

MYSTERIES¹

Stanisław Przybyszewski

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Michał Kruszelnicki, “Polish Satanist” and his Norwegian Connections

Stanisław Przybyszewski (1868-1928) was a legendary Polish writer, poet, dramatist and musician whose name is up to this day associated with scandalous literary work and provocative artistic behavior. His persona remains a perfect expression of all heights and lows of the nineteenth's century decadency.

In 1889 young Przybyszewski left Poland for Berlin to study medicine. It was there where he wrote in German his essential books (*Zur Psychologie des Individuums, Totenmesse, Vigilien, De profundis, Im Malstrom, Satanskinder*) which much contributed to the development of the European modernism. An admirer of the thought of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and the work of *poètes maudits*, interested in morbid and demonic elements permeating the history of culture and haunting the human soul, greatly inspired by occultism and Satanism, Przybyszewski created his own philosophy of a human being as dramatically torn between the rational, harmonic sphere of the soul and the irrational, dark sphere of blind sexual forces and the drive towards self-

¹ Przybyszewski's essay *Mysterien* was originally published in the German magazine „Die Zukunft” 1894, nr 105, p. 603-609. In 1997 it was translated into Polish by Gabriela Matuszek and included in: Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Synagoga Szatana i inne eseje (Satan's Synagogue and Other Essays)*, selected and translated by Gabriela Matuszek, Oficyna Literacka, Krakow 1997, p. 102-110. The present translation is based on the Polish version of the text.

destruction. He was one of the most uncompromising European advocates of the modernist slogan “art for art’s sake” and a tenacious critic of bourgeois society, which he despised and regularly scandalized with notorious excesses.

Przybyszewski read in several languages and during his stay in Germany was considered a complete erudite, although no-one has ever seen him reading the whole book... While he never finished his medical studies, he managed to attain impressive psychological and neuro-physiological knowledge which he then used in his first books, whose subsequent publications quickly earned him the opinion of the leading figure of German intellectual life. In the course of 1890’s this peculiar individual, by many known simply as a “Polish Satanist”, was a leader of an artistic group meeting in the famous café *Zum Schwarzen Ferkel* in Berlin. The intellectual pace of those meetings was said to be so high, that it took an enormous amount of absinth, tobacco or hashish to soothe the participants’ senses ignited by never-ending, day and night discussions about philosophy, art and literature. At times, the discussions were interrupted by Przybyszewski suddenly throwing himself to the piano to play Chopin. Despite being completely drunk, he would always enthrall the company with his performance. The group usually consisted of prominent artists out of whom the most famous were Scandinavians (Ola Hansson, August Strindberg, Edvard Munch, Arne Garborg, Andreas Aubert), but it also attracted many other colorful bohemians, eccentrics and sheer boozers. Knut Hamsun happened to meet Przybyszewski and his clique in 1894 in Kristiania, but was never a part of it.

Przybyszewski played a significant role in introducing to German and Polish readers the silhouettes and works of such Norwegian artists as: Munch, Hansson, Gustav Vigeland, Henrik Ibsen and – last but not least – Knut Hamsun. He highly valued these artists, wrote in praise of their works in his critical essays, regarding them as advanced modernist explorers of vexing

contradictions and dark depths of the human soul. Przybyszewski's sympathy for the new Norwegian culture grew even further when in 1893 he met Dagny Juel (1867-1901) – Norwegian artist born in a doctor's family in Kongsvinger. At that time she was having a short romance with Strindberg and was also probably the lover of Edvard Munch. She met Przybyszewski in *Zum Schwarzen Ferkel* and, fascinated, married him the same year, although he has not still divorced his first Polish wife who eventually committed suicide in 1886. Dagny became Przybyszewski's artistic muse. In 1893-1898 they lived alternately in Kongsvinger and Berlin, becoming an inseparable and picturesque couple whose views on art and literature exerted a huge influence on both German and Norwegian bohemian circles. Przybyszewski's love poems dedicated to Dagny, inspired by the sea landscape of Kristianiafjord (*By the sea*, 1899), are counted among the most powerful and fervent examples of Polish erotic poetry.

