Literary studies

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The 'Dziady' Project in Dmitry Bogoslavsky's Dramaturgy

Projekt „dziady" w dramaturgii Dmitrija Bogosławskiego

Праект „дзяды" ў драматургіі Дзмітрыя Багаслаўскага

Abstract

This paper focuses on the works of Dmitry Bogoslavsky – a Belarusian playwright who writes in Russian. Its aim is to examine the worldview of this actor, director and dramatist based on selected works by him, and to trace his artistic evolution. More specifically, the paper seeks to answer the question of how Bogoslavsky's works explore the Belarusian custom of Dziady (Forefathers' Eve), understood as an element of the Belarusians' mental image of the world. The analysis of Bogoslavsky's texts and the plays he directed has led to the conclusion that the theme of deracination and homecoming are at the core of his art. In order to communicate with their ancestors, laid to rest in their native land, characters in his works must establish a relation with an extrasensory reality by entering the ritual circle of Dziady. By depicting the spiritual realm in parallel to the world of the living, Bogoslavsky has been engaged in a certain kind of 'Dziady' project, one set in the contemporary theatrical and dramatic context, and yet strongly embedded in Belarusian tradition and mentality.

Key words: theatre, dramaturgy, new drama, direction Dziady (Forefather's Eve), Belarusian mentality

Abstrakt

Artykuł poświęcony jest twórczości Dmitrija Bogosławskiego, białoruskiego dramatopisarza piszącego po rosyjsku. Celem badania jest ustalenie cech światopoglądu białoruskiego aktora, reżysera i autora tekstów dramatycznych na podstawie analizy wybranych utworów oraz prześledzenie ewolucji twórczej autora. Przedmiotem szczegółowej analizy stała się próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, w jaki sposób białoruski obrzęd dziady, rozumiany jako element mentalnego obrazu świata Białorusinów, obecny jest w dramaturgii Bogosławskiego. Przeprowadzona

analiza tekstów i spektakli wyreżyserowanych przez Bogosławskiego pozwala na stwierdzenie, że temat oderwania od korzeni i powrotu do domu należy do najważniejszych w jego twórczości. Kontakt z przodkami, którzy spoczywają w rodzinnej ziemi, wymusza na bohaterach relacje ze światem duchów i wprowadza w rytualny krąg „dziadów". Przedstawiając w twórczości dramatopisarskiej i reżyserskiej świat duchów, istniejący obok świata żyjących, Bogosławski konsekwentnie realizuje na gruncie współczesnego teatru i dramatu swoisty – mocno osadzony w tradycji i mentalności białoruskiej – projekt „dziady".

Słowa kluczowe: teatr, dramaturgia, nowy dramat, dziady, reżyseria, mentalność białoruska

Анатацыя

Артыкул прысвечаны творчасці Дзмітрыя Багаслаўскага, беларускага драматурга, які піша на рускай мове. Мэта даследавання – выявіць на аснове аналізу выбраных мастацкіх тэкстаў асаблівасці светапогляду аўтара, рэжысёра і акцёра і прасачыць за яго творчай эвалюцыяй. Прадметам дэталёвага аналізу з'яўляецца пошук адказу на пытанне, у якім выглядзе абрад дзяды, які разумеецца як частка ментальнага вобраза свету беларусаў, прысутнічае ў п'есах Багаслаўскага. Аналіз тэкстаў і пастаўленных Багаслаўскім спектакляў прыводзіць да высновы, што тэма адрыву ад каранёў і вяртання ў свой дом з'яўляецца адной з самых важных у яго творчасці. Сувязь з продкамі, адносіны герояў са светам духаў уводзяць чытачоў і гледачоў у рытуальная кола „дзядоў". Прадстаўляючы ў сваёй драматургічнай і рэжысёрскай творчасці свет духаў, які існуе побач са светам жывых, Багаслаўскі паслядоўна ажыццяўляе ў межах сучаснага тэатра абрад „дзядоў", які трывала ўкараніўся ў традыцыях і менталітэце беларусаў.

