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SOVIET THEATERS

1917 - 1941

A Collection of Articles

by

Yosyp Hirniak, Serge Orlovsky,
Gabriel Ramensky, Boris Volkov,
and Peter Yershov

Edited by Martha Bradshaw
Brooklyn College

RESEARCH PROGRAM ON THE U.S.S.R.
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PREFACE

Soviet and Western histories of the Soviet theater often sound like the histories of theater in two entirely different countries. Official Soviet theater historians see the development of theater and drama since the Revolution as a struggle for a socialist repertoire and style of production in the face of the corruption of this aim by formalists and bourgeois decadents devoted to the doctrine of art for art's sake. Every new decree or pronouncement by the government or the Communist Party on the subject of theatrical spectacles is regarded by these writers as another advance in the continuing process of defining the role of art in a socialist society. Each new play which satisfactorily expresses the political aims of the moment is viewed as another step toward the realization of the desired goal: a theater which furthers the aims of the state and the Party.

To such historians the years since 1917 provide a progressive revelation of the rules for socialist art in the theater. The triumphs are all at the expense of the prerevolutionary theater, which is officially regarded as a theater for the elite, a theater more interested in form than content, a theater whose content was as doomed as the class it entertained. One Soviet writer, willing to take something from each of the giants of the pre-Soviet theater, nevertheless dismisses Stanislavski as too "mystic" and Meierhold and Tairov as too "aesthetic" for the new socialist theater.[1] The aim of the new theater, according to the official view, has been to bring the heritage of the classics to the masses and to create new plays to teach the people how to behave in the new society. The classics, of course, are selected and reinterpreted

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1. Novitski, Pavel, *Sovremennye teatral'nye sistemy* [Contemporary Theatrical Systems], Moscow, 1933, p. 42.

to make them suitable vehicles for educating postrevolutionary man.

The prevailing Western view of Soviet theater history, on the other hand, sees it as a process of degeneration. While many of the earlier, more popular reports in English on the Soviet theater were as indiscriminately enthusiastic as Soviet propaganda itself, more serious Western observers have long been aware of the dangers to theatrical art of control by a government or state party. Soviet émigrés from the twenties on have registered the bitterest complaints against the Party control of art. Emigré and Western observers see a splendid flowering of international theatrical movements in Soviet Russia in the first years after the Revolution, gradually robbed of its vitality by steadily encroaching government and Party control. They point out that all of the great figures of the Soviet theater were men who had come or were just coming to artistic maturity at the time of the Revolution. They note further that the Soviet producers who gained world fame for their brilliant productions became silent or were suppressed, one by one, by the government which first applauded them.

There is a core of solid factual writing about the Soviet theater in English. Letters, articles, director's plans, memoirs of some of the great men of the Russian theater who lived on and worked under the Soviet regime have seen publication in English: Stanislavski's *My Life in Art* and *The Actor Prepares,* Nemirovich-Danchenko's *My Life in the Russian Theater,* some of Eugene Vakhtangov's letters and articles, some of Meierhold's rehearsal notes. Several competent Western theatrical observers have published serious studies based on visits to leading Soviet theaters. Norris Houghton's *Moscow Rehearsals* is one such study; another is Huntly Carter's *New Spirit in the Russian Theater,* which has much valuable material on the early period, though his orientation seems uncritical in the light of later developments. Western observers' reports on the national theaters in the U.S.S.R. are

sketchy.

One reason for the comparative scarcity at present of substantial Western studies of the Soviet theater based on first-hand knowledge is that it has become increasingly difficult for Western students to obtain admission to the Soviet Union. The time of Soviet hospitality to visiting Western theater scholars is past, and remarks on Soviet theater in English now come mostly from people who have no special theatrical training. The essays in the present volume, therefore, add a dimension of reality which is lacking in both Soviet and Western accounts hitherto available. The authors are neither mere visitors nor official spokesmen. They are refugees from Soviet Russia, men who spent part or all of their productive lives in the U.S.S.R. in theater work, and they describe life in the Soviet theater "from the inside out," as visitors could not do. On the other hand, they discuss problems of theater life under state control which Soviet writers are prevented from touching by training and censorship.

Sergei Orlovsky, who writes in the present collection on Moscow theaters, worked in the Maly Theater and the Moscow Art Theater. He had several years of experience in a *kolkhoz* theater as well. The author of the article on the Central Theater of the Red Army, Boris Volkov, was a designer and scene painter in that theater and worked with the architect of stage plans, Mal'tsen, at the time of the construction of the new building. Peter Yershov, author of the section on the training of Moldavian acting cadres, was a teacher of literature in the Theatrical School in Odessa and at the University of Odessa. Yosyp Hirniak, who writes on the Ukrainian theater, was a member of the Berezil' Theater in Kiev and Kharkov and was an actor and stage manager in several other Ukrainian theaters. Gabriel Ramensky, who writes about the labor camp theaters, was trained in the arts at the University of Leningrad, then lectured on literature, and played in theaters briefly in Leningrad before he began the first of several terms in forced labor camps.

It is important to note that all of the contributors to this volume left the U.S.S.R. shortly after 1940. Their work therefore refers mainly to the twenties and thirties, the earlier and middle period of Soviet theater.

* * * * * * * * * * * * *

To understand the theatrical scene in which these men lived and worked, the reader may find useful a brief account of major events in Soviet theater history up to 1941, emphasizing particularly the relation of the government and Party to the theaters in the U.S.S.R. and the evolution of the official aims set for the Soviet stage. Against this background the problems of theater life shown in these essays can be seen in proper perspective.

In the Soviet Union official decrees and statements on the theater are the key to theater life. The relatively few decisions taken by the government or Party in this field indicate that the official conception of the theater as an instrument of propaganda has never changed, although efforts to make the theater a more perfect political instrument have steadily advanced.[2] It should be noted that the history of Soviet drama is but one aspect of the history of Soviet literature, and that literary decrees are as germane to an understanding of the position of drama in the U.S.S.R. as are the decrees on drama themselves.

In November 1917, shortly after the People's Commissariat of Education (Narkompros) was established, the theaters were placed under the jurisdiction of the Commissariat's Department of Art. The Theatrical Section of the Narkompros (known by the abbreviation TEO) was organized in January

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2. For a convenient summary of the principal degrees, with the current official interpretation of their significance, see "Teatr" [Theater], *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* [Large Soviet Encyclopedia], Volume on the U.S.S.R., 1947, columns 1584-1602.

1918, to implement the November decree.[3] Theater legislation was thus among the first matters treated by the revolutionary government, and this priority made it clear at once that government use of art was a part of communist dogma.

The opening sections of Mr. Orlovsky's article on Moscow theaters show the disorganization of the theaters in the capital during the first postrevolutionary period, when they were experiencing the difficulties associated with a time of revolution and civil war. Mr. Hirniak's description of Ukrainian theater groups during the same period suggests the immense hope with which some theater circles received the Revolution and indicates that the effect for the Ukrainian theater was at first a greater freedom than it had ever had previously.

All theaters in Soviet Russia were nationalized in August 1919, and a Theater Central Committee was formed (the Tsentroteatr).[4] Members of theatrical collectives became members of an all-Russian trade union. In 1921 the management of the theaters was turned over to the Art Department of the newly organized Glavpolitprosvet, a government office for the propagation of communism.[5] During the NEP, many theaters returned to private ownership briefly. In 1929 the theaters were put directly under the head of the Committee on Art Affairs, which after 1935 was made responsible to the Council of People's Commissars (known since 1946 as the Council of Ministers). It should be noted that the Party Central Committee and the local Party committees always exercised active or indirect supervision over the art committees and theaters.

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3. *Loc. cit.*

4. Rostotski, B., "Osnovnye etapy razvitiya sovetskovo teatra" [Basic Steps in the Development of the Soviet Theater] in *Sovetskii teatr* [Soviet Theater], Moscow, 1947, p. 36. Rostotski is also the author of the encyclopedia article on theater cited above.

5. *Ibid.*

Separate organs in the republic commissariats of education were established to oversee the rapidly expanding theatrical affairs in each Soviet republic, but these republic committees on art affairs were responsible to the all-Union committee. Local committees in the republics were responsible to the republic committees. A central body for censorship of repertoire was set up with branches, all subordinate to the Glavrepertkom (Main Repertory Committee) in the Narkompros. State and local subsidy to theaters increased after 1929 and continued until 1948. There are interesting figures on subsidies in the articles by Mr. Orlovsky and Mr. Volkov.

The expansion of theaters to the national republics during the twenties and thirties is claimed by the Soviets as one of their proudest achievements. In 1920 Stalin, in his article "Policies of the Soviet Power on the National Question in Russia," had advanced the thesis that the Soviets "must develop a local national theater and national educational institutions."[6] Before the Revolution, according to the Soviet theater historian Rostotski, "only nine nationalities [of the Russian empire], besides the Russian, had their own professional national theater. By 1941, of the 926 professional theaters in the U.S.S.R., 410 played in fifty languages of the fraternal republics."[7] Some of the difficulties of personnel in the national theaters, however, become clear in Mr. Yershov's article on the formation of a Moldavian acting cadre. Government intervention after the independent establishment of a national theater is graphically shown in Mr. Hirniak's description of the life and death of the intensely national Ukrainian theater, Les' Kurbas' Berezil'.

In the thirties, during the period of establishing the collective farms, dramatic groups were sent to or formed in the

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6. Stalin, J. V., *Marxism and the National Question: Selected Writings and Speeches*, New York, 1942, p. 81. The original article appeared in *Pravda*, No. 226, October 10, 1920.

7. *Large Soviet Encyclopedia, loc. cit.*

collective farms to help in imposing this much resisted reorganization on the peasants. Mr. Orlovsky's fragmentary reminiscences of the peasants' reception of the city actors rings true.

The Kurbas theater in Kharkov was attacked and finally suppressed not only on national but also on aesthetic grounds, a fact which reflects yet another Party dogma of importance in the life of the Soviet theater: the official canonization of socialist realism as the obligatory ideal of all Soviet art. The concept of socialist realism was in the process of formation even before the Revolution. There were attempts at defining it during the years of the New Economic Policy (1921-1928). Nearly every Soviet historian of the Soviet theater notes that in 1923, on the occasion of Ostrovski's centenary, A.V. Lunacharski, then Commissar of Education, coined the slogan, "Back to Ostrovski!" to guide the theater in its new postrevolutionary efforts. It is usually explained that Lunacharski's slogan meant a return to Ostrovski's psychological fullness and the application of this realism to contemporary themes. The slogan was in effect an official call for a return to nineteenth century realism as the proper mode for a socialist theater. A parallel movement was noted in literature and the other arts.

With the profound social changes represented in the aims of the First Five-Year Plan and the harnessing of the theater directly to propaganda, the comparative freedom enjoyed by the Soviet theater during the period of retrenchment came to an end. Up to that point the Soviet government and the state party, occupied with more pressing problems, had not fully formed nor thoroughly expressed their concept of political control of the theater. An important meeting of Party and theatrical figures in 1927, called in connection with the launching of the First Five-Year Plan, established as the basic criterion for judging the work of the theater its "sociopolitical significance." Government and Party control in art was here made explicit and effective. The insistence on

conformity to politically defined goals grew steadily from that date to the present.

In April 1932 the Party Central Committee published its decree "On the Reorganization of Literary and Artistic Organizations,"[8] in which socialist realism, a concept which had been bandied about for several years previous, received official formulation. Artists in the Soviet Union have been trying to interpret it and conform to its dictates ever since. Articles in *Pravda* in 1936 censuring the composer Dmitri Shostakovich for formalism and Demyan Bedny's play *Bogatyrs* for an incorrect interpretation of the Russian past provided two examples of artists who were not interpreting the term correctly.

The inevitable and logical complement to accounts of theaters which have run afoul of the Party line, as did the Kurbas theater and some of those mentioned in Mr. Orlovsky's article, is provided by Mr. Ramensky's account of theater people in forced labor camps. The subjugation of art to politics in the "cultural and educational" programs of the labor camps resulted in some tragic, though encouraging, paradoxes. In Soviet propaganda plays presented by and before the victims of Soviet power, the planned effects tended to be turned into their opposite—an unexpected example of the operation of the dialectic!

World War II brought a momentary change in emphasis from the goals of the world communist revolution to the glories of the Russian past, but the underlying concept of political control of art shifted not at all. In August 1946 came the Party directive "On the Repertoire of the Drama Theaters and Measures for Their Improvement,"[9] which restated the aims of depicting the "joyous" future society and teaching the masses communist ideas, and pointed out the shortcomings

8. *Pravda*, April 24, 1932.

9. *Large Soviet Encyclopedia, loc. cit.* The directive first appeared in *Kul'tura i zhizn'* [Culture and Life], August 30, 1946, p. 1.

in repertoire and dramatic criticism from this point of view. The purging of "cosmopolitan" critics shortly afterward was a logical extension of the purging of formalist producers in the thirties. "Cosmopolitan critics" were those accused of criticizing dramatic events from the point of view of "decadent Western" theater instead of from that of a theater with socialist aims. Clearly, if drama is to be the complete servant of a political dogma or organization, critics must be found who will analyze plays as propaganda first, and only second as art.

The problem of repertoire has caused great trouble throughout the history of Soviet drama. The demand for politically useful plays is heard with increasing insistence down the three decades of Soviet rule, in an atmosphere of constant redefinition of communist aims. Official historians of the Soviet theater make much of the alleged achievements along these lines, but even in the plays which have been officially approved much material not "useful to the Soviet land" has been found by the critics, from the earliest years on. Theater people in the Soviet Union, however, pay more and more attention to the critics as control grows. Incidents in several of the essays here presented show how a play is changed in the course of rehearsal, how quickly a play can lose favor, how some playwrights, after an initial success, cease to write acceptable plays. Enlightening, too, is the experience of the Red Army Theater, formed for the express purpose of military propaganda and yet unable to obtain plays suitable for production in its imposing new building.

The nearly insurmountable repertoire problems facing some of the younger national theaters are vividly illustrated in Mr. Yershov's description of the formation of a Moldavian theater. The students he taught were faced with cultural, political and linguistic problems all at once, problems which were aggravated by the lack of theoretical and dramatic materials in their own language. And though Soviet historians speak of breaking down cultural barriers between the R.S.F.S.R. and

the other republics by "unifying the repertoire," that is, performing Russian plays in republic theaters and plays by minority theaters in Moscow, the reader sees at what cost this unanimity is achieved in Mr. Hirniak's description of what happened to the Ukrainian playwright Mykola Kulish when his plays too definitely failed to conform to the prescribed line.

The efforts of the Soviet stage to redeem a poorly written play by style and characterization are also seen in several of the essays: Mr. Orlovsky's description of the production of *Lyubov Yarovaya* helps to explain the success of this play, now accepted in the Soviet Union as a contemporary classic. Mr. Volkov's explanation of the success of *Father Unknown* provides an insight into the character of the Soviet audience. It takes a long time to kill a theater with as well-trained staffs as many of the Soviet theaters managed to obtain in the years before and immediately after the Revolution.

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Paradox is the essence of the Soviet theater, as it is of much of Soviet life. The essays in the present collection reveal the vitality of an expanding and experimental theater initially encouraged rather than obliterated by the Revolution. The reader becomes aware of the painful attempts at readjustment by the great prerevolutionary theaters and of their eventual failure in one way or another. Generous government aid allows new theaters to run ahead, while the dead hand of government supervision drags them back. The reader can see the great diversity in style of the modern Russian stage in the process of transformation into the unity of monolithic monotony. A theater clamoring for new plays, encouraged to present the "new reality," attracts its best audiences with performances of Western and Russian classics. A Party which vaunts its achievements in terms of world theater punishes the experimenters who made the achievements possible. A

government which spreads theatrical groups to every part of the many countries composing the Soviet Union purges the self-expression it has encouraged, or makes meaningless the expansion so encouraged by hedging it about with restrictions and orders.

With all this, there emerges from these pages on the Soviet theater a picture of an extraordinarily vital theater making a heroic attempt to meet the needs of a new audience and express the transformation of life taking place in its homeland. The positive achievements of that blaze of activity in Russian theater which began early in the present century are even yet not finally at an end, but the losses brought about by repression are tragic and irrecoverable.

MARTHA BRADSHAW

New York
May 1954

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Moscow Theaters, 1917-1941

Serge Orlovsky

Introduction

The falsification of history which so persistently concerns the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union could hardly fail to extend to the work on the history of the Soviet theater as well. One must not only treat all work and research on the history of the Soviet theater with care, but more, one must always remember that the authors who have written and are writing under present Soviet conditions cannot help but exaggerate the success of "politically useful" plays and discount the success of experimental or non-political productions. It is the duty of Soviet theatrical people who have come to the West, into a land of freedom of speech and the press, to write accurately about what they have witnessed, in order to lighten the work of the future historian of the Soviet theater.

The present work by no means pretends to be a detailed and complete research study on the Soviet theater. It is rather a description of the basic theater movements and separate episodes of which the author was a witness. However, similar reminiscences doubtless will appear in time, and will prove useful material to those engaged in theatrical research. In describing the theatrical trends in Moscow during this period and the customs and life of the Soviet actor, the author is holding to a chronological development, except for the history of the Moscow Kamerny Theater, which is treated separately as most characteristic of the conditions in which the creative life of the artists took place.

Moscow Theaters in the First Days of October

The winter of the year 1917-1918. Inflation. Transportation disorganized. Robberies. Arrests.... As a protest against the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, the teachers are on strike, and the schools are closed. The most active and substantial part of the intelligentsia is fleeing to the south. The intelligentsia remaining in Moscow are engaged in sabotage, and everyone is sure that the Bolsheviks can hold out no more than a few months.

And there is panic in the theater. Stamping their feet and shelling sunflower seeds, a crowd of Red Guards, sailors and workers pour into the gilded velvet-draped halls of the imperial theaters. The directors of the theaters have fled; the actors go to meetings in great excitement, just as the whole country gathers in excited meetings.

Difficult and sometimes insoluble problems confront the new managers, hurriedly elected by those who have remained: guarding the theaters and productions from destruction, obtaining food rations for the starving actors, heating the theaters.

At the Moscow Maly Theater the red velvet curtains are already cut up for leggings. From the wardrobe storehouse of the Zimin Opera Theater period costumes are stolen for Tolstoi blouses and dresses for the soldiers' "ladies." The problem of heating is so difficult that productions are cancelled, or the performances are held without heat and the theaters are so cold that water freezes on the stage. In a performance at the Kolyayev Peoples' Home it is a few degrees below zero. On-stage the actors gather raspberries in fur coats and galoshes. This line is in the play: "What a hot summer day today!"

However, by the force of inertia and traditional theater discipline, performances and rehearsals continue. In the 1917-1918 season, the repertoire of the Moscow theaters consists half of Russian or foreign classics and half of plays by the prerevolutionary dramatists Gnedich, Nevezhin, Spazhinski, Ryshkov, Sumbatov, Naidenov and others. A "purge of the repertoire" is

announced by the government of the Soviet republic. Only the classics remain on the programs; all the rest are thrown off the stage of the permanent theaters and remain only in the repertoire of touring companies and groups of actors who have been thrown together haphazardly for special performances. Censorship has not, so far, reached these companies. Among contemporary dramatists, only Gorki is recommended. Gorki's play *The Old Man* [*Starik*] is first presented at the Maly. Thanks to talented performers, especially V.N. Pashennaya and S.A. Golovina, the performance has great success.

The financial condition of the theaters is catastrophic. Free tickets are distributed in the factories, plants and army divisions; there are neither donations nor subsidies for performances, and the newly elected management, chosen by vote of the theater companies themselves, has no means of paying salaries to the theater workers. Salary is replaced by a ration ticket; the remnants of former bourgeois luxury, useless to everyone in such times, are taken off to market. Peasants carry pianos, gramophones, fur coats, pictures, and china out of the city. They give two pounds of flour for a spinet, but only one pound for a big piano, because it is more difficult to cart the bigger one away.

Huge placards about activities on the front lines are hung in the squares, and the population follows with excitement the approach of the Whites toward Moscow. The great mass of the residents sees in the Whites its only hope for delivery from hunger and destruction. Sabotage among the actors grows, a passive protest against the usurpation of power by the Bolsheviks. And many actors refuse to play simply because the stage is unheated, and because the new spectators, peasants and workmen, do not know how to behave in a theater. For example, in the winter of 1918 at the Maly, at the beginning of a performance, assistant director S.A. Lanski announces that because of the illness of artist Maria Nikolaevna Yermolova, her role will be filled by artist Yelena Konstantinovna Leshkovskaya. From the first rows of the parterre is heard a loud retort, "They spit on us!"

In the "Perpedrama" (the First Travelling Dramatic Theater) Dostoyevski's *The Idiot* is playing. The dramatic dialogue between Myshkin and Rogozhin, in pauses and halftones, is in progress. The chilled audience stamp their boots, warming their feet, and hold loud conversations. They make jokes and some girls scream. An actor from a Moscow Art Theater studio, N.S. Gradevski, playing Myshkin, stands up, goes to the ramp and hysterically shouts: "I cannot play before these boors! Curtain!" The crowd of spectators in leather jackets and soldiers' overcoats throw themselves at the wings with the firm intention of teaching the conceited actor a lesson. He is with great difficulty led out of the theater by the back way, so ending the performance. These incidents reveal the character of the theater in the days after the Revolution.

The "Government Commission for Education" was organized by the Soviet government in November 1917, and the work of the theaters was put under its supervision. One of the first decrees of this commission was the expulsion from the theaters of the actors of anti-Soviet leanings. Many were in time arrested by the Special Commission for the Struggle with Counterrevolution, Speculation, and Sabotage (the Cheka). So, for example, twenty-two actors were expelled from the Maly, among them such well-known artists as E.T. Zhikharev, E.P. Lepkovski, V.V. Maksimov, A.N. Schepkina, and E.P. Schepkina. In order to be able to continue performances at the Maly, the commission quickly had to take in a large group of young actors, among whom were such subsequently famous actors as N.F. Kostromski, N.A. Solov'yov, E.N. Gogoleva, and N.A. Belevtseva.

Discipline in the theaters fell apart. Even in the Moscow Art Theater the authority of Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko was of no help. The actors refused to play certain performances, refused roles for the sake of incidental work on the side, where they could receive provisions for pay. At this period, many distinguished older actors traveled in unheated railroad cars to some provincial workers' club and took part in concerts and performances for a pound of sugar or two or three herrings.

For two and a half years the Moscow Art Theater did not present a single new production and the first première after the Revolution was unsuccessful. An experiment in pure spectacle, Byron's *Cain* did not turn out well for the Art Theater. The new spectator did not understand Byron, nor this impressionistic interpretation of him. After a few performances, *Cain* was taken from the repertoire. The Moscow Art Theater seemed to be blocked in its creative work. The opening which followed *Cain,* Gogol's *The Inspector General,* was a success not of the theater, but of the actor, M.A. Chekhov, who played a completely new and unusual treatment of Khlestakov, the leading role.

Stanislavski in his book *My Life in Art* describes this difficult time as follows: "We found ourselves in a blind alley. It was necessary to stand off at a distance and look over the general picture in order to appraise it more accurately. In short, it was necessary to get out of Moscow."[1] And so the Moscow Art Theater with all its bag and baggage (it was decided to take all the members of the MKhAT family with them) left "on tour," as it was called officially. In fact, it was a real flight to an émigré world. The Art Theater returned when the New Economic Policy began, having lost many of its actors, who remained abroad and did not want to return to their native land. Too many troublesome memories remained in the minds of the members of the MKhAT who fled.

Here is one of the episodes from the first years of the Revolution. In the winter of 1918 a group of actors from the Art Theater was invited to give a concert for one of the Red Army divisions near Moscow, in return for a special ration. They took the actors in sledges to a former country house, then occupied by soldiers. In the huge twin-lighted hall stood small iron stoves, red-hot. The hall was packed with soldiers and sailors who were awaiting the performance. Steam rose from their damp overcoats and galoshes; the blue smoke from cheap tobacco blinded the eyes. First, in evening dress and patent slippers, Vsevolod Alekseyevich Verbitski came out. The silent audi-

torium heard with surprise the words of Alexander Blok, incomprehensible to them:

> ...I sat at the window in a crowded hall,
> Somewhere a violin sang about love -
> I sent you a black rose in a goblet
> Of gold, like Heaven, Ai.....[2]

Verbitski finished in complete silence. The next selection, from *The Brothers Karamazov,* they didn't listen to and exchanged indignant comments. "What is that bourgeois mumbling about there?" shouted someone from the hall. Then from the crowd appeared the forcible figure of the commissar, loaded with machine gun ammunition belts and with a huge Colt at his belt. Stopping the actors with a gesture, he loudly announced: "Here now, let's have the accordion player! And lock up this smart group—swindlers! I myself will take care of them in the morning!" An army accordion player quickly replaced *The Brothers Karamazov,* and the hungry artists of the Moscow Art Theater, frightened to death, were led under guard to a distant cold room, where they sat till dawn. Only toward morning did one of the actors think to try the door, which seemed locked. It was open and everyone dashed out, up to their knees in snow, in evening dress, to go on foot to Moscow, forgetting the rations about which they had dreamed the day before. Thus, comparatively happily, ended the first trial of the "patronage" system for actors. In the following years, the actors' work for patrons took different forms, but we will speak of that in its own time.

Such was the history of the Moscow Art Theater for eight years, that is, from 1917 to 1925. The theater didn't show a single new play by a contemporary author and staged only two new productions from classical drama.

The Maly Theater was in a completely different position. The Maly, as an imperial theater before the Revolution, was accustomed to having its creative life arranged by the officials of the Office of the Imperial Theaters. They were accustomed to absolute subordination to the management, and

therefore could not, like Stanislavski, act against the wishes and demands of Party leaders.

In these same eight years, the Maly staged six new plays by contemporary authors. After Gorki's *The Old Man,* mentioned above, A.V. Lunacharski's *Oliver Cromwell* was presented, but even the exceptionally talented actors of the Maly couldn't help this show to success. Like the play itself, the production turned out colorless and boring. Lunacharski as a dramatist was much less talented than the Ryshkovs, Sumbatovs and Shpazhinskis whom he, as Commissar of Education and the leading exponent of politics in art, attacked so fiercely. An insufficient knowledge of the stage and long reflective monologues made Lunacharski's plays heavy and boring. Nevertheless, in the twenties Lunacharski's plays, *The King's Barber, Poison* and others were played in all the theaters of the Soviet Union, since these were plays by the "boss" himself. Directors of theaters hoped, by putting on these plays, for special mercy from Lunacharski, who was at the helm. This attention finally had its effect, and he seriously considered himself a major dramatist. Among actors, and in fact among the general public, his partiality for his wife, the actress N.A. Rosenel', was well known. At his order the director of the Maly, A.I. Yuzhin (Sumbatov), took Rosenel' into the troupe of the Maly and, in spite of the indignation of the actors, gave her the best roles, to which this little-talented and inexperienced actress had not the least right. When she received the main role in Lunacharski's play *Velvet and Rags,* this sign appeared on the door of her dressing room:

> Gathering rubles craftily, the Narkom[3] hits it right on the nose; he gives rags to the audience, and velvet to Rosenel'!

When Rosenel' read these verses, she promptly went into hysterics; then an actress of the Maly, V.N. Pashennaya, distinguished in general for her upright and bold character, decided to quiet her. She went to her and tried to convince her that it was always necessary to look the truth in the face. "You," she said to her, "receive roles thanks only to the fact that your

husband is the Narkom. You are not in reality a skilled actress, but that is nothing to be upset about—experience will still come to you; you must only be more modest."

After this reprimand Lunacharski had a big discussion with Pashennaya and Yuzhin, the director of the theater. The position of Rosenel' in the Maly is without doubt a typical phenomenon in the Soviet theater of the twenties and the beginning of the thirties. Among the Soviet actresses one could mention more than one name connected with some one of the Soviet magnates, who protected not only the actress, but, ordinarily, the theater in which she worked as well.

The Actors' "Market" and Casual Collectives

In the very first years after the October Revolution there flared up a spontaneous zeal for theatrical art. M.A. Chekhov in his memoirs calls this the period of "studio enthusiasm." A difficult job stands before the future historian of the theater: to distinguish all these various theatrical trends. According to data of the People's Commissariat of Education, in the year 1922 forty-six officially registered theaters and studios were counted in Moscow. Besides this a great number of studios and theaters were not registered, since they did not have time to get organized before they collapsed after the first performance.

The reasons for this stormy growth of theaters and studios one must seek first in this: that in this difficult period people wanted to forget themselves and get away from the realities of a difficult life into the world of fantasy in art. Second, during the period of the Red terror it was easier to hide in the theater and to change one's family name. Actors had long been considered as outside politics, and those in power treated them with more consideration than they did other employees among the intelligentsia. And finally, the theater offered material security. The Bolsheviks at once learned the significance of the theater as a propaganda medium, and actors received better than average rations in that period. For example,

even actors of the artistically feeble traveling theaters were equal with Kremlin workers in receipt of rations, and every week they went to the Kremlin for flour, lentils and horse meat.

The innumerable Moscow theatrical collectives of the first years after the Revolution presented the most variegated picture from the creative point of view. First (the most numerous group) came the casual collectives, gathered together either for a few performances or for a single performance. They had a chance repertoire, without any theoretical creative aim, without set decorations, but with only rented costumes and wigs. At first at Kudrinskaya Square, in the courtyard of a former "widows' home," and then near the walls of the Strastny Monastery, the actors' "market" gathered daily in a great crowd. Here the experienced provincial tragedians – Neschastlivtsevs – slowly strolled about; hungry and ragged Arkashki[4] were always nimbly scurrying by; a rapturous youth, dreaming of roles and the lights of the stage ran fast; former officers, moustaches shaved, and "former people" gloomily stood around, trying to get lost in this motley crowd. All this crowd of many thousands milled about in a noisy turmoil.

There, too, petty entrepreneurs hurried about and "recruited" productions. As soon as one such entrepreneur succeeded in concluding an agreement with some workers' club or army division to stage a performance for a certain amount of goods, he hurled himself into the crowd. The familiar and little-known actors surrounded him and trade began, with the result that half of the goods promised by the club remained in the pocket of the entrepreneur, and the satisfied actors for a pound of flour or a half pound of sugar traveled by wagon, sleigh or unheated train to play one or two performances, spending the night in the club on tables or chairs. Often the roles were familiar to the actors chosen, and it was necessary to meet only once before the performance at someone's apartment and arrange who should enter from which door, and on which side of the stage this or that piece of dialogue should take place. However, there were not a few cases where the actor chosen had not the

least understanding not only of his own role but of the play in general.

Thus it was that prompters were the commodity most in demand; without them many a production sent out would have been unthinkable. The first question which an actor asked on being selected was: "And who is the prompter?" There were such extraordinary masters of this art that a player could be completely ignorant of the text and only repeat after the prompter, who whispered with a range of different intonations, in this way letting the players know which was to speak these or the other words.

It is clear that one must not speak of the quality of such performances; they were typical "potboilers" having nothing in common with art, productions which the inexperienced new spectator took in his own way, not noticing all the defects, anachronisms and absurdities of which these productions were full. At the same time, the local Party organizations and club leaders tried by every means to spread the anti-artistic but politically "necessary" agitation plays, demanding this kind of play from the entrepreneurs who bought the productions at the "market." The play dealers attempted to prove the revolutionary character of the plays offered, as for example *The Fires of St. John* by Sudermann, where a landowner, Vogelbreiter, "exploits the proletarian Marika"; or Griboyedov's *Woe from Wit* in which Chatski "battles with the feudal landlords"; or Ostrovski's *Poverty's No Crime*, in which is depicted "the struggle of the poor shopman" Mitya with "the capitalist" Gordei Tortsov.

In spite of these attempts, however, the Soviet agitation plays began gradually to penetrate even to the actors' "market." They brought better prices, although the public was demanding a repertoire from the life of the "great world." The first play to have success both with the audience and the Party organizations was *Revolutionary Wedding*. It was set at the time of the great French Revolution, done in the manner of adventure plays. This play suited both the administration of the clubs, since it was revolutionary, and the audience, since it had an interesting plot and the characters were marquises and officers

in scarlet costumes of the end of the eighteenth century. The play stayed in the repertoire of the traveling theaters for a long time. Propaganda plays taken from contemporary life fared worse; only young inexperienced actors agreed to learn the roles and they never had any success.

The appearance of a play by A.N. Tolstoi and Shchegolev, *The Empress' Conspiracy*, was a great event in the life of this group of theaters. This play was presented many times to packed houses in all the theaters and clubs. Everyone wanted to see on the stage the Tsar, the Tsarina, Rasputin, the ministers and well-known members of the court. Although in the majority of the productions it was impossible for the audience not to laugh at the manners of the courtiers, dressed in fantastic livery with trimmings, at the pronunciation of French words and so on, nevertheless, all the tickets to *The Empress' Conspiracy* were grabbed up instantly, and the frivolous boulevard play had great success. The justification for this work of Tolstoi's can be only that many hundreds of hungry actors, thanks to it, managed to live through these difficult years.

After the actors' "market," which carried to the regional workers' clubs doubtful plays on themes by Dostoyevski and Sardou, Ryshkov and Molière, Sumbatov and Schiller, sometimes more permanent theatrical groups were formed, with people on tour from the former Imperial theaters or the Moscow Art Theater at the head, and with a permanent staff of players. The theater department of MONO (Moscow Department of People's Education) registered these collectives and gave permission for performances, but up to this time they had not interfered with the creative or organizational life of these collectives. Unlike the groups formed by chance at the actors' "market," the regional or traveling theaters with a permanent troupe were already looking for something new, both in repertoire and in the form of the productions themselves. The search for the new could be found in the very names of these theaters, as, for example, the theatrical collective "Truth of the Stage,"

which the little-cultivated workers of MONO registered as "Truth Under the Bridge."[5] This collective later obtained permanent space on the Arbat, in a movie theater, and was then called the theater of the Khamsovet (from Khamovnicheskovo Soviet of Workers' Deputies). Well-known professional actors worked as managers and directors in such theaters, the sets were executed by experienced professional artists and, of course, the productions of these theaters had nothing in common with performances from the actors' "market."

In the repertoire of these theaters appeared the plays of Gorki which had not earlier been performed, Hauptmann's *The Weavers*, Kamenski's *Stepan Razin*, the folk play *Tsar Maximilian* and others. These theaters depended on their box office take, but the ruble was falling in value every day and the billions of rubles which the actors received were not enough to support them. Or else, before a month passed and the time came to distribute the salaries, the ruble had had time to fall so sharply that the money which a month before had been worth something could buy almost nothing. So, for example, I remember that on one of these salaries in 1921 all I could buy was a few sweets which I ate on the way home. There were cases when shrewd directors of the theaters announced that tickets to the theater would cost one log of wood or one egg, but since few seats were sold at such a price, such cases were rare.

The creative search for new theatrical form did not go beyond conventional realism, because the general public didn't go to impressionistic performances which they didn't understand. I remember that the Khamsovet Theater showed a formally interesting production of *Tsar Maximilian*. The director was B.I. Vershilov of the Moscow Art Theater's First Studio. The work was treated in the theater along the lines of re-establishing the old original "native action." Costumes, wigs and properties were such as the peasants themselves might have made: the robe of Tsar Maximilian was a simple piece of canvas painted to look like ermine; the wigs were of tow

or cotton; the throne was made from an old armchair, and so on. The actors pronounced the lines in a well-known native jargon, as people on the Volga use the "o"; the humor was crude and plain-spoken. Among actors, the show had great success, but the audience didn't value this production and the show didn't make money. A few years later Eugene Vakhtangov, with approximately the same production plan, presented the work of the MKhAT Third Studio, *Princess Turandot,* which had a great deal more success. This can probably be explained first, because the tale by Gozzi is more a romantic fantasy, and second, because the players which the show represented were not Russian peasants, but stage actors of the Renaissance, a fact which in itself had great theatricality. Still later the MKhAT Second Studio decided to stage by this plan Leskov's *The Flea.* It had great success, because the theater public had grown up during these few years and began to evince an interest in such productions, which it formerly had not understood.

In the Romanesque Theater a striking production of Kamenski's *Steban Razin* was playing. In form it was the ordinary realistic production, but the décor and costumes were extraordinarily bright and colorful. The production was a great success, because the theatergoer saw at the beginning of the play the heroic figure of the revolutionary Stepan Razin and not the conventional robber; and, second and more important, he saw uncommonly vivid scenes of the Volga; the colorful boyars and Persians presented an unusually beautiful picture.

But melodramas and situation comedies enjoyed the greatest success in these theaters. Such shows as *Charley's Aunt, The Fall of Pompeii, The Tricks of Scapin* or, on the other hand, the melodramas *Parisian Beggars, Hawks and Ravens, Two Orphans* – these were always great financial successes and played to overflowing houses.

Theatrical Studios in the First Years After the Revolution

A characteristic feature of these first years after the Revolution was the existence of innumerable studios, each immersed in the search for new forms of theater. Very often the search for form became an end in itself; studio enthusiasts were so carried away by their formal experiments that they completely forgot why some particular form was especially necessary. Out of this attitude came not a few curiosities, of which I shall speak later. The better and more temperate of these studios obtained very interesting results, and grew into serious professional theaters; and the MKhAT, Maly, Korsh, and others came to be considered their older brothers.

The most significant of these studios was Vakhtangov's (in 1920 it was changed to the MKhAT Third Studio). Thanks to its extraordinary director and his teaching talent, and to the correct selection of the studio students (from among whom came, later, such well-known actors as, for example, Yu.A. Zavadski, B.V. Shchukin, and V.A. Orlov) this studio found its own special creative character and very quickly gained the same rank as the best academic theaters. Vakhtangov devoted several years to work with students, implanting in them the bases of the Stanislavski system and developing the creative individuality of each student. If we do not count the "school" productions, of which the most interesting was Chekhov's *The Wedding,* Vakhtangov's studio first appeared on the public scene with Maeterlinck's play *The Miracle of St. Anthony.* This production struck Moscow as an absolute revelation and was called, as a joke, "The Miracle of Eugene Vakhtangov." To the tiniest detail, every gesture, every movement, the make-up, details of costume, every walk-on part extraordinarily harmonized with the basic line of the director and with the idea of the designer. The production appeared a triumph of the director, because everything was subordinated to the general idea of the production. The spectator was so filled with belief in the holiness of St. Anthony

that there were people who swore that they saw brightness coming from the head of the actor Zavadski, who played St. Anthony, and could not be convinced that no shining took place. The impression was so strong that even now it is difficult to forget that reverent attitude toward art with which the theatergoer left this play thirty years ago.

The authority of Vakhtangov in his studio was not less than the authority of Stanislavski in the Art Theater. His every word was caught up by his students with eagerness; his every wish was law; and this is why it was possible to create such a complete and finished production. One must add Vakhtangov's extraordinary talent for noting quickly and precisely any mistake by an actor and his uncommon capacity for work.

The second show of his studio, *Princess Turandot,* was worked on during his illness; he was unable to come even to the dress rehearsal and did not see the production before the public. Its success at the dress rehearsal was extraordinary. Vakhtangov's teacher was at the rehearsal; Stanislavski immediately after the rehearsal went to congratulate the ill Vakhtangov. The success of *Princess Turandot* placed the studio in the first rank among the dramatic theaters in Moscow. Nevertheless, in spite of the great success of this production, that fine aesthetic delight which the spectator received at the performance of *The Miracle of St. Anthony* was not reached in *Princess Turandot;* apparently the sick Vakhtangov did not have enough rehearsals to attain that which he succeeded in catching so brilliantly in the production of *The Miracle of St. Anthony.*

Vakhtangov died on May 29, 1922, and soon after his death the studio received the name "Vakhtangov Theater."

The Theater Semperante, with the leading actress of the Maly Theater, Levshina, and the talented director and actor Bykov, was of no less interest. It, like Vakhtangov's studio, for three years carried on studio laboratory work (1918-1921) and only in 1921 showed its first production to the

public. The novel feature of this theater was the fact that it didn't have a playwright. The authors themselves formed and created the text at rehearsals, according to a subject proposed by the director. The text was not fixed, and one could watch two presentations of one and the same production and find very little the same in the text. In a tiny little place on Granatny Street (the house seated scarcely more than a hundred people) this small collective showed absolute miracles. There was no curtain in the theater, and before the beginning of the play the spectator saw only three white walls and an empty space for the actors. But the lights were switched on and immediately, instead of the white walls, we saw a medieval castle, or a forest, or the interior of a country house. These effects were achieved by means of a system of projectors, the light of which did not fall on the faces of the actors. Bykov himself believed in theosophy, and therefore many productions of this theater were on serious philosophical themes; but there were also simple comedies of situation, played by the talented collective with outstanding mastery. In view of the great interest in the group, and the small seating capacity, it was extraordinarily difficult to get into this theater, and a man who saw a performance of the "theater in Granatny Street" was considered a happy man. Bykov spent a huge amount of painstaking work with his students. Indeed, in order not to slip out of character and to learn how to experience a wide variety of feelings on call, then instantly to make up the text which would be both appropriate and literary, a great amount of training was necessary for the actors, who had to be not merely talented but cultivated. The school at the theater, which Bykov himself ran, educated these actor-improvisators. Unfortunately, fate was not so kind to this interesting theater as, let us say, to Vakhtangov's theater. No small role was played in this by the fact that Vakhtangov was a fellow-traveler at the time, while Bykov was not careful and often spoke out openly against various mea-

sures of the Bolsheviks. The interest in the Theater Semperante on the part of the public and the Soviet government was so great that, in spite of the protests of Bykov and Levshina, the Semperante was moved to a large building, a former movie theater, which was soon made ready for plays. The projected lights had to be replaced by the customary decor, the intimacy of the small place was lost, the reality and accuracy of the dialogue were lost, because the young actors who were living people in the small room immediately became stilted and weak on the big inconvenient stage. Only the talented actor Bykov and the experienced actress Levshina remained interesting. Soon after the move to the big movie theater, they arrested Bykov as having taken an active part in a theosophic organization, which was compelled under the Soviet power to carry on its meetings in secret. According to the report in Moscow at the time, he was shot, although there was no official notification of this. In any case, no one heard anything more of Bykov again, and after his arrest the Semperante completely faded away and soon was closed. So quickly and unfortunately ended one of the very interesting pages of the Russian theater.

The Fourth Studio of the MKhAT is also interesting. The MKhAT artist Burdzhalov managed this studio. This theatrical collective did not seek out any "new forms," but the studio love for the work and the friendly atmosphere made it possible for them to present several interesting productions to theatrical Moscow. The most significant of these was Somerset Maugham's *Land of Promise*, a play by the English playwright on the life of Canadian farmers. Although the subject of the play was very remote from the Soviet theatergoer of the time, it became for a few years one of the favorite productions in Moscow. The Fourth Studio did outstanding work on translated and classic plays. For example, it was the first to show on the Russian stage the little-known play of Griboyedov, *His Own Family*. Unfortunately, however, this studio did not grow as the Vakhtangov Theater did. In the

middle of the twenties, the director Burdzhalov died; the collective existed temporarily as a regional theater and then was reorganized into the Realistic Theater where the director N.P. Okhlopkov carried on his experiments.

The existence for a few years of the Chaliapin Studio is also worth noting. This studio was first organized by Chaliapin for his own children, who were joined by their friends. Because of his personal fame, many well-known actors in Moscow were attracted to his directorial and teaching work, and as a result a very interesting production of Schnitzler's *The Green Cockatoo* was shown. In the mid-twenties Chaliapin and most of his children emigrated and the studio's existence was cut short. Part of the actors of this studio went over to Vakhtangov's studio and part went out into the provinces.

The Pursuit of New Theatrical Forms

Within the first days of the October Revolution the Bolsheviks understood the vast significance of the theater, and art in general, as propaganda. The problems of re-educating the actor and creating a revolutionary dramaturgy and new theatrical forms were posed in almost the first days of the existence of the Soviet power. Just as they did to Soviet society in general, so to the theater, the Bolsheviks employed the system not only of the knout, but also of the honey cake. Not only, as has already been said, did they place the actor in a privileged position in regard to food rations, but at the petition of the management, they freed him from army service, from compulsory work in street cleaning, road repair, etc. Not without interest to the future historian of the theater is this document which I have kept: "Artist of the Maly Theater, Comrade M.N. Yermolova, in view of the fact that she is occupied in performances, is freed from the compulsory sewing of soldiers' shirts." Theatre people, although they presented old "bourgeois" plays, were nevertheless considered to be engaged in the most responsible revolutionary work.

Attempts to find a new repertoire and new theatrical forms were still more encouraged by the government. Theatrical collectives presenting anti-artistic agitation plays on themes of the Party slogans of the moment received theater space, materials and costumes completely free. Such encouragement could not but find people wishing to seek out not merely new forms of theatrical art, but also a new revolutionary repertoire. They began a conscious break with all theatrical traditions simply on the grounds that they existed in the old "bourgeois" theater. The full freedom for creative experiments was without doubt a positive factor in the theatrical politics of the time. Directors and managers of the theaters were not tied down in their creative work. Only because of this freedom could there develop among the numerous and most varied theatrical currents such interesting theaters as Vakhtangov's, the Kamerny, Meierhold's, and the studios of the MKhAT.

A few words about the theatrical collectives, which had declared irreconcilable war against the old prerevolutionary theater. One of them, reorganized in 1920 as the Theater of the Revolution, "Terevsat" (Theater of Revolutionary Satire), made this forthright statement: "The task of the theater is political agitation, for the sake of which we subordinate all our artistic work to the principle of social usefulness." The result of such an approach to art was that the man who supplied the ideological inspiration of this theater, Alpers, himself had to admit in 1927: "The first steps of the Theater of the Revolution were marked by the low artistic level of its work...." We can continue this pronouncement of Alpers and state that the further steps of this theater toward real art were very slow and one can speak seriously of the creative work of the Theater of the Revolution only at the beginning of the thirties.

In the first years after the Revolution, Alpers attests, "The spectator was happy when a worker in a blue blouse chased a potbellied capitalist in traditional frock coat and high hat...." But we must note that a certain part of the audience was usually pleased by the kind of play shown at a fair (the *balagany*).

It then becomes clear that the merit of this "new" theater was not great, for even in the times of "cursed tsarism" the workers' audience was pleased when the traditional Petrushka beat a gypsy with a stick at the fair.

During the first years of its existence, the productions of the Theater of the Revolution had the character of the "living newspapers" or "the blue blouse groups." There were no sets and no costumes. Scripts were written hurriedly on themes of the moment. Only with Meierhold's coming to the theater did it become possible to speak of this collective as a theater.

Meierhold is the most colorful figure of the Soviet theater. He first had a few years of work with Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko in the early years of the Art Theater. Meierhold was the first performer of the role of Treplev in Chekhov's *The Seagull* at the Art Theater. He was next engaged in stormy searches after new forms of theater with Vera Kommissarzhevskaya, and then did a brilliant production of *Masquerade* at the Aleksandrinski Theater. He wholeheartedly accepted the October Revolution, entered the Communist Party, and up to the time of his arrest was a leading figure of the Soviet revolutionary theater.

The now well-known method of biomechanics in the theater was proclaimed by Meierhold at the beginning of the Revolution. It demanded only an external, "graphic" drawing of the role. "The life of the human spirit," of which Stanislavski always spoke, did not interest Meierhold. In contrast to the Art Theater, which always aimed at making the theatergoer forget that he was in a theater, Meierhold sought to make the spectator not forget for an instant that he was in a theater.

Meierhold's rejection of costume was temporary (only *The Magnificent Cuckold* was performed without costumes in "prose-dress"). At first Meierhold tried only to prove that the actor did not need accessory means for an effect on the audience. From this idea came the rejection of make-up, wigs and costumes in this first period, but he very soon returned to the costume and the wig, giving them a conventional, symbolic significance. (Ostrovski's *The Forest,* in Meierhold's treatment,

dressed Milonov, a priest, in a golden wig, Bulanov, a young *gymnasium* student, in a green one, and so on).

Meierhold always declared that he was seeking an approach to the new audience, and he next turned to the diverse methods of the older popular theaters. So, for example, the construction in *The Magnificent Cuckold* was borrowed from the Shakespearean stage. The bridge in the production of *The Forest* was borrowed from the ancient Japanese theater, and so on. At the end of his directorial activity he turned to real objects and used properties from real life. As early as *La Dame aux Camélias,* he had not merely real furniture and dishes, but museum crystal, porcelain, and so on.

A group of revolutionary theaters with Meierhold at the head aimed to break with all the bases of former theatrical traditions. They rejected the whole "cultural heritage." The theater was understood as class struggle. The Proletcult[6] declared: "The theater was born as a court theater; then reborn in the commercial theater, and only the Soviet theater became, finally, a scientific and class theater." Such an approach to theatrical art was devoid of exactly the scientific approach because it consciously omitted such a link as the popular theater. Such theaters as the Meiningen or the Moscow Art Theater were listed under the title of "commercial" theaters, and the agitation theaters of the first years of the Revolution were called "scientific" theaters. Nevertheless, this definition was axiomatic for all theatrical young people of the twenties!

A group of studios and theaters of this orientation considered the box stage of the old theater old-fashioned and unnecessary. Instead of painted scenery, a "construction" was ordered. "Dynamics of action" were demanded of the director and the actor and to help this along, there were elevators on the stage, as well as screens and movable walks. The individualism of the actor of the old theater was rejected and these new devotees sought new forms of "mass action" in their performances. They did not allow the perform-

ers of the old realistic theater to speak at discussions of the future of the Soviet theater, and once when Stanislavski and Yuzhin, who had been hissed by the young people of the Proletcult, walked out of one of these discussions, Yuzhin shouted: "The public will judge us! If the Maly and the Art Theater are empty within ten years, and the audience comes to you, then you are right!" But the older generation didn't have to wait for ten years. Terevsat, the Agitation Brigade of the Proletcult, the Blue Blouse, the Theater Number One of the R.S.F.S.R., and so on, burst like soap bubbles; one revolutionary form replaced another, and these theaters were always half empty in spite of the fact that tickets were distributed in the factories and army divisions as a point of Party discipline.

Finally, one last theatrical group of the period. This included the "futurists," the "expressionists," the "nothingists," and other aesthetic currents. Their studios came into existence for a few months, and closed; but in their place others of the same sort opened. At the head of such studios were directors who were seeking something which had never existed before, in the hope that this "new thing" would be declared the only real revolutionary trend.

On the Arbat the Forreger Studio showed productions consisting of two to three short episodes which could be played in a few minutes. There was such a pile-up of bright colors, "dynamics," free movements, and scampering around the construction units that the playgoer's head whirled and every idea of the production (if there was one) slipped away. I remember an amusing performance in the Fortunatov Studio. An old French vaudeville was playing; the audience went to the show in the hope of having a little laugh, but a disappointment awaited them. The curtains parted and on the stage there were bright colored rags, green cubes, red balls, and lilac triangles. The actors were draped in sheets, like tunics, and on the top of each sat another actor. They didn't speak, but howled, climbing around through the cubes,

balls and triangles. As for anyone's desire to snatch even the smallest hint of the content of the gay vaudeville, that was impossible. At the intermission we begged the director to explain his idea to us. With the look of a learned man talking to the untaught, he explained to us that in every man there are two principles: one good, the other evil. For this reason another actor was sitting on the shoulders of every actor and when the character said something good, the upper actor spoke, but when the lower passions were roused in him, the lower actor spoke. The red balls indicated the difficulty of life's pathway; the lilac triangles, it seems, were pleasure....It is difficult to remember everything, and we left the performance perplexed.

Here is an example of the stories which circulated during this hectic search for "new forms." An unknown man who called himself the actor Fyodorov came to a director, Comrade X, and proposed an absolutely vital innovation in the theater. "There are prompters everywhere," he said, but there was nowhere yet a "relfus." *Relfus,* he explained, was the word for prompter (*souffleur;* in Russian *sufler*), spelled backward; the prompter says the words to the actor, but the *relfus* should prompt the audience concerning the spiritual experiences of the actors and, the main thing, concerning the political situation. The idea pleased Director X; it was impossible to deny its originality. And so, at the next performance there appeared before the audience the new figure of the *relfus.*

Molière's comedy *The Tricks of Scapin* was playing, and behind the actors, in the prompter's box, sat Fyodorov in the role never before seen in the theater — the *relfus.* The show was playing in the winter, and there was nothing but thought to warm the theatergoers, who shrank from the cold, steam coming out of their mouths. But the *relfus,* in a fur coat, sat in the prompter's box and now and then waved his hand. At this signal the actors "froze" in the pose in which

the signal of the *relfus* caught them, and the action was interrupted. "You see," shouted the *relfus,* turning to the audience, "you see how this bourgeois capitalist Geronte grudges money to his son! If he grudges money for his son so, then what can the working class expect from him? No mercy to the bourgeoisie, they are abscesses and ulcers on our body!" Again the signal and the actors continued Molière's dialogue.

Director X was delighted. Here it was, a new revolutionary form! Such an innovation would not go unnoticed. But suddenly, in spite of the cold, the *relfus* took off his fur coat, his jacket, his tie.... The audience, which had already seen a great deal in the new play, at first did not pay any attention to this, thinking that it went with the style of this production, but when the poor *relfus* took off his boots and trousers, they began to laugh. They carried the *relfus* off the stage and, to the great confusion of Director X, it was explained that the actor Fyodorov was in truth Fyodorov, but no actor; rather he was a runaway patient from a hospital for the insane. So sadly ended the experience with the "*relfus.*"

Speaking of this period of Moscow theatrical life, it is impossible not to recall the so-called "mass actions." The question of the change from the individual creativity of the actor in the old theater to "revolutionary" creativity of the masses long troubled the heads of departments of propaganda and agitation. And so at the base of the Sparrow Hills near Moscow, and then in the amusement garden on the banks of the Moskva River, mass presentations were given, in which both audience and actors took part in the production in the open air. Such "mass actions" were on historical and contemporary revolutionary themes, although the plan of the subject was of a single type, and the main changes from show to show were in the costumes. For example, one actor-audience in jackets and boots represented the odious blood-sucking landowners; armed with knouts, they chased another group of spectator-actors, dressed in peasants' overcoats and Russian blouses, depicting the poor peasants doing forced labor. At

the crucial moment there appeared on the river the "decorated boats of Stenka Razin." Singing folk songs, the men in the boats landed on the shore, and the third group of spectator-actors, in the picturesque costumes of robbers of the eighteenth century, threw themselves on the "landowners" and their shopmen. After a small struggle, they freed the enslaved peasants, tied up the landowners, seated the peasants in their boats, and all sailed away together down the river singing.

Another theme: a group dressed in English military jackets jeers at a group of colonial people dressed in fantastic costumes. But workers and sailors arrive in the nick of time, free the "colonial slaves" and bind the exploiting Englishmen. There were in these skirmishes not a few cases of maiming, because the audience-actors were so carried away that they forgot that this was only a theatrical production. It was partly for this reason that such "mass actions" were abolished and later reinstated with forces of real actors who rehearsed beforehand. The audience stood in a crowd on the river bank observing the course of the fight from a distance, without the right to take a direct part in these performances.

The experiment of Professor Serezhnikov with "collective declamation" or "mass reading" was also of some interest. Serezhnikov taught artistic reading and diction in the Bryussov Institute. His students learned to read the poems of Verhaeren and Mayakovski in chorus. As many as forty people read together at one time. A powerful sound was achieved, mainly with male voices, and the works lent themselves to this choral reading. When Serezhnikov's group began giving concerts, they were invariably successful with the worker audience, and many imitators of this kind of declamation came into being. Every imitation was, of course, weaker than the original. With the change in the years of the NEP to a limited budget for splendid theatrical undertakings, this form of artistic reading gradually came to an end because it was impossible to pay forty readers for one number in a concert program.

So the experiments with the substitution of the masses in

place of the individual artistry of the actor turned out a fiasco. Gradually it became evident that without the separate actor, without his personal experiences, the theater, however new and "revolutionary," could not exist. The organs of agitation and propaganda turned all their attention to repertoire, to dramaturgy, to the creation of new Soviet plays, leaving the question of the search for new forms of the theater for the Second Five-Year Plan.

This period of theatrical life in Moscow, embracing about five years, was characterized by attempts to destroy all the old traditions of the "bourgeois" theater and to find a new, revolutionary form. Thanks to the freedom of creation which existed without any doubt in the first years after the Revolution, many theaters and studios were successful in finding their own new creative character. The director-innovators were not, of course, successful in definitively destroying the old theatrical traditions.

Birth of a New Soviet Dramaturgy

The first real creative triumph of the new dramaturgy, which is not mentioned in official Soviet reference books, was a play by a young writer Ryndo-Alekseyev, entitled *Iron Wall,* produced at the Maly Theater in 1923. This was without a doubt one of the few Soviet plays which could pretend to a place in contemporary literature.

The action of the play takes place in an imaginary land, "Weltlandia." A struggle of an underground revolutionary party against the government is going on in the country, and the Soviet embassy encourages the struggle in every possible way. The heir to the throne is attracted by a young revolutionary girl and enters a revolutionary organization under an assumed name. The revolutionaries cast lots to choose the one who is to undertake the murder of the king. The Soviet embassy, knowing that the heir to the throne is an incognito member of the organization, manipulates the lots so that the choice falls on the heir. The

son does not find the strength in himself to kill his father and his girl does it in his place.

Witty dialogue, a plot which gets hold of the audience, vivid characters, and the good literary style of the play immediately attracted the audience. The role of the king, brilliantly played by A.I. Yuzhin, and of the heir to the throne, played by A.A. Ostuzhev, made more vivid the impression on the audience, and for a few years *Iron Wall* remained in the repertoire of the Maly and its branch. Only after several years did the repertoire committee and the Party Central Committee catch their error. The trouble was that the work showed the Soviet representatives financing revolutionary and terroristic parties in a land where they were accredited. The author accurately revealed in this play everything the government in the Kremlin was hiding by every possible means, and one can only be surprised that the play held the stage for a few seasons at the Maly, which was always under the eye of the "Party and the government."

Only the young and talented Ryndo-Alekseyev paid for this production; he was shot at the end of the twenties. The production was taken from the repertoire and categorically prohibited.

The new Soviet dramaturgy had a long and difficult birth. The agitation plays of the first years after the Revolution sometimes seem consciously to mock the political line which they were called upon to defend. The effect of such plays on the public, and of many subsequent plays (like those of Bill'-Belotserkovski, Shimkevich, Smolin, and others), was partly just the opposite from what the agitation department expected. The characters of the positive heroes, the iron commissars, the wise, conscientious workers were monotonously unlifelike and stilted. The negative characters, painted only in black (the bourgeoisie, priests, officers, landowners, and capitalists) had no human feelings; their only basic action was exploitation and mockery of the proletariat. The plot of these plays was so schematized that it was absolutely impossible

to play in them; ordinarily actors limited themselves to "reading" the separate roles.

Nevertheless, one had to admit that there were some inexperienced listeners who took the untalented monologues of the positive hero in all seriousness and applauded when the actors tied up the landowner or killed rebellious peasants. Oftener, however, the audience laughed at the instructive maxims of the hero who looked as if he came out of a calendar print, and secretly followed with great interest the life of the White Guards or the bourgeoisie presented on the stage. The Soviet audience kept this attitude even when the so-called Soviet "classic" drama emerged. Many people went with special pleasure to the second act of *Lyubov Yarovaya*[7] to look at the well-dressed women, the beautiful uniforms of the White officers, to hear the old songs, and to see, however briefly, a piece of the beautiful life which had disappeared into the past.

This attitude of the public was noted at the end of the twenties by the Moscow Theater of Satire in a show called *Moscow from One Point of View.* One of the characters, a young member of a youth group, says, "No, don't drag me to a movie about the Civil War. Give me princes and counts to look at on the stage...."

A significant majority of the first Soviet plays were on historical themes (Lunacharski's *Oliver Cromwell,* Kamenski's *Stepan Razin,* Trenyov's *The Pugachov Rebellion,* Platon's *The Arakcheyev Regime,* Lerner's *Peter III and Catherine II,* and so on). On the one hand, the dramatist lightened his burden by getting away from the more treacherous themes of the day and from the sad spectacle of life in the first years after the Revolution. On the other hand, as has been said, the life of the past, and still more the appearance on the stage of historical characters, attracted the audience and concealed the absence of literary value in the play.

One of the first plays about contemporary life (after Ryndo-Alekseyev's *Iron Wall,* of which we have already spoken) was

Dmitri Smolin's play *Ivan Kozyr and Tatyana Russkikh.* (The première was at the Maly in December 1924.) There was something new in this play. The action took place on a big ocean liner, very successfully represented with a constructivist set; a huge model of a steamship revolved to reveal first the captain's bridge, then the upper deck, the stoke-hole, the inside of a cabin, and so on.

Propaganda was paramount. A former Cossack, Ivan Kozyr, is in enforced emigration. (Apparently, there is nothing new under the sun, and the legend about displaced persons being held by force in Europe was already used as propaganda in 1924 in this play.) Ivan, of course, longs for his native land. He is actively pro-Soviet, and when he stows away on the ocean liner, the Communists and sympathetic stokers and sailors hide him. The former house servant Tatyana, also carried away by force into emigration with the family she served, is on the same boat; her new mistress, a Frenchwoman, is taking her to Hamburg to sell her into a brothel. Tatyana meets Ivan, and at their first meeting they declare that they love each other and dream of returning to the Soviet paradise. However, Tatyana pleases an American millionaire traveling on the same boat and, after vain attempts to get rid of his insistent wooing, Tatyana and Ivan, directing long pathetic monologues to the audience, throw themselves into the ocean and perish.

There is a group of negative representatives of the Western world—the capitalist American, the Frenchwoman and her husband, and others. As their counterparts, the play displays a group of positive characters: Ivan and Tatyana, the simple stokers and sailors—all of them just alike. But the most unrealistic part of the play is the scene in prison, when Ivan teaches a Negro to pronounce correctly in Russian the "favorite" word of the workers—"Lenin." The young Negro in a kind of ecstasy, holding his breath, says it with love and tenderness in his singsong voice, "L-e-n-i-n. . . ."

In spite of such a blatantly stilted and false story, the production had some success with the audience. This success must be largely accounted for by all those scenes which depicted "capitalist corruption" (a cancan by the cafe singer Loretta, mistress of the American capitalist; the evening which Tatyana spends in the American's cabin, with a musical trio playing Tchaikovsky, and so on). The successful set of the ocean liner and the masterly acting also contributed much. V.N. Pashennaya played Tatyana; V.R. Olkhovski, Ivan; E.N. Gogoleva, Loretta; and N.F. Kostromski, the American. The play was not dropped from the repertoire of the Maly for several years, and in a rejuvenated form was moved to an affiliate of the Maly.

With the light touch of this play began the fad for "sea plays" (*Rudder Left!, Storm, The Calm,* and others). A new rubber-stamp hero appeared—the brotherly sailor, later to find his most complete conception in the character of Shvandya in Trenyov's play *Lyubov Yarovaya.* Shvandya was the first successful Soviet image of the wise, sly, illiterate, happy, and witty young fellow who keeps his own counsel, infecting the whole audience with his gay wisecracks. This was a real find for the Soviet theater, without a doubt, and the brotherly sailor appears in a number of plays under different names and in different situations

Shimkevich's *V'yuga* is typical in its subject matter of many Soviet plays of the twenties. The action unfolds in an isolated province; at the instruction of the Party, a grandiose building program is in progress (the construction of a dam and electric power station). The "steel Communist," an engineer who has come from Moscow, falls in love with the secretary of the local Party committee, a "steel Bolshevik girl." Since the workers are seized with enthusiasm for the project, the work goes quickly in spite of uncommon difficulties. However, a former White officer in the guise of a monk and the local kulaks supporting him organize a wrecking party and break through the dam when the end of the work is near. The conscientious

workers successfully save the electric station with the heroic help of the "steel Bolsheviks." The "monk" and the kulaks helping him are unmasked and arrested. Vacillating workers and villagers in the play see all the infamy of the diversionist and the kulaks and become convinced that the Party is absolutely right.

Such plays were undoubtedly written at the special request of the agitation department and prepared the way for the attack on the kulak which took place at the end of the twenties. However, neither *V'yuga* nor the myriad similar plays had any success with the audience; they were plays of the season and could not be held long in the repertoire.

Receipts of the theaters always reacted sharply to the repertoire, and if Ostrovski, Griboyedov, Gogol, Schiller, and Molière almost filled the houses, only historical plays from the new repertoire could hold their own. In answer to this situation special measures were taken: the theaters were required to have contemporary plays in their repertoire; tickets to these plays were given out around business concerns, plants, and factories, at a reduction, but in a "voluntary-compulsory arrangement." This "voluntary-compulsory" system was a widespread phenomenon among the Soviet population and it forced foreign observers to misinterpret many sides of Soviet reality. Such measures as subscription to a government loan, trade-union membership and buying a theater ticket for a contemporary play were indeed voluntary, but on the other hand the local trade-union or Party committee called up for questioning anyone who avoided taking part in such a campaign. First they talked with the offender in a friendly manner and only hinted that his behavior was not leading to anything good. At his repeated refusal to take part in the "voluntary" campaign, they called him to the NKVD, where they began to dig into his past, his social origin, and so on. And suddenly the hero who dared refuse to take part in a "voluntary" campaign sponsored by the Party organization disappeared. I can point to the example of the talented actor A.N. Aleksandrov.

When all the actors of his theater subscribed a month's pay to a regular government loan, he subscribed only ten rubles. He responded to all the admonitions of the trade-union and Party committees with the statement that he himself was in need, that he had a family, that the campaign for the government loan was voluntary, and that he would not subscribe more than ten rubles. All his friends told him not to be stubborn, but Aleksandrov did not want to listen and he held to his position. It ended in their trying him within half a year; it was explained that at the time of World War I he had been a Russian Army officer and had concealed this when he filled out all his questionnaires. The court took into consideration the attestation, handed to them by the trade-union committee of the theater where his refusal to subscribe to the loan was related. He was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. After such a case, which was generally known in theatrical circles, one did not find any more brave fellows who would refuse to take part in "voluntary" campaigns.

Social Work in the Theaters

To the end of the twenties also belongs the enthusiasm for the organization NOT (Scientific Organization of Labor). The representatives of this organization carried on research in factories as to how production could be stepped up. They introduced the "assembly line" system, borrowed from Ford in America. They gave out premiums for inventions in the field of raising the production rate of a single worker. This beginning of "Stakhanovite" work was then called shock work, and the worker who produced more goods than his comrade was called a "shock worker," and received special insignia.

This campaign soon penetrated all Soviet institutions and finally even the theaters. The representative from

NOT appeared in the wings of the theater with a stop watch in his hand and began to note the number of minutes an actor spent on stage. Some interesting figures were obtained: except for two or three of the leading actors who were playing the central roles, all the rest of the actors engaged in this performance spent in all from ten to twenty minutes on stage! What kind of a day's work was ten minutes? Meetings, production conferences, discussions on this theme began. What could be called shock work in the theater? An actor playing a small role could not burst on the stage when he ought not to be there according to the course of the play! After long debates they found a compromise with the representatives of NOT. In the working time of the actor they included study of the epoch represented in a play, reading of literature and research for characterization. Besides this, they introduced the practice of training two or even three players for each role, overloading the time of free directors and actors. Furthermore, they began to organize free "patron" concerts and performances in Red Army units, at factories and plants. Separate directors and actors were sent to workers' clubs to organize independent drama circles. In this way all the free time of a theater worker was taken up, and if one adds to this all the various social duties (meetings of the trade-union committee, Osoaviakhim, and the Society "Friends of Children," as well as benefit performances for mutual aid, cooperative shops, and so on), then the actor engaged in the repertoire literally did not have time left to work on his role.

