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THE BYELORUSSIAN THEATER AND DRAMA

THE BYELORUSSIAN THEATER AND DRAMA

by

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Mr. Lehrman also edited the entire work and endeavored to unify the style of the other translators with his own. The author wishes to thank him especially for the painstaking attention he has devoted to the manuscript.

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FOREWORD

Perhaps no Soviet cultural endeavor has received more favorable comment from the West and America than the remarkable developments in the theater. In the early days of the new regime, when it was possible for foreigners to visit the Soviet Union with some freedom, many theatrical experts went to gape and wonder at the performances specially staged in the summer theater festivals. The air was electric with the magical names of Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, Meierhold, and Tairov. The brilliant, fresh and often highly original staging of Russian classical and foreign plays profoundly impressed the visitors, and even the relatively dull Soviet drama won acceptance by virtue of the extraordinary acting and mounting of it.

Now all these great directors are dead. The early enthusiasm and wonderful innovating power have vanished. In fact, since the War, no art form has received more furious criticism in the Soviet press than the theater and drama. Students of the subject, now with more information at their command, not a little of it made possible by Soviet displaced persons who had been connected with the theater, have begun to understand more clearly the development of the Soviet theater and why its early revolutionary brilliance has faded to the drab conservative shade that it bears today.

The new forces released by the 1917 Revolution, the fierce desire for change, gripped the theatrical world in the early years of the new regime as they did all art forms. These new impulses inspired a group of highly talented directors to create a revolutionary theater, though some of them were simply realizing to the full, experiments that they had begun before 1917. The Communist Party, however, which soon realized the value of the theater – a form of communal art – as an instrument of Bolshevik propaganda and education, began the slow but steady process of bringing it under Party

control. Some of the old directors struggled against this regimentation, others compromised with it, and a few, like Meierhold, became its victims. By dint of extensive government support, a vast, nationwide theatrical superstructure was raised, and effective education in the theater arts was provided. But by the early 1930's, when the power of Stalinism in the Party had swept all before it, the baleful results of regimentation in the theater became apparent to all. Experimentation – the life force of a great theater – had been virtually eliminated; a version of the Stanislavski system, encumbered by the demands of socialist realism, was forced on all as the prescribed method of staging; and an official emphasis was placed upon the performance of often crude Soviet propaganda plays which discouraged directors and actors and bored the audiences. Worse than this, a climate of fear, entirely inimical to the free expression of art, had been generated in the Soviet theatrical world which soon bogged down in the hopeless red tape and oppression of Party directives. Since the end of World War II, the intensification of Party controls has brought the Soviet theater and drama to their lowest level of artistic demoralization.

Now one of the significant accomplishments of Dr. Seduro's study is to reveal how this total pattern of development in the R.S.F.S.R. has been repeated in the history of the Soviet Byelorussian theater and drama. Hitherto what little has been learned in the West of cultural developments in the national republics has come largely through the medium of Great Russian publications and propaganda. These sources have tended to stress the autonomy of art among the national minorities, and flattering pictures have been presented, under the well-worn slogan of "socialist in content and nationalist in form," of the tremendous impetus given to the development of all manner of indigenous expression in the arts among the minority peoples of the U.S.S.R.

Both as a participator in and an observer of the events and developments he describes, Dr. Seduro, in his book, provides

a scholarly record of the initial realization, under the impetus of revolution, of a wonderful Byelorussian cultural dream of a national theater and drama, a dream that soon turned into a nightmare of interference, persecution and repression by the Communist Party which was determined ultimately to compel all cultural manifestations in the minority republics to conform to a pattern designed in the Kremlin. Dr. Seduro takes the reader step by step through the brilliant efflorescence of the dramatic arts in Byelorussia during the early years after 1917, the heartbreaking struggle over the late 1920's and early 1930's to maintain freedom of movement and independent national elements, and the final enforced submission to the cultural dictates of the Party which today has turned the Byelorussian theater and drama into dull and boring instruments of government propaganda. In the course of this story one perceives the utter sham of the official U.S.S.R. "big brother" cultural nationality policy, which is really a big bully policy in its relations to the national minorities.