Ключавыя словы: тэатр, драматургія, новая драма, абрад „дзяды", рэжысёр, беларускі менталітэт

Dmitry Bogoslavsky represents a generation of young talented Belarusian playwrights who are regularly featured in prestigious competitions and festivals. Albeit written in Russian, their works exhibit distinctively Belarusian features. As a result of the rapid development of Russian-language literature in today's Belarus, an increasing number of studies have been published on the phenomenon of the 'multilingualism' of Belarusian literature (Gončarova-Grabovskaâ, 2012; Bâzlepkina, 2010; Siwek 2013; Kavalëû, 2012; Kawalou, 2014; Lappo, 2018). According to Svetlana Gončarova-Grabovskaâ, the Russian-language plays by Belarusian authors 'имеют точки соприкосновения с русской драматургией. Их сближает общий интерес к проблеме человек и социум, поиск новых художественных экспериментов в области драмы'[1] (Gončarova-Grabovskaâ, 2012, p. 83). Siarhiej Kavalioŭ has

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[1] 'Have a point of contact with Russian dramaturgy. They are brought together by a common interest in the question of man and society, and by the search for new creative experiments in the

been seeking to answer the question of what culture Belarusian literature belongs to, while also contemplating whether the extensive body of Russian-language texts may compromise the development of national literature in the Belarusian language:

> Czy powinniśmy patrzeć na współczesną rosyjskojęzyczną literaturę Białorusi jako na ekspansję kulturową, czy może raczej widzieć w niej przejaw wielowiekowej tradycji polietniczności i polilingwizmu, tak charakterystycznego dla literatury białoruskiej na wszystkich etapach jej rozwoju?[2] (Kawalou, 2014, p. 260).

It seems that the works of playwright, dramaturge, actor and director Dmitry Bogoslavsky offer a different perspective on this question, whilst also helping to identify how the Belarusian-language embedded an image of the world, and the mentality of Belarusians are reflected in Russian-language texts. His total immersion in theatrical practice is important. The stronger Bogoslavsky's ties with Belarusian theatre, the more prominent becomes the Belarusian face of this Russian-language author.

Bogoslavsky represents a generation of playwrights usually mentioned in the same breath: Pavel Pryazhko, Maksim Dosko, Pavel Rassolko, Konstantin Steshik, Nikolai Rudkowsky, Andrey Ivanov and Dmitry Bogoslavsky. The algorithm of success was similar for all of them – to win one of the many Russian contests for playwrights, put on a play in Moscow, put on more performances across Russia or, alternatively, stage a play that becomes a major success at a prestigious theatre festival, and garner acclaim in Europe, including, eventually, Belarus. In one interview Dmitry Boguslavsky said: 'Мои пьесы стали популярными уже после того, как их раз 15F–20 поставили за рубежом'[3] (Bogoslavskij, 2016). From that point on, they would go their separate paths of success. Pryazhko has found accomplishment in a creative duo with St. Petersburg director Dmitry Volkostrelov. Konstantin Steshik's plays have been critically acclaimed and continue to win awards, albeit enjoying much less success on stage. Nikolai Rutkowsky's works have been staged primarily in Russia, where they have enjoyed popularity in the young theatrical community, as it continues to work on new renderings of the plays, especially as part the now-fashionable performative readings. Bogoslavsky has been working at the Minsk Youth Theatre and becoming increasingly anchored in the Belarusian scene. He has also been acting and recently taken up directing – with considerable success. He has directed Natalia Vorozhbyt's *Sasha, vynesi musor* (Sasha, Take the Rubbish Out) and Dmitry Danilov's *Chelovek iz Podol'ska* (The Man from Podolsk). Furthermore, Bogoslavsky has been employ-

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field of drama'. Unless indicated otherwise, all Russian, Polish and Belarusian sources have been translated by Marek Robak-Sobolewski.

[2] 'Should we consider contemporary Russian-language literature in Belarus to be the product of cultural expansion, or rather a sign of the age-long tradition of polyethnicity and polylingualism that have been so characteristic of Belarusian literature throughout the history of its development?'