A group of actors working on a coming production called themselves the "shock brigade"; after rehearsal they had to remain for meetings and consider the plan for socialist competition with some other group in their own theater, then socialist competition with another theater. Such plans

as these, for example, were worked out: to shorten the period of preparatory work and stage an opening some weeks earlier than planned; to develop "the class approach" in the depiction of a character; to insist on knowledge of the role at the first rehearsal; to cut expense in the staging by a certain number of rubles. In reality, all these devices for socialist competition were completely unrealistic and the whole undertaking accomplished nothing but overburdening people with unnecessary work. How could one define to what percent the "shock brigade" working on the production of Gogol's *Inspector General,* say, fulfilled the item of the "class approach to characterization"? It was natural that in such questions the figures were invented, and the actors busied themselves in what was called "throwing dust in people's eyes." In other matters this was done still more simply: a plan was drawn, let us say, an estimate for a production, and, instead of ten thousand, as the true estimate of cost be, they wrote down twenty thousand. Then, "thanks to socialist competition," the "shock group" succeeded in cutting its expenses by one hundred per cent. Wall newspapers began to appear in theaters by a required arrangement; they were all full of socialist competition index figures. The local trade-union committee, the Party committee and the administration (the "triangle") really worried and took quite to heart each index of the separate actors and the production groups. Only toward the middle of the thirties did all this excitement with production indices and socialist competition begin to quiet down. For almost ten years in Moscow theaters the mania for competition and shock work ruled. One could often see a time-honored actor who was getting on in years with the insignia of a shock worker on his chest. More recently these insignia have been replaced by orders.

An incident with the well-known actor P. M. Sadovski shows how important and significant socialist competition

as a creative factor was considered in the theater. Like all the "older generation" of the Maly, Sadovski cast an ironic eye on this campaign and more than once, in funny verses, mocked the "Staff of Shock Brigades of the Maly Theater." Once there appeared a note tacked to the big contest board which hung in the wings. It was a caricature of competition and there were a few words on it written in Sadovski's hand. A disturbance began at the Maly, quickly penetrating the political and social organizations of Moscow. At a trade-union committee meeting it was decided to exclude Sadovski from membership for his anti-Soviet "excursion"; the administration of the theater seriously considered the question of whether they could allow Sadovski to play any more at the Maly. Not only the wall newspapers in the theaters, but the central newspapers as well, noted the "sally of the class enemy" at the Maly. The actors of the Maly, former friends and comrades of Sadovski, were afraid to talk to him, since a conversation could be taken as a bond with a class enemy, and everyone expected the arrest of the beloved Moscow artist. His undefined position continued for more than a month while the Party Central Committee neither sent an announcement that Sadovski could remain in the theater, nor gave him a trial period after which he could again become a member of the union. As was later explained, they called Sadovski to the GPU more than once that month, and the affair might have taken a serious turn for him had there not appeared a note about it in the foreign press. The Party leadership apparently didn't want to make good copy for consumption abroad. From this time on, only the very closest friends of Sadovski had the chance to hear his witty verses satirizing the Soviet regime.

The period of the NEP, the period of the "breather," could not but be reflected in the theater as happily as in the life of the whole country. The basic index for repertoire policy was then box office receipts. The words of the entrepreneur Migayev in Ostrovski's comedy *Talents and Admirers* were in

vogue: "... We, materialists, we judge by the box office; if receipts are good, then there is talent." Therefore, although contemporary shows with their invariable evildoers and steel Bolsheviks did appear on posters (the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Party Central Committee demanded it), the theaters spent little money on them, since they knew beforehand that after a few performances they would have to take them from the repertoire. The classics, translations, and historical plays made good money.

Leaders of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda drew their own conclusions from this and proposed to the theaters that they introduce special interludes on political themes at the beginning of every performance. Before the performances, and sometimes at intermissions, short scenes were played in front of the curtain by actors not in the show. Actually, the sketches were little scenes on the news of the day. The players in these scenes, dressed in blue workers' blouses, recited dialogues in verse about the bloody capitalism of the West, about the colonial policy of imperialists, about the necessity of shock work to build socialism in the Soviet Union, and so on. The actors tried in every possible way to get out of taking part in these scenes, yielding these "roles" with pleasure to the young people; the audience listened to this "enforced selection" tired and bored. I remember one such interlude at the Moscow Art Theater: it was devoted to a new process then emerging in the mining business. Almost the whole troupe of the MKhAT was arranged on the stage, with the old-timers at the head, and in recitative they read miserably written verses. I don't know how the silent audience felt, but coming off the stage after this scene V. I. Kachalov said to his costumer loud enough for everyone to hear: "Quick, give me a drink! Only a horse could swallow such a disgraceful spectacle!"

At the end of the NEP, when the theaters began to receive more subsidies from the government, which then dictated the repertoire, the necessity for "interludes" of this sort also passed.

The First, Second and Third Studios of the Moscow Art Theater

The middle and end of the twenties was the period of the flowering of Moscow theaters. All the most interesting productions of theaters representing the most diverse schools of thought took place in these years. Let us look at a few of the leading theaters of the capital and their creative character at this time.

The opening of the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theater took place long before the Revolution. A group of K. S. Stanislavski's students and his assistants organized an experimental studio workshop, not at first intending to show their work to an audience. However, in 1912 a group of his students succeeded in talking Stanislavski into showing their production of *Loss of Hope* to theatrical Moscow. The success which attended this show determined the further fate of the First Studio, for gradually they began to show their work in regular open performances. Until the departure of the Art Theater abroad, the studio adhered strictly to the basic teaching of Stanislavski, reaching the height of its achievement as a theater of psychological realism when it staged a dramatized version of Dickens' *Cricket on the Hearth*. Present at one of the performances of this dramatization, Lenin expressed his indignation at the ideas which Dickens was propagandizing. One must destroy the petit bourgeois comfort of the family hearth and not admire it, Lenin said, and this comment was enough to cause the repertory committee great trouble in obtaining the right to perform this production, and finally it was enough to ban its performance entirely.

At the departure of the MKhAT abroad in the 1922-1923 season, the First Studio sharply changed to a completely different creative line. Production of Bromley's *The Archangel Michael*, Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (translated as *The Hero*), and Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and *King Lear* settled a new style for the studio.

Stanislavski and the Art Theater, from the day of its founding to its last days, held that theater was the art of reliving experience. "The life of the human soul" was the basis of Stanislavski's system. In its new work, the First Studio took an entirely different stand, seeing theater as the art of presentation. In the old quarrel with Meierhold and Tairov on one side and Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko on the other (about whether the audience should forget that they are in a theater or, on the contrary, not for a moment forget that they are in a theater), the First Studio turned unexpectedly to the side of Meierhold and Tairov. From *Loss of Hope* and *Cricket on the Hearth*, productions of psychological realism, the studio turned to large-scale productions of brilliant theatricality. Instead of the lyric *Cricket*, they took up at once the harsh passions and large scale characters of Shakespeare.

In Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, the director A.D. Diki posed the task of getting away from the national folk color and showing a "production common to all mankind." But, depriving the production of its narrowly national Irish coloring, the theater obtained the opposite result and deprived Synge's comedy of its lyricism and humor. In the next production, Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, the theater bordered on the grotesque in a turn to buffoonery.

Having entered on this new creative path, the First Studio made a contribution to the search for new revolutionary forms. This new creative character of the First Studio was met with delight by the theatrical policy leaders. Only *King Lear* was received with hostility, but the fault was not the theater's but Shakespeare's, said the Soviet critics.

With the return from abroad of the Art Theater and Stanislavski, the creative divergence of the theater from the studio was marked, and in 1924 the studio decisively left the guardianship of its parent theater and by a special government decree was renamed the Second Moscow Art Theater. At the head of this new theater was the talented actor and director M.A. Chekhov, nephew of Anton Chekhov. (Michael

Chekhov later became one of those who did not return to Russia.) Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was the first production of the new theater, with Chekhov in the role of Hamlet. Just as against *King Lear,* so against *Hamlet,* Soviet criticism was sharp.

This production of *Hamlet* at the Second Moscow Art Theater was presented as a return to the native theater "of the square." Deserting their legacy of a theater of "experience," the actors of the Second MKhAT brilliantly, trenchantly, and with strong rhythm presented "stage masks." The production had some success, thanks to the new treatment of Hamlet by Chekhov, who played him as a man struggling for the truth. Hamlet's soliloquies, in this staging of the play, disappeared, but Chekhov held the spectator with the noble masculinity of his characterization. Also interesting in this production were the King as played by A.I. Cheban[8] and the Queen, played by V.V. Solovyova,[9] set forth by methods of vivid theatricality; these actors portrayed the roles with such mastery that many actors from other theaters came several times to see their performance. As could be expected, Soviet criticism received the production of *Hamlet* very coldly. Here is one of the characteristic responses: "The social significance of *Hamlet* in our times rises no higher than a certain limit, remaining profoundly foreign to the new world outlook."

The second production of the 1924-1925 season brought extraordinary and deserved success to this theater. Zamyatin's *The Flea,* an adaptation of a story by Leskov, was staged as a brilliant piece of buffoonery in the style of the stage of the local fair (*balagany*), but with the slant of a political pamphlet. The form of the show was carried out with outstanding success by the talented director and actor A.D. Diki. In the bright major tone of the show Diki succeeded in revealing delicate humor and an interesting directorial idea. The rich characters of Platov, the generals and

others still more strongly emphasized the realistic representation of the Tula blacksmith Levsha (played by the actor L.A. Volkov), who brought to the audience an almost Karatayev-like peace and humility.

The success of *The Flea* with the Moscow audience was huge. What the director B.I. Vershilov had not succeeded in doing in his own time with the production of *Tsar Maximilian,* the Second MKhAT had succeeded in doing brilliantly. As a theatrical achievement, the production of *The Flea* can only be compared with Vakhtangov's production of *Princess Turandot.* However, the officials of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda viciously attacked this production of the Second MKhAT as well, accusing the theater of "aestheticism," "eclecticism," and other such sins. "A new Soviet, revolutionary repertoire is needed! The Second Moscow Art Theater has gone away from revolutionary days and gone back to Leskov and Dickens!" shouted the Soviet press. In spite of this criticism, there was not a theatrical worker in Moscow at the time who could deny the great success of the theater which had grown in a short time from the little studio into one of the leading theaters in the country.

The fate of the Second Studio of the MKhAT turned out a little differently. Organized by Stanislavski's students a few years before the Revolution, it had time to show a few school productions, of which *Youth* and *The Green Ring* showed that the school had a future. The Second Studio stayed in a small building, not dreaming of trying to become a big, self-supporting theater, in spite of the example of the First Studio. They did not depart from those principles and creative aims which their teacher Stanislavski had given them. At the return of the MKhAT from its trip abroad, Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko saw that it was impossible to continue further performances of the MKhAT in Moscow; too many actors had become political émigrés,

taking advantage of the fact that the MKhAT found itself abroad. Among the actors who did not return were well-known artists who had occupied strongholds in the MKhAT repertoire: M.N. Germanova, M. Zhdanova, Uspenskaya, O. V. Baklanova, A. Tamirov, Bulgakov, N.F. Kolin, Sharov, and N.O. Massalitinov. Kachalov and M.M. Tarkhanov remained with the troupe, returning a little later. The only way out for Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko was to take into the MKhAT troupe all the young people from the Second Studio, which was organically united with the old staff. After a very short time many young actors of the Second Studio had taken leading positions in the Art Theater: for example, N.P. Batalov, O.N. Androvskaya, K.N. Yelanskaya, I.Ya. Sudakov, M.I. Prudkin, N.P. Khmelev, and E.S. Teleshova.

The MKhAT took over to its own stage in its entirety one of the productions of the Second Studio, *Yelizaveta Petrovna,* by Smolin. The play was a historical chronicle. It begins at the time of the death of Peter I and ends with Catherine's coming to Russia. In the play there are numerous minor episodic historical characters, and only the character of Elizabeth goes through the whole play. With crude jokes at the German predominance around the Russian throne of that time, and with caricatures of Anna Ivanovna, Peter II, and many other historical characters, Smolin at the same time gives human and interesting characterizations of Catherine I, Elizabeth, Menshikov, and Razumovski. The brilliant playing of V.S. Sokolova as Elizabeth, E.S. Teleshova as Catherine I, V.Ya. Stanitsyn as Razumovski, and M.N. Kedrov as Menshikov made the production so interesting that it was taken into the repertoire of the MKhAT almost without a change and continued to be played on the MKhAT stage for more than ten years.

The leader and founder of the Third Studio of the Moscow Art Theater, Eugene Vakhtangov, was one of the

MKhAT actors who did not go on the trip abroad. He accepted whole-heartedly the October Revolution and entered actively into the search for new theatrical forms. Taking part in the work of the First Studio in 1921, he staged Strindberg's *Eric XIV* there with Michael Chekhov in the title role. This was one of the first productions revealing a sharp departure from the tradition of Stanislavski toward the theater of artifice. Here is what Vakhtangov wrote at the time about this production: "This is an experiment of the studio in its search for theatrical forms. Up until now the studio, true to Stanislavski's teaching, has doggedly aimed at obtaining mastery of inner experience; now the studio is entering a period of search for new forms." And further: "This is the first experiment. Experiment, to which our own times have directed the studio. The Revolution demands that we take the petite bourgeoisie off the stage. The Revolution demands of us significance and vividness." And in Vakhtangov's staging, *Eric XIV* was not the historical king of Sweden, but the "generalization of kingly power, connected with a personal oppressive fate."

The Third Studio grew from a small circle of student youth who had decided to devote themselves to the kind of theater with which Vakhtangov was concerned. In his creative aims Vakhtangov tried to connect everything which he had learned from Stanislavski with the new problems which Meierhold put before the theater. Here is how one of the students closest to him, B. Zakhava, defined the "Vakhtangov approach to art";

> Stanislavski and Meierhold! Vakhtangov's theater is a synthesis of the basic concepts of theatrical art which these names symbolize. Stanislavski and Meierhold ---content and form, truth of feeling and theatricality--- these Vakhtangov wanted to unite in his theater. He intended that this theater should express the organic unity of the "eternal" basis of the art with theatrical form, directed by a sense of the contemporary.[10]

Such tasks set by Vakhtangov for the collective of the Third Studio demanded new forms and new methods of playing. During the life of Vakhtangov, the Third Studio found some sort of synthesis between Stanislavski's teaching and the innovations of Meierhold. In *The Miracle of St. Anthony* and in *Princess Turandot,* Vakhtangov contrived to give a dazzling theatrical presentation, full of the living feelings and passions of man.

However, Vakhtangov did not long have the chance to manage the studio he had created. Within half a year after the official opening of the theater he died from cancer of the stomach. After his death his students and assistants were not able to reconcile the diametrically opposite teachings. The productions of the Third Studio after the death of Vakhtangov slid first to psychological theater, which he so thoroughly rejected (in Bulgakov's *Zoe's Apartment,* the vaudeville *Lev Gurych Sinichkin,* and others), and then to a manifestly Meierholdian sense of spectacle (in Gogol's *Wedding,* Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and others). In 1923 and in 1928 the Third Studio (which was renamed in 1924 the Vakhtangov Government Studio, and in 1926 the Vakhtangov Government Theater) went on trips abroad (to Berlin, Paris, Stockholm) where the productions created by Vakhtangov himself, *The Miracle of St. Anthony* and *Princess Turandot,* had great success.

The greatest interest which a production of the Vakhtangov Theater excited in the twenties was Bulgakov's *Zoe's Apartment.* Wittily and caustically satirizing life in Soviet society at the time of the NEP, Bulgakov's play (like all his plays) accurately pictured the ugliness of the Bolshevik system and its influence on the Russian intelligentsia of the time. The show was played by the Vakhtangovites in methods close to the psychological theater and was received with delight by the audience; however, the Party organizations did not long stand for this mockery of

Soviet life. The production was soon taken from the repertoire and the repertory committee forbade its performance.

The Meierhold Theater

The extraordinarily talented director and theatrical innovator who had proclaimed a "theatrical October," Vsevolod Meierhold, was backed in his experiments by the government and Party organizations in every way possible. Every new production of his theater caused a great hum in Moscow theatrical society. Not only theater people but even the ordinary spectator were caught up in quarrels about Meierhold's methods. From the middle of the twenties to the closing of the Meierhold Theater, his was in the first rank of the leading theaters of the capital.

One of the first productions of this theater which challenged the academic theaters and proclaimed the Revolution in the theater was Faiko's *The Teacher Bubus*, staged in January 1925. In searching for a new revolutionary production, Meierhold chose Faiko's muddled and complicated play. The action of the play takes place in a European capital, in the home of a great capitalist who has lured a young and innocent girl to him with the intention of refining her, with the help of a teacher, and making her his mistress. Instead of the distinguished Paris professor invited, the common schoolteacher Bubus is palmed off on the capitalist. Finding himself by accident in the capitalist's home, Bubus tries by means of "peaceful propaganda" to correct and enlighten the representatives of the big bourgeoisie. The dramatist and the director, developing the theme of "class vigilance," sharply satirize his attempts. In the character of Bubus the author shows the "liberal conciliator" and proposes that the audience be on guard and merciless against this kind of traitor to the Revolution. Before Bubus is thrown

out, he succeeds in suggesting to the girl the idea of flight, and she runs away, throwing her jewels in the capitalist's face. She then joins the rebelling proletariat and takes part in the civil war which has flared up. Detachments of revolutionary workers arrest Bubus who exclaims as the curtain falls, "I am not understood! I am not understood by anyone!"

In the staging of this play, Meierhold discovered a new acting skill which he called "fore-play." It was in fact only a method well developed and well known in the old theater, and one which even enters into Stanislavski's system. Meierhold himself admitted that he first saw this method in the acting of A.P. Lenski, the famous Maly actor of the last century. It consists of this: before delivering his speech, the actor lets the audience understand his position and the struggle of his spiritual experiences by mimicry and gesture. Meierhold repeated the use of this method in many of his productions, and it led him in *The Inspector General,* for example, to pantomime. In the system he saw an opportunity for educating by means of the "actor-tribune" who depicted for the audience the "class core" of the spoken dialogue.

The second new method which Meierhold also used throughout his work was musical accompaniment. The whole performance of *The Teacher Bubus* was played with uninterrupted musical accompaniment. The music was from works by Chopin and Liszt, with the aim, according to the pronouncement of Meierhold himself, of "making an association with Chopin's tragedy in love and Liszt's troubles in love."

The sets of the show were conventional and unusually simple: for the whole performance bamboo sticks with copper rings were set up, and they jingled at the entrance of each character on the stage. In the first act there was only a fountain; in the following acts everything was done with lighting effects.

The greatest success (in the opinion of Meierhold's

followers and the Party leadership) and the one which called forth a great furor in Moscow was Meierhold's staging of Gogol's *The Inspector General.* In this production Meierhold did indeed turn upside down all the old ideas about this comedy. The representatives of the left wing and the Department of Agitation and Propaganda exulted: finally, an amazingly vivid new revolutionary form of production had been found! Could it have entered anyone's head at that time of culminating success in Meierhold's experimentation that the "greatest innovator and revolutionary, the man who had proclaimed the theatrical October," and who had just dared to turn upside down Gogol's classical comedy to suit himself, the all-powerful Meierhold—could it have entered anyone's head that he, of all people, within a few years would perish in the cellars of the NKVD as an "enemy of the people"?

Meierhold broke the text of *The Inspector General* into fifteen episodes, combining it with the text of other comedies by Gogol and even with *Dead Souls* because he considered Khlestakov a relative of Chichikov and Ikharev (the latter in *The Gamblers*). Costumes, magnificent uniforms, stylish furniture, and the manners of officials clearly indicated that the action took place not in a provincial town but rather in a big city, in short, in St. Petersburg. And Meierhold intended to achieve this, arguing that Gogol could not satirize the St. Petersburg *beau monde* but, because of the censorship in Nicholas' time, had to place the action in the provinces.

In his report about the Meierhold Theater's production of *The Inspector General* (in December 1926), A.L. Slonimski said:

> Meierhold has undertaken a revision of Gogol. He has broken the old molds and forced one to think about whether the "real" Gogol is the one presented to the audience of the academic theaters. This revision has evoked indignation, and the acting brotherhood so popu-

lous in Moscow hissed louder than anyone. And the man-in-the-street, the primordial enemy of all revisions and especially artistic ones, took up their protest.

However one reacted to Meierhold's experiments and his daring revision of classic plays, one had to admit that there was much of great interest in the production of *The Inspector General,* though it was too specialized to be understood by the general public. In *The Inspector General,* Meierhold gathered together all that he had found in his previous experiments—in *The Magnificent Cuckold, The Teacher Bubus, The Forest,* and *The Mandate*—and he made a summary of his searches after new forms.

As in his previous productions, Meierhold made wide use of pantomime in *The Inspector General.* So, for example, when Anna Andreyevna caught her daughter in the arms of Khlestakov and scolded her, the captain (a mute character, introduced by the director) went up to her, stopped, put his hands in his pockets and seemingly sympathized with the mother. He looked at the daughter reproachfully, but then Anna Andreyevna said, "You have other examples: your mother before you. Here is the example you should follow!" At this the captain clasped his head and went off upstage, expressing the despair which had taken hold of him at the thought of the mother's virtue. Khlestakov's whole monologue was done as a dance. He was drunk, tumbled off his feet, pulled himself together and again whirled around in a waltz, hanging on to his lady. Finally, he reeled with a crash onto the couch where he fell asleep. At the moment when Khlestakov understood that the townspeople were taking him for an important personage, he changed into an army uniform, depicting in pantomime all the importance of his person.

The production was saturated with music; for example, Khlestakov danced to the music of a song by Glinka, "In my blood burns the fire of desire." Even separate remarks came out as if they were words set to music. The officials

in a crowd at the door repeated: "He took a 300 ruble loan from me," "and 300 from me" and so on, in different voices, with different timbre, as in a fugue.

Lighting in this production also emphasized the fortunes of the characters; for example, in the last scene (the episode called "Triumph, So Triumph") the projectors were burning and the whole scene was blazing with light, but as soon as the letter was read and it came out that Khlestakov was not the inspector, the lights went out and the finale was played in candlelight. The replacement of the actors with dolls in the last extraordinary mute scene is interesting. This is the scene of which Gogol wrote that "everything had to represent a stone group—the curtain must not be dropped for two to three minutes."

At the same time, there were places in this production which descended to pure clowning. An example is the scene in which the loans are collected, when all at once myriad doors open and the officials stick their hands through with packets of banknotes. The blending of different styles and the extraordinary number of directorial approaches employed by Meierhold made it difficult for the spectators to take everything in; involuntarily they paid more attention to the fantasy and ideas of the director than to the actors.

Nevertheless, *The Inspector General* in Meierhold's production not only brought about passionate arguments among various schools of theatrical thought but it undoubtedly also inspired the Soviet director of the twenties with a fresh stream of inspiration and the desire to dare.

The Moscow Maly Theater

After contributing a historical fantasy to the Soviet theater in Glebov's *Zagmuk*, the Maly Theater in December 1926 showed a production which for many years became "standard" as an example of Soviet dramaturgy, a dramatization of Trenyov's *Lyubov Yarovaya*. At that time it was

very unclear to directors and managers of theaters what one should show in the contemporary theater and especially what would have success and what would not. These two plays can serve as the best examples of this state of affairs. *Zagmuk* and *Lyubov Yarovaya* were played at the Maly in the same year.

While they were working on Glebov's play, the management of the theater was sure that it would be at last the production which would define the subsequent path of the Soviet theater. The subject of the play was an uprising of slaves in Assyria against the priests, merchants and other counterrevolutionaries. The rebellion was openly communistic, but it was not organized by the Chekists and all the enemies of the new order were not destroyed. This error brought about the failure of the rebellion. Justification of the Red terror under the guise of the allegorical "Assyrian material" seemed to the management of the Maly a very important and interesting piece of work.

The staging was entrusted to the young theatrical innovator, N.O. Volkonski. Against a background of gold and marble structures, in historically accurate Assyrian costumes, not sparing any expense for this production, the best Russian actors of the time tried to transport the audience to the time of ancient history. And, in spite of the exceptional wealth of the Assyrian ruler, his wives and courtiers; in spite of the interludes inserted between acts, in which ballet dancers of the Bol'shoi Theater performed; in spite of the mass scenes of the revolt, the slave market and the battle, in which several hundred co-workers and students took part—this rich production had no success with the public nor with the representatives of the government. When directly after the premiere of *Zagmuk*, the theater began rehearsals of Trenyov's play, *Lyubov Yarovaya*, all the workers in the theater were convinced it would be a second failure. It is interesting to note that the only man who always predicted correctly the success or failure of a new actor or a new play was the old usher who had worked at the Maly for sixty years and remembered very clearly the first productions of

Ostrovski's plays. Apparently his great experience gave him the ability always to foretell accurately the success or failure of a play but, in spite of this, no one listened to his prediction of the success of *Lyubov Yarovaya*. They were all too thoroughly convinced of the opposite. Great was the amazement of the whole collective on the day after the opening when it appeared that with this production the Maly had won the first victory in the struggle for a new Soviet repertoire. Stalin himself (or, as they called him in the theaters, the "Boss") came to see this show more than ten times and was delighted at the correctness of the theater's line.

The action of the play takes place at the climax of the Civil War in a small seaport city in the south of Russia. Through a kaleidoscope of events and a series of episodes and characters, the basic action of the play is carried on by the schoolteacher Lyubov Yarovaya. She becomes identified with the Red cause when she hears that her husband has been killed. He had been a Red but, having seen Germany as a prisoner, he has changed sides and is alive and working for the Whites. He catches her spying for the Reds, but lets her go free. Later, however, she catches him and gives him up to be shot.

In the final scene, Lyubov follows Mikhail (her husband) with her eyes as he goes to die, and she says to the commissar, "Only now in this moment am I really and forevermore your comrade." On these words the curtain falls. This last scene was subjected to correction by Stalin himself. The actress V.N. Pashennaya, playing Lyubov Yarovaya, in order to justify even a little the false position of a heroine letting her beloved husband be shot for the sake of the Revolution, paused and then threw herself with a hysterical cry after Mikhail, fell on the stair and said the last words through stifled sobs. Stalin expressed his dissatisfaction with this "sentimental" scene, and in later performances the actress who played the role spoke the concluding words firmly, decisively, like a conscientious revolutionary woman.

Lyubov Yarovaya abounded in vivid comic episodes, which

accounted in large part for the success of this show with the average spectator. The character of Shvandya, the goodhearted sailor, contributed a great deal to this aspect of the play. The plan of the whole production was designed for comedy, and all the characters except Lyubov Yarovaya and her husband won the laughter of the audience. The swift episodes and scene changes did not allow attention to wander. A revolving stage made possible quick scene changes, so that even while one change was taking place, some small scene was going on. In the characterizations of Yelisatov, Lieutenant Malinin, Kutov, the priest Zakatov, and other representatives of the White movement, the directors of the Maly (I.S. Platon and the Communist L.M. Prozorovski) above all sought the negative and laughable sides. They suggested that the whole White movement consisted of speculators, crafty dealers, black marketeers, or simply stupid people. The talented actors engaged in this production produced brilliant comic, even grotesque, characterizations and were the involuntary models for the players of these roles in other theaters of the Soviet Union. The scene of the sailor Shvandya's costume change, in which he suddenly becomes "Lieutenant-Prince Kurnosovski," took place with uninterrupted laughter from the audience. And it was impossible not to laugh at the clumsy, illiterate happy-go-lucky fellow Shvandya when he tried to represent himself as a White officer. The exceptional stage charm of S.L. Kuznetsov, who played Shvandya, called forth the sympathy of every audience, and the spectator forgave the absence of truth on the stage, since of course Shvandya's tricks were impossible in real life terms.

The representatives of the petite bourgeoisie in the White movement were played in the same kind of humorous style, bordering on the grotesque. There was the guard Chir, for example, who handed over the sailor to be shot; when Shvandya was led up for punishment, Chir followed behind and sang to him as he set off. There was the former servant Dunka, dreaming of fleeing with the Whites to Paris; the girl Makhora, flirting with the clerk; and other episodic characters who from their

first appearance on the stage called forth laughter, despite their lack of truth to life. They treated as a burlesque even such a touching scene as the one in which an old woman looks at her maimed son and asks: "And where are your eyes?" There was friendly laughter in the audience at this.

In 1935 Stalin suggested that the Art Theater stage *Lyubov Yarovaya* as a Soviet classic which should be played in all the theaters of the Soviet Union. In spite of Stanislavski's resistance, the desire of the "Boss" was law and the play was included in the repertoire. The staging was entrusted to the director I.Ya. Sudakov. Very soon all the falsity and tendentiousness in Trenyov's drawing of the characters was revealed. For nearly half a year Sudakov worked with the actors, but when, by MKhAT tradition, the dress rehearsal was shown to the heads of the theater, the actors could not play anything sincere and true to life. Stanislavski unfortunately saw the reason for this not in the author's text, but in the director.

Nemirovich-Danchenko himself undertook to rework the production and, as a result, in December 1936 the Art Theater showed its première of *Lyubov Yarovaya*. The play turned out boring, weak and unconvincing. General opinion in Moscow ascribed this failure of the theater to Stanislavski's system and the Art Theater's school of thought, as if the system aimed at staging everything in a dry, trivial and long-drawn-out manner. As a matter of fact, this production clearly proved that although the false characterizations could seem lifelike and funny when played in a comic-grotesque style of acting, a serious approach with creative analysis revealed them at once as stilted and unlifelike. Thus it was clearly only the comic style of the production which saved the collective of the Maly and which for many seasons gave *Lyubov Yarovaya* first place as a classic of Soviet playwriting.

After this production, the Maly was firmly on its feet and could fight with the "left" tendencies of the revolutionary Soviet theater.

The Moscow Art Theater (MKhAT)

In the first years after the MKhAT's return from abroad, as already mentioned, it was necessary to train that large group of young actors from the Second Studio which was poured into the theater to replace the actors who had stayed abroad. It is true this work was lightened by the fact that the Second Studio for the whole time of Stanislavski's absence had adhered to the heritage of its teacher and the system of the MKhAT. However, it took several seasons for an organic fusion with the older group. (It is enough to point out that on its return from abroad the Art Theater took into its troupe eighty-seven new actors and actresses.) Stanislavski boldly included all the new artists in the repertoire. The first production was Trenyov's play *The Time of Pugachov* (September 19, 1925). Moskvin played the central role of Pugachov, and the new young actors played the rest of the numerous roles in this show. As in *Lyubov Yarovaya,* this play of Trenyov's was not distinguished for the truth of its characterizations. It was a pale production, ill-received by the audience, and played in all only forty times.

The next première of the theater was Ostrovski's comedy *A Warm Heart.* This was the first success of the theater since the Revolution. The production is still in the MKhAT repertoire, proof enough of its success. Stanislavski himself staged it and as in *The Time of Pugachov,* young people took many of the roles and got attention. The show produced several talented actors: V.Ya. Stanitsyn (Vasya), N.P. Khmelev (Silan), K.N. Yelanskaya (Parasha), and others.

Stanislavski here applied the method of "artistic maximalism" for the first time, that is, realism, scenic truth, and at the same time, theatrical brilliance—all to the maximal limit. Characterizations of the cast were sharpened almost to the point of the grotesque—a method which we have seen, for example, in *Lyubov Yarovaya* at the Maly. Here, however, there was this difference: under the comic treatment lay real

human feelings and sincere experiences. It was easier to attain this, of course, with Ostrovski's classic material than with the tendentious text by Trenyov.

The striking set by the artist Krymov was unusual for the always modest style of the Art Theater and emphasized the comic treatment of the show. Ostrovski's comedy *A Warm Heart* has always been difficult to produce because three comedians are in it at once, and not every theater has three in its troupe. At the MKhAT this problem was easily settled and in one show were the brilliant performances of V.F. Gribunin (as Kuroslepov), M.M. Tarkhanov (as Gradoboev) and I.M. Moskvin (as Khlynov). This festive, gay and interesting show destroyed the idea that Ostrovski's plays were not fit for the Art Theater.

The next openings of the theater in 1926—Kugel's *Nicholas I and the Decembrists* and Pagnol and Nivoix's *Merchants of Glory*—presented nothing of significance except that almost all the performers in these shows except Kachalov, who played the role of Nicholas I, were young people who were getting practical experience in MKhAT openings.

Like all the other Moscow theaters, the MKhAT was looking for a new playwright. Artistic discussions between the theater and the playwright Trenyov seemed unsuccessful; the rest of the playwriting of the time was so weak that it was impossible to think of starting work on such agitation plays. Stanislavski naturally turned to contemporary literature and the possibility of dramatization. A novel by M.A. Bulgakov, *White Guard,* attracted his attention; it related sincerely and realistically the tragedy of an officer's family against a background of events of the Civil War in Kiev. There were no lovable sailors, who had been repeated to the point of boredom; there were no steel commissars and conscientious workers. The cast were former Russian officers, but not those officers who were painted only in dark colors to gratify the Communist Party, but real living people with all their virtues and shortcomings. The excellent literary Russian

of the novel enhanced its value. Bulgakov was already well known to Moscow readers for his daring story "Fatal Eggs." He satirized Lenin in it allegorically, in the figure of a scientist who brought out of some rare eggs the improbable monsters and reptiles of Communism. Fortunately the allegory was not understood by the censor and the story saw the light of day. When, at Stanislavski's request, they found the author of *White Guard,* he was living near the city in a little room, and like many a former officer, was very hard up. With Stanislavski he undertook a dramatization of his novel, a process which involved a great many changes, so that the play *Days of the Turbins* must be considered not a dramatization of the novel *White Guard* but a completely independent work.

The play traces the fortunes of the White Turbin family through the fall of Kiev first to Petlyura and, at the end of the play, to the Reds. Their activities reflect their reactions to the changes. Aleksei is killed; Yelena's husband runs away. The rest live through occupation by Petlyura's forces, and in the final scene all the friends of the Turbins are gathered around the Christmas tree. A far-distant cannonade is heard; the Bolsheviks approach. "Prologue to a new life," says Nikolka. "For some a prologue, but for some an epilogue." Studzinski ends the play with these words and shoots himself. (Captain Studzinski's suicide was later prohibited by the repertory committee, and the singing of "God Save the Tsar" was allowed only in drunken discordant voices.)

At first the roles in this play were assigned to the "old" members of the troupe (Knipper-Chekhova, Kachalov, Leonidov, and others), but very soon Stanislavski found that the new repertoire demanded new, young forces. *Days of the Turbins* was completely recast, and on opening night theatrical Moscow applauded the young actors with delight. They became after this performance the favorites of Moscow. The success of the author Bulgakov and of the young generation of actors was exceptional. It is not an exaggeration to say that not a single play had such success in the Soviet Union. Feeling ran so high in the

audience on opening night that it required the intervention of the militia. Some shouted: "Nonsense! Counterrevolutionaries!" and others, "Thanks for the truth!" The women were hysterical; there were tears in the eyes of the men. Stanislavski, working according to his "system" with the young actors, achieved this: that a production in simple realistic tones, without a "construction" nor directorial inventions affected the contemporary Soviet audience more strongly than either *Bubus* or even *Lyubov Yarovaya.* It seemed that the audience needed neither biomechanics, nor a new "revolutionary" form of theater, nor a "class approach" nor mass action, but the simplest, most sincere truth, and this excited the audience more than all the rest! To this method of simplicity in art and scenic truth, Stanislavski and the old generation of the Art Theater devoted their whole creative lives.

Representatives of the art of presentation, Tairov, Meierhold and others, held that the actor ought never really to feel, but only show the outward form of his emotion to the audience. Stanislavski held, rather, that the feeling of an actor must always be sincere and truthful, and only then will the outward form be sincere and truthful The quarrel between these two factions is of long standing. In Russia this quarrel was especially lively between Mochalov and Karatygin at the beginning of the last century. The difference is only that until Stanislavski the representatives of the art of reliving experience sought real experience in inspiration, and his system proved that it could be evoked as a result of work on oneself and should not depend on inspiration.

Stanislavski always stressed that his system was not his "invention" but the result of an analysis of the creativity of the great masters of the Russian and European theater, verified by experience in the work of the older generation of the Moscow Art Theater. There is reason to believe that he wrote extensively on his system and that the material has not been allowed to be published. The Soviet censor, in spite of strong ties with the MKhAT and the respect which

Stalin himself showed toward Stanislavski, did not grant him permission for publication of the system since questions of the "spiritual experience of man" and of the "soul" in general went contrary to materialism, the only doctrine admitted by the government. Several volumes of Stanislavski's work, on which he continued writing up to the time of his death, were left with his sister, A.S. Sokolovaya, who took part in his work. After her death they went to Stanislavski's private secretary, R.K. Tamantsevaya. One must hope that they will be preserved until the time when they can be published. A compromise which Stanislavski's friends proposed, to replace the word "soul" throughout with the words "the higher nervous activity of man," suited neither the censor nor Stanislavski.

Therefore directors and actors in the Soviet Union have learned the system from Stanislavski's students and then from each other. This is why so many different ways of understanding the separate elements of the system have turned up. The memoirs *My Life in Art* and the little book *An Actor Prepares*, written as if it were a diary of a student in a theatrical school, cannot of course give any but a remote idea of the basic volumes of Stanislavski's work. As in many other questions, the Stalinist government acted quite illogically in this: prohibiting publication of the system by which the MKhAT works, it closes theaters of other schools of thought and shapes all the other theaters of the Soviet Union to the MKhAT pattern. When Meierhold brought up this contradiction openly at a director's meeting, they arrested and destroyed him, in spite of his undoubted merit in the Soviet theater.

"Socialist realism" was declared the official style for theatrical work at the beginning of the thirties. No one for a long time could give a comprehensible answer to the question of what was to be understood by the term, but finally the following formulation was made: "Naturalism is what really happened in life .... Formalism is what

never happened and could never happen in life .... Realism is that which could happen in life," and finally, "Socialist realism is that which not only could happen in life but that which must without fail be useful in socialist construction." As a result of this formulation, a treatment of, let us say, some character from an Ostrovski play as a satire of the merchant or courtier would be acknowledged to be in the style of "socialist realism." If any kind, human impulse could be noted in the characterization of the capitalist, such a treatment could be in the realistic style, but not "socialistic." In this way Soviet theaters, Soviet directors and actors have continually found themselves under the threat of accusation that they are departing from socialist realism, and such an accusation brings in its trail not only the removal of productions from the repertoire, or transfer of roles to other actors, but even complete organizational purges.

The fate of I.Ya. Sudakov, the director and artistic manager of the Maly theater, demonstrates such a case. In 1944 Sudakov staged A.N. Tolstoi's drama *Ivan the Terrible*. The morning after the opening he read in *Pravda* a reprimand of the production and the specific accusation that socialist realism was absent in the treatment of the figure of Ivan the Terrible. On reading the article, Sudakov felt ill; a severe heart attack suddenly struck this uncommonly strong and healthy man. A few months later Sudakov was removed from his duty as artistic manager of the Maly and sent to the Urals. Only recently he again turned up in Moscow as one of the assistant directors of the MKhAT. It is clear from this why the management, directors and actors of the Soviet theater try to dress every production in the style of "socialist realism." The slightest error can lead not only to a deserving and respected director or actor's failing to receive an order, citation or reward, but—much more terrible—he may be introduced to prison, exile or the labor

camp. There are well known cases where, within a few years, "re-educated" directors and actors return to their work from exile or labor camp and have a completely different attitude toward art, devoting all their strength, all their time and talent to praise of the Soviet line and glorification of the "great teacher." The director and actor A.D. Diki, the MKhAT actor M. Nazvanov, director Yu.A. Zavadski, the best master of ceremonies in the U.S.S.R. A.G. Alekseyev, and many others received re-education in prisons and exile; and they now appear active builders of the Soviet socialist theater, rewarded with orders and honorary citations. The fate of other actors was not so fortunate; for example, the talented and fascinating actress of Nemirovich-Danchenko's theater, Galemba, was sent to Siberia, in spite of the fact that her arrest occasioned great difficulties in the repertoire of the theater. For more than half a year Nemirovich-Danchenko petitioned for her release and when at last, by Stalin's special order, her case was reviewed, her full innocence was revealed. She was returned from Siberia to continue her work in the theater, but she could not do so since she had frozen both feet in the long marches on foot in winter, in light slippers through severe frosts. And how many actors have not had powerful patrons and so have disappeared into the distant labor camps of the North! This is why it is not surprising that in spite of the fact that theater workers in large numbers are anti-Soviet, they all devote their ideas, their talents only to "socialist construction," that is, "socialist realism."

In the tenth year of Soviet power (November 1927) N.N. Sukhanov's historical chronicle *The Year 1917* was performed at the Maly. Interest in this production was extraordinary. It is enough to say that the characters were Nicholas II, Protopopov, Prince L'vov, Rodzyanko, Tsereteli, Kerenski, Brusilov, Denikin, Lenin, and so forth and so on. There was no dramatic structure in the play; it was separate scenes tied to-

gether only by the historical events of 1917. The author tried objectively enough to show the development of the February and October Revolutions. A member of the Party was director of the production (a fact rare in Soviet conditions at that time), and there was as well the secret police officer L.M. Prozorovski, who added, by all possible and impossible means, agitational tendentiousness to the treatment of the historical characters and the separate scenes. As a result, the extraordinary interest which was awakened in Moscow society by this production quickly burned out. Instead of living people, the political figures of the Revolution, there appeared uninteresting caricatures of Nicholas II as a drunk, Kerenski as a neurotic imitating Napoleon, and so on. In the last scene, before a crowd of workers and sailors packed on the stage, Lenin himself appeared on a balcony lighted by varicolored projectors, and amid the noise of the ecstatic crowd, he extended his arm and the sun rose over the land. A new cycle of Soviet dramaturgy began with this performance, a series of toadying productions depicting the deified leaders of the proletarian revolution (*The Man with a Gun, Chimes of the Kremlin,* and others).

There is a story about the actor who took the role of Lenin in *The Year 1917* which is not without interest. At the distribution of roles, external resemblance was taken into account first. There were actors in the Maly who were more or less suitable for all the roles except the role of Lenin, and since the character of Lenin was appearing on the stage for the first time, they had to be doubly careful. Among the workers of the Urals was found a certain Korniyenko, a man amazingly like the "leader of the world proletariat." No special make-up was needed for this player, the more so since he himself took the similarity so seriously that he always wore a necktie like Lenin's and boots with the toes curled up; he cut his beard and hair according to a photograph of Lenin. The amazed glances which passers-by turned on him and the ovations which audiences gave him at every appearance on the stage apparently destroyed his mind. On a cold winter night on the anniver-

sary of Lenin's death he appeared at Lenin's tomb on Red Square in a jacket and without a cap. He turned to the guard, asking why they were standing there when he was alive. The story goes that the watchmen threw away their weapons and took flight. Whether this part of the story is true I don't know, but on that day the poor double of Lenin, the worker Korniyenko, was dispatched to a psychiatric clinic. His role in *The Year 1917* from that time on was taken by the actor V.N. Berns, who had to use a lot of make-up and who had no such success. And as a matter of fact the production itself did not last long after this; first, because the receipts fell, and second, because the role of another leader was not shown at all, a leader who by this time had already become a dictator. This mistake was an expensive one for the author Sukhanov, a former Menshevik, since it was one of the reasons he was shot at the beginning of the thirties, as was officially announced.

At the end of the twenties the Moscow Art Theater staged a play declared by the repertory committee and the government to be a historic performance. This was V. Ivanov's play *Armored Train 14-69*. The theme of the play was the Civil War, a theme already beginning to grow old, but nevertheless, the success of this production was indubitable. From the political point of view the right line was taken, since not only was the struggle of the workers against the Whites depicted (in the scene with Plekhanov at the railroad depot), but also the activities of the partisan-peasants with Vershinin at the head. As in *Lyubov Yarovaya*, the Whites were presented as drunks, sadists and fools. From the artistic side, the mass scenes were done with talent (especially the scene on the bell tower, which was presented successfully even in concert readings), and there were individual successful pieces of acting, as for example, Vershinin by V.I. Kachalov, the Chinese by M.N. Kedrov, and Vaska Okorok by N.P. Batalov. The production stayed a long time in the repertoire, although one cannot compare its success with that of *Lyubov Yarovaya* at the Maly, and still less with

the well known *Days of the Turbins* at the MKhAT.

Productions of Moscow Theaters in the Thirties

For the MKhAT 1930 was a productive year. However, out of all the openings of that year, only *Resurrection,* based on Tolstoi's novel, stayed in the repertoire. The new Soviet audience continued its resistance to the contemporary tendentious repertoire and bought tickets to the classics. Besides this, in *Resurrection,* the Art Theater, unlike other theaters, continued its traditional line of psychological realism, quickly overcoming the illness of "leftism," with which all Moscow theaters were infected at this time. Kachalov's superlative reading of Tolstoi's text gave special charm to this production. In a simple dark blue jacket, without make-up, with a pencil in his hand, and without any theatricality, Kachalov walked among the first rows of the orchestra and in the wonderful velvet Kachalov voice related the story of Katyusha and Nekhlyudov. As if illustrating the story, separate scenes from the novel passed before the audience. The theater tried a new and daring method to show Nekhlyudov tortured by doubts in his study. Kachalov related everything that Nekhlyudov was thinking; on the stage the artist V.L. Yershov, who played Nekhlyudov, showed outwardly his inner experience and thoughts.

At the same period, the Maly Theater definitely lost its way among its "left" experiments. Deserting all traditions the theater was accustomed to, a new version of *Woe from Wit* opened, staged by the young director–innovator N.O. Volkonski. At great expense the scene designer Isaak Rabinovich gave the show a constructivist treatment, very fashionable at the time, and the set was made out of real redwood and expensive brass. The playing area was sloped to allow the audience to see the actors better, but on the other hand it made the actor move unnaturally. A huge gold

frame with a powdered wig and a scepter in it hung on the stage in the third act; this was supposed to represent a portrait of the Emperor Paul I. One of the basic situations in Griboyedov's comedy is that Chatski, in love with Sophia, is convinced that she does not love him. Volkonski put before Fadeyeva, the actress playing Sophia, the task of showing that, on the contrary, Sophia loves Chatski, but that he has been carried away in settling social problems and will not pay any attention to her. The author had his revenge on the director for wanting to turn the plot of his play upside down, for the show turned out farfetched, unconvincing and incomprehensible. For example, wishing to emphasize the importance of the figure of Khlestova, the director had a bell sound before her exit, and all the guests went down on their knees. In the gossip scene, all the lights were turned off, and the whole crowd of guests, with flashlights in their hands, whispered: "He's gone out of his mind...." Also, the guests were unusual, humpbacked, deformed, bald—and all dressed alike. This production did not last long and was adjudged by critics and the repertory committee "formalistic." In current Soviet publications and references to the Maly, the production of *Woe from Wit* in nowhere mentioned, as if it never had happened. But it existed for two seasons and has unquestionable interest as one of the unsuccessful experiments in imitation of Meierhold.

A large group of the Maly actors, especially the older people, took the violation of the traditions of the old theater tragically. Such an approach to the classics, however, was in some strange manner considered as conforming to the general line of the Communist Party. To object to the experiments and alteration of classic drama meant at that time to object to the general line of the Party. And a man who openly defended the realistic traditions of the old theater was considered backward and, worse, counterrevolutionary. This is why the talented old actors and direc-

tors, indignant at the "revolutionary experiments" on the Russian classics, could nowhere speak about it openly. It was just the same with many Russian people who were indignant at the practices of the Soviet power, and could not even conceive of openly speaking against it.

The performance of Afinogenov's *Fear*, which opened at the Art Theater in December 1931, was interesting from the political point of view. The hero of the play, Professor Borodin, head of a research institute, proves in his work that the basic stimulus in the life of the majority of the Soviet people is fear. "The peasant fears enforced collectivization, the intelligentsia accusation of wrecking, the Party member the eternal purges, and so on," Borodin says in his report. The conclusions which the professor drew from his observations of the Soviet people were amazing in their daring, and it remains a puzzle how the Soviet censor happened to pass the play. The Communist Clara answers Professor Borodin, but very unconvincingly, crudely, citing the fact that in Tsarist times the government had hung her son. It became clear to all the actors even at rehearsal that the play in that form could not be passed by the repertory committee; the representatives of the Party nucleus of the Art Theater turned directly to Stanislavski with the request, almost a demand, that he review and re-do the production. Stanislavski himself began to rehearse with the actors but, since he could not approach dramatic material tendentiously, always seeking rather the truth, the production became even more anti-Soviet. The scene in which the professor, wonderfully played by L.M. Leonidov, reads his report made a stupendous impression on the repertory committee. The members of the committee declared that the play could not be presented in that form. They took out Monakhova, who was playing Clara, and mobilized for this role the best actresses in the Art Theater—Sokolovskaya and Knipper-Chekhova. They cut a few of the Professor's

shocking lines, strengthened the scene in the last act where Borodin suddenly understands that he is "mistaken" and confesses his fault to the NKVD examining magistrate. In this form, finally, they passed the production. The authorities nevertheless doubtless recalled this play to Afinogenov when he was arrested and exiled at the end of the thirties.

In 1932 a competition for the best play was announced by the Soviet government. More than twelve hundred dramatic compositions were entered and the commission composed of members of the Party Central Committee and the directors of the leading theaters decided that they could not give first prize to any. They gave second prize by the decision of the Council of People's Commissars on February 17, 1933, to V. Kirshon for his play *Wonderful Alloy*. The government turned it over for production to the Art Theater as the best play. Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko were both on leave that season because of illness, and V.G. Sakhnovski who was replacing them could not refuse; rehearsals therefore began. When Nemirovich-Danchenko returned from abroad, these rehearsals were already going on, and there was nothing left for him to do but continue work on it.

The plot of the play was very simple. A group of young Komsomol members gets together in a research institute to find an invention needed by Soviet aviation. They rather quickly invent a "wonderful alloy" which will allow Soviet planes to fly faster and higher than the planes from capitalist countries. When the planes have flown higher, the authorities thank the youth collective and award them orders. But Kirshon presented this political propaganda theme in the form of mid-nineteenth century vaudeville. For example, in the finale, when the authorities come to congratulate the young collective, the leader of the collective, Gosha, tears his pants and his friend takes them off to get them mended. The poor Komsomol member

hides behind a table without his pants on, declaring his love for a Komsomol girl, and he meets the delegation without his trousers. Such a situation cannot but call forth furious laughter in the audience, but whether it is worth being shown on the stage of the Art Theater is very doubtful! Here are a few selections characteristic of Kirshon's humor:

Kostya: I ask you, how do I swim?
Petya: You swim? - Like the Bol'shoi Theater.

Petya: How did you sleep?
Girl: Lying down.

Petya: Did you see her? The blonde?
Gosha: Not yet.
Petya: What do you mean, not yet? - Will she soon be a blonde?

Petya: Physics is closer to me, that is, physical nearness—I love hugging the girls.

These are a few of the pearls, taken at random from this prize comedy which played at the Art Theater for two seasons. True, in recent reference books, this play is not mentioned in the MKhAT repertoire, but it was evidently expunged because Kirshon himself was arrested and, according to rumors, shot. However, in 1933, Kirshon was in favor and conducted himself at rehearsals of *Wonderful Alloy* with amazing self-assurance. At one rehearsal, a young actor mixed up the author's text, and suddenly from the auditorium Kirshon stopped the rehearsal, which no author had ever done. He shouted rudely: "Why is it that when the actors play Ostrovski or Chekhov they don't mix up the lines, but they get all balled up in mine?" The young actor, undisturbed, answered this outcry: "Probably because in Ostrovski all the words are right, and in Kirshon, there isn't a word which isn't false!" Kirshon left the auditorium, slamming the door behind him, and went straight to Nemirovich. After a while, Nemirovich

called the young actor to his office and gave him a dressing down for his "disrespect to the playwright." After his speech Nemirovich was silent for a moment and then slyly narrowed his eyes and said: "But in general, youngster, you were not embarrassed and you answered correctly—only don't say anything about it to anyone. Now—get out!" With this attitude toward the play on the part of the whole theater, it was natural that it turned out to be uninteresting, not at all like a MKhAT production, although the audience laughed at the vaudeville scenes and jokes.

These same years were productive ones at Meierhold's theater. In 1933, Meierhold presented Sukhovo-Kobylin's *Krechinski's Wedding.* Cast in the good light mold of Scribean theater, with a swift plot about a criminal, written in a rich language, the comedy presents no great problems in production as do the other two plays of this author's trilogy. If Krechinski does have some features of Khlestakov and Chichikov, he is nevertheless smaller, simpler and more superficial. Meierhold decided to give to the play the social idea lacking in it and with this idea link it to the whole trilogy. This was the aim of Meierhold's production and the reason for its failure. Wishing to give the play a significant social meaning, a deep idea, Meierhold transformed this comedy into a cumbersome, heavy show in slow tempo. On the one hand, Meierhold declared: "The scenic interpretation of the play in my production receives a new coloration, far from falling in with the usual farcical performance." But, on the other hand, Rasplyuev in this production dances and sings couplets of the old-time vaudeville, and at one point slides down the banisters; a stream of playing cards flies out of his pocket; he jumps on the bed. That is, he uses exactly the farcical methods which Meierhold disclaims. However, in spite of this, there was no laughter in the audience at this production, and out of

a gay comedy, in the words of the Party reviewer D.Tal'nikov, came a "leaden mystery." As always in Meierhold's productions, the show was saturated with music and Krechinski's monologues were delivered as recitative, which the talented actor Yu.M. Yur'yev performed splendidly. Apparently understanding this, Meierhold introduced dialogue from other sources; Krechinski declaimed the poems of Derzhavin, and Nel'kin those of Venevitinov. And he introduced a group of new characters around Krechinski—with full first and last names. There were Mr. Krap and Voschinin and Stervinski and many others. The introduction of these characters into the play, as well as the wife of Bek and her daughter, a Frenchwoman, two Tatars,the barber Joseph, and so on—twenty-two characters in all who did not occur to the author—turned out to be a heavy weight, making it very difficult for the audience to take in the play. On the one hand adding to Krechinski's task by having him read Derzhavin's poems, Meierhold on the other hand robbed the actor of his best lines, projecting Krechinski's shocking remarks on a huge transparent screen. Meierhold wrote in the press: "Krechinski is called upon to reveal the terrible lying of bourgeois reality...." and again, "The production exposes capitalistic society where the ministers appear as a troupe of marionettes..." In fact, however, no such exposé took place, and a long-drawn-out and boring show resulted instead. It was an undoubted creative failure of the Meierhold Theater, in spite of all the noise which admirers of the "left" tendency in art made about it in Moscow.

With the next production in his theater, Meierhold made a sharp turn toward realism and even naturalism. This was Dumas' *La Dame aux Camélias.* Ordinarily this play was put on especially for some actress, a heroine of the theater. It was not without reason that both Sarah Bernhardt and Eleanora Duse had played *La Dame*

aux Camélias. But Meierhold tried to find another justification for the production, although it was clear to everyone in Moscow that he was staging the play for his wife Zinaida Raĭkh. In an article he wrote not long before the opening, Meierhold cited an episode from the memoirs of Lyadov about Lenin's presence at a production of *La Dame aux Camélias* in Geneva, and of Lenin's reaction: "Ilyich, deep in his box, ashamedly wiped his eyes." Meierhold comments on this sentence thus: "It is not difficult to guess what called forth Lenin's tears in this drama; he saw in it the artistic confirmation of the slavish position of woman under capitalism." We do not know why Lenin cried at this play; whether it was a dramatic situation in the play, or Bernhardt's acting, or really the slavish position of woman under capitalism. One thing was clear, however—that this last reason was necessary to Meierhold in order to justify under Soviet conditions the necessity for this production.

Further on in his article Meierhold promised an "exposé of the capitalist system, directed at the enslavement of women." However, his departure from Meierhold methods in this production set his erstwhile admirers in arms against him. In reviews of this show in the official Soviet press, we read: "In this production Meierhold didn't touch the author's dialogue and so seemed under Dumas' thumb." And, "In this 'grandmotherly' production we did not recognize at all the socialistic temperament of Meierhold...."

Apart from the realistic approach to character and the return to the sources of his creative ability in work with the actors, that is, to the methods of the early Art Theater, Meierhold approached naturalism in the mounting of the play. *Things* played an important part: authentic period furniture, real vases, candelabra, crystal, and original period costumes transformed the stage into a museum. A real parrot in a cage detracted attention from the actor. But in this departure from his former "revolutionary"

principles, Meierhold the innovator took his revenge on Meierhold the director of *La Dame aux Camélias.* Having become accustomed in the course of many productions to outward form, to the representation of a directorial idea, and not to their personal experiences, the actors of Meierhold's theater could not at once master the new problems of realistic characterization. And as a result, in a real actor's piece, played in the manner of the actor of the old theater, the main thing was missing—there was no actor!

Nevertheless in this much-disputed production Meierhold made a contribution to the history of the theater, first with the application of the method of "diagonal composition." The construction of diagonal settings in this production was not simply a trick but an interesting experiment not devoid of practical sense. It was emphasized by a strip of carpet which went from wings right downstage to wings left upstage. The actor gained by this because in his basic scenes he could play without difficulty, if not full face toward the audience, at least three-quarters. Besides, the construction of the diagonal *mise en scene* enlarged the playing area, which was especially important for a short scene or in those scenes which had to represent a big hall, a square or a park. Therefore, although the production of *La Dame aux Camélias* was unsuccessful for the theater, Meierhold succeeded in finding a new method which could not go unnoticed in the history of the theater.

On November 28, 1932, the MKhAT finally showed a dramatization of Gogol's *Dead Souls.* The dramatization was done for the MKhAT by the playwright Bulgakov and was rehearsed for two years. The director Sakhnovski began work on this production, but after Stanislavski looked at it, Sakhnovski's work was called unsatisfactory and Stanislavski himself undertook to rework and complete the show.

A talented director of great theatrical culture and erudition, Sakhnovski had approached *Dead Souls* as an unrealistic work and looked for some "devilry" in it. So, for example, he planned the scene at the governor's ball in this way. The drunken Nozdrev announces that Chichikov is trading in dead souls, and Chichikov, frightened out of his wits, runs away unnoticed. The guests start to look for him under the divan, on the chandelier, in the full conviction that this Chichikov is a devil. Suddenly Korobochka appears among the guests and in a voice from beyond the grave asks each: "And who knows but what there are dead souls walking here?" At this the stage grows dark. Such a method, perhaps interesting if applied to some other material, was at the root of the error in the production of *Dead Souls*, and Stanislavski took over reworking it. During this process another year passed. In spite of exceptionally talented playing of the Gogolian types by the veteran members of the MKhAT (I.M. Moskvin played Nozdrev, L.M. Leonidov Plyushkin, V.F. Gribunin the Governor, M.M. Tarkhanov Sobakevich, M.P. Lilina Korobochka) and in spite of successful performances by actors of the "second generation of the MKhAT" (M.N. Kedrov as Manilov and V.O. Toporkov as Chichikov), the production was regarded as tedious, with too many "MKhAT pauses." According to the unanimous opinion of reviewers and audience, it was not a play but a brilliant illustration of a novel. However, the production has held the stage for more than twenty years and, as the "old generation" gives way, the "third" generation has taken over and plays it now (B.I. Livanov as Nozdrev, A.N. Gribov as Sobakevich and so on).

Stanislavski approached this work not as a *regisseur*-producer, but as *régisseur*-teacher. As a result the actors grew during this production, but in comparison with earlier work, Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird* for example, the show itself was unoriginal, dull and boring.

Such a failure befell the MKhAT with its next production as well, Ostrovski's *Talents and Admirers*. Work on this play, in the sense of time spent, was a record—three years. It was interesting too because it was the last MKhAT production in which Stanislavski took a direct part. Apparently feeling that the time was coming when he should hand over to the new generation the Art Theater, his own beloved child, to which he had given his whole life, Stanislavski spent all rehearsal time on practical and theoretical lessons instead of trying to make a good show of it. Theatrical pedagogy interested him and not the show. The rehearsals of *Talents and Admirers*, which took place in Stanislavski's apartment and sometimes in the garden of his private home in Leont'yev Street, were exceptionally interesting. Of the old members of the theater only V.I. Kachalov was playing. The rest of the players were members of the "second generation" (A.K. Tarasova, A.P. Zuyeva, V.L. Yershov, V.A. Verbitski, M.I. Prudkin, M.A. Shul'ga, V.A. Orlov, O.N. Androvskaya), and there was a group of the young people. The rehearsals from the very first were turned into lessons, often having no direct relation to the play. After each such lesson the actors hurried home to write down whatever new they had heard from Stanislavski who felt that he must hurry to hand down his knowledge and observations to the young generation. Since the Soviet censor has not passed the mass of Stanislavski's work and his famous "system" has not so far been published, these rehearsals of *Talents and Admirers* at Stanislavski's home formed the background for the majority of theatrical teachers in the Soviet Union. And the lessons were more useful for the young MKhAT actors than several years of theater experience and made it possible for them to apply Stanislavski's methods in all their other productions.

In the same year, on the stage of an affiliate of the MKhAT there was shown a production composed of some

stories from Gorki's *In the World.* Korsh's theater had been dissolved and the actors had been dispersed to various theaters in Moscow. The site was given over to the MKhAT as an affiliate, replacing the small site of the former Second Studio, the so-called "Small Stage." Sukhotin, the man who staged the production, took separate scenes from Gorki's works: *My Universities, Konovalov, Lullaby* [*Strasti-Mordasti*], *Twenty-Six Men and a Girl,* and *The Master* and made of them one show, connecting all the scenes with the character of the young Gorki who goes through the whole play. A series of genre pictures of life in old Russia was the result rather than a play.

Gorki was interested in the production and often came to rehearsals, making observations which had nothing to do with theater technique. So, for example, he stopped the rehearsal of the scene in Semyonov's bakery and began to tell about how they used to make fifty buns from a pound of flour, while on the stage they were making them so big that they couldn't make twenty from a pound. After this observation special rehearsals were arranged at which the actors learned how to mold smaller buns. The critics received this production with delight, especially the performance of M.M. Tarkhanov as the master Semyonov: "He is a symbol of old Russia, a symbol of the master; he is the real kulak-exploiter," reviewers wrote, choked with emotion. Actually, against the background of the young people who took part in this production, M.M. Tarkhanov did indeed create a very interesting characterization, but the Soviet reviewers themselves wanted to see the "symbol of old Russia" in Semyonov.

The critics compared these two productions, *Talents and Admirers* on the main stage and *In the World* at the affiliate, and the comparison was not to Ostrovski's advantage. "The Art Theater's problem was to show Ostrovski's classic work from the contemporary class point

of view, that is, to master this classic critically," wrote one of the major Party critics, O. Litovski. Actually, Stanislavski did not pose the question of a critical approach to Ostrovski's play and did not try to reveal the classical work from the class point of view. The task, as I have said, was more significant: the preparation of the new generation in the Art Theater, and Stanislavski fulfilled this task with honor.

Apart from this, the production was not badly received from the point of view of real art. Among the many Party theater reviewers in Moscow was one especially violent and short-witted man who analyzed questions of Stalinism much better than questions of art, a certain Tal'nikov. And this is what Stanislavski loved to say to an actor: "Here your dialogue is real art, but here it is Tal'nikov."

None of the actors or *regisseurs* took petty official Party criticism seriously, but brushed it aside like a troublesome fly. It was only unpleasant if a big article appeared in *Pravda*—this meant that high Party circles had decided to take something seriously and soon the expected organizational purge took place.

The next opening at the MKhAT affiliate was a dramatization by N.A. Venkstern from Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*. Venkstern was without doubt a talented playwright of great culture who turned to the dramatization of the classics after a series of his plays had been prohibited; Bulgakov, the author of *Days of the Turbins*, did the same. The dramatization from *Pickwick Papers* was done, really, in a masterly fashion. The basic plot line was taken from the great mass of Dickens material, and the Dickens characters kept all their original excellence. As in its time *Days of the Turbins* had raised a group of the second generation actors from the ranks to take the place of the old members, so the opening of *Pickwick Club* (as the dramatization was called) brought into prominence a new, younger group, or as they were called the "third generation." V.V. Gubkov (Pickwick), P.V.

Massalski (the actor), S.K. Blinnikov (Job), A.M. Komissarov (Winkle), E.N. Mores (Fat Boy), O.N. Labzina (Mary), N.F. Titushin (Wardle)—these are basically the young replacements who with this production earned their places in the repertoire of the Art Theater. This production was interesting also for its décor. The scene designer P. Williams, working for the MKhAT for the first time, designed a very colorful, vivid and original set. The numerous scene changes of the play were effected by dropping painted panels, and there were even mute characters on these. The designer was especially successful in the prison scene where the people locked up for their debts sat and stood, milling about on the stairway. In the scene of military maneuvers, which the Pickwickians watched, a huge curtain with a battle scene drawn on it was dropped and, at a shot from a cannon, was raised swiftly in the darkness. The Pickwickians themselves meanwhile sat in a carriage, harnessed to a pair of property horses which waved their tails, moved their feet and rode across the stage after the maneuvers were over.

V.Ya. Stanitsyn, the director of this production, a member of the second generation, worked under Stanislavski's direct supervision, and Stanislavski observed a few rehearsals. This was Stanitsyn's first production at the MKhAT and he joined the group of MKhAT directors after this show. The show was special too because, for the first time, the writer and playwright Bulgakov, appointed by Stalin, took part in it as a laboratory-director and player of an episodic role as a judge. Appointed as laboratory-director, Bulgakov himself begged the theater to give him the chance to play a small part since he wanted to get closer to the whole theatrical workshop. His first appearance in the small role of the judge could be called successful, and, as he himself said, this experience gave him much as a dramatist. *Pickwick Club* also played with great success on tour in Leningrad and Kiev, and so solidly was it done that it is still in the repertoire more than eighteen years later.

In the same season, Ostrovski's *Storm* was done on the main stage—a show which cannot be called successful. The performance of the role of Catherine by K.N. Yelanskaya, and even more of her understudy V.N. Popova, was dull and unconvincing, and without a Catherine there is no *Storm*. Good performances by O.N. Androvskaya (Varvara), B.N. Livanov (Kudryash) and especially B.G. Dobronravov (Tikhon) did not save the situation. The Party critics attacked the production for its religious-mystic side, and Nemirovich was not able to lift this production to the level of MKhAT productions.

The End of the Thirties

At the end of the thirties one failure followed another at the MKhAT. The fault lay wholly in the decline of Soviet dramaturgy. Korneichuk's *Platon Krechet* was no more than an ordinary Soviet agitation play. No matter how the collective with its talented actors tried to make up for the dramatic material, they were not successful. Although the official press, the repertory committee and high government circles tried in every way to show the "rise" of the Soviet theater, it was precisely because eminent Party members meddled more and more in art, thinking of the theater only as one of the aspects of Bolshevik propaganda, that the Soviet theater at the end of the thirties steadily declined in quality.

A small breather at the MKhAT came with the production of Gorki's play *Enemies* in October 1935 and the dramatization of Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina* in April 1937.