Apart from these important political considerations in cultural matters, Dr. Seduro's study is rich in details in his systematic history of the Byelorussian theater and drama – the development of the various theaters, their methods of production, the training of actors, the repertory and an analysis of the significant plays, and accounts of the lives and activities of well-known directors, actors and dramatists. In short, we have in this book the first full-length treatment in English of the Byelorussian theater and drama, based on extensive research, and written with authority by an author whose intimate knowledge of the facts is untrammeled by Soviet censorship. The book is a welcome contribution to all who are interested in theater and drama, and to all serious students of the Soviet Union who will find in its pages a wealth of information on cultural matters and on the complex subject of regimentation in the arts.

ERNEST J. SIMMONS
Columbia University

May 1954

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INTRODUCTION

The last three decades, from 1920 to 1950, have been the most important period in the entire history of the Byelorussian theater. During this, the period of the state theater, the Byelorussian theater possessed a rich repertory and a variety of form and style; it reflected the struggle of the Byelorussian people for their own art. This period will be given thorough consideration later in this study. However, to make the picture more nearly complete and to throw some light on the Byelorussian theater in general, let us begin with an examination of its sources. In this way we shall later be able to analyze more deeply and more completely than otherwise the outstanding landmarks in the development of the contemporary Byelorussian theater.

The history of the Byelorussian theater as an independent branch of the history of art has, most unfortunately, never occupied its proper place, nor does it today. It can even be said that before Frantsishak Alyakhnovich's book *Belaruski teatr* [The Byelorussian Theater] was published (Vilno, 1924), the theme had scarcely been touched upon independently. To be sure, the history of the Byelorussian theater had been described to some extent in connection with the histories of the Russian and Polish theaters. Hence, much information about its historic past is available in several works.[1]

In these works, the history of the Byelorussian theater is included in the histories of the Russian and Polish theaters. As Aleksandr Vaz'nyasenski has correctly remarked, the Byelorussian historian must, from this material, isolate the history of the Byelorussian theater as a separate discipline. This was done with the great tact and taste of a theatergoer by Alyakhnovich, the noted Byelorussian actor and playwright, in his *Belaruski teatr.* Having reviewed the available sources, and using his own experience in the Byelorussian theater, Alyakhnovich compiled in his book a brief but important history

of the theater activities of the Byelorussian people. He began with the ancient dramatizations of rituals, of the *skomorokhi* and of witchcraft, and he continued through the important developments of the folk drama, the *batleika*[a] and the interludes of the school drama. His book ends with the first attempts to create a professional Byelorussian theater at the beginning of this century.

Alyakhnovich used material from many works.[2] The final two sections of his book, which are devoted to the twentieth century, are really the personal reminiscences of a participant in all the Byelorussian theatrical undertakings of the early 1900's.

The Minsk Subsection of the Institute of Byelorussian Culture specifically studied the history of the Byelorussian theater for several years. Its work was directed mainly towards investigating the different materials connected with the history of the theater.

Thanks to the energy of the Subsection's director, Nazar Byvayeŭski ("Yazėp Dyla"), suppressed or unpublished dramatic works by various Byelorussian writers were found in the various archives. These included plays by Mikola Yanchuk, whose pseudonym was Hrymota.

The composite history of the Byelorussian theater was not finished, however. This was because the dissolution of Byelorussian cultural forces began shortly afterwards (1930-1938). Consequently, even the materials of this study were not completely preserved.

The work of Alyakhnovich remains today the sole attempt to write such a history which has both national scope and historical consistency. No modern writer who wishes to continue the history of the Byelorussian theater to the present (when the theater has established a new, official and national trend in its artistic and creative work) can fail to use the material in

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a. The *batleika* was a late medieval type of drama originally connected with the Roman Catholic Church. See below, Chapter 2.—Ed.

Alyakhnovich's book or to be grateful to Alyakhnovich for having facilitated further research.

A critical survey of the Byelorussian theater during the last thirty-odd years will both generalize the experience of the Byelorussian nation in the theater arts and will show the struggle which the artistic world has carried on under the oppression of a totalitarian regime.