[3] 'My plays only started to gain recognition in Belarus after being staged 15–20 times abroad'.

ing his playwriting techniques as a dramaturge (a project called *Mabyć* (Perhaps).
However, he has been the most successful as the author of Russian-language dramas.
He wrote his first piece called *Peshka* (The Pawn) in 2007. The play gained acclaim,
which began a streak of success, with Bogoslavsky's texts reaching new milestones:
the play *Bracho* (Bracho) was shortlisted in the 'Premiery.txt' competition (2010)
and received a special award for 'the excruciating and vehement depiction of today's
world', and the drama *A esli zavtra net?* (And if there is no tomorrow?) ranked high
in the 2012 'Eurazja' competition. Almost all his subsequent plays have won in com-
petitions: he is a three-time winner of the 'Debut' award (for: *Liubov' liudei* (Love for
People)*, Tikhii shorokh ukhodiashchikh shagov* (The Quiet Rustle of Departing Steps),
Vneshnie pobochnye (Side Effects). His real success, however, came in 2011, when
Love for People received all possible awards[4], including the most prestigious one in
Russia – the 'Zolotaia Maska' (Golden Mask). The 'new drama' (notably represented
by Russian-language playwrights such as Bogoslavsky) has met with a rather cold re-
ception in Belarusian theatres, which are more conservative than in Russia. Moreover,
the Belarusian audience today is more traditionally inclined, considering otherwise
non-contentious topics taboo. Bogoslavsky offers the following explanation why this
is the case: 'Белорусский театр более мягкий, ему свойственно обходить какие-то
острые углы. А российский, как и мировая сцена, уже давно и свободно говорит
на социально-политические темы'[5] (Bogoslavskij, 2016). It seems, then, that writing
for the Russian stage involves more freedom both formally and in terms of content.
Indeed, not only do audience expectations shape the work, but they also inform the
reception of the performance. The Belarusian audience expects cultural entertainment
and beauty, forcing theatres to have fairly conventional, classically based repertoires,
avoiding the disquieting, rebellious and socially conscious 'new drama', searching for
new forms and means of expression.

However, Daniel Przastek argues that: 'Pod powierzchnią szarości i bylejakości
kryją się wyspy niezależnego myślenia teatralnego. Młodzi walczą z utrwalonymi
schematami, poglądami i ocenami'[6] (Przastek, 2012, p. 111). The difficulties with
bringing plays to the stage have led to the emergence of performative readings as
a substitute for performances. December 2011 saw the establishment of the Alternative
Theatre Studio in Minsk under the direction of one of its co-founders (together with
Viktar Krasoŭski and Siarhiej Ancelievič) – Dmitry Bogoslavsky. Despite struggling
to find audience acceptance in Bogoslavsky's home country, *The Quiet Rustle of De-*

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[4]   *Love for People* received several major playwright awards in such notable competitions as 'Lubi-
       mowka', 'Eurazja', 'Litodrama', 'Zolotaia maska' and 'Deistvuiuščie litsa'. It has been staged in
       two Moscow theatres (Mayakovsky Theatre and Taganka Theatre) – a fact showing the magnitude
       of success, and an important promotional asset.

[5]   'Belarusian theatre is more tame, evasive on highly contentious topics. By contrast, Russian the-
       atre has long embraced socially and politically charged themes, as has the world scene'.

[6]   'Hidden beneath the surface of dullness and mediocrity are havens of independent theatrical
       thinking. Young stalwarts are struggling to change established patterns, views and judgements'.

parting Steps caused such a sensation in Russia that its eventual impact on Belarus was inevitable.

The paradox is that the Russian-language 'new drama' has also been of interest to a (more open-minded, experimental and modern) theatre which puts on plays in Belarusian. Thus, it has had Russian-language pieces translated into Belarusian. *The Quiet Rustle*... has already seen two translations and two major premières. In 2013 the play, translated by Voĺha Kavalieŭskaja, had its world première at the Republican Belarusian Dramaturgy Theatre, and in 2014 it was staged under the title *Tata* (Daddy) at the Janka Kupala National Theatre. The theatre commissioned a new translation from Iryna Hierasimovič. As noted by critics, Boguslavsky's play 'гучыць па-беларуску цалкам натуральна'[7] (Marcìnovìč, 2014) in her translation.

