

Title: Between Hamlet and St. Sergius: An Artistic Quest in Mamin-Sibiriak's *Shooting Stars*.
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In October of 1899, D.N. Mamin-Sibiriak wrote of his latest work: "I'm finishing a novel ... that I am so sick of I could die" (Gruzdev). After its publication, Maxim Gorky observed that Mamin-Sibiriak's "social feeling" was declining. Later critics mostly chose to ignore this work. Unlike other works of Mamin-Sibiriak that deal with issues of capitalist exploitation and other social problems, his novel *Shooting Stars* is dedicated to St. Petersburg's artistic circles. This shift in focus presents a problem for interpretation and for placing the novel within the Russian literary canon.

Since Mamin-Sibiriak himself was a professional art critic and an amateur artist, his choice of a new topic was not accidental. To rehabilitate the novel in the eyes of critics, I propose to focus on the novel's central question as it is articulated by one of its characters: "How can there ever be national art in a completely savage country?" To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the novel within its historical and cultural context, to look past some obvious but not entirely sincere populist statements within it, and to make sense of its characters' struggle to find and express meaning through art. Instrumental in this analysis is Leonid Heller's philological notion of "religious ekphrasis," a type of ekphrasis that invites one to look with a spiritual eye in order to gain a holistic vision of the world.

Gruzdev, A. "D.N. Mamin-Sibiriak (1852–1912)." In Mamin-Sibiriak, D.N. *Sobranie Sochinenii v 10 tomakh*. Moskva: Pravda, 1958. V. 1, pp. 13–38.

Mamin-Sibiriak, D.N. *Padaiushchiia zvezdy*. Moskva: M.V. Kliukin, 1899.

Heller, Leonid. *Ekfrasis v russkoi literature: trudy Lozannskogo simpoziuma*. Moskva: MIK, 2002.

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