Notes to the Introduction

1. Cf. Varneke, B. V., *Istoriya russkovo teatra* [A History of the Russian Theater], 2nd ed., St. Petersburg, 1914; *Ibid.*, 3rd ed., Moscow, 1939; Varneke, *History of the Russian Theater,* tr by Boris Brasol, rev. and ed. by Belle Martin, N.Y., Macmillan, 1951; Rezanov, V. I., *K istorii russkoi dramy. Ekskurs v oblast' teatr iyezuitov* [Towards a History of the Russian Drama. An Excursion into the Theater of the Jesuits], Nezhin, 1910; Rezanov, *Iz istorii russkoi dramy. Shkol'nye deistva 17-18 vv. i teatr iyezuitov* [From the History of the Russian Drama. School Plays of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries and the Theater of the Jesuits], Moscow, 1910; Morozov, P.O., *Ocherki po istorii russkoi dramy* [Essays on the History of the Russian Drama], St. Petersburg, 1888; Morozov, *Istoriya russkovo teatra* [History of the Russian Theater], St. Petersburg, 1889, Vol. I; Famintsin, A. S., *Skomorokhi v Rusi* [*Skomorokhi (Skomorokhi* were singers, actors and musicians in olden Russia who performed mainly comic and acrobatic numbers.—Ed.) in Olden Russia], St. Petersburg, 1889; Windakiewicz, H., *Teatr kollegjów jezuickich w dawnej Polsce* [The Theater of the Jesuit Colleges in Olden Poland], Cracow, 1922; Windakiewicz, *Teatr polski przed powstaniem sceny narodowej* [The Polish Theater Before the Inception of the National Stage], Cracow, 1924; Wójcicki, Kazimierz, *Teatr starożitny v Polsce* [The Olden Theater in Poland], Warsaw, 1841.

2. Cf. Bessonov, Pyotr, *Belorusskiye pesni s podrobnymi ob''yasneniyami ikh tvorchestva i yazyka, s ocherkom narodnovo obryada, obychaya i vsevo byta* [Byelorussian Songs, with Detailed Explanations of Their Creation and Language, with an Essay on Folk Rites, Customs and the Whole Way of Life], Moscow, 1871; Bessonov, *Kaleki perekhozhiye* [Wandering Handicapped Minstrels], Moscow, 1861-1864; Romanov, Ye. R., *Belorusskiye teksty vertepnovo deistva* [Byelorussian Texts of Nativity Puppet Shows], Mogilev, 1898; Shein, P. V., *Belorusskiye narodnye pesni s otnosyashchimisya k nim obryadami, obychayami i suyeveriyami, s prilozheniyem ob''yasnitel'novo slovarya i grammaticheskovo primechaniya* [Byelorussian Folk Songs, with the Rites, Customs and Superstitions Connected with Them and an Appendix Containing a Glossary and Remarks on the Grammar], St. Petersburg, 1874; Karski, Ye. F., *Belorussy* [The Byelorussians], Moscow, 1921, Vols. II and III.

Part I

THE PRE-SOVIET BYELORUSSIAN THEATER

Chapter 1

THE MIDDLE AGES

From prehistoric times on, every people has possessed its instincts for amusing itself, for dramatic activity, along with those for self-preservation. These first instincts found expression in the whole range of ceremonies pertaining to different rites and cults.

For reasons of climate and economics, the Greeks developed culturally before most other peoples. Among the Greeks, these ceremonies were transformed into a theater, in the full sense of the word. The ancient, classical cult of Dionysus was an embryonic form of the later Greek theater.

Among the Byelorussians also, dramatic elements first appeared in the songs and games of cults and rites which contained elements of dramatic action. The various games, dances, forms of magic and holidays of the Byelorussian people reveal many dramatic devices in their different types of dialogue, mimicry and other actions. As the Russian scholar Pyotr Bessonov has correctly stated in his *Belorusskiye pesni* (and as Frantsishak Alyakhnovich has repeated in his *Belaruski téatr*), the Byelorussians have always felt the need for a theater. The olden precursors of the theater satisfied this need through the various pagan feasts and games closely connected with cults. These furnished the basis for subsequent dramatic activity. This dramatic element consisted mainly of pagan songs and rites, but the opposition of Christianity to them prevented them from developing into a genuine folk theater. The observance of such holidays as St. John's Eve (*Kupal'le*)[a] and

a. The Eve of St. John (The Baptist) is celebrated by the Orthodox Church on June 24th (old style). Orthodox secular organizations changed from the Julian (old style) to the Gregorian (new style) calendar only after the tsarist regime had collapsed in 1917; the Russian Orthodox Church, however, continues to use the Julian calendar to this day.—Ed.