In *Enemies*, in spite of the tendentiousness of the "class conflict" between the Bardins and Skrobatovs, representatives of the bourgeoisie on the one hand and a group of conscientious workers on the other, there is nevertheless undoubted truth in separate characterizations—something for an artist to get hold of. V. I. Kachalov, O.L. Knipper-Chekhova and M. M. Tarkhanov and the "second generation"

as well—V. A. Orlov, M. I. Prudkin, A. K. Tarasova, and others—could convey lifelike and convincing characterizations of the Russian intelligentsia at the beginning of this century. The characterization of the "conscientious workers" was more difficult. Gorki obviously idealized them and they became types in his hands, not living people. Therefore, in spite of Gorki's talent as a dramatist, the positive characters were dull, insincere and boring, while the negative characters were much more rounded, interesting and vivid. It was not for nothing that the Soviet actors did not like to play the positive characters in contemporary plays. The endless labor which the director and actors spent in work on a positive character gave them no satisfaction for the simplest of reasons: in a farfetched bookish character it is impossible to find lifelike truth.

The production of *Anna Karenina* had great success with the Soviet public. In spite of the deletion of characters like Levin and Kitty (because the Soviet censor feared to show a landowner like Levin, feared to touch the sore question of private land ownership), and although A. K. Tarasova, the actress playing the main role, was too modern a woman and could not convey what Tolstoi had so accurately observed, nevertheless the success of this production was indubitable. The reason again lies hidden in the yearning of the Soviet theatergoer to get away from the present and, even for a few hours, be carried off to the world of the past or the world of fantasy. The décor was successful; a multitude of scenes changed quick as lightning, thanks to big velvet screens. The production was interesting, too, in that the costumes and properties were real. There had been a sale at Tsarskoye Selo of things belonging to the Tsar's family, and a MKhAT representative bought real uniforms, insignia, vases, candelabra, boots, dresses, and so on. Many actors played in this play in uniforms and dresses which had personally belonged to the dead Tsar and Tsarina.

By MKhAT tradition, the mass scenes, noises and separate details of the show were wonderfully done. The scene at the races merited interest: along the stage representatives of the highest Petersburg society were sitting or standing. They watched the races, which were supposed to be at one side of the hall. For a long time Nemirovich could not get the actors to follow all together the same moving point on the racecourse. Then small electric lights, not noticeable from the audience, were placed along boxes in the dress circle; one after another the lights went on, enabling the whole crowd on stage to follow the same point on the racecourse. This effect evoked considerable surprise in the audience, and most important, the audience believed more easily that the actors saw Vronski's unfortunate accident.

Interesting also was the method of the last scene, involving Anna's suicide. Out of the depths of the very dark stage moved a model of a locomotive with two headlights which, as the train neared the station platform, moved wider apart by a special mechanism, at the same time getting brighter. This device gave the audience the full impression of the train's moving towards them; the very realistic noise of the locomotive and Anna's last cry created strong sensations.

Of the actors' performances, N. P. Khmelev's Karenin deserves special mention. The characterization of the dry bureaucrat–aristocrat was restrained, precise and sharp. At the same time there were moments when one felt sorry for this man, because the characterization was many-sided: "In playing a mean character, search out where he is kind," said Stanislavski.

In general, one must admit that the dramatizations of such popular classical works as Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*, or Dostoyevski's *The Idiot* and *Crime and Punishment*, or Gogol's *Dead Souls* were almost always unsuccessful. One reason for this is that the theatergoer has over the years worked out his own personal image of Anna

Karenina, Natasha, Chichikov, or Raskolnikov, and for the actor to convince the theatergoer that his, the actor's, characterization is more just than the imagined and accustomed image of the theatergoer himself is a task which can hardly be fulfilled. This partly explains the lack of success of the MKhAT's *Anna Karenina* with the Russian emigration in Paris in 1937. Of course, political reasons also played a role, as, for example, the accusation that the Art Theater's actors did not know how to wear costumes, that the costumes themselves were not right and not stylish. The charges were absurd first because the costumes were real and not theatrical and second because a former master of ceremonies at the Court of Prince Volkonski taught the artists the manners, bows and curtsies. It must be pointed out that at the so-called "academic" theatres in the twenties and thirties a number of "former" people found temporary refuge. For example, at the Maly the head housekeeper was formerly the man in charge of the distribution of foreign passports under the Moscow Governor General Shramchenko, and the director's helper was from a great old Russian family.

The authorities organized the MKhAT's trip to Paris with special care, thanks to which not one actor failed to return to Moscow. In the first place, every member of the MKhAT who went to Paris left a member of his family in Moscow; if both husband and wife worked in the MKhAT, then one of them had to remain behind. Second, it was clear to everyone that among the actors were secret NKVD employees who reported all conversations. Some were suspected of this, but no one would make up his mind to condemn anyone on suspicion alone. And, finally, special political study leaders went with the troupe, without whose permission it was impossible to go anywhere or to talk with anyone. So, for example, the former wife of one of the actors, an émigré, came to the hotel, and the political instructor did not allow the actor to visit with her. The mother of an actress, also an

émigré, came; they did not allow her backstage at all, and the political instructor tore up a note which she wrote to her daughter. An exception was made for Moskvin and Kachalov who were allowed to see Chaliapin, but during the visits the venerable MKhAT actors urged Chaliapin to return to the U.S.S.R., which made it clear why the authorities had allowed the meeting. Some representatives of the old emigration were energetic enough to somehow thrust anti-Soviet literature into the pockets of the actors' overcoats, but the result of this was just the opposite from that desired. All the Soviet actors were so frightened that they tore up and destroyed these leaflets and brochures, not reading them, afraid that someone in the company would see such literature in their hands, for which not only they themselves would have to answer but their innocent relatives as well. In general, the members of the MKhAT got nothing from this trip; they were conducted through the slums of Paris, to see how the "proletariat" lives under capitalist conditions; they read only Soviet newspapers. The only thing which was surprising to all of them was the abundance and variety of goods, but even here the political study leaders managed to convince them that the ordinary French citizen did not have enough in his pocket for such things, and only the members of the bourgeoisie could take advantage of them.

Many theaters shared the fate of the MKhAT in these years. Vakhtangov's Theater, for example, was suffering from the illness of "leftism" and did not find its own theatrical style in spite of daring and desperate experiments. So the theater returned to its habitual realism. It did fourteen productions of contemporary plays in eleven years, and not one of these shows, despite colossal work by the *régisseur*, the talented actors and the set designers, was worth memtioning in the history of the theater. Let us take, for example, the staging of Pogodin's play *Tempo*. The play touches upon a whole series of problems—the struggle for

Bolshevik tempo, socialist competition and shock-brigade work, the class struggle, and so on. However, according to the director, the leading theme was this: "The complicated process by the help of which the fundamental reformation of living human material takes place in the process of socialist construction; the process of revising human psychology and the human conscience—this is the basic theme of the play." And in the play we see how the sullen seasonal workers, collected in the Kostroma region for work on one of the largest socialist construction projects, are transformed under the influence of "joyous collective labor" into "real fighters for the interests of the working people and conscientious builders of socialism." And here for the sake of the building of socialism, the bearded Kostroma fellows outdo American tempos! Is it necessary to say that this whole theme is false from beginning to end? And once the whole position is stated falsely, how are the actor and director to get that "verisimilitude of feeling and reality of passions" which Pushkin defined as real art in his letter to Annenkov?

After several years of marking time and living through such plays as Seifulina's *Virineya,* Lavrenev's *The Breakup* and Pogodin's *Tempo,* Vakhtangov's Theater finally showed a production which could be considered a creative triumph. For the fortieth anniversary of Gorki's literary activity, in September 1932, *Yegor Bulychyov and Others* was staged. This was the first and, undoubtedly, the best play of four well-planned Gorki plays, each of which appears to be a continuation of the preceding one. *Yegor Bulychyov* encompasses a comparatively small period of time: from November 1916 to the beginning of March 1917. During this time the reversals at the front, the growing dissatisfaction with the tsarist government, the disorganization of transportation, impending famine, the debates in the Duma, the murder of Rasputin, and finally the February Revolution all take place. This is the historical background against which the action of the play develops. All the events occur in the

close family circle of the Bulychyovs, and yet the events which were taking place outside the walls of this house made themselves felt. In the character of the merchant Bulychyov, Gorki presents an honest man of strong will who had made his way to wealth not by speculation but by honest hard labor. He was a representative of the merchant class, which was on the one hand close to the manufacturer and on the other, to the consumer. Bulychyov has an incurable disease and the doctors have condemned him to death. The nearness of death forces Bulychyov to look back over his past life and evaluate anew all the traditions and views of the society to which he belongs. As a result he comes to sense the inevitable doom of his class. He begins to ridicule it all and laughs at everything. He hates the members of his family around him, who are waiting for his death to get the inheritance. His illness, suffering and death take on the significance of a symbol in Gorki's play. But the play is strong not only because of this, but because lifelike people live and act in it, with all their positive and negative qualities. Finally, the actors had honest material which was easy and a joy to work on. L. A. Andreyeva, A.K. Zaporozhets, L. P. Ruslanov, O. N. Basov, and other actors of the Vakhtangov Theater gave vivid and truthful characterizations, but, of course, the highest attainment of the collective was the creative success of B. V. Shchukin, who played Bulychyov. His convincing, brilliant and rich characterization of the merchant Bulychyov, who envisions oncoming death, will long remain in the memory of all who saw this excellent performance.

Rank in the Soviet Theater and Visits of Leaders

Toward the beginning of the thirties a "table of ranks" for theater workers was set up, and it still serves as the set of inducements by which the Party leadership lures the actors of Soviet theaters into striving for positions as the "foremost people of the land." The indications of honor are:

the Order of the Red Labor Banner, the Order of Lenin, the Hero of Labor, Honored Artist of the R.S.F.S.R., Honored Worker in Art, People's Artist of the U.S.S.R., Laureate of the Stalin Prize, and so on. Many of these orders and designations give the actor not only satisfaction to his pride, but tangible advantages as well: rewards in money, the use of the "Kremlin hospitals," membership in closed cooperative stores, the right to a taxi without waiting in line, reduction on apartment rent, free rides on streetcars and railroads, the right to make concert appearances without preliminary censorship, and so on. An actor expects a reward for a successful portrayal of the role of a positive hero and he tries, for the sake of the reward, to play the hypocritical figure of the "steel Communist" as convincingly as he can. The number of "honored" and "people's" artists grows every year, and it is necessary for the authorities to think up new designations and new inducements. Even at the beginning of the thirties there were jokes in acting circles: "The show has Unhonored Artist Ivanov in the cast," or "Soviet actors consist of several groups: the first is few in number, the Deserving Honored Artists; the second group, the Undeserving Honored Artists; and the most numerous, the Deserving Unhonored and the Undeserving Unhonored Artists." After Stalin praised the film *Chapayev,* rewards were ordered for all members of the cast. Among the cast was a peasant, a member of a *kolkhoz* who knew nothing about art, a man they had taken for the film only because he was the right physical type. His share was a citation as "Honored Actor of the R.S.F.S.R." So this peasant Honored Artist even now, most likely, is working in a *kolkhoz.*

The dramatic theater had great significance in the system of Soviet propaganda. The Soviet government and Party leadership grasped this at once, in the first years after the Revolution, and it is therefore not surprising that the representatives of Party organizations interfered directly in

theatrical life. The city committee of the Party was the actual master of any city theater, and the regional Party committee controlled the regional theater. The leaders of the proletarian revolution themselves interfered in the life of such theaters as the MKhAT, the Maly, the Vakhtangov Theater, Meierhold's, the Kamerny—not to speak of interference by the Committee on Art, the repertory committee and the Party Central Committee. It was a rare performance at the MKhAT which did not have one of the responsible workers of the Party Central Committee, the NKVD or the government sitting in the audience. It was part of the job of the MKhAT manager (F.N. Mikhal'ski) to keep track of all the Kremlin intrigues so that he would not make a mistake in seating political enemies in the same box, or seat an important official who had fallen out of favor nearer than one who was on his way up. For example, a few days before his arrest, former Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Rykov came to the MKhAT. He was seated in the government box, and suddenly in the second act the "Boss" showed up. Everyone already knew that Rykov was in disgrace and that he had been demoted from Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars to an insignificant post in the postal and telegraph commission. The MKhAT administration was in a turmoil, afraid that the "Boss" would not want to watch the show alongside Rykov. However, Rykov's secretary came to thank Mikhal'ski at the end of the performance for seating Rykov so "happily." It seems that Rykov had had a long talk with Stalin, who was very polite and friendly to Rykov. "Who knows? Maybe you have made peace between them quite by accident...," said the secretary. Great was the surprise at the MKhAT when literally within a few days they learned of Rykov's arrest as an enemy of the people. This case was the only one of this kind in Mikhal'ski work; ordinarily he was amazingly well informed. I remember once I was in the administrator's office when Yan B. Gamarnik, head of the Political Administration of the Red Army, came in. Mikhal'ski gave him a pass for the last row of the par-

terre. When Gamarnik left, I asked: "What have you done? Tha was Gamarnik!" Mikhal'ski smiled and answered: "Never fear, I know what I'm doing.... Gamarnik is finished." And sure eno within a short time I read his name among others in the list of "enemies of the people."

The production of *Lyubov Yarovaya* had great success with the people in the government. Stalin actually saw the play at the Maly ten times. Then it was discovered that an attempt on his life was being planned. A large amount of dynamite was found in the office of the director of the Maly, directly under the government box. The director of the theater was arrested and Stalin did not come to the theater at all for a long time. Meanwhile the government boxes in the Maly and the MKhAT were radically reconstructed. The boxes were made of reinforced concrete and so constructed that it was impossible to see from the audience whether someone was sitting in the box or whether it was empty. The entrance to the box led into a special corridor, with a door on a court where no one was allowed, so that the government box was completely isolated from the audience and from the wings. Nevertheless, the theater company knew very well when Stalin had come to a performance. First, all the telephones in the theater were cut off, and it was not only impossible to make calls out but no incoming calls could be received. Second, strange people walked slowly back and forth along the corridors, and in the ladies' restrooms there were strange women with purses in their hands. Near the entrance of the stage stood the same strangers in plain clothes

Once, at a performance of *Days of the Turbins* at the MKhAT a play the "Boss" often came to see, what the strange ladies kept in their handbags was discovered. In the basement under the stage stood a big metal barrel used to make the sound of an explosion in the third act. A wire led to this barrel from the assistant director's room. At the right moment he pressed a button and a deafening explosion went off in the barrel. At intermission the assistant director S.P. Uspenski noticed one of the strangers near the barrel; he went up to him and asked him

to leave. In answer, the stranger showed his NKVD identification and rudely told Uspenski to mind his own business. The assistant director shrugged his shoulders and went upstairs to begin the third act. The stranger put a chair near the barrel, made himself comfortable, and began to doze.... Suddenly a terrible explosion went off right next to him and threw him and his chair several feet away. The stranger began to roar wildly, grabbed his revolver and hurled himself upstairs. One of the strange women standing near the stair saw his scowling face and drawn revolver and ran onto the stage, taking the same kind of revolver out of her smart handbag as she ran. The assistant director arrived just in time, and the actors standing nearby calmed them both down, and there the incident ended.

Stalin's love for showy effects was well known. Here are a few little-known incidents out of the life of the MKhAT. In the 1928-1929 season the repertory committee took Bulgakov's *Days of the Turbins* out of the MKhAT repertoire as a "counterrevolutionary work." Three years passed. The set for this show had already been redone for another production when suddenly there was a call to the manager from Stalin's secretary: "Stalin wants to know when *Days of the Turbins* will be playing at the MKhAT." Disturbed, the manager informed him that the play had been taken out of the repertoire three years ago. Within a few minutes, another call, and the "Boss" himself was on the line: "I didn't know that they had removed *Days of the Turbins* from the list. Today is Tuesday; I will come to see this play on Saturday; put it back in the repertoire." So the MKhAT began frenzied labor to get ready the production, which was already forgotten. They worked on a new set day and night; the actors rehearsed, sewed uniforms and so on, but on Saturday the show went on, and the "Boss" was sitting in the government box. As a result of his look at it, the production was approved, but only for performance at the MKhAT. Stalin liked the play so much that he came to see it ten times, as he had come to *Lyubov Yarovaya* at the Maly. But when a director in

Turkestan took it into his head to stage *Days of the Turbins* in the mid-thirties at the order of the local secretary of the Party committee, both the secretary and the director were arrested and exiled.

They never stopped badgering Bulgakov, the author of *Days of the Turbins:* they didn't publish his works; he was excluded from the Writers' Union. They did not arrest him, but on the other hand he felt that he could not go on living such a persecuted life. So at the beginning of the thirties he wrote a letter to Stalin in which he described his position. He said that he was an artist and could write only as he felt, but that if this was not proper under Soviet power, then let them shoot him or let him go abroad where he could write. Within a few days the telephone rang, and Bulgakov went to answer it: "This is Stalin speaking. I received your letter; I have some influence in the Party and I am putting an end to your persecution for you. You must be taken back into the Writers' Union. Would you like to go to work in the Moscow Art Theater?" The excited Bulgakov of course said yes. On the next day Nemirovich-Danchenko called him and invited him to work at the MKhAT in the capacity of assistant director. (After working at the MKhAT several years, Bulgakov died of tuberculosis in Moscow not long before World War II.) In spite of Stalin's promise, Bulgakov's plays were not published in the Soviet Union and after his death his widow had about twenty unpublished plays. Who knows whether they will ever see the light of day? In any case, they are of great interest for the Russian theater.

Stalin came to one of the productions of *Platon Krechet* at the MKhAT. During the last act he called Nemirovich-Danchenko to his box and asked him about the theater's future plans. At the end of the conversation, Stalin asked what salary the actors received. Nemirovich answered that all their wages were different, depending on their qualifications. "Well now, for example, how about that tall actor in the crowd?" asked Stalin, pointing out Nekrasov, a young actor who had just come into the theater. "He receives 225 rubles a month," answered Nemirovich. (This

was the lowest salary of an actor in the subsidiary staff.) "That's not much!" Stalin answered laconically and left. The next day the astonished Nekrasov learned that he has been promoted several ranks higher and was to receive a salary twice what he had been receiving.

The Moscow Kamerny Theater

The sad story of the development of the Moscow Kamerny Theater is so revealing of the Soviet conditions in which creative life goes on that it deserves to be treated separately. In the example of the Kamerny Theater can be seen with special clarity how everything fresh and talented perishes when freedom of creative action is absent. No theater in Moscow so graphically reveals the stifling of real art by govemment despotism as the Kamerny.

In the first season after the Revolution (1917-1918) in the little building of the Russian Theatrical Society on Nikitskaya Street, the Moscow Kamerny Theater presented its new productions. Under the leadership of the talented director A.Ya. Tairov, the Kamerny Theater that year suddenly grew from a small experimental theater collective, which had been formed in 1914, into a serious rival of the great theaters of the capital.

The theater clarified its aims for the first time in this season. It believed in formal, external mastery of theatrical form with all the elements of a production subordinated to the creation, by a director-dictator, of a beautiful theatrical spectacle. It brought the plasticity of the actor to refined pantomime and raised decoration to the limit of brilliance and vividness.

After the opening of *Salome* and especially after *King Harlequin* (one of the Kamerny's best productions), there was no longer any doubt that the Kamerny had found its own special character and presented itself as a mature, completely formed artistic organism. No matter how one might wish it, this special style could not be termed revolutionary.

And although the Kamerny had the talented actors of "synthetic" theater A.G. Koonen, N.M. Tsereteli, I.I. Arkadin, S.S.

Tsenin, and others, the whole creative life of the theater was in the hands of Tairov, the founder and artistic director of the theater. It was not without reason that the theater was called the Tairov Theater in Moscow. In the Art Theater Stanislavski held that the outward expression of the feeling, attitude or condition of the actor would always be correct if the actor sincerely and honestly felt it. And he believed that the events of the character's inner life ("what") were conscious, while their external expression ("how") was always subconscious. Tairov at the Kamerny, on the other hand, demanded from his actor completely well-defined, finished and conscious gesture, mimicry, intonation, and movement. He felt that only by the director's painstaking and dictatorial labor could finished productions be created.

In the course of a dispute about the staging of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1921, Tairov declared with heat that a Kamerny actor "had to know how to do everything," and that if the argument was now about the staging of Shakespeare, then tomorrow and the day after they would talk about how the Kamerny actors played melodrama, mystery, harlequinade, and operetta. And in fact in the five years from 1917 to 1922 the Kamerny put on a play by Paul Claudel, *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, a dramatization of E.T.A. Hoffman's harlequinade *Princess Brambilla*, Scribe's melodrama *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, Racine's tragedy *Phèdre*, and Lecocq's operetta *Giroflé-Girofla*. It was a most varied repertoire to which the Kamerny staff grew accustomed, a repertoire which gave Tairov the chance to solve a series of acting and directorial problems and to create that type of "synthetic" actor who, in actual fact, "knew how to do everything."

The last première of this five-year period was the operetta *Giroflé-Girofla* in which Tairov achieved exceptional mastery. There was nothing of the usual operetta in this production, but it was a vivid show in which everything—music, dancing, the brilliant colors of the scene designer, the exceptional plasticity of the actor, and the furious tempo of the production—

was harmonious and created a picture which gave the audience the deepest aesthetic enjoyment. There were people, of course, who did not like it and rejected so "aesthetic" and "synthetic" a theater. But no one could say that it was not art, that it was uninteresting or boring, or that it had no right to existence. The representatives of the "orthodox" realistic or psychological theater were beside themselves with indignation at Meierhold's Theater, asserting that it was not art but trickery. And the revolutionary youth called the productions of the Art Theater photography and on these grounds not "art." Everyone agreed that it was art in Tairov's theater, but some saw "the real thing" in this art, and others saw some "extravagance" of a great master. Only the people in power and the Party critics were sharply antagonistic to the Kamerny production, accusing Tairov of making marionettes of living actors and robbing the theater of inner content. Most important, they charged him with not wanting to stage plays from the contemporary revolutionary repertoire. The Party nursemaids were horrified that the audience went to the Kamerny to forget about the "burning questions of the day." So, under the pressure of the Party leadership, directly after a resounding creative success, the Kamerny Theater went on its first trip abroad in order, according to Tairov's announcement, to review its creative method and repertoire during the prolonged travel.

The trip abroad brought the Kamerny Theater not only success but also recognition for its new contribution to the history of the theater. Upon his return, however, Tairov made his first bow to Soviet demands and began to depart from his creative aims. The first production of the Kamerny on its return from abroad was the dramatization of Chesterton's novel *The Man Who Was Thursday*. This was already a renunciation of "theatricalized forms" in the name of a closer approach to Soviet reality. This attempt was only partly successful because it was impossible to overcome at once the methods of work which the theater had formed over the years. The show of contemporaneity was abstract and purely external; the production

obviously suffered from the effort to come closer to the contemporary. Persecution by the Party critics continued. We read in the Soviet press of the time: "The Kamerny is a theater of decadence."... "The Kamerny has lost contact with the masses." "The Kamerny Theater doesn't listen to the call of its time." "The Kamerny Theater is ideologically unsound." As a result, undoubtedly under pressure of Party criticism, Tairov was forced to undertake a revision of his artistic methods. Unsuccessful productions like Ostrovski's *Storm,* Marienhof's *Lawyer of Babel* and Shaw's *Saint Joan,* advanced such talented scene designers as the Stenberg brothers; but they could not save the Kamerny from the gradual surrender of its creative conquests made at the beginning of the twenties.

In 1928 Tairov staged a production which caused an incredible stir in Moscow. This was Bulgakov's *The Purple Island.* It was a sharp satire on Party members in art. As in his well-known story "Fatal Eggs," Bulgakov moved the action to an imaginary world. On the purple island "red natives" and "white negroes" carry on the action. The red natives conquer and begin to issue decrees. A red native censor (whom the audience easily recognized as the representative of the main repertory committee) demands that the play must end in the world revolution of which the red natives dream so that the end of the play should be "ideologically sound." A learned parrot in the play keeps repeating: "Workers of the world, unite!" So obvious and daring a satire on the Bolshevik dictatorship could not go unpunished. The production was taken from the repertoire; the author Bulgakov was ostracized.

In the next season Tairov made a new thrust which could not have been accidental: Semyonov's *Natalya Tarpova* was staged. A rostrum was introduced into the play, from which the cast turned to speak directly to the audience. The speeches of the negative characters, making rabidly anti-Soviet statements, were met with the applause of the house! After a few performances this play, too, was taken from the repertoire, and Tairov in order to save himself and his theater had to go in for real

Soviet agitation plays. Kulish's *Sonata Pathétique* was performed and finally in 1933 Vishnevski's *Optimistic Tragedy*. In this production, the Kamerny departed completely from its traditions. It presented scenes of the Civil War just as it had been ordered to show them to the Soviet audience. Almost ten years late, the Kamerny did a play about the Civil War, like those which other Moscow theaters presented about the time of the opening of *Lyubov Yarovaya*. Just as Pashennaya depicted an unrealistic character—the steel woman communist—in the Maly's *Lyubov Yarovaya*, so in *An Optimistic Tragedy*, the exquisitely feminine Alice Koonen, in a short ill-fitting leather coat, depicted the character of a "steel commissar" among the sailor-revolutionaries. Like Yarovaya, she was a type which never existed in life. In spite of all the director's attempts to the contrary, the familiar figures of Antigone and Adrienne Lecouvreur showed through in this characterization. This action-packed battle play, which dealt with the heroic Bolsheviks at the time of the Civil War, was finally favorably received by the critics and for a short time Tairov earned the approval of the ruling circles.

However, Tairov did not take into account the new zigzags of the general line. The new aim was to inspire national feeling, a move made necessary in view of the approaching war. In 1936 Tairov made an unforgivable mistake and staged Demyan Bedny's *Bogatyrs* with Borodin's music. The mistake was the more strange because as early as May 1934, the Council of People's Commissars and the Party Central Committee had issued decrees about the "incorrect methods" being used for the teaching of history in the schools of the U.S.S.R. This was a blow at the so-called Pokrovski school and already at that time marked out the new line of national propaganda. Bedny, close to high government circles (he even lived permanently in the Kremlin) could not but know this, and so the appearance of *Bogatyrs* (in which the Russian epic heroes were satirized and the baptism of Russia was satirically shown as a "drunken business") could be looked upon as an

outspoken demonstration against the government decree. For some inexplicable reason the Committee on Art Affairs reviewed and passed the play for production. Molotov was at the première; he watched only one act and then left in a huff. The production was at once taken from the repertoire, of course, and the Kamerny Theater, Tairov and the Committee on Art Affairs received the most severe rebukes. Special meetings were ordered to be held in all theaters to pass judgment on the incorrect interpretation of Russian history at the Kamerny. The Committee on Art Affairs even passed a special resolution on November 13, 1936 in which all the "sins" of the Kamerny were listed. "Such plays only rejoice our enemies," the resolution read. The production of *Phèdre* (1921) was mentioned as a play of "incestuous love"! In *Conspiracy of Equals* (1927), "Tairov surreptitiously introduced the Trotskyite plan." This was a play about the Thermidorian coup d'état in France, and just at that time the Trotskyites were accusing the Stalin group of a Thermidorian revival. Besides this, there was a famine in the U.S.S.R. in 1927; there were always lines in front of grocery stores. And in the play the French people were angry because they were promised much, but in fact they were fed in lines at the grocery stores!

They mentioned, of course, Bulgakov's *The Purple Island,* that unpardonable libel of the dictatorship of the proletariat. And they recalled *Natalya Tarpova* where, apart from the open addresses to the audience by the negative characters, which won the applause of the non-Soviet citizens (!), they found still another "terrible place." Here is the exact text of this observation: "But this was a small matter to Tairov! A shock-device was allowed in this play – the use of the death of Lenin, the greatest tragic event of our time, for settling the love conflict between Natalya Tarpova and the wrecker Gobruk. This is a most impudent sally which only this theater could commit." And they noted that Kulish, the author of *Sonata Pathétique,* had been arrested and exiled as a counter-revolutionary. The success of the Kamerny abroad was ascribed

to the fact that its art was closer to the bourgeois West than to the Soviet audience. "It is not without reason that the foreigners go more frequently to the Kamerny Theater than to any other,' observed Kerzhentsev, the representative of the Committee on Art Affairs, not without malice. At the very beginning of the Revolution Tairov had enunciated a remarkable slogan: "Art is without a party: it is like air, like water, like the sun, it lights everyone with its ways, everyone whose soul is alive." This slogan sounded in 1936 like thorough counterrevolution because art, according to Soviet leaders, had above all to be a Party instrument.

The complete breakup of the Kamerny was only a part of the great purge in art which was beginning all over the country. In the post-war period, the work of the Kamerny declined so decidedly that when the theater was actually closed, the loss to theatrical Moscow was not great.

More Trouble for Soviet Theaters

Stern accusations were also levelled at the Second Moscow Art Theater. In *The Reign of Mit'ka,* a play about the Time of Troubles, the Second MKhAT showed the false Dmitri as a representative of the people, whereas, according to the official line, he was an "agent of the Polish interventionists." The character of Peter was "distorted" in A. Tolstoi's *Peter I* (1930). There was nothing of the "merchant tsar, the talented historical figure" in the play. The harsh attacks of the Party critics on the Second MKhAT at each twist in the Party line ended finally in a proposal by the Committee on Art Affairs to move the whole theater with its complete staff to Kiev. The artistic director of the Second MKhAT, Bersenev, found nothing better to do than to complain about the persecution to the English ambassador at a banquet. This unfortunate diplomatic step made the Party leadership lose its temper and at the end of 1936 the Second Moscow Art Theater was closed and its members were distributed among other theaters of the capital and

suburbs. By this order was at once struck out that glorious page in the history of the Russian theater written first by the "First Studio of the Moscow Art Theater" and then the "Second Moscow Art Theater." Apart from the political "mistakes" in past productions, the Second MKhAT began to displease the Party Central Committee in that it did not take to the directive about "socialist realism" and continued its own experiments in the creative life of the theater along the lines of artistic maximalism developed by Vakhtangov and Michael Chekhov in their time. Bersenev is today, however, head of the Lenin Komsomol Theater in Moscow.

The logical continuation of the persecution of the Kamerny and the Second MKhAT was the persecution of the Meierhold Theater, which was still farther away from the principle of "socialist realism," especially in its most recent work, *La Dame aux Camélias.* Meierhold as if on purpose threw out a challenge to the Party directive about Party art with his next production in Leningrad, directly after *La Dame aux Camélias,* Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades.* In this production he made a complete departure from "Meierholdism" and created an excellent and talented production, full of deep, tragic meaning. In a routine already worked out, an article appeared in *Pravda,* "Strange Theater," with a berating of the "father of formalism in the Soviet theater," and directly after this article the Meierhold Theater was closed by government decree. One must honestly admit that all the opponents of Meierhold's methods in art, those who argued that Meierhold was destroying everything fine in the theater, after this decree were all on the side of the talented director who had fallen into disgrace. But of course no one dared to come openly to his defense. Only Stanislavski found enough civil courage to invite Meierhold into his studio as a teacher and director. So, at the end of their lives Stanislavski and Meierhold again were together in their creative work—not for long, it is true. On August 6, 1938 Stanislavski, the greatest transformer of theatrical art, died. And within a few months after his death, the greatest rebel and revolutionary in

theatrical art, Meierhold, was arrested after a daring speech at a directors' meeting. A great number of the most various rumors exist about Meierhold's later fate in exile. Only one thing is sure—that he perished in one of the Soviet labor camps in 1939. The Committee on Art Affairs in Moscow was officially informed of this. No less tragic was the fate of Meierhold's wife, Zinaida Raikh; within a month of his arrest she was found murdered in her apartment. Everything bore traces of a great struggle, and there were seventeen knife wounds in her body. Her neighbors heard her cries in the night but were afraid to find out what was the matter. No results of the investigation of the affair were reported anywhere, and the death of Zinaida Raikh is covered in mystery—no rarity, however, in the U.S.S.R.

A year before, a talented young actor of the Maly, V.E. Meier, had died under mysterious circumstances. The background of this affair was as follows. After the writer B. Pil'nyak was shot, his widow, the Maly actress O.S. Shcherbinskaya, made a second marriage to Meier, but their happiness was short. Shcherbinskaya was soon arrested and exiled to Central Asia. Meier made pleas everywhere to be exiled with his wife, but he was left in Moscow and early one morning in the winter of 1938 they found him dead on the pavement under the window of his second floor apartment. The doctor's conclusion was that his death was caused from his fall to the sidewalk. Everything had been rummaged through in his room; even the books were thrown off the shelves with many pages torn out. The Maly was forbidden to arrange a funeral for Meier, and it was announced that he had thrown himself out of the window while drunk. But his friends in the Maly knew very well that this was untrue.

After the terrible year of 1937, after Stanislavski's death and Meierhold's destruction, Stalin's socialist realism was finally entrenched in Soviet theatrical art. Leading theatrical figures still alive, like Nemirovich-Danchenko and Tairov, were either ruined or scared. Meierhold's daring words, hurled at the meeting of the first directors' conference on June 14, 1939, accurately defined the position of the Moscow theaters at the end

of the thirties. He said: "That miserable and pitiable thing which pretends to be called the theater of socialist realism has nothing in common with art! Go to the theaters in Moscow and look at the dry and boring plays, one like the other.... There, where only recently the creative idea was the key; there, where there were the best theaters of the world, there now rules dismal mediocrity.... Wanting to throw out the dirty water, you have thrown the child out with it! Hunting down formalism, you have destroyed art!"[11] The Soviet powers did not forgive Meierhold for these words, but the words sank deeply into the soul of everyone who heard them, and more than a thousand Moscow theatrical figures heard Meierhold's speech and told it, of course in a whisper, to all the rest.

Numerous patriotic shows and pictures began to appear. The Politburo was getting ready for war and understood very well that it would not go far wrong with an appeal to Soviet patriotism. This line fully justified itself in 1941; the Soviet soldiers and officers did not want to fight for Stalin and for world revolution; they preferred a hundred times over to give themselves up to capture. But in 1942 hundreds of thousands of soldiers and officers died for their native land, for Russia, imitating the heros of their fatherland who had died with Kutuzov's armies, and Suvorov, Nakhimov, Skobelev and even much earlier, under Alexander Nevski, Dimitri Donskoi and other legendary heroes of the Russian people.

The great majority of the new plays at the end of the thirties can be divided into three basic groups: 1) superficial chauvinistic plays about the lives of Russian historical heroes–*Kutuzov, Admiral Nakhimov, Suvorov,* and others; 2) plays in which Lenin and Stalin were introduced and where the "decisive role" of Stalin was depicted–*Chimes of the Kremlin* at the MKhAT, *Man with a Gun* at Vakhtangov's Theater, and others; and 3) anti-fascist and anti-German plays–*The Keys of Berlin, The Ambassador* and others. The last group of plays was removed from the repertoire of all the theaters in the U.S.S.R. in a single

night when Ribbentrop arrived in Moscow.

The playwright of the Soviet theater attentively following the general line of the Politburo is always trying to guess the right theme for his new play. He consults representatives of Party organs or the Committee on Art Affairs. Well-known and distinguished playwrights like Trenyov, Vishnevski, Afinogenev, and Korneichuk often got special instructions from the Party Central Committee about what theme in a play was needed at a given time. So, for example, a few months before the attack on the kulaks, Shimkevich's play on this theme, *V'yuga,* turned up in Moscow; in the years of collectivization appeared Kirshon's play, *Grain;* before the Party purge, there was *Pavel Grekov,* and so on. No less indicative in this connection are the plays inciting hatred toward the fascists or the Americans, or plays awakening chauvinism of the national majority group. The minor or beginning playwrights watch carefully the new plays coming from their older comrades and immediately after a play elucidating a new theme, a whole series of plays on the same theme follows.

When finally a new play is accepted by a theater for production, a hidden battle begins between the director and the Party overseers upholding the author. The director and the cast do everything possible to bring to the play some credibility; they rewrite whole scenes, monologues and so on. The author does not have the courage to take upon himself the decision and hands over the changes to the inspector from the Committee on Art Affairs or the Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Party Central Committee. As a result not a rehearsal passes without the author's rejecting some change or the *régisseur* proposing to redo the dialogue of this or that scene. This is why work on a new Soviet play brings a nervous atmosphere to the theater and why the opinion of every leading Party member is so important both to the director and the playwright. It is not for nothing that many Moscow theaters, before showing the dress rehearsal

to the repertory committee, arrange a showing for prominent members of the Party in order to secure their favorable opinions

And there are several cases in the history of the Soviet theater when insufficiently informed members of the repertory committee got into difficulties for their opinions. So it was at a showing of the film *Chapayev* which drew an unfavorable review from *Soviet Art.* But on the day after publication of the review all the newspapers praised this "achievement of the Soviet film industry" and attacked the reviewer in *Soviet Art.* It seemed that Stalin had seen the picture and liked it.

A closed rehearsal of Romashov's play *The Fighters* at the Maly was shown to Stalin and Voroshilov. The next day the repertory committee got the play and attacked the theater which "didn't understand the play, played the characters wrong" and so on. The Maly director Vladimirov modestly answered: "I don't know but yesterday an important Party worker saw a rehearsal and was satisfied." The embarrassed representative of the repertory committee couldn't hold his temper and asked: "What important worker said such a piece of stupidity?" To this remark, not without pleasure, Vladimirov answered, "Comrade Stalin." The condition of the poor member of the repertory committee was not enviable, and shortly after he lost his job.

A playwright receives huge royalties if his play is performed in many theaters of the Soviet Union. By government decree at the time Lunacharski was in charge of art and education, an author received 1½ percent of the proceeds for each play and 0.5 percent for a performance in translation. A playwright like Trenyov, for example, whose play *Lyubov Yarovaya* was approved by the Committee on Art Affairs and was played in all the provinces, each month received as much as a hundred thousand rubles. One need not therefore be surprised at the large number of playwrights in the U.S.S.R. The deceiving hope of making a million rubles from a single successful play attracts many, the more so because the contemporary play does not demand literary values. It is important only that it be politically

correct. Every Soviet theater has to pay the author's royalties for every performance to the Writers' Union, which takes care of paying the playwright. And since the theaters pay not only for contemporary plays but for the classics as well, the royalties accumulating from plays by Fonvizin, Griboyedov, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Molière and Schiller, for example, go into a fund of the Writers' Union. This money supports a huge staff of special inspectors in every city in the U.S.S.R. for the purpose of checking up on the correct reckoning of royalties. It is only fair to state that the payment of royalties from plays and movies to living authors is conscientiously and promptly carried out.

Screen writers and playwrights in the U.S.S.R. eamed very high remuneration in comparison with other professions, but at the same time, the system was often highly inequitable. For example, Bulgakov received several hundred rubles a month in royalties for the outstanding play *Days of the Turbins,* which could be played only in the MKhAT and there not more than once a week. At the same time, Korneichuk received hundreds of thousands of rubles for the light-weight comedy *On the Ukrainian Steppe,* which played throughout Russia. An author therefore was not so much interested that his play should be produced in some good theater as that all the provincial theaters should play his work.

As I have noted earlier, the standardization of Soviet theaters in the name of "socialist realism" was carried to such lengths that only Meierhold dared to make a statement against it. But the Party leadership did not interfere in the theory of scenic art before 1950, because it understood little of it. The refusal to allow Stanislavski's system to be printed can be attributed more probably to chance than to serious interference in the technique of acting. The fact is that after the death of the original founders of the MKhAT–Nemirovich, Kachalov, Moskvin, and Leonidov, and the experts on the system E.S. Teleshova and V.S. Sokolova– there remained only a few people, directors of the "second generation," who could tell the truth

about Stanislavski's teaching. The majority of the theaters and theatrical schools in the U.S.S.R. using the system put into practice whatever is closest to the views of their own managers, aiming of course at "socialist realism." And, since the understanding of this concept is completely confused, they put into practice the ordinary principles of the realistic theater of the past.

In spite of the undoubted negative attitude toward the existing regime, the workers in Soviet theaters could very seldom and only passively resist the ideology introduced into a contemporary play. The director and actor were always aware of the close supervision of the Party organization, the local trade union, the Committee on Art Affairs, the members of the repertory committee, and even simply the informers in the staff of actors. And each one understood very well that active resistance would transport such a hero to the "corrective labor" concentration camps. The desire to convey in his own person the human features of a character and instead of a formula to show a living person—this aim is in the blood of every artist, and it is just the thing that is needed in a play permeated with ideology. Only this can make the heroes more realistic and true to life. Therefore it will not be a mistake to admit that the actors and directors of the Soviet theater, in spite of their negative attitude toward the propaganda channeled through them, are forced to help it on. Three stimuli urge them to this: 1) the feeling for truth, natural to everyone, forces them to work on a falsified character, however poster-like and schematic, bringing to it their own personal truth; 2) fear of the Party, professional inspectors and official informers; and 3) the natural desire to make a career in the theater, to better their material well-being, because almost every well-played role leads to an increase in salary or the receipt of a citation, order or prize.

Theater staffs in Soviet Russia, as in old Russia, are permanent. An actor's average length of service in one theater is not less than ten to fifteen years. Fifty-year jubilee celebrations of an actor's service in one theater are no rarity. Further-

more, there are generations of famous families who have served in the same theater (the Sadovskis, for example; Prov Mikhailovich in Gogol's time, Mikhail Provich and Olga Osipova at the end of the last century, Prov Mikhailovich the younger and Elizaveta Mikhailovna in the early twentieth century and finally, Prov Provich and Mikhail Mikhailovich in our own times). The permanent position at the same theater and the narrow circle of friends in the theater does not give the actor a chance to resist consciously the ideological arrangement of a production nor to play worse than he can.

The scale of wages in the theater is so varied that an actor or director can always hope for a raise. With regard to salary scales, all the theaters of the Soviet Union are divided into five groups: academic theaters, theaters of the first zone (republic theaters), theaters of the second zone (regional theaters), and theaters of the third and fourth zones (district and *kolkhoz-sovkhoz* theaters). The salary for each zone has from ten to fifteen different rates. So, for example, in 1941 the academic theaters of the fourth zone had rates from 120 rubles a month to 420 rubles a month. But this is not all. In the big theaters there are working norms. For example, a People's Artist of the Republic receiving the highest salary has to play no more than four performances a month; and if he plays more than the required number of times, he receives overtime for each extra performance. At the MKhAT actors like Moskvin and Kachalov played ten to fifteen performances a month and received basic salaries of 2000 rubles, plus five to six thousand for overtime. The other groups, in order, had to play six, eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, and sixteen performances a month (depending on their qualifications). And finally, the young people had to play not less than twenty-eight performances a month, so they rarely received overtime pay. If a theater shows some ideologically necessary, politically correct play, the whole theater can move into another zone and the actors' salaries automatically rise. Besides this, sometimes actors win prizes for the best characterizations in a play, or citations, orders or the highest award—a Stalin Prize.

This system, which exists in all Soviet enterprises, is especially evident in the theater.

Professional Organizations and Working Conditions

The professional organization of the theater (the trade union committee) is a sort of appendage to the theater administration. All especially important questions are decided by the so-called "triangle" of the theater—the director, the representative of the *mestkom* (trade union committee) and the secretary of the Party organization. The *mestkom* is chosen by open voice vote at general meetings of the theatrical company, but the Party organization nominates the candidates. Such candidates always pass, and therefore the trade union organizations are always in the hands of the Party organizations and are in reality dependent on them. It was not for nothing that Lenin said that the "trade unions are the schools of communism." The decisions of the *mestkom* always conform to the views of the Party organization and the administration. Therefore in his quarrels with the administration the actor can never count on the help of the trade-union committee. Above all, the *mestkom* looks after fulfillment of the plan, the correct political line in the theater, the "political-moral" condition of the collective, and the "Marxist-Leninist" studies of the theater workers. The trade-union committee manages questions of patronage of the theater by the Soviet Army, factories or *kolkhozy*. It calls meetings of the collective on political matters (for example, working out the formalistic slant of some theater or personality in the artistic world, awarding an order to some theater, treating questions of foreign policy—allegations about Colorado beetles being dropped from airplanes by the Americans, bacteriological warfare in Korea and so on). If some theater does not fulfill its plan, then the *mestkom* answers for it, equally with the administration of the theater and the Party organization.

On the staff of the *mestkom* of the theater ordinarily are

members of the collective who are far less cultured than the other workers in the theater, because the organization is composed mainly of Party members who have little to do with the collective. They may be stagehands, hairdressers or ticket sellers and, only for the sake of appearances, one or two "sympathetic" actors. I remember one "extraordinary" general meeting of the MKhAT troupe, called by the *mestkom* on the question of some speech by the Pope. The representative of the *mestkom,* a Party member and a young stagehand, addressed the actors of the MKhAT with the following speech: "What does this reptile want, the Pope of Rome? What is this shark after? He wants to drive a knife into the back of the working class! But we won't let him do this, comrades! We will rally our proletarian ranks closer under the standard of Stalin...." This is no anecdote but a fact which I myself witnessed. The actors suppressed their laughter and unanimously passed the resolution proposed by the *mestkom* representative. Within several years this young working man was a major figure of the Central Committee of the Trade Union of Art Workers and settled serious creative questions with the same ease with which he made the resolution in the MKhAT about "a proper answer to that reptile, the Pope of Rome."

But there are positive factors in the work of the *mestkom,* in spite of all that has been said. Besides fulfilling the plan, organizing political study and subscriptions for loans, etc., the *mestkom* of a theater also is concerned with social matters and living conditions. For example, there are funds for mutual aid in each theater. Membership in the fund is not obligatory but almost everyone pays his membership fees faithfully. To increase the fund, special performances and concerts are arranged. Every member of the mutual aid fund can obtain a loan equal to a month's pay, without any special request or red tape, at any time. The loan can be paid back gradually over a year's time. Besides this, in exceptional cases—illness, death, the birth of a child, and so on—by special re-

quest to the bureau of the fund, a more substantial loan with a longer time to repay can be issued. Furthermore the *mestkom* receives from the central committee of the trade union free passes or cut-rate tickets to rest homes and sanatoriums. These are distributed among the actors who need them most.

Trade union committees organize housing co-operatives whose members complete payment for their own shares in several years and thus receive a room or apartment in Moscow. When provisions are short, the *mestkom* organizes a cheap dining room in a "closed membership co-op" where theater workers can get products without standing in line, by showing a card. One must give them their due: this function of the *mestkom* is a great help to theater workers.

I have already noted the outside activity of the actor and director in the Soviet Union. Besides the basic work in performances and rehearsals almost every theater worker bears some "social burden": he must serve on the *mestkom* or as a member of the various semi-political organizations of which Soviet society has so many. Since theater workers' basic salaries are hardly ever sufficient, all must take work on the side as well. Actors work with the directors in other theaters, lead dramatic circles in plants and factories, perform in the movies, give readings on the radio, organize concerts, and so forth. Many teach in theatrical schools or give private lessons. However, in spite of such extra work they have to carry on social work outside the theater as well, and it is very difficult to refuse to do it. They may be responsible for overseeing *kolkhoz* theaters or inspecting children's theaters of national minorities. A commission of specialists has to be present at all inspections, invited either by the city Party committee or the Committee on Art Affairs. The theatrical brigades make trips to *kolkhozy*, *sovkhozy*, army divisions, factories, and plants. The staging of productions in army divisions under patronage, attendance at all possible meetings, writing articles for newspapers and magazines—all these jobs are done without pay by actors and directors as

part of their social labor. As a result, it is not an exaggeration to say that the working day of the average worker in the arts is not less than ten to twelve hours. It is no accident that in the MKhAT alone during the last few years so many of the second MKhAT generation died: B.G. Dobronravov, N.P. Khmelev, O.S. Bokshanskaya, E.S. Teleshova, V.S. Sokolova, N.P. Petrova, V.G. Sakhnovski, and V.A. Verbitski, although their deaths occurred at an age ordinarily considered the peak of an actor's creative activity. Apparently such overburdening with constant nervous strain does not go unpunished.

In the middle of the thirties all the difficulties attending the transfer of an actor from one theater to another began. In 1937, before an actor could move to another theater, the administration itself had to free him. The resourceful Soviet citizens quickly figured out a way around this law: they stayed out of work or were late to rehearsals or performances and so called forth their dismissal by the administration. They then entered the theater with which they had made an agreement beforehand. This evasion of the law finally evoked a special directive by the Soviet government about absences and latenesses, by which not only truants but also those who were more than twelve minutes late were subject to trial. The court ordinarily sentenced such a criminal to several months of forced labor at the place of service. By this means, the theater did not suffer; the actor continued to work, but the larger part of his salary went to the government. Second latenesses or "truancy" carried the threat of a still more serious punishment: as much as several years in prison or even the concentration camp. By this means, it was made necessary for the actor to obtain the consent of the administration and artistic director of the theater before he could change from one theater to another. In the overwhelming majority of cases the permission of the manager and artistic director was easily granted. There was no point in holding an actor who did not want to work in a given theater. But theoretically the theater

administration could prevent any actor from moving to another theater.

Conclusion

Every theater in the U.S.S.R. aims at being the first to show a new Soviet play and therefore tries to keep on good terms with the playwrights. A theater which first presents a politically necessary play has the chance not only to move up into the next grade of theaters but to receive a Stalin Prize as well. The artistic director chooses the repertoire for a theater, consulting with the Communist advisor, and works out with him the plan for the season. This is turned over to the Committee on Art Affairs for approval. Here, usually, various changes and additions are introduced and a quarrel between the artistic director of the theater and the committee begins. Sometimes this quarrel is settled peacefully, but not infrequently these cases are turned over to the city or regional committee of the Party, whose decision is binding for the theater. Normally the plan consists of the following: six openings in a season, of which not more than one can be a classic. There were no special orders on this point, and the number of openings varies with the material resources of the theater and the working methods of the artistic director. So, for example, the not inconsiderable number of premières at the MKhAT at the beginning of the thirties was the result of Stanislavski's experimental work. The repertoire of theaters consists mainly of plays which hold the stage for several seasons. Such productions as *Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich* or Chekhov's plays have held the stage at the MKhAT for forty to fifty years and during this time have run through several casts. Many of Ostrovski's plays at the Maly have run for more than fifteen years, and in all the other theaters of the Soviet Union it is a rare production from the classical repertoire which lasts less than five to six years. Contemporary plays are another matter; since they are written on a theme of the moment and do not have literary value, the majority of them last only

one or two seasons. After this they lose their timeliness and box office receipts stop. One of the most popular plays in the Soviet Union, in spite of its complicated production (several scenes in different sets and a large number of characters), was undoubtedly *Lyubov Yarovaya* by Trenyov. This play, written in 1925, has not gone out of the repertoire even today. The reasons for this are not only that it pleased Stalin himself and is considered a classic Soviet play but also that it appeals to all tastes, composed as it is of a great variety of episodes. The success and widespread performance of light comedies in the U.S.S.R. is characteristic, comedies in which there is no politics, or in which one hardly notices the political slant. Such plays as Katayev's *Squaring the Circle,* Shkvarkin's *Father Unknown,* Mass and Kulichenko's *The Orchards Are in Bloom,* Venkstern's *Snowstorm* and the translations: Nicodemus' *The One Who Gives Short Measure,* Notari's *Three Thieves* and Fulda's *The Fool* have stayed in the repertoire for many years in the regional theaters of Moscow, Leningrad and the provinces. The simplicity of staging, the small number of characters, the absence of all boring politics, the accurate depiction of characters known to everyone and the numerous situations which the heroes of the play get into have always attracted the public to these productions. It is a rare theater in the U.S.S.R. which has not staged these comedies in order to make money for a small outlay and so balance its financial plan or save money for some elaborate production.

Thus, the Soviet repertoire can be divided into the following categories: first, a group of plays acclaimed in every way by the government and Party leaders in the field of art and "recommended" for production by the Committee on Art Affairs. These plays, however, do not make money; the tickets are distributed through professional organizations in factories, plants and Soviet institutions. The theater administration, knowing very well that such plays will have no success, tries not to spend much on décor. Plays of this type include Korneichuk's *On the Steppes of the Ukraine,* Romashov's *Fighters,* Trenyov's

On the Banks of the Neva, and Pogodin's *Man With a Gun.*

A second group of plays is not recommended by the government organs, and in order to stage them it is necessary to convince the members of the Committee on Art Affairs of the necessity and expedience of having such a play in the repertoire. However, tickets for these plays are always sold out beforehand and don't have to be given away free. These plays are mainly comedies (Olyosha's *Three Fat Men,* for example) and historical plays.

Of course, the plays and dramatizations which would have the greatest success with the public are those which are categorically prohibited by the main repertory committee, but there is not a single artistic director who would risk scheduling such plays in his repertoire plan, knowing very well the complete hopelessness of receiving permission to play them. Andreyev's *The Seven Who Were Hanged* is such a play. This dramatization was still playing in the provinces in the mid-twenties with great success and always made money. The repertory committee at length realized that to condemn the death sentence in a land where someone was shot every day was the height of cynicism, and the dramatization was categorically prohibited, as were all Andreyev's plays. Dostoyevski's *The Possessed* also belongs to the forbidden classics; the dramatization of this novel played at the MKhAT before the Revolution and then around the province but it was prohibited at the very beginning of the Soviet reign. It was hard to get permission to stage *Crime and Punishment* until 1941; permission was obtained more easily for *The Idiot.* All of Bulgakov's plays were forbidden, the historical plays of Ostrovski were forbidden until 1937, Sumbatov's plays and those of Nemirovich-Danchenko were "not recommended for production." In general, of all the prerevolutionary dramatists (not classics) only Naidenov's *Vanyushin's Children* was passed. The rest were either forbidden or "not recommended."

It was not sufficient to obtain permission for the inclusion in the repertoire plan of any given classical play; one still had to present a director's plan because one might make the mistake of staging Ostrovski's *Storm* with a religio-mystical slant, for

example. An acceptable director's plan might envision the heroine of this play, Catherine, as deceived by the "religious narcotic." One of the most important questions in passing a play was the director's treatment, his plan for staging. The production of Ostrovski's *Wolves and Sheep* at the Maly is characteristic. In this play the landowner Murzavetskaya was transformed by the director into an abbess who carried on her machinations for money at the iconostasis and hid her bills of exchange in the Gospel. Russian plays and western European classics were transmuted by such director's plans into caricatures or distortions of their usual form. Molière's *Tartuffe* was done strictly as an anti-religious play.

Up to 1948 all the government theaters received subsidies, depending on the grade to which they belonged and the repertoire plan which had been accepted by the Committee on Art Affairs. The amount of the subsidy received depended mainly on the director's skill in making out his production plan. As a rule, the plan was padded since it was known beforehand that the committee had to cut a certain per cent. The sums of subsidy were nowhere fixed and were determined for each theater separately. While the Bol'shoi Theater in Moscow received millions in subsidy, *kolkhoz-sovkhoz* theaters received ten thousand a year. On the average one could count on a Soviet theater's receiving 50 percent of its expenses from the government and 50 percent from the sale of tickets. Of course these percentages were apt to fluctuate in individual cases. Inspectors of the Committee on Art Affairs watched carefully to see that there was no overspending in a theater and gave a timely warning in case of danger. In such a case, the director of a theater lost his job and a new one was appointed. It fell to the new director's lot to straighten out the theater's financial condition. From the mid-thirties on, an artistic director (not a Party member) was given equal responsibility with the director. He was supposed to economize on some productions (more often the contemporary ones) in order to have money to spend on the mounting of a big classical production.

By the old tradition of prerevolutionary Russian theaters, the winter season lasts a full eight months, and in the big capital theaters ten months. The summer season is from two to four months. The academic theaters give their actors a two-month leave in the summer at full pay. However, not all the actors use this leave since they are often engaged in a summer tour with the theater. In the twenties and at the beginning of the thirties such tours were organized by private entrepreneurs who formed small groups with a simple repertoire and transported the show all over the country, paying the actors well. This was done, for example, at the Maly. Every summer from eight to ten groups toured from the Moscow suburbs (Malakhov, Pushkino, etc.) to Vladivostok, Tbilisi and even Igarka. However, the Committee on Art Affairs took the tours into its own hands. The private owners completely disappeared, giving way to the government. Instead of a number of small groups, one tour (very rarely two) was sent to the manufacturing centers or capitals of the national republics with the repertoire of those plays which had been playing in that theater during the winter season. They took all the sets and all the technical workers, and instead of the earnings which the actors got in the summer from the private owners, they had to go for the same salary. In spite of this, ordinarily such cumbrous tours did not justify themselves financially, and the local authorities had to pay from their own funds for the "cultural necessities" which had come on tour.

There was one curious aspect of these tours which better than anything else characterizes the Soviet way of life: a Moscow theater on tour, let us say, in Kiev, made differentiations in everything among its workers. So, for example, an actor who received a salary of more than 800 rubles a month traveled first class; one who received more than 600 rubles traveled second class; and the rest went third class. The same division took place at the station: some went by Packard, others by smaller cars, a third group by special autobus, and the fourth

simply by streetcar. And the same stratification was followed at the hotel. Strange cases arose, for example, when a husband received a higher salary than his wife. They had to either travel in different cars, or the wife paid the difference in cost of the ticket.

While the Moscow theaters are on tour, the theaters of the national republics or of the big provincial cities are brought to Moscow. These journeys provide the central authorities with an opportunity to supervise the visiting troupes more closely, since the critics in the capital write about their productions. Furthermore the actors from the other republics have a chance to play before the metropolitan audience and perhaps earn a citation or an order.

After the Soviet government and Communist Party began the battle against "formalism," some theaters, including the Second MKhAT, the Korsh, the Meierhold, and the Kamerny, were closed. The artistic leaders and directors of these theaters either got acquainted with the NKVD system or were frightened into silence. Soviet art was cut to one pattern; it became boring and dry, and even the provincial and national theaters which came to Moscow on tour presented nothing of interest to theatrical society. All the productions became alike, different only in the greater or lesser talent of the actors or director. So, gradually that wonderful heritage which the Bolsheviks received from the old days, that once famed Russian theater made brilliant by such names as Stanislavski, Yermolova, Davydov, Yuzhin, Leshkovskaya, Kachalov, Moskvin, Chaliapin, Sobinov, Meierhold, and Tairov, was transformed into a subservient tool of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Communist Party Central Committee.

Like every art, the theater must above all be free. Only in a freely creative soil can gifted and talented actors and directors grow anew in Russia. We await that time.

A NOTE ON KOLKHOZ-SOVKHOZ THEATERS

Theater came to the country too in the first years after the Revolution. Toward the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, not only did every district capital have a seasonal troupe of actors but even in the larger villages of the broad Russian empire, amateur dramatic productions were staged often enough, not to mention the "Petrushkas" and popular shows at fairs and bazaars. Organizers and participants in these occasional productions in the country were members of the "village intelligentsia" of local teachers, veterinarians, regional doctors, and so on. It was a rare village in Russia in 1917 which did not have a small stage either in a school building or a separately constructed place where simple productions could be given. Of course, the repertoire and quality of performances in these productions were not the purest metal, but then the spectator was not demanding and forgave, or at times did not even notice all the blunders of the amateur actors.

Before the penetration of the Soviet agitation-propaganda material into the village, the so-called agit-plays, there was a short interval of time when separate occasional groups of professional actors reached out into the country. Directly after the October Revolution and at the very beginning of the twenties when famine raged in Russian cities, it was only in the country among the peasants that one could still get some kind of provisions. And so, hungry professional actors whom the city could not feed betook themselves for "earnings" to the country. As is well known, this privileged position of the country did not continue long; the Soviet government organized special brigades which began to gather produce from the peasants by force, and near the beginning of the NEP the peasants themselves began to starve. However, the few years of travel "among the folk" by theater artists were not spent in vain.

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At the beginning of the twenties, I traveled with a small

group of professional actors around the towns and countryside of the Moscow, Yaroslavl' and other districts. The peasants received us very well, although they looked a little condescendingly on people who earned their bread by so doubtful a trade. It is true that after the performances the relationship changed a little and they began to look on the actors with great respect, together with some surprise. I remember a grave, bearded "master" who came to meet our train in a cart (it was several kilometers from the station to the village of Buturlino where we began our shows). On the road he asked me, "And you—you don't work at anything? Only act in plays?" I excused myself but answered firmly. "So . . . that means you trick the people out of their money, eh?" That is what my peasant asked, but there was in his tone not the least desire to offend us.

The next day the same peasant took us to a neighboring village, and he did not sit motionless on his cart but helped us in every way with our trunks, put hay on the seat and thoroughly took care of us. On the road he breathlessly related to me the contents of the performance he had seen last evening. We were playing Schiller's *Intrigue and Love*, and he said to me with great heat (I was playing Ferdinand): "Don't you know, that letter to her," and he pointed with his whip to the actress playing Louisa, "that contamination there ordered her to write it! And she didn't want to, before God, it's the truth, I myself sat there and saw it all, but that never occurred to you—you believed it! That's how such a thing came about, God forgive us!" Such a playgoer was no exception in the country, and it is a great satisfaction to the actor to play before such a spectator.

Far more than in the city, the village playgoer demanded costume plays, and a production in which the tsar and tsaritsa were characters caused a real furor. The peasants at that time did not care for plays of contemporary life, and still less for those in which the characters were simple people or muzhiks. For example, our production of Gorki's

The Lower Depths was a decided flop, and we had to remove it from the repertoire after two performances. "Well, why did you put on such rubbish yesterday? Tfu! It was disgusting to look at!" So said our audience.

The repertoire of our tour was accidental, the basic condition being that there should be few characters and that the roles should be ones we had played, since it was difficult to rehearse during constant travel. But the spectator himself made corrections in our repertoire. After we had played *Intrigue and Love,* a setting of *Prince Serebryanyi,* and Moliere's *The Tricks of Scapin,* all plays which yielded full box office receipts, we couldn't find another money-maker. Nicodemus' *The One Who Gives Short Measure,* Sudermann's *The Fires of St. John,* Notari's *Three Thieves,* and also Russian plays by Ostrovski, Gorki and Chekhov—all these works played before an empty house.

The technique of the audience was simple. A play was always repeated several times. A very small audience showed up for the first act of the first performance, and if the play pleased them, then even at the second act would appear new members of the audience, informed in some miraculous manner that it was worth going to the theater that day. And at the second performance of that play, the house would be full. If the play seemed uninteresting to the small audience, then no amount of advertising would work, and the play would be performed before an empty house.

The actors lived in separate rooms which they rented from the peasants, dining all together at the common table of one peasant who was well off and who fed us very simply but nourishingly for fifty kopeks a day. To our general horror it soon appeared that the manager could not pay out even fifty kopeks for each man. Receipts had fallen so badly that we had to reconstruct the repertoire immediately. We decided to stage Griboyedov's *Woe from Wit,* a play which was always considered a feature in the city. Comparatively more time was spent in rehearsal on *Woe from Wit,* and the show was

ready within a week.

An unusual contrivance was used as advertising: since the theater in the city of Sergach was located at the foot of a hill, its iron roof was easily seen, and so the announcement was painted in huge letters on this roof. Hand-drawn posters were stuck on all houses and signposts. One of the actors had the idea of painting "Woe from Wit" on the backs of pigs rooting not far from the theater. And in spite of such unusual advertising, only a few people came to the "feature," and however hard we wished, the number of the audience did not increase during the second act!

Meanwhile our material position became catastrophic. We were long ago in debt for our board, and we had no money for travel. Finally fortune favored us. It came into someone's head to stage a sharply cut version of A. Tolstoi's *Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich*, and the audience began to pack the theater. We acted this play in all the towns and villages around several times, and everywhere we went there were not enough tickets for those desiring them. We quickly straightened out our affairs, the more so since the next opening completely unexpectedly turned out successful as well. Although there was no mention of tsars or high society in this next play, the country audience liked it very much. It was O'Neill's *Anna Christie*. Word that this play was interesting preceded us, and even in a shed in the small God-forsaken little village of Kamenischi when we arrived with *Anna Christie*, so great a crowd of peasants already awaited us that they couldn't all get into the shed, and we had to take the wide door off its hinges so that the audience standing in the street could see the show.

Autumn came and fewer and fewer people came to our theater hut. Always nearer and nearer to our village moved brigades from the capital, collecting provisions from the peasants. Disturbing rumors were abroad; a "committee on poverty" raised its head in the village. The attitude toward

the actors, as representatives of "the city," changed sharply, and receipts fell.

Directly after the enforced collectivization of the peasantry was put into effect, at the time when the destruction of the "kulaks, as a class" was completed, the Communist Party began to introduce a series of measures for the intensification of propaganda in the country. They had to beat into the heads of the peasants who had entered *kolkhozy* and escaped exile that the government, the Party and Comrade Stalin personally were loading them with benefits, freeing them from "exploitation by the kulak"; that life was "better and happier," and finally, above all, that life in the *kolkhoz* would be a happy paradise. They had to rouse hatred toward the "bloodthirsty kulaks," and awaken "proletarian watchfulness." The agitation play presented itself as one of the means of propaganda, an active and effective means. This is why local theatrical activity in the country was encouraged by the government at the beginning of the thirties. Brigades from city theaters were sent to the country with a repertoire of propaganda plays; traveling movie theaters were organized; a cheap agitation literature and plays easy to produce in village theaters appeared in great numbers.

The themes of these plays were monotonous; the quality remarkably low. There was a group, drawn from life in the country before the Revolution, and oftener from the time of serfdom, in which the landowners were presented as beasts, torturing their peasant serfs; these plays had the inevitable ending in which a tortured, strong and wise peasant predicts the coming of a better day when the stupid and bestial landlords will be destroyed by the free people. Another group of plays depicted the battle of the kulak counterrevolutionaries with the "aware" part of the village, the poor. Those people serving the priests and those under the kulaks—that is, those peasants of the middle group who themselves dreamed of owning property, helped the kulaks.

The small number of village theaters which then existed

could not serve a hundredth part of the village audience, and therefore the necessity of organizing special theatrical collectives for use in the country began to be discussed in central Party groups. The organization of these theaters moved along two lines: the establishment of groups of young players from the city permanent theaters, and the organization of new theatrical entities. In 1933, sections of *kolkhoz-sovkhoz* theaters were instituted by the regional departments of the Committee on Art Affairs.

These theaters at once began the selection of personnel. There was a surplus of actors in the big city theaters at this time because the government subsidy was very substantial, and theater staffs were therefore inflated. For example, at the Maly Theater at the beginning of the thirties, there were nearly two hundred actors on the permanent and auxiliary staffs. Naturally, even in a subsidiary (the small theater called Safonov, in the southeast part of Moscow), many actors were without work and played only several times in a whole season. Out of these rarely employed actors was created one of the first *kolkhoz* theaters for the village of Zemetchino in the central black earth district. A major *régisseur* of the Maly, I.S. Platon, agreed to go as leader of this theater; his relations with the Party organization of the theater were strained at this time. And indeed all of the actors who went out to work at the Zemetchino Theater hoped that this socio-political work would be taken into consideration for them in a few years, and that even if they received no citations or orders, at least their positions at the Maly would be greatly strengthened.

It was decided to make the Zemetchino Theater a model *kolkhoz* theater, and they had all the resources necessary for this since the decorations and costumes were made in the workshops of the Maly. The staff of actors, taken from among the young people and the middle group of the Maly, was sufficiently strong; the directors came out from Moscow, the technical workers were from the Maly, and one of the

most experienced directors and theatrical administrators, Platon, managed the whole.

