

Title: The “Idyllic Myopia” of The Garden of Eden: Ippolit Shpazhinskii’s *On a Forgotten Estate*
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Ippolit Shpazhinskii (1848-1917) was one of the most popular, but now little known, Russian dramatists of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Although Shpazhinskii’s popularity rested predominantly on his propensity for flamboyant theatricality, *On a Forgotten Estate* (1880) stands somewhat apart from the playwright’s usual pattern. In this paper I will analyze the interaction between the play’s dramatic structure and spatiality. I will also focus on the way Shpazhinskii recasts the master narrative of “superfluity” into a discourse of marginality by subjecting the ideological topicality of the early 1880s to the melodramatic mode.

The play’s composition follows a ‘topographical’ pattern: the first act takes place in a forest, the second act moves to a provincial estate, the third one goes out to a garden, the fourth act shifts to another part of the garden, and finally, the last act concludes again in the forest. Such ‘topography’ not only accompanies the formal intrigue, but also highlights the connotation of the sites as cultural loci. The forest functions both as a site of delineation and a site of asylum. In my reading of the estate I utilize the notion of ‘idyllic myopia’ — an idiom coined by Priscilla Roosevelt in her discussion of the Russian nobility’s utopian visions of the Russian countryside.

The topos of the garden is presented both as an archetypal biblical trope and a structural center. The garden, an integral cultural and aesthetic element of the estate, is also a confluence of two paradigmatic motifs: a quest for identity and a quest for union with nature. The dramatist subjugates the Arcadian longing and ‘superfluous’ impetus to melodramatic conventions as a loss of authenticity which transforms into a loss of innocence. Thus the analysis of the spatial symbolism of the three major loci will illustrate their significance in foregrounding the ideological discussions of the times through the prism of melodramatic techniques.