When in 1898 the Berlin's artistic coterie dissolved definitely, Przybyszewski returned with Dagny to Krakow, Poland, where he was offered the position of the editor-in-chief of the influential periodical "Życie" ("Life"). In Poland the attitude to Przybyszewski was nearly idolatrous at that time; he was widely recognized as a godfather of European artistic bohemia and an unchallenged authority. He quickly formed a new literary circle which would meet in Krakow's famous and still existing pub *Jama Michalika* and shock the public opinion with its unruly alcoholic escapades. Przybyszewski's links with Norway ended, when in 1899 he suddenly left Dagny for his newly found love – Jadwiga Kasprowicz. Dagny did not avoid the grim fate that seemed to await those who knew Przybyszewski. In 1901 she was shot dead by a deranged Polish fan – Wladyslaw Emeryk.

In the course of time Przybyszewski's artistic abilities were weakening and his fame faded. Some say he was like a meteor: his talent was great but it burned out fast. Up to this day, however,

Przybyszewski's name has been associated with an insightful and passionate promotion of Norwegian modernism in Poland. The example of this can be found in the present essay on Knut Hamsun's novel *Mysteries*.

Mysteries

What wonderful times those were!

Yes, the times of Büchner¹, Voght², and Strauss³, when science blossomed so exuberantly, when one knew everything and everything could have been explained. Were there yet any mysteries, was there still anything to be discovered? Yes, probably: the soul. But this puzzle was only to appear in the near future and make these great words: *eritis sicut Deus!*⁴ come true.

¹ Friedrich Ludvig Büchner (1824-1899) – German philosopher, psychologist and physician, one of the key figures in the nineteenth century scientific materialism. In 1885 he published the work: *Force and Matter: Empiricophilosophical Studies* where he sought to prove that both matter and energy are infinite. He was also an opponent of German idealism (Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel), claiming that the world is a pure becoming and has no higher purpose, no ethical sanction, nor is it guided by any transcendental power.

² Caspar Voght (1752-1839) – German merchant, traveler, and social reformer. In 1799 he founded An Institute For Education in Agriculture in Gross Flottbek – one of the first such schools in Europe.

³ David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) – German historian, theologian, and writer. In his sensational book *The Life of the Jesus Critically Examined* (1835) he denied Jesus' divine nature and questioned the Gospels' historical value, but he praised in it the everlasting profundity of the Christian message, represented in Jesus' simple teachings and lifestyle.

⁴ *Eritis sicut Deus, scientes bonum et malorum* (Lat.) – “You shall be like God, knowing good and evil” – famous words spoken by the Devil in the *Book of Genesis* (3,5). They reappear in Goethe's *Faust* when Mephistopheles writes them in a student's diary (*Part I*, the scene in the Faust's study room).

Those were the marvelous times of the *chimie de l'âme*¹, pure analysis, the fabulous renaissance of scholastics with its faith in absolute certainty, the times of the belief in unquestionable truths, contradictions, forces and laws of nature, and the non-existence of God.

Then some more skepticism appeared; one came to look closer at everything from aside and smile with confusion, and suddenly the dark curtain fell off the eyes and one was again turned to the great, eternal mystery: the soul and its abysmal depths. It was suddenly realized that despite its formulae, explanations, interpretations and firm convictions, none of psychology's assertions had solid fundamentals, even the claim about the mutual relation between stimulus and reaction. It was figured, then, that the human mind is constantly moving in the same circle: old prejudices return as telepathy, facts of isometry justify the alchemists' search for the philosophers' stone, "the milk of the virgin"², and ancient animism is reborn in the form of consequential monism. Hence the skepticism, an inclination to what is deeply hidden and derides explanation, hence the liking in nuances, for the inconstant and the transient. A herd-like "materialistic world-view" may well predominate this era of skepticism, but it is merely a surrogate for thinking. So never has there appeared with more power this eternal riddle, this great mystery of the soul – even in the Middle Ages, which in its Satanism voiced so impressively the fear and understanding of all that is profound, gruesome and mystical in the human being.

From every corner a wry face of dreadful mystery grins and bares its fangs. It does not lend itself to comprehension, it slips from our hands, chuckles derisively, and if for one single moment

¹ *Chimie de l'âme* (Fr.) – "The chemistry of the soul".