A tragic event occurred at the first performance in the Zemetchino Theater, one which cost many peasants their lives. Gogol's *The Inspector General* was being performed at the opening of the theater, as dictated by an old tradition of the Maly. Suddenly in the third act the stage collapsed, and the flies, arches and set decorations pressed down upon the fallen actors. At the investigation of this event, it came out that the posts on which the stage stood had been sawed through. Fortunately not one actor perished; a few people broke or dislocated an arm or leg. The local NKVD of course immediately charged sabotage. The actors of the Zemetchino subsidiary of the Maly were proclaimed almost heroes and the event was exaggerated as a proof that opposition by the kulaks still remained in the village and therefore struggle against them continued to be necessary.

Kolkhoz theaters on the model of the Zemetchino Theater began to be organized both by the young people and by those unsuccessful in other city theaters. But the basic staff of the *kolkhoz* theaters nevertheless was drawn from among unemployed actors, studio student-actors and members of local theater circles.

With the beginning of the thirties, the formation of new theaters and new theater studios became extraordinarily difficult. Permission was given only by government and professional institutions. Therefore, in order for a theater group to receive the right to give performances, the group had to find itself a sponsor. So in Moscow appeared the Transport Theater, the Theater of the Furniture Trade, the Theater of Osoaviakhim (a paramilitary civil defense organization) and so on. The drama circle of the Central House of the Workers in Education staged a few professional productions and the participants decided to set out to be a professional theater, but they could find no sponsor. Finally in 1934 the Department of Water Supply and Drainage offered to take them under

their auspices. However, the title "Theater of the Department of Sewerage" seemed a bit of a joke and the group accepted a proposal to join the staff of the *kolkhoz-sovkhoz* theaters of the Moscow oblast and go out to work in the country. So came into being the third *kolkhoz* theater of the Moscow oblast, called the Mikhailovski Theater, since their first productions were presented in the Moscow oblast. The Venyovski *Kolkhoz* Theater had been organized before this, having given its first productions in the town of Venyov, and so on.

For a short time a network of *kolkhoz-sovkhoz* theaters grew rapidly, and there wasn't an oblast in the U.S.S.R. which didn't have a few *kolkhoz* theaters. The *kolkhoz* theaters were directly subordinate to the oblast Committee on Art Affairs and the oblast committees of the Communist Party. The artistic directors of the *kolkhoz* theaters were actors and directors from the leading Soviet theaters, among them such well-known actors as Leshin, Deikin and Kuza, the dramatist V. Mass and others.

Conditions of work in the *kolkhoz* theaters were exceptionally difficult. This is to be explained by the following. The oblast Committee on Art Affairs allotted to each *kolkhoz* theater in its oblast a subsidy which varied from a hundred to two hundred thousand rubles a year. This sum was settled upon at special conferences with the director and the artistic manager of the theater, on the basis of the plan worked out by the theater. As a rule the amount of the proposed subsidy was cut at these sessions, and one had to increase the number of performances planned. So, for example, the number of performances in a month in 1934 varied from twenty-four to twenty-eight. If one takes note that it was seldom possible to give more than two performances in one village and that trips to the next village took sometimes as much as ten hours, then it becomes clear how strenuous was the work of actors and management. And every move meant obtaining transportation and arranging for food and lodging for fifteen

to twenty people. But most important, with so great a number of performances, there was absolutely no time left for rehearsals.

In order to get out of this difficult position, the *kolkhoz* theaters resorted to shrewdness. They began to give parallel performances, of course breaking the staff of actors into two groups, small enough before division. The quality of the performances suffered, but it was in this way easy to fulfill the planned number of shows and still leave time for rehearsal. Ordinarily the *kolkhoz* theaters of the Moscow oblast traveled for one and a half to two months around the villages, playing once each evening and sometimes even twice. The plan was to stay a month or a month and a half for rehearsal in Moscow. During this rehearsal period, the group succeeded in giving a few performances in Moscow workers' clubs in order to move towards fulfillment of the plan. There were constant quarrels about this practice between the *kolkhoz* theaters and the representatives of the Committee on Art Affairs, the point being that it was decidedly more profitable to play in workers' clubs where receipts were higher than in the villages. Besides this, it was possible to rehearse during the day and the actors were not so tired as on tour, but the Committee demanded more performances in the village. The administration of the *kolkhoz* theaters tried by every means to juggle the terms and present performances in the regional cities in place of shows at the *kolkhozy*.

The second question which always called forth quarrels with the Committee, quarrels which even reached the ears of the oblast Party Committee, was that of repertoire. The theaters yearned for the classics, both Russian and Western, and the Committee insisted on contemporary propaganda plays. After long quarrels it was finally decided that classics should constitute 50 per cent of the plays prepared for production. The number of premières should not exceed five a year, with the provision that no more than two hundred hours of rehearsal should be spent on each new production. This made possi-

ble the preparation of rather complex and interesting performances. If one takes into consideration that the same play was repeated sometimes as many as two to three hundred times, one sees that productions for the *kolkhoz* theaters had little to distinguish them from those of the average permanent city theaters.

Pay of the actors in *kolkhoz* companies, in comparison with the theaters in Moscow, was very low. In 1940 the highest rate was 360 rubles a month, and there could be only three actors at this rate in a company. The salaries then ran: 280, 240 and 180 rubles. During this same period, the average actor in the so-called academic theaters received 1000 rubles or more. And one must add that the usual number of performances in the *kolkhoz* theaters was not less than twenty-eight a month, while average actors of group one theaters usually played sixteen or even fourteen times a month. It is therefore not surprising that the actors of the *kolkhoz* theaters were eternally weary, rundown and hungry.

The audience at the *kolkhoz* theaters was already completely different from that before the introduction of enforced collectivization. The village intelligentsia had disappeared, yielding its place to Party members sent out from the city. The well-to-do peasant-master whom we met so often in the first years after the Revolution was no more. All of his kind had either been removed to the North or had been transformed into conscientious builders of *kolkhoz* happiness. The young people looked more like factory workers than the peasant girls and fellows we had met at the beginning of the twenties.

It is not surprising, then, that their attitude toward the plays and the repertoire had changed. The administration of the *kolkhoz* theaters every now and then circulated a questionnaire among the *kolkhoz* audience, wishing to investigate the opinions of the new peasantry. Here are some characteristic pronouncements of *kolkhoz* members. After a performance of a comedy by Ostrovski, *At a Jolly Spot*, this note appeared: "It is good that the theater shows how Yevgeniya deceived her husband; this

production showed us how we must be watchful toward enemies of the people"(!) After a performance of Molière's *The Tricks of Scapin:* "Why do you show such rubbish? Nothing of the sort happens in life. Show us the real life of Western Europe." After *Lyubov Yarovaya* by Trenyov: "According to you, this wife who leads her husband off to be shot is a heroine. But in our opinion she is such a scoundrel that she ought to be shot herself!" From these opinions which have stayed in my memory it is clear, first, that the peasant spectator had become much more serious and selective as to subject than he was twenty years before, and, second, that side by side with the conscientious pro-Soviet opinions there were no fewer than half as many opinions (anonymous) which had a sharply anti-Soviet character. However, cases of open sabotage, as in the case of the Zemetchino Theater, were very rare.

The desire for spectacle was so great that in the years 1934-1941 there was never a case when tickets to *kolkhoz* plays were left unsold. Performances always took place before packed houses. Unfortunately the houses were so small that they held scarcely two hundred fifty to three hundred people. It was for this reason that the receipts forced the management to play in workers' clubs, and this alone enabled the theaters to fulfill their plans.

It is not surprising that the *kolkhoz* audience rushed to the performances of the *kolkhoz* theaters. The set decorations and costumes alone brought things to the village which they had never seen before. The theaters might spend about 60,000 rubles on the average for the production of a new play. But in spreading this money over five premières, the theater generally succeeded in economizing on the contemporary plays, in order to give one or two classic productions to a good designer and spend on it one hundred thousand or even 120,000 rubles. Receiving the materials from a special distributor or getting costumes and wigs by "pull" (as it is called in the Soviet Union by *blat*) with permanent theaters, the theaters could turn out productions not at all bad.

Besides their own basic work, the actors of *kolkhoz* theaters had also to carry on work with the *kolkhoz* amateur groups. But since no *kolkhoz* theater stayed long in one place, this work was in actuality of no use. Nevertheless, the attraction for amateur productions in the village never let up. The most diverse plays were chosen for these productions, depending on the taste of the group members or depending on what play would draw a crowd. For example, in a *kolkhoz* of the Borovsk district in 1940 a drama circle staged Schiller's *Maria Stuart.* They used blankets and sheets instead of costumes. Instead of beards and mustaches, they glued tow on their faces with carpenter's glue, and instead of make-up they used oil paints. As a result, the members of the drama circle couldn't get the glue and paint off their faces. At the order of the regional Party Committee, a few actors of the *kolkhoz* theater were commandeered for this *kolkhoz,* to give "instruction."

Central government and Party organs had no notion of the conditions under which the work of the *kolkhoz* theaters went on, and every department head imagined it according to his own ideas and sent out his orders in line with these ideas. So for example, the head of the Committee on Art Affairs, Kerzhentsev, talked to the managers and leading actors of the *kolkhoz* theaters and asked them whether they knew how to run a tractor and what their views on agriculture were. When it appeared that none of them had the least understanding of agronomy or of a tractor, since they had devoted their entire lives to questions of art, Kerzhentsev was furious and ordered that lessons should be given in every *kolkhoz* theater on agronomy and how to run a tractor. Panic took hold of the actors. They didn't have time for rehearsals, with the eternal traveling; they often had time to sleep only a few hours a day—and here was still another burden— and what a job! Fortunately for the *kolkhoz* theaters, Kerzhentsev soon afterward lost his job, was accused of some crimes or other, of left or right tendencies—and was liquidated. The actors remained ignorant in matters of agronomy.

The next assault on the actors of the *kolkhoz* theaters was from the Secretary of the Moscow Oblast Party Committee, who argued that in their time free from performances, the actors ought to be able to conduct talks and reports on political themes with members of the *kolkhoz* and to hold short seminars on the *Short History of the Communist Party.* A hurried preparation of the actors in the principles of Leninism-Stalinism was begun. On the train and in buses, on carts and in waiting rooms at a few hours' stop on a trip, the actors sat with textbooks in hand and studied the history of the Party. Of course, this could not help but tell on the preparation of new productions, since not only the actors but even the directors read and studied, instead of new plays, political exercises which had to be turned in to the instructor every month. Directors of the theaters supervised the political study vigilantly. The manager of the theater had to be a Party member, and was the secret eye of the Party oblast committee. Party members who might be interested in matters of art, even in the Moscow oblast, were very few. Therefore in the *kolkhoz* theaters members of the Party were named as directors who had no relationship to art at all, but were very often simply uncultured people. In the Mikhailovski *kolkhoz* theater, after a first rehearsal of *The Cherry Orchard,* the manager of the theater declared: "Of course, Comrade Chekhov didn't write so badly, but where in this play is socialist construction depicted? Where are Bolshevik tempos? I propose that we turn directly to Comrade Chekhov with a request that he make some suitable corrections." It had to be explained to the manager of the theater that "Comrade Chekhov" had no relation to socialist construction and had died thirty-five years before.

Another director, in the Venyov *kolkhoz* theater, a bootmaker by profession, was interested only in the footgear to be used; when he asked about the next production, he referred to the repertoire in his own peculiar way. "What's this? Again the play in *yalovye* (calfskin) boots?" meant a play of Ostrovski's. "And the one in lacquered slippers with buckles?" was, of course, Molière. When he said,

"You know me, I like best of all our plays the one which takes place in felt boots...," he spoke of our production of Venkstem's *Snowstorm.*

Notes to *Moscow Theaters, 1917-1941*

1. Stanislavski, K. S., *Moya zhizn' v iskusstve* [My life in Art], Moscow, 1941, p. 508.

2. "V restorane," *Aleksandr Blok: Sochineniya v odnom tome* [Alexander Blok: Works in One Volume], Moscow-Leningrad, 1946, p. 169.

3. *Narkom* is a shortened form of the title *Narodnyi komissar* (People's Commissar).

4. Neschastlivtsev and Arkadi Schastlivtsev are two poor touring actors in A. N. Ostrovski's play *The Forest.*

5. There is a confusion of two words in the Russian. *Podmostki* means "stage," while *pod mostom* means "under the bridge."

6. *Proletcult* is a shortened form of the Russian title of a short-lived proletarian writers' organization formed just before the Revolution and in great prominence during the first postrevolutionary years—the Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organization.

7. The play by K. Trenyov was first performed in 1926.

8. Later Cheban went over to the main Art Theater troupe.

9. Solovyova later emigrated to the United States.

10. Zakhava, Boris, *Vakhtangov i evo studiya* [Vakhtangov and His Studio], 2nd ed., Moscow, 1930, p. 139.

11. A more complete quotation from Meierhold's speech is available in English in Juri Jelagin's *Taming of the Arts,* New York, 1951, pp. 171-73.

The Red Army Central Theater in Moscow

Boris Volkov

The Purpose of the Central Theater

September 14, 1940 marked a milestone in the theater life of Moscow.[1] On that date a new theater, the Central Theater of the Red Army (now called the Theater of the Soviet Army) was opened to the public. The Soviet press was correct in calling it a "giant theater." Besides being the tallest building in the Soviet Union up to that time, the Red Army Central Theater was, and still is, the largest theater with the biggest and best-equipped stage in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet attitude toward art being what it is, the Red Army Central Theater, like all other Soviet theaters, was intended exclusively as an instrument of Communist propaganda. In this particular case, because it was planned as an army theater, the objectives and character of the propaganda to be disseminated were of a special kind.

The Central Theater, which was to be specifically equipped and endowed with large resources, was required to shape the thinking of officers, soldiers and civilians (from whose ranks more soldiers and officers were to come) by producing plays which dealt with specialized subjects. These subjects included feats of heroism performed by members of the Red Army during the Russian Civil War; inspiring episodes in the lives of great Russian military leaders such as Suvorov, Kutuzov and Alexander Nevski; portrayals of Red Army life in time of peace and war; stories depicting potentially hostile foreign nations and their representatives in the blackest possible light; and finally, classic plays by Russian authors and

a few foreign classics. Thus, except for the last, which were purely educational, all subjects to be dealt with on the Central Theater stage were expressly for propaganda purposes. In this way the Red Army was to be inspired by examples of its heroic past, to have its patriotic pride aroused by reminders of the life and achievements of great Russian military leaders, and to become imbued with hatred of nations regarded as potential enemies of the Soviet Union. The Political Administration of the Red Army, which molds and supervises the political thinking of army men, had these propaganda objectives clearly in mind when it ordered the building of the Central Theater, for these objectives determined not only the choice of plays but the very architecture of the theater.

The Red Army Central Theater as a Building

The Red Army Central Theater in Moscow occupies a site on Commune Square (which formerly bore the name of Catherine the Great.)

The problem confronting the architects who took part in the contest for designing the new Red Army Central Theater was twofold. First, the theater had to answer the structural, technical and politically symbolic requirements formulated by the Political Administration of the Red Army. Second, in its outward form, it had to blend with other buildings in the square and retain something of the Russian Empire style of the early nineteenth century which marked an old college building standing nearby; this building had been designed by G. Gilardi, and is now the Central House of the Red Army. For the Soviet architects who took part in the contest the problem was further complicated by the confusion of ideas and theories which characterized Soviet architecture at that time (the early 1930's). Although some of the best-known Russian architects submitted plans for the theater, it is not surprising that not one of their designs was approved by the Red Army.

The Political Administration found what it wanted in a design prepared by two practically unknown architects, K. Alab'yan and V. Simbirtsev. The plans were worked out under the direct supervision of the Political Administration and made public after approval and acceptance. Alab'yan's and Simbirtsev's design fell short of designs submitted in the contest in solving the strictly structural and technical problems of theater architecture, and it made no attempt to conform to the architectural style of the old buildings on the square. But on the other hand it did provide a striking solution of the politico-propagandistic problem—the erection of a building which would be an imposing monument to the Red Army.

For the basis of their architectural idea Alab'yan and Simbirtsev took the emblem of the Red Army, a five-pointed star with cut inner angles, which they surrounded with a ring of ninety pentagonal columns. The upper part of the building, above the colonnade, was also in the shape of a star and was topped with a pentagonal pedestal upon which, according to the approved design, was to rise the statue of a Red Army soldier holding a five-pointed star in his outstretched hand. (Later the statue was changed to represent a soldier blowing a trumpet.) The Political Administration chose sculptor S. Merkurov to prepare the statue, which was to be wrought of red sheet copper.

The height of the building is about eighty meters (262.4 feet) to the top of the pedestal, plus eighteen meters (59 feet) to the top of the figure. The building is 280,000 cubic meters (almost ten million cubic feet) in size. There are broad granite steps on all sides, joining at the angles of the star. A central granite stairway leads to a vaulted vestibule which is used as a check room. The floor in the vestibule is inlaid with pieces of colored marble which form a decorative pattern. From the vestibule two wide stairways of white marble lead to an enfilade of foyers and thence to

the theater hall which is arranged in the form of a steep amphitheater with a total seating capacity of fifteen hundred persons. All the seats in the orchestra, the amphitheater, loges, and balcony are made of beech wood and are upholstered in red. The loges adjoining the stage on both sides are reserved for the use of members of the government and have circular foyers with separate entrances from the outside.

A smaller theater with a seating capacity of six hundred is to be found in the upper part of the building. It is an affiliate of the main stage and uses players from the main company. It is also used for rehearsals and meetings.

In the main part of the building, despite the spacious vestibule, foyers and auditorium, the width of the marble stairways, large smoking rooms, and comfortable seats everywhere, the playgoer finds himself in a state of constant inner discomfort. There is a reason for this. In designing their theater the architects focused full attention on political objectives, finding a solution in enclosing the entire building within a pentagon. Bound by this shape in planning the interior, the architects were obliged to deny themselves the usual rectangular shape of rooms and to use instead such geometrical figures as trapezoids, parallelograms, circles, pentagons, and if a rectangle, then one with a cut corner or curved walls.

Architectural and decorative treatment of the interior was carried out with masterful skill while following classic examples almost to the letter. Particularly successful in this sense are the foyers with their cornices carrying an ornamental pattern designed by V. Favorski, Honored Member of the Soviet Academy of Arts, and painted by his pupils under his personal direction. Outstanding too are the bronze ornamental work on the marble steps and the bronze lighting fixtures with openwork patterns after classical models overlaying frosted glass. But here, too, the interiors fail to make a harmonious impression despite rich ornamentation,

pilasters, columns and cornices, enormous chandeliers, and much marble and bronze work. This lack of harmony results from mingling classical forms of the past with the new architectural elements revealed in the theater's design.

Since painting plays an important part in the decorative scheme, it merits a more detailed account. A visitor walking up the right or left marble stairway leading from the vestibule to the foyers notices two large canvases. One, representing Stalin and Voroshilov against a background of the Kremlin, is the work of A. Gerasimov. The other, by P. Sokolov-Skalya, represents "The Storming of the Winter Palace." These paintings are enlargements by the artists of their original panels which decorate the walls of the main pavilion of the Agricultural Exposition. Gerasimov's canvas, with its lifeless, stiffly posed full-scale figures of Stalin and Voroshilov painted with conscientious detail against a sweetly colored view of the Kremlin, looks like a huge colored photograph. The painting by Sokolov-Skalya, which contains a great number of figures, is arresting in its composition and color and the breadth and boldness of its treatment. It may be mentioned in passing, as characteristic of the values placed upon works of art in the Soviet Union, that Gerasimov was paid 60,000 rubles for his painting, while Sokolov-Skalya received only 40,000. A subject dealing with Stalin and Voroshilov was more important in official eyes than the storming of the Winter Palace in the early days of the Revolution.

In the hall of the theater the central focus of interest is the painting which covers the curtain, measuring thirty by fifteen meters (about one hundred feet wide and fifty feet high). It is the work of V. Favorski, who is especially well known as an engraver and book illustrator. The artist's idea was to make the curtain a synthesis of architecture, sculpture and painting—all by means of painting.

The subjects of the painting on the curtain are as follows: Against a rusticated wall painted to simulate bronze

bas-reliefs with scenes of the parading Red Army stand full-sized statues of Ostrovski, Pushkin, Gogol, Gorki, Shakespeare, and Sophocles. The statues are separated by painted pilasters with capitals draped in the folds of a painted red curtain. The background is formed by two tapestries—one picturing a fight on a barricade, the other an exploit by Chapayev in the Civil War. In the distance loom landscapes representing the various Soviet republics as well as Moscow and Leningrad as it is hoped they will look in the future. It had originally been planned to have the tapestries illustrate varied scenes from the works of the great playwrights on the curtain, but by order of the Political Administration of the Red Army this plan was abandoned and military scenes were substituted.

The curtain, though brilliantly painted, gives the impression of a composition crowded with many unrelated subjects. Another weakness is that in addition to serving as a wall separating the auditorium from the stage the curtain is also a movable unit used to change the opening of the stage as required by a particular play or scene. This fact was not sufficiently taken into account, with the result that the monumental painting on the curtain (representing a solid wall) is seen to be nothing but painted canvas, for the half of the curtain not drawn behind the proscenium arch detracts from the spectator's concentration on the particular scene being enacted on stage.

Next to the curtain, the pictorial spot which most catches one's eye is the mural on the ceiling, whose awkward shape of a trapezoid with a rounded base confronted the painter with numerous difficulties. The art of ceiling painting reached its high-water mark in the baroque era. A characteristic feature of its development was the pictorial concept which aimed at an illusionary break through the ceiling with an extension of architectural details so that interior pillars would stretch away into the infinitude of

painted sky, disappearing in clouds with groups of floating human figures.

The Political Administration of the Red Army commissioned the painter Bruni to do the ceiling and indicated certain political themes to be treated. In his work, Bruni attempted to combine these political instructions with classic principles of ceiling painting as developed during the baroque period. However, as far as the formal elements of design were concerned, Bruni, soon after beginning his work, was driven to the conclusion that the very shape of the ceiling was wholly incompatible with traditional classic treatment. Only the side of the ceiling abutting on the proscenium arch permitted retention of baroque principles. Here the architectural frame of the stage could be extended pictorially, making use of the state emblem of the Soviet Union as well as human figures.

On two other sides of the ceiling Bruni painted pillars stretching into the sky and carrying the figures of army signalmen and fliers. These pillars are not linked with the treatment of the auditorium walls and therefore look as if they do not belong there; also the painted banners which separate them appear merely as fillers for the vast ceiling space.

In his treatment of the fourth, rounded, side of the ceiling the artist sought to balance his composition by painting separate panels within three intersecting arcs. The panels present views of Russian nature characteristic of various regions of the country, from north to south—a solution of the pictorial problem which linked it not with the baroque but with later classic and Empire styles. Thus, because of pressure by the Political Administration, with its express demands for certain subjects, the artist was obliged to mix different and incompatible styles of ceiling painting.

There are two more examples of painting in the Red Army Central Theater: round panels over the right and left refreshment bars. The one on the right entitled "A Summer

Cross-Country Race," is the work of A. Deineka. The other, on the left, is called "Red Army Men on a Skiing Expedition" and was painted by L. Feinberg. Deineka's painting is the more impressive of the two. It has a good deal of movement in the figures of the sportsmen and much sunlight and air in its colors. It is actually the second picture painted for this panel space. Deineka's first attempt pictured a group of football players scrimmaging for a ball, but this painting failed to please Voroshilov who, it is reported, gave orders to paint over this "daub." Deineka tried hard to save his work but finally yielded and repainted it, barely finishing the job before the opening of the theater.

The Red Army Central Theater has a stage of truly enormous proportions. The area of the stage is almost twice as large as that of the auditorium. The proscenium opening measures thirty meters wide (98.4 feet) by fifteen meters high (49.2 feet), with a stage depth of sixty meters (196.8 feet). Engineer I.E. Mal'tsen, who designed the stage, aimed at maximum adaptability of construction. Because of the great height of the stage, it is possible to raise out of sight sets measuring up to fifteen meters high (49.2 feet). From the sides and lower levels, movable platforms with scenery enough for a whole set can be rolled out when needed. The principal element in the stage construction is a large revolving cylinder weighing 400 tons, with a diameter measuring thirty-two meters (105 feet). On one side the cylinder has a separate revolving circle fifteen meters (49.2 feet) in diameter.

The stage floor is divided into squares, each of which can be raised three and a half meters (11.5 feet) above the stage and lowered the same distance below stage level. The stage is equipped with innumerable machines for lifting lighting devices, scenery, curtains, and so forth, which operate above the stage, and for lowering or raising sections of the floor, which operate under the stage. In both

cases the operation is set in motion electrically. Ten thousand electric light outlets supply illumination throughout the building.

The Red Army Central Theater stage is so large that it permits the performance of realistic battle scenes, with buildings erected many stories high, or the use of real tanks in staged attacks. When such efforts are planned, they pose special problems for the artist in charge of such matters. On a stage of normal proportions, the scenic designer plans his sets and properties in such a manner as to deceive the spectator into believing distances and objects are greater than they really are. On the enormous stage of the Red Army Central Theater the scenic designer does not have to produce the appearance of size or depth. His problem is rather to make plastic use of space (as the sculptor does in working in the round) and at the same time avoid falling into crass naturalism.

A stage of these proportions requires special forms and methods of work not only from the scenic designer but also from the director and actors—above all, it requires special plays. On these latter points, the Central Theater proved itself to be still very inadequately prepared when it first opened to the public.

Organization of the Red Army Central Theater

Acting companies organized by the Soviet government entertained units of the Red Guard as far back as the years of the Civil War. Their work at that time was already stamped with propagandistic aims. In the mid-twenties acting companies made up of amateur soldiers appeared in the Red Army, and toward the end of the twenties Red Army clubs came into existence in some cities.

In addition to these activities by army groups, mass dramatic spectacles on military themes were held here and there with the participation of not only soldiers but also large groups of industrial workers. In one of these spectacles, staged during the summer of 1924 outside the city of Rostov-on-the-Don,

about two thousand workers from a local tobacco factory took part, together with cavalry units of the Red Army under the command of the famous Civil War leader Budyonny. The spectacle represented the battle of the Perekop Isthmus where the Bolshevik forces overwhelming the troops of General Vrangel broke into his Crimea bastion and brought the Civil War there to an end.

The Red Army clubs which opened throughout the country took over military propaganda in a planned and organized fashion. They addressed themselves not only to soldiers and commanders but equally to the young civilians who came to the clubs. The clubs gave training in shooting, held classes in the study of the rifle and the machine gun, organized musical groups in which bands were formed, and conducted political classes and lectures. This activity was capped by organizations of amateur troupes which produced short plays and shows on military themes in their larger political and international aspects.

To direct the artistic activities of these troupes, it was usual to engage an actor from the local theater company. Sometimes he was paid a small salary, but more often it was arranged to have the theater company assume patronage over the army troupe. The work of these clubs was always under the control of the political board of the local army unit, which received its propaganda material and instructions from the Political Administration of the Red Army in Moscow. The Political Administration also organized a special unit which sent its instructors in military propaganda to the army clubs.

Meanwhile an important development was taking place in the Soviet capital. The huge old college building on Commune Square in Moscow, which became the Central House of the Red Army, has now been occupied by the Red Army for about three decades. The right wing of this building contains rooms where models of armaments of new design are exhibited and classes and lectures are held for senior officers. In the same wing there is a large sports hall where contests are held between

various army units in athletics, boxing, wrestling, and so forth. The left wing of the building houses the Red Army Museum, a movie theater, a small concert hall also used for conferences, a concert bureau, and an assortment of offices. The central part of the building contains a large restaurant with several dining rooms, each painted a different color; a double foyer used for exhibitions of works by Russian and foreign artists; and two halls, a small one known as Voroshilov Hall and a large one known as the Red Banner Hall, which has a stage, a colonnade and a gallery.

On October 15, 1929, this stage of the Red Banner Hall played host to the first performance of what later became the Red Army Central Theater. The drama company which appeared in this performance was one of several units organized in the House of the Red Army. The other units were a vaudeville troupe under the direction of Il'in and Tipot, a Red Army song and dance ensemble under the direction of Aleksandrov, and a puppet group. Soon after these last three units were organized they became a part of a group formed by the Political Administration for purposes of propaganda and stage instruction and were sent to the Far East to entertain the large Soviet Army there. On their return to Moscow the three units were merged under the designation "Small Theater of the Red Army." (The word "small" [*malyi*] in this case refers to what is known in the Soviet Union as "small forms" of the theater, i.e., vaudeville acts.) In contradistinction, the drama unit was given the name of the "Large (Bol'shoi) Theater of the Red Army."

The Large Theater began its work by staging a political revue entitled *The Chinese-Eastern Railway*, which dealt with events in the Far East during 1929. The revue was the work of many hands and underwent several drastic revisions during its run. About the same time, the Small Theater produced a play by Vsevolod Vishnevski called *The First Cavalry Army*.

The high command of the Army and the Political Administration were dissatisfied with Director Fyodorov's staging of the revue on the Chinese theme and accused him of formalism.

However, they were pleased with Il'in's production of *The First Cavalry Army*. After these two productions, the companies of the Large and Small Theaters were merged, and a new theater began to operate in the Central House of the Red Army under the direct control of the Political Administration. On the other hand, the Army Song and Dance Ensemble and the Puppet Theater were separated again as independent units, though remaining under the control of the Political Administration. The Army Theater Bureau of the Red Army House took over the army vaudeville activities by supplying its own acts.

The reorganized drama theater then put on its third production entitled *The Followers of Makhno*, a play by V. Vol'kenshtein which described the adventures of a Russian intellectual in the camp of Makhno, an anarchist and anti-Bolshevik bandit of the Civil War period. The play had little in common with the propaganda subjects of the Red Army and after a short run was withdrawn from the stage by the Political Administration.

This brought to an end the first unsuccessful season of the Red Army Central Theater. The second season opened with a play entitled *Between the Storms*, written by D. Kurdin and adapted by I. Vsevolozhski. Its subject was the reform of the Red Army which took place in 1924. *Red Star*, the organ of the Red Army, severely criticized the directors L. Prozorovski and B. Nikol'ski for failing to sustain the play's quality and presenting a production which treated the subject like a "petit bourgeois drama."

The theater's next production, *A Blow at the Steppe* by Gleb Alekseyev, which dealt with a Red Army agricultural commune, also failed to meet with approval from the authorities.

These failures were attributed to the lack of professional experience on the part of the company which was manifest in the inability of the theater to formulate the principles and methods of its work. During the theater's first two years of activity this subject was frequently discussed in *Red Star* and in drama magazines. Some critics voiced the opinion that the

theater should have a professional company made up largely of young actors, that it should follow the method and system of established Moscow theaters such as the Moscow Art Theater or the Vakhtangov Theater, and that it should produce plays by established playwrights. Others held that the theater should be conducted along experimental lines and should produce plays which could be continuously adapted to fit the changing political situation. These critics also insisted that the Red Army Theater should be built on principles underlying the work of the so-called TRAM theaters (theaters of working young people), developing gradually from a theater of amateurs to professional status. It was maintained that the actors of the Red Army Central Theater should be drawn from the ranks of the army and former army men who had distinguished themselves as actors in various army drama groups and wished to continue in this work, with additional recruits from among members of workers' drama circles and students of drama schools.

Certain points in the program of the theater stood outside the realm of controversy because the matters had already been resolved by special decree of the Political Administration. These points included the necessity of periodic tours to various army and navy units, and a concentrated effort to raise artistic standards of all drama circles within the army and navy and in military schools and colleges.

Nor was there any disagreement on the question of repertory. Everybody agreed that the plays produced by the Red Army Central Theater should deal mainly with military subjects. The repertory plan was approved by the Political Administration, which announced a contest for plays dealing with the following questions:

1) Training, organization and life of the contemporary Red Army
2) The Red Army in relation to the industrialization of the country and the working class

3) The Red Army in relation to the peasantry and rural problems
4) International problems
5) Historical subjects

Despite repeated appeals addressed to Soviet playwrights in newspapers and magazines the contest failed to provide the theater with the plays it needed. From those submitted only two were accepted, and these turned out to be bad—the work of inexperienced army tyros. One of the plays was *The Army Commissar* by A. Ovchin-Ovcharenko, treating the subject of army maneuvers; the other was *The Test* by A. Davurin, which dealt with discord in the family of an army commander, a convinced Communist who becomes the target of constant charges by his "bourgeois" wife that he is neglecting his personal and family life.

The plays were not interesting, and in addition they were badly directed and poorly acted. The result was that despite free passes distributed widely among industrial workers and students, few people went to see them of their own choice. Audiences were made up of soldiers from the Moscow garrison who came in large units under orders from their superiors.

It was obvious to the army high command and the Political Administration that the government plan of using the theater as a means of military propaganda and militarization of the country was far from being realized. After two years of failure, a special conference was held to consider the question of the theater. Present at the conference were General Yan Gamarnik, head of the Political Administration of the Red Army, Marshal Kliment E. Voroshilov and V. Mutnykh, head of the Red Army House. The conference laid down the principle that the Red Army Central Theater had been designed to serve the needs of the Red Army by dealing with the problems of the army and that only highly qualified professional actors, scenic designers and directors could perform this task satisfactorily. It was accordingly decided to invite the well-known Soviet director Yuri Zavadski to become the artistic head of the

theater. Zavadski was a pupil of Vakhtangov, a former actor of the Moscow Art Theater, and at the time of the invitation head of a theater of his own in Moscow. Being a man of deep theatrical culture and fine taste Zavadski was an excellent choice for the job. Fortunately he was able to accept the artistic leadership of the Red Army Central Theater, combining it with work in his own theater. A new era began in the Central Theater.

Zavadski's Leadership

In 1932 Zavadski was appointed head of the Red Army Central Theater in charge of all matters relating to its artistic activities. Immediately after his arrival the atmosphere of genuine theater made itself felt in every department. One of his first acts was the revocation of the rule which made it obligatory for artistic personnel as well as administrative personnel to wear military uniforms. Thereafter the artistic and technical personnel were exempt from this obligation except during visits of the company to out-of-town military units, and the administrative personnel had to wear uniforms only during the days they performed their duties in the theater.

Under Zavadski, Ye. A. Bril' was made producing director and manager of the company. There were also three young assistant directors, two of whom, A. Shans and V. Pil'tson, were graduates of the Moscow State Institute of Theater Arts (GITIS); the third, A. Glebov, a member of the Communist Party, was a "promoted student" with previous experience in non-professional theater who, in addition to his theater duties, became secretary of the Red Army Theater's Communist organization.

Zavadski and Bril' were the principal directors, but on occasion, for special productions, other Moscow directors such as Sakhnovski and Tolchanov were engaged. They worked under the supervision of Zavadski and had the assistance of one of the young directors. For the production of politically important plays, the assistant director was usually Glebov,

who was appointed in such cases "on the recommendation" of the Political Administration. The theater had two scenic designers, Volkov and Telengatr, who were permanently attached to the company, but other artists were occasionally invited for certain productions.

From the first days of his engagement Zavadski began recruiting new actors, mainly from other large cities: Kiev, Kharkov, Gor'ki, Saratov, Baku, and so on. In the Soviet Union as in old Russia actors are not engaged for the run of a play, but are permanent members of repertory companies. Therefore it is only the closing of a theater and not the closing of a play which releases actors for employment elsewhere. The Red Army Central Theater thus took over a number of actors from the Korsh Theater in Moscow which had closed down. Two actors came from the Kamerny Theater, and a few others from other Moscow theaters. The rest came from the provinces. The acting personnel of the company was finally fixed by the end of 1933, when it included approximately forty persons. Auxiliary personnel were provided by the studio group attached to the theater, numbering twenty-five persons. The following actors formed the nucleus of the company:

Men	Women
Konovalov	Kupriyanova
Cherkasov	Zerkalova
Khokhlov	Kuznetsova
Khovanski	Khorlamova
Khodurski	Ranevskaya
Petrov	Volot'ko
Nasonov	Dobrzhanskaya
Krechetov	Troitskaya
Gerago	Rudina
Danil'ski	
Stolyarov	
Pirogov	
Voznesenski	
Bel'ski	

Some of the young men and women who formed the original company of the Red Army Central Theater continued to work under Zavadski. One of them, Stolyarov, later won distinction by his acting in the part of Martynov in the film *The Circus*. Those of the members of the former company who were not incorporated in the main group joined the studio organized under Zavadski where they continued as students.

The musical direction of the new theater was placed in the hands of Boris Aleksandrov, son of Aleksandr V. Aleksandrov, the famous leader of the Red Army Ensemble of Song and Dance. After his father's death in 1946, Boris Aleksandrov left the Red Army Central Theater and took over the direction of the Ensemble.

At this time (the mid-thirties) the political and administrative control of the theater assumed definite shape. The Political Administration of the Red Army continued to be the principal "boss" of the Central Theater. Rodionov, an assistant of General Gamarnik, was appointed to supervise the activities of the theater.

Another "boss," since the Central Theater was located in the Red Army House, was V. Mutnykh, head of the House, member of the Revolutionary Military Council and a high commanding officer of the Red Army—posts which made him equal in rank to a full general. Subordinate to Mutnykh was Major General L. Orlovski, head of the Central Theater, who in turn ruled over his assistants, V. Meskhiteli, and the administrative officials, who were civilians under the new system.

Mutnykh, head of the Red Army House, was a well-educated and cultured man who respected and appreciated the directorial talents of Zavadski and his wide theatrical culture and knowledge. Thanks to this fact he refrained from interfering in matters of artistic direction and often defended both the artistic and material interests of the theater before the Political Administration. Mutnykh enjoyed the respect of the theater personnel as well as of the administrative personnel of the Red Army House, from the cleaning women to the higher commanding officers under him. His administration resulted in the

maintenance throughout the building of perfect cleanliness, order and quiet—facts of particular importance during visits of foreign tourists to the building.

The smooth running of the whole organization was upset on the occasion of visits by General Budyonny, who found fault with everything and expressed his dissatisfaction at the top of his thin, squeaky voice. As a rule, every time Budyonny came to the Red Army House a number of army officials were incarcerated for a few days.

Fortunately, Budyonny's attacks did not extend to the theater personnel. He seldom went to the theater, and then only to performances. During intermissions he used to go backstage, and putting on the air of a great connoisseur of theater art, praised or berated the show, soon veering around, however, to horses or his own "heroic" feats during the Civil War—stories he had often told on former occasions.

Major General Orlovski, who was administrative head of the theater, provided the link between the theater and the Political Administration. He was not well versed in matters of the theater, but he was a member of the Communist Party and a high-ranking officer in the army. Actually, the whole administrative and financial management of the theater was in the hands of Orlovski's assistant, Meskhiteli, a non-Party man who was an expert in theatrical matters.

The technical personnel of the Red Army Central Theater numbered thirty-five persons, constituting several units: carpenters for framing sets, six men; stagehands, eight men; property men, four men; technicians for lighting and electrical mechanisms, six men; wardrobe personnel, eight persons; make-up and hairdressing personnel, two persons; and painter (flats), one man. On occasion, some of the technical units were unable for various reasons to complete their tasks without extra help before the opening of a new production. In such cases, assistance was obtained from outside by hiring additional personnel.

In the matter of finance, the Political Administration of the Red Army supported the Central Theater's budget. The theater

was consistently in the red since the seating capacity of the old theater hall, despite daily performances, was too small to recoup expenses. The deficit during the winter season in Moscow (in the summer the company went on a tour of army units in the provinces) was made up by a grant from the Political Administration amounting to some 700,000 rubles. Expenses of the summer tour were similarly backed by the Political Administration.

Plays and Playwrights

During the three years of Yuri Zavadski's artistic direction, the Red Army Central Theater produced the following plays: *The Jesters* by A. Ostrovski; *Prince Mstislav the Brave* by I. Prut; *Father Unknown* by V. Shkvarkin; *Fighters* by B. Romashov; *The End of a Squadron* by A. Korneichuk; *The Eastern Battalion* by the Tur Brothers and I. Prut; *I Love You* by I. Prut; and *Smug Citizens* by Maxim Gorki. A few detailed remarks about some of these plays are in order.

Prince Mstislav the Brave was the first play to bring its author I. Prut to the attention of theatergoers. The play describes an episode of the Civil War, setting forth a theme which was traditional with the Soviet playwrights of the period. An armored train of the White anti-Bolshevik army, bearing the name "Prince Mstislav the Brave" is captured by the Bolsheviks. The Whites succeed in stopping and surrounding the train by removing the rails before it and behind it. The Bolshevik commander of the train, his wife, the political commissar, the engine stoker, and two soldiers withdraw to one of the cars and by means of two machine guns and a cannon succeed in holding off the Whites. Under cover of night, one of them slips through the ring of besiegers in an attempt to report their plight to other Bolshevik forces. As the siege continues, all members of the Red unit but one are killed or seriously wounded. At the last moment a Bolshevik relief force arrives, the Whites are routed, the railroad track is repaired, and the armored train sets off to new

conquests to the tune of a victory song.

The only spot in the play in which the pulse of real human life was felt was a scene in which the last surviving member of the Bolshevik unit, the machine gunner Suslov, while keeping watch on the Whites, reminisces with touching simplicity about his native Siberia and various Siberian dishes. The part was played by the gifted actor A. Petrov, who sensed the inner truth of this scene and acted it with much conviction. The audience responded with a storm of applause and retained the memory of the simple Siberian peasant, not in the act of revolutionary heroics, but in the revelation of homely human sentiments. In directing the play, Zavadski laid particular stress on this scene.

Vasili Shkvarkin's play *Father Unknown* marked the opening of a new era in the life of the Red Army Central Theater. All through the years 1931 and 1932 and the beginning of 1933, Soviet playwrights had failed to produce a single good comedy of contemporary Soviet life. Soviet plays of that period were all propaganda pieces on political themes. One can mention the best known among them: *Fear* by A. Afinogenov, *Joy Street* by N. Zarkhi, and *My Friend* by N. Pogodin. But political plays, the better ones as well as the poor ones, failed to attract audiences, in fact repelled them. Yet once produced, these plays with their complicated settings and big casts had to stay in the repertory on orders of the authorities for twenty to twenty-five performances in succession—an obvious drag on the financial resources of the theater. Audiences wanted comedy. Classical comedies, Russian and foreign, would have helped considerably. But the politically minded Main Repertory Committee (Glavrepertkom) in authorizing the repertory plans of the theaters never permitted more than two or three premieres of classical comedies for each season.

The result was that most of the theaters in the Soviet Union were in the grip of financial crisis, except the theaters in Moscow where, because of their greater resources, the situation was somewhat less acute. Of course, at that time

all theaters in the Soviet Union were subsidized by the central government as well as by municipal and regional organizations. But the deficits, the result of poor attendance, were larger than the subsidies, and while theater managements pleaded with the powers that be for further relief, the salaries of actors and other theater personnel often remained unpaid for two or three months.

It was at a time when Soviet theaters were particularly hard hit by the absence of popular Soviet comedies that Shkvarkin, commissioned by the Moscow Theater of Satire, wrote his play *Father Unknown,* a situation comedy in which propaganda and political elements were held down to a minimum.

The first version of *Father Unknown* submitted by the author was comic in action but not in its lines, which were rather flat. During the course of rehearsals, however, in the hands of such masters of laughter as the actors of the Theater of Satire—Kara Dmitrie, R. Kholodov, F. Kurikhin, and others —the dialogue began to take on new life. In rehearsing their lines the actors improvised witticisms, injected humor by intonation, developed some of the author's funny stories, and so on. Most of these changes, which were carefully noted down, were accepted by the author since he realized how much they improved his play. The first performance of *Father Unknown* at the Theater of Satire was an enormous success, and the play, performed daily, ran for a whole year.

It is not unusual in the Soviet Union for a play to run simultaneously in two theaters in the same city, in view of the great demand for tickets, the desire of the government to disseminate a play widely, and the rivalry in style among theaters. The exceptional success of *Father Unknown* at the Theater of Satire led to its being produced next at the Red Army Central Theater. In this case the script used was the Theater of Satire's revision. A few weeks later, Shkvarkin's play was packing theaters in all the Soviet cities, and not only Russian theaters, for, translated into other languages,

it became equally popular with Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian, White Russian, Uzbek, Estonian, Lithuanian, and other national minority audiences in the Soviet Union. So great was the play's success that Shkvarkin was spoken of as the first millionaire of the Soviet Union.

The extraordinary success of *Father Unknown* was not due to the play's literary merits. It was the result largely of the fact that the characters were not the usual government officials—chairmen and secretaries of local, provincial and regional committees—of whom everybody was sick and tired in actual life. Nor did the play engage in political propaganda, deplore enemies of the people and saturate the spectators with a stage display of the same propaganda slogans and posters which met the eyes of the audience in daily life from the walls of factories and government offices. Instead, the play's characters were attractive young people, most of them students who, as a result of a romantic collision of interest, found themselves in one comic situation after another. The spectator laughed in the theater, laughed on his way home, and probably laughed even as he went to bed. The play helped him to forget the dull and somber reality of the next day.

It might seem strange that the Red Army Central Theater, which was called upon to carry on military propaganda by producing plays dealing with military themes, should have staged a play like *Father Unknown* and that it should have done so at the direction of the Political Administration of the Red Army. However, there is a simple explanation for this fact. The Red Army Central Theater at this time was a newly-organized dramatic unit which had not yet won popularity in Moscow and had no audience of its own. It was clear that propaganda plays could not attract large audiences. Realizing this, the Political Administration chose Shkvarkin's play to serve as bait and recommended it to the theater. Simultaneously, the Central Theater began rehearsing another play, *Fighters*, by Boris Romashov. This play was about a

military subject—the clash between public and private interests of Red Army officers—and was thus exactly the kind of fare which the Red Army Central Theater had been organized to bring to Soviet audiences. *Father Unknown* was designed to bring the audience back to the Central Theater for less attractive and less palatable propaganda.

The play *The Eastern Battalion* was written by the journalistic team of the Tur brothers on a commission from the Political Administration of the Red Army. It has a foreign setting and aims to expose colonial imperialism. The story deals with revolutionary disturbances among soldiers stationed in a colonial territory; trouble arises when they refuse to be used as oppressors of the native population. The place, although not clearly indicated, can be surmised from various references to be a French colony in Africa. To turn the soldiers away from political interests, the European government ruling the colony sends them a battalion of prostitutes. Unexpected complications, however, arise from the fact that one of the newly-arrived young women is a Communist who enrolled in the battalion to join her soldier-fiancé in the colony.

The romantic motif and the pompous phrases in defense of the oppressed natives fail to make *The Eastern Battalion* anything but a piece of claptrap propaganda under a cheaply attractive but vulgar cover.

Acting on direct orders of the Political Administration, the Red Army Central Theater company began rehearsing the play before the final act was completed. This was the first dramatic effort of the authors, and they found themselves unable to give a proper resolution to their fabricated conflict. Eventually the last act was written by Pil'tson, one of the assistant directors of the company.

The production of *The Eastern Battalion* was marked by an episode which throws light on Soviet literary mores. It began with playwright I. Prut's accusing the Tur brothers of plagiarism. After the production of his play *Prince Mstislav the Brave*, Prut succeeded in making his way into the Political

Administration circle, winning the favor of no less a person than General Gamarnik, head of the Political Administration, and becoming a sort of court playwright to this Administration.

Prut began to act as if he were the boss of the Red Army Central Theater, constantly interfering in its artistic and administrative affairs. At the time rehearsals of *The Eastern Battalion* were in full swing, Prut, who had just returned from a vacation in the Rest Home of the Political Administration at Sochi in the Caucasus, suddenly announced that during his absence from Moscow the Tur brothers had appropriated a story he had told them and used it to write what they claimed to be an entirely original play. The charges were taken to court, and Prut's inability to substantiate them by evidence of witnesses resulted in a verdict favorable to the Tur brothers.

But Prut did not drop the matter. As the trial ended, he shook hands with his opponents, admitted defeat and invited them to his home for a glass of vodka. There Prut turned the conversation to his play. The trial, he said, had gone against him, but only because he could not produce evidence to back up his charges. Surely, the Tur brothers knew this, he continued, and in all honesty should admit he had given them the plot. The brothers admitted this but insisted that since he was still unable to prove their use of his story, he had better write a play on some other subject. Prut bet them that he could prove the charge. The Tur brothers accepted the challenge and offered a bet. As they shook hands on it, the door into an adjoining room opened revealing two stenographers from the Political Administration with a record of the entire conversation (tape recorders were not yet known). Thus, the case went to court for a second time, resulting in a verdict which recognized Prut as a co-author of *The Eastern Battalion.*

Thereupon another conflict broke out. The last act had not yet been written, and the Turs said that Prut should do it, while Prut insisted it was the brothers' duty to finish the

play. It was all resolved, as already mentioned, by assistant director Pil'tson's completing the sorry job. When eventually produced by the Red Army Central Theater, the play proved a failure and was soon withdrawn. The same thing happened in the provinces.

Maxim Gorki's first play, *Smug Citizens*, was produced for special reasons. The Central Theater's company was made up largely of actors recruited from provincial companies. They all had different training, and the younger members lacked proper theater culture. It was felt the company needed a play which would provide a training exercise, enabling the members to give the acting a more uniform pattern and develop individual technique on a firm basis. *Smug Citizens*, a classical play in Soviet eyes, was chosen for this purpose, and Teleshova, an actress of the Moscow Art Theater company, was invited to direct it. The project having been planned as an educational studio effort, the rehearsals proceeded concurrently with rehearsals of other plays, and in fact it was two years before the play was finally produced, in the early part of 1935.

The Stanislavski system, used by Teleshova, was not obligatory in the Soviet theater. But directors able to apply this system were highly regarded as experts in their field. Furthermore, the Stanislavski system lent itself readily to the demands of socialist realism which the Soviet government had proclaimed the sole acceptable form of art.

Voroshilov

People's Commissar for Defense Kliment E. Voroshilov called himself a friend of the Red Army Central Theater. He was invariably present at first nights and saw some plays more than once. He usually took a side entrance to the theater, where stage sets were lifted by special pulleys, then changed his clothes in the dressing room of his favorite actor, A. Petrov, and through a gallery made his way to the government box. During the intermissions he walked to the hall

backstage which was named "Voroshilov Hall," where he chatted with the director, scenic designer and actors in the production.

Whenever Voroshilov visited the theater, by his orders a bountiful supper was served in Voroshilov Hall after the performance for members of the company. Voroshilov joined them at the table, after ten or fifteen minutes offered congratulations to everybody, then left while members of the company continued to eat and drink as long as they wished. Voroshilov was well informed about the private lives of many actors and other theater workers and liked to show off at these suppers by making embarrassing remarks about those present. On one occasion, his remark that he knew about a love affair between one of the actresses, a married woman, and one of the actors, induced the actress' husband to leave her although the story had no basis in fact. On another occasion Voroshilov raised his glass and said, "Tonight even Ushakov has the legal right to drink." The reference was to the make-up man, who secretly helped himself to liquor which he kept concealed among various make-up bottles. Stunned by Voroshilov's knowledge of his secret, the make-up man did not touch a drop during the entire supper. But the next day and all through the week he was completely drunk, informing everyone in the theater that he was carrying out orders of the People's Commissar for Defense and that nobody could make him stop drinking.

Voroshilov's visits to the theater ended not only in feasts for the company. Besides favorites, he also had his *bêtes noires,* actors whom he disliked either as persons or as performers in certain roles. As far as they were concerned, he merely gave orders to the director of the theater, Orlovski, to fire them, refusing to listen to any explanation or argument. Quite a few actors thus fell from grace.

Besides his regular visits to the theater, Voroshilov also went there accompanied by a retinue of generals on the occasions of official celebrations of various important events.

Such were Red Army Day, Aviation Day, celebrations in connection with Party congresses, or visits to the Red Army Central Theater of foreign military guests. In such cases the repast which was spread at the conclusion of the performance was no ordinary supper but a sumptuous banquet. The table, laid out with expensive plate and silverware, groaned under the weight of dishes with all kinds of viands and innumerable bottles of wines and liquor. Waiting on the guests were servants in black tailcoats. In another respect these banquets differed from ordinary suppers: they could be attended only by members of the directorate, play directors, scenic designers, and actors who had appeared in the performance, not by other members of the theater's working personnel. On these special days the Red Army building could be entered only at a fixed hour and with a special pass; no parcels were allowed, and clothes had to be checked at a designated place. So that the required "order" could be preserved, plain-clothes men moved all over the building.

In a way these celebrations were welcome to the company, especially to the younger personnel who eked out a meager existence on the low salaries they received. The occasions were full of excitement. Women and men were required to appear in evening clothes, but few owned such apparel. Some were given permission to obtain such clothes from the theater wardrobe, and each tried to get there first to have the best choice. Others rushed to their friends to borrow what they needed. During the performance there was real inspiration in the acting, intermissions were cut as short as possible, and everybody in the company looked forward to the supper, especially since the company included high dignitaries.

As soon as the performance was over, everybody changed quickly and went to the hall where tables were laid out. But there was a long wait; Soviet banquets have their ritual. One had to listen to several long speeches, greetings and congratulations, to express enthusiasm over wishes for the overthrow of capitalism by the world proletariat, to send greetings to

the Communist Party and the Soviet government, and especially ardent greetings to the Father of Peoples, Stalin, to applaud long and hard, and perhaps to honor somebody's memory by respectfully rising to one's feet. Only after all this was one permitted to attend to the appetite and help oneself to the abundant delicacies on the table.

The supper was usually followed by a dance. Among the dancers, General Tukhachevski was particularly expert and graceful in contrast to the stocky and clumsy Voroshilov. The actors danced hugging the walls of the hall so as to keep out of the way of more important dancers and especially to avoid colliding with them.

As the party drew to its close, General Budyonny, by that time thoroughly intoxicated, usually threw himself into a Russian folk dance, bending his knees and kicking his heels. When everything was over, automobiles of the Red Army House were waiting to take everybody home.

The day-to-day work of the Red Army Central Theater did not really arouse Voroshilov's interest. On rare occasions, in a conversation with the commanding officer of the Red Army House, he would inquire about a new play and ask what "his" theater was going to show next. There were times when Voroshilov read the new play before it was produced (as happened with Romashov's *Fighters* and Korneichuk's *The End of the Squadron*). In these cases he called up Zavadski to inquire about the general plan of production and the interpretation of principal characters and even made suggestions about casting. He would end with instructions to supply the theater with all necessary materials, however scarce, for costumes and properties. The theater's very resourceful manager took advantage of these opportunities to fill the theater's storerooms with materials for other productions.

The Company's Tour in the Summer of 1934

In the summer of 1934 the Red Army Central Theater company was sent on a tour which was divided into two separate

phases. First of all the company was to play in Leningrad and Kronstadt for two months and return to Moscow. Then after a brief stay in Moscow it was to pick up the specially constructed portable stage sets and proceed on a tour of the Byelorussian Military District via Smolensk, Minsk, Vitebsk, Bobruisk, Gomel', Borisov and Nikolayev.

The company's repertory during the tour was to include the following plays: *The Test* by A. Davurin, *Fighters* by B. Romashov, *Father Unknown* by V. Shkvarkin, *Prince Mstislav the Brave* by I. Prut, and *The End of the Squadron* by A. Korneichuk. In addition, the company was to give a number of concerts for various military units at airfields, in munitions plants and aboard naval ships.

At a meeting of the company held in Moscow before setting off on tour, General Gamarnik's assistant, Rodionov, made a speech explaining the political tasks facing the company on its tour and the duties of each of its members. The Central Theater company, he explained, was to conduct its tours as the cultural vanguard of the Red Army. In addition to the performances of plays and concerts, the company was to carry out the important task of rendering aid and instruction to amateur groups in army units, Red Army houses, military plants, and ships of the navy. The company was to take into account the fact that it would come face to face with its basic audience; this meant the standard of its performances had to be higher than it was in Moscow.

Members of the company were to observe complete and strict secrecy about everything they would see in the army units or military plants, remembering that everywhere there were many enemies of the people and foreign spies. During the stay in Kronstadt and the tour of the Byelorussian Military District, all members of the company were to wear military uniforms and leave the place of performance or their billets only with permission of the director of the theater, Orlovski, after informing him where they were going.

When he had made these points, Rodionov concluded his speech with the statement that the company's tour was not

intended as a restful trip. On the contrary, the company would have to work perhaps five times as hard as it did in Moscow.

During the first week of May the Red Army Central Theater company, with its entire acting, artistic and technical personnel, arrived in Leningrad. A performance was to be given in Leningrad's Bol'shoi Dramatic Theater, and all members of the company were housed in the best hotels such as the European, the October, and the Angleterre. From the very first day all of Rodionov's injunctions were forgotten. Taking advantage of the absence of enforced rehearsals, everybody wanted to go sightseeing, and there were many museums and places of interest which claimed attention—the Hermitage, the Russian Museum, the Admiralty Museum, the famous palaces at Peterhof and Gatchina, Leningrad's own renowned "islands," and much besides. Moreover, everyone had plenty of cash since before the trip started, salaries, traveling expenses and additional daily allowances had been paid. Leningrad restaurants were tempting to the visitors, and the American Negro jazz band at the Astoria aroused pleasant expectations. The "public work" of aiding amateur organizations was for the time being dismissed from mind, for the heads of the company made no attempt to bring it up, apparently deciding to take things easy themselves.

Two weeks after the opening of the company's season in Leningrad, Rodionov, accompanied by Korneichuk and Prut, came over.

For Korneichuk this period was the beginning of his career. At the time he was still a candidate-member of the Communist Party, but it could be said even then that a political career in the field of literature was assured to him, mainly because of his oratorical gift. During his stay in Leningrad he gave several political addresses: at the Admiralty, in military plants and aboard navy ships. His subjects included the Civil War, the international situation and political events in the Soviet Union. With each passing day, his name acquired a constantly growing popularity in Communist literary and theater circles. Nor was he shy about pushing himself to the

front. Whenever Kirov, Stalin's closest associate and all-powerful government official in Leningrad, was present at a performance of the company, Korneichuk was invariably seen sitting next to him.

A different method of making a career was used by I. Prut, the "court playwright" of the Political Administration of the Red Army. He made it his business to be *au courant* with all backstage intrigues among the actors, knew their shop talk and was a regular attendant at the actors' parties, including drinking parties. Prut was not liked among members of the company and his curiosity about everything made people cautious in his presence, dampening their conversational ease and candor.

In Leningrad the company of the Red Army Central Theater gave daily performances at the Leningrad Bol'shoi Dramatic Theater and in addition gave about fifty concerts on warships and in military plants.

At that time the Leningrad Red Army and Navy House had no professional drama theater, only a theater with a company made up largely of amateurs who performed short acts on themes of the day. This theater used to tour army and navy units in the Leningrad Military District, showing only premières of its new program to the Leningrad audiences. Aside from this vaudeville theater, the entire theatrical effort of the Leningrad Red Army and Navy House was confined to organizing concerts with the participation of artists from the Moscow and Leningrad stage.

The Red Army Central Theater, on orders of the high command of the Red Army, went to Kronstadt, the naval base of the Soviet Baltic fleet just outside Leningrad, two days ahead of the previously scheduled date. The change was made to allow the company to take part in the welcoming reception to be given by the city of Kronstadt and the Baltic Fleet for the *Chelyuskin* men, who, since their escape from an ice floe on which they had spent several months, were touring the larger cities of the Soviet Union (of course, at the expense of the state). In every city, the local Communist Party and municipal

authorities held elaborate receptions in their honor, although far from favorable rumors about the circumstances of their rescue circulated in Russia, especially in Moscow and Leningrad.

The official version, designed for propaganda purposes in the Soviet Union and abroad, raised the members of the *Chelyuskin* expedition to the status of heroes, and it was claimed that the best airmen of the Soviet Union had been sent to the Arctic to rescue them. According to the unofficial version, however, which had its source in private reports from members of the expedition, the men had received orders over the radio to remain on the ice floe and wait for the rescuers although the entire group was able to walk over to the Siberian shore without exposure to any undue risks. An anecdote was going the rounds in Moscow to the effect that local residents from the Siberian coast visited the floating camp every day to take food to the marooned. If one accepts this last version—and most people in the Soviet Union believed it—it is clear that the staging of rescue operation and the pompous receptions given the "heroes" in Soviet cities (on which large sums were expended) were needed by the Soviet government to show Western Europe and America how, disregarding expense and all other considerations, the Soviet government took care of every human being and came to his aid when he was at the mercy of the wild forces of nature.

The reception for the "heroes" which was staged at Kronstadt under the direction of the political heads of the city and the Baltic fleet was elaborate, involving air and naval displays.

In the evening the guests of honor, seated in the front rows of the Red Navy Theater, together with the high command of the Baltic fleet, watched the visiting Central Theater company open its season with *The End of the Squadron* by Korneichuk. The author himself greeted the guests and particularly, of course, the Politburo and Stalin in a speech from the stage before the curtain rose.

The members of the company failed to realize their hopes of seeing much of Kronstadt and the warships (including the flagship) and of talking to the sailors. The only persons to whom they were able to talk were political instructors and a few naval officers. They were unable to visit the warships, and as for seeing the city, they were advised by their company heads not to walk about the street—which practically amounted to prohibition of all sightseeing. In fact, the entire personnel of the company began to feel constrained from the time the sets and properties of the company were loaded on the ship of a Leningrad dock. This operation was subjected to the strictest surveillance, with every stage set and box of costumes being closely examined; even personal baggage was examined.

Upon the Red Army Central Theater company's return to Moscow, preparations were started immediately for the second half of the 1934 tour—the visit to various military centers in the Byelorussian Military District. Two railroad cars were provided for the company's personnel, and a freight car for sets and costumes. For this tour special portable, non-realistic sets were constructed in the form of curtains and mats.

In the cities visited, play performances and concerts were given in the houses and clubs of the Red Army and sometimes in the local city theaters. When entertaining army units out of town, performances were played in the open air, in tents, on specially built stages, and at airfields even on the wings of parked airplanes. The audiences in these cases were exclusively military and varied in size from a couple of thousand to as few as thirty or forty men. Admission was free, for expenses of the tour, including the salaries of personnel, were borne by the Political Administration of the Red Army.

It must be recalled that one of the objects of the tour was to help raise the artistic standards of local amateur groups of army entertainers. The Red Army Central Theater company came in contact with several such groups in the cities

of Minsk and Gomel', and with various army units throughout Byelorussia. These so-called "amateur theaters" performed short propaganda plays and gave concert programs in which the usual numbers were army songs by a chorus, folk dances and the so-called "chastushki," humorous folk couplets accompanied by a concertina. In some of these groups, women's parts were played by men.

During the tour, a characteristic episode occurred involving the activities of the actor Aleksei Petrov. A Leningrad motion picture studio, the "Lenfilm," which was producing a film entitled *Peasants,* wanted Petrov to play a part. Since he was engaged in almost every performance of the company, the directors refused to grant him permission to play in the movie. The motion picture studio countered by an appeal to Voroshilov himself, whose favorite, it well knew, was Petrov. The result was an order from Voroshilov to coordinate Petrov's appearances with the theater company with his acting for the movie studio. To facilitate this, the army was ordered to place an airplane at Petrov's personal disposal. Towards the end of the tour Petrov estimated that for six weeks he had slept only four nights on the ground.

The Byelorussian tour proved to be exhausting not only to Petrov but to the entire company. Life in railroad cars, irregular and haphazard eating, daily performances in different towns and theaters (the latter in most cases unadapted for professional work), daily loadings and unloadings of sets, in which the entire company personnel, regardless of status and official rank, had to take part—all this brought the company to such a state of exhaustion towards the tour's end that everybody thought only of the vacation which was to follow.

Fifth Anniversary

The 1934-1935 season of the Red Army Central Theater, the fifth anniversary of the opening of the theater, was celebrated by an exhibition of sketches and models of all the

theater's productions and by a gala jubilee meeting at which most of the theater personnel received commemorative gifts from the Political Administration of the Red Army and personally from People's Commissar of Defense Voroshilov. The gifts consisted of silver cigarette cases and watches manufactured in prerevolutionary days by the Pavel Buré Company. It is interesting to note that every time Voroshilov presented a gift to actors, painters, musicians, or Stakhanovites and other outstanding performers of production tasks, the gifts were invariably watches manufactured by the Pavel Buré Company and of the same serial number, carrying an identically engraved inscription: "From People's Commissar of Defense of the U.S.S.R. Voroshilov." How great the stock of these watches at the Kremlin was, it is impossible to say.

On the anniversary day the actors Petrov, Khokhlov, Khovanski, and Konovalov were awarded the honor rank of "Merited Artist of the Republic." Director Yuri Zavadski and the head of the Red Army Song and Dance Ensemble Aleksandrov received gold pocket watches.

A few days after the anniversary Aleksandrov lost his watch when his pocket was picked in a streetcar. The entire force of the crime-investigating apparatus was mobilized to search for the culprit. Some days later the lost watch, or another of the same make, was returned to Aleksandrov with an admonition to take greater care of government gifts.

The 1934-1935 season included the production of a new play, *I Love You* by I. Prut, a comedy dealing with summer maneuvers of the Red Army.

The play had eight scenes. To give the stagehands time for changing the scenery, interludes related to the action of the play were played between the scenes. At that time distinctions among army commanders were indicated only by triangles, cubes, diamonds, and rectangles sewn on the collar. The entr'actes showed an old lady, a landowner of

former days, sitting in an armchair outside the little house left in her possession and situated in the region where the maneuvers were taking place. The old lady is visited by Red Army commanders, of whom she keeps making fun by addressing them by their insignia: "Comrade Four Cubes," "Comrade Three Diamonds," "Comrade Two Crossties." During the rehearsals the actors could not figure out the purpose of these episodes, particularly since they were couched in a tone offensive to the Red Army. Later, the meaning became clear when the Soviet government issued a decree introducing officer ranks in the Red Army.[2] It was revealed that Prut's play *I Love You* had been commissioned by the Political Administration in order to prepare the privates and officers of the Red Army for this decision of the Soviet government.

Administrative Changes and the New Art Director, Aleksei Popov

The Red Army Central Theater entered the year 1936 with important changes in its administrative and artistic direction.

The first change was the transfer of Mutnykh, commander of the Red Army House, to the post of Director of the Bol'shoi Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet. Outwardly, appointment to the directorship of what was officially known as the Theater of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee seemed a promotion for Mutnykh. Actually, transfer to a civil post for a military man with the rank of full general was a demotion. This soon proved to be the case by events which followed. In 1937, Mutnykh was arrested and executed.

At the time of Mutnykh's arrest, Orlovski, the commander of the Central Theater, was also arrested. After some six months' confinement, Orlovski was released, a shadow of the man he had been and with many teeth missing. After his release, Orlovski was sent for a rest to Sochi in the Caucasus. But he was arrested again six months later, and his

subsequent fate remains a mystery to this day.

Toward the end of 1935 the Political Administration had proposed to Yuri Zavadski that he merge his own theater, which he had gradually built up from a studio, with the Red Army Central Theater, of which he was official Artistic Director. Zavadski, for reasons of his own, declined the proposal. As a result, he was dismissed from his post at the Central Theater, while his own theater, with himself as its head, was sent from Moscow to Rostov for four years.

Zavadski's successor at the Red Army Central Theater was Aleksei Popov. Popov had obtained his stage training at the Vakhtangov Theater. Afterwards he worked at the Theater of the Revolution, from which he was recruited for the Central Theater.

It can be said that the Red Army Central Theater reached artistic maturity with the production of *Smug Citizens* and *Vassa Zheleznova* by Gorki, Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *General Suvorov* by I. Bakhterev. The two Gorki plays, produced under Zavadski, were training exercises which helped to develop and cement the company as a unit.