Christmas (*Kalyada*)[b] was accompanied by many different songs and rites. At the feast of St. John's Eve, all nature—the grass, the trees, the animals—lives, speaks and moves in harmony with man. At Christmas, the plants, such as the hop, hemp, poppy, and millet, are active. People dress up to imitate such birds and animals as the goose, bear, crane, lizard, nanny goat and billy goat; these creatures are also active in the games named for them. In connection with all this, the goat became traditional and later passed into many folk dramas and tragedies. Many songs were composed about it, such as "Ho-ho-ho, kozan'ka" [Ho-ho-ho, Little Goat].

In relation to the goat image, the creative activity of the Byelorussian people has occupied the leading position among all Slavic peoples down to the present. The representations of the goat contain certain significant dramatic elements. These include the disguise of the reversed sheepskin coat, the headdress of a goat's head with horns, bells and, ribbons or a white blouse with a goat's head sewn on. (The head is made of wooden boards banged together by means of a string which represent the lips and teeth of the goat.)

These ancient traditions of the folk stage were long and clearly preserved in the artistic practice of the so-called *skomorokhi*.[c] These were professionals in antique acting. From the eleventh century until almost the middle of the seventeenth, the *skomorokhi* amused the masses with their humorous presentations in streets, squares, fields, and villages. They amused the masses and the boyars in the banquet halls of the palaces and in the manor houses. To the accompaniment of the music and singing of the *skomorokhi*, the people themselves took part in the games; they found an outlet for their need of unbounded happiness and healthy revelry

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b. The Byelorussian names of these holidays clearly indicate their pagan origin, just as the etymology of "Easter" does in English.—Ed.

c. See p. xiv, Footnote 1.—Ed.

in songs, capers, dances, laughter, and clapping. Thus, the people forgot their sorrows and escaped from the drabness of everyday life. This in indicated by a couplet from one song: "Piper, piper, come play your pipe / Let me soon forget my grief."[d]

The Christian clergy later attacked these popular entertainments, calling them "pagan deviltry" and "mockery and blasphemy." Despite this, however, the people liked the presentations of the wandering *skomorokhi* and did not abandon their pagan customs. The *skomorokhi* disguised themselves in various costumes; they put on masks and beards. They acted out different everyday scenes representing beasts and human beings; they entertained the people with various jokes, farces and masquerades. They used the creative work of the people, such as songs, music and proverbs, to a great extent. This corresponded to the tastes of the masses and pleased them.

In the course of time, however, the struggle of the clergy against the "sinners" over the irrepressible joy and carousing of the *skomorokhi* became more intense. The regimes limited this "devilish" activity more and more. Hence, by the middle of the seventeenth century, the *skomorokhi* disappeared. Their traditions were preserved in the practise of stragglers and of the so-called Christmas singers (*Koilyadoŭsbchiki*). These last wandered from house to house and village to village at Easter (*Vyalikdzen'*) and Christmas. The traditions were also preserved in the division of labor of these Christmas singers; they had pouch bearers, beginners and assistants (or "yes-men"), and musicians. But this, as distinguished from the *skomorokhi*, was not a company of professional actors but a temporary grouping of people who performed on certain holidays.

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d. Throughout this volume no attempt will be made to reproduce the meter or rhyme scheme of the poetry quoted by the author. The form of the verse will, however, be indicated wherever appropriate. –Ed.

As a result of the creative activity of the *skomorokhi,* however, humorous scenes from folk life passed in some form into the ***batleika***[e] and the interludes of the school dramas. Included in the latter, they continued to exist as an element of folk drama.

Extraordinarily little is known about the theatrical and general artistic life of medieval Bylorussia. Recurrent wars completely wiped out a great number of cultural monuments, manuscripts and other indications of Byelorussian folk works of the past. However, the historical chronicles and archive materials which do survive give us sufficient evidence to state that the artistic and theatrical work of that time was on a rather high level. The people produced many talented individuals who entered the castles of princes and kings. There, these persons exchanged their sheepskin coats and bast shoes for foreign, figured camisoles. They created models of professional art and fulfilled the artistic requirements of the élite of their times.