In 2017 – a decade after his début as a playwright – Bogoslavsky's new play called *Tochki na vremennoi osi* (Points on the Axis of Time) was no longer part of the competition. Instead, it was performed in the 'Masters' section dedicated to the works of 'accomplished, award-winning authors'. Polish translations of Bogoslavsky's plays have seen several performative readings in Poland, including one much-publicised, though rather unsuccessful, première (Teatr Współczesny, Warsaw, 2014). In 2016 they were published in a book entitled *Nowa dramaturgia białoruska. T. 5. Dmitrij Bogosławski,* compiled and edited by Andrey Moskvin (Bogosławski, 2016). In the span of a decade Bogoslavsky has moved from a novice to an 'accomplished author' – as put by the festival's organisers – whose plays have been successfully staged not only in Russia and Belarus, but also in Abakan, Ufa, Ulan-Ude, Ulan-Bator, Warsaw and Kiev.

Bogoslavsky's biography seems to be fairly ordinary – born in 1985 in Minsk, he studied Direction of Rituals and Festivities at the Belarusian State University of Arts in Minsk (he was not accepted into the Department of Acting). After graduating in 2005 he enrolled with the Belarusian State Academy of Fine Arts, entering a special programme in Theatre Directing. He graduated in 2010, but his affiliation with the Belarusian State Youth Theatre goes back to 2008. Bogoslavsky lives in Minsk. Yet, hidden behind the veil of a seemingly anchored life (he was born and studied, and has lived and worked in the same city) is the 18-year period he spent in Kalmykia. Bogoslavsky's parents moved there soon after his birth, and it was not until he entered higher education that he came back to Belarus.

Deracination and homecoming has been one of the core themes of his works. Faced with the question of what roots are if not ancestors buried in one's homeland, the characters in his dramas resort to communicating with the world of spirits, entering the ritual circle of Dziady. In *Love for People* the protagonist kills her drunkard and abusive husband, hiding his body and trying to move on with her life. She reveals her crime to a policeman she has known since childhood. In love with her since school days, the policeman proposes to the protagonist, and she agrees to marry him. However, the dead husband's ghost will not leave her alone, forcing the protagonist to live

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[7] 'sounds perfectly natural in Belarusian'.

with two men – one real, the other not. The new husband cannot come to terms with this situation, and tries to strangle his hated-beloved wife. Eventually, however, he takes his own life. The play *And If There Is No Tomorrow?* is about a teenager's encounter with death – having to deal with a paralysed person ('the dead alive') on a regular basis, she is pushed to suicide, which leads her to a calming encounter and a new loss, a new death. In *The Quiet Rustle of Departing Steps* the protagonist is engaged in a relentless dialogue with his deceased father as the latter is tranquilly preparing to depart to the other side.

Underlying Bogoslavsky's choice of Russian as the language of his creative output may be both his inadequate knowledge of Belarusian (this is nothing out of the ordinary for the Russified citizens of Belarus, and given that Bogoslavsky grew up outside his homeland, the most likely reason) and practical considerations – by doing so, he has more opportunities as an artist, since almost all performances in Belarus are staged in Russian. Thus, Bogoslavsky's approach in this regard seems perfectly reasonable and pragmatic: 'Тут для русского языка поле больше. Просто у в стране нет ни одного конкурса драматургического, а как молодому автору себя заявить? Поэтому, конечно, удобнее писать на русском. Это удобнее и продавать'[8] (Bogoslavskij, 2015a).

And also, let us be clear on one thing – there is no doubt that Russian theatre provides novice playwrights with better opportunities[9]. The Belarusian stage is much less tolerant of obscene language. Well-aware of the reality of Minsk theatres, Dmitry Bogoslavsky is willing to accept censorship in this regard:

> К театру мы относимся как к развлечению и не хотим его воспринимать как срез нашей жизни. Возьмем, к примеру, «Любовь людей». В четырех сценах здесь присутствует мат. В Минске скоро будет постановка этой пьесы, и его оттуда аккуратно изъяли. Я не возражаю. Но все же, если мы говорим о современном театре и о жизни, то не может человек, ударив молотком по пальцу, сказать: «Ай, какая оплошность, какой же я неаккуратный». Поэтому в каких-то моментах, мне кажется, мат вполне естественен. Хотя я не сторонник как мата, так и жестокости на сцене. И в последних моих пьесах их практически нет[10] (Bogoslavskij, 2014).