The other two plays, which were directed by Popov, revealed the beneficent results of the training period and established the company as exponents of the methods and principles of the Moscow Art Theater. But it can hardly be said that either of these two productions directed by Popov was an achievement of which the theater could be justly proud. The trouble lay in Popov's general policy as a director. Unlike Zavadski, he was much too subservient to the dictates and wishes of the Party organization and the Political Administration of the Red Army.

In directing a play, Popov's concern was with scoring Soviet propaganda points rather than bringing out artistic aims and effects embodied in the play. And in choosing his propaganda points, too, he followed the line laid down for him by the political leadership of the Communist Party.

Thanks to this political subservience, Popov secured a firm hold on the Central Theater and has occupied the post of Artistic Director from 1937 to the present.

As examples of Popov's directorial treatment of plays, it will be useful to dwell a little longer on *The Taming of the Shrew* and *General Suvorov.*

From the outset, the main idea of Popov's direction of *The Taming of the Shrew* was to stress the great contrasts and contradictions of the period in which the play is set. There were two other ways of treating the play open to Popov. One was to emphasize a comedy of situation. Popov rejected this approach for fear of falling into a "formalism" which would detract from a realistic depiction of the characters. The other method was to stress a comedy of character. But this was apt to result in a conflict with the play of situation so brilliantly developed by Shakespeare, as Popov saw it. Moreover, and this was the principal consideration, neither of these two methods answered Soviet demands as to how classical plays were to be handled. To avoid clashing with these demands, Popov made it his directorial objective to lay bare the contradictions of the Renaissance era as revealed in its typical contrasts.

In his production he showed incredible destitution, sordidness and degeneracy existing side by side with breathtaking luxury. There were magnificent squares, buildings and monuments, and next to them squalid and stench-filled slums. Debauchery reigned supreme, yet the purest love flowered by its side. There were villainy and treachery, stakes at which scientists were burned to death and next to them the beauty-worshiping paintings of Botticelli—paintings against whose background men displayed casks with bodies of their murdered enemies preserved in brine. Petruchio's small country house, as portrayed by Popov, was a dive for a gang of bachelors, ragged and half-starved but gay and happy. Viewing the era from this standpoint, the stage director stressed the role of servants and made them as important as the principals. He employed them especially in numerous interludes

with which he studded the play, making them engage in all kinds of comic business.

Popov's hopes of success came true. The Soviet press was loud in its praise of the production and noted its lyrical quality, tenderness and warmth.

In producing *General Suvorov* the director set himself the objective of painting the portrait of the great Russian army leader during the reigns of Catherine the Great and Paul I, free of traditional idealization. As noted earlier, Soviet government propaganda aims included fanning patriotic sentiment among the people to counteract anti-Communist sentiments brought on by poverty, semi-starvation and the constant fear of being thrown into jail. Suitable subjects for such patriotic propaganda were the numerous historical leaders of the Russian people such as Aleksander Nevski, Peter the Great and Suvorov. Naturally, these national Russian heroes were to be interpreted in a Communist light, i.e., suggesting conclusions profitable to Communist policies, much as these conclusions might, and did, violate historical truth.

The title of the play *General Suvorov,* rather than simply "Suvorov," reveals the playwright's lack of interest in Suvorov the man, with a frustrated personal life, deep religious feelings and strong passions. Nor did the task set before the playwright include painting a broad picture of Suvorov's military genius. This was to avoid possible comparisons to the disadvantage of Soviet military leaders in the event of their failure in future wars. Accordingly, although Suvorov stands in the center of the play, there is no dramatic development in his own life. In story and action the play takes place around him without being advanced by him. The play has a great many characters who appear only in one or two scenes, and besides Suvorov only his orderly remains in the play from beginning to end.

The Soviet political masters were not completely satisfied with the production. The Party press criticized Popov for

showing the heroism of the Russian people without laying sufficient emphasis upon the hardships and sacrifices borne by the Russian army in Suvorov's Swiss campaign against Napoleon, a campaign in which the Russian army fought stubbornly on in the Alps although wretchedly dressed and often without food. From the propaganda point of view, always uppermost in the Soviet mind, Popov failed to prepare the audience for conditions of warfare which would demand absolute sacrifice from the Russian people.

The War and Theater "Brigades"

On September 17, 1939, V. M. Molotov, chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, informed the population of the Soviet Union that the Communist Party and the government had decided to place the workers of the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia (which at that time were part of Poland) under the "protection" of the Soviet state. The high command of the Red Army was given orders to carry out this decision. As soon as military operations began, great numbers of artists, playwrights and writers expressed a desire to provide entertainment for the army at the front.

During Red Army operations in this campaign for the Soviet-Nazi partition of Poland, seventy-six units, comprising fourteen hundred of the best representatives of the Soviet theater and art world, went to serve at the front in the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia. Among the artists who appeared with these units, the following should be mentioned: People's Artists of the U.S.S.R. Kachalov, Tarasova, Tarkhanov, Khmelyev, Klimov, Yablochkina, Korchagina, and Aleksandrovskaya; People's Artists of the Republic Pechkovski, Cherkasov, Polyakov, Kramov, Buchma, and Slonov; and prizewinners ("laureates") in Soviet and international contests Oistrakh, Gilel's and Flier. Among the units that went to the front were "brigades" of the Moscow Bol'shoi Theater of Opera and Ballet and the

First Moscow Art Theater, and "brigades" representing the operetta, vaudeville and circus.

The eagerness of Soviet theater workers to get to the front was motivated chiefly by a desire to visit countries beyond Soviet borders. This possibility offered the prospect of seeing life in the Western world with one's own eyes and, especially, of buying for oneself and one's family a great variety of articles which were absolutely unobtainable, even for the most privileged among artists, in the Soviet Union.

Within a short time one began to see in the streets of Soviet cities men and women wearing suits, coats and dresses of good foreign manufacture. Theater companies brought back to the Soviet Union materials for theatrical costumes, electrical equipment and whole sets of stage machinery. Playwrights, too, were eager to go to the West, particularly since it was comparatively easy to be sent on an official mission.

During the years 1935-1939 Soviet dramatists produced only a few plays answering the demands of Soviet rulers. The most outstanding of these plays were *Life* by F. Panfyorov, *A Tale* by M. Svetlov, *The Wolf* by L. Leonov, *The Teacher* by S. Gerasimov, *Happiness* by Molyarevski, and *Bogdan Khmel'nitski* by A. Korneichuk.

Many plays were written about prominent figures in the Communist movement, such as Sverdlov, Dzerzhinski, and Ladoketskhoveli (a prominent Bolshevik killed in the Tbilisi prison in 1903). Since this kind of play was especially attractive to young writers, the works which resulted were invariably of low quality. The only play that won the full approval of Party circles was *The Extraordinary Commissar* by V. Vynnychenko and Rogov, which dealt with the activities of Dzerzhinski, head of the notorious "Extraordinary Commission," popularly known as the Cheka.

In the eyes of Soviet leaders, the events of 1939-1940 made political topical interest on the playwright's part more imperative than ever. It was thought that acquaintance with

the life of the West and close observation of the Red Army under wartime conditions would enrich the Soviet writer's outlook, and all kinds of facilities were given him for visits to the newly-occupied territories. But Soviet authorities failed to take into account two important facts: one, the buying orgy of the visitors due to years of famine of most consumers' goods at home—a fact which tended to make the playwrights forget the official purpose of their visits; and second, the visitors' discovery (apparently unforeseen by Soviet leaders) of the tremendous difference between the life the visitors found outside Soviet borders and the false picture of it presented at home by Soviet propaganda. Since they had to write plays denouncing the foreign capitalist world, their firsthand impressions of that world were anything but conductive to such a denunciatory attitude. Of course, some of the playwrights did write their commissioned plays. One of them, Y. Permyak, wrote a play titled *The People are Jubilant,* which dealt with the Polish-Ukrainian cities of L'vov and Belostok after their occupation by Soviet troops, and submitted it seven days after the actual occupation. However, not a single play submitted during that period was ever produced.

But if the period was creatively sterile, there was tremendous activity by theater companies in the entertainment of Red troops. In little more than a year, from August 1939 to September 1940, some 29,000 performances of plays and concerts were given by various theatrical units before Soviet soldiers and sailors. Of this number, 3,377 concerts and plays were performed within a single ten-day period dedicated to the twenty-first anniversary of the Red Army and Navy.

During all that time the Red Army Central Theater company, apart from sending two units to the new western territories, remained in Moscow preparing the opening of the new theater building, which took place in October 1940.

The final month before the opening the company played on the stage of the Moscow Kamerny Theater. The transfer from

the Red Banner Hall of the Red Army Central House to the Kamerny Theater was prompted by a desire to give the company a chance to accustom itself to a larger stage: the Kamerny Theater stage is twice as large as that in the Red Banner Hall, and the new Red Army Central Theater's stage is three times as wide and five times as deep as the Kamerny Theater stage.

In preparing for the opening of the new Central Theater a number of problems arose. The company had to be enlarged both in artistic and technical personnel; new large-scale stage sets had to be made; a repertory of plays (a highly important matter) had to be selected to serve the special needs of a Red Army theater; and special measures had to be taken to make the theater popular with the wider public.

Drama critics had shown fairly little interest in the work of the Red Army Central Theater company during all of its previous existence. Only the most important productions attracted the critics' attention, and even then there was much diffidence in their comments, the significance of a particular production being determined not on merit but on the atmosphere of the Party attitude surrounding it. And it must be said, Soviet critics had an extraordinarily sensitive nose in these matters.

But as far as repertory was concerned, the problem of pleasing the critics (which really meant pleasing Communist leaders) remained formidable. There were no suitable plays to be had on the life of the Red Army. On the theme of Soviet life in general *The Teacher* by S. Gerasimov was chosen. There was also a tragedy, *Yemelyan Pugachov,* by I. Lukomski, which dealt with the great peasant rebellion led by Pugachov in the eighteenth century; and a play provisionally named *Live Flowers,* which the well-known Soviet playwright Nikolai Pogodin was commissioned to write, dealing with the Communist idea of the proper combination of personal and civic interests in a Soviet citizen. *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* representing classical comedy, was in-

cluded in the list of plays planned for the season.

But although *The Teacher* and *Live Flowers* had men of the Red Army among their leading characters, their stories did not specifically illustrate military-political themes. Furthermore, none of the new Soviet plays was suitable for the opening of the new theater either by political significance or literary quality. Under the circumstances, it was decided to revive some of the plays done by the company on its old stage, refurbishing them for the new theater. These plays were *General Suvorov* by I. Bakhterev, *Silver Gulch* by N. Pogodin, *The Court Affair* by A. Sukhovo-Kobylin, and *The Taming of the Shrew.* The play chosen to open the season in the new theater was *General Suvorov.*

The Opening of the New Red Army Central Theater

The gala opening of the new theater took place on October 14, 1940. Preceding the performance a solemn meeting was held. People's Commissar of Defense Voroshilov, Marshal Semyon Timoshenko, Deputy Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Lev Mekhlis, Deputy People's Commissar of Defense Shchadenko, Chief of the General Staff General Kyril Meretskov, and Commander of the Moscow Military District General Tyulenev were among those in attendance. Also present were various generals of the Red Army, representatives of the High Command of the Navy, delegates of the Supreme Council of the U.S.S.R., representatives of Party and governmental departments, Stakhanovites and honor men of large industrial plants, Heroes of the Soviet Union, and the rest of the Soviet elite.

Many speeches were made and many good wishes expressed. Nearly every speech called upon dramatists to write plays that would help solve the problems of ideological education of the builders of communism. Opinions were expressed that the new army theater should make every effort to create a new repertory of Soviet plays whose main theme

would be defense of the fatherland. Others stressed the necessity for Soviet playwrights to lay bare the processes shaping the emergence of a new communist consciousness and the intellectual significance of the path traveled by the men of the Stalin era. In his speech Artistic Director Popov stated bluntly that the company saw no prospect of producing in the near future a single play that would answer the purposes of the Red Army Theater and said that all the new plays already written were bad and unfit for production there.

The commander of the Red Army Central Theater, Regimental Commissar Ugryumov, pledged to justify the trust of the Party and the government by satisfying all their demands and to raise the theater to the level of the best theaters in the Soviet Union. High-sounding phrases, though, were of little avail. Only a short time after his speech, Ugryumov was removed from his post of Commander of the Red Army Central Theater and was succeeded by Major General S. Pasha.

The opening performance took place amid loud acclaim. Artist Shifrin drew on all his talent and experience to provide striking scenic effects in which the great width and depth of the stage were used with brilliant resourcefulness. The play, poor as a dramatic work, was unable to make much of an impression upon the audience, but where it failed, the gaps were filled by splendid acting and breathtaking scenery.

As far as material requirements for the success of this opening were concerned, the Army's Political Administration had seen to it that the theater should have everything it needed without the least delay. The theater's storerooms had been packed with countless rolls of silk, velvet, brocade, and other fabrics. The part of the building occupied by workshops resembled a factory employing many workers, so great was the noise of mechanical saws, turning lathes, sewing machines and hammers.

In general, it must be said that the material resources of the Red Army Central Theater, generous as they had been in

the old building, became practically unlimited after the move to the new building. The scenic designer or the director needed only to ask for what he wanted and it was supplied immediately. Theater workshops produced metal and wooden constructions several meters high, manufactured special electrical equipment for lighting effects, sewed costumes, painted scenery, molded properties. Moreover, in addition to the supplies received from the Political Administration, the Red Army Central Theater, together with all other Moscow theaters, drew on the resources of the Main Committee on Art Affairs. The supplies open to the company were particularly abundant during the years 1939-1940 and the later war years when military propaganda assumed exceptional importance.

It goes without saying that operating along these lines the Red Army Central Theater could never be self-supporting. Daily expenditures of the theater amounted to 25,000 rubles, whereas the daily take with a capacity audience amounted to only 12,000 rubles. The daily loss of 13,000 rubles was made up by the government which in addition bore the cost of the annual two-months' summer tour of the company. The small theater hall in the upper part of the new building, originally intended for rehearsals, was soon turned into a branch of the Red Army Central Theater. In this case the objective was not to increase the theater's earning ability but to enlarge the audience upon which to exercise its political influence.

The War Years in the Theater

Theater units to serve Soviet troops at the front began organizing as soon as the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, but these efforts were disrupted by the rapid advance of the German armies. The Red armies retreated, abandoning one city after another and being encircled with disastrous monotony. No propaganda was able to change the course of events.

Besides, the Soviet government had other things than the theater to think about.

Several theater units which succeeded in reaching the front were taken prisoner by the Germans. Army theater activity therefore became concentrated in the far rear where fresh armies were recruited and trained. At these points, theater groups aimed at propagandizing certain victory and belief in the inspired policies of the Soviet government and Generalissimo Stalin.

As the Germans advanced deeper into Russia, theater companies in provincial cities folded up and hurried eastward. This was not organized evacuation but the movement of small individual groups. A large percentage of actors stayed to wait for the Germans. Only a few theaters in the larger provincial cities were evacuated completely and in an organized fashion, but the local Soviet authorities could claim no credit for these successes. They were due to the personal enterprise of individual theater directors who were public-spirited enough to think about saving their theaters as well as themselves. In the majority of cases, the leading Soviet administration personnel, including heads of Party committees, executives of state enterprises and officials of the NKVD, loaded their belongings onto government trucks and fled to safety at the first opportunity. Needless to say, they washed their hands of responsibility for what would happen to the population they left behind—a population which included artists and large groups of Jews.

The bigger theaters of Moscow and Leningrad were evacuated to specified localities in the rear.

Of the plays published during the first months of the war with Germany only two deserve mention: A. Perventsev's *The Winged Tribe* and A. Gladkov's *Long, Long Ago.* The first play tried to affirm faith in a final victory, while the second, which was written in verse, drew a romantic picture of the adventures of a young woman who, disguised as a man, took part in the patriotic war against Napoleon. Both these

plays were produced by the Central Theater, which was evacuated to Sverdlovsk in the Urals where it stayed for nearly two years.

As the Germans began to withdraw and Soviet armies pressed them further and further westward, the cities, as they recovered from the Germans, gradually restored their theaters. Actors, who had scattered all over Russia during the period of retreat, hastened back to resume their work. For its part, the Soviet government reasserted its interest in the theater and resumed active control over the functioning companies. The fact is that the government needed the theater more than ever, for it had to justify to the Russian people its unpreparedness for a war which had resulted in defeat and capture by the Germans of many millions of Soviet soldiers, destruction of numerous cities and the burning of countless villages. On rush orders, the Committee on Art Affairs began organizing theater units to send to the front. These units included the Front Theater of Moscow Oblast, the Front Theater of the Art Department of Moscow Oblast, the Front Theater "Iskra," the Front Branch of the Maly Theater (two units), the Front Brigade of the Bol'shoi Theater, the Theater of the Red Banner Baltic Fleet, the Front Theater of Comedy, the Front Branch of the Vakhtangov Theater, the Theater of the Northern Fleet, the Front Theater "Ogonyok," Front Brigades of the First Moscow Art Theater, the Front VTO (All-Union Theatrical Society) Theater (two units), the Front Moscow Drama Theater, the Front Theater of Musical Comedy, and the Front Branch of the Red Army Central Theater. (This unit gave over twenty-five hundred concerts during the war years.) There were also many other units made up of vaudeville and circus artists.

New plays appeared dealing with the heroism of the Russian people and the Red Army in the war, and with the guiding role of the Communist Party and that "man of genius" Stalin. The following may be mentioned: *At the Walls of Leningrad* by V. Vishnevski, *The Officer of the Fleet* by A.

Kron, *The Earth Bears Witness* by Z. Agranenko and I. Baru, and *The Immortal* by A Arbuzov.

The Red Army Central Theater returned to Moscow in June 1943 after nearly two years in Sverdlovsk. After the war the stage of the theater began to ring with the anti-Western propaganda which has dominated the Soviet scene ever since. The Soviet Army, however, which saw the different life in the West, is the most active enemy of Soviet propaganda, and no Red Army theater will make any honest soldier forget what he managed to see during the war.

Notes to *The Red Army Central Theater in Moscow*

1. My sources for this article on the Red Army Central Theater are as follows:
For the period April 1933 to April 1935, I worked with the Red Army Central Theater as artist and deputy director for scenic design. During the same period, at the invitation of I. E. Mal'tsen, chief engineer-designer of the projected new Central Theater, I worked in drawing up the blueprints and plans of the stage of the new theater, work carried on in constant contact with the architects of the new theater, Alab'yan and Simbirtsev.

For the period prior to 1933 when the Red Army Central Theater was being organized, information was obtained from conversation with V. I. Mutnykh, Commander of the Red Army House, and Professor Aleksandrov, leader of the Red Army Song and Dance Ensemble.

Supplementary information for the period to 1935 was obtained from the Soviet magazine *Teatr i dramaturgiya* [Theater and Dramaturgy] and the army newspaper *Krasnaya zvezda* [Red Star].

For the period from 1935 to the opening of the new theater in October 1940, information was obtained from *Red Star* and from personal conversations in the theater with Director for Scenic Design Gol'dman and other colleagues.

2. For a summary of the contents of the decree, see White, D. Fedotoff, *The Growth of the Red Army,* Princeton University Press, 1944, pp. 374-377. For the Russian text, see *Sobraniye zakonov i rasporyazhenii raboche-krest'yanskovo pravitel'stva SSSR* [Collection of Laws and Decrees of the Workers' and Peasants' Government of the U.S.S.R.], No. 57, November 23, 1935, Section 1, p. 822.

Training Actors for the Moldavian and Bulgarian Theaters, 1934-1938

Peter Yershov

Among the many nationalities of the Soviet Union, one of the smallest is the Moldavian. Consisting in 1938 of about 260,000 people living in the agriculturally rich southwestern Ukraine, it comprised just over one-tenth of 1 per cent of the entire Soviet population. The autonomous Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic at that time covered a little more than five thousand square miles.

On this territory were situated three rather small towns and several villages, as well as numerous hamlets. The vast majority of the population was, and is still, peasants.

The Autonomous Moldavian S.S.R. had been formed on October 12, 1924 as a part of the Ukrainian S.S.R., seemingly in accordance with the desires of the Moldavian people. To understand the reasons for this action, one must look first at Moldavia's location and, secondly, at the Bolsheviks' desire to have a propaganda outpost bordering on Rumania. Until 1940, the Moldavian S.S.R. bordered on Bessarabia along the Dnestr River. The capital of Moldavia, at first located in Balta, was subsequently transferred to Tiraspol', a city of 100,000 situated near the Bessarabian border.

Tiraspol' itself grew rapidly, filled with beautiful, tall buildings, though most of the old peasant huts remained. Some of the streets were paved. A handsome theater was erected on the site of an old prison. A gigantic electric power station was set up to provide current for a chain of *kolkhoz* villages along the left bank of the Dnestr, and everything was bathed in electricity, as if to scorn the darkness of the Bessarabian villages on the opposite shore.

The long-prepared-for "return" of Bessarabia to the U.S.S.R. finally took place in 1940 and immediately presented the opportunity of sending into it previously established Party administrators, *kolkboz*, school, and theatrical institutions and political-propagandistic organizations. The number of Bulgars living in several villages in the Odessa and Dnepropetrovsk regions was considerably smaller than that of Moldavians but, nevertheless, sometime during the thirties a Bulgarian section was formed at the Odessa Pedagogical Institute. By 1938, teachers for Bulgarian schools began to be graduated.

In the Odessa Theatrical Technicum,[1] in accordance with the instructions of the Ukrainian S.S.R. Peoples' Commissariat of Education, two sections were created, the Moldavian and the Bulgarian, in which the future actors of the touring *kolkboz* theaters were to receive their training. In 1933, on the sixteenth anniversary of the October Revolution, the first performance of the National Moldavian Theater took place. The cast was chosen from Moldavian working class youth.[2] Later that year the first Bulgarian touring *kolkboz* theater was formed in Odessa, designed to serve the regional Bulgarian population.[3]

In reality, the whole affair occurred in the following manner: the Party Central Committee in Moscow imposed upon the Ukrainian Party Central Committee the duty of taking measures to develop special work in various sectors of the Ukraine where national minorities were settled in order to root out "bourgeois-nationalist" tendencies and to implant "Soviet revolutionary culture." A resolution of the Ukrainian Central Committee on November 22, 1933 dealt directly with the establishment of Bolshevik educational cadres among the Moldavian population.[4] On the basis of the resolution an amateur Moldavian dramatic group was soon formed, rashly but effectively called "The National Moldavian Theater" by the magazine *Theater and Dramaturgy*. Since the young director Bondarenko, however, was not in a position to train the entire troupe, a large number of the actors

entered the Moldavian section of the Odessa Theatrical Technicum. A majority of actors from the Bulgarian Touring Theater also joined the Technicum for somewhat the same reason. While the cadres were in training in the Technicum —until 1937 or 1938—the Moldavian and Bulgarian theaters existed as rather small, semi-professional dramatic groups traveling about the area. They put on variety performances —songs, agitational skits, dances, and so forth. They were referred to by the press, however, as valuable theatrical organizations.

The means allotted for the organization of national sections were generous, especially because the tasks assigned were clearly defined: to train not only individual actors, as was done by ordinary theatrical schools, but *entire theatrical companies*, cohesive casts, closely knit troupes with a truly Soviet attitude toward the theater and a corresponding Soviet repertoire.

This, perhaps, was an effort to develop an essentially new kind of Soviet theatrical worker, ready at the first call to carry out the Leninist-Stalinist theatrical policy in the newly annexed regions and districts and in all parts of the countries themselves. For even at that time plans were secretly under way for the annexation of Bessarabia and hopes were cherished for revolutions in Rumania, Bulgaria and the rest of the Balkans.

The question of altering the actors' methods was repeatedly raised in theatrical circles as the result of pressure from Party and labor union organizations. The actors were reproached (and sometimes not without reason) for deviating, in their stage outlook, from the approved line. The actors, on their part, replied that creative theatrical workers lived a special, nervous life. The habit of being "on call" to perform before audiences, the necessity of often being in a specific, intense state of excitement, the concern for their own appearance and manners, occasionally the artificial stimulation of alcohol—all this, they said, causes in the

actor that complex of qualities and emotions which in an extreme form has been summarily described in the characterization of the famous actor Kline as "a genius . . . and a debauchee." The actors were told that all this was greatly exaggerated, that laxity and dissoluteness were results of the base tradition inherited from bourgeois society, that Soviet life creates wholly different premises, that an actor is just as much a worker as any ordinary laborer, and that he must change his outlook and frame of mind accordingly.

How the Party officials proposed to effect such a change is made clear by a study of the training programs for the Moldavian and Bulgarian actors in the Odessa Technicum. The training process is undoubtedly still not finally completed.

The training of cadres of young actors is most simply and easily brought about with the help of studios in the theaters themselves. Accordingly, dramatic schools of the prerevolutionary theaters, studios of the Moscow Art Theater, the Vakhtangov Theater, and others all prepared for a "theatrical shift," at which time the best students remained in the troupes in which they had trained and the rest dispersed about the provinces.

However, from a theatrical-pedagogical point of view, and especially from the Soviet political point of view, such a traditional studio system had many shortcomings. First, each theater tried to put forward its own "system" in its own studio; second, constantly surrounded by a theatrical atmosphere in which the old thespian traditions continued with their "birthmarks of bourgeois outlook"—extreme irritability, love of adulation, tendency to indulge in excessive use of alcohol and other vices, superstitiousness, intrigues, envy, and so forth—the young people quickly acquired these defects. Consequently, the idea was put forward in Odessa of setting up "nurseries" separate from the theaters, in which the greenhorns could be shielded from baneful influences and indoctrinated in new and more valuable attributes. In the

"nurseries" a new kind of Soviet theatrical worker could be brought up on the basis of the Marxist-Leninist world view. Of course, actual dramatic practice was carried out on the stages of the theatrical schools, which were carefully supplied with scenery, costumes and make-up for that purpose. Actually, however, the isolation of the young people from the theaters and from older actors was illusory because the teachers of declamation and other skills were experienced Ukrainian or Russian actors from the local theaters, people with whom the students came into extensive, close and continuous contact. Moreover, the students often attended the public theaters on free passes and secretly took "extra" parts in their plays.

According to the schedule of the theatrical school, the Moldavian and Bulgarian companies were supposed to leave the confines of the school walls after three or four years as complete troupes, each with its "dowry" of movable scenery, wardrobes, wigs, and other necessary items. At the preliminary conferences in the school, to which successful actors and certain university professors were invited as advisors, the problem of how to form a harmoniously united troupe was long debated. The Stanislavski system was prescribed as the basis of the pedagogical process.

The assignment of various subjects each year and the amount of time put in on them each semester or each week, like the entire program, was less regulated and less standardized in Soviet "art" schools than in secondary schools and universities teaching humanities or sciences. The art schools, by virtue of their specialized nature, paid greater attention to the individual pupil; they used a method involving regular classroom work together with a progressive system of teaching. Individual instruction was given in such subjects as voice training, solo singing, breathing, diction, and declamation (generally callled "expressive" or "artistic reading"). The lessons were usually about a half hour in each subject for each student, two or three times weekly,

depending on the number of students. Lessons in plastic movement, dancing, gymnastics, and make-up were given in large classes and in small groups or "brigades," so that the instructor could keep an eye on each student.

The programs for the Moldavian and Bulgarian sections generally followed those of other theatrical technicums, with the exception that there was added the study, in the Moldavian and Bulgarian languages, of the (as yet unwritten!) Marxist history of the Moldavian and Bulgarian peoples. This addition was absolutely necessary, especially for the Moldavians since, strictly speaking, the Moldavian literary language was at that time in the making; it was not developed until the thirties, and the Bulgarian learned in village schools was spoken as a peasant dialect.

The complete program for both sections was as follows:

1. Subjects of General Education
   - History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)
   - History of the revolutionary movement
   - History of the class struggle
   - Study of one's native language, including short historical and geographical studies of one's own nation
   - Study of elementary mathematics (for the more retarded pupils)
   - Study of Russian and Ukrainian

2. Specialized Subjects (Class work)
   - History of literature
     - Study of the development of literature from ancient times to the present with special attention to development of the drama
   - History of the theater
     - Detailed study for three or four years. (Texts were hard to find since Marxist theatrical criticism was just beginning.)
   - Physical education
     - Gymnastics

Dancing and plastic movement
Choreography
Acting craftsmanship
(The most important subject throughout the entire course of study, an average of ten to sixteen hours being devoted to it every week.)
Speech
Diction and expressiveness
Make-up
History of Art
Style

3. Specialized Subjects (Individual training)
Speech
Voice training, breathing, solo singing
Acting craftsmanship
Make-up

In all, each student was busy some six to nine hours each day, not counting the time spent in rehearsing for the performances that were the course examinations at the end of each school year.

From the moment training was inaugurated in the national sections difficulties arose: first, over the admission of students; second, over the selection of teachers; and third, over the teaching of certain subjects, in particular the Moldavian language.

The first contingent of applicants for the school was made up of young men and girls from the outlying villages. Some of them had taken part in amateur theatricals and wanted "finishing"; the rest had come straight from the village school, carrying with them the atmosphere of the peasant hut. Dazed and at loose ends in the city, sometimes wearing coarse homespun shirts and skirts, with calloused hands, they understood farming far better than the little scraps of information they had tried to catch in the Ukrainian-Moldavian seven year school. Many had hoarse, broken voices and lacked any kind of stage ability. Some sixty Moldavians and Bulgarians

filed applications for admission. It turned out that the local screening of applicants had been conducted in a very haphazard manner. One applicant had perhaps taken part in school plays; another was a passionate movie-goer and had not missed a single film shown in the *kolkhoz* reading room; a third had dreamed of becoming an actor and had already taken part in the newly organized, semi-professional Moldavian or Bulgarian theater; still others had signed up on the advice of their teachers or at the insistence of the local Komsomol or Party organization which had a quota to fill.

The admissions committee of the Technicum held a series of strict examinations for the applicants, designed to reveal each candidate's capacity for theatrical work. The applicants were given tests of the ear, voice, physical qualities, receptivity, imagination, mimicry, and so forth. The committee could not reject a large number of applicants, however, since it had to fulfill the "task set by the Party and the government" with regard to forming the two national sections. However, the obviously unsuitable candidates, mostly surplus women, were turned down. As a result, the first session began with about thirty students in the Moldavian section and about twenty in the Bulgarian. The age of the first-year students ranged from about sixteen to twenty-one, making it obvious from the outset how difficult and exacting would be the work of polishing this extremely raw material. Most difficult of all, indeed, was the "reworking" of those who had spent several months "acting" and had acquired the stamp of rank amateurism.

The problem of selecting the teaching staff was no easier. It was necessary above all for the school to avoid the lecture method of presenting subjects of general education, which was employed in the Ukrainian and Russian sections. In the Moldavian and Bulgarian sections it was necessary to use the heuristic method, checking up on the students, drawing them out in class discussion and assigning them for "homework" rather large portions of reading material to be summarized. On the other hand it was utterly impossible to find

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teachers knowing Moldavian or Bulgarian for the courses in the history of literature, the history of the theater and the history of the Communist Party. As a result it was necessary to invite specialists who taught either in Ukrainian or in Russian. The Moldavian and Bulgarian students did not really understand literary discussions or lectures in these languages, however, and it was therefore necessary for the instructors to proceed very slowly, using as translators the more advanced and abler students. Even more difficult was the work of those who taught specialized subjects such as diction, voice projection and acting craftsmanship, for such instructors were themselves actors in either the Ukrainian or Russian theaters in Odessa. Hence it was necessary to hire and to pay separately Moldavian and Bulgarian language instructors as assistants at the lessons in declamation and histrionics. The teachers of voice, however, could not be completely sure that the students' Moldavian or Bulgarian pronunciation was completely correct either in terms of phonetics or elocution. Assigning as material for recital some prose or poetic excerpt in Moldavian or Bulgarian, the teacher would ask the assistant to give him an interlinear translation in Russian or Ukrainian and, helped by this, would follow the student's words, being careful of his intonation and diction and sometimes making comments with the assistant's help. Naturally many of the fine points of declamation were either missed or not noticed. Besides, some of the teachers' foreign intonations, coming from their native languages, would unconsciously creep in. In the end, then, a satisfactory achievement in this field was impossible.

With regard to the problem of teaching, particularly the Moldavian language, it must be noted at the outset that the prevailing acting method in which the students were trained was the Stanislavski method, although it was far removed from the system which Stanislavski had actually advocated. It was rather a system based on Stanislavski's work but considerably modified by additional methodological devices. There were, however, a number of obstacles in the path of

the Moldavian and Bulgarian students. The intellectual equipment of the majority of them was still very primitive, although a number of them possessed definitely good, if embryonic, instincts for creative work. The real stumbling block, however, was the Moldavian language. The entire problem, furthermore, was complicated by political considerations.

Philologists have discovered both the earliest records of the Moldavian dialect, dating from the fifteenth century, and the earliest significant literary works in Moldavian, dating from the seventeenth. For generations the population of Bessarabia and of old Moldavia (the territory between the Seret and the Prut Rivers, including Bukovina) has spoken Moldavian. Moldavian is even now spoken in parts of Rumania, although it is a colloquial dialect there and had no literary formulation until after 1945.

On the basis of an analysis of the lexical and syntactical structure of Moldavian, Soviet and other philologists have come to the conclusion that Moldavian is one of the Romance languages which has acquired, in the course of historical events and ethnographical movements, a large number of Turkish and Slavic elements. Until the 1930's Moldavian was written in the Cyrillic alphabet. The Soviet linguist Sergiyevski in 1937 called Moldavian a "dialect," but only a year later described it as a "language," being careful to point out that "only in Soviet Moldavia is it becoming an independent literary language."[5] Furthermore, up to 1940, the Moldavian language was divided into northern and southern dialects, demarcated roughly by the Yagorlyk River.

The great difficulty in teaching Moldavian in the Moldavian section therefore becomes clear. Such a language, though necessary for future Moldavian actors, was during the thirties still in the formative stage. The problem was complicated still further by the higher Party organizations' insistence on a sharp distinction between Rumanian and Moldavian. The natural desire of some Moldavian writers and philologists to use as a base for the formulation of a Moldavian literary

language the already crystallized Rumanian, which is in fact extremely close to Moldavian, was considered a dangerous political deviation, a "bourgeois nationalist" move derived from "boyar Rumania" and inapplicable to "socialist Moldavia." The use of the Latin alphabet for Moldavian in the middle thirties provoked a tempest in Party circles. As late as 1938 it was said that "bourgeois nationalists have tried to check the growth of Moldavian culture, littering the Moldavian language with Rumanian words and idioms, silencing the history of the Moldavian people's struggle against the Rumanian boyars."[6] A number of Moldavian writers and teachers were persecuted as "enemies of the people," including the Moldavian language teacher in the Odessa Theatrical Academy. This turn of affairs greatly discouraged the students and other faculty members; it made it completely clear how politically dangerous it was to work in the Moldavian section. With great difficulty, another teacher was found who had the task of navigating between Scylla and Charybdis, avoiding "vulgar deviations" into the northern or southern Moldavian dialects and at the same time renouncing the Rumanian literary language.

The All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences tried amid much confusion to develop research in the field of lexicology and morphology and a Moldavian alphabet, but it moved slowly.

At the outset the teaching staff was sincerely enthusiastic about the idea of forming the Moldavian and Bulgarian sections, since the idea itself was good and since such a thing had never existed before—an art of, by and for the ordinary people of these regions. The political concepts and aims of the program did not become apparent to most people until later.

The teachers of the art of acting worked out special programs for the "national" students, gradually setting up for them more difficult exercises to develop their alertness, imagination and ability to communicate. Moving away from

what was well known and familiar, in the second course more complicated sketches were assigned–sketches involving one or more partners and the use of brief extemporaneous passages. Only in the third course did work begin on excerpts from plays with set texts. The teachers were required to arrange the sketches and to select the excerpts in such a manner that the students' class and political consciousness would be sharpened. Hence there was a preponderance of themes concerning the *kolkhoz*, the worker, the struggle against the class enemy and spies, and the "emotional essence of socialist construction." There were regular committees on subject matter which debated the programs and over-all plans of the lessons in the presence of representatives of Party and Komsomol organizations. These committees demanded from the teachers of general education courses particularly intense and thorough preparation for the lectures on Marxist-Leninist principles and the analysis of revolutionary examples.

In the lessons in declamation, models of Moldavian or Bulgarian literature were supposed to be used. Although Bulgarian, which has a long history, offered the possibility of using various literary forms–fables, long poems and even lyric verses–Moldavian presented so little and that little so poorly defined that to work with it was as unrewarding and as dangerous as to work with the Moldavian language itself. In the first place, not all kinds of writing existed in the body of Moldavian literature, making it necessary to borrow material from Ukrainian and Russian poetry and have the translator-assistants put it into Moldavian. One could never be quite sure of the literary value of the translation. Translations were also made of required prose works, especially of Soviet plays. Korneichuk's *Platon Krechet* was used as a text in almost all sections of the Academy and was given as the final examination work. Of classical plays, selections were used from Schiller's *The Robbers* and *Intrigue and Love* and from Gorki's *The Lower Depths*. Despite the meagerness of

the repertoire, the long work on it resulted in thoroughness and depth.

This is not to say that there is no Moldavian literature at all, as has been asserted. There are literary documents in Moldavian that date from the seventeenth century. Furthermore, Moldavian creative writing was an accomplished, if embryonic, art by the beginning of the twentieth century. Moldavian material that could be used in the classes included prose works by D. Milev and poems by the "poet-enthusiast" Mikhai Andriyeska and by Feodor Malai. The poet, critic and dramatist Lekhttsir wrote works suitable both for literary study and for use in acting classes. These, however, although excellent, were considered by the Soviets to suffer from "deviations." Lekhttsir's anthology *Poetry* and his poem *Nikita,* which treated of the class struggle in the *kolkhoz,* had literary value. Excerpts from his plays *Kodryanu,* which treats the class struggle in Moldavia in the days of serfdom, *Gauduka,* a play about the revolutionary insurrectionist movement among the peasant serfs, and *Victory,* in which the shock worker movement and the most recent socialist labor methods are portrayed, were used for acting. Also well known were the works of the poet Kornfel'd, who wrote the poem *Tiraspol'* in 1932, the poet Kaftanaki (who was continually in trouble with the censorship) and the prose writers Markov and Kanna. Use of the original Moldavian writings of all these men was extremely dangerous, however, since writers' fortunes varied according to the political situation, and the school might have to pay heavily for using the works of "depraved" writers.

The Bulgarian section had a somewhat easier job, inasmuch as there existed an established and valuable body of literature which it could draw upon for use in all classes. Among the most important of these writings were those of the nineteenth century author Khristo Botev who is still looked upon as a poet of the people. His verses and heroic lyrics calling for freedom and for revolution (but not communist, to be sure) are not far removed from folk songs, giving them great

appeal among the peasantry. Students also recited the poetry of I. Vazov, in which the author's "gratitude and affection" for his "Russian brothers" was expressed. Selections were read and recited from Vazov's novel *Under the Yoke* (1889) about the April uprising of 1876; from the work of Todar Vlaikov-Veselin, a member of the *narodnik* movement; from the book of poems *The Broken Idols* by D. Polyanov; and from A. Kirkov's revolutionary verses. All these works were part of the proletarian literature that developed under the influence of D. Blagoyev, for whom the Bulgarian sector of Odessa is named. For instruction in acting craftsmanship, excerpts from I. Vazov's plays were used: *Ruska, The Exiles* and the plays on Bulgarian peasant life—*Darkness, The Vampire* and *The Mother-in-law*. Students also recited passages from Ostrovski's *The Forest*, Gorki's *The Lower Depths* and *Yegor Bulychov*, Korneichuk's *Platon Krechet*, and others.[7] The student body of the Bulgarian section, however, turned out to be less satisfactory and less able than the Moldavian. Consequently the results were far less successful.

There were two categories of students in the Odessa Theatrical Academy: city students, who lived at home, and the majority, who lived in special dormitories not far from the Academy. They received regular grants ranging from fifty rubles a month to over one hundred rubles a month during the later courses. In addition, they could eat in an inexpensive student dining room. Some of them also received financial or other help from their *kolkhozy*. But with the minimum monthly amount required to live set at about a hundred rubles, the grants were insufficient and many students had to find additional work—a difficult task indeed since study took up both mornings and afternoons and, during rehearsals, evenings as well.

In the beginning there was some fear that the backward and uncouth students in simple country attire would become targets for the mockery of their Russian and Ukrainian fellows, or that they themselves, suffering to a considerable degree from feelings of inferiority, would tend to get into scraps.

Experience, however, showed that students of different nationalities made warm personal friendships and got on well with one another, the more educated and more intelligent of the group helping the rest.[8]

The influence of the city students on their fellow Moldavians and Bulgarians soon produced a change in the appearance of the latter who, in various ways, tried to become part of the group, to dress like the rest, to get hold of fashionable clothes by various means and to imitate their teachers. Girls learned to use powder and lipstick and eventually acquired the manners of actresses.

No supervisors lived in the dormitories, and responsibility for good behavior and order there lay with the Party organizer (the head of the Party organization in the Academy) and with the Komsomol organizer and his assistants. Although the students behaved modestly and temperately in their first year, thereafter they became more demanding. There even were incidents in which senior students organized something in the nature of a revolt against teachers they did not like. In such cases, "politically conscious" Komsomol members rather adroitly making use of the Marxist dialectical method, resolved the affair to the satisfaction of all the students. There were warnings and reprimands against excesses in behavior (truancy, a "binge" either outside or inside the dormitory, Bohemianism), but then one would always hear excited retorts: "We're creative artists!" "We're easily aroused!"

Furthermore, the students were not much interested in studying political or Marxist historical subjects. Komsomol groups were set up to read and analyze various newspapers and magazines from a political point of view. "Socialist competitions" were organized in which students agreed to report on selected chapters in the history of the Party, to take active part in political discussions, to raise their marks in general education courses, to take charge of lagging colleagues, and so on. On the other hand, however, the specialized disciplines—voice presentation, choreography, make-

up and, in particular, classes in acting craftsmanship—captured the students' interest completely and no prodding was necessary. Such "excessively" professional enthusiasms demanded Party direction. Meetings were arranged at which it was explained that a "politically unprepared" actor could not be a good Soviet actor. In the end the students mastered all the necessary political phraseology and themselves flaunted it. How much of this came from within no one can tell. The art of camouflage among Soviet minorities is amazing. Only one thing must be added: toward the end of the training period a number of students began to exhibit the "birthmarks" characteristic of actors of the old school.

If one takes as a standard the extremely high quality of the old Russian and Ukrainian theaters and that of many of the republic and regional theaters in the U.S.S.R., then the young Moldavian and Bulgarian companies, especially the latter, were not of the first rank. In one sense they could not have been, being young and based upon inadequately educated actors who were trained more thoroughly in political opinions than in acting craftsmanship. Nevertheless, the young groups were not amateurs but professionals. Awkwardness and self-consciousness had gone as well as amateur intonation, artificial gestures, poor carriage, and coarse and elementary mimetics. The young actors had learned to articulate better, to understand their work, to develop a role thoughtfully, to gain an understanding of the ideas and theme of a play, and to determine the relationship of one role to another. They knew how to select appropriate costumes and how to apply make-up, and they had acquired the ways and habits proper to stage discipline.

The young people had diverse talents: some who had exceptionally good voices sang solo parts or duets; some played popular or folk instruments, some the piano. Almost all of them danced well, having been taught by the choreographer of the Odessa Opera House. Particularly splendid were the Moldavian folk and formal dances, especially the *moldavinyasku* and the *zhok*. Such accomplishments were essential

because the troupe was to tour among the *kolkhozy* and had to be able to put on not only dramas, comedies, vaudeville skits, and recitals, but also many kinds of dances.

Upon graduation neither of the two companies received any "dowry" of stage properties, because in the home of the Bulgarian Theater in Blagoyevo, and later in Odessa, and in the building of the Great Moldavian National Theater in Tiraspol' there already existed a complete set of basic, easily moved stage scenery—flats, curtains, backdrops, scrims and draperies, and basic wardrobes. The building of the Moldavian Theater itself, completed during the 1937-1938 season, presented an extremely handsome exterior, although inside it was less interesting, being grey, with two tiers and no loges (a "bourgeois prejudice"). Worst of all, on the relatively shallow stage and throughout the auditorium there were many acoustical "dead spots." The building, the first Moldavian State Theater in history (later named after Maxim Gorki) contained twelve hundred seats.[9]

In the early years the repertoire consisted of carefully prepared dramatic scenes from Ostrovski's play *The Forest*, Korneichuk's then popular play *Platon Krechet* translated from the Ukrainian and somewhat cut, and a number of declamatory, musical-vocal or ballet numbers. Although several Moldavian plays existed, they were treated with caution and uncertainty since many Moldavian writers had suffered during the purges and their works had been outlawed.

In Moldavia itself the future was politically uncertain. It was preferable, therefore, to use translations. Moldavian literature as a whole had been given the "militant task" of "re-educating" the Moldavian peasant masses[10] and portraying the processes of socialist reconstruction in city and village. But this task had not yet been accomplished so that the young theater found itself in a difficult position, made more difficult by the fact that directors were reluctant to join an itinerant company. Young students who had just graduated from the Academy in Odessa found themselves serving as permanent directors.

How much of a "new breed" were these actors who had been sent out to re-educate the masses? Like the majority of people under the Soviets, the young actors possessed the ability to mimic, and this ability was enhanced by their professional training. Some of them, of course, obviously accepted the Soviet ideology in good faith and tried to be conscientious Komsomol and Party members. The rest imitated Soviet behavior either from fear or from ambition, but there is good reason to suspect that many were filled with misgivings and secret protests. That this was the case was indicated by their love of ceremony, their dandyism and their concern over their own appearance, none of which were attributes countenanced by the "general line."

No matter how much they were prevented from imitating the "old school" actors, such imitation did develop and spread. The young people were indulged in everything they did. In 1940 in connection with the annexation of Bessarabia several of the more able actors received the title "Honored Artist of the A.M.S.S.R.," despite the fact that they had had only two and a half years' experience. At the same time it was widely asserted that some of the theater's most recent performances were much poorer in quality than their earlier work.

After 1940 the Moldavian *Kolkboz* Theater had a far wider field in which to operate. To Bessarabia, which had been badly underdeveloped as part of Rumania, such a theater seemed a true novelty. For the first time the people heard their native songs and language spoken on the stage (permeated, of course, with the venom of agitation and propaganda). They were delighted by the young artists' mastery of their native dances. Thus was demonstrated the political value of the first Moldavian *Kolkboz* Theater, a theater which had the task of "weakening and overthrowing imperialism" in the region.

Despite official rewards and encouragement, working in the national *kolkboz* theater was like walking on the edge of a razor. All too easily one might fall out of step with the constantly varying "general line" of Soviet nationality policy.

Hence the constant caution and "vigilance," the nervous tension and dread which were generally felt by those taking part in the theater's work. As recently as 1952, the linguistic controversy was still raging in Soviet Rumania over the Russification of the Rumanian language.[11]

Moreover, a number of significant changes in the organization and repertoire of the Moldavian Theater have taken place. Thus its base has been moved from Tiraspol' to Kishinev. Several actors of the young Itinerant Theater, graduates of the Odessa Academy, have joined the company of the permanent Moldavian National Repertory Theater. The repertoire consists, as before, of second or third-rate national plays and works from Russian or Ukrainian dramaturgy, such as Asaf'yev's ballet *The Noble Peasant Girl* (a Pushkin theme), Korneichuk's *Platon Krechet*, and Pogodin's *The Chimes of the Kremlin.* (In the last named Honored Artist Shtyrbul took the part of Lenin; Apostolov, the part of Stalin; and Honored Artist Konstantinov, another role. Of the three, all former students in the Moldavian section of the Academy, the most talented was Konstantinov.)[12] Also interesting is the fact that the practice of establishing "actors' nurseries" independent of the theaters has ceased.[13]

For the abler and more mature young student actors, the scope of the *kolkhoz* theater was severely limited and rather dull. They longed to go on to the Russian or Ukrainian stage or to join the "old school" actors in the town theaters, where they might genuinely develop in creative terms and copy from the older actors not merely the superficial signs of the craft. That is, they wanted to avoid being a "new breed" devoted to narrowly propagandistic, political tasks. To transfer from the national theater to others, however, was extremely difficult—in fact impossible—since it threatened the dissolution of the national minorities' theaters and was therefore prohibited.

Notes to *Training Actors for the Moldavian and Bulgarian Theaters, 1934-1938*

1. Until 1935-1936 the theatrical secondary schools in the U.S.S.R. were called technicums; after that date, however, they were designated schools or academies. Until 1934, the Technicum was part of the Musical-Theatrical Institute of Odessa, but it was later separated from the Institute, which subsequently became the Odessa Conservatory. Such name changes, however, did not greatly affect the administrative structure nor alter the program of the theatrical school itself.

2. *Teatr i dramaturgiya* [Theater and Dramaturgy], September 1933, p. 79.

3. *Ibid.*, July 1934.

4. *Radyans'ka Ukraina ta A.M.S.S.R. (ekonomichno-adresoviі dovidnyk)* [Soviet Ukraine and the A.M.S.S.R. (Economic Address Reference Book)] 1934/1935, p. 415.

5. Sergiyevski, M. V., "Materialy po izucheniyu zhivykh moldavskikh govorov na territorii SSSR" [Materials for the Study of Living Moldavian Dialects in the U.S.S.R.], *Uchonye zapiski instituta yazyka i literatury* [Scholarly Notes of the Institute of Language and Literature], Vol I, 1937. See also "Moldavskyi yazyk" [The Moldavian Language], *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya,* 1st ed., 1938 (hereafter referred to as BSE). See also "Moldavskaya literatura" [Moldavian Literature], *Literaturnaya Entsikopediya* [Encyclopedia of Literature], Vol. VII, 1934.

6. "Moldavskaya Avtonomnaya Sovetskaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika" [Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic] in BSE, Volume on the U.S.S.R., 1938.

7. "As late as the beginning of the twentieth century there was no Moldavian literature," *ibid.* But the article on Moldavian literature in *Literaturnaya Entsiklopediya, op. cit.*, lists chronicles from the

seventeenth century and journals, newspapers and some nineteenth century literature, in a language strongly influenced by Rumanian.

8. For further details, see Peterle, Ya., "Natsional'noye samochuvstviye podsovetskikh lyudei" [National Self-Consciousness of Soviet Minority Peoples], *Na rubezhe* [On the Border], Paris, No. 3-4. 1952.

9. For photographs and descriptions of this theater, see the article "Moldaviya" in BSE, *op. cit.*

10. See "Moldavskaya literatura," *Literaturnaya Entsiklopediya, loc. cit.*

11. See "Russifikatsiya rumynskovo yazyka" [The Russification of the Rumania Language], *Novoye Russkoye Slovo,* New York, June 25, 1952.

12. In reference to these points, see *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* [Soviet Art], January 31, 1947, March 21, 1947, and August 24, 1947.

13. See *Sovetskoye iskusstvo,* May 23, 1947. Such studios have been set up in at least thirty-three Soviet theaters.

The Theater in Soviet Concentration Camps

Gabriel Ramensky

The thirty-year history of Soviet concentration camps lies like an enormous undigested mass in the world's social consciousness, but premature conclusions on the subject of a particular nature and on the basis of particular phenomena may easily lead to gross errors. The following sketches on the theater in Soviet concentration camps are nothing more than authentic historical fragments from a morbid era, pictures sketched by a man who knows Communist camp life from firsthand experience. The author considers this to be his contribution to the future history of a state: the GULAG[1] state which exists within the Soviet state.

In 1922 the Przheval'sk concentration camp was established near Lake Issyk-Kul' as well as a second camp on the shores of the White Sea, about thirty-five miles west of Archangel where the city of Molotovsk now stands. Among the first prisoners in the camp on the site of present-day Molotovsk were Kronstadt sailors who had participated in the 1921 revolt. The regime in the camp was immediately established as a rigorous one with starvation rations and beatings like those in former prisoner companies. Reduced to despair, the prisoners declared a protest hunger strike in 1923 which was broken by dispersing the prisoners to various places.

Beginning with 1923 the Solovetski camp on islands in the White Sea grew at a rapid pace. Every year its population increased several times over. In 1924 there was a total of 4,000 inmates, whereas in 1929 an outbreak of typhus took the lives of 17,000 inmates without making any appreciable reduction in the number of prisoners.

The meaning of the Civil War term "military prisoners" had broadened by the time of the establishment of the concentration camps. In addition to officers, prisoners included priests, Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, anarchists, and in general all those who did not openly accept the Bolshevik regime or who might be expected not to accept it. Ordinary criminals and political prisoners found themselves together in the same camps.

Every Soviet labor camp had a so-called "cultural-educational section" for the political indoctrination of prisoners. It was as a part of this section's program that the camp theater came into being. The following description of life in the labor camp "cultural and educational" world deals with the theater at the Solovetski camp, its transfer to Kem'-Mokh on the mainland, and the new grouping of prisoner-actors in the Svir'lag[2] area with the main theater at Lodeinoye-Polye. The theatrical groups involved in these projects disappeared at the dissolution of the Svir'lag camps in 1934 following a number of uprisings by the prisoners. Some of the same actors turned up again, however, in the theater groups formed during the "Yezhovshchina"[3] in Siberian camps farther east. The life of each theatrical group which was formed was unstable, and each was broken up, only to reappear in a different camp with different members at a later time.

The First Theater

In 1923 two theatrical directors arrived at the Solovetski camp: one named Bor (I forget his first name) and the other named Vladimir Yevtikhevich Karpov, the son of the famous director Yevtikhi Karpov. Among the charred ruins of the churches on the islands, in the former monastery refectory, a stage was built. Benches were made for the audience and flats for the stage; the curtain was hung, and work commenced. The formation of a regular troupe was not permitted, but the camp administration arranged for the directors and actors

to do lighter ordinary labor, with the added obligation of working in the theater.

In 1924 Bor produced *Days of Our Life* by Leonid Andreyev, and Karpov did Ostrovski's *The Storm*. Anya Sh., daughter of a public figure in Petrograd society who had been shot by the Bolsheviks, played the role of Olga in *Days of Our Life*. The highly-cultured, emotional girl played the role brilliantly. Individual performances were on a professional level, although much of the production was reminiscent of the provincial pre-revolutionary theater with its crude scenery, its prompter and its clichés. However, the play was a great event in the lives of the camp inmates and they spoke constantly about the performances.

The criminals, who eagerly attended the performances by the "counterrevolutionaries," did not fail to do their share. They organized concerts and had their own repertoire; they played the part of robbers or convicts, danced the *chechyotka* and sang their own songs. On the stage they built a prison, from the barred paper windows of which they read verses. Enthusiasm and pathos were felt during their performances. One of them sang:

Prison, prison, what a word,
It is shameful and terrible,
But for me it's quite different,
I've known the prison for a long time.
I know the narrow, little cell,
I know the prison ration well,
I know the iron grating and
I know the prison lock.

Another sang:

Our land, our Solovetski
A wondrous land for *ka-ers*[5] and *shpany*![6]
Sing a song of camp life,
Smiling bravely like a child!

The gnats[7] are very good in spring,
The view from Sekirina Mountain's[8] fine,
Where happy people take their rest
From all the cares of useless work.

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Where happy people take their rest
From all the cares of useless work.

To all who rewarded us with Solovetski
We say, "Come here yourselves
And sit here three or maybe five years;
You will remember it with joy."

Between verses the singers would beat out the *chechyotka* with the general approval of "their kind" in the audience.

In those days there was no strict regulation of "educational" work, and therefore many strange things occurred in the name of the "cultural-educational section." For example, a literary evening was held at which the criminals read verses to the tune of a criminal song about a "doll" who loved a "guy." The song went on to tell how "stool pigeons" shot and wounded the girl during a robbery, but this only made her love for her young hooligan grow stronger.

In 1926 the camp on the island became crowded. Moreover, the increasing exploitation of prisoners for work in the forest called for expansion to the great forests of the mainland. The camp was accordingly moved from the island and on the territory of the Karelo-Finnish Republic camp subdivisions were set up: *otdeleniya* (sections), *lagpunkti* (work sites), *komandirovki* (commands) and *tochki* (points). SLON (abbreviation for Solovetski Camps of Special Designation) was renamed Northern Camps of Special Designation (also abbreviated SLON). It was considered expedient to move the camp administration of SLON from the island to the city of Kem'. There on the border the settlement of Kem'-Mokh grew, composed of the buildings of the camp administration, the barracks for the prisoners—and a theater. At the lumbering work in which the majority of prisoners were engaged, inmates were beaten and many of them deliberately wounded themselves in order to avoid the harsh labor in the forest. As a result, the prisoners at that time were not able to attend the theater. But the camp chiefs, the camp office workers (*pridurki*), and the free citizens of the village came to the theater.

It was a real theater: a stage with small wings, an auditorium with a balcony and a certain comfortable home-like

quality reminiscent of the prerevolutionary serf theaters of the princes Yusupov and Sheremetev.[9] The theater had an abundance of new directors and actors arriving from the free world. In 1926 an actor-director of the Leningrad Aleksandrinski Theater, I. D. Kalugin, arrived for a ten-year term. Kalugin had been a talented student of Yu. M. Yur'yev as well as a playwright. Like almost all the intelligentsia of that time he had adopted the ideas of "populism" in Russian social thought and had even accepted the Bolshevik Revolution. Moreover, he had written a play *Kalyayev,* based on the life of the man who assassinated Grand Duke Sergei in 1905. The play was performed under the Bolsheviks in the Aleksandrinski Theater. During the famine years of the early 1920's Kalugin had organized a commune of volunteers and enthusiasts in Yaroslavl'; the commune existed for a long time.

By 1926 the program of the Bolsheviks had disillusioned him completely, and he wrote his own program, which he took to one of the secretaries of Leon Trotski for criticism. A few days later Kalugin was arrested.

At approximately the same time a group of boys in a secondary school in Moscow formed their own "government." Of course, this was only a game. Sasha Rodishchev, son of the stage designer of the Trade Union Theater, took over the portfolio of the "minister of foreign affairs," but on the next day the whole "cabinet of ministers" was arrested and each "minister" was sentenced to ten years in a concentration camp by the GPU. Sasha Rodishchev ended up in Kem' where he soon became the pet of the directors, actors and public. The son of an actress and a theatrical artist, he had, so to speak, been born in the theater and now this stood him in good stead. Sasha painted the scenery, worked on the properties and acted in the plays, doing everything eagerly and willingly. Working with experienced directors helped him to become an actor and by the end of his term of imprisonment he had become a real professional.

In 1925 the Soviet government exchanged some prisoners

with Hungary. Hungary was given a number of army officers, and the Soviet Union in return received Communists who had participated in the Hungarian Communist revolution. In this group were Gadutski and Chrepko with his daughter Teresa, a Komsomol member. In the same year, however, the exchanged Communists were arrested, detained for a long time in the prison at Lubyanka for interrogation, and then shot in accordance with an administrative decree of the Special Council of the GPU. Teresa, however, was sentenced to a concentration camp for ten years, and she came to Kem'. Here the directors and actors managed to get her out of the laundry and into the theater to work, at first as a seamstress, then in minor roles.

A little later, as punishment for carrying on anti-Soviet propaganda, several actors came to Kem' from the Leningrad Bol'shoi Dramatic Theater to serve terms of varying length: V. K. Grigor'yev, Kolosov and the actress E. K. Vedzhini. From other theaters came M. Grinko, V. Izvol'ski, the actresses Prel'berg and A. M. Zalesskaya, and others.

Under the conditions of barracks life and the local climate, V. K. Grigor'yev lost his voice almost completely, but his talents as a director remained intact. E. K. Vedzhini was no longer young, but she preserved her ability to penetrate profoundly into the characters she portrayed, an ability which made her a favorite with the concentration camp audience. Izvol'ski always played the successful hero. The actress Prel'berg was noted for her phenomenal memory: she knew by heart all the plays in which she had taken part. Once when the theater group went on a trip and forgot to take the text of the play, she dictated it in full. When they returned and compared the texts, they found them absolutely identical.

The actress A. M. Zalesskaya had worked in Leningrad as a singer in vaudeville. With a big operatic voice but inadequate vocal training, her prospects were limited. In the concentration camp she was used in drama and soon became a good dramatic actress. Her stunning appearance had helped her a great deal on the stage, but it also brought her to SLON

for ten years under suspicion of espionage. Some foreign diplomats or important tourists had noticed her and desired to become acquainted with her. They were introduced—and thereafter the Leningrad vaudeville stage lost her.

In 1926-1927 the liquidation of private "entertainment" enterprises, including theaters, began in Leningrad. The first victim was the operetta theater directed by Ksendzovski. Ksendzovski decided to defend himself, but it was difficult to do so. A special committee inspected his theater and discovered a crack in the plaster. "The building is falling apart," said one of the committee members and the committee drew up an indictment in which it was claimed that the theater would certainly have collapsed during a performance, burying all the spectators in the debris, and that only thanks to the care of the Soviet regime had this catastrophe been prevented. Ksendzovski and his wife, the actress Orlova, were arrested and jailed. While interrogations were going on, Ksendzovski slashed his wrists in an unsuccessful suicide attempt. The court sentenced him to ten years in a concentration camp; his wife received a three-year sentence. They came to Kem' in a regular trainload of prisoners.

It was not always easy for the prisoner-actor to get into the camp theater. The camp administration at Kem' was not easily persuaded to make it possible for actors to play. A rule existed making performance of common labor compulsory for a period of three months for each newly-arrived prisoner, regardless of his special training and education. This was done evidently so that the prisoner would be submissive when given lighter work and would know what awaited him at the slightest whim of the administration or at the slightest misstep he might make.

Even when they had been assigned to work in the theater, there were very few actors who managed to stay there for their whole term without ever performing common labor. Many reasons were found for transferring a prisoner to common labor: a decline in production, a shock campaign, arguments

with the camp administration, infraction of discipline, a romance between an actor and an actress, or the authorities' displeasure at the way an actor played a certain role. Then, too, pressure was exerted by the repressive apparatus on certain categories of prisoners: kulaks, those sentenced under one of the sections of Article 58,[10] Trotskyites and "counterrevolutionaries" in general. Sometimes an actor would be called up in the morning to the URO[11] and would be sent to a distant subcamp or to a different camp altogether for no apparent reason.

Concessions were not made by the camp regime toward the actors, but the work itself in a sense excluded them from the forced labor system by permitting them to "take leave" and enter a kind of free world which sometimes lay beyond the limits of the GPU and even of the U.S.S.R. Rehearsals, performances, individual work on the role—these were daily, hourly furloughs from the camp, and their moral significance for the prisoner was tremendous. During leisure hours the actors returned to reality, but even actual conditions were better in many ways for them than for those who worked in the forest or on the roads. In the theater the mosquitoes did not bite in the summertime, the frost did not bite in winter, and in spring and fall the dampness did not penetrate. The barracks for prisoners working in the camp administration were built to last a longer time and to serve as a showplace for outsiders, and therefore were made of better lumber and with more normal finishings: with ceilings and roofs, with floors and bunks made of boards, with tables and benches. The living conditions in such barracks were many times better than in the barracks or tents at the production sites. In general, the administration barracks approached the communist ideal of a collective dormitory: people worked, came to the barracks for meals and sleep and again went to work. Individual life with its demands was excluded. Men and women lived in separate barracks. Visiting between sexes in the dormitories was strictly forbidden.

At five o'clock in the morning the orderly awoke the prisoners. They washed and had breakfast in the kitchen or in the dining room and at six o'clock lined up to march off to work. At Kem'-Mokh the actors and actresses also were in the morning line-up. Their group was led to the theater. At the dinner break, they were returned to the barracks and then led back to the theater, brought back for supper and again led off. Roll call was taken once more at the theater at nine in the evening during a ten to fifteen minute interruption of the rehearsal, which then continued until about eleven at night. On performance days roll call took place later.

The actors' work was in either dramatic or concert productions. The dramatic and concert work in turn had two "service" sections: one for the theater in the camp administration; the other for the clubs of the sections, work sites, and smaller units of the camp.

At each work site a club was built almost at the same time as the living quarters and sometimes even sooner. It was figuratively regarded as a "smithy" in which, according to the official expression, the "reforging" of prisoners was to take place: the reforging of counterrevolutionaries into Communists, enemies of the people into "friends," socially dangerous elements (SOE)[12] into wholly nondangerous elements, socially harmful elements (SVE)[13] into completely useful ones. The Cultural and Educational Section (KVCh)[14] of the work site organized the construction of the club buildings on the basis of "voluntary enthusiasm," that is, in the hours after the fulfillment of the day's quota in production. Refusal to engage in these *"subbotniki"* (spare time collective assignments) was dangerous.

In the club, as an official part of the administration, all the work of the Cultural and Educational Section went on: rehearsals and performances of the local agit-brigades, conferences of the prisoners (to discuss questions of strengthening the labor effort and increasing output), drawing of posters (depicting idlers, malingerers, production breakers, and

slackers, as well as shock workers and Stakhanovites), and so on. Troupes from the camp administration at Kem' would come periodically to these clubs to put on plays and give concerts. The KVO (Cultural Educational Division)[15] determined the repertoire, the time and the itinerary of the trip. There were enough directors, actors and musicians in the Kem' theater for more than one troupe or concert ensemble. Sometimes several performances were prepared simultaneously.

There were many productions in the theater of the camp administration: *Not a Copper—and Suddenly a Whole Gold-piece* and *Belugin's Wedding* by Ostrovski, *Mistress of the Inn* by Goldoni, *Republic on Wheels* by Mamontov, *The Cheat* by Shkvarkin, *Fear* by Afinogenov, *Tempo* by Pogodin, *Lyubov Yarovaya* by K. Trenyov, and many others.

The style of the production depended on the directors, and since their training and schools varied, there was no unity of style. Kalugin worked in the traditional spirit of the Aleksandrinski Theater, Grigor'yev in the Bol'shoi Dramatic Theater style, L-dov in yet a different style. Nor was there any unity of formal training or practical experience among the actors. The stage designers also approached productions in different ways: one was fascinated by constructivism, another preferred realism or "artistic truth." Nikitin, for example, resolved his design problems in a mild kind of futurism. Sokolov, because he was not originally a theater artist, injected an element of nontheatrical painting; independent work by Sasha Rodishchev bore an eclectic character which overcame the contrasts and made combinations which were so original and well justified that often an experienced eye could not detect the diversity of borrowing, and out of it came a sort of dynamic innovation, a thrust forward to a different artistic plane.

Sasha's ingenuity was unlimited. On tours he was irreplaceable. He would choose some object in a local household, drag it to the poor and empty stage of a work site and set it up there. In each act the position of the object was changed

to indicate changes of scene. For the production of Pogodin's *Tempo* Sasha invariably brought along a wooden sawhorse (an object always available in a camp). In this play the action takes place at a construction project. The sawhorse was first the "construction"; then it represented the forest where the project was under way, with construction material scattered about; again, it was the sign of a covered passage or the place at the construction project for the workers' *artel'* (commune) to have breakfast and discussions. The horse was moved from place to place, to the left, to the right, athwart the stage, sideways or diagonal to it. The actors placed themselves in groups in front of the horse, some sat on it, several crawled on top, or as the curtains parted, some were climbing down.

Of course, Goldoni's *Mistress of the Inn* required more than "constructions" of this sort to be staged properly, and therefore Sasha always first inspected the stage, the courtyard and the barracks, and, depending on the results of this search for ready materials, determined which one of the plays in the repertoire the troupe could present.