² In the arcane alchemic art "the milk of the virgin" (known also as "the water of life") is a metaphorical name of a white mercury, the transformative substance that was believed to bring about the process of transmutation.

we look in its eyes, we can suddenly recognize it, but it is only for a while, for one second later we cannot tell where is this something which we have just held in our hands, which we have torn into pieces with such a delight, which we so thoroughly divided into subsequent categories and put on suitable shelves, in a systematic manner, according to methodologically determined points of view. Where is that which we can feel so clearly yet cannot grasp it, this fragile and resilient... what is its name in the first place?

Or else: something blossoms in the abyss, yes, deep inside we can feel some kind of a huge, fantastic flower growing out in the brains, a red poppy turning to blood. One should see how it drips through the pores, one should see the real orgy of the shattered and smashed limbs – yes, and in order to see it, someone jumps out of the window and falls onto the sidewalk. Garshin ended like this¹.

Or something roams the soul and starts falling apart. Something strange and uneasy raises there, as if a terrible disaster was to happen at any moment. And we catch ourselves realizing that our thoughts have become completely alien to us, we do not consider our deeds as ours any longer. We can feel something around us, something like a foreign eye which drills into our neck, a hot breath that whiffs the face, and then, suddenly we see it: Horla, Horla! This is how Maupassant ended².

¹ Vsevolod Mikhailovich Garshin (1855-1888) – Russian author of about 20 short stories which in their artistic force and humanism have been compared to those of Dostoyevski. Przybyszewski refers here to Garshin's probably best-known novel: *The Red Flower* which tells the story of a madman who, closed in the asylum, becomes more and more convinced that the whole evil of the world has its roots in the three poppies growing in the hospital's garden. Garshin himself committed a suicide by jumping out of his apartment's window located on the fifth floor of the building.

² Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) – French writer, considered one of the leaders in the short literary form. In his renowned story *Horla* (1887) (in

One may try to explain all this the way he pleases, one can even reach for a whole dictionary of great psychiatric knowledge to seek help, but X will remain X.

Or this: an ordinary day, we are walking with a woman whom we hitherto regarded as nice and likable, and all of a sudden something happens – maybe it is an evanescent expression on her face, one we have never seen before yet which falls deep inside the soul – and suddenly we feel inside ourselves a hungry dog, we try to give our voice some tenderness, we feel it turn into whisper as we are trying to squeeze our brain with our hands to neutralize its tremor and keep it in balance, we feel our heart tremble and a strange feeling overflows the whole body – this is love. Is it not a great mystery?

The particles of my brain's substance have composed in a curve turned to the left... Isn't it wonderful!

These are the riddles, the mysteries that torment Johann Nilsen Nagel, the protagonist of Knut Hamsun's book *Mysteries*, translated so finely into German by Marie von Borch¹.

Johann Nagel is one of those *quelqu'uns*² who in the times of a breakthrough, on the verge between downfall and rebirth degenerate into something terribly sick and infinitely healthy at the same time, something half-decayed and yet bearing at its core an infinite number of fertilizing germs, a form being simultaneously the source of decline and the seed of life. He is one of those individuals who consist of contradictions, of the most heterogenic

French *hors-là* means “from there”, but it could also be translated as “from beyond”), Maupassant described a young man tormented by an obsessive feeling that his life is controlled by an invisible yet powerful, vicious creature. Realizing that “Horla” will never leave him alone, the hero eventually decides to take his own life. Writing this novel, Maupassant himself suffered from schizophrenia and died six years later in a complete dementia.

¹ Marie von Borch was Hamsun's first German translator. She translated *Hunger, Mysteries, Pan, and Redactor Lyngé*.

² *Quelqu'un* (Fr.) – “someone”, an indefinite, ordinary person.

elements, who endowed with a particular sensibility, find themselves in a state of a never-ending struggle, as everything is scattering in them, everything dissolves. The most destructive sensations ruin inner balance, making the mystical centre of power with which all the spiritual states are connected displace and loose its hold. One can never be sure of such people because they bear in their hearts a drive towards destruction. Although they may now experience a frenzy of joy and happiness, this giant but loosely weld construction can collapse at any moment. Everything falls, tears away, breaks, and a new metempsychosis may begin.