This can be affirmed especially with regard to the so-called golden period of Byelorussian culture which flourished during the age of the Grand Duchy of Byelorussia and Lithuania. The high point of this development coincided with the Renaissance (in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries). Following the example of Europe,[f] the princes began to adopt a rich court life. In the palaces, there were balls, banquets, concerts, splendid and luxurious receptions, and complete theatrical presentations. In those times the Byelorussian language was predominant throughout higher society. Introduced into state use as the official language by Prince Olherd as early as the middle of the fourteenth century, the Byelorussian language remained the only one in which the laws and literature of the Grand Duchy of Byelorussia and Lithuania were written until

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e. See Footnote 2.—Ed.

f. In Byelorussian usage, the word "Europe" does not include any of the Russian lands.—Ed.

the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Suffice it to recall the Byelorussian editions of the noted Lithuanian Statute[g] in 1529, 1566 and 1588 and that earlier monument of juridical writing in Byelorussian –the *Statute of King Kazimir* in 1468. This was really the period of rebirth, both for the great traditions of Polotsk (the cradle of ideas concerned with politics, government and cultural originality) and for the influence of Western European culture.

The legislation of Byelorussia at that time permitted persons of all conditions to go abroad for education, for professional study, for the pursuit of knightly quests, or simply for greater personal happiness. Many people left Byelorussia to study at the universities in Prague, Bologna, Venice, Leipzig, Cracow, and other European cities. Such a person, for example, was the first Byelorussian printer, Frantsishak Skaryna of Polotsk. Culture, education and enlightenment spread. The reform movement introduced diverse trends of religious and– later–secular thought into the life of Byelorussia.

The Renaissance, coming from Italy, aroused a universal interest in art. The wife of one of the Princes Zyhimont was the daughter of a Prince of Bari of the noted Sforza family. This facilitated the spread of Italian cultural traditions into Poland and Byelorussia. Individuals began to study singing, musical composition, orchestral music, and how to play the organ, the clavichord, the lute, the flute, and the violin. The need and demand for artists, coupled with the shortcomings of foreign masters, compelled the boyars and princes to pay more and more attention to the talents of local individuals. For this very reason, conditions were created which favored the appearance of Byelorussian art. Naturally talented individuals who came from the people itself quickly mastered the manners and etiquette of cultured society; very often they mastered aesthetic difficulties also and attained supremacy

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g. The collection of laws of the Grand Duchy of Byelorussia and Lithuania.

in ensemble art. At this time Byelorussians held positions in choirs, orchestras, theater and ballet companies; they frequently produced first-class talents of European renown. Thus, among the performers of that period—the famous actors, singers and other musicians—the chronicles contain such names as those of the singer and composer Symon Pyatka, the singers Saŭka Tabiyashak and Yury Vyarbkovich, the flautist Andrėi Kulakoŭski, the cymbalist Kryshtapor Pravinski and the instrumentalists Mikola Klaŭs, Pavel Badonski, Yuri Radziminski and Yanka Kuraŭski.

Tabiyashak and Vyarbkovich became particularly famous. Even the dry chronicles, recording that time, were unable to omit excited mention of their performances. Tabiyashak had an exceptionally enchanting lyrical tenor of rare beauty, gentleness and resiliency. A contemporary writer has borne witness to the strength of this voice by calling it "more beautiful than a siren's." Vyarbkovich was a basso of unusual might and power. According to the chronicle, "his voice drowned out the most powerful organs and caused the glass in the windows to rattle."[1] The Grand Duke and King himself, together with his courtiers, did not miss any opportunity of hearing these "local marvels"; they all took pride in such singers and boasted about the pair to their guests. Upon going abroad, they took the singers with them to demonstrate the ability of Byelorussian artistic genius to an astonished Europe.

Following the pattern of the court, the most important aristocrats, in their numerous castles and palaces, also maintained artistic salons; they established theaters and promoted the artistic life of the country in every way they could. Thus, the homes of the local princes—Kurbski, Slutski, Radziwill (at Nesvizh), Sapieha (at Drui), and of the Hetman Khadkevich—seemed to be in competition with each other in the variety of arts which they offered. Among them, the marionette theater and the *batleika* underwent a special development; they had choral, instrumental and other kinds of supplements.

Young people in the universities were carried along by the general cultural development and the humanistic trend; they added not a little of their own creative work. At all the universities of Europe in which Byelorussian young people studied, the artistic disciplines–poetics and music–were taught as part of the classical "seven liberal arts." They were, therefore, compulsory for all students. The whole university atmosphere was permeated with an interest in art and its practice. Small skits, soirées and theaters encouraged the love, knowledge and appreciation of art. These produced a group of actors, singers, composers, and instrumentalists. The original works of such Byelorussian writers of the time as Frantsishak Skaryna, Symon Budny, Vasil' Tsyapinski, Andréi Rymsha, Lyavon Sapeha, Laŭrén Zizani, and Kazimir Pashkevich furnished evidence of the high cultural level of art and literature during that age.