During trips to give performances on Popov Island (where there was a sawmill) Sasha would gather discarded laths and bring them back to Kem'-Mokh. Soon he had quite a few of them and asked the theater carpenter to plane them; in his spare moments he tied them together with fine cord as mats are woven; he painted the sides in different colors and put on various decorations. As a result he had light portable screens which could be rolled. The production of plays on tours of the work sites was made much easier, for the screens took the place of ordinary scenery flats and could easily be placed in any form on the set.

Before the performance there was the usual fuss. The assistant director quickly sets the stage, hangs the backdrop and the curtain, arranges the screens and the necessary properties. The actors are dressing in the corners and making up before the light of lantems. The "educator" is out

in the auditorium guarding the seats reserved for the supervisors. Everything is ready, it is time to begin, but the camp chiefs are not here. It's impossible to begin! The audience is noisy. In the dirty and bedraggled uniforms of penal servitude they sit on benches and stand packed in the aisles and along the walls. On their faces is the "uniform" of oppression, of insurmountable longing and weariness. In the noise one can make out rude swearing, sometimes loud, sometimes quiet, which the criminals brandish as their only weapon to defend the remnants of human dignity.

The actors look out into the auditorium through the peephole in the curtain. Still no camp officials. The "educator" sends a messenger to find out what is causing the delay. Twenty minutes go by, and suddenly a whisper makes the rounds of the stage: "They've come!" When the chief is seated, the assistant director bangs a hammer against the tray which serves as a gong and the curtains part. The noise in the hall breaks off.

From their penal servitude a window to freedom is opened for the prisoners. In front of the window real life passes by, life without guards, people in ordinary dress freely managing their affairs—walking, loving, being sad or happy; even parents and children are together. One's conscious mind goes off into this lost world reflected in the acting of the players.

The reactions of the audience are strong and often contrary to the intention of the playwright. Exhaustion and overwork cause stormy and incongruous reactions to the ideas expressed in a play. The Communist totalitarian system has destroyed the usual relation between the play and the emotional reactions of the audience.

For a Soviet camp spectator a tragedy turns into a play about everyday life, melodrama and sentimental drama turn into comedy, and a Soviet comedy into drama. What situations confronting heroes of a prerevolutionary play could be more tragic and dramatic than those which have been experienced by every spectator in a camp theater? Therefore, in places

where the actor and the author expect tears, anger, fear, the audience responds with laughter; to comic situations in a Soviet play it reacts with stony silence. At the performance of a Soviet play in the camp the spectator is on the side of the negative characters, the "villains."

The performance goes on. Concealed from the spectators is the process of inner struggle taking place in those speaking and moving in this window of freedom. Kalugin is on the stage; not so long ago his soft baritone voice sounded in the Academic Aleksandrinski Theater. Now he treads the boards which are only rough planks; watching him is a monarch who is not a king but who nevertheless has the power to send him into solitary confinement after the performance or to order fifty grams of pastry for him from the camp store as the reward for a good performance. The hero raises his voice, pronounces the last phrase of the first act and "makes a period." The curtains close. Applause. The camp chief rises, lights a cigarette and goes on to the stage.

"Who is in charge?" asks the chief, turning to Kalugin. Conceit and the pleasant consciousness of superiority echo in the question.

"I am the director, citizen chief," answers Kalugin.

"Well, so far, not bad. Let's see how you'll play later. And that one who plays the son—what's his name?"

"Rodishchev, citizen chief."

"He seems to be talented. What's his article?"[16]

"Fifty-eight, section ten."[17]

Mention of Article 58 immediately cools the camp head's interest. Puffing his cigarette, he tries to assume the absent-minded look of an intelligent man.

"May we begin?" the assistant director asks, half to the director and half to the camp chief.

"Yes, begin!" answers the chief and goes back to his seat. The assistant director beats the metal tray with the hammer...

The performance is ended, but the people remain in the hall for several seconds without moving: they are reluctant

to "wake up," reluctant to disrupt the dream of freedom and of the free human condition. A short pause before the return to reality is observed after each performance, after each concert, with a psychological regularity. The actors have grasped this pattern, and therefore they announce each time, "The performance is over." Following the announcement from the stage, one hears the command at the club entrance: "Fall in by the barracks for roll call!" In the headquarters they are beating on a piece of rail with something metallic: "Roll call!"

The actors change and remove their make-up, eat the day's portion of bread and go to sleep wherever there happens to be a free place, or lie down in the club. The actresses are conducted to the women's barracks.

With many variations, but with striking similarity, the outer picture and the inner content of this picture are repeated at all the work sites where the prisoner troupe appears before the prisoner audience.

Tours to Work Sites: Four Kinds of Audience

The labor camps in the region of the Svir' River grew rapidly, Kem'-Mokh remaining the main camp in this area. Groups of actors sooner or later reached almost all the subcamps in the Svir'lag. About twenty miles farther north was the little village of Lodeinoye-Polye. A group of actors from Kem' was sent there and then divided into three smaller troupes, the first of which was to tour along a tributary of the Vorona River. The second group was to visit work sites along the left bank of the Svir', and the third was to travel toward the village Voznesen'ye, about thirty-five miles from the Svir'. The actor R. went with this last group; Kalugin was in charge. There were several amateurs in the troupe drawn from among the criminal prisoners.

The troupes almost always traveled without escort. Although it would have been easy to escape from an unescorted

troupe, no cases of this kind are known to have taken place. Officially, no group responsibility was imposed upon the actors, but everyone knew that all of them would answer for even one person's escape. Arrests and investigations would begin. Next to whom had the fugitive slept? With whom had he been friendly? After the arrest of the suspects, those who were not suspected of complicity in the escape would be sent off to the hardest labor and the theater would cease to exist. These conditions restrained them from escaping, because it was unthinkable to do their comrades a bad turn. Moreover, unescorted movements were considered by the prisoners as a sort of liberty and this lessened their motive for escape. However, the fact that they were unescorted did not mean that the troupe was completely trusted. It traveled under the secret surveillance of the *seksot*[18] "educators" and local operators, and the camp received daily reports by telephone or by mail on the number of actors on hand and on the progress of the trip.

The actors loaded the scenery, the costumes and the properties on the boat. The director obtained the travel documents, the boat whistled and cast off for Voznesen'ye, a free settlement. The senior "educator," Belyayev, accompanied the troupe. A crowd of free people gathered on the deck. The prisoner-actors kept apart and did not mingle with the free citizens. Being rather afraid of the GPU's all-seeing eye, the free citizenry did not try to engage in conversations with people who were in prison overcoats. Contact with prisoners was regarded as sympathy for counterrevolutionaries and might have dire results.

In the evening twilight the boat arrived at Voznesen'ye (the name means "Ascension" in Russian. Strange that a large settlement and a district center could have preserved such a religious name for so long without having been changed to some sort of "Beriya-town" or "Life-Is-Better-Ville.")[19] The village was noteworthy in that it stood on the southern shore of Lake Onega at the very source of the Svir' River,

and at the northernmost end of the northernmost canal of the Mariinsk system. There was a large wharf, a drydock for river transport and for the construction of wooden barges—and nothing more. No more than three thousand citizens lived in the village. At the dock there stood a newly constructed club building made of pine, which included a library, a sports hall, and a completely professional stage and auditorium with about five hundred seats.

The actors took over the sports hall for their living quarters and slept on the floor. On the following day posters announced the performance. First they put on *Smoke* (*The Mutiny*) by Lavrenev. At the first light of day Murov and Sasha Rodishchev were already stamping about the stage. The scenery was set up, the scene changes prepared for each act, the properties checked. The director announced a rehearsal for ten o'clock. To everyone's satisfaction the rehearsal went smoothly. The performance was to begin at eight o'clock in the evening, and they began to dress and make up at seven. They were excited and were enjoying it. The real stage and the real auditorium stimulated them.

The performance began promptly at eight. The auditorium was full and several hours before the performance the sold-out sign was hung in front of the box office. At the entrance the police drove away a crowd of youngsters without tickets. The actors were at the peak of their creative form. The smoothness of the performance, well rehearsed in every detail, would have been the envy of any provincial troupe. The spectators were thrilled not so much by the play as by the acting. After each act they applauded at length, evidently forgetting that they, free men, were applauding the contemptible counterrevolutionary "zekas" (the usual term for prisoners.)[20] The actors, along with the public, also forgot they were "zekas!" The performance ended in triumph for the actors and the complete satisfaction of the spectators. At the end of the performance it was learned that the tickets for the next day's

performance of Kirshon's *Grain*[21] had all been sold. Overjoyed with success, the actors had some bread and water and settled themselves on the bare floor for the night.

The morning rehearsal the next day was disrupted when Kalugin was summoned to the district executive committee. The chairman of the executive committee announced with a certain amount of scorn, "This morning your actors robbed an apartment in the village."

"Excuse me," objected Kalugin, "how do you know that the actors did it?"

"We don't have such specialists in our district and nothing like that ever happened before your arrival. Of course, we do have robberies, but not of apartments. We have a different kind, you understand," the chairman concluded.

"We also have our own style," parried Kalugin, "and it just so happens that we don't have any apartment specialists. Tell me, hasn't anything happened to your bank? Is the bank intact?"

"Yes."

"Well, that means that the actors are not guilty of anything and you're off the track. We could only be responsible for a bank. Our troupe is made up of professional actors and they will not rob under any circumstances, but there are two amateurs with a dark past. However, apartments are not their specialty; they can steal into a bank and open any kind of fireproof safe, but they don't enter apartments even though there might be millions there. Just as a carpenter won't undertake watch repairing, they won't go out to rob an apartment. It's not their specialty."

Kalugin returned to the sports hall looking gloomy, assembled the whole troupe and spoke at length of the honor of the theater. Everyone suspected Misha Rom. Rom was from Moscow, a "houseman" (a specialist in robbing apartments); he had also perfected the art of pickpocketing. The situation was a critical one: the first trip to a theater in a free settlement might be the last trip and might even force

the theater personnel back to common labor.

The criminal prisoners retired to one side and argued about something. Evidently the fate of the theater disturbed them too. Whether it was the decision of the criminals or just coincidence, after dinner someone found the stolen property under the planked sidewalk.

The disturbance among the actors gradually subsided, but toward the beginning of the performance it rose once again. They were ashamed to go on stage.

They played *Grain* well, but no longer with the same enthusiasm as they had felt in *Smoke*. A professional would have noted breaks in the rhythm, a lack of precision in movements, moments of emotional uncertainty in the presentation of the text. In spite of the insecurity of the actors, however, the audience applauded vigorously.

The third performance was *Tempo*, which went off better than *Grain*. The actors had calmed down considerably and were less ashamed to face the audience.

The earnings from the three performances were impressive, about two and a half thousand rubles. This became the property of the camp. Kalugin had to give them the money and account for every kopeck of expense.

While the performances were going on and the actors were excited about the theft, the frost suddenly came on. At first there was a thin layer of ice on the river and then it was completely covered with ice. Navigation ceased. The boats put up for the winter and there were still no paths for the sleds. The troupe had to wait several days for the sled road.

Finally, a road was made. At the executive committee's expense they rented two horses and carts from the *kolkhoz* for the scenery and the trunks. The actors went on foot, through the silent forest, crossing paths, rabbit tracks and the tracks of wolves and foxes. They passed through remote villages, peculiarly northern villages, resembling museum exhibits or fragments of ancient Russia. Arriving back in camp they put

two plays into rehearsal at once: *A Million Anthonys* by Gradov and Orlov, already begun at Voznesen'ye, and *Prince Mstislav the Brave* by Prut.

No one asked about the Voznesen'ye robbery incident; evidently the profits from the performance mitigated the unusual circumstances. They had no sooner begun rehearsals at camp than the "educator" Belyayev arrived with a new itinerary: travel to Ostrichiny for two performances and from there to the work sites of the first camp section.

Two days later Lavrenev's *Smoke* was put on in Ostrichiny. The club was not heated. The frost was thick, one of those northern frosts which can penetrate to every corner of the building. In the club the actors put on their make-up and frosted the mirror with their breath. The play began with a scene at dinner with drinks: when the glasses were brought to the table there was ice in them. In their ball gowns Zalesskaya, Burdakova and Teresa Chrepko were blue with cold. The officers at supper could not keep their teeth from chattering. The audience sat in fur coats and felt boots; many of them left before the third act. When the play was half over the actors increased the tempo. Backstage they ran to their places and did exercises to get warm. When the curtain fell after the last act the make-up wouldn't come off in the cold, so the actors went to the barracks and took it off in front of the stove.

The next day they put on *Grain,* staged as if the action took place in winter, with fur coats, boots, caps, ear muffs, and mittens. This time the public didn't fill half the hall. The collection for the two performances was less than five hundred rubles.

The next scheduled appearance took place in a forest work site where there was a preponderance of criminal prisoners. There was no club and no place to put on a play, and so it was decided to limit the performance to a concert. The work site was about twelve miles from Ostrichiny and the actors went on foot along a little-traveled, difficult road.

They arrived just in time to prepare for the concert. The only possible place for a performance was the barracks. The spectators were spread out in sitting and reclining positions on the tiered bunks as if they were in loges. The brigade leaders lived in a little side hut jutting off one room from the entrance through the corridor, and this little room was provided for the actors' use.

The concert was opened by Cheremisov on the accordion. From the very first number the young criminals were enraptured and cried out their praises in their own jargon.

After Cheremisov, Kalugin read a poem by Zharov, "The Accordion." The simplicity of the doggerel style recalled revels, mirth, love, and hate. The songs by Zalesskaya to accordion accompaniment evoked no less enthusiasm than the accordion itself. The audience jumped on the bunks, shouted, clapped, cursed, and called, "More, more!" The performers then read excerpts from plays and humorous tales; Podorozhnyi sang and then the accordion played again.

The troupe could not continue their journey that evening—it was too late. The actresses spent the night in the headquarters building under the watch of the sentry commander and the armed guards, and the actors dozed near the stove in the brigadiers' barracks.

At six o'clock in the morning the workers went out into the forest, and the actors prepared for a ten-mile march to the work site Vorona, a little settlement farthest removed from the administrative section and from local villages, in the deep forest. The prisoners there prepared logs for floating down the Vorona, a tributary of the Svir'. Long trips of this sort tired the actors but also gave them satisfaction. Hiking along the road singly and in pairs they could devote themselves to daydreams, or talk without fear that someone would overhear them. With discussions of this type the road seemed much shorter, the time passed unnoticed, and quite unexpectedly the camp watchtowers appeared ahead, and then the gate into the paling, behind which lived the prisoner audience of

prison art.

Only intellectuals were sent to this work site. Many historians, professors, graduate students, and persons sentenced in connection with the Platonov affair[22] were there. As soon as the officials had counted the "guests," the actors were surrounded by the "host" prisoners and immediately taken to their own barracks. The "guests" were seated on the best benches and shown the places where they would sleep—places which would be unoccupied because the "hosts" would be off at night work elsewhere. On the table appeared boiling water; someone put out a piece of sugar, evidently from a package received long ago. Someone else proffered a piece of bread, another placed a half kettle of soup before the actor and in the spiritual warmth everyone spoke: "Drink, eat, don' be ashamed, those who are rich are happy." And then the prisoners asked about the news from the outside world. Had they by any chance read a central newspaper, met any new arrivals come across anything new from the camp administration?

In the evening Kirshon's *Grain* was put on at the club. In the miserable auditorium sat earnest and serious prisoners. They applauded warmly but moderately after each act.

Professor Kirpichnikov returned to the barracks after the performance in great excitement and shared his impressions with one of the barracks "guests," the actor R. According to the professor the performance had been an excellent one. All the actors played very well, especially Kalugin, Zalesskaya, Rodishchev, and Kolosov, and indeed the whole ensemble had distinguished themselves by their great care in enacting their roles and by their sensitive interpretation of the text. The professor had been really satisfied. The words of the professor seemed strange and even a little insulting to the guest, although neither malicious irony nor plain derision was intended.

"Professor," said the guest, "today you saw a beggarly art, art in rags and tatters, conducted on the stage not of a theater but of a cattle yard. How could such a performance

please you, you who have seen performances in the theaters of the capital?"

"I asked myself the same question after each act," the professor answered, "and I think that my colleagues did the same," and he looked at his barracks comrades, who nodded their heads in agreement. "And even so I liked the performance. In the first place, I had never been so close to actors at work. In the academic theaters the distance separating the actor and the spectator lessens the effect of what is perhaps the most interesting element of a play: the psychological pattern of mimicry and gesture. There, in the academic theater, I see, or rather, I guess about a person from indistinct faces and broad gestures, but here every little feature of character was understandable to me.

"In the second place *Grain,* as a play about village life, could hardly gain from a production in rich costumes or with brilliant scenery, with electric lights during the intermission, with an interplay of prismatic lights from the chandeliers. Today I saw life in a play, truth and not a tale, and in this our club helped me by really resembling a cattle shed more than an ordinary theater. It did not destroy for me any impression or mood by brilliance or light or elegant symbolism. Of course, you may say that the play is not sincere, that it is primitive in its theme and in the motivation of its dramatic events," the professor continued, "but it is not a question of what the author wants to say; rather, it is how his text will be translated by the spectators into the language of truth. I saw more in the play than Kirshon wanted to say, and I perceived what he said in a different way from the one he assumed in his audience. Yes, there are times when not only theatrical performance but all of art, all science and even the everyday conversation of ordinary people is perceived only in terms of the experience and insight of the observer, and must in a sense be 'translated' into the truth."

On the second day the troupe put on *Smoke* by Lavrenev. From early morning the professor was nervous lest something

prevent his attending the theater. The others were excited too. The academic seriousness of discussions about the theater, about performances under camp conditions, might puzzle a person fresh from the free world. Indeed, what could intelligent people find in the mutilated art of a camp troupe? But they did find something. Deprived of books, magazines, habitual scientific work, creative research on historical phenomena, they had been suddenly awakened with a jolt, and behind the poor set of the camp stage had seen or discovered documents of contemporary life filled with profound scientific interest.

The performance began as usual. The hall was crowded. There was a smell of decay from the boots, mixed with the characteristic atmosphere of sulphurous stench, sweat, cheap tobacco, and overcrowded dormitories, but no one noticed this; they were used to it.

This time the play treated not the collectivization of the countryside but the Civil War, the revolt within the Red Army against the Bolsheviks, and the suppression of the revolt. The life of the people of the recent past was shown, restored on the stage. The translation of *Smoke* into "the language of truth" was made easier by the content of the previous day's performance. On the basis of personal experience the audience drew unmistakable conclusions about the fate of the Red hero of the play, Ruzayev, and his comrades-in-arms, the partisans. Where now were these peasants who fought "for land, for freedom, for a better lot" with a naive trust in the Bolsheviks? Some had perished long ago, undoubtedly along with Ruzayev himself in the torture chambers of the GPU, others had disappeared, and still others had ended up in collective farms. As for the ensigns and lieutenants, it was not necessary to talk of them—they had been killed long ago.

Bolshevik destruction of groups of the population was demonstrated in *Smoke* without any anti-Soviet intention on the part of the playwright. The truth was revealed to this special audience by their own experience. It is for this reason that

the intellectuals and the ordinary workers were so attentive to the performances in the camp; "translating" the play, they themselves knew the real consequences of the actions shown as heroic on the stage. The professor was right. Sitting in the hall in front of the stage, he laid bare the dramatized Soviet abstractions and established their authentic meaning and force, making a sociological prognosis with the help of historical criteria. This was truly scientific work.

Before going to sleep in the professor's barracks, some members of the audience praised the performance, for some reason in whispers, but for the most part they were quiet. The theater left the next morning for another work site. In Vorona there remained only lumbering, work quotas and the anticipation of daily rations.

Traveling from site to site the troupe gave eighteen performances and several concerts. The conditions and impressions, the stages and spectators were, with little variation, identical. Only in one work site, in the dense forest on the right bank of the Svir' River downstream from Ostrichiny, did the actors see something unusual: a large rectangle of barracks with many prisoners, and a two-storied building in one corner of the rectangle. This was the club. The "educator" had built it by getting prisoners to do the work during their leisure hours.

The arrangements were suitable for a theater in a big city: a stage with wings, an auditorium with room for over six hundred people, dressing rooms, a lobby, and storage rooms. But the building was not completed. The stage was floored with rough boards while the hall floor was the bare ground. The windows, still without frames, were covered with pieces of old tarpaulin and in the club there was no theatrical equipment. The building was a striking example of Soviet "stupidity"; a great deal of lumber had been wasted, as well as the labor of the prisoners, for the club had not been completed because of the lack of any construction materials other than lumber itself. The settlement was to be abandoned

in a year, as soon as they had cut down the surrounding timber. And it was not suitable as a permanent settlement for anyone because of its primitiveness.

Because *Grain* permitted the actors to wear outer clothing as costumes, this play was performed in the cold building. Nevertheless both the actors and the spectators were frozen. In the morning the troupe received the order to return to Rovskoye and there await a new itinerary to tour the free theaters, Voznesen'ye and a large settlement south of it. During the return trip they rehearsed *A Million Anthonys* and *Enemies* by Lavrenev. The new repertoire had already been submitted to the camp administration.

Voznesen'ye in winter seemed different. On the wharf silence reigned. The passenger boats, tug and barges seemed frozen in the ice. Where Lake Onega had been there now extended a broad, snowy steppe. In the mornings and evenings grey whispers of smoke curled upward in the cold sky from the chimneys of the dozing village—the ovens were being warmed. Through the icy window panes came the yellow gleam of kerosene lamps. Nothing stirred: the silence of the North. It seemed that they had come in vain, that no one would attend the theater here, that the rare pedestrians in the streets did not need theatricals, for they were half asleep. But toward evening of the second day the sign was posted at the box office: tickets for the first performance were sold out.

The first play presented was *A Million Anthonys*, an agitplay with some adventure and an interesting conflict but an improbable plot. It was difficult for the spectator in Voznesen'ye to translate it into "the language of truth" because the play dealt with the little known subject of intrigues among the Vatican cardinals and their participation in secular business. This permits the bandit Baiotorso, who escapes from prison, to make a spectacular career in the Catholic clerical world and win himself an important position in commercial enterprises. He acquires an industrial enterprise for

the manufacture of religious images and puts on sale a million St. Anthonys—hence the name of the play.

The theme was not without its platitudes. Its official anti-religiousness had no relation to the Orthodox conscience and was therefore not useful in the U.S.S.R. This was not clear to the administration who had suggested the play's production. Nor could the actors reduce the play to such a degree of absurdity that the spectators would interpret it in an anti-Bolshevik sense, because the audience had no point of reference to contrast to that absurdity. For the spectator in Voznesen'ye the performance was almost a "dumb show," i.e., it was accepted visually and for its speech melody but nothing more.

The outer aspect of the performance with its exotic quality evidently completely satisfied the audience, and the sign of rapport with the stage was evident—the silence, and with it, after each scene prolonged applause. In short, the première of *A Million Anthonys* went off well.

On the second day there was another première, *Enemies* by Lavrenev, a play which later was not included in the complete collection of the author's works. The reason is understandable. The main heroes of the play are Soviet pilots, blood brothers descended from a family of intellectuals. The elder brother honorably serves the Soviets but the younger is hostile to them. A struggle begins. The conflict is resolved by the younger brother's escape across the border in an airplane.

Lavrenev's works are all devoted to one problem, one central image: the highest qualities of the Russian officer's honor in prerevolutionary times. This high spiritual worth he contrasts both to the old world and to the new, elevating it to an absolute. His positive heroes appear as bearers of absolute honor even when they serve dishonor. This honor not only belongs to former officers but, according to Lavrenev, has been "democratized." A Chekist may possess it or a secretary of the Party district committee, or a commissar; and only the possession of this conception of honor makes these characters positive.

How did Lavrenev arrive at this central image? Evidently it was not easy for him, an officer of the tsarist navy, to get along with the Bolsheviks and reconcile himself to reality; and he did not reconcile himself, but entered the service of absolute honor, not of the Bolsheviks. Henceforward Lavrenev speaks only of honor, in various forms and with many variations. In *Enemies* he imparts it to the elder brother for his "positiveness" and withholds it from the younger brother for his "negativeness." This does not make the play a Soviet drama since the question does not concern the complete recognition by the older brother of everything Soviet, but only of the inadmissibility of treason.

The treatment of the theme in *Enemies* is rather pale and the camp spectator could easily justify the treason of the younger brother to Bolshevik dishonor. Kosinov played the younger brother very successfully. During the play two reactions from the audience were perceptible: one was a lack of understanding, the other a subtle perception, with a justification of the treason.

In the morning the actors journeyed eight miles to a village south of Voznesen'ye. Although the village was large, the club was small. It was the old trading building of a "liquidated" local merchant. The theatrical hall of the club resembled a rich provincial shop of the past, with its suggestions of trade in herrings, tar, collars, tea, sugar, tobacco, skins, and various wares.

The ceilings of the hall and the stage were of the same height. From the artists' dressing rooms a corridor ran into the lobby and it was decided to use this in the first play, *Grain*. The stage was small but two scenes could be carried into the audience: the scene where the peasants come to a meeting and the scene showing the attempt to set fire to the village soviet. Since it was more convenient in staging the play to bring the group of kulaks and their supporters to the stage through the audience, this was planned. As a result of this piece of staging the play was turned upside down and transformed into a

counterrevolutionary play at the actual performance without the slightest intention to do so on the part of the director.

In the evening the hall was filled with typical northern peasants in short fur coats, felt boots and fur caps with ear muffs. The curtain opened, revealing a scene in the apartment of District Committee Party Secretary Mikhailov, played by Kalugin. Before the audience of peasants appeared those who had deprived them of their peaceful existence, denuded their way of life by destroying its festive picturesqueness, insulted their faith, brought on shortages and poverty, "dekulakized" them, and driven them to the *kolkhoz*. The scene ended with a suspicious silence in the hall. There was no applause, but the actors understood that this was not a criticism of them.

When the peasants appeared on the stage the audience came to life again. Then came the scene of the kulak meeting (Act II, scene 3). The actor "kulaks" and "kulak supporters" came on to the stage through the audience. No one was surprised at this; on the contrary, the stir in the seats and the expression on the audience's faces said: "Aha, here come our people! Let's see what will happen."

The members of the audience included themselves in the play and reacted along with the play. When the Communist of the district committee, played by Podorozhnyi, ordered: "Make them turn in a minimum of grain," there was a cry from the audience, "That's what you think!" An unmistakably jolly noise arose in the hall, the peasants clearly expressing their reactions as in well-rehearsed mass scenes in productions of the big professional theaters. Remarks started to be heard more often, and the audience's reactions grew sharper. Truth had come to the hall and to the stage. Art through abstraction had reverted to life. The meeting in the play became a real one.

At the end of the scene the actor "kulaks" and "kulak supporters" went out through the hall, and it seemed to them that they were now talking in the name of these very villagers,

while the peasants in their seats made gestures as though they were sending their representatives into the midst of the crowd in order to say: "Good boys, you said the right words! Don't be afraid—we won't give you away. We'll stick together and they won't be able to do anything to us." In the scene where the plot to set fire to the village soviet is hatched at the house of the kulak Ivan Gerasimovich, the entire audience participated with the most intense silence and conspiratorial concentration. The poor peasant and "kulak supporter" Grunkin, played by the actor R, had the particular sympathy of the audience.

Immediately after the curtain at the end of the scene the audience noisily began to demand that the action be continued, saying, "Why wait, let them die, damn them!"

On their way to the fire scene the actors passed through the hall, which was gripped in deadly silence. The spectators were afraid to breathe lest the noise betray the stealthy actors. The conclusion of the play disappointed and angered them; they were restless for revenge and for action. The performance was over but the peasants still sat there. Even when the end of the performance was announced the quiet of several seconds was unbroken and only then, finally, came stormy applause.

How could it happen under Soviet conditions that a play by the Communist Kirshon, irreproachably written in Party language with an irreproachable Party line, sounded counterrevolutionary in performance? This is the creative method of "socialist realism." Adapting reality in favor of socialism, Kirshon constructed an emotional life of the play aimed at arousing the Party's emotions, but not the people's, and therefore his *Grain*, particularly in the provincial theaters, was turned upside down.

The next day *Smoke* was put on for the same peasant audience. The hall was filled a half hour before the beginning of the performance; the peasants were already stamping and beating their palms, crying "Begin, it's time!" This

time the rapport between the audience and the stage was not the same as had existed during the performance of *Grain*. The Soviet regime is not portrayed in *Smoke*. The struggle of the rebellious Red Army with the partisans produced an attitude of ambivalence among the audience: some were sympathetic to one side, some to the other. Nevertheless, the performance was understood, and it went over well.

Finally the third performance, *A Million Anthonys*, and the hall was again filled. But from the first scenes it was apparent that the performance was not reaching the audience. By the end of the evening no more than twenty people were left in the auditorium.

According to plan, performances ended and before the troupe lay the return trip to Rovskoye by way of the work sites along the way. The troupe could not leave the next day because the carts had not come for the scenery. Kalugin decided to give the actors a day of rest without any rehearsals. But this decision led to the theater's destruction. Taking advantage of the day off, Rom, the professional thief, decided to make use of his basic specialty. Under the guise of a walk in the village he observed available objects and began formulating a plan of action. On the day off nothing occurred, but the next day when it was time to depart, Rom appeared bearing a sack in which he had concealed an expensive fur coat stolen from one of the inhabitants.

During the trip, when the actors had guessed that in the sack which Rom had tossed on the cart there was an expensive fur coat, they all felt depressed. Everyone thought of the hard labor ahead of them in the forest. The scandalous theft of the fur coat threatened the theater with liquidation. The trip back to camp became particularly distressing.

The cart with the scenery had not reached the work site where they were supposed to put on a performance and spend the night. However, the troupe was taken in and given a place for the night and Kalugin was handed an order from the KVCh to proceed immediately to the camp. The performances

along the way were cancelled. Then a guard came to the actors and conducted a search. They looked for the coat but did not find it. The authorities of the village which they had just left had made contact with Rovskoye and Rovskoye in turn with the work sites along the route of the troupe.

In the evening of the following day, tired, hungry and crushed by the expectation of reprisals, the actors approached the camp. The commandant met them and in accordance with the camp chief's orders led them five miles farther to a forest work site. Their room in the camp had been occupied by other lodgers. They became even more despondent. At the forest site they might be sent at once to lumber work.

At the wall of a small barracks lay the unloaded scenery. In this barracks, room was made for the actors, while the actresses were put in a women's barracks. Personal suitcases and knapsacks from the cart were laid out between the empty bunks of the barracks. It was cold in the barracks, uncomfortable and dark. As soon as they arrived Rom was packed off to solitary confinement.

The next day Kalugin was called up to the camp chief and Teresa Chrepko, Kolosov and Kosinov to the Accounting and Distribution Unit. All of them returned that evening. Decisions about the future of the actors had resulted in the dissolution of the troupe. Kalugin had been given a two-hour rebuke by the chief and the assignment of preparing a performance for the very next day with the remnant of the company. Teresa was transferred to Moscow, to the Lubyanka prison. Kolosov and Kosinov were freed before their terms had expired, in accordance with the system of taking time off one's sentence for labor days (ten days a month off, if quotas were fulfilled every day of the month; the same for camp workers and for actors if there were no administrative punishments). The parting was simple, sincere and filled with sadness. Teresa wept and Sasha Rodishchev was thrown into despair: they loved one another. She was taken away under escort.

Kolosov and Kosinov received a paper permitting them to move freely to the administration of Svir'lag, and they went by foot to the nearest railroad station. At the administration they would receive real documents of liberation with complete juridical power to receive passports from local Soviet authorities.

Having lost two professionals and an experienced amateur, Kalugin cut and re-cut the productions and rehearsed them in their new form. But three days went by and Rodishchev was called up to the Accounting and Distribution Unit for transfer to the theater at the central camp, at Lodeinoye-Polye. It was learned that the troupe under the director Grigor'yev had been transferred from Kem' to Lodeinoye-Polye, and that he had petitioned the administration to enlarge his troupe.

With Rodishchev's departure the theater was left without a stage designer. Rom was released from solitary after a few days but did not remain in the theater. He was appointed an "educator" in a work site. The loss of five actors left the theater without a repertoire. Kalugin did not know how to get out of such a difficult situation, but suddenly help came: an order from the camp administration calling Kalugin, R., Sazhin, and Podorozhnyi to Lodeinoye-Polye. Left behind temporarily were Zalesskaya, Burdakova, "the comic" and the "extras" (five amateurs from among the criminals). Zalesskaya was later recalled to Lodeinoye-Polye. There was no more theater. The "extras" stole the costumes. The scenery remained lying in the barracks and was soon burned as useless.

Destruction of the Theater

The re-established theater in Lodeinoye-Polye, with Grigor'yev's troupe and some of the former players—the actresses Prel'berg, Leontovich and Gulyaeva, and the actors Izvol'ski, Grinko and Stulov—took on the aspect of a real

theater. On the first of May, 1932, the theater put on Lavrenev's *The Break,* a play which had become a sort of ritual in Soviet theaters. They also played *Lyubov Yarovaya,* Ostrovski's *There Wasn't a Copper,* and Notari's *A Trial Concerning Three Million,* and gave concerts at Lodeinoye-Polye and surrounding towns in free theaters. Rodishchev revived Shkvarkin's *The Cheat;* Grigor'yev staged an adaptation of a novel; and Kalugin did Marienhof's *Hogs* and Hasenclever's *Businessman* in Aleksei Tolstoi's translation. Pogodin's *Tempo* was revived. *The Cheat* was staged as an operetta with the well-known operetta actor Ksendzovski, and was highly successful. A summer theater was built.

Meanwhile, the production quotas at the work sites were not being filled and the administration ordered the establishment of "storm" tempos and a "shock campaign." The drama group was informed that appearances at free theaters were over; it was to be divided into two sections and to get ready for tours to work sites. Kalugin headed one group, Izvol'ski the other. With Kalugin went Zalesskaya, Matveyeva, Gulyayeva, Rodishchev, Sazhin, Shtel', Podorozhnyi, R., Mamontov, Grachev, and others; they went north and east, while the other group traveled south. Each group took three plays as repertoire and acts for concerts.

Their audiences were varied, but as the "shock campaign" proceeded they met audiences who were dead on their feet. Suddenly the troupes were called back.

The chief of the KVO, Tuzov, announced that they had not been performing useful work, that there were those in the troupe who were undermining camp discipline, and worse yet, that they were carrying on harmful agitation. For these reasons the theater was to be reorganized, and many actors were to be sent to common labor.

Next day Yendovitski and Podorozhnyi were summoned to the URO where they were told to get ready for transfer to the Solovetski camp since they were ten-year men and had to

be kept under strict surveillance. Grinko, Prel'berg, Vedzhini, and Leontovich completed their sentences a few days later and left the troupe. The day after that several others were transferred to common labor as undesirables and intellectuals: Kalugin, Sazhin, Stulov, R., Zalesskaya, Matveyeva, the actors Sokolov and Nikitin, and the costumer Nikitina. Shtel' was put in the office to register the prisoners entering and leaving the camp. Ravinski, formerly administrator of theaters in Kiev, was appointed chief director. Those who remained for him to supervise were Rodishchev, Gulyayeva, Mamontov, Izvol'ski, Kamchatov, Lida, and Marusya. All the former repertoire was done away with, and there were not enough people for new productions. It was impossible to produce anything of a serious nature with only three professionals.

The nine persons taken from the theater were moved to the sawmills and woodworking factories of Zaton. There they were split up and sent to various workshops and jobs. For two months Kalugin and R. sorted and stacked boards. During the brief rest periods they would sit on the boards reciting dialogue from plays, calling up memories from the theater's past and indulging in fancies about its future. The abscesses and sores on their hands gave them no relief; their clothes were torn and covered with tar.

The artists Sokolov and Nikitin polished benches, stools, office desks, and coat racks. The actresses made window frames.

The first autumn frosts began. Barges left Leningrad to get wood. They had to be loaded in haste or the frosts would strike and freeze everything until spring. Brigades of workers were collected from the mills of Zaton and turned out to work in the forests and on the banks of the Svir' and its tributaries. They sawed, cut, split, dragged, loaded, unloaded, and loaded again. Five miles from Lodeinoye-Polye, where a small stream flowed into the Svir', a huge lumber

camp was set up. Great batches of floated logs awaited loading. The actors Sazhin, Stulov and R. were among those who performed this work. The others were sent into the forest.

The loading was done in three shifts; the actors were on the night shift. At dusk they left the bank on a narrow raft made of birch logs. Arriving at the barges which stood at anchor, they hooked logs in the water and tossed them into the barge. The quota per man was eighteen cubic meters [about 636 cubic feet] in a shift. As they lifted the logs, icy water poured over the men and by morning their clothes were frozen. One morning on the way home from work, R. stumbled and fell head first into the water. Back on shore his bones ached, his teeth chattered and he had chills all over. He rested in the canvas tent on hard boards, his clothes and shoes not fully dried out until the evening shift.

At the end of the day's work the "educator" would come to the workers in the tent, ferret out the actors and, ignoring their weariness, urge them to "think up" something. By "think up" he meant perform something funny or amusing there in the barracks. The special talents of the actors were not taken into consideration, for there were "educators" who would ask a singer, "Can you swallow balls or knives?" A negative answer would disappoint the "educator"; like it or not, one had to "think up" something.

Many prisoners who had worked in the theater in freedom did not work in the camp theater during the whole period of their imprisonment. For example, Krasyuk, an actress and teacher in a Leningrad theatrical studio, worked as a laundress for five years. However, no one was exempt from "thinking up" performances.

The central theater in Lodeinoye-Polye could not recover from the blow which it had been dealt. It was no longer a real theater. Ravinski could not revive it since he was only an administrator. Izvol'ski was only an actor. Rodishchev required experienced advice and no such adviser was available. There

could be no question of touring the free theaters of neighboring construction projects and cities because there was no decent repertoire. The group struggled along with more concerts, but what they offered was of little interest. In January the theater lost two more actors: Lida and Ravinski became involved in a quarrel, and Lida was sent to one camp, Ravinski to another.

In April 1933 R. reappeared. He had been sent from a logging camp to Lodeinoye-Polye for release. From the moment he received his release document from the URO he again became an ordinary Soviet citizen until the time when he was arrested once more for having been a prisoner.

When the central theater completely ceased to function, Kalugin was brought back from common labor, appointed chief director once again and ordered to turn out "first-class productions in 'storm' tempos." He got a full company together and within a short time presented Gorki's *The Lower Depths* and Goldoni's *The Mistress of the Inn.* Rehearsals and productions began to take on a genuinely theatrical character. Shtel' was brought back to the theater and several newly-arrived professionals were discovered in work sites. But Rodishchev, Gulyayeva and Izvol'ski completed their sentences and left the camp to live as exiles.

Despite their departure, however, the central theater flourished until the autumn of 1934. It is said that in 1934 the prisoners of Svir'lag staged an uprising. The nature of the uprising is not known, but the leading part in the uprising was supposedly played by the intelligentsia. This is entirely possible. At any rate it is certain that Svir'lag was dissolved after 1934. This fact is noteworthy. Former prisoners can name many camps which were opened, but it would be difficult for them to name any which were closed, for there were few of these.

Apparently Svir'lag was dissolved as a politically unreliable camp after the uprising was suppressed, and the central theater and all the agit-brigades disappeared with the camp.

After 1935 the lumber camps were given new names: Vytergor, Kargopol, Onega. The inmates of Svir' who were still alive were probably transferred to those camps. Of course, theaters and agit-brigades appeared in the new camps, but after Kirov's assassination in December 1934 matters became increasingly difficult, particularly with the appointment of Yezhov as head of the NKVD in September 1937, at which time theatrical staffs were abolished even in the camp administration; the only remaining theatricals were in clubs for free hired workers.

In 1935 Kalugin completed his sentence and left the camp, but he was not free for long. Almost all of the actors of the Svir' Theater who had been released were rounded up during the "Yezhovshchina" as former prisoners and were given new sentences.

Actors In The Tragedy "Yezhovshchina"

Nikolayev murdered Kirov in the established Chekist method—with a bullet in the back of the head. But the explosion was not limited to Kirov's skull; it produced a chain reaction throughout the U.S.S.R.

Among the innumerable victims of the sweeping purges which followed were many actors and dramatists (Meierhold, Kirshon and hundreds of lesser known persons), who were shot or sent into penal servitude. Gloom reigned in the theaters of the cities. The doorbell ringing in the apartment at night stops the blood, dries the lips, paralyzes the will, and halts the breath. Knowing themselves to be innocent, people nevertheless prepare "for any emergency" a package with the necessary things for life in prison.

Trainload after trainload of prisoners was sent to concentration camps. Many of those in the trainloads were intellectuals, including directors, actors, musicians, film workers, dramatists, and designers. They were given the chance to see for themselves and experience at first hand the authentic "socialist realism" without any embellishments.

As a general rule creative research in a camp is impossible for artistic workers, and what is most important, the motive for experimentation is lacking, killed by the fact of enslavement. Of course some accumulation of impressions does take place in the years of imprisonment, but it is hardly significant in its scope, its practical usefulness and its relation to the general evolution of art as compared to the experience of artists who work for the same length of time under conditions of freedom.

The club theaters of the Ukhta-Pechora Camp began in Kotlas. Group after group of prisoners saw the performances: in Knyazhpogost, Sangorodok ("hospital town"), Chib'-Yu (later renamed Ukhta, a large railroad station and river port), Kozhva, Ust'-Usa, Azdva, Abez', Kochmesa, Vorkuta Sangorodok, Usa-landing and the Vorkuta mine.

The distance from Chib'-Yu to Krutaya is almost seventy miles. The construction of a road between the two points was regarded as urgent, but there were no machines whatsoever for the work, and consequently, it didn't matter at all where the work began. They began to build the entire road at once, dividing the length into sections of about four miles each. Every section was worked by a group of prisoners assembled at a work site. The first work site after Chib'-Yu was Vetlosyana, where all those who were dying from exhaustion were taken. Many people died of hunger and the work was really difficult.

The chiefs considered that they needed something theatrical on the road building project. The head of the KVCh of the road section was one-eyed, of average height, sly and weak. He continuously went back and forth among the work sites. An agit-brigade was demanded. They gathered the criminals, two enemies of the people, and for artistic direction they chose R., demanding from him a work plan for the month. The task of writing a plan was not easy with such a selection of "actors." Each of them could do something, but not in the theater. After carefully checking what they knew, R. decided

on a program of small acts. It was a difficult task but worthwhile because of its novelty.

R. decided categorically to reject an agit-brigade of the camp type, although such a decision threatened him with a return to the earth-works. A program with a list of the numbers and texts, the form and the necessary time for preparation was laid out in the plan. Into the program went jargon songs, whichever any of them knew. The songs couldn't be used in their original form on the stage, however, even on this most primitive stage, and R. had to clean them up. The dances had to be toned down by eliminating vulgar elements and creating an impressive ending. The adaptations had to be written from the beginning and rehearsed. Members of an "orchestra" which contained a balalaika, a mandolin and a guitar had to learn the necessary melodies by hearing them sung, since none of the musicians could read music.

The program was accepted and the work went into full swing. Credit must be given to the young criminals—they really loved art and were ready to serve it with complete self-denial. From early morning the "singers" vocalized and they enjoyed it when R. shouted at them, showed them how to move their diaphragms, how to place the tongue, how to hold the breath, when not to take a breath, and so forth and so on. Then the dancers began to beat out their gypsy dances and the *chechyotka.* Gradually the voices and songs, feet and dances began to change and acquired lightness and ease. Finally out of this came something acceptable for the camp stage, something original and colorful.

"One-eye" arrived (that is what the prisoners called him), reviewed the show, approved it and sent them out to the work sites. Oddly enough, the prisoners liked the program. As for the KVCh, of course it was not exactly according to its liking: the political element was weak. Only in one scene was there a feeble criticism of camp life and that was all.

The most difficult thing to achieve was the concert discipline which is so important for rapport with the spectators.

R. didn't succeed for a long time until finally the necessary method was discovered. It was a simple device: he had to check carefully to ascertain who among the group of criminal "artists" was the "boss," pick him out, instruct him, make him a sort of elder, and then entrust to him the conduct of the concert. That was all: everyone would then work smoothly and always be ready for his entrance on the stage if he valued his teeth.

Willingly occupying themselves with theatrical art, the "actor" criminals did not forget their basic profession and managed to rob their director. Evidently out of respect for him they did it all cleanly and subtly; they opened his suitcase without breaking the lock, taking only his two shirts, one suit and a book—a collection of short stories. They replaced everything else neatly, locked the bag and tied it up with the rope just as before.

The group never gave a second program. Spring began, the ice on the rivers began to move and it became possible to move the prisoners by barge to Vorkuta. Ninety per cent of the workers on the road had been sentenced to the Vorkuta special camp. The "Yezhovshchina" was reaching the last, highest point of its terror. Work on the road from Chib'-Yu to Krutaya was stopped. The workers were driven to the Ukhta landing for transport in barges.

Toward evening of the third day everyone had been transferred to barges, the convoy had counted them once again, performed a drill in case they had to shoot the enemies of the people, and the tugs dragged the barges to Vorkuta, beyond the Arctic Circle to the tundra for work in the coal mines.

Beyond the Arctic Circle

Fifteen hundred hungry people were driven from the three barges to the shore of the Usa near the mouth of the Vorkuta, from which could be seen the northern spurs of the Ural Mountains and the empty horizons to the north and west. The

next day two hundred and fifty men were called out of the prisoner ranks, seated on flatcars at the station of a narrow gauge railroad and taken off to the mine forty miles away. It was snowing and a piercing north wind was blowing; everyone froze although the date was June 12, 1937. The dreary waste of the tundra framed the dreary thoughts of the miserable people—dreariness in a dreary emptiness.

At the mine the guard herded the newly arrived group into the auditorium of the club. In the U.S.S.R., churches, theaters and warehouses are very often turned into temporary stopping places for prisoners. Roll call was held and they were led to the bath. Their linen was boiled in insecticide. The old inmates of the camp, many of whom walked on crutches, came from afar to look over the arrivals. Scurvy had covered them with blemishes and made their legs crooked.

The camp was spread out on the incline of a small mountain off the banks of the Vorkuta River. But the higher one went the damper the place—the swamps of the tundra do not depend on the level of the ground. The barracks were set along the only road, covered with coal slag. At the very highest and swampiest spot stood the club and the kitchen.

The new group was designated as a brigade of loaders; they were located in tents on the bank of the river. With the group had come the actor R., the musician Aleksandrov and the Leningrad tenor L. In the morning on their return from work they went to get acquainted with the local actors and musicians. The club theater was made of wood, with about seven hundred seats and a fairly roomy stage. A dramatic troupe and a concert ensemble were performing there.

Fyodor Drebezgov directed the dramatic troupe; in the past he had been a student in the studio of the Aleksandrinski Theater and an active Komsomol member, a friend of Polozov, who had been shot in connection with Kirov's murder.

Another actor, Safonov, was a Muscovite. They had come to the apartment to arrest his father, but his father had died three weeks before so they took the son ("Wasn't the son a Safonov, too?") and gave him five years.

There was also a dramatic actor from Archangel and the actress Sakhnovskaya from Moscow, the wife of the famous director Sakhnovski. The composer Tsvetayev was also there, the nephew of the poetess Marina Tsvetayeva; a basso from Kazan'; the ballerina Yanovskaya; a violinist from Kazan' by the name of Khasa; a violinist from Moscow—Poznanski (the former personal secretary of Trotsky); a singer from Baku; and a jazz dancer, Lyutsi (a Negro from America). There were also many others—directors, actors, artists, literary men, and musicians.

Before July 1937 the Vorkuta theater was weak but held together. At that time even "enemies of the people" were permitted on the stage as well as in the jazz and brass bands. The actors and musicians were not freed from common labor, but they were appointed as guards or janitors, i.e., to lighter work so that they might combine this labor with their artistic work.

The newly arrived actors in the column of loaders managed to see only one dramatic performance that year. The play was a *kolkhoz* play, a weak agitation piece called *The Woman from Moscow.* The author was not well known. The heroine of the play, a middle-aged peasant woman, goes to Moscow for a visit and falls in love with the life of the *kolkhoz;* she agitates for entering the *kolkhoz* and finally talks her neighbor into doing so—that is all. From the first word to the last, the play was completely unconvincing. Everything was false, both emotions and ideas. Nevertheless Drebezgov and Safonov in the main roles amused the audience.

Soon after *The Woman from Moscow,* a concert was organized. Performers came on the stage with artistic readings and with little scenes on camp subjects; the virtuoso guitarist Glazkov appeared, and there was some jazz under the direction of

Tsvetayev. The main number was performed by the violinist Poznanski. This was his last performance. The audience was seized by an overpowering nostalgia. Perhaps this was due to the consonance of the melody with their own numbed emotions.

At the end of June 1937 panic arose in the theater and in the orchestras: artists and musicians who were "enemies of the people" and in general all those who had been sentenced for counterrevolution under the various articles and statutes were forbidden to appear on the stage and indeed to perform any work which did not correspond to their health category.

To avoid work in the mines, several of the sickest prisoners tried to get into the groups in secondary work sites lower down on the Usa. Drebezgov and Safonov succeeded in joining the group at Usa-landing in a loading column. Later R. was put in the group for Adak with the invalids, but luckily he was detained by the medical commission in Sangorodok and as a heart case remained there for two months before being sent to the work site at Usa-landing. The women were taken to the women's section in Kochmesa where they rooted out stumps and dug vegetable gardens.

The amateur actors among the criminals could not, of course, take charge of the theater independently. The theater closed and did not reopen until late spring 1938. By that time they had no time for theater; a drama was beginning which later received the name "the Vorkuta tragedy." A commission flew in from Moscow to select prisoners to be shot. Each day they gathered people by barracks and tents and sent them to the brick factory to solitary confinement. At first they shot them in groups, but in March they conducted a mass murder of more than a thousand people.

The most frantic period at Usa-landing was the navigation period. The administration and the KVO prepared for this. The administration appointed and accepted loaders, organized their work, prepared to accept the cargo that was

on the barges, and send coal to Archangel. At all work sites and at the mine a "mobilization" was conducted: they gathered up "everyone able to carry a spade"—artists, extra cooks, orderlies, janitors, accountants, all those out of work because of the curtailment of all construction work for the time of the "storm," in short, all the second-rate manpower, and drove them to Usa-landing to load and unload.

The KVO mobilized the educators, musicians and artists. The sanitary section transferred doctors, male nurses, medical assistants, and orderlies to the "storm," and sent them to Usa-landing. At this time of year there was no night and the sun never dipped below the horizon, lighting the "storm" around the clock like a Stakhanovite.

They worked in columns and brigades for eight hours at a stretch. The next eight hours they ate and slept and again went out for an eight-hour work period. That meant that some days they worked for sixteen out of twenty-four hours, the next day for eight hours and the third day again sixteen, or on the average of twelve hours a day.

The port seethed with people and a whole town of tents sprang up. The guards and the watchdogs were increased. Noise, hubbub, barking, obscenity, and the rending cries of the column heads and the brigadiers: "Let's go, let's go! Come on! Press on!"

The KVO was busy organizing its part of the "storm": it ordered ochre and lamp-black for drawing posters. The prisoners cut and spliced plywood for black lists, red lists; they painted them, prepared the standard texts, soiled the matting for the banners of disgrace, ripped red satin for the banners of heroism and glory, printed leaflets with the call for honest shock work and threats and insults for idling, prepared placards and slogans, placed inspectors and educators in columns, and made ready a brass band for uninterrupted playing during the whole "storm". But all of the work of the KVO cannot be enumerated. It was responsible, variegated, exhausting—and vile.

Dramatic presentations and concerts did not enter into the plan since they might curtail the time for work or for sleep; there was little difference between work or sleep since the still sleepy "laborer" would doze off at work. The dramatic actors and vaudeville performers made their appearance only as loaders and with spades. It was different with the musicians of the brass band and the jazz band, for they played music unceasingly at the loading point, setting faster and faster work tempos. There was no escaping their playing either during work hours or during the hours when the "manpower" was useless to the Soviet regime.

Finally the first barges with the cargo appeared. How many hopes rested on these barges! They brought cheap tobacco, "fresh" vegetables, camp clothing, sugar, third-rate groats, vegetable fat, herring, salted cod fish! Perhaps there were even onions and the Siberian wild garlic on the barges, perhaps bast shoes and mosquito netting.

And now to meet the arriving barges the band struck up a march, the artists carried the plywood signs with their slogans and the posters: "Let's give them coal! We'll show them! We'll overfulfill the plan!" "We'll show them!" "We'll develop our labor competition!" (In the camp it was considered inadmissible to use the word "socialist" competition.) From this moment on the "storm" was officially considered to have started.

The brass band went from one brigade to the next thundering a march. Behind them came the jazz orchestra under the direction of Tsvetayev; "enemy of the people" Aleksandrov rhythmically "chirped" on ten percussion instruments. Aleksandrov "chirped" with talent, enriching jazz although he was deaf. One number was done with the singer Lunichev. A song "Little Brother Sun" was a great success. In it the workers call on the sun to give them light for their shock work. The brigades particularly liked the line about "singing a spirited song" while they worked; for some reason, it inevitably evoked laughter. "Little Brother Sun" did not re-

fuse to enter the competition and shone around the clock.

Besides Lunichev, the American Negro Lyutsi also played with the jazz band. He danced Negro folk dances and rollicking *chechyotki.* His dancing was stupendous. He beat time standing, sitting and lying down, furiously rolling his eyes. However, Lyutsi survived only one such "storm" and was no longer there the next year. He had died.

The "storm" revived art in the camp: music, vaudeville and poster art, but for a significant period it interrupted the dramatic work which had been started earlier. In April, after the mass shootings had been completed according to plan, the KVCh began to urge political prisoners as well as criminals to take part in theatricals. At the Usa-landing work site they collected actors without freeing them from common labor. F. Drebezgov, again in the theater and again the director, revived the performance of *The Woman from Moscow,* taking Safonov, R. and Yermakova for various roles. In a short time the first performance was held in the dining room. The play has already been discussed. This time the roles were cast with greater success, and therefore the performance was received with great interest.

After *The Woman from Moscow,* they put on Uspenski's *Young Person.* Uspenski, a colleague of R.'s at the Leningrad Institute of the History of the Arts, had written a bad play. The author's name and the scholarly institute in which he had studied explain the failure. The majority of students at the Institute of the History of the Arts were the children of "former people," i.e., people of nonproletarian origin. Permission to enter other institutions of higher learning was denied them with almost no exception. The Institute of the History of the Arts, on the other hand, was on a semiprivate basis, was not included in the state budget, and therefore accepted anyone who could pay. Nonproletarian social origin in those days was a sort of birthmark. Each one of the "former people" knew that he was being watched by "vigilant activists" and that at every turn more would be required of

him than of those with an acceptable background.

With such a social origin it was a great risk to write anything. The slightest ideological inaccuracy in one's work was more than dangerous; it might be called "a deliberate sally by the class enemy on the ideological front." The dramatist with a "bad" origin had to "insure" himself continually by resorting to projections into the ideal, the communistic, the desired, but not the real.

Primitive, superficial, with a complete absence of artistic and everyday truth, the play *Young Person* runs like this: The janitress of a factory office is awaiting her daughter's arrival from the big city. The daughter had finished studying at an institute and is due to return momentarily to her "home" factory. The daughter arrives and gets a job in the factory as an engineer. The play continues with the usual cliches: the daughter uncovers wrecking, exposes an engineer-wrecker, rescues the honest but short-sighted chief engineer, organizes a competition between the Komsomol brigades and thus overcomes an interruption in work, conducts extensive social work, and establishes her engineer's authority among the workers. At the end she wants to get married to an old man, the chief engineer, but he won't marry her because of shyness. That is the entire plot.

It would be difficult to expect such a play to be a success, and it was not. Only the chief engineer was true to life, and the audience felt this was due to the performer R. The other characters satisfied neither the actors nor the audience.

The third play scheduled for the repertoire was Goldoni's *Mistress of the Inn.* More than ten rehearsals were held before the "storm." The prisoner-actors got as far as the reading and the staging, but when they were ready for the real creative work the "storm" interrupted everything. It was supposed that rehearsals would begin again as soon as the "storm" quieted down, but for many reasons they were not started again. The most important of the reasons was the loss of the cavalier. R. was supposed to play that role, but

he became ill with pleurisy and vitamin deficiency. He was sent to Sangorodok in a serious condition.

From that time on, for more than a year, the prisoners managed only with vaudeville and jazz performances at the Usa-landing work site and at the mine. In general the vaudeville theater is a fairly complex genre. Good vaudeville actors are a great rarity. Successful vaudeville numbers by actors are also very uncommon. A vaudeville actor can go on with one or two numbers for several years and some of them can do this for a lifetime. For this reason a vaudeville actor must have a continuous change of stages; he is continually in search of a new public. The existence of a vaudeville theater in a camp is possible only when the camp is spread over a great number of work sites (at the lumber mills, at points along the construction of railroads and canals and so on). At Vorkuta these conditions did not exist and vaudeville came to a dead end. The administration understood very little of the difficulties facing a vaudeville actor and looked on the slow changes in the repertoire as sabotage. It therefore transferred the actors to common labor.

Only in 1940-1941 did true dramatic presentations with new directors and a new crop of actors appear at the Vorkuta camp theater. At that time F. Drebezgov and V. Safonov were already free since they had completed their term of imprisonment. At the beginning of 1941, at a new mine, the director N. put on *Day of Judgment* by Shkvarkin. This was a serious mistake, although fortunately for N. the mistake passed unnoticed: at that time Shkvarkin was already in prison, and perhaps even worse, and his plays had been removed from the repertoire.

The play was successful, as were most of Shkvarkin's plays. Of course it was a far cry from the classics, but it was better than the run-of-the-mill Soviet plays. The theme was Soviet life: the ease of divorce, the even greater ease of marriages in the official Party circles, and family intrigues. "For some reason or other I'm always bored when

I get married," the heroine complains. Yanovskaya played the role.

The play was very well rehearsed. The amateurs who were selected and "trained" by the director differed little from the professionals. One felt the work of an ensemble in the performance, and it seemed that there were no second-rate or third-rate roles. Every detail, every moment was carefully thought out and presented to the spectator with perfect timing. But the director could not balance the rhythmical power of Yanovskaya with the general rhythm of the play. In the past she had been a talented ballerina who had then gone into the drama, and this was apparent in her interpretation of the role. The hairdresser was Bestsennaya from the amateur group, and she played her role most professionally from beginning to end.

The play was put on in the prisoners' dining room, although next door there was a completely new theater with a large stage and an auditorium for the free hired workers seating eight hundred persons. This theater could not be used by the troupe, however, for prisoners were not permitted there.

The prisoners made a stage in a corner of the dining room and decorated it for *Day of Judgment* so successfully that it would be difficult to imagine the play in any other setting without disturbing its profound intimacy. Even on the day of the performance none of the actors was freed from the common work obligatory for all prisoners.

* * * *

The work of the camp theaters is difficult to evaluate. There are indications in this series of sketches from camp theater life that the "educational" purposes which prompted the formation of the theaters were not fulfilled. The performances, which varied greatly in quality, seem rather to have provided moments of escape from the severities of life in camp—both for performers and audience. In this sense, the plays and concerts served as "rays of light in the kingdom of darkness."

Notes to *The Theater in Soviet Concentration Camps*

1. From the initials of the Russian for Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps (Glavnoye Upravleniye ispravitel'no-trydovykh lagerei).

2. "Svir'lag" is a contraction of the words *Svir'*, the river, and *lager'*, "camp." Svir'lag refers to the whole area along the Svir' where camps and subcamps were established.

3. The term Yezhovshchina refers to the climactic period (1937-1938) of the great purges, during which Nikolai Yezhov was the head of the NKVD.

4. The *chechyotka* is a dance characterized by rapid, light striking of the feet on the floor.

5. Counterrevolutionaries or political prisoners.

6. "Riff-raff" or criminal prisoners.

7. The gnats on the Solovetski Islands were a terrible plague for the prisoners. As a punishment for minor offenses, prisoners were stripped bare and made to stand at attention. The gnats would cover the naked person in a gray mass.

8. At Sekirina Mountain there was a solitary confinement cell with a strict regime. Imprisonment there was for a six-month term, but not everyone sentenced survived this period.

9. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many of the great Russian landowners maintained well-equipped private theaters, on Western models, at their estates. Performers in the theaters were serfs, who usually did theatrical work along with their ordinary duties, but sometimes devoted their whole time to acting.

10. Article 58 is the section of the criminal code dealing with political offenders.

11. *Uchotno-raspreditel'nyi otdel,* the Accounting and Distribution Section of the Camp.

12. *Sotsial'no opasnye elementy;* literally "socially dangerous elements;" persons suspected of being unfriendly to the Soviet regime.

13. *Sotsial'no vreditel'nye elementy;* literally "socially harmful elements"; persons convicted as saboteurs or wreckers.

14. KVCh: Cultural-Educational Section for camp subdivisions.

15. KVO: Cultural-Educational Division in the main camp. The KVCh in the subcamp was administratively related to the KVO.

16. That is, "Under which article of the criminal code has he been imprisoned?"

17. Counterrevolutionary activity.

18. *Sekretnyi sotrudnik,* "secret collaborator" or police informer.

19. A satire on a well-known phrase from a speech by Stalin.

20. From the Russian abbreviation Z.K., for *zaklyuchonnye v kontsentratsionnykh lageryakh* (prisoners in concentration camps).

21. The title of the play *Grain* has often been translated *Bread.* The word *khleb* in Russian has both meanings.

22. The veteran historian S.F. Platonov was sentenced to a term in a forced labor camp on charges of monarchist conspiracy. He died there in 1931.

Birth and Death of the Modern Ukrainian Theater

Yosyp Hirniak

The Ukrainian theater throughout its history has been not only a medium for entertainment and spiritual progress but also very often the leader and even the defender of the political rights of the Ukrainian nation. Professor D. Antonovych in his work *Three Hundred Years of Ukrainian Theater –1619-1919*[1] singles out as the peculiar characteristic of the Ukrainian theater the nationalistic and revolutionary character of its development.

The three hundred year history of the theater studied by Professor Antonovych occurred during some of the most tragic periods of Ukrainian history. It was an era during which the Ukrainian land and the Ukrainian soul were being torn asunder by Russia on the one side and Poland on the other. The church was denationalized, schools were destroyed, the Ukrainian printed word was forbidden and the upper class of the nation, the intelligentsia, was assimilated into other cultures. Only the isolated peasantry endured, and it remained the foundation of the Ukrainian nation. The peasants in their songs, their folklore, their plays and native entertainments, apparently "harmless" expressions of the national spirit, created opposition and even waged war against their oppressors and enemies. The theater, a synthesis of all these expressions of national creativeness, remained the only bastion against alien encroachment.

The result of each endeavor of the occupying governments to destroy even this segment of Ukrainian spiritual life was to give birth to new forms and styles in the theater. When

the tsarist government by its ukase of 1817 abolished the Ukrainian Kiev Mohyla Academy and with it the so-called *shkil'nyi* theater (school theater), there sprang from the national depths a new and modified form of theater called the *svits'kyi* theater (civil theater). The outlawing not only of the printed Ukrainian language but also of the spoken language by the tsarist minister Valuyev in 1878 resulted in the closing of the *svits'kyi* theater; however, it was immediately succeeded by the *pobutovyi* theater (theater portraying customs and manners), and this, in turn, gave way to the modern theater, which originated with the 1917 Revolution. Because the Ukrainian theater was always the source of social action and was the national weapon in the struggle against the enemies of Ukrainian culture and nationality, it was cherished as the invaluable treasure of the Ukrainian people. This use of theater was the foundation of the particularly "national" quality of the theater in the Ukraine.

The *pobutovyi* theater probably saved its people from complete catastrophe during one of their blackest hours. For twenty years it offered them their only consolation and leadership. The historian Antonovych states:

> The resonance of the native word, the motives of the native song, the fire of the native dance—all these awakened something living but forgotten in the soul, warmed the heart. Therefore, there developed a different and closer relationship between the actors and the audience in addition to the usual love of art. The actors were first considered as community and political leaders who primarily cultivated the Ukrainian national cause and, second, they were intimately regarded as masters, who with their artistry reached into the innermost depths of the soul. Rarely, therefore, has an audience's attitude toward a theater been comparable to that of the Ukrainian people of the 1890's toward the infant Ukrainian theater.[2]

The transition to the *pobutovyi* theater produced a group of exceptionally talented actors who succeeded from their very first attempts in becoming the masters not only of the heart but also of the dreams and hopes of the people.

Kropyvnyts'kyi, Zan'kovets'ka, Sadovs'kyi, Tobilevych, Saksahans'kyi, Zaterkevych, and many other Ukrainian actors could have been the pride and glory of the most famous stages of the world.

The path of the Ukrainian *pobutovyi* theater was not easy. Not every participant in the theater was able to bear the oppression and caprice of the tsarist administration. The limitation of themes, the orders forbidding any plays in Ukrainian except those of "Little Russian" ethnography—these are problems which few European theaters have had to face. The limitations haunted the *pobutovyi* theater for over a quarter of a century and this gave Mykola Sadovs'kyi, the leader of the Ukrainian theater and its director for many years, the right after thirty-five years to adopt a crown of thorns as the emblem of his theater. The *pobutovyi* theater after great difficulties in achieving even so much was permitted to stage only plays based on village life. Only after many years of effort did Staryt'skyi and Karpenko-Kary succeed in including in their repertoire one or two dramas based on Ukrainian history. This thematic limitation narrowed the range of the theater and its actors. In spite of this limitation, however, the exceptional talents of the actors of the *pobutovyi* theater surprised even the leading Moscow and Petersburg critics. Because of this success, the doors of the Russian theaters were often opened to such actors as Zan'kovets'ka, Saksahans'kyi and Sadovs'kyi. Even such a strict and demanding critic as Suvorin, director of the Petersburg theater at that time, stubbornly demanded the transfer of the *khokhlushka*[3] Zankovets'ka to the Aleksandrinski Theater.

The 1890's and even more the beginning of the twentieth century sharply changed the direction of European dramaturgy and theater. Dramatists of great literary skill and temperament joined the theater, among them Ibsen, Hauptmann, Schnitzler, Maeterlinck, Verhaeren, and Chekhov. New styles of playing and production were required for the new plays. The theaters of other nations, with their diversity of styles

and ability to experiment, could make the transition gradually. Left exclusively to the efforts and means of one group of actors and limited to one style, the Ukrainian theater underwent a painful crisis in making the change.

The peasantry had begun to produce its own intelligentsia, which in turn began to demand new ideas in the theater. The revolutionary movement of 1905 resulted in a slight lessening of censorship not only in the theater but also in the press. Ukrainian literature gained a further measure of freedom in western Ukrainian lands which then belonged to Austria-Hungary. In these areas Ukrainian newspapers, journals and publishing houses provided a haven for Ukrainian writers whose work by this means reached readers in central Ukraine.