These souls are like hunted animals that will never find peace. Their home is everywhere, yet they nowhere feel *at home*, each place seems to be their homeland and yet homeland is something they have not found. They are delicate and inconstant as pure silver and even the tiniest impulse suffices to cause an explosion in this effervescing crater underneath. All that is deep in them appears outside as superficial, and all that is most intimate, lived in heat and fearful storms of life, turns up to be a cliché; the great seems small, for it is regarded from a limited perspective of crude instincts, sympathies and interests. They always wear masks for if they don't, a wry grimace shows on their faces; they are lost and deceitful, they hate and love everything at the same time. They can rejoice in life like jaunty children, only to be overwhelmed by a painful feeling of repulsion one moment later. Everything eventually turns out to be rubbish for them, pure nonsense, everything becomes just a *blague-blague, oh, la sale corvée de la vie!*¹ Indeed, to live is highly indecent! „I am a stranger, alien to this world, I am God's fixed idea – call me what you will”² – cries Nagel finally in his unhappiness.

¹ *Blague-blague, oh, la sale corvée de la vie!* (Fr.) – “All is a blague and nothing but a blague, oh the dirty labor of life!”

² In *Mysterier* this fragment goes: “Jeg er en fremmed, en tilværelsens utlænding, Guds fikse idé, kald mig hvad I vil” – K. Hamsun, *Mysterier* [in:] *Samlede Verker*, vol. 1, Gyldendal, Oslo 1992, p. 335. The English

And what is particularly interesting in the character of Nagel is his morbid distaste for all the opinions voiced by someone before him, for all the meals eaten before him. What he finds pleasant, disgusts him right away, because it might also be pleasant for his neighbor. He constantly has an impression that the harpies befouled his meal. There is in him a demonic drive towards saying “No” instead of “Yes”, reversing everything, turning ideals into dirt and dirt into ideals. Then, suddenly, he seems like a Nietzschean god, who, stretched above the Pleiades¹, rests and laughs hollowly at the human monkey which he created for his own amusement, and in his suffering he tickles its feet to make it scream of happiness and cry with tears of joy big as grains of a pea.

Each opinion accepted as good and right is for Nagel a stinking superstition of the masses and thus from above the rubble of shattered idols he rises proudly towards the great and mighty power of the “overman”, the “free spirit”, the good European, who shrugs contemptuously at such a dwarfish creature as philistine whom he already finds terribly boring.

There is one more thing that belongs to and complements the physiognomy of such a man, this being his love for the oppressed and for all that lives in the dark, hiding, in misery and disdain. It seems that some kind of a covert sympathy attracts him to such people, or maybe it is only a kind of defiance to elevate what has been disregarded. He is good and honest just from spite, because of the contempt for all that others set high.

translator of the novel, Gerry Bothmer, altered the original text here, translating “Guds fikse idé” as “a stubborn manifestation of God” – See: K. Hamsun, *Mysteries*, transl. G. Bothmer, Souvenir Press, London 2006, p. 282. I think Hamsun’s words say about Nagel something quite different from Bothmer’s proposition, therefore I decided to restore the original expression in this sentence.

¹ Pleiades – in Greek mythology seven nymph-daughters of Atlas, who were placed by Zeus in the firmament to save them from the pursuit of Orion.

Johan Nagel makes a cripple of himself, one who makes funny faces for money and goes half-naked to the market in order to dance in front of the crowd. He desperately tries to smuggle money for a poor maiden and he does so not out of philanthropic reasons, but out of that particular, aristocratic sympathy of the lord who prefers the small and wretched ones above the so-called mighty.

This complex nature, in which thousands of seas and blue skies wave – so timid, delicate and boundless that almost devoid of any horizons, so sickly innocent it has to lie and put masks in order not to reveal its secrets and depths to the crowd, so respectful in regard to the sacred mystery of its own individuality that it would rather die than prostitute itself – this nature cannot conform to the living conditions of the “bourgeois” society and has to perish, in accordance with the Darwinian-Spencerian law of survival and in accordance with the morality which sends what is beautiful and extraordinary to serve as manure for the slaves.

There exists, however, a state which might bring him salvation. It is the state whereby all the powers of the soul unite and culminate and when the most intensive synthesis of its quarreled, contradictory elements emerges. Then, what once was sterile, becomes creative genius, a coward changes into a hero and a melancholic into a careless reveler. This state is, actually, love. A decadent nature loves differently than other people do. It is not capable of giving itself without reserve, of loving a woman for a woman's sake only – in its object it loves itself. Around the picture of a woman there accumulates all that is most delicate and subtle, all that causes the greatest delight and makes the strongest kind of sensation, the most powerful expression of the individual's spiritual constitution which chants a woman out of the abysmal depths of the soul... All this concentrates and flows into one feeling of love, in an immense, joyful momentum of a spiritual synthesis.