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[8] 'Here [in Belarus – I.L.], Russian gets more space. It's simple – there is no single playwriting contest in our country, so how do you expect a young author to come up? So, writing in Russian is obviously more convenient. As is selling'.

[9] It's not only a Belarusian thing, although Belarusians make up the largest and most representative group. Authors from other former Soviet republics – say, Anna Yablonska from Odessa, or Valeriy Pecheykin from Tashkent – too, have sometimes failed, or it took them too much time, to get into the conservative theatres of their countries, and so Russian theatre 'annexed' them.

[10] 'Here, in Belarus, theatre is considered entertainment. We don't want it to mirror our life. Take *Liubov' liudei*. Four of its scenes contain obscene language. Obscene words have been carefully rubbed out for the upcoming Minsk début of the piece. And I have nothing against it. But if we're talking about contemporary theatre and life, you can't have a man who has just hit his finger with

It seems that the traditionalism of Bogoslavsky's plays stems from his continued adherence to the theatre canon both as an actor and director. Despite being affiliated with the Moscow community (once) involved in teatr.doc and the Lubomiwka Festival, he remains within the Belarusian theatre's sphere of influence. This may be the reason behind his departure from the documentary and socially conscious approach typical of the 'new theatre'. On the stages of his home country, Bogoslavsky plays Chekhov's Kostia Treplev – a young man bent on reinventing the art of theatre, looking for new forms and challenging conventions. Yet, his writing may be better reflected by the attitude of Mrożek's protagonist, Artur, who rebels against the rebellious fathers, tired of Stomil's experiments. Bogoslavsky remains sceptical about the post-dramatic formal devices of the 'new drama' and about inverted values, shunning anti-aesthetics.

Although seemingly realistic, his plays are actually very metaphoric and poetic. The ambiguity becomes apparent in a scene in which one of the characters turns out to be the ghost of a dead person. Part Two of Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady*, which contains references to Belarusian customs, is called a masterpiece of drama – one offering Polish readers a pagan ritual and, by extension, a prototypical (Kołankiewicz, 1999) perspective on the Belarusian perception of and communication with ancestors. Preserved to this day, the ritual gives us an insight into the Belarusian mentality – marked by an easy relationship with the afterlife world. One of the indications of this is the extraordinary number of 'Forefathers' Eve' festivities. They were held three to six times a year, depending on the region, to celebrate Shrovetide, Radanitsa, All Souls' Day and so on. (Vinogradova, Tolstaya, 1999, p. 45). The main festivities, however, took place in autumn, when a feast was held at home to win the favour of the dead and help them find peace; and in spring, when people took foods and drinks to the graves to celebrate Radanica on the second Tuesday after Easter (see: Duczyc, 2006).

Bogoslavsky's most representative piece is *The Quiet Rustle of Departing* Steps, a drama about a quarrel between siblings over the estate left by their deceased parents. In this work he explores the space between life and death, delving into the metaphysics of relations with the realm of the dead. Between each scene, Bogoslavsky put a refrain in the form of a dialogue with the deceased father. Almost the same dialogue is repeated several times. The dead man asks his son to cut the roses in the cemetery; 'the ones beside your mother's head... she has trouble breathing when they're around...' The son cuts the roses and reports this to his father, with the latter answering: 'I know'. By travelling between the worlds, the father not only makes sure his wife is comfortable, but also brings himself up to date with his still-living son's affairs. At the core of this deeply religious but non-Christian view of death is the idea that the worlds of the living and the dead are one; that both these worlds can help each other, especially within families. In one of his interviews Bogoslavsky revealed that: 'История с выкапыванием розы

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a hammer say: 'Oh my, I'm so clumsy.' So, I think it is perfectly natural in some situations to use a non-normative lexicon, although I'm not a fan of profanities and cruelty on stage. And there is almost nothing of that in my recent plays'.

семейная, в Минске происходила'[11] (Bogoslavskij, 2015b). These documentary, real underpinnings of one of the key artistic themes (the roses-related theme recurs three times) not only reflect the Belarusian perception of the world, but can also provide completely new rules of interpretation.