The appearance of dramas by Lesya Ukraïnka and Volodymyr Vynnychenko as early as the 1890's and later of works by O. Oles' finally decided the fate of the *pobutovyi* theater. True, it struggled along for another quarter of a century, but the struggle was futile. In previous decades the theater had always been a step ahead of the audience; now the audience had left the theater far behind. Antonovych writes:

> It is interesting to note that just as in the first half of the nineteenth century the fate of the Ukrainian *svits'kyi* theater was decided by Kotlyarevs'kyi, Kvitka and Shevchenko, and just as the fate of the *pobutovyi* theater was also decided by three dramatists, Staryts'kyi, Kropyvnyts'kyi and Tobilevych, so at the beginning of the twentieth century the creators of the new modern Ukrainian repertoire who conditioned the founding of the modern Ukrainian theater were also three famous Ukrainian writers—Lesya Ukraïnka, V. Vynnychenko and O. Oles'.[4]

The simultaneous appearance of the three dramatists, strangers to the theater, each with his own peculiar artistic characteristics, bringing a content and style novel and strange to the theater, caused a sharp crisis. The actors who had founded the profoundly realistic *pobutovyi* theater could not in the twilight of their years adapt themselves to the new and alien style. The actors had been obliged all their lives

to play only peasant scenes with a very meager palette of colors in their characterizations, emotions and psychological conflicts. Action, movement of the body and flexibility of the voice were developed and trained only to portray the peasant class. The historical characters of the *pobutovyi* theater even though enveloped in romanticism, nevertheless in essence never strayed far from the realistic roots of the common people.

The spirit and musical poetry of Lesya Ukraïnka's plays *Forest Song* and *Blue Rose* were unattainable for the actor of the *pobutovyi* theater. Even greater acting technique and mastery were demanded of the actor by Ukraïnka's numerous other dramas, which were written with an expert knowledge of ancient epochs of Egypt, Greece, Rome, Arabia, and medieval Spain and Muscovy. She portrayed contemporary political and psychological experiences against the backgrounds of these historical periods. The Greek or Roman toga or a Spanish cloak and dagger were alien and awkward to the actor of the *pobutovyi* theater.

The works of V. Vynnychenko, even though their social themes were based on the contemporary epoch, introduced the modern representation of mood on the stage. This too was foreign to the actor of the older theater. Vynnychenko brought to the theater a vigorous political and artistic temperament. And finally, O. Oles' came on the scene with his plays, "études," which required of an actor a delicately subdued, half-tone technique and the interpretation of symbols.

Confronted with the requirements of the new drama, the *pobutovyi* theater was helpless. The directors of the theater realized this, but, in order to save their prestige, saw no other solution to this critical situation than an attempt to ignore new trends in the drama. Such a reactionary attitude toward the needs and demands of the time and of the audience was fatal.

After the revolutionary movements of 1905 and under the

influence of continuous demands by the Ukrainian press (the newspaper *Rada* and the journal *Ukraïnska khata*), some members of the younger generation of the *pobutovyi* theater, especially from M. Sadovs'kyi's theater, pleaded that plays based on the new dramaturgy, Ukrainian and foreign, should be included in their repertoire. Sadovs'kyi, one of the most resourceful directors of the theater, tried to support the demands of the young people but, according to Antonovych, the results were disappointing in the extreme. After every failure the innovators were viewed with greater distrust and the conservatives sank further into artistic stereotype. However, these attempts were not discontinued after such failures. For several years individuals of the second generation of the *pobutovyi* theater, such as Maryanenko, Pan'kivs'kyi, Korol'chuk, and others stubbornly struggled for mastery of new dramatic techniques. As a result of these efforts the Sadovs'kyi theater produced the following plays among others: *The Good Hope* by Heijermans; *The Enchanted Circle* by Ridel'; *Lies, Natus'* and *Young Blood* by Vynnychenko; *Blue Rose* and *The Stone Master* by Lesya Ukraïnka; and, eventually, *Autumn* and *The Dance of Life* by Oles'.

Those plays which portrayed village life, as *Young Blood* does to some extent, were accepted by the audience with reservations; the rest caused disappointment and distaste. The symbolism of Oles' and Ukraïnka's *The Stone Master* led to the most pronounced failures. Gogol's *The Inspector General* was successful, possibly because this masterpiece was based on a realistic theme close to Ukrainian life and because Sadovs'kyi, who played the role of the mayor, had great talent. The partial successes and resounding failures convinced the actors and even the supporters of the *pobutovyi* theater that a new theater, a new type of actor and, most important, a new producer who would create, teach and reform the theater, were needed.

Leading Ukrainian circles of society sought a solution to the problem by organizing a regular dramatic school. A drama

section had already opened at the Musical Institute in Kiev, which had been founded by Mykola Lysenko. Maria Staryts'ka, the daughter of Mykhaylo Staryts'kyi, the dramatist and founder of the *pobutovyi* theater, became its director. She organized the studies on as high a level as possible in this modest school. During its ten-year existence this school produced a number of students who went on to the *pobutovyi* theater in Kiev, but it was not satisfied either with the form or with the content of that theater.

The fourth period of the Ukrainian theater began energetically to demand its right to existence. New dramas were ready for it, the new actors were training for it and the audience had long awaited it. There was at first, nevertheless, no such impetus as had stimulated the formation of previous theaters. Such a stimulus was soon supplied, however, by the Revolution of 1917.

Les' Kurbas

In the troupe of M. Sadovs'kyi in Kiev there appeared at the end of 1915 a young actor named Les' Kurbas, who was the son of one of the most talented actors of the Galician theater of the nineties, S. Ya. Kurbas. Les' Kurbas spent his early childhood backstage in the Galician touring theater. After the premature death of his father, the small child was brought up by his grandfather, a churchman. After completing a course in classical study, Kurbas was sent to the University of Vienna to study philosophy. The young student inherited from his father a zeal for the theater and a fanatic love for art; consequently, he devoted more time to studies at the Drama Academy, listening to lectures by the famous German tragedian Joseph Kainz, than to philosophic studies. Upon returning to Galicia he rejected a teaching career and joined the Galician theater.

This decision by a young member of the intelligentsia with a higher education was at the time considered more than strange by Galician society. The Galician theater, due to the

comparatively liberal Austrian censorship, was not so limited in its repertoire as was the Ukrainian *pobutovyi* theater, yet its poverty and constant nomadic life were not such as to attract young actors from circles of the intelligentsia. The actors and the theater were loved but not respected at that time in Galicia. Many theatrical artists, especially opera singers, sought their livelihood in foreign European theaters, while Galician society shortsightedly prided itself that its countrymen were enriching the culture of its neighbors.

Kurbas joined the theater in 1912, just at the time of its administrative reorganization. It was at this time that Joseph Stadnyk, long the director of the theater, retired, and his place was taken by Roman Sirets'kyi, while Stepan Charnets'kyi became producer. The efforts of these men during two years left a marked trace on the history of the Galician theater, to which the young actor Les' Kurbas contributed. His first appearance on the humble provincial stages evoked a strong reaction among the Galician audience. His acting presented something new, fresh and vigorous. In addition to extraordinary acting talent, Kurbas brought a broad general culture and analytical thinking into the theater.

World War I swept like a whirlwind over the lands of western Ukraine, dispersing the actors of the theater in which Kurbas worked; he was carried on the tide of war to Kiev, where he found the doors of the *pobutovyi* theater of Mykola Sadovs'kyi open to him. Sadovs'kyi, who viewed the new dramaturgy with unconcealed skepticism, nevertheless gladly welcomed Les' Kurbas into his troupe.

Although the Kiev audience received Kurbas' first appearances very sympathetically, the Sadovs'kyi theater disappointed the young actor. In the Galician theater, however poor it was in scenic technique and properties, he had found resourceful acting partners who were educated more in the manner of Western European dramaturgy than in the Ukrainian *pobutovyi* style. German drama, French comedy, the lightness of the Austrian operetta—none of these was strange

to the Galician actor. He had often appeared successfully even in opera. This variety of genres had developed his technique and range. It was exactly these characteristics which were lacking in the *pobutovyi* theater.

Soon after his arrival in Kiev, Kurbas joined a group of students in the dramatic section of M. Lysenko's Institute. These students were enthusiastic about the modern Ukrainian plays but were not yet able to find a new theater in which to play them. Kurbas offered them his leadership as actor and producer. His personal charm and ability to inspire his fellow actors with fervor and even fanaticism for an idea laid the foundation for a new Ukrainian theater from these first efforts. The young enthusiasts found in a suburb an old dilapidated building formerly occupied by a harness maker and there, away from the public eye, began work on Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex.* At that time neither Kurbas nor the talented young group had any clear, concretely drawn creative project or plan. They only possessed the zeal and desire to find at all costs the path to a new form of expression in the theater. The Revolution of 1917 overtook this work.

The Revolution at first brought to the Ukrainian theater freedom from censorship. The production of plays which could not have been dreamed of previously was at last permitted. The Revolution awakened the sleeping masses, who forthwith demanded from the officials the quickest and fullest solution of a whole series of political and spiritual problems. The theater was subjected to this general upheaval. In order to take immediate advantage of the influence of art on the national masses, the Ukrainian revolutionary government created a board to develop artistic groups for serving the population. So arose the "Teatral'na Rada" (Theatrical Council) which was headed by Volodymyr Vynnychenko, the first head of the government. The Council was comprised of representatives of science, literature and art; it was their duty to establish a number of theatrical institutions.

Through the efforts of this group the State Drama Theater was founded in Kiev, the capital of the young Ukrainian state; a chorus was placed under the directorship of A. Koshyts'; a symphony orchestra was organized; and the establishment of an opera theater was entrusted to M. Sadovs'kyi. The Lysenko Institute was given the motto: "Intensive training of new cadres for all branches of the theatrical arts."

In the two-year existence of the young independent nation, especially during such a stormy revolutionary period, it would be unreasonable to expect an ideal development and fulfillment of all these undertakings. There was much that hindered growth and much that indicated juvenility and immaturity. However, historic periods in which an entire nation actively participates eventually find a solution for perplexing and even supposedly insoluble difficulties and impediments.

The Young Theater

The group of young actors led by Les' Kurbas, which in 1916 had started work with great enthusiasm on *Oedipus Rex*, was unexpectedly overtaken by the revolutionary events of 1917. Here at last was their opportunity to build a new theater. The older generation, however, which had control of the theater, took a skeptical view of the younger group whose members had no theatrical fame behind them. The generally acknowledged popularity of young Kurbas was of no avail in face of the backstage professional jealousy of his older colleagues who were members of the Theatrical Council. The young group understood that it could expect no help even from revolutionary society, and Kurbas with his collaborators decided to attract attention to themselves by deeds. Parallel with rehearsals of *Oedipus*, they quickly prepared V. Vynnychenko's play *Bazar*, the premiere of which forced even the skeptics to regard this youth with awe and respect. Heartened by the success of their first venture, the

young actors attempted to organize a regular theater. Thus, in the autumn of 1917, the "Young Theater" [*Molody Teatr*] was formed under the directorship of Les' Kurbas.

Since it did not have its own theatrical home, the Young Theater was able to perform before the Kiev audience only three or four times a month, when the Russian troupe of the Bergen Theater on Fundukliiv Street was closed. In its first theatrical season (1917-1918) the Young Theater prepared five plays: *The Black Panther and the White Bear* by Vynnychenko; *Yolya* by Zhulavs'kyi; *Youth* by Halbe; *Doctor Kerzhentsev* by Andreyev; and *An Evening of Études* by Oles', which included *Autumn, In the Light of a Camp Fire* and *The Dance of Life.*

The first performances, although as yet without a clear-cut style, showed great promise. These plays by Vynnychenko, which had seemed so weak and colorless in the prerevolutionary theater of Sadovs'kyi, and after the Revolution in the State Drama Theater under the direction of I. Maryanenko, sounded completely new and convincing as interpreted by the new actors. The actors' inexperience was compensated for by the absence at last of the *pobutovyi* stamp. The literature which dominated the first season of the new theater was an overdue tribute to the prerevolutionary exponents of progressive art.

The group also suffered painful failures, for example, Andreyev's *Doctor Kerzhentsev.* But these were unavoidable missteps such as always accompany a youthful movement.

Although Vynnychenko's plays rang true on the stage of the Young Theater, their author, with his social and family themes, cannot be considered an organic part of the Young Theater. Kurbas and his young actors drifted instinctively toward theatricalism, and this is perhaps why in their presentation Oles' symbolic plays were the most effective. The audience of students and revolutionaries overflowed the theater and from the outset realized that in this young group it would find answers to its questions and demands.

> This spectator in the revolutionary whirl sensed intuitively that before him a revolution in the theater was taking shape, and perhaps already occurring.... He merged with the participants of the Young Theater into one body, into one indivisible audience. The same situation was reflected in the theater as had existed at the creation of the national *pobutovyi* theater.[5]

Once again the audience became an active participant in the theatrical experience.

The Revolution of 1917 not only brought such positive results to the theater as the reestablishment of contacts with the progressive spectator, elimination of censorship and the possibility of producing plays in translation from other literatures, but it also offered the opportunity of putting the theater on a sound financial basis. The Ukrainian theater for the first time in its three hundred year history understood the full meaning of Shevchenko's words: "One's own truth is found in one's own home."

Since the newly-founded Ukrainian government was unable to guarantee the budget of the theater in that time of civil war, the financial burden was assumed by two Ukrainian cooperatives, *Dniprosoyuz* and *Tsentrosoyuz*. These organizations financed the purchase of a huge building on Prorizna Street which was remodeled to conform to theatrical needs. At the end of the first season the entire ensemble, headed by Kurbas, was sent on vacation to the Black Sea coast where the actors rested and prepared their repertoire for the next season. Since the cooperatives were supported by the population, the people themselves became the patrons of their own art theater.

Contact with the people was the main reason for the formation and existence of the Young Theater. This was unmistakably proclaimed in the "Artistic Manifesto" of the Young Theater published in the Kiev *Workers' Gazette* on September 23, 1917: "The Young Theater depends on the progressive circles of the Ukrainian intelligentsia...," it stated, and

further, "Our existence is closely connected with the development of Ukrainian thought and spiritual orientation..."

> In our literature, which until the present time most clearly reflected the social temper, we see a great, rightful and profound change after a long epoch of Ukrainophilism, romantic Cossackism and ethnographism, patterned after the "modernism" of a purely Russian style. This change is a direct return to Europe and to ourselves, without intermediaries, without authoritative example. This is the only way in art. . . .

These ideological tenets upon which Kurbas began developing the Young Theater demanded a new form completely different from the ethnographic style and even from those forms used by the State Theaters which had been newly created by the Theatrical Council. In founding the Young Theater, Kurbas declared war against the *pobutovyi* theater and against realism, which in his opinion paralyzed the flow of creative thought and, even more important, obliterated the distinguishing mark of the theater itself—theatricality.

In 1917 Kurbas published a series of "Theatrical Letters," in which he discussed what should be done to illuminate the path of the new theater. In one of these letters[6] he wrote:

> Realism, even when not practiced fully... is the most anti-artistic expression of our time.... [It] has gained control of the theater and is paralyzing its every creative attempt.

The cause of the general distaste for realism in the Ukraine, he believed, was the inertia and conservatism of the *pobutovyi* theater. Kurbas continued:

> This is a land of so-called symbolism, a land of mysticism, at times permeated with religion and at times searching for a sphere outside the scope of religion—a land with a theater which until the present has not uttered one fully convincing word, but which through the expression of literary elements ... promises us a future of heretofore unheard-of revelation.

Influenced by Henri Bergson, Kurbas stressed the importance of creativity and intuition. With his artistic and idealistic

concepts, he secured the support of the Ukrainian revolutionary generation which was at that time largely under the influence of socialist, ostensibly materialist, doctrines. The resolution of this apparent contradiction must be sought in the creative potential and revolutionary spirit of the theater and its director, as well as in the Revolution itself, which brought to life all the contradictory hopes and dreams of the entire nation.

The initial variety of styles in the repertoire of the Young Theater was a necessary compromise during its exploratory period.

Yakiv Mozheyko in his short study entitled "The Young Theater" (1918) attempted, on the basis of reviewing the artistic resolutions and the whole activity of this theater, to foresee the artistic aims of Kurbas:

> What aim should art have in general in the life of humanity? There can be but one answer to this question: No aim at all save one—beauty. Art is beauty. To create art is to create beauty and to serve her faithfully. Beauty is substance, the primary characteristic of the universe .... This is the road followed by the Young Theater. We can be sure that the future is in its hands.

Kurbas, in searching for his own peculiar style, which would be equivalent to but not copied from theaters of other European peoples, charted a difficult but lofty path. In his "Theatrical Letter" he pictured the future theater as follows:

> The actor of this theater will not attend clubs or public meetings searching for examples for outer imitation. He will seek himself... on the mountain heights, he will whirl along with the sound of waves from bottomless chasms, listening to their whispering and immensity; he will be spellbound at the clash of thunderheads and bolts of lightning.... He will go to the endless sea and will be captivated by its kaleidoscopic nature, by the gentle sibilance of the blue-green, crystalline waves or by the dramatic surge of power and the roar of the wild surf.
>
> There he will nurse his perception, imagination and creative power. These will be his examples. And in the

> silence of his own laboratory he will seek original and perfected forms with which to express the incomprehensible poetry of his own soul....

Such demands on the actor could not fail to elicit skepticism and even active resistance from the conservative group of actors in the *pobutovyi* theater. Some professionals in the troupes of the state theaters were even frightened by the vigorous gusts blowing from the Young Theater. The influence of Kurbas' "Manifesto" and "Theatrical Letters" was great throughout the Ukraine.

The Civil War following the Revolution severed all ties with artistic trends in Russia and Western Europe. The meager information which nevertheless filtered into the Ukraine indicated marked differences in artistic circumstances and situations. In Moscow alone, there was an imposing gallery of great theatrical masters—Komisarzhevski, Yevreinov, the vigorous Meierhold, the fanatic Vakhtangov, the elegant Tairov, and the colossus Stanislavski. Their stubborn irreconcilability made them mutually complementary, and made possible the creation of a great theater. In Kurbas' case he was forced, alone, with but a small group of understanding helpers, to sail an uncharted sea.

In developing the Young Theater, three problems had to be solved: the theater required a new type of actor, a repertoire, and a style, or, as it was then called, a "face." The training period in the summer of 1918 was put to good use. Kurbas took his young players to the shores of the Black Sea in order to "listen to the sibilance of the waves" and respond to "the clashing of thunderheads and bolts of lightning."

In the autumn of 1918, the Young Theater opened its second season with eleven new plays in its repertoire. For such a young group this was indeed a great achievement. Their repertoire included *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles; *The Sunken Bell* by Hauptmann; *In the Desert* by Lesya Ukraïnka; *Enemy of the People* by Ibsen; *Tartuffe* by Molière; *An Evening of Études* by Oles'; *Sin* by Vynnychenko; a Ukrainian *vertep*

(a Christmas play); *Woe to the Liar* by Grillparzer; *Candida* by Bernard Shaw; and a specially staged adaptation of poems and lyrics by Shevchenko. This varied repertoire of the young troupe was not accidental. Kurbas knew that a mere mechanical change to a new Ukrainian and Western European repertoire would not solve the problems of the new theater, and he realized that he must have actors who were at once a part of the new movement in European theater and yet distinctively Ukrainian.

Kurbas decided to lead his actors to the source of the Ukrainian theater, to the ancient *vertep* (Christmas mystery play[7]) to seek there the traces of their own traditions. He condemned the imprints left by the *pobutovyi* theater, but at the same time he taught the actors of the Young Theater to bow down reverently before the great artists of that theater—Zan'kovets'ka, Kropyvnyts'kyi, Sadovs'kyi, and Saksahans'kyi—and to carry over the fruits of their genius into their own theatrical work. A great injustice is perpetrated by those apologists of the *pobutovyi* theater who call Les' Kurbas "the destroyer of the *pobutovyi* theater." Very few of his contemporaries respected so lovingly and carefully the achievements of the creative participants of that theater. However, Kurbas, more than anyone else, saw the weakness of the artists who were unable to preserve the achievements of their great predecessors and who were therefore powerless to create a theater for the new era. After studying the previous resources of the Ukrainian theater and after classifying their stylistic characteristics, he urged the actors to study his results and to make them part of their own technique. In his approach to theatrical education he did not limit himself to the achievements of the Ukrainian theater alone. He led his young actors through the world classics, through the Renaissance, back to ancient Greek tragedy, to seek there the primary healing waters for the rejuvenation of his theater. He believed that only through these waters could the Ukrainian actor be cleansed of the colors and form

of "Little Russian" provincialism.

The young Theater opened its second season in its own theater with *Oedipus Rex*. Two years of hard work had been spent on this tragedy, an indication of the importance Kurbas attached to it. The presentation not only fulfilled the claims which had been expounded in the "Theatrical Letters" and the "Manifesto" but exceeded all the expectations of the sympathizers of the Young Theater. Through his interpretation of the role of Oedipus, Kurbas joined the first rank of great actor-tragedians in the Ukraine. Solovtsov had often played this role in the Kiev theaters; the Kiev audience had also had the opportunity of enjoying the artistry of Mounet-Sully[8], and a few years before the Revolution the German tragedian Moissi[9] had left an unforgettable impression with his version of *Oedipus*. Not only the Ukrainian critics but all of the critics compared Kurbas' interpretation favorably with that of the other great actors. However, his acting took second place to his directorial mastery.

Oedipus Rex, as produced by Kurbas, became the cornerstone of the Young Theater. His knowledge and will subjugated the actors to the artistic vision of the director and at the same time he succeeded, where necessary, in covering up the actors' inexperience by his mature professional mastery. In *Oedipus*, the Kievan audience felt a "rhythm," a coherent form of the drama as well as the foundation of the characterization, movement, intonation, and psychological action of the leading characters. The chorus of the ancient tragedy, as is well known, has been the Achilles heel of almost all the modern producers who have staged this drama. Some producers have eliminated it completely; others, if they have used it, have limited it to the minimum, ascribing to it only an auxiliary role.

Kurbas, however, made the chorus the center of attention in his interpretation of Sophocles' tragedy. It was the moving force in the development and culmination of the dramatic

conflict. The music of the women's and men's voices emphasized the moods and emotions of the actors. Each word and its intonation, the *mise en scene* and the gestures of each actor were organically connected with the music of the chorus. The sound, action and gestures complemented each other and created a unity of expression. Twenty members of the chorus spoke their lines together, yet retained their individual characteristics in vocal coloring and the movements of the body. This comparatively small group gave a completely new performance in Kurbas' interpretation and one which was different from the previous practice of reading the strophes and antistrophes. Oedipus, Jocasta, Creon, and the other characters preserved the aims of the author and carried further Kurbas' interesting directorial idea.

The second play produced in the theater's second season was the comedy *Woe to the Liar* by Grillparzer. The theme of this witty comedy by the early nineteenth century Viennese romantic author concerns the spiritual and national contradictions of two neighboring countries of Western Europe in early feudal days. It afforded the director material for an eccentric buffoon form of presentation. The poetic style, the medieval religious casuistry, and the concept of falsehood in the name of truth served as a means for the actors of of the Young Theater to attain brilliant theatrics, flexibility, lightness of action, and exaggerated characterizations. Here for the first time the young artist Anatoly Petryts'kyi displayed his brilliant talent. His scenic designs greatly contributed to the success of the production through their vibrant colors and expressive lines.

Kurbas included in the repertoire of his second season the *Rizdvyanyi Vertep* (Christmas mystery play) based on *Vertepne Dyistvo* [Happening in a Manger] by Galagan. In the *Vertep* the young actors attempted to return to the primary source of the Ukrainian theater, neglected by the two previous periods of theatrical development. The immobility of the actor as a manger statue in this production was but an

exercise in clarity of form. In addition, Kurbas sought in this production the achievement of the classic style of speech and gesture which had been rejected by Shchepkin and with which Kropyvnyts'kyi was not even familiar.

In staging Shevchenko's mystery play *The Great Vault*, his poem *Heretic* and a group of his lyric poems, Kurbas revealed a latent dramaturgic talent. The mighty, prophetic words and ideas of the poet inspired the director to create dramatic forms which became the foundation for the style of the new Ukrainian theater. The Ukrainian language, the language of Shevchenko, expressed on this stage not the folklore of peasant customs but the spirit of the nation in an all-encompassing fullness.

Very few of the contemporaries of the Young Theater realized the value of the *Vertep* and the dramatization of Shevchenko's poems and verses. These two presentations were shortsightedly evaluated by the critics of the time as a tribute to the demands of the day.

These few productions of Les' Kurbas far surpassed the limits of ordinary theaters. Each of the productions was a new stepping stone and the new postrevolutionary Ukrainian theater followed the path the Kurbas theater had marked out. The Young Theater accomplished feats which in other times would have taken decades or even longer.

The greatest achievement of the Young Theater and of Les' Kurbas was the establishment of a concrete outline of the new theatrical format which was to replace the *pobutovyi* theater. The return to the *vertep* and to the artistic treasure chest of Shevchenko's works was the right path. It brought about splendid results in the staging shortly afterward of Shevchenko's poem "Haydamaky."

Shevchenko's "Haydamaky"

The occupation of Kiev by Bolshevik detachments forced the Ukrainian government to evacuate the capital and move to the west. The Theatrical Council terminated its existence

while the theatrical institutions founded by it fell under Bolshevik rule. The Young Theater was forced to cease its activity and was ordered to join the State Dramatic Theater in a single collective. The forced collaboration of the two directors Kurbas and Zaharov and of the two ensembles, each with different aims, could hardly produce outstanding artistic results. Soon this episode in the life of the theater was succeeded by another, with the entrance of Denikin's White forces into Kiev. The White Army brought with it the most reactionary orders and prohibitions since Valuyev's times, forbidding any appearance of Ukrainian spiritual life; the actors were forced to flee for their lives from Kiev. One group of actors, directors and artists of the Young Theater and of the State Dramatic Theater moved to Kamenets-Podolsk, seeking contact with the Ukrainian government, while another group scattered throughout the neighboring provinces. A small number, including Kurbas and Zaharov, remained in Kiev with their families. In the spring of 1920 external pressure forced those who had remained in Kiev to gather into one ensemble and to form the Theater of Taras Shevchenko.

Bolshevik propaganda exploited on the one hand the dissolution of the Ukrainian Liberation Movement by the Russian and Polish invasions and by Allied "intervention" and, on the other hand, the political shortsightedness of the White Guard Administration, which declared that all nationalities of the Russian Empire other than the Russians were still under the Tsar. This catastrophic political naïveté and lack of foresight drove the peasants, as well as a substantial segment of the intelligentsia, including the artistic circles, into the net of Bolshevik slogans. A great majority of the peasants, upon receiving the landowners' land, believed in the sincerity and truth of Bolshevik demagoguery. The intelligentsia was faced with the complicated problem of the future life and development of the nation. It is not surprising, therefore, that the leading segment of the nation which,

in any case, had no choice in selecting its course, was lured by the motto, "Freedom for Ukrainian Language and Culture," especially since it never lost the hope that the political situation would change.

The very conditions which had originally forced the two groups to unite now effected a more harmonious coexistence than had previously been the case. The older actors of the State Dramatic Theater reconciled themselves to the restless temperament of the young actors and attempted to meet them harmoniously in the realm of artistry.

Kurbas decided to stage Shevchenko's poem "Haydamaky" for the traditional yearly celebration of Shevchenko's anniversary. The reason for selecting this particular poem can be found in the political situation in which the Ukraine found itself. Not being able to find a suitable dramatic work in either classical or contemporary literature, Kurbas once again turned to Shevchenko. Almost all drama containing a historical theme which might serve as material for a monumental presentation so important at the time was centered around some historic figure. The theater, which desired to echo contemporary events and those socio-political processes in which it grew and flourished, had to mirror the times. But the times, it seems, had outgrown separate individualities and had replaced them by collective groups, great masses—the entire nation. Kurbas found an analogy to this situation in the *Haydamachchyna* and its interpretation by Shevchenko. (The *Haydamaky* were outlaws living along the Dnepr River who participated in the Ukrainian revolt against Polish rule in 1734. The local townspeople regarded them as warriors against the Polish enslavement of the Ukraine.)

The Great Vault, Heretic and *Lyric Verses* had been presented by the Young Theater as short plays, each with a vividly designed form which adhered to all the demands of classic dramatic structure. The poem *Haydamaky* was made into a full three-act play by the director. A Greek chorus and music were used as organic components of the

play. The poet's description of the battles, the persecution of people, the "bloody banquets," and the lyric love scenes between Oksana and Yarem were rendered by pantomime. Their elasticity and rhythmic background, whether an unusual tenseness was needed or lyric and mellifluous music, created a unified, harmonious and breathtaking spectacle.

Through the use of a great number of artistic devices, logically connected and motivated, Kurbas achieved a new form of dramatic presentation. Music was used not as an entertaining interlude or an accompaniment to a song or dance (as it would have been in a *pobutovyi* melodrama) but as a means of dramatic revelation which supplemented the words and often replaced them. Here the directorial responsibilities overlapped those of the playwright to such an extent that it was difficult to separate these two components of the theater. Only the dramatic stagecraft of Les' Kurbas could have chosen and arranged so masterfully the mighty words of Shevchenko and created from this poem a playable tragedy. It is not surprising, then, that Yakiv Savchenko in reviewing the play in *Bol'shevik* (May, 1920) entitled his article "Haydamaky by Shevchenko-Kurbas."

When Kurbas approached the staging of the play he made the following statement of his aims to the cast:

> The production must be monumental, that is, internally dynamic but externally static. Monumentality is primarily simplicity, clarity and an overall meaning of form and content. This is an art of great passions and large scale sufferings which correspond to the many national and social trends of all humanity. It becomes evident from this why the accent is not on a *pobutovyi* presentation, not on the details of the portraiture, but on its idea of national and social content. Everything is clear, sharp and simple. The pantomime is performed strictly to music. In the love scenes there is lyricism rather than sentimental "thrills" which hint directly of romantic experiences. Great movement, statuesqueness–monumentality.[10]

The scenic decorations for the production were limited and neutral. There was no realistic suggestion as to the

place of action. The set consisted of grey drapes and a blue horizon which, with the help of lighting, indicated the time of day or the mood of the action. An important role was played by the so-called "living wall," composed of a group of women all dressed in grey cloth cut in the manner of a Ukrainian costume. They were referred to in the program as the "ten words of the poet." These "ten words," almost as though they were the poet's muses, represented that antique chorus which transmitted the thoughts and words of the poet to the audience. They linked and commented on the acts and happenings and, at the same time, carried out decorative and utilitarian functions during the performance. This device was probably the best possible method of bringing the poet himself into the play as an active dramatic figure who, although he was not present on the stage, spoke and actively participated in the action through every word and movement of the "muses."

Among the director's innovations must be included the cinematic concept of the instantaneous change of scene and the representation of simultaneous actions. This device afforded the director the opportunity of including in one act many scenes covering various times and locations.

The dramatization of *Haydamaky* occupies a unique place in the history of the Ukrainian theater. With this production Kurbas gave a sound foundation to the new National Theater. P. Rulin, the historian of the Ukrainian theater, in analyzing the iconoclastic importance of this performance, writes in one of his articles:

> On Shevchenko's anniversary L. Kurbas presented his dramatization of *Haydamaky*, which this time was more important than the usual anniversary presentation. At just that time the war with Poland had burst out in all its fury, and the apt dramatization of Shevchenko's poem, in which were embodied distinct and profound concepts of the applied theater, supplied good agitational material which organized the people for the struggle with the enemy, even though the accent was on national rather than on social factors. Formally the play utilized the best achievements of the new theater's experience,

> such as the rhythmic organization of mass, its sounds and movements, [and] an unusually fine musical score which took a notable step forward on the way toward synthetic performance.... All this contributed to the great success of the presentation, not only for those disturbing days; it also made *Haydamaky* a classical play of the early revolutionary Ukrainian theater, spreading it all over the Ukraine and even in the most provincial corners, wherever there was a Ukrainian theater.[11]

And later in the article, he states:

> *Haydamaky*, regardless of the importance of lyricism in this presentation, was undoubtedly an expression of the particular revolutionary activity of the Ukrainian theater; for the first time a clear call for liberation was heard from the young Ukrainian stage....
>
> During the three years of civil war the Ukrainian theater made great progress. It quickly caught up with other European theaters. By-passing its own *pobutovyi* repertoire, this theater mastered the European playwrights, learning to present them in the spirit of honest psychological realism. However, the foremost leaders of the theater understood that the theater has other and broader tasks before it than merely conscientiously staging the plays of European playwrights. These foremost artists of the Ukrainian theater also realized that traditional realism is a completed phase in the history of theatrical artistry, that the times demand finer, deeper and stronger means of influencing the audience.[12]

Haydamaky entered the very soul of the Ukrainian theater and was performed everywhere, but not all the directors were equal to Kurbas in professional culture and intelligence. Therefore, the strict form of Kurbas' staging was often twisted and the performance acquired an eclectic character, as happened in the Theater of I. Franko when the poem was produced by Hnat Yura. Only Kurbas' collaborators Melyaïv, Vasyl'ko and Yanuariy Bortnyk were able to retain the conception of the first performance. Nevertheless, for the next ten years one frequently saw advertisements throughout the Ukraine like the following: "Haydamaky—according to Kurbas," or "Haydamaky—according to *mise en scène* by

Kurbas." All attempts by the innumerable other producers to stage this poem in their own way failed to surpass the Kurbas version.

After the dismissal of Kurbas from the Ukrainian theater in 1933, Postyshev ordered that every play produced by him, including *Haydamaky*, should be deleted from the repertoire on the grounds that it was a "national counterrevolutionary heritage" left by Kurbas.

Les' Kurbas, considering the theater one of the fundamental elements in the nation's culture, could not limit his directorial activity to the success of a single season's repertoire. At a time when regimes, governments and authorities were changing with lightning rapidity, Kurbas, who had been able as a result of the revolutionary conditions to bring the Ukrainian theater out of its provincial limitations, could not and did not wish to limit himself to the success of one or two plays only. Soon after the premiere of *Haydamaky*, a group of enthusiasts again gathered around him and, using the name of "Kievs'ky dramatychnyi teatr" (Kiev Drama Theater), moved to Uman and eventually to Bila Tserkva in order to continue their work.

There were several reasons for the formation of this new group and its departure from Kiev. First was the economic ruin which had been brought about by War Communism, and the resulting famine which forced the urban intelligentsia to seek preservation in small cities, towns and villages. The second reason for the departure from Kiev was the desire of the Young Theater to strive constantly for professional perfection, an aim which was impossible to achieve in the cold and hungry city. The third reason was that in Kiev the Bolshevik administration immediately attacked the theater in an attempt to subjugate it for its propaganda purposes. The provinces still offered the possibility of doing one's work without the protection of an unwanted government. P. Rulin writes:

> So, thanks to the harsh economic difficulties, to the circumstances in which one had to live in the big centers, the Ukrainian provinces became the locale for the continued efforts of the leading Ukrainian theatrical groups, which acquainted the provincial audience with European plays and with the new works of Ukrainian playwrights, the most popular at the time being Vynnychenko. Although this "culturization" was a step backward in formal development as compared to previous innovations, yet it was a necessary period which brought to the attention of the wide masses the importance of the Ukrainian theater.... After their strenuous efforts, this provincial intermission turned out to be a very beneficial period of repose for the actors who arrived in Bila Tserkva in the summer of 1920. Having experienced all sorts of economic deprivations, this heroically devoted group not only found time for preparatory work, from which it was to make a living, but also trained and taught the local devotees of the art.[13]

Mention must also be made of those complicated external conditions which perforce influenced the psychology and outlook of the participants in the theater. All efforts to preserve Ukrainianism were being trampled down and drowned in a sea of blood. "Equality, freedom and fraternity of nations!" This lure, which caught the majority of the people, became an empty pharisaical phrase in the newspapers. In actuality a new change occurred: oppression and subjugation by Moscow's occupation forces. That segment of fighters for freedom which did not leave its native land was driven into the forests, into the insurgent underground. Only a small detachment of the national army and an insignificant group of the intelligentsia were able to emigrate, and the people who again found themselves under enemy rule had to find a solution to their desperate position. The representatives of culture and art, who with their talents could continue the struggle, were obliged to take upon themselves the heavy responsibility of this mission. Literature and the theater again had to use their particular means of influence so that the enemy should not succeed in lulling to sleep the national consciousness which had been acquired during the national

revolution.

Kurbas went through a profound process of re-evaluating artistic and ideological values during his stay in the provinces, which were the battleground for insurgent struggles and armed resistance against Red invasion. These conditions forced a change in the previous goals of his theatrical art and brought it out from behind closed walls into the arena of national life.

Daily events helped him to his decision. Students of universities and institutes often participated in mass scenes of Kurbas' productions, helping the theater and at the same time acquainting themselves with new forms of art. Some of them later carried their knowledge to the remotest corners of the country, where they led small independent groups of actors. After a play, which was always widely attended by Red Army men, these student actors often disappeared, to be replaced the next day by other students from similar educational institutions. The friends of these students often told the director secretly that the "vanished actors" had not returned from a regular insurgent raid.

In the midst of such conditions Kurbas carried on the improvement of his acting mastery and intensified his studies of directorial problems. With every new performance the director's role became a more and more dominant factor in the new theater. Among the new plays in the repertoire of the Kievan group was Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, which appeared for the first time on the Ukrainian stage. In Uman, playing the role of Macbeth, Kurbas appeared for the last time in his life as an actor. At the pinnacle of his acting maturity and mastery he bade farewell to his beloved profession in order that he might devote himself completely to the directorial task, which demanded absolute concentration and clear separation of these two theatrical functions. By Kurbas' decision the Ukrainian theater lost an unusually original and talented actor, but at the same time it became enriched by acquiring a director-producer and director-pedagogue.

Every play staged by Kurbas was distinguished by some new characteristic which enriched theatrical and acting resources. In *Macbeth* he introduced the fundamentals of a school of acting which was destined in the next ten years to leave its mark on the entire Ukrainian theater and the training of its actors. The actors in Kurbas' performance of Shakespeare's tragedy were asked to eliminate all subconscious, accidental and naturalistic feeling which resulted from their mood and psychological condition. Kurbas at the time was cultivating a technique aimed at guaranteeing an equal and identical execution of a given role regardless of the psychological condition or mood of the player. This aim demanded an exact and profound precision of form, worked out during rehearsals, and the complete elimination of that kind of improvisation which was widely practiced by the actors of the naturalistic school.

During its stay in Bila Tserkva and Uman the Kiev Dramatic Theater devoted itself completely to intensive training for the perfect mastery of elasticity and rhythm. Their studies included the classic ballet, acrobatics, fencing, and the technique of vocal delivery. They studied Coquelin and Diderot for practical and theoretical study in the acting art.

The Berezil' Artistic Association

During the period of War Communism a substantial segment of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, in order to preserve itself from the Cheka and the famine of 1921, found sanctuary in schools and social institutions in district and country towns where the trained administrative apparatus of the Bolshevik regime had not yet become entrenched. The metropolitan centers of Kharkov, Kiev and Odessa were daily becoming more crowded with Bolshevik officials who brought with them the "northern fruits" of the October Revolution. The semi-official newspapers, such as *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*, and a great number of literary-artistic journals systematically propagated even in the farthest corners of the former tsarist em-

pire the theories of "proletarian and communist" art. With the help and blessing of the propaganda organs of the proletarian dictatorship, the slogans of the Communist Party began to seep into artistic circles. New establishments and organizations sprang up like mushrooms after the rain; in literature and the theater resounded new and fantastic theories of a "future proletarian art." Following Moscow's example, where the Maly Theater came to be considered reactionary and the Moscow Art Theater had to save itself by going abroad for a few years, this political trend gained impetus in the Ukraine, becoming complicated there by national factors.

The achievement of national liberation in 1917-1919 was now declared to be a "bourgeois nationalist counterrevolution." Communist and Komsomol members destroyed the fruits of earlier creative efforts and imposed the doctrines of "the art of the future—the art of the coming communist epoch." Futurism, imagism, surrealism, and similar trends of prewar and postwar European art provided the noisy Komsomol masses with the weapons for an attack on "bourgeois reactionary art." In Russia, however, and especially in Moscow and Petrograd, this process of sovietization and the attack on art and culture were not so painful as in the Ukraine and other territories of national minorities. In Russia, Lunacharski, a highly educated man who was not indifferent to Russian culture, through his authority and influence as head of the Commissariat of Education preserved the Russian theater and other branches of art from ruin by the Bolshevik Revolution. The Russian theater always found fervent protectors among leaders of the Communist Party, who were able to find a compromise between the theory and practice of the proletarian revolution.

The Ukraine, however, became the proving ground for all sorts of experiments with Communist theories in art, without any sentiment for tradition or cultural values. The Bolshevik regime directed its attack against Ukrainian culture. One of

the first objectives of the attack was the theater which, because it could influence the population, was destined to become one of the most important tools of Communist propaganda. With the intense moral and material backing of the Party and the Komsomol, theatrical studios and collectives began to spring up, taking over those theaters and art establishments not yet fully ruined by hunger and civil war, which still had in their ranks a fair number of talented actors. Kurbas, discerning the danger of this maneuver, decided to counteract it by actively returning to Kievan theatrical life. Resistance and counterattack in the Ukraine was carried on by the church, science, schools, the theater, the village, and the insurgent underground. It took various forms, depending upon the place, situation and possibilities.

In January 1922, Kurbas and the entire troupe of the Kiev Dramatic Theater returned from Uman to Kiev. At the time, among the literati of Kharkov and Kiev, attempts were being made to organize publishing activities. Yearbooks and journals of literature and art were published. The lecture halls of universities and special institutes overflowed with village youth. Esteemed academicians and scholars, disregarding hunger and cold, worked in the unheated rooms of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Professors of universities, institutes, conservatories, and lower schools returned from provincial towns. In the literary journal *Hart* appeared short stories and novels by Khvyl'ovyi, Dosvitnyi, Yalovyi, and many other new writers. On the streets of Kiev one could meet Zerov, Ryl's'kyi, Burhart, Dreykhmar, Filipovych, Zahula and the confused and tendentious Pavlo Tychyna, who daily visited the hospitable home of Lyudmyla Staryts'ka-Chernyakhivs'ka, where he warmed himself with saccharin-sweetened hot water and sought sponsors for the republishing of *The Sunny Clarinets*. Mikhayl' Semenko, exploiting the slogan of the International, "He who was nothing will be everything," brought out his *Kobzar No. 2* and every month published new manifestoes of the Pan-Futurists Association

(ASPANFUTU). The work by young artists in various fields and the desire of millions of young people for education convinced Kurbas that his decision to continue his work in the theater was necessary. If, before his return to Kiev, he had nursed hidden doubts and the desire to flee from Bolshevik reality, after his return these ideas were dispelled by his friends and by the return and repatriation of a part of the emigration from Poland and Czechoslovakia. The nation, finding itself under a new yoke, searched for ways to survive. The theater was obliged to take the positions prescribed for it in this struggle.

In March 1922, Kurbas and his followers drafted a statute for a new theatrical organization, which was named "Berezil' Artistic Association." It was evident from the statute that the aim of the association was to group together representatives of art who had some connection with the theater, such as directors, actors, playwrights, artists, musicians, critics, and theatrical experts. The doors were opened wide to all to join in a combined effort. The Berezil' Artistic Association took upon itself the obligation of solving a whole series of cultural and artistic problems. To enable the theater to perform its tasks, a veritable army of trained and qualified specialists of all categories would be needed. The Berezil' Artistic Association undertook the responsibility of training such an army.

Why "Berezil'" (the Ukrainian name for the month of March)? Whence this unusual name for an artistic organization? Later, when Kurbas and "Berezil'" became the targets of severe criticism by Marxist critics, Kurbas had this to say concerning the name:

> Why Berezil'? . . . When Berezil' was founded, we were all very young, very romantically disposed toward the Revolution, which for us had great poetic glamor; if we were to choose a name for the theater at the present time, we would not name the theater as we did, but would name it for Marx. Symbolically this name [Berezil'] sounds awkward to some people who are not used to it, but it is beautiful to us. At

> that time we were reading poetry written by the Norwegian poet Björnson. There was a competition among the bourgeois writers as to their favorite month and the reason for their choice. Björnson chose March, the month of disruption—hence the name.[14]

The name "Berezil' itself shows that Kurbas was trying under the new circumstances to continue at all costs the further evolution of the Young Theater. The times and the circumstances, however, demanded a fluid and compromising technique and strategy.

From its first steps Berezil' checked the Proletcult primitivism by adopting their slogan "Away with art for art's sake." Kurbas and his followers formally repudiated their former servitude to "beauty"; they deliberately forgot that once they had created "art not for partisan aims but as an aim in itself...." Now they declared in their statute that "the theater is a means of agitation and propaganda." This was their passport for continued life and for the possibility of further developing the modern Ukrainian theater.

To satisfy and justify these new standards, proper plays were required, but there were none, either in Russia or in the Ukraine. Kurbas once again used his skill as a dramatist and composed a pantomime in two parts entitled *October*, in which he presented a poetic version of the overthrow of the tsarist monarchy by the Revolution. Within three months, in February 1923, another composition called *Ruhr* was staged; in this Kurbas used the spoken word. The theme of this four-scene playlet was the events in Germany during the occupation of the Ruhr by France. These two productions complemented each other and symbolized the Ukrainian national struggles.

The debut of Berezil' in these two agitational propaganda works synthesized the experience gained through several years of the most varied experimental work. The flexible bodies of the Berezil' actors, their clear and explicit actions, their expressive gestures and diction, all interwoven by the director into an artistic composition, created a spectacle

which the audience observed with surprise and sympathy. In these presentations the clear style was evident which characterized the entire first period of creativeness of Berezil'. The directorial accent in these compositions was on "the masses." The cause for this preference for mass scenes even in the Young Theater must be sought in expressionism. Kurbas later explained his tendency in these words:

> The Young Theater, having developed under the combined influence of classicism and modernism, the neoromanticism and symbolism of Wedekind and Peter Altenberg, under the influence of this original, varied bouquet was a theater of eclecticism and stylization. But only to a certain degree. Only to a certain degree because the guide for its programmatic labors was that activism of world outlook and attitude toward life which at that time flowered in Germany in a great wave of expressionism. This thought germinated here and there under the influence of the might of countless armed forces scattered into all the corners of the world; it was a period during which the individual was affected not only by a single happening, not only by customs and manners with their petty details but by tremendous experimental waves and by endless eruptive dynamics.
>
> To the expressionist [Swiss painter] Hodler this meant that when walking through a forest one sees not the actual trees but only the rhythm of vertical parallels.... There is some expressionistic shading even in such a stylization as *Oedipus Rex,* while the improvisation of *Heretic* was the first expressionistic presentation in contemporary Russia.[15]

German expressionism came into the theater and motion pictures from literature and art. But in the theater the expressionistic drama and scenic designs were unable to merge organically with the actor. Between the dramatists Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller and the artist George Grosz on the one hand, and the actor Pallenberg or Wegener on the other no blending was reached. This merging could not be achieved even by the German director Piscator. The temperamental Meierhold also encountered frequent difficulties in expressionistic staging.

Kurbas had a rare directorial talent, the ability to subject all the components of the theater to a stylistic form and to make everything completely clear and perceptible. His feeling for artistic simplicity and truth was capable of expressing the most difficult stylistic form in theatrical terms.

A lack of suitable dramatic material and the absence of scenic equipment forced Kurbas to build a presentation on journalism, on newspaper chronicles, on the perfection of a style, on the flexibility and elasticity of the physical and psychological aptitudes of the acting personnel, and on his own directorial creative vision. Such acting could take place wherever necessary, without requiring theatrical props. On a bare stage, in a square, in a clearing or in the open steppe, the "Berezil'tsi" demonstrated their dramatic mastery before the army, the workers and the peasants.

The first two improvised propaganda pieces, in spite of their superficiality, rocked the very foundations of the Proletcult's noisy conceptions, which not a single left theatrical group had been able to dramatize.

With this first public appearance the Berezil' Artistic Association began to realize its wide organizational ambitions. By the end of 1922 the Association had opened four theatrical studios with over four hundred students and older actors. Three of these studios were in Kiev, the fourth in Bila Tserkva. Soon a fifth studio, experimenting in peasant theater, came into existence in Boryspol and a sixth, a branch of Berezil', in Odessa. The Berezil' Artistic Association created a separate directorial staff, an artistic-scenic design studio, the first theatrical museum in the Ukraine and a press headquarters with its own magazine *Barykady Teatru* (Theatrical Barricades). A special group of young dramatists, directors and artists worked on the repertoire and scenery for workers' and peasants' clubs. The first attempts at finding a style and repertoire for a theater aimed at a juvenile audience were made in one of these studios.

The First Studio consisted of actors who, together with

Kurbas, had passed through all the purgatories of creative endeavors in the Young Theater and the Theater of Shevchenko and the Kiev Drama Theater in Bila Tserkva and Uman. This group, after moving to Kiev, was joined by students from the Dramatic Institute of M. Lysenko, and with this troupe Les' Kurbas presented his dramatizations *October* and *Rubr.* Simultaneously, intensive work was begun on *Gas* by the German playwright Georg Kaiser.

The Second Studio, under the directorship of the young actor Faust Lopatyns'kyi (son of the famous opera star Filomena Lopatyns'ka), was composed of student youth from Kiev University and other schools of higher learning. Together with their professional studies, these students wanted to get a theatrical education for use later in the popular independent group theaters which have existed all over the Ukraine from the distant past.

The Third Studio, which was headed by the young director Yanuariy Bortnyk, was given the task of acquainting the farthest corners of the country with the accomplishments of the modern theater. Its permanent headquarters was in Bila Tserkva. However, perhaps the most illustrious attainment of the Association and of Kurbas himself was the Fourth Studio, which was comprised exclusively of actors of the older generation with famous theatrical names and with long years of service behind them.

After the first presentation of *October* and the publication of the aims and tasks of the Berezil' Artistic Association, actors made their way from every part of the Ukraine to Kiev seeking to work with Les' Kurbas. Former actors of the National Theater, the State Drama Theater and even the founders of the Theater of Ivan Franko deserted the director Hnat Yura and went to Kiev. Unequivocally accepting all of Kurbas' conditions, they became members of the Fourth Studio of the Berezil' Association. Kurbas' conditions were in reality quite demanding. All the actors had to forget their theatrical past, their theatrical "names" and their professional ambitions and were obliged to begin learning anew

the rules of theatrical artistry. The educational program was quite broad and varied, and for an older actor it was even physically difficult. Grey-haired "Berezil'tsi" had to prepare their stiffened muscles and their whole body for the classical ballet or acrobatic stunts and simultaneously to broaden the scope of their general and theatrical studies.

If Kurbas had proposed such conditions to these actors a few years earlier, it is absolutely certain that he would have been made the object of derisive wit. However, in 1922 he was the final victor on the theatrical front, and therefore the Fourth Studio numbered among its members such actors as Ivan Mar'yanenko, Serhii Karhal's'kyi, Stepan Vasyl'ko, Stepan Bodnarchuk, Pavlo Dolyna, Ambrozii Buchma, Yosyp Hirnyak, Les' Serdyuk, Danylo Antonovych, Olympia Dobrovol's'ka, Rita Neshchadymynko, Polina Samiylenko, Lyubov Hakebush, Sonya Manuylovych, and Polina Nyatko. These and many other actors were ready to devote themselves without reservations to the new theater, which was still only a glimmer in Les' Kurbas' imagination.

For a whole year the members of the Fourth Studio devoted themselves to physical conditioning and to theoretical and practical work in learning disciplines which were to assist them in preparing for completely new and more difficult theatrical tasks than they had ever undertaken previously.

It is generally recognized that all initiations of theatrical reforms or the appearance of new artistic trends in the theater have been executed by young, specially trained groups of collaborators. The older theatrical generation subjects itself with great difficulty to new and unfamiliar demands, or not at all. Such directorial innovators as Antoine, Reinhardt, Stanislavski, Meierhold, Tairov, and Vakhtangov were all forced to train a completely new generation of actors. Those rare instances when mature actors lent themselves to directorial experiments (Yur'yev in the theater of Meierhold, Pallenberg and Wegener in that of Piscator) were but episodes which left no great or lasting impression. The Fourth Studio

of the Berezil' Artistic Association is a unique example of a theatrical group where the actors' egocentrism was reformed.

The Fifth Studio was located in a village of Baryshpil'skyi. Its assignment was to assist the individual dramatic circles directly, preparing scenery and decorations for their plays and training instructor-directors. This studio was an experimental laboratory for the village theater.

In addition to the studios mentioned above, the Association organized a whole series of laboratories and committees for studying various general artistic and technical problems which were in any way connected with the theater. The most important of these was the "director's laboratory," which eventually became the "directorial staff." In this first and unique Ukrainian school the following later leaders of the Ukrainian theater, among others, received their training: Lopatyns'kyi, Vasyl'ko, Melyaïv, Ihnatovych, Tyahno, Baloban, Dolyna, Shmaïn, Ol'shans'kyi, Dubovyk, Sklyarenko, Pyasets'kyi, Kryha, Bortnyk, Verkhats'kyi, Zatvarnyts'kyi, Dykhtyarenko, Krushel'nyts'kyi, Voronin, and Zemganiv.

The Decorator's Studio was headed by Vadym Mellyer, whose work is of great importance in the history of the new Ukrainian theater. This studio undertook the training of enlightened and technically qualified artists to be assistants to the director in preparing the scenery. It produced such famous artists of the Ukrainian stage and motion pictures as Shklyaïv, Tovbin, Ashkinazi, Vlasyuk, Panadiyadi, and Symashkevych.

An original and very useful organization was the Psychotechnical Committee under the direction of the neuropathologist Dr. Valyentyn Hakebush. This committee utilized applied psychology for the purpose of establishing teaching methods and professional selection for theatrical and artistic work.

The work of these studios, laboratories and committees, not being subsidized in any way, was based on the energies

of Les' Kurbas and on the ideological enthusiasm of the members of the collective. In a war-scarred building without windows and doors, which had formerly been the home of the cabaret theater "Pall Mall," the "Berezil'tsi" developed their broadly planned work. Soon the fruits of their labors astonished all spectators. The most confirmed skeptics and enemies of Ukrainian culture were caught by surprise and were forced to accept with admiration and respect the artistic productions of the Berezil' group.

The postwar social upheavals, the general European spiritual crisis, and the pessimistic philosophy of Spengler had a far greater influence on the Ukrainian intelligentsia to which the Berezil' Association belonged than did the materialistic Marxist-Leninist concept which became the ruling creed by order of the government. The Berezil' Artistic Association, having paid its tribute to the times with *October* and *Ruhr*, continued the line adopted by the Young Theater. Kurbas considered Georg Kaiser's play *Gas* most appropriate at that time and it is not surprising therefore that he devoted to it all of his energy and talent; with the cooperation of the artist Mellyer and the composer Buts'kyi he achieved the highest artistic accomplishment of the era.

The drama was presented against a background of expressionist and drastically simplified scenery which only symbolically suggested the scene of action. Expressionist, dissonant music was organically connected with the movement and words of the actors and with their expressive "transformed gestures." This term "transformed gesture" was coined because of the demands made on the actors' physical endurance in the presentation of *Gas*. In spite of its controversiality, the production performed a particular service in the method of training the Berezil' actors. "Transformation" is an artistic and theatrical concept indicating a procedure by means of which the director and actor attempt to reveal reality as profoundly as possible. "Transformation" in the

Berezil' system was that artistic sign, that theatrical "symbol," which presents the essence of a certain phenomenon, a certain reality, and helps the audience to see its real meaning. This concept is not new in painting and literature. Caricature in politics and mannerism in art often provide excellent examples of "transformation." As an economical artistic measure "transformation" is used to reveal and decipher the most diverse psychological and social phenomena. In the presentation of *Gas* this "transformation" was greatly sharpened; it was expressed in the work of author, director, artist, composer, and the entire acting ensemble.

The play, which portrays a conflict between the workers and the owner of a gas refinery, was not written in accordance with "Marxist dialectics." It gave the director the opportunity of presenting a social tragedy by the arrangement of mass portraits, mass scenery and mass rhythms. A pacifist, "the son of a billionaire" (such is the laconic designation of the leading character in the play), is the owner of a factory. He is unable to discover the reason for a catastrophic explosion ("the formula was correct, yet the gas exploded"). In his humanitarianism he does not suggest the "bourgeois bloodsucker" made familiar by the Bolsheviks. His aim in life is not exploitation but the desire to combat and subjugate the forces of nature for human interests. And yet he unwillingly finds himself in a tragic conflict with his closest associates, the factory workers. The catastrophe produced by natural forces, involving the death of thousands of people, destroys the "billionaire's son" mentally and morally.

Kaiser's theme provided only the core for this spectacle of great tensions. Kurbas was obliged to struggle with the dramatic material, with its mysticism. Kurbas' interpretation of the play suggested a definite ideological orientation toward the new trends in world concepts. There was a noticeable break with daydreaming and with a passive attitude toward life and its problems. In the play there was felt an undertone of creative vigor, especially in the rhythm of mass

scenes, when the whole ensemble moved as an obedient elastic mass. The entire production was based on the principle of synthetic theater, in which music and spatial arrangements are used to express a single purpose. The formal perfection of the presentation testified to the artistic potential of the director and the theater he had founded. A year of intensive work by the experimental First Studio had produced unusually effective results.

Gas opened in April 1923 in the Kiev theater. The comments and discussions which were evoked by this presentation were surprising even to the members of the Berezil' theater. For a whole year, until the opening of a new production, the polemics centered around *Gas* did not subside. The artistic success of this presentation by Berezil' became the turning point in the whole theatrical life of the period. Characteristic of the general tenor of the discussions concerning this work of Kurbas is the following excerpt from an article in the journal *Chervonyi Shlyakh* [The Red Path]:

> *Gas* undoubtedly laid the foundation of the theater of the Revolution, which until the present existed only either in theory or in the unsuccessful attempts of other Ukrainian directors....
>
> *Gas* is the product of a year's work by the Berezil' Studio. Kurbas placed the basic emphasis of the presentation on the problem of showing social class dynamics in their dialectic process. Without the least exaggeration it can be stated that Kurbas solved this problem brilliantly. The form of the presentation impresses one with its scholarly development. Kurbas studied in their minutest details all the rules of utilizing his actors for mass presentation as well as the minimum and maximum technical possibilities of his actors, and on the basis of his findings set himself the goal of presenting an artistic and rhythmic synthesis based on the elements of the various categories of rhythm in the developing process, the elements of a mass meeting and the collective sorrow during the explosion.[16]

The Viennese journal *Nova Hromada* [The New Community], the organ of the West Ukrainian and émigré circles under the editorship of S. Vityk, wrote as follows:

> In this presentation of *Gas*, Kurbas achieved unprecedented results in solving the problem of staging collective and constructive scenes. It might be said that with this presentation a new era has begun in theatrical art. Although the play is filled with bourgeois tendencies and the cheap philosophy of "a person of higher ideals," Kurbas made of it a revolutionary play by highlighting the idea of class struggle and making this its central theme. It is a new approach in presenting social tragedy through the construction of mass scenes, mass rhythmics and mass scene movement.
>
> The movement of the masses is as harmonious as musical waves. Every change of the psychic rhythm is demonstrated by Kurbas with an appropriate change in the rhythms of stage movement....[17]

With the first performance of *Gas* Berezil' dealt a severe blow to all leftist and Proletcult speculative theories. With this performance Kurbas proved that art can only be art when it is not forced but is created in a free spirit. Since both official and non-official reviewers attempted to capitalize on his artistic achievements for their own propaganda purposes, Kurbas was forced to specify and explain the ideological bases of the Berezil' Artistic Association. In the Berezil' journal *Barykady Teatru*, he wrote,

> Berezil' is not creating a Communist culture at this time and is not founding a Communist theater, although it accepts into its ranks those who entertain such ideas and the metaphysics connected therewith.... In Berezil' the intuitivist and the intellectualist, the constructivist and the expressionist, the sympathizer with the Proletcult ideology and the eccentric can and do work together.[18]

Kurbas knew that leftist theories were incapable of creating or rejuvenating the theater, that they represented only an evanescent malady of the times. He conscientiously compromised tactically by coexisting with them so that later he could have the possibility of directly influencing their evolution and the overall development of the Ukrainian theater, keeping it pure from anything incidental, alien and fortuitous.

Beginning with 1922, Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa, and the other

large cities in the Ukraine were invaded during the summer season by touring actors of the Moscow and Petrograd theaters, a circumstance which permitted a comparative analysis of theatrical achievements on an all-Union basis, so to speak. The leftist theatrical front of Moscow was represented by Vsevolod Meierhold and the theater of Vakhtangov. Since the first days of the October Revolution these two outstanding directors of the Russian theater had been especially active in the development of Soviet art, not only within the walls of their own studios but also in the theater section of the People's Commissariat of Education. These two founders of the postrevolutionary Russian theater not only accepted the October Revolution and proletarian dictatorship as facts, but became their fanatic supporters. However, their theoretic and ideological standards differed sharply from their creative practice, which could not tear itself away from the prerevolutionary aesthetic soil from which it had grown. Neither *The Miracle of St. Anthony* nor *Flood*, neither the highly aesthetic *Princess Turandot* at the Vakhtangov Theater nor *Dybbuk* in the Habima Theater, all productions by such a master as Eugene Vakhtangov, nor *The Magnificent Cuckold* as produced by Meierhold corresponded to their ideological beliefs at the time.

The abandonment by Berezil' of the realistic era of the *pobutovyi* theater and the clear-cut development through the artistic achievements of the Young Theater to a "distinctly defined form of expressionistic drama" gave the theorists and critics the pretext to call Kurbas and Berezil' the "embryo of the new proletarian theater." Kurbas' objection to this label was the reason for his announcement in *Barykady Teatru* that "Berezil' at the moment is not creating a Communist culture, is not building a Communist theater," and that "all attempts to create such a theater and the metaphysics connected therewith are considered as mere amusement."

The presentation of Kaiser's *Gas* must be regarded as the

last play in which Kurbas paid his debt to expressionism, even though his disciples, the directors Lopatyns'kyi and Ihnatovych, continued to cooperate for some time with another German dramatist and expressionist, Ernst Toller, presenting in the Berezil' Studios his plays *Mass Man* and *The Machine Wreckers.* However, these were only faint echoes of the full tones of Kurbas' production of *Gas.*

The creative activity of the Young Theater, the widespread restaging of *Haydamaky* and, finally, the appearance of Berezil' with such plays as *October, Ruhr,* and *Gas,* as well as many other works of the studios of the Association, gave Kurbas and his Berezil' an almost undisputed position as the theatrical center of the Ukraine. Many theaters began to appear throughout the Ukraine at that time; they popularized more or less successfully and even at times professionally the achievements of the theatrical revolution, and they worked intensively to raise the cultural standards of the audience. Even the Russified conservative groups of the population were obliged to reconcile themselves to this unusual and to them inexplicable phenomenon. For the first time Russian and world classics were played successfully in Ukrainian. Credit for this achievement must go to the peripheral popularizing theaters for making wide circles of the urban population conscious of the new style. With the staging of *Gas* by the First Studio, Berezil' emerged the indisputable victor in the struggle with the new Russian theaters in Ukrainian cities; thereafter no one dared to question the priority of the Ukrainian theater. The Russian theaters in the main Ukrainian cities had always been only the provincial reflections of the theaters of Moscow and St. Petersburg and by the 1920's they were unable to compete with the artistic productions of Berezil'.

After a year of work the Berezil' Artistic Association faced the question of establishing a permanent theater. Kiev, with a population of half a million and with thousands of

daily visitors from all over the Ukraine, demanded continuing performances by the new theater which had become an inseparable part of the cultural growth of the nation. Such a function could have been undertaken only by the Fourth Studio, which was composed of actors of many years of experience.

Even before the opening of *Gas*, Kurbas had undertaken preliminary work in the Fourth Studio on a dramatization of *Jimmie Higgins*, a novel by Upton Sinclair which was popular at the time. As usual, Berezil' was again obliged to struggle with the material, the realism of which did not suit the contemporary style of the theater. Abandoning expressionism, Kurbas mastered Sinclair's ideological concept and gave his play a concrete optimistic tendency. The very fact that in that country across the sea, a country with an exemplary democratic system and incomparable material well-being, there were writers who treated themes of social injustice and class contradictions was intriguing to Kurbas. In order to adjust himself to the author's realism, the director used blank verse for the text of *Jimmie Higgins*. The central theme of the novel was that the recent war had been a class rather than a national struggle; by stressing this idea Kurbas raised the play to the status of a tragedy.

Kurbas was through with expressionism; he stressed class characteristics in this presentation. He introduced many new characters into the dramatized version and by so doing transformed whole chapters of the novel in which the author describes political situations and social conflicts. The monologues, dialogues, detached phrases, and even short utterances of groups of workers at their strikes and meetings and of soldiers on the European fronts, gave a new form to the drama which it was impossible to ascribe to any of the theatrical "isms." Special stage designs were required to supplement the adapted text and the acting. The whole presentation was designed as a "constructivist" production in a unified style. The former Berezil' abstract and expression-

ist style acquired more concrete contours in this formulation. The center of attention which in previous presentations had been on mass scenes was transposed in the presentation of *Jimmie Higgins* to the basic figure of the theater, the actor. The hero of the play symbolized the masses, which in this play were the American soldiers among whom the unfortunate Jimmie spent his life. This mass with its movement and action on the stage expressed the thoughts and supplemented the experiences of Jimmie Higgins. Now the mass had to change its former practice of stylization on the stage and come closer to a more full-blooded portrayal of concrete figures than had been done under the schematic expressionist conditions.

In *Jimmie Higgins* Kurbas used the motion picture for the first time in the Ukrainian theater and with its help transferred both the action and the characters from the stage to the screen and vice versa. With Kurbas' artistic skill, this apparently risky and questionable method permitted the expansion of theatrical limits. The characters in the play were momentarily transferred from the stage onto the screen and there in army foxholes or amidst sea storm or in factory disasters continued their action. Such a transfer of action from the live stage to photographed natural conditions demanded special behavior by the actor if the whole production were to avoid falling into an unaesthetic eclecticism.

The director and actors of the Fourth Studio dealt with this complex and difficult problem admirably. After the premiere, which took place on November 20, 1923, wide discussions were again devoted to the new achievements of the Berezil' group. There were many public lectures and discussions on this theme by various educational and social institutions and clubs. *Gas* and *Jimmie Higgins* eventually reconciled the staid old Ukrainian groups whose conservatism up to that time had prevented their accepting Kurbas' modernism and, finally, the whole Russophile segment of the Ukrainian population was obliged to approach this manifestation of new Ukrainian culture with a different standard

than it had done previously.

The *Proletars'ka Pravda* of January 8, 1924 (then published in the Russian language) carried this remark:

> It has been proposed to L. Kurbas that he give his dramatization of *Jimmie Higgins* to the Moscow Theater of the Revolution for presentation in that theater. The play will be staged directly under V. Meierhold.

Meierhold's interest in this dramatization should not be compared with the present day "propagandistic" policy of exchanging dramatic works between the peoples of the U.S.S.R. Today the Party organs order the most notable Moscow theaters to include in their repertoires plays of questionable quality, and the theaters dare not object to such a unification of the repertoire. From 1920 to 1930 the theaters still enjoyed a certain freedom in selecting their dramatic material. The theater under Meierhold, like all the others, was also caught in the repertoire crisis, and it was therefore inevitable that the publicity concerning the success of *Jimmie Higgins* would be noticed by such a sensitive director as Meierhold. He instinctively felt that Kurbas had hit upon the true path and wished to share in its exploration. However, Kurbas, who bowed his head with great respect before the masters of the Russian theater, protested with all his might against the arrogant position taken by Russian artists toward the cultural process of the so-called national minorities and, therefore, did not accept the tempting proposition and did not permit the play *Jimmie Higgins* to leave the Ukrainian theater.