And this soul consisting of disconnected sensations, an individuality torn apart like Grabbe's God¹, shattered into thousands of pieces, becomes consolidated and strong when in love. For love is the highest concentration of delight, conjunction of the mightiest yet most secret forces, intensification of the consciousness up till its most impossible limits. And upon all this the Ego entangles: this last expression of the infinite chain of heredity, the last word of a thousand-year-old culture with its eternal goals, aspirations, improvements, likings, sympathies and selection².

And so Johann Nagel falls in love. He himself does not know why. And again, it is a great mystery. Of course, this mystery is beautiful, very beautiful for his aesthetic sense, but for the thinking and analyzing intellect a bare physical fact is not enough. Nagel looks for the reason of his love in some kind of a mystical, inexplicable sensation he must have had once he appeared in the city where his beloved-one lived. Maybe it was the flags fluttering over the roofs, celebrating her birthday, maybe it coincided with the fact that her former lover has took his own life because of her,

¹ Christian Dietrich Grabbe (1801-1836) – German dramatist inspired by the work of Shakespeare and German writers from the *Sturm und Drang* period. Author of many historical plays. Przybyszewski probably refers here to the dramas *Hannibal* (1835) and *Hermann's Battle* (1837) in which Grabbe described the exceptional individuals suffering from social alienation.

² In the decadent world-view a human being was regarded as a final, mature product of a long evolutionary process which made it exceptionally sensitive, subtle and refined but at the same time susceptible to psycho-physiological degradation and thus unable to live an active, creative life. Aware of the imminent decline, a decadent nature was constantly experiencing the feeling of surfeit, lack and emptiness of existence. The only way to overcome it was to intoxicate oneself or search for intensive emotional states, such as fear, aesthetic delight, sexual ecstasy, or... love. Clearly, Przybyszewski makes Nagel a representative of the nineteenth century *décadents*.

maybe it was her name, Dagny, that induced this excitement, or – *au diable l'analyse*¹: he simply loves her.

Dagny Kielland is one of those unhappy creatures which our culture has produced in millions; she is endowed with strong, natural instincts destroyed by thoroughly developed spinster morality. And although she became cold inside, she wants to possess every single man. She is impotent because the revered meanness and hypocrisy of the “good” company had crushed her courage to follow the voice of the heart, because she is incapable of loving someone with that unrestrained passion which derides all “obligations” and tramples every “prohibition”. She is cowardly, yet vain enough to catch in her web an interesting stranger. She permits him to go quite far, she encourages him, even kisses him, and then breaks up with him only to begin a new game. Dagny Kielland is not allowed to love Nagel since she has a fiancé. Yet she lets him know clearly that she loves him, although she should not. Maybe she is suffering because of this, maybe some kind of anger and despair is raging in her soul, or maybe she is only mad because this stranger has gained too big a power over her – who knows? Everything in her is a sham, she deceives herself, she could well have gone further than she did, and then she would probably see one day that this man has been completely indifferent to her, but she would still go through life with him, for this is what the morality ingrained in her requires.

And so a terrible tragedy begins, as one of the geese supposed to procreate with her betrayed and deceived husband destroys a born aristocrat of the intellect. Nagel engages in a desperate fight, he lies or besieges her with brutal sincerity, he howls and whines crawling at her feet like a dog, he despises her, mocks and slanders her only to later find himself carving her name on a tree and kissing it madly. The impossibility of possessing this woman paralyses his body, falters his moves, gives them an absolutely un-

¹ *Au diable l'analyse* (Fr.) – “To hell with analysis”.

necessary and idiotic sense. Nagel suffers; he can feel his once achieved concentration fall apart, the synthesis of the intensified feelings of delight loosen, the unsatisfied lust spiral and quiver. Nagel suffers the exasperating pain of the weakening sexual feelings, which only in constant accumulation, in incessant concentration prepare the grounds for the highest, synthetic experience of delight, the feeling of balance and stability.

The great tragedy of the great man develops with immense speed from the moment when Dagny ruins with a truly feminine brutality his attempts to find peace and spiritual harmony at Martha Gude's side. And yet another day of the most terrible miseries, and then – a frightful Hallelujah of doom, a terrifying symphony of the wretched soul, lacerated with bloody emotions. Johann Nilsen Nagel throws himself to the sea: "Some bubbles came up to the surface"¹.