According to Pavel Rudnev, Bogoslavsky is a playwright who points to the salutary effect of illusion and the therapeutic qualities of escapism, highlighting the right of the 'small man' to hallucinate. The Russian critic has an oneiric take on Bogoslavsky's dramas:

> В его пьесах разрабатывается тема зыбкого пограничья между реальностью и обманными иллюзиями, психическими тупиками, куда заводит нас сознание, которое не может уцепиться за реальность (…) герой совершенно не понимает, на каком он свете. Но это пограничное мучительное состояние благостно: отец рядом (…) для Богославского принципиально, что мир сновидений – это не сладкий сон, а кошмар, быть может, еще более мучительный, чем реальность[12] (Rudnev, 2016, p. 67).

It seems, however, that the presence of 'dziady' (meaning ancestors) in the Belarusian mental image of the world is neither hallucination nor illusion. Rather, it is a normal state. In Andruś Horvat's best-selling book *Радзіва „Прудок"* (Radio 'Pond'), the protagonist, like the author himself, leaves the Belarusian capital of Minsk for the countryside. He moves into his grandfather's abandoned cabin, and slowly, through efforts of his own, brings the cabin back to normal. He is preoccupied with making repairs, tending the garden and, from time to time, writing on Facebook. From these Facebook notes will emerge a book that will captivate Belarus. Meanwhile, the narrator is preparing for a holiday:

> Наступай восенню я адсвяткую Дзяды ў сваёй хаце. Нічога кніжнага – усё, як дагэтуль робіць маці: прыгатую вячэру, адчыню вокны і дзверы для памерлых, на стол пастаўлю адзін лішні сталовы прыбор. Але ці не замала гэтага будзе? На ўскрайку маёй вёскі на могілках з сярэдзіны дзевятнаццатага стагоддзя пахаваны прынамсі 61 мой продак з маім прозвішчам. Столькі я налічыў у метрычных запісах у архіве. Там, напэўна, кожнае дрэва захоўвае частку майго генетычнага матэрыялу, бо вырасла на праху дзядоў[13] (Gorvat, 2017).

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[11] 'The story with cutting roses is a family story; it happened in Minsk'.

[12] 'His plays explore the flickering space between reality and ephemeral illusion, the mental deadlocks we are brought to by our consciousness as it fails to hook onto reality (...) The protagonist is completely oblivious to the world he lives in. Yet, with the father being around, this wearisome borderline state brings relief. (…) Fundamental to Bogoslavsky's works is the belief that visions in sleep are not sweet dreams but nightmares wearing on us perhaps even more than reality'.

[13] 'This coming autumn I'll be celebrating 'Dziady' in my own cabin. I won't do this by the book – everything's going to be exactly like my mother used to do: I'll fix a supper, open the windows and doors to let the dead in, and set an additional place for them. Will it be enough, though? I have

This year the young man wrote on Facebook:

> Дзяды паелі, папілі ды пайшлі да маёй маці. Яна сёлета саступіла мне права прыняць шаноўных гасцей першым.
> – Ну што – пайшлі ўжо?
> – Пайшлі.
> – Добра, тады я свечку запалю, каб не заблукалі[14] (Gorvat, 2017).

On Radanitsa it's customary for Belarusians to spread tablecloths on the graves of their grandfathers/great-grandfathers, and put food and drinks on it, including alcohol – some nice cherry liqueur for grandma, and some vodka for grandpa, if that's what they like. On 'Dziady' they have guests over. And when thinking about Belarus – other than the usual love-of-the-landscape sentiment – it is their forefathers (dziady) they are thinking about. For instance, this is how modern-day poet VaĺŹyna Mort sees her country[15]:

> Для мяне Беларусь пашыраецца не ўшыр, а ўглыб. (…) Мне цікавы шэпт нашых мёртвых, нашых прывідаў. Гэта Беларусь невербалізаваных жыццяў, якія не хочуць знікнуць і маўчаць, каб мы іх пачулі. Я ўважліва сачу за прывідамі, слухаю сваіх мёртвых. Яны жывуць сярод нас. Іх прысутнасць можна пабачыць на нашых тварах[16] (Mort, 2017).