Immediately after *Jimmie Higgins*, the Fourth Studio, having accepted the responsibility of being a permanent theater, became a producing theatrical institution where all the young Berezil' directors were able to try out their creative talents. Almost every month new plays were staged in which the young directors, besides gaining experience, were obliged to develop further Kurbas' experiments and thereby to enrich the new Ukrainian theater. And so, in the first few seasons of Berezil', the debuts of Lopatyns'kyi, Ihnatovych, Vasyl'ko,

Tyahno, and Kudryts'kyi brought forth famous directors, some of whom, having been fortunate enough to escape the constant purges, have directed the Ukrainian theater until the present time. The newspapers often referred to the intensive growth of Berezil' and the appearance of its always fresh achievements. The January 8, 1924 issue of *Proletars'ka Pravda* on the occasion of the première of Toller's *The Machine Wreckers* wrote:

> In *Gas*, Berezil' portrayed a collective creativeness, in *Jimmie Higgins* the clear-cut individual performance of the actors. *The Machine Wreckers* showed that new directors are maturing in this Artistic Association.

On February 17 of the same year the Fourth Studio presented to the Kiev audience Hnat Ihnatovych, one of its graduates from the director's laboratory, who for his first public appearance staged Toller's play *Mass Man*. At the same time appeared the productions of Vasyl'ko's *After Two Rabbits*, *The Peasant Uprising* by Mérimée and *The Secretary of the Labor Union* by Sinclair.

During this period Kurbas believed that the revolutionary theater originates in places where there are social disturbances, revolution, and progress, where the theater is ahead of the audience and leads it onward. The theater, according to Kurbas, should not repeat itself but should constantly search for new approaches and should prevent stagnation and stabilization. Kurbas maintained that the purpose of the theater was to re-educate the people.

With such opinions about the theater and its role, Kurbas returned to Shakespearean drama and revised his former concepts of *Macbeth*. It was natural that Berezil's production of this play caused feverish discussions soon after its première on April 7, 1924, but opinions were not so unanimous as those which had followed previous Berezil' productions. A definite group of the community and several of the critics bitterly denied the right of the director to modify the classics. Academician M. Mohylyans'kyi, one of the oldest critics, had

the following reaction:

> Kurbas' staging of *Macbeth* at the beginning of April was really a spring delight even though wise men and specialists attempted to drown it in a whole flood of questions of "principle," the first of which is: should the classics, and especially Shakespeare, be modified? All the questions of "principle" were simply boring because, actually, it is not so important whether joy comes in accordance with principles or contrary to them. As long as there is joy, as long as there is artistic achievement! And by staging *Macbeth*, the great directorial talent of Kurbas achieved a great victory, passed a difficult test, and by giving the viewer a classical tragedy with kings, witches, etc., preserved in the impressions gained by the viewer the basic features of the profound intentions of the dramaturgic genius and poet of human passions.... What else can be demanded of a director?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> To those who scream that any modification of an author's text is a sacrilege, we say: not one Shakespearean play has ever been given without modification... beginning with the fact that it is generally acceptable to make cuts.... Yet every cut is in itself already a definite modification of the text.... And it seems that the question is whether modification is not a distortion of the basic characteristics of the artistic structure... and, naturally, if the question is raised abstractly, "Can one in principle introduce inserts into a Shakespearean play?"—our answer is: "No, one cannot, one absolutely cannot, but Kurbas can...." They say the victor is not judged....
>
> Some feel it is criminal to interrupt tragic scenes with mischievous pranks by a fool and with interludes. However, we want to answer this with a true life "story" taken from theatrical history in Kiev.
>
> Some fifty years ago *Hamlet* was playing in Kiev. It was being done quite properly but without any attempt at originality in the production, in other words, routinely. And then in the last scene when Hamlet attacks the king and raises the dagger over him and then strikes him with it, from the gallery resounded the word: "Check! Checkmate!" Was this the hooligan outburst of a savage or some kind of inner compulsion to break, to spoil, and to interrupt the

> tragic action? Perhaps it will be easier for the reader to answer this question when we tell him that the author of the "performance in the gallery" was Mykhaylo Drahomaniv, then a young student in Kiev University.... That which was done by Drahomaniv from the gallery under the influence of a subconscious need... Kurbas consciously carried over to the stage.... In this lies the whole essence of his style of producing *Macbeth*.[19]

Kurbas' numerous repeated productions of *Macbeth* with new variations testify to the importance which he ascribed to Shakespeare's works in the Ukrainian theater. Several decades earlier translations had been made of Shakespeare's plays by Panteleymon Kulish, but it was only due to the tirelessness of Kurbas that this genius of the world theater became available to the Ukrainian audience. Since that time, Shakespeare's plays have begun to appear in the repertoires of various theaters all over the Ukraine.

Although the National Revolution of 1917 to 1919 suffered defeat, national consciousness and the spiritual and cultural achievements which were gained during the short term of national independence rooted themselves deeply among the people. In order to calm this people so greatly disturbed by the Revolution, in order to get as much bread as possible from the Ukrainian villages, in order to control the Ukrainian mines and factories without useless hindrances, the Moscow Communists in occupying the Ukraine were forced to make extensive political and spiritual compromises. A period of "Ukrainianization" became obligatory for the Ukrainian peasant, intelligentsia, worker, office employee and army man.

Berezil' constantly acquired new tasks. Heretofore, on the Ukrainian urban stage, in the circus, in the opera, and in the operetta theater, the Russian language had been dominant. Now these auditoriums began to be filled by a new spectator, a Ukrainian spectator, and he demanded his own language in all these genres. However, this problem could not be solved merely by mechanically changing over into the Ukrainian

language. For this, a Ukrainian actor was needed with an artistic command of all these genres. Berezil' enthusiastically began working on this assignment.

Berezil' opened its 1924-1925 theatrical season in the Solovtsov Theater, the stronghold from which the Russian actor had defended the interests of the Muscovite monarchy for half a century. In 1924 the Ukrainian language was heard for the first time on the stage of this theater. Similar occurrences took place in Kharkov, Odessa and other Ukrainian cities.

The first presentation in its new home was a play by Marko Kropyvnyts'kyi, *They Made Fools of Themselves*, which the director produced in the form of a circus spectacle. One reason which forced Berezil' to make this experiment—giving a comic play in circus form—was the basic aim which underlay the existence of this collective: the mastery of the techniques of all genres and forms of presentation. Even a future artist of the Ukrainian circus arena was supposed to get his professional education in Berezil'. Moreover, the circus is a factor which primarily influences the motor reflexes and, therefore, easily influences the entire audience; however, it lacks the unity of a guiding thought which governs drama.

Berezil' attempted to connect these two forms on the theatrical stage, aiming at enriching and deepening the influence of the theater on the audience. The musical comedy *They Made Fools of Themselves*, the roots of which can be found in the last modifications of the *commedia dell'arte* and in the plays by the founders of European comedy, Goldoni and Molière, lent itself admirably to this experiment of a buffo-circus presentation. The first directorial work of F. Lopatyns'kyi in the Second Studio, *The New Ones Are Coming*, had already displayed this leaning toward the grotesque and the cultivation of acrobatic techniques and circus tricks. The attempt to synthesize all these resources and to create a circus presentation in the theater was at that

time a daring and controversial endeavor. Today, it is commonplace. Not only has the motion picture industry during the past decades produced brilliant circus motion pictures containing dramatic or comic themes, but the theaters of Western Europe and America have also produced musical shows in which circus techniques played a dominant role.

On November 8, 1924, the Kiev audience saw the Berezil actors in a comedy for the first time. The circus element ir the production of *They Made Fools of Themselves* was not a mere extra attraction in the play; the circus was the organic form of the entire production. The clown's circus trick, the *salto mortale* of a ground acrobat, the aerial loops between two trapezes, all evolved logically from the action and stage situation. The stage was reminiscent of a circus arena with all the trimmings and scenery required for a circus performance. The main characters of the old prerevolutionary *pobutovyi* comedy—the parents of twelve daughters, Kuksa and Dranko—were made up to resemble circus clowns. The actors performed the most difficult acrobatic tricks with the lightness of professional acrobats, yet this "act" was a motivated and necessary result of the development of the action and of the psychological position of the characters. The witty modification of the spoken lines of the comedy, the sharp satire on current Soviet customs and manners and on the Bolshevik bureaucracy, the circus technique of the actors, their lightness and flexibility, and the originality of the director's ideas created a vigorous and joyous spectacle. *They Made Fools of Themselves* was the first Berezil' presentation in which the actor took the center of the stage. The director was merely the stylist and the organizing element of the constituent parts of the play. His task was to reduce all the components to one common denominator and to present the play in a sure, clear and unified form. The actor had the opportunity and duty to reveal and use all of his creative abilities. The style of the play permitted extensive improvisation and freedom of movement by the actor on the

stage but only under one condition: the actor had to have command of his body to adhere to the compulsory rhythm and command of his feeling for proportion, artistic tact and aesthetic taste.

Similar experiments were made by Berezil' during its entire existence. Not one theatrical genre eluded this theater's attention. Behind the laboratory walls of Berezil', problems of the Ukrainian theater were intensively studied: the musical comedy, theatrical political satire, revues, and even the modernization of the opera. As a result of such continuous studies Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* was included in the Berezil' repertoire with a completely new "contemporary" text. The success enjoyed by this operetta as presented by the Berezil' actors hastened the organization and foundation of operetta theaters in all the larger Ukrainian cities.

The satirical political revues entitled *October Revue*, *Hello on Wave 377* and *Four Chamberlains* prompted the organs of the National Education Council to start a special theater for this genre in Kharkov, called *Veselyi Proletar* [The Happy Proletarian].

In the last phase of his work with Berezil', Kurbas also tackled the problem of the opera. In his penultimate production, a play by I. Mykytenko entitled *Dictatorship*, Kurbas attempted to bring new life to the atrophied characteristics and stereotypes of operatic traditions. It is a great misfortune that his tragic fate erased this valuable contribution.

The subsequent theatrical seasons, until Berezil' moved to Kharkov in 1926, represented the highest development of the Ukrainian theater. During this comparatively short period a brilliant group of young directors was educated; the Berezil' Artistic Association gladly released them later for independent work in numerous theaters all over the Ukraine. Theatrical institutes, technical schools and studios opened their doors wide to Berezil' graduates who as teachers carried the methods and resources of the new theater to the

farthest parts of the Ukraine.

During this period a new type of actor appeared and matured, one who worthily replaced the famous masters of the Ukrainian stage of previous eras and completely displaced the leading representatives of the Russian theater in the Ukraine, who until this time did not release their monopoly on theatrical culture in the Ukraine. The persistent cooperation of Berezil' with playwrights and the original staging of the finest examples of national and world literature were a life-giving impulse for the appearance of a new contemporary drama and comedy. The many-sided activity of Kurbas and Berezil' in the first half of the 1920's contributed to that glorious flowering of the theater which became one of the basic pillars of the post-revolutionary cultural renascence.

The Soviet government, having settled post-revolutionary administrative difficulties and having healed the wounds of the Civil War with the New Economic Policy, began to take complete control of cultural education. It is clear why the artistic expansion of Berezil' in no way entered into the political aims of Moscow. The Party organs began slowly but steadily to take over the leadership of the means of education and it consequently became necessary to appoint a definite place and role in this development to Berezil'. The Party's aim for the group was certainly not like that of the "charter" of the Berezil' Artistic Association, which in its objectives was by this time too divergent from Party interests.

Taking into account the artistic worth and creative powers of Kurbas and Berezil', the Soviet government ordered the reorganization of the Association into a permanent professional theater, and then transferred it to Kharkov, capital of the Ukraine at that time, so that it might assume the functions of the leading theater. On the one hand, the Bolshevik government with this maneuver hoped to paralyze the wide activities of the Association in the various aspects of art, narrowing its role only to the theater. On the other hand, the gov-

ernment "with an expansive gesture" supported those literary and community organizations which were striving for the transfer of Berezil' to the capital, attributing to it great importance. Ukrainian social leaders and even some Party members who headed the cultural and educational institutions (Shums'kyi, Hryn'ko, Skrypnyk, and others) wanted to see Berezil' in the center of the cultural processes, while the Muscovite administration desired to have this institution under its control so that it could limit its influence on circles outside the theater. Les' Kurbas was forced to bow to the orders of the authorities and to liquidate all the studios, laboratories, sections, and branches and reorganize them into one theater under the name of "Berezil'." This group in August 1926 moved to Kharkov and was domiciled in the former Russian theater of Sinel'nikov. The Berezil' quarters in Kiev were taken over by the Theater of Ivan Franko, which was directed by a former member of the Young Theater, Hnat Yura.

Although several guest appearances of the First and Fourth Studios had afforded the Kharkov audience the opportunity of becoming acquainted with the Berezil' artistic productions, these sporadic visits had reached only the leading circles of the city's audience. The majority of the population of the industrial city was still under the influence of the prerevolutionary Russian theater and the Theater of Ivan Franko, which had settled in Kharkov in 1922. Franko's theater was one of those which, touring all over the Ukraine, had served as a propagator and carrier of new theatrical trends. However, the Theater of Ivan Franko, being unable by itself to carry on the responsibilities of a permanent theater, was obliged to use the services of directors of the Russian provincial theater. The Theater of Ivan Franko was incapable of leading the Kharkov audience forward, being enslaved by the audience's conservative

feat the inertia of the Kharkov inhabitants and attain the position which had long since been reached in Kiev.

In opening his first Kharkov theatrical season, Kurbas was unaware of these new conditions and committed a tactical blunder. He began the season in Kharkov with *Golden Tripe* by the Belgian playwright Crommelynck. Both the play and the directorial interpretation were in the spirit of Kurbas' former searchings and experiments. It was therefore natural that a great part of the Kharkov audience received the play with surprise and reservations. Only a handful of the leading critics tried to understand the intention of the director and the theater, but even they were unsuccessful in combating the coldness and reserve of the audience.

After this first failure Kurbas compromised and considered the preference of the Kharkov audience for light theatrical fare, especially musical comedies. The theater immediately began preparing their version of Sullivan's operetta *The Mikado*. Due to the same considerations, Somerset Maugham's *Rain*, under the title *Sadie*, was advertised on the theatrical posters. This was followed by the Ukrainian historical drama *Sava Chalyi* by Karpenko-Kary. *Sava Chalyi*, as presented by the director Lopatyns'kyi, proved that Berezil' could adapt Ukrainian classic dramaturgy to modern theatrical resources. Owing to the flexibility of its repertoire the Berezil' theater soon succeeded in establishing contact with the audience which had so coldly received its first production. The Kharkov audience soon lost its Sinel'nikov-Yura conservatism and, after becoming acquainted with the repertoire of the Kiev period, permitted itself to be led into the Berezil' artistic world.

At that time Kharkov was the scene of a wide "literary discussion." For three years in the columns of the newspapers and journals and in public discussion several literary organizations had been battling one another. The themes of the polemics were not only the stylistic trends in literature advocated by the various organizations but the political and

economic status in which the Ukraine found herself after the Bolshevik occupation. A profound tone was given to this vehement discussion by the Free Academy of Proletarian Literature (referred to as VAPLITE, an abbreviation for *Vil'na Akademiya Proletars'koy Literatury*), of which the inspiration and ideologist was Mykola Khvyl'ovyi, a talented writer, temperamental journalist and daring oppositionist in the Communist Party. In his literary works, pamphlets and articles Khvyl'ovyi sharply criticized the national policies of the Muscovite Bolshevik regime in the Ukraine. Several playwrights were fostered and developed by VAPLITE and began collaborating with the new theater most successfully. The most prominent of these was Mykola Kulish, destined to play a decisive role in the artistic achievements and ultimate fate of Berezil'.

In 1925, while still in Kiev, Berezil' had included in its repertoire Kulish's second play *A Commune in the Steppes.* Although Kulish's first creative period was under the strong influence of the realism of the *pobutovyi* theater, especially the dramatic heritage of Karpenko-Kary, the timeliness of his theme, the strength of the dramatic conflict and the exceptional clarity of his scenic portrayals immediately interested the Ukrainian theater and evoked a live reaction from the audience. In staging *A Commune in the Steppes,* Berezil' was obliged to raise the play to its own formal level and thus overcome Kulish's *pobutovyi* tendencies. The theater attempted to generalize the realistic details of the action and the portrayal, and thus the play took on the characteristics of a typical phenomenon rather than those of an actual episode.

Both Kulish's first play, *Ninety-seven,* and his second, *A Commune in the Steppes,* concern the famine of 1921-22. Kulish came from a family of the poorest peasant class (his father was a farm laborer); from his earliest childhood therefore he had been forced to obtain an education under exceptional hardships and to strive for a better material and social

position than that of his parents. His social background and difficult living conditions pushed the young man into the revolutionary milieu which was under the influence of materialistic philosophy. In 1920 he was in the ranks of the Communist Party, which used him for education and journalistic work. While still in his early school years, he exhibited the great literary talent which after the Civil War blazed forth in his first drama *Ninety-seven.* This play and *A Commune in the Steppes* portrayed the difficulties of building a Communist community. In these first dramas Kulish tried to speak in the language of a faithful Communist. However, when he saw the facts and the truth, as a true writer, he described them in the language of truth. He drew powerful portraits of the famine which the Communist Party was attempting to blame on attacks against the regime by inimical elements. However, actuality proved it to be otherwise; life itself showed that the Bolshevik government was neither willing nor able to find a solution to this dreadful situation. Kulish's early plays left this impression with the audience.

The sharp, observing eye of the author and his bent toward analytical thinking would not be subdued by Party interests. The responsibility of Mykola Kulish toward truth was stronger than his responsibility to Party discipline, which demanded of him tendentious and propaganda plays. This is why his first play made the author very popular with his audience.

Kulish first became acquainted with the Berezil' Theater and its artistic resources when he came to Kiev for the premiere of *The Commune in the Steppes.* A year earlier the first performance of *Ninety-seven* in the Theater of Ivan Franko in Kharkov had been received by the audience with exceptional sympathy. The play had been produced there according to the traditions of the *pobutovyi* theater.

The Berezil' production of *A Commune in the Steppes* was a completely new and debatable phenomenon on the Ukrainian artistic scene. In the prerevolutionary and first post-revolutionary years the author had been forced to live and work in

the isolated southern section of the Ukraine where the stylistic patterns of the new theater had not yet penetrated. Therefore, it was not surprising to the "Berezil'tsi" that he received their interpretation of the play with reservations. His first acquaintance with the modern theater, with its artistic demands, with its completely new style of performance and the thoroughly original treatment of the dramatic work by the director left a deep impression on the creative thinking of the still young playwright. The aura of success surrounding his first play *Ninety-seven* as produced by the Theater of Ivan Franko was quickly dispelled under the impressions seen at the Kiev Berezil' Theater. The production of *A Commune in the Steppes* by Berezil' led Kulish along a new road, one of restless searchings and of constant action.

After Berezil' was transferred to Kharkov, Kulish, like the other writers who were members of VAPLITE, became a steady attendant at the theater and followed very attentively the creative work of its directors and actors. This closer acquaintance turned into close association which did not cease until the end of the creative, artistic activities of the Berezil' Theater, of the director Kurbas and of Kulish himself.

In Kiev, the Berezil' Artistic Association had included all the component parts of theatrical production. Dramatic material was worked out at the dramaturgic laboratory of the Association in direct contact and close cooperation with the director-producers. Almost the entire repertoire of Berezil', with the exception of the works by the German playwrights Kaiser and Toller, was the product of members of the theatrical organization. *A Commune in the Steppes* was the first original Ukrainian play which Berezil' accepted without subjecting it to the fundamental alterations which all the other contemporary dramatic material had required.

On the transfer to Kharkov, after the reorganization of the Berezil' Artistic Association into the Berezil' Theater, a

change occurred also in its manner of work with the dramatists. The Berezil' Theater was no longer able to foster a separate drama department as a section of the organization. Mykola Kulish's debut in Berezil' opened the doors of the theater to writers from various literary circles. In these groups the writers perfected their artistic skills and crystallized their ideological opinions with great enthusiasm in sharp debates.

VAPLITE, having become in the middle 1920's the dominant literary organization, correctly evaluated the role played by Berezil' in the development of the young Ukrainian culture and, having recognized the strength of the artistic and administrative talent of Les' Kurbas, pledged the closest creative cooperation of its writers with the theater. This cooperation was initiated by the leading literati of VAPLITE, Mykola Khvyl'ovyi, Mykhailo Yalovy, Mayk Johansen, and Ostap Vyshnya, who jointly revised Gilbert's text of the operetta *The Mikado*, using Sullivan's music, and thus helped to make a witty and appropriate political satire out of this delightful operetta. Thenceforth, no comedies or satiric revues were ever produced in the Berezil' Theater without the participation and talents of the above-mentioned writers. From the very first Kharkov theatrical season, plays by completely new playwrights were included in the Berezil' repertoire, which were then seen on the stages of all the Ukrainian theaters. The names of Dniprovs'ky, Liubchenko, Tsymbal, Mamontov, and Yaroshenko on the theatrical placards in the cities of the Ukraine marked the birth of the long-awaited new drama. The unsurpassed masters of artistic language Maksym Ryl'sky and Mayk Johansen began to enrich the repertoire of the Ukrainian theater with brilliant translations of works by Shakespeare, Schiller and Hugo. Molière's comedies found a talented translator in Orysa Steshenko, the niece of Mykhailo Staryts'kyi. The broadly outlined activities which had been clearly formulated in the charter of the Berezil' Artistic Association began to be rewarded with suc-

cess far beyond its hopes.

After completion of the season in the spring of 1927, Les' Kurbas made a speech entitled "The Aims of Berezil'" at a theatrical debate. The speech was published separately by the publishing house of VAPLITE. In his speech Kurbas attempted to illuminate the position of Berezil' and the entire post-revolutionary theater during the several years just past. He also analyzed the political and social conditions affecting the cultural life of the Ukraine, conditions which had a direct influence on the theater. In breaking away from its provincial limitations the theater had to struggle with the conservatism of the older Ukrainian generation on the one hand and with the Communists on the other. The Communists stubbornly resisted the slightest evidence of a rebirth of Ukrainian culture. The stand taken by Kurbas indicated the tendencies of the leading group in the young Ukrainian literature. The intense polemics of Mykola Khvyl'ovyi against the all-Russian Communist policy toward the Ukrainian Republic reflected the positions taken by Berezil'. Kurbas had persistently propagated these ideas from the first days of the republic's existence. Disregarding the undeniably great artistic attainments of the Ukrainian theater and the fact that Berezil' in many instances surpassed leading post-revolutionary Moscow theaters, the representatives of the Russian artistic world, and especially the theatrical critics of the Russian press in the Ukraine, were unable to discard pre-revolutionary criteria for appraising the Ukrainian spiritual and artistic movement. For them everything Ukrainian continued to be second-rate, "Little Russian." Even though Kurbas and Berezil' constituted a self-reliant Ukrainian phenomenon, even though the mark of Western European culture was clearly evident in the style of the theater and in the artistic world outlook of its ideological head and director, nevertheless, the professional critics of the Russian press attempted to ascribe its success to the influence of leftist theaters of Moscow. At every opportunity the names

Berezil' and Kurbas were associated with the names of Meierhold, Tairov and Vakhtangov. Nevertheless everyone who was able critically and objectively to grasp the renascence of Ukrainian culture then going on was forced to admit the falsity and tendentiousness of such reviews. In his report on "The Aims of Berezil'" Les' Kurbas gave absolute proof of the baselessness for claims of such a supposed dependence.

The direct, creative contact between Kulish and Kurbas which grew after the transfer of Berezil' to Kharkov had a decisive influence on Kulish's further creative activity. As early as 1927, prior to the beginning of the second season in the theater's new home, Kulish proposed that Kurbas present his new play entitled *The National Malakhyi*. The entire acting ensemble and the artistic director of Berezil' were impressed with the astonishing growth of the dramatist and with his radically changed literary style. In such a short period of close association with the theater, only a person with great talent and of unusual flexibility could have comprehended and adopted its creative methods, which were the results of ten years of intensive work and experimentation. *The National Malakhyi* showed that the new theater at last had a playwright. For the dramatist who only a year ago had thought that he would never be able to rid himself of the Karpenko-Kary tradition, such a step forward with the Kurbas theater was indeed a reassuring experience.

The completely new dramatic form, the highly artistic language coming from the depths of the lyric Ukrainian soul, and the very serious idea expressed in the play, all bespoke the artistic maturity of the work. Kurbas, who up to that time had been forced to seek material for his directorial ideas either in world dramaturgy or in his own adaptations, was handed a play which not only satisfied his aesthetic and artistic demands but also disclosed to him completely new and hitherto unforeseen horizons. The dramatist Mykola Kulish took his place next to the director in the foremost

ranks of the Berezil' company.

In *The National Malakhyi,* Kulish, a recent soldier of the Revolution, was able to view the results of the Revolution with a critical eye. Mykola Khvyl'ovyi had been forced by the Communist Party to curb the expression of his ideas on the further development of Ukrainian culture. "Marxist criticism" began to determine the theme and style for the whole artistic world under the Soviets and ideological deviations from the general line were punished. After all this Mykola Kulish appeared with *The National Malakhyi,* in which he again subjected contemporary reality, as he saw it, to sharp criticism.

The characters in the play are all in one way or another victims of the Bolshevik regime. Some are insane, others are fanatics haunted by unfulfilled desires, members of the Communist Party, adventurer-careerists, prostitutes, or madams of brothels. There is not a single positive character, not one bright ray of light. Not a trace has been left of the former alluring slogans of the Revolution. The Revolution, in the words of an old peasant woman who throughout the play seeks a way to Jerusalem, "has galloped all over the steppes of the Ukraine on horseback, and only a trail of dust has been left behind."

The main character in the play is Malakhyi Stakanchuk, a letter carrier in a small isolated town who, shaken by the Revolution, believed that it really would lend wings to his small grey person and open the way for his fondest dreams. However, such dreams could only be dreamed by infatuated or sick people under the actual conditions of the "dictatorship of the proletariat." In order to prevent any accusations of ideological heresy, of breaking away from the general policies of the "proletarian rule," the playwright endowed his hero with the qualities of an abnormal, sick person. Malakhyi Stakanchuk, desiring to isolate himself from the entire outer world, orders himself to be walled up in a small closet and there for a long time works on his projects, "the

reforms of man." On leaving his closet he sends his projects for study and confirmation to the highest office in the Ukraine, the Council of People's Commissars. Kulish leads the hero through all the trials and tribulations of a bureaucratic governmental apparatus where such fantastic projects would have to be examined. The representatives of the government protecting themselves from the inquirer's importunate ideological honesty, fraudulently lock him up in a psychiatric hospital and only there, among the mentally ill, does he find a sympathetic audience. Malakhyi Stakanchuk could find no other listeners for his sermons because everywhere, from the highest positions to the lowest social circles, there were only automatic, soulless and frightened performers of "directives."

The Berezil' Theater and its director Les' Kurbas concentrated all their endeavors on the quickest possible production of this play. In March 1928, there was a so-called "community preview" of *The National Malakhyi* directed by Kurbas. The Repertoire Committee and the National Commissariat of Education found themselves in a very uncomfortable dilemma. The representatives of the government were reluctant to permit the performance of a play with such oppositional tendencies. On the other hand, the authority of Les' Kurbas and the artistic contribution of the new work by Mykola Kulish demanded especially careful handling rather than routine procedure. Luckily, at that time the heads of the organizations which guided the development of education and art were people of Ukrainian origin who were in some degree concerned with the question of Ukrainian culture. For a whole month the Kharkov audience impatiently awaited the first public performance of the play. After long and heated debates between the dramatist and director on the one hand and the leading Party officials on the other, and after some unimportant compromises entailing slight changes in the text, the play was permitted to be shown to the public for a short time.

Rarely has a play aroused such a storm of arguments and discussions, such fiery defenders and attackers as did the premiere of *The National Malakhyi*. The house was packed to the rafters at each daily performance. The audience, which represented all strata of society, participated in the play with emotion. Individual thoughts and phrases in the play were constantly repeated by the audience at meetings of Soviet organizations, in schools and at home. On the streets of Kharkov or at meetings in workers' clubs one could hear quoted the witticisms which with such extraordinary appropriateness indicated the unfortunate results of the policies and administration of the Soviet government.

After such an audience reaction, the official so-called "Marxist critics" led an intensive attack upon the playwright and the theater, accusing them of all sorts of anti-Party and anti-state sins. All the former designations for oppositional movements, such as Khvyl'ovism, Shumskyism, Trotskyism, national and anti-national transgressions—all were hurled against Kulish and Kurbas and, eventually, at the end of the theatrical season, the Repertoire Committee forbade the further performance of the play. Berezil' was forced to delete it from its repertoire. Mykola Kulish, as a member of the Party, was constrained to submit to Party discipline and to admit the partial correctness of the critics' arguments. Kurbas fared much worse since he had never belonged to the Party and from the first days of the theater's existence had definitely resisted the attempts of the Bolshevik regime to subject theatrical art to its own interests. And this time, when the Marxist critics accused the theater, they stated that

> ... In addition to the petty bourgeois dreams of Malakhyi, who drops nationalistic aphorisms throughout the play, in addition to the psychiatric hospital, the tavern, the house of prostitutes, etc., the play showed nothing else; it showed the lone representative of the proletariat in the air on a telegraph pole, torn from the realities of life, which appeared to be persecution of the working class and its

> dictatorship; the theater does not instill the audience with enthusiasm but, to the contrary, deflates him....[20]

In the discussions occasioned by this production and by the entire Ukrainian theatrical activity, Kurbas voiced some of his creative principles, which were also considered inimical to the "dialectic materialist method." In defending his views, Kurbas stressed that the theater should not "pump the audience full of enthusiasm, should not play on its emotions, because enthusiasm is but a bottle of revolutionary beer," "a gypsy romance," "spiritual inebriation." An audience filled with enthusiasm very quickly becomes sober after leaving the theater in the light of contradictory reality. On the contrary, the audience must be forced to think, to understand the processes taking place on the stage and to fix them in its brain. Kurbas accused the Marxist critics of not having observed and understood a very important and fundamental principle in *The National Malakhyi*, that in this play the world theme of "fondest dreams" is expressed in a national form. This, Kurbas argued, is a splendid and unique example of how a world theme must be clothed in a truly national form. Therefore, the Berezil' Theater could not ignore such works and it would not shun such problems in the future, he said.

Although the play was dropped from the Berezil' repertoire and no other theater would risk beginning work on it, passionate discussions continued to center around it and its interpretation by Berezil' for a long time. Some obstinately attacked the dramatist and the director, while others regretted that artistic works of such great importance could not become the cultural and spiritual possession of the entire community. The latter group of disputants in the core of the Party and in the cultural-educational organizations did its utmost to free the play from the censor's prohibitions. The play was again passed for performance for a short while during the 1929-1930 theatrical season as an excuse for again and finally prohibiting it after a few performances. This time the Soviet

government not only forbade the production of the play but forced the author to criticize and condemn himself. The following statement was made by the terrorized dramatist Mykola Kulish in the *Literary Gazette* of February 28, 1931:

> Malakhyi Stakanchuk, in demanding the immediate reform of man, voices politically oppositional sentences which are very reminiscent of the Trotskyite theories of the time.... Besides this the hero is armed... with nationalistic aphorisms.... I did not oppose "Malakhianism" with our revolutionary creative activity (the reconstruction period), the socialistic successes and great achievements of the Party in the field of cultural-national growth. And in such a form the play assumed a politically harmful meaning by taking a stand against the Party through its expressions of Ukrainian national deviations. I eventually recognized all of my errors, and I now condemn them as I condemn all those who were identified with them during my entire literary activity during 1927 and 1928.[21]

So the Party machine compelled Kulish to deny not only his own work but also himself. Les' Kurbas this time occupied a slightly less painful position. Having devoted all of his artistic talent to the stage representation of Kulish's work, he completely disagreed with the decision of the Repertoire Committee and refused to go the way of the dramatist. Therefore, the Commissar of Education at the time, Mykola Skrypnyk, in obedience to a directive of the Communist Party, stated in 1929,

> Comrade Kurbas believes that the work *The National Malakhyi* by Kulish is rooted... in the entire history of our culture. Comrade Kurbas wants to join his theater with these historic ideological traditions of Ukrainian culture, to join and bind it. And in this we differ with Comrade Kurbas.... In the national question Comrade Kurbas is repeating the old arguments, the same ones which Khvyl'ovyi supported when we fought against him.[22]

Such was the stand taken by Skrypnyk as the National Commissar of Education and a member of the Politburo of

the CPU(b) as to the ideological principles of Kurbas and his theater. However, the Berezil'tsi and VAPLITE were aware of the completely different personal opinions of the National Commissar as to the duties of Ukrainian art and of its entire spiritual culture. In 1929, in Party discussions and in the press the Communist Party set forth its categoric demands on the entire literary and artistic front. The fierce struggles which until that time had been carried on among the numerous creative trends in literature and in the theaters had the character, at least externally, of free creative endeavors and the search for new paths. In 1929 the Party and its representatives put a stop to this freedom. During this discussion, however, one was still able to defend one's viewpoint, though at some risk. It is therefore not surprising that Kurbas completely and categorically opposed the Party's demands to submit the theater to the interests and tasks of the Party and its propaganda. Kurbas tirelessly defended the right of the leading theater to separation from the "fundamental proletarian mass," considering such a separation imperative if the theater was to remain creative and a leading force. Many opponents of Kurbas, however, adherents of the general line and of Moscow's demands, understood too literally the meaning of "creative contact with the proletarian audience."

Skrypnyk, as the spokesman of the Party and its policies in the field of literature and the theater, did not hesitate to defend Kurbas' conceptions, which basically disagreed with the official demands of the Party. In appeasing the followers and opponents of Kurbas, Kulish and Khvyl'ovyi, he announced: "Our task is not to crawl down to the level of intelligence of the working mass, but to raise its standard of knowledge." And further: "It is not enough to lead the organized worker-spectator to the theater—his theatrical thought must also be organized. . . ."

This is essentially what Kurbas had fought for during his entire theatrical career. In this case he and Skrypnyk differ-

ed only on the exact definition of the word "audience." The People's Commissar of Education was thinking of the "working class audience" while Kurbas had in mind the whole of Ukrainian society.

The fourth play by Mykola Kulish, *Myna Mazailo*, which opened in 1929, was also subjected to bitter criticism by defenders of the Party line. The play reflects the tensions of Ukrainian nationalism during the twenties and reactivated the arguments put forth by Khvyl'ovyi and VAPLITE against "imperialistic Moscow chauvinism" in relation to young Ukrainian nationalism. In *Myna Mazailo* the author depicts the clash between the two nations: the Ukrainian (as the subjugated nation) and the Russian (as the ruling nation). *Mazailo* outgrew the limits of the merely "Ukrainian" play by artistically representing this "struggle between two cultures" and suggesting how it could be resolved under certain concrete conditions. Ukrainian culture had long been regarded as a lower "peasant" culture by the Russian and the Russianized Ukrainian landed gentry and bureaucracy. The Ukrainization which was encouraged in the twenties could be looked upon as a doubtful blessing. The main character in the play, Myna Mazailo, declares: "Ukrainization is a method of making a provincial of me, a second-rate servant, a way of denying me the chance for a better position." Members of the older generation like the brother of Myna, Taras Mazailo, go further in their mistrust of the process, disappointed as they often were with national and social politics: "Their [the Bolshevik Muscovite] Ukrainization is a method for exposing us, Ukrainians, and then destroying us all, without leaving a trace. I warn you!"

In defining the division of forces on the subject of "the struggle between the two cultures" which was taking place in the Ukraine Kulish presents one more type of Ukrainianism which was actually evident in the new "modern," "European" segment of post-revolutionary society. The exponent of this third Ukrainian attitude in the Kulish comedy is Mokii Maz-

ailo, Myna's son. In order to prevent the Communist critics from accusing him of nationalist leanings, the author stressed Mokii's spiritual and cultural orientation toward the Komsomol.

In *Myna Mazailo* the playwright achieved great power in his ridicule of imperialistic chauvinism and Moscow's shortsightedness in dealing with nationalist matters. His portraits of Ukrainian characters rose above everything of that nature which had been presented on the stage up to that time under the Soviets. The action of the play centers around a very insignificant episode but one which has been used in many plays—the change of one's proper name. Mazailo, a petty official in a Soviet institution, and his wife and daughter suffer because of their name which, in their opinion, is vulgar and unmelodious. A suggested name change from a Ukrainian to a Russian form raises the national issue in a personal human form.

The political acuteness of the play was not all in its favor. Mykola Kulish made great strides along the path toward a great contemporary drama during those uncertain international struggles. Very slowly and only with great difficulty did Soviet dramaturgy conquer the realistic drama of the *pobutovyi* type. Kulish was the only Ukrainian and one of the few Soviet playwrights in general who attempted to create new forms in drama. His play *Myna Mazailo* was a notable step forward in comparison with *The National Malakhyi;* the earlier play was new only in various "scenes," while in his fourth play there was already a successful attempt at new comedy forms. In *Mazailo* elements of style appeared which have become parts of the new form. In this comedy words sparkle, blend in unexpected bold combinations, poke fun in metaphors, merge and scatter in brilliant paradoxes. The comedy contains both a touch of colorful national primitivism and of the achievements of contemporary techniques. Kurbas, in staging the comedy for the Berezil' group, remained true to himself and his method of

work. Each of Kurbas' new works was a stubborn search for especially clear and artistic forms, the fruit of deep culture and deep perception into the nature of the theater. Kurbas, as the director, almost always went further than the author of a play. So it was with *Mazailo;* where the author merely suggested, the director explained fully; where the author touched upon daily life, the director made national and social symbols of the touches. Kurbas gave a realistic play romantic treatment.

Berezil' made a strong production of *Myna Mazailo,* the scope and meaning of which went far beyond the usual "hit." Submitting the play to romantic treatment had the result that each of the characters grew to tremendous stature; even though this stature arose out of reality, it nevertheless expressed so much ideological content that it portrayed much more than "reality." The artist V. Mellyer, in designing the settings for the play, had to find a particular means of expressing this "super" reality. He used only broad bold lines, a few unimportant furnishings of a middle-class home, and he built a "construction" which extended upward into the empty reaches of the stage. These elements accentuated the unreal, symbolic character of the production.

A particular achievement in the production of the play, and one of which Berezil' was rightly proud, was the dramatic interpretation of the characters. The comedy contained numerous negative characters of the Soviet world in the 1920's and the production permitted the actors to display their talents. For an entire season the comedy occupied the Berezil' stage, playing to capacity audiences.

The play renewed the old quarrel between representatives of Ukrainian nationalism and the Moscow Party members who discouraged national ideas in the Ukraine. None of the participants in the theatrical discussion of 1929 was surprised when propagandists of the Party line subjected Kulish's two most recent plays, as produced by the Les' Kurbas theater, to the ruthless fire of "Marxist criticism."

Actually, the Central Committee of the Communist Party initiated this discussion in order to restrain and finally liquidate the Ukrainian "national deviation." In Moscow a play lampooning the Ukrainian liberation movement in 1917, *Days of the Turbins*, was a great success and no one accused the producer or playwright of "Russian nationalism and chauvinism." But in the Ukraine the theatrical discussion of 1929 became an attack on the foremost theater and the greatest playwright, who were accused of nationalistic counterrevolution.

The "theater discussion" ended with the clear implication that the theater, which up to that time had been able to exercise some creative initiative and freedom of choice in dramatic material, from that moment on was obliged to bow to the general Party line and become the mouthpiece for Party propaganda. Les' Kurbas and Mykola Kulish defended their artistic position bravely, and Mykola Khvyl'ovyi supported them, but it was evident that a new era in Soviet theater in the Ukraine had begun. It is obvious from the repertoire of Berezil' up to that time that the theater had been extremely selective in its choice of Soviet dramatic literature. The Party's attack on literature and the theater, so unequivocally stated during the theatrical discussion, opened the doors of hitherto unapproachable theaters to all the rankest propagandistic dramatic trash.

Immediately after this discussion the Berezil' Theater began to experience a new type of administration. Until this time government opinion of their work could be learned from the press and from the official critics. From the autumn of 1929, political commissars, appointed as secretaries of professional centers and even as administrator-directors, began to appear at the administrative offices of the theaters. They had orders from the Central Committee of the Party not only to take control of theater finances but also to take an active

voice in their entire creative work. The local Party committees, lacking adequately trained personnel for such supervision, assigned these functions to uneducated factory workers or even to demobilized Red Army men. The only requirement was that they should be Party members who could be depended upon to supervise directly the creative and economic life of the theaters. These Party supervisors, in performing their functions as policemen and informers, tried also to paralyze the original creativeness of the manager-directors and to sow suspicions of political unreliability and distrust against them among the mass of theatrical personnel. In addition to this morally disrupting work, their task was to insert propagandistic dramatic literature into the repertoire of the theater.

Kurbas sensed that the Berezil' Theater would not be able to withstand completely the general Party pressure. He understood that he could not expose an organization which numbered almost one hundred actors and directors to the very serious consequences which would result from expressions of disobedience and opposition. Therefore, he permitted his young directors to produce the plays *Cadres* by Ivan Mykytenko, *The Little Town of Ladenyu* by Leonid Pervomays'kyi and *The End of a Squadron* by Aleksandr Korneichuk. He himself made an apparent compromise and produced a play recommended by the Repertoire Committee: the over-publicized play written at the outset of collectivization, Mykytenko's *Dictatorship*.

But Kurbas resolved to continue along his line in the Ukrainian theater regardless of the conditions, though he did not wish to subject his collaborators to danger. He decided under these circumstances to take the full responsibility upon himself for all decisions.

So it was that the apparent compromise on *Dictatorship* was merely an illusion. Although 100 per cent ideologically correct in text this play became in Kurbas' interpretation the object of sharp criticism and of accusations of formalism,

aestheticism and distortion of Party directives. Kurbas raised this banal agitation piece on the enforced collectivization of farms to the status of a profound tragedy. To do so, he turned the ideological message upside down.

The author, on orders of the Communist Party, had attempted to idealize the government activities in a village during the period of bitter struggle against the *kolkhoz*. The "class enemy" was a caricature of hard-working peasants with some land of their own who were being forced to give everything to the *kolkhoz*. The director preserved the human dignity of these characters and thus changed the playwright's conception. The ruthlessness of the government officials, however, was retained. By this shift in emphasis the director elicited sympathy for the peasants and made villains of the officials. Instead of propagating the idea of the *kolkhoz*, the production showed all the negative sides of the movement and all the cruelty and inhumanity of the manner in which it was being established.

From the formal artistic viewpoint the production of *Dictatorship* again demonstrated the great talent of Les' Kurbas for directorial experiment. This time the center of his attention was the genre of musical drama.

In the 1920's, during those courageous and successful years of theatrical experiment, the most difficult field for innovation was the opera. It seemed that this stronghold of theatrical conservatism could not be vanquished by the most determined revolutionary reformers. It was no coincidence that it was at this time that the musical theaters of Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko made their appearance in Moscow. In the last days before the Revolution and the first post-revolutionary years, the fiery Meierhold had also tried his hand at staging opera. Nevertheless, all these attempts went no further than battling the stereotyped form of operatic productions and the primitive acting of the actor-singers.

Les' Kurbas attempted to approach the problem from another standpoint. He began not with existing operas but with

a new approach to musical drama itself. Taking Ivan Mykytenko's play *Dictatorshíp* as the basis for a libretto for a musical drama, he encouraged his young and promising collaborator in Berezil', the composer Meytus, to try his hand at it. The young man was successful in composing interesting and fresh music for this unusual production. Kurbas entrusted the roles to the Berezil' actors, who had to utilize their acting ability to make up for their lack of operatic voices. They sang, they declaimed to the background of music in a melodious recitative, they complemented the musical-dramatic form of the play by intonation and gesture. All this created a truly musical spectacle; it was a completely new experiment in the regeneration of the musical theater. It was the first, perhaps very modest, but nevertheless definite forward step along the way to a new form of operatic theater.

Following the hostile reaction of the Party Marxist critics to the production of *Dictatorshíp*, Les' Kurbas did not produce a single new play in Berezil' until 1933. During this time he confined himself to the general managership of his theater and to pedagogic activities. He concentrated his attention especially on the directors' department. Sensing that the time would soon come when he would no longer be a part of the Ukrainian theater, he wished to train directors and actors in his conception of theater. He opened an actor's school in connection with the theater; it was shortly reorganized into the Theatrical Workshop, and talented young people promptly flocked to it. At the same time he gladly welcomed into his theater those students who were finishing dramatic schools of higher learning and institutes in all the main cities of the Ukraine, supervising their daily practice. The young directors who had received their education within Berezil' were now obliged to carry the entire responsibility of preparing a new repertoire. Les' Kurbas, in correcting and assisting them, had but one aim: to leave well-qualified substitutes in his place.

The playwright Mykola Kulish, whose creative fate was so closely linked with that of Kurbas and Berezil', could not forsake his literary personality and bow completely to the directives of the Communist Party. Although he confessed his "errors" and deviation from the Party's general line under Party pressure, nevertheless his next play, *Sonata Pathétique* written in 1931, continued and completed his observations on the national problem stated in his two previous plays. Although all three plays are different in form, they can be considered a trilogy: *The National Malakhyi* a tragi-comedy, (the author called it a tragedy), *Myna Mazailo*, a classical comedy, and *Sonata Pathétique*, a drama. Among the plays by Mykola Kulish, the latter work holds a unique place on the basis of content, ideological tendentiousness and form. It is the most poetic of Kulish's plays. The poet and critic Svyatoslav Hordyns'kyi in his preface to the published version of *Sonata Pathétique* has characterized it as a dramatic poem. He notes the political origins of the play:

> The character of *Sonata Pathétique* bears strong traits of romanticism. The reason for this approach to the work can best be explained by the times in which it arose. The situation was as follows: Moscow was alarmed because the Ukrainians were using the so-called Ukrainization in a manner completely different from that desired by the Communist Party and [therefore] used all its efforts to arrest the process of the "rebirth of the nation," a slogan which Khvyl'ovyi, himself a Party member, introduced as a condition for the future social order in the Ukraine.[23]

The action of the *Sonata Pathétique* takes place in 1917, when three enemy powers were clashing in the Ukraine: the national Ukrainian, the White Guard Russian and the Russian Communist. Beethoven's sonata forms a background of somber pathos for the events of the play. The main character, called simply "I," is supposed to find "the right Bolshevik path" through the chaos of the period. "I" was to be that red thread which was to bind and strengthen the Bolshevik

line in the drama, to make possible the production of the play on a Soviet stage. Whether he desired it or not, the author did not achieve this aim; his Ukrainian nationalism won out over the Bolshevik ideology and the play *Sonata Pathétique* was not allowed to be produced on the Ukrainian stage; it could not even be published. Kurbas' refusal to produce any play for two years was partly in protest against this censorship.

In Moscow, however, Tairov at the Kamerny Theater gained permission to produce the play. In a translation by Zinkevich it opened on December 20, 1931. It must be noted that until that time the works of Ukrainian writers had been done only very rarely on the Moscow and Leningrad stages. Governmental orders finally opened the theaters to consideration of Ukrainian work, and even this was because of political and not artistic reasons. Tairov was one of the first Russian directors who, on his own initiative, studied the work of Kulish. *Sonata Pathétique* captured his imagination and he used all of his influence to get permission to stage it.

For a long time Moscow critics were afraid to voice their opinions of the play and its production. Over a month and a half after the première, on February 9, 1932, there appeared in *Pravda* an editorial signed by five members of the *Pravda* staff, B. Reznikov, Vasil'kovski, P. Yerukhimovich, N. Bugovoy, and N. Nazarov, entitled "The Unsuccessful Pathétique." In general it gave a favorable evaluation of the Kulish drama and the Tairov production at the Kamerny Theater. Consternation hit the governmental official circles in Kharkov. Everyone knew that opinions expressed in *Pravda* were in fact directives which one could not dispute. Therefore the Repertoire Committee in the Ukraine Commissariat of Education immediately began to study its previous injunction against the production of *Sonata Pathetique*. It seemed that soon the Ukrainian audience would also have the opportunity to seeing the best work of its beloved playwright. While the discussions about releasing the play were

taking place, however, there appeared in *Pravda* on March 4 a small notice signed "Ukrainian." The writer attacked Tairov and the editorial staff of *Pravda* for printing the favorable review. The editors immediately retracted their previous article and without protest agreed with the thoughts of "Ukrainian," knowing full well that this pseudonym masked the former Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks in the Ukraine, Lazar Kaganovich, a member of the Politburo, one of the secretaries of the Party and the right hand of Stalin. Kaganovich was the author and executor of all the repressive measures against Khvyl'ovism, Shumskyism, VAPLITE and the Ukrainian cultural rejuvenation in general.

On March 24, 1932, the Kamerny Theater showed this brilliant play for the last time, and on the same day the play was withdrawn from the repertoire of the Leningrad Theater of Drama, where it had also been staged. The discussions in the Ukrainian Repertoire Committee also ceased and the frightened executors of the commands of Stalin, Kaganovich and Postyshev soon buried the work. Stalin's viceroys adopted the three-century-old practice of the Russian gendarmes —the destruction of the creations of the Ukrainian spirit. And this time they struck one of their most telling blows.

In the spring of 1933, after the suicides of Mykola Khvyl'ovyi and the National Commissar of Education, Mykola Skrypnyk, Les' Kurbas and Mykola Kulish made one last attempt to break away from the pressures of Bolshevik terrorism.

Kulish could no longer be forced to write pharisaical propagandistic material based on the theme of the building of a rosy future and socialist justice under the all-scorching Stalinist sun. Not being able to write as his heart and conscience dictated, he decided to dwell on the subject of the European economic crisis, the theme of the world depression during the 1930's. The national problems to which he had devoted all of his best work became so painful and acute

that he was forced to seek a different approach. It was clear that this time he attempted to speak of the pain in his soul and in his era by setting his play in a foreign country.

From a note in the Polish press the playwright took the subject of his last play, *Maklyena Grasa*. According to the news story, an old Polish man was zealously seeking a person who would agree to kill him for money. The murder would enable the old man's family to obtain a large sum of insurance money and thus ensure their welfare during the economic crisis then raging in Poland. In Kulish's play the organizer of his own murder is a stockbroker, while the murderer is a ten-year-old girl named Maklyena, the daughter of the sick and jobless Grasa. The small broker, who has been speculating with the money of others, has earned tens of thousands of dollars and, taking advantage of the bankruptcy of a factory owner, has decided to buy a factory for a mere trifle. Just as the broker is on the point of realizing his deal, he unexpectedly learns that the bank where he keeps his money has also gone bankrupt and that he, too, has become a beggar. This unexpected blow leads him to suicide, but at the last moment he stops. He is seized by the idea of finding, at all costs, a person who will agree to kill him, so that his wife and daughter may receive his insurance money, which would be sufficient to pay for the factory. Little Maklyena, who gathers the food that dogs leave along the streets and so saves her sick father and her little sister from starvation, agrees to kill the speculator for a small sum. He gives the girl a gun, and puts the sum agreed upon next to him. Maklyena can get the money only after shooting and killing him. However, the professional broker even here cheats his little client: he does not put the promised money in the designated place. Even at the last moment the broker is a swindler: he must profit even from his own death.

It is a well-known fact that the Communist Party had categorically required Kurbas to produce a play in accordance

with the demands of "socialist realism." During rehearsals of Kulish's play, Kurbas announced: "If you wish to see artistic realism, come to see the production of *Maklyena Grasa.*"

However, before the audience saw the play, events took place in Kharkov which had a profound influence on the subsequent existence of Kurbas, Kulish and the Berezil' Theater.

In the spring of 1933 the Soviet Commissar of Education, A. S. Bubnov, invited Kurbas to take part in the olympiad of theatrical art of the peoples of the U.S.S.R. which was to take place that summer in Moscow. Only a few of the nations were to participate in the olympiad, and Russian theaters were not included. Everyone felt sure that the invitation was a device to fool people in the U.S.S.R. and throughout the world about national policies in the Soviet Union, at that difficult time of the rigors connected with collectivization.

When Berezil' ignored this command to appear at the olympiad in Moscow, all the actors then clearly understood that this time a drastic conflict could not be avoided. Even without this, the situation was unbearably tense.

The suicide of Khvyl'ovyi and soon afterward that of Skrypnyk hastened the intensive purge along the entire cultural artistic front which was conducted by P. P. Postyshev, at that time the dictator of the Ukraine. Kurbas and Berezil', together with the plays by Kulish, had been subjected to destructive blows by the Bolshevik critics for the past three years. Postyshev simultaneously built monuments to Shevchenko, the great Ukrainian writer, and destroyed untold Ukrainian villages, shot writers or exiled them to Siberia to a certain death. Having lured some writers with rich food, luxurious villas and private cars, he broke their creative resistance and forced them to glorify Stalin's dictatorship.

Postyshev tried this method on Kurbas. The subject matter of the first and last discussion which Kurbas had with Postyshev was related by him to the author of the present work.

Having invited Kurbas to see him, Postyshev announced

that the Communist Party was commissioning the director to build a theater which would be suitable to the requirements and tasks of the era. He plied Kurbas with compliments and then declared that the Party was entrusting him and him alone with this "great and responsible mission." He then added that Kurbas must first accept the general line of the Communist Party and, admitting his national tendencies up to that time, must condemn the activities of his associates, Khvyl'ovyi and Kulish. He must, as well, explain to the Ukrainian community the harmfulness of Skrypnyk's policies in the Ukraine.

Kurbas answered that he could not follow the Party line, because this line had brought affairs to such a pass that in the capital of the Ukraine the corpse of a woman dead from starvation had been lying in the street near the entrance to the Berezil' Theater for three days. The grotesquely deformed and starving peasant children wandering along the streets made it impossible for him to follow the Party line which had produced their hunger. He was not conscious of his "nationalist" tendencies because he did not consider them to be contrary to those of his nation. He could not condemn the activities of Khvyl'ovyi and Kulish because he considered himself an adviser in these activities. He had never agreed with Skrypnyk's views and had fought against them all his life, but since Skrypnyk admitted the harm which his policies had brought to the Ukrainian people and then committed suicide, he would not throw stones on Skrypnyk's grave. He could not build a theater which would be suitable to the requirements of the Communist Party and the style enforced by it because this style excluded freedom, the basis of all art. Finally, Kurbas stated that he considered himself incapable of playing the role of a puppet who waves his arms and legs when someone else pulls the strings. The discussion ended on this note.

Soon afterward, Kurbas permitted the theater's administration to announce in the press and on the billboards the day

of the première of *Maklyena Grasa.* As before every new production, so now there was a period of feverish activity in the theater. After each daily performance the actors remained for night rehearsals. After the last dress rehearsal, which lasted from seven o'clock in the evening until noon the following day, Kurbas announced that the première would not take place that evening because some of the scenes in the play required further work. The Commissariat of Education was notified of this delay and the actors were called to an all-night rehearsal.

The Berezil' actors had often experienced that strange feeling which a person has when he is in a place where he cannot see the passing of night into day and of day into night. So it was this time when the author of the present study (who was to play the leading role in *Maklyena Grasa*) left the theater and saw the life of Kharkov at high noon. Painfully and clearly I felt the difference between the real world and that in which I had lived for sixteen hours during rehearsal in the theater. On the stage, bathed in lights from the reflectors, among heavy red velvet curtains and sets several stories high where the action of Kulish's beautiful play took place, one was far from the tragic scene which Kharkov presented in 1933.

Crossing the theatrical square between the monuments of Pushkin and Gogol, I saw starving peasant children, whose rags barely hung on their pitiful bodies, looking at me imploringly with half-dead eyes, with outstretched hands—hungry little corpses pleading for aid. I hurriedly emptied my own half-filled pockets and tried as quickly as possible to reach the actors "community quarters" so that I could throw myself on a couch and forget everyone and everything during a few hours' sleep. I had slept only a couple of hours when I was awakened and given a letter informing me that the Ukrainian Commissar of Education, V. P. Zatons'kyi, had ordered us to present our play that same day before the

members of the Repertoire Committee and the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Communist Party of the Ukraine.

Kurbas' protests were to no avail; the order was irrevocable. Living for thirteen years under Bolshevik occupation, one becomes inured to anything, yet none of us could really believe that the government would demand the presentation of an unprepared play. With a premonition of impending calamity I returned to the theater immediately.

In front of the Berezil' building there was an unusual number of armed GPU agents. At the stage entrance a guard demanded my identification. The corridors backstage and the stage itself were full of armed soldiers from special branches of the GPU. An agent of the GPU sat in my dressing room. As soon as I had crossed the threshhold he began searching my pockets without uttering a word. Not finding anything of interest, he told me to prepare myself for the play. I noticed that my make-up paraphernalia were strewn over the table and and that the boxes were open, even though I had the keys in my pocket.

The agent, seating himself on the ottoman, did not take his eyes off me. I was convinced that I was already under arrest. The arrival of the wardrobe mistress and the hairdresser reminded me that I must get ready for my role and that the play would begin within an hour. I do not know whether there have been similar instances in the history of the theater where an actor had to prepare for his role at gunpoint. The Berezil' actors were perhaps the first to have this experience, under the benevolent protection of the Stalin constitution.

Mechanically I dressed myself and put on my make-up, not even thinking of my role. The text and content of the play fled from my mind; before my eyes I could only see the silhouette of the Chekist agent. And when at curtain call as I went toward the stage I noticed that my agent was following me like a shadow, I completely lost the power of self-control.

Grasa, the character whom I portrayed, opens the play. I appeared on the balcony of Grasa's home, moved quickly to the center of the stage and by a narrow bridge walked out over the audience. I was to begin my first monologue over the heads of those sitting in the first rows of the orchestra. As I looked down I saw the decorations worn by Vsevolod K. Balitski, the chief of the GPU in the Ukraine, the bald head of Stanislav V. Kossior, Secretary of the Ukrainian Party Central Committee, and the frowning faces of Postyshev, Zatons'kyi and the whole staff of the Ukrainian Politburo. They were surrounded in the orchestra and balcony by a sea of blue hats worn by the GPU agents.

My chest was gripped as though in a vice, my throat was parched and I began my monologue unconsciously. What I said, how I acted before those stony faces, I do not know. It was only when the rest of the cast began to appear and the action on stage unfolded that I gathered my senses together.

Seeing the eyes of my colleagues and their pale faces under their greasepaint, I felt that all of us were walking the stage like shadows of mirages and that we had nothing in common with the play, with the scenes or with the action. This was not the theater but some sort of inferno and we, the actors, wandered through it as though walking on burning coals.

The Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Communist Party of the Ukraine, which had decided to force Kurbas to change the entire Berezil' Theater over to "socialist realism," witnessed a production of a very special "realism." An eye-witness of the premiere of *Maklyena Grasa*, George Dyvnych, wrote:

> Kurbas sought Shakespearean realism and the entire production was raised, so to speak, to the Shakespearean style. Here were portrayed colossal passions in their naked, absolute reality....
>
> The classic red draperies with their golden tassels which framed the stage indicated this intention to present a classic Shakespearean production in its post-Shakespearean European

> form, so to speak. Kurbas welded the play, which was interspersed here and there with separate and individual scenes and episodes in the action, into four perfect acts. The Shakespearean realism of Kurbas was a refuge from "socialist realism." "Socialist realism" demanded the type of "truth" which was convenient for the Party. Kurbas' Shakespearean realism gave the truth as it is, the naked insane truth of life.
>
> The theater portrayed the inner life of the main character at its clearest and most typical, in an almost hyperbolized form. The Shakespearean theme of passion, the idea that a man may use even his own death in his gamble with life, demanded of the Berezil' actor the greatest artistic sympathy and the greatest technique. The theater, the actors and the director seemed to feel that *Maklyena Grasa* was their last expression, the apotheosis of fifteen years of endeavor.[24]

Naturally, Postyshev, Kossior and Balitski could not accept such a style. The fate of Kurbas and of those holding his opopinions had already been previously determined as a result of the above-mentioned discussion between Kurbas and Postyshev. After five performances *Maklyena Grasa* was removed from the repertoire by order of the National Commissariat of Education and its publication was forbidden. On demand of the Party, the critics condemned it, classifying it as a "counterrevolutionary infiltration of a class enemy," and Les' Kurbas, at the decision of the Central Committee of the Party, was relieved of his post as the artistic director of Berezil', on the charge of "bourgeois nationalism."

The last act of the "staged" judgment of Kurbas occurred at the meeting of the Board of the National Commissariat of Education, headed by Zatons'kyi. The all-powerful Postyshev and his lackeys determined behind the walls of the Commissariat of Education, in the presence of representatives of cultural-artistic organizations, to announce officially their allegations and accusations against Kurbas. All that had been stated previously was, supposedly, the opinions of the critics and individuals, but now the representatives of the

government spoke. Through the lips of Zatons'kyi and his assistant Khvylia, Kurbas was accused of every possible sin against Communism. He was termed the evil genius of Berezil', who had led the theater into a nationalist abyss. The Party functionaries demanded of the actors unsparing criticism of their teacher and harsh condemnation of all his artistic activities.

The oldest of all the actors present at the meeting, Ivan Maryanenko, had the courage to express his amazement at such a decision on the part of the government. He declared that as a former collaborator with the artists of the "National Theater," he took upon himself the complete responsibility of stating that until Kurbas took over, the Ukrainian theater had never gone beyond the boundaries of a provincial stage, that Kurbas had led this theater out into the world arena and had given the Ukrainian actor a first-class theatrical education. He said further that he could not comprehend the government's action against such a famous leader of Ukrainian culture as Les' Kurbas.

Kurbas was permitted to speak in his own defense, and he addressed his last words to the actor Maryanenko:

"Ivan Oleksandrovych! You're the oldest person among all of us here present, but nevertheless you're a gray-haired child who doesn't understand what's going on here. To whom are you speaking? To this pack of speculators and chameleons who are hiding behind the name of the proletariat? Look at them!"

Then followed a relentless characterization of the Soviet officials who were present, sitting there in the role of prosecutors and judges of Ukrainian art. When the chairman attempted to stop him, Kurbas, disdaining the command, announced that he was speaking for the last time and that he would speak his mind:

"I know that tomorrow I will not have the opportunity to speak. Here, in this crematorium of Ukrainian culture you do

not dare to shut my mouth, for I speak in the name of Ukrainian art which you are destroying."

He then went on to reveal in fiery words the entire barbaric policy of the Commissariat toward art, all the destructive methods of battle against all evidences of growth of Ukrainian art.

From that moment the doors of the Berezil' Theater were forever closed to Les' Kurbas. The next day he left Kharkov. The Berezil' Theater, the creation of his hands, was forced to disavow its teacher and even to change its name.

On the freezing day of December 26, 1933, on a street of friendless, cold Moscow, at nine o'clock in the morning, two agents of the GPU approached Les' Kurbas and indicated that he was to go with them. A GPU car with drawn curtains quickly drove up and they shoved into it this national artist of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic, the most famous director of the Ukrainian theater. A few moments later the gates of the infamous Lubyanka prison closed behind him.

That morning Kurbas had had an appointment for his first conference with the actors of the Maly Theater, the director of which at the time, Amahlobeli, had invited him to produce *Othello* at the Maly. But in the Soviet Union no one knows whether he will ever arrive at his intended destination.

Two days later they transferred Kurbas to Kharkov in a prison van and handed him over to Balitski and Postyshev. Behind the walls of the GPU Kurbas saw for the first time the evil methods of persecuting people of which he had probably heard earlier but which he had not believed existed.

An inhuman, endless process of inquiry began. Kurbas could not at that time be condemned as a criminal against the state because of his activities in the cultural life of the Ukraine and for his work in the Berezil' Theater. The choice of a given play (which had been permitted by the Repertoire Committee) or the use of a realistic or romantic form in a

production were at that time not yet considered a punishable criminal act. But once a person fell into the hands of the GPU, he was designated as a "state criminal."

From his inquisitor Kurbas learned that the Soviet government supposedly knew that he, Kurbas, was a member of an organization whose aim was to overthrow by force of arms the existing governmental structure, the Soviet government. According to the interrogator this organization had a name: The Ukrainian Military Organization.

For four months, until May, 1934, the interrogator could not get an admission from Kurbas of membership in this organization. Specially picked cellmates, whose task was to advise Kurbas to confess, were also unsuccessful. Other psychological and physical methods, among them hypnosis, were likewise unsuccessful. Kurbas was courageous to the end. In May they sent him to the White Sea Canal and then to the labor camp on the Solovetski Islands. There, together with Kulish, Zerov, Irchan, Epyk, and hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian patriots, he suffered unbearable hardship, hunger and cold.

The northern days and nights dragged along until 1937, the terrible year of the Yezhov terror. In that year the short but affectionate letters which his mother had been receiving from him ceased. In the Solovetski labor camp all trace of the great director of the Ukrainian theater Les' Stepanovych Kurbas perished. And in the Ukraine the record of his brilliant theater was erased completely.

The theatrical museum founded by Kurbas destroyed all interpretations, models of stage scenes, pictures, stenographic notes of speeches and lectures given by Kurbas, newspaper articles and criticisms—everything which was reminiscent of the golden period of the Ukrainian theater. Everything was destroyed, so that future generations would know nothing of the loss suffered by Ukrainian theatrical culture.

Notes to *Birth and Death of the Modern Ukrainian Theater.*

1. Antonovych. D., *Trista rokov Ukrains'kovo teatru 1619-1919* [Three Hundred Years of Ukrainian Theater, 1619-1919], Prague, 1925.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

3. *Khokhlushka* is a Russian term for Ukrainian woman, *khokhol* for Ukrainian man. It can be taken as an insult by a Ukrainian, unless used affectionately.

4. Antonovych, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

6. Published in the *Literaturno-kritichnyi al'manakh* [Literary-Critical Almanac], No. 1. 1918.

7. The *vertep* is a production depicting the birth of Christ and the events connected there with. Religious theatrical performances of this kind were very popular in the Ukraine, and the seriousness of the subject matter did not preclude insertions of folk humor. The *vertep* began to appear in the Ukraine early in the seventeenth century, having penetrated from the West no earlier than the fourteenth century. See Antonovych, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

8. Jean Sully Mounet (1841-1916), known as Mounet-Sully, was a famous tragedian in the Comedie-Francaise.

9. Alexander Moissi (1880-1935), a German actor with the Deutsches Theater, was long associated with Max Reinhardt, and it is Reinhardt's production of *Oedipus* which is referred to here.

10. Taken from stenographic notes in the Director's Section. The author was at the meeting.

11. Rulin, P., "Ukrains'kyi Dramatychnyi Teatr za p"yatnadtsyat'-rokiv zhovtnya" [The Ukrainian Theater During Its Fifteen Years

of Existence], *Zhyttya i revolyutsiya* [Life and Revolution], 1932, p. 100.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Rulin, *loc. cit.*

14. Hrudyn, D., "Declarations and Manifestos," *Krytyka* [Criticism], No. 1, 1931, p. 102.

15. Kurbas, Les', "Shlyakhy Berezilya" [Paths of Berezil'], published by VAPLITE, 1927.

16. *Chervonyi shlyakh* [The Red Path], No. 2, 1923.

17. *Nova hromada* [The New Community], Vienna, No. 2, 1923, p. 104.

18. *Barykady teatru,* October, 1923.

19. *Chervonyi shlyakh,* No. 4-5, 1924, pp. 282-283.

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21. *Literaturna hazeta,* No. 8, February 28, 1931.

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