I would not elaborate to such an extent on this book, was it not for the significant values it possesses, both from the cultural-historical and psychological points of view.

It is a great Jeremiahian song of degeneration². But not degeneration in the commonly accepted sense, like a degeneration of a damaged, failing body. No, this is a degeneration of the times

¹ K. Hamsun, *Mysteries*, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

² To a modern reader's ear the term "degeneration" sounds rather odd, but it was one of the key ideas in the late nineteenth century's decadent world-view. Its adherents believed there existed a link between an individual's artistic abilities and the morbid, pathological states of mind and body. Przybyszewski expressed similar views notably in his first famous work: *Zur Psychologie des Individuums* (published in 1894, the same year as Hamsun's *Mysteries*), where on the example of Friedrich Nietzsche, Frédéric Chopin and Ola Hansson he examined the psychology of the artist, claiming that it is the artist's hypersensitivity and over-refinement of the nerves and senses that endow his works with exceptionality and genius. One of Przybyszewski's notorious sayings was: "Norm is stupidity, degeneration is genius", but in the following two paragraphs he is critical of the modern "degenerates" among whom he saw too many "dilettantes", "epigones" and literary amateurs. He visibly

of the decline and breakthrough; it amounts to the disturbance of emotional balance. Feelings are deprived of their direction, of their unifying force; there is nothing to conjoin them, every single feeling oscillates around itself instead of uniting with the others. This degeneration comprises the surfeit of the senses, the general blasement wherein everything begins to abhor us and the reflex of vomit appears around the corners of our lips. It comes down to the directness with which one receives the sensations that before reaching the place of their destination – the source of individuality, mystical depth, the sacred soil that gives life and development – had been filtered by the brain, divided, analyzed, and completely deprived of their intensity.

This degeneration gave birth to the herds of dilettantes who think they can do everything yet they cannot create anything, who were already born impotent and squander their forces pointlessly on constant attempts to combine their will with their emotions. This is the degeneration that created a culture of epigones who in spite of their ability to sympathize, remain in fact bloodless and mild in their feelings, having weak brains and delicate hands. It is a generation of analytics, psychologists and great virtuosos *en nerfs*¹, such as Bourget² and Barrès¹, Bashkircev² and the typical

separates such authors from Hamsun whom he valued high for picturing in the character of Nagel the drama of the real “degenerated” genius.

¹ Virtuosos *en nerfs* (Fr.) – “virtuosos of the nerves”.

² Paul Bourget (1852-1935) – French writer and critic whose fiction offered deep insights into the morals of the French society as well as into human’s psychology. Today Bourget is remembered mainly for his remarkable novel *The Disciple* (1889), a story of the philosopher/teacher and his former disciple who – guided by his master’s theories and incapable of living outside the realm of philosophy – manipulates a young girl’s sincere feelings and finally contributes to her suicidal death. Here and later Przybyszewski expresses his critical view of Bourget’s other famous book: *Psychology of the Modern Love* (1890) in which Bourget described in details, maybe even too scholastically, various phenomena related to love, focusing particularly on the institution of a “mistress” in France, jealousy, and break-ups.

epigone Amiel³ – the whole flock of slavish imitators of Goethe and... who could count them anyway.

They could all be great geniuses but they lack a synthesis that gathers all the scattered skills in one place, they lack nerves of steel that provide the brain with the most intense emotions, they lack strong organic sensations to give the consciousness its strength and power. There should happen an explosion encompassing all the sensations, an opening of a crater into which the content of life might flow. But the degenerates are never capable of such an activity of the brain as is the case with genius individuals since their brain diffuses sensations and all vanishes under the touch of their creative hand.

But what makes Hamsun's book particularly worth of interest is the psychological subtlety with which every single line was written. Already Stendhal⁴ – and I am not speaking here about awful products of some Mantegazza⁵ or about the doctrinal,

¹ Maurice Barrès (1862–1923) – French novelist and patriotic extremist, author of numerous and thematically diverse novels. In his first trilogy *The Cult of the Self* (1888) he advocated a supreme, egoistic and active individual. In later works he expressed overt nationalist and anti-German views.