The plays *Side Effects* and *Points on the Axis of Time* are also part of the 'Dziady Project', exploring the space between life and death, and delving into the metaphysics of relations with the realm of the dead – a theme which runs through Bogoslavsky's works. Interpreting Bogoslavsky's plays through the oneiric or psychoanalytic lens leads to impoverished meanings and narrowed contexts, as was indirectly proven by the failed Polish première of *Cichy szmer oddalających się kroków*. In the play staged at Teatr Współczesny in Warsaw under the changed title – *Saszka. Sen w dwóch aktach* (Sashka: A Dream in Seven Acts) – the metaphysics of dialogues between the son and

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at least 61 ancestors bearing my name buried in the mid-19th century cemetery on the fringes of my village. This is how many I could count in public records. Each tree there probably shares some of my genetic code, since they sprout up from the ashes of my forefathers'.

[14] 'The forefathers ate, drank and went to my mother. This year she let me be the first to welcome the distinguished guests. 'Have they left yet?' 'Yes.' 'Good, I'll light a candle so they don't get lost'.

[15] Mort is a pseudonym, and it seems not a coincidental one if we consider the ritual of 'Dziady' – involving a special bond with ancestors, with the world of the dead – to be the defining aspect of Belarusianness.

[16] 'To me, Belarus is not expanding to the outside, but to the inside. (...) I'm curious to hear the whispers of our deceased, our spectres. It is a Belarus of unspoken beings, refusing to vanish, and waiting in silence so we can hear them. I observe these spectres keenly, and listen to my deceased relatives attentively. They dwell among us. You can see their presence in our faces'.

his deceased father were reduced to merely a dream, with the title alone imposing pre-conceived notions to that effect:

> Spektakl ma podtytuł „sen w dwóch aktach". Okazuje się bowiem, że niektóre ze scen to jedynie projekcje/sen głównego bohatera, który odwiedza medium komunikujące się ze zmarłymi. Bogosławski zwodzi widza, zacierając granicę między jawą a snem, życiem a śmiercią. Bawi się formą, za którą jednak nie stoi szczególnie odkrywcza treść[17] (Sygnatowicz, 2014).

Even the stellar cast (featuring Borys Szyc in the main role) did not help, and the performance, as well as the play itself, received scathing reviews:

> Tekst Bogosławskiego jest dość powierzchowny, trochę „wyprany" z emocji, bez należytego podłoża psychologicznego. (…) Jeśli sami lubimy śnić, wybierzmy się do Teatru Współczesnego[18] (Rutkowska, 2014).
>
> Największym dramatem premiery w stołecznym Współczesnym jest sam dramat. Utytułowany białoruski autor Dmitrij Bogosławski napisał sztukę tak wzruszającą, że chwilami chce się tę telenowelę w stylu *Klanu* przełączyć na coś bardziej wyrafinowanego[19] (Cieślak, 2014).

It is not by coincidence that Bogoslavsky made his directing début with Natalia Vorozhbyt's *Sasha, Take Out the Rubbish* which is about the loss of someone close. Despite being dead, the husband-father does not leave the stage throughout the play, but he also rarely gets to speak. The permanent presence of the spectre lends a different perspective – one of a dual reality borne out by those from the other side – to everything that is happening on the stage. This presence (the father-husband can be seen by the audience, but not by the characters) symbolises the man's pervasive presence in the women's life, the internal dialogue each one of them is holding with him, and the emptiness inside that is haunting them. At some point one of the women screams: 'Sasha, take out the rubbish!'.

Bogoslavsky's invitation to participate in the *Mabyć* project launched by Alexandr Marchenko was an important theatrical experience for the Russian-language

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[17] 'The play has a subtitle – "sen w dwóch aktach" ("a dream in two acts"). For, as we learn, some scenes are but projections/dreams of the protagonist, who is using a psychic to communicate with the dead. Bogoslavsky misleads the audience, blurring the lines between reality and dream, between life and death. He is playing with form, but the content behind it is not particularly revealing'.

[18] 'Bogoslavsky's text is fairly shallow, somewhat "devoid" of emotions, and lacks a psychological background. (...) If you're a keen dreamer yourself, go to Teatr Współczesny'.

