

Title: “Our Two Worlds of Chaos Called Out to Each Other:” Blok’s *The Puppet Show* and Andreev’s *Black Maskers*

Author: Vladimir Ivantsov, McGill University

Studies on the literary connections between Aleksandr Blok and Leonid Andreev exist, yet no one has conducted a systematic comparison of Blok and Andreev’s dramatic works. Indeed, both of them created innovative dramatic forms, and it is primarily through the theater that the two writers got to know each other personally during 1906–07. In a later article written in commemoration of Andreev, Blok characterized the relationship between the two of them as “two worlds of chaos” that “called out to each other.” Applied to several of their works written around the time of their first meeting, this statement correlates with the sense of disintegration of reality experienced by their protagonists. Duke Lorenzo, the protagonist of Andreev’s little-studied play *Black Maskers* (1908), is obsessed by destructive, chaotic forces embodied as sinister maskers. In my presentation I will postulate that *Black Maskers* plays an important role in the artistic dialogue between Blok and Andreev. A detailed comparative study of *Black Maskers* and Blok’s *The Puppet Show* (1906) demonstrates that the latter most likely was one of the major influences on Andreev. Even at first glance, both plays have numerous common poetical features, including a medieval masquerade setting, images and motifs (maskers, doubles, “eternal darkness”). On a deeper level, in *The Puppet Show* Blok has reversed the binary oppositions basic to Symbolism (symbol/allegory, transcendental/immanent, sacred/profane) in order to show the relative, unstable nature of a puppet-show-like reality that hides emptiness. Similarly, in Andreev’s play “maskers who were invited by Lorenzo” stand for insoluble contradictions of the protagonist’s consciousness while mysterious characters named “black maskers,” who in fact do not wear masks at all, function as signs with an empty signifier and refer to nothing except the “eternal darkness” of their (non-)existence.