² Maria Constantinovna Bashkircev (Marie Bashkirtseff) (1858-1884) – Russian painter and sculptor. She became famous posthumously after her intimate *Diary* (1887) written in French since infancy was published.

³ Henri Frédéric Amiel (1821-1881) – Swiss philosopher, poet and critic. He is now recognized mainly for his posthumously published *Journal Intime* (1883-1884).

⁴ Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle) – French writer regarded as a forerunner of the European realism and one of the greatest practitioners of the psychological novel (*The Red and Black*, 1830). Stendhal is still widely recognized for his philosophical essay *On Love* (1822) – the one Przybyszewski praises here. *On Love* has stood the test of time as an agreeable mixture of romantic passion for love and an urge for its rational explanation.

⁵ Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1910) – a great Italian neurologist, physiologist and anthropologist. He marked the Italian culture with a huge body of works whose themes range from articles on craniology and physio-

reeking of Ribot's¹ salon psychology *Psychologie de l'amour* by Bourget – was able to present in his excellent *De l'amour* an infinitely subtle, and similar to Hamsun's *Mysteries*, analysis of this most powerful of all functions – love.

Love embraces an individual without a fairly justified reason: maybe it is a mood induced by the light in which we accidentally saw a woman, the scent of the roses she had in her hair, a pose that her body assumed. Love can be born out of the funniest subtleties of which we are only seldom aware. The brain tries to trick us, however; it searches for the reason in God knows what physical and mental attributes, but these can only support love, strengthen it, but not trigger it.

It is out of such an accident that Nagel's love has been born: a deep mystical sensation was suddenly set in motion, one whose

gnomy to guidebooks concerning love and science fiction. Some of them were abundant in controversial moral and physiological claims (for example the superiority of the “European man” over other races). Largely inspired by Darwinism, Mantegazza was also a pioneer in psychopharmacological investigations, long before S. Freud he explored drugs', especially cocaine's, influence on the human's organism. Mantegazza attempted to provide a holistic picture of human behavior in his four subsequent volumes: *Physiology of Pleasure* (1854), *Physiology of Love* (1873), *Physiology of Pain* (1880), *Physiology of Hate* (1889). It is the second (and most popular among the readers) volume of Mantegazza's oeuvre that Przybyszewski is critical of. Suffice it to say this book has shown that love was not only feelings but also pure physicality, and by so doing it played a significant role in the history of European sexology.

¹ Théodule Ribot (1839-1916) – French psychologist, professor at Sorbonne and Collège de France. He is considered a founder of modern psychology and psychopathology in France. Somewhat forgotten today, Ribot's works were very influential and commonly read at the end of XIX century. Thanks to Ribot psychology became a discipline recognized and taught at French universities. His numerous works include *Heredity: A Psychological Study of Its Phenomena, Laws, Causes, and Consequences* (1873), *The Diseases of the Will* (1884), *The Diseases of Personality* (1885), and *The Psychology of the Emotions* (1896). Hamsun too consulted some of Ribot's works.

existence he was not aware of, and yet it was deeply hidden in his most intimate sexual life. And thus love appeared. And the way it evolved, plunged into the wildest orgies of suffering, gradually destroying the sense of identity – all this was depicted by Hamsun with an unrivalled artistic and psychological power.

Throughout the whole book there steal dreadful ghosts of modernity, the whole myriad of ghouls generated by the brain. They are the impressions which suddenly creep out of the corners, make the brain vibrate, little by little turning to monomania, until one day they assume shapes that will destroy this brain in a frantic agony of fear. Everything will become a chaotic mass, entangled bundle whose Ariadne's thread was buried in the bottomless abyss of the soul's eternal mystery.

Everything in this novel is a great mystery. The protagonist himself is a mystery, much the same as his whole life is. His name and job remain a riddle: Nagel is not his true name and he is not an agronomist for which he wants to pass. His deeds are dictated by mysterious motives, albeit subtly justified from the psychological point of view. And throughout the whole book there permeates a painfully humoristic tone wherein laughter coalesces with desperate perplexity and a horrid, destructive atmosphere of a blague: *Quelle comédie que la vie et quelle sottise d'en faire un drame*¹.

At the end, however, the comedy turns into a frightful drama.*

Kongsvinger, Norway

¹ *Quelle comédie que la vie et quelle sottise d'en faire un drame* (Fr.) – “What a comedy life is, and how foolish it is to make a drama of it”.

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