foreign to him except in its broadest aspects. His characters, though hailing from a world but little known, and often extreme and extremely peculiar, are on the whole normal.

Andreyev, on the other hand, is a child of civilization, steeped in its culture, and while as rebellious against some of the things of civilization as Gorky, he reacts to them in quite a different way. He is wondrously sensitive to every development, quickly appropriates what is new, and always keeps in the vanguard. His art is the resultant of all that the past ages have given us, of the things that we have learned in our own day, and of what we are just now learning. With this art Andreyev succeeds in communicating ideas, thoughts, and feelings so fine, so tenuous, so indefinite as to appear to transcend human expression. He does not care whether the things he writes about are true, whether his characters are real. What he aims to give is a true impression. And to convey this impression he does not scorn to use mysticism, symbolism, or even plain realism. His favorite characters are degenerates, psychopaths, abnormal eccentrics, or just creatures of fancy corresponding to no reality. Frequently, however, the characters, whether real or unreal, are as such of merely secondary importance, the chief aim being the interpretation of an idea or set of ideas, and the characters functioning primarily only as a medium for the embodiment of those ideas.