[19] 'The most tragic hero of the Współczesny première was the drama itself. Award-winning Belarusian director Dmitry Bogoslavsky wrote a drama so dramatic you might find yourself wanting to switch from this Bold-and-Beautiful-style soap opera to something more sophisticated'.

playwright. The theatrical investigation (as the authors call the genre) was carried out using the *verbatim* technique, and focused on finding the 'hidden Belarusian'. Such explorations in the Belarusian theatre are firmly grounded in tradition. In Janka Kupala's play *Tutejšyja* similar investigations are conducted by two researchers – one from the East (wearing Great Russian clothes and shoes, and an unkempt beard), the other from the West (wearing a Polish outfit and a bushy moustache). They are searching for the 'real Belarusian', but fail to find one, as the Western Scholar sees a typical 'Всходнё-Крэсовэго поляка з немалон дозон крві познаньско-гуральскей', while the Eastern Scholar concludes that 'Ісціно-русскій ціп Северо-Западной Обласці і безусловно з прымесью монгольско-фінской крові'. What gives additional meaning to the conclusions they make is the fact that both scholars work in Belarus, the difference being that one received his education in the East, the other in the West. This suggests that they 'soaked up' different ideologies, now seeing things from divergent perspectives, and succumbing to illusions that inform their views.

The 'Search for a Belarusian' project' was taken on by one of the few Belarusian-language theatrical groups[20], and the *verbatim* technique was meant to ensure objectivity of the end result. Three languages can be heard during the spectacle – Belarusian, Russian and Trasianka. This is quite unusual for the Republican Belarusian Dramaturgy Theatre (RBDT), since its official policy and remit is to stage performances in and promote the Belarusian language. They made an exception to this, taking a less stringent approach to their promotion policy and linguistic purism. RBDT actors conducted interviews on 'Who is a Belarusian?' in various regions of Belarus. Ultimately, the performance included responses from: a businessman, football supporters, foreigners, a pro-life activist, a bus ticket inspector from Minsk, two Belarusian-language speaking members of the creative circles (artist-performer Aleś Puškin and director Andrej Saŭčanka), a beekeeper from a Polesian village and a woman – victim of domestic violence. The interview started with a question about Belarusian self-stereotypes, encouraging a critical reflection on the popular views regarding tolerance, humility, diligence, and perseverance that Belarusians are famous for. Bogoslavsky then processed this material to produce a modern-day image of a Belarusian, one not coming from an Eastern or Western scholar (although elements of such perspectives were present, as the interviews involved Italians and a Russian woman from Moscow), but from 'the inside'. Before the performance the audience was asked to fill in anonymous questionnaires, requesting them to provide their own definitions of words such as 'homeland' and 'faith' (each questionnaire contained a different set of words)[21]. Then, before each of the four parts of the performance, the actors read out the questionnaires.

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[20]   Only four out of the twenty-eight state theatres in Belarus have an only-Belarusian policy, and all are based in Minsk. And since other theatres 'may, but do not have to' stage Belarusian-language plays, they prefer Russian because the audience is used to it.

[21]   The questionnaires have usually been left blank, reflecting the conservative attitudes of Belarusian audiences (even those in the capital city) as they refuse to embrace interaction in theatres (including ones as harmless as the request to fill in a questionnaire).

One of the episodes involves shoes falling on the stage. Each of the actors puts them on – literally stepping into someone's shoes – and tells the stories of their characters to illustrate the problem of being bilingual. One of the actors repeatedly changed his shoes during his monologue, speaking Russian in one pair, and Belarusian in the other. Eventually, he would stand in two different shoes. This is perhaps what being torn between two cultures feels like to Belarusian playwright Dmitry Bogoslavsky. By depicting the spiritual realm in parallel to the world of the living, Bogoslavsky has been engaged in a certain kind of 'Dziady' project, one set in a contemporary theatrical and dramatic context, and yet strongly embedded in Belarusian tradition and mentality. Bogoslavsky has been honing his playwriting skills by working on other authors' texts to draw inspiration, and reveal and unlock certain dormant concepts of his own, and by subjecting documentary materials to a dramatic treatment in order to contemplate the mechanisms of reception. As an actor, he has been trying to embrace the Other. In his mind the most important Other is the one who no longer belongs to the world of the living, but who remains part of the family – someone who continues to be relevant no matter what. Whether present or not.

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