

Title: Valerii Briusov's *Zemlia* and the Theater of Convention
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In 1905, Valerii Briusov's prose tragedy *Zemlia* appeared in the Symbolist almanac *Severnye tsvety: Assiriiskie*. Though Briusov later dismissed the work as more literary than theatrical, Vsevolod Meyerhold thought highly enough of the play that he almost staged it at his "theater-studio." *Zemlia* is set in a futuristic dystopian city in which the water source has run dry. A charismatic leader, Nevatl', rises from the ranks of the intellectual elite to solve this dire situation. He plans to open the city's roof, which shields it from the sun and air, so that the people might "return to the earth" (a reference to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). The plan ends in catastrophe, however, when the roof is opened and mass suffocation and death ensue. At the play's end, the blinding sun rises overhead in a false semblance of the Apocalypse. With its futuristic sets and fantastical setting, *Zemlia* could be considered a testing ground for Briusov's views on theater in his influential essay "Nenuzhnaia pravda" (*Mir iskusstva*, 1902). Following the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck, Briusov argued that the conventions of the theater of antiquity, not its religious status as divine rite, were the chief source of pathos in ancient drama. In my paper, I argue that Briusov's conception of tragedy in *Zemlia* departed from the Nietzschean view of tragedy in the work of Viacheslav Ivanov and Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, who consistently privileged the religious stakes of the genre over its purely aesthetic significance to contemporary art.