Skaryna's career was exceptionally broad and varied, including science, publishing and literature. Yet he did not fail to remind his readers of the significance of art and, in particular, of "music and also singing."[2] Influenced by the centers of culture, Byelorussian folk works acquired a new quality about this time. They became more polished, more professional both in form and technique. Byelorussian folk art became enriched with new forms and genres, as well as with the appearance of a number of professional performers. Among these new genres was the popular drama, the *batleika*.

Chapter 2

THE *BATLEIKA*

After the decline of the Greco-Roman theater of antiquity, the theater was revived in Western Europe during the Middle Ages through the so-called religious drama. The Catholic clergy sought to influence the hearts of the masses by every method. Knowing that the people were inclined to theatrical performances, the clergy seized upon this instinctive liking and used it to dramatize religious services. The effects of religious pomp, processions and the various holiday ceremonies attracted the broad masses through the dramatic element to participate in the cult. The people did not always, however, decipher the contents of Christian dogma.

The road upon which Christ entered Jerusalem was shown, for example, covered with brocade and stewn with flowers; Christ, played by a boy, was riding on an ass. A large number of church attendants with brilliant gonfalons sang holy songs and piped so pleasantly as to transport the listener to the other world.

At Christmas, Catholic churches and monasteries showed evangelical scenes of Christ's birth. A figurine, the newborn Christ, lay on the hay in a manger; at its sides stood the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. A grotto was constructed containing a coffin in which a doll represented the dead Christ. The tortures of Christ were depicted by individuals who had previously memorized their parts.

These scenes later developed into complete religious performances and were called mysteries and miracle plays. They depicted miracles and the lives of the saints; they introduced personifications of such abstract conceptions as good and evil.

Gradually, the religious drama quit the church building for the church square; there, different humorous and satirical

scenes began to supplement it. Such scenes kept widening the separation between the religious drama and the church. They caused the former to be transferred from the church square to the public square. A theater was constructed in three horizontal sections on the public square to represent Paradise, Earth and Hell.

At this point, travelling marionette theaters began to appear with puppets instead of actors. The precursors of plays included the church *batleika,* the *szopka* and the *jasielka.*[a] Productions were given in the enormous show-booths of the monasteries and the Roman Catholic churches; in content, these resembled the religious drama. Such scenes were shown as the birth of Christ and the Adoration of the Magi; King Herod and the Biblical scenes dealing with Adam and Eve were also presented. Interpolated among these themes were scenes from folk life, with its dances, taverns, drunkards, barmaids, and devils.

These amused the people until the church attendants occasionally began chasing away those whose hilarity was too boisterous. Finally, the bishops forbade these shows in the churches. By that time, however, the broad masses of people were fond of this kind of theater and demanded it. Consequently, many entrepreneurs turned up eager to make money from this simple but profitable business. This was all the easier because the puppet theater presented no involved problems of transportation. With puppets substituting for live actors, the theater became cheap to operate and easy to move. It also permitted as great an increase in the number of the cast as was needed. Thus, the problem of the repertory was simplified. There was no need for wardrobes or make-up because such things were arranged permanently beforehand.

Having developed from the religious drama and the medieval mystery play in Germany, the *batleika* passed through Poland to Byelorussia. Once there, it spread quickly as a

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a. The *szopka* and *jasielka* were Polish nativity plays.—Ed.

result of the efforts of both the monasteries and of the mendicant brotherhoods.[b] Soon it was adapted for the most popular and widespread holiday entertainments.

At the beginning, the main play in the *batleika* repertory was the Christmas mystery, including the birth of Christ, the Adoration of the Magi and the Shepherds. This explains the origin of the word *batleika.*[c]

The Byelorussian *batleika* contained interludes from folk life. Various aspects of daily life were colorfully depicted. In contrast to the school drama with its interludes, the *batleika* came from the art of the people; it approached folk life considerably more closely and spontaneously than did the school drama; the *batleika* reflected the world of the Byelorussian peasantry much more clearly and expressively. This won it popular esteem and success. Hence, the *batleika* existed among the Byelorussian people almost until the First World War.

The structure of the Byelorussian *batleika* was comparatively simple: it consisted of a medium-sized box in which puppets moved, suspended on wires passed through a board beneath them. The person who worked the puppets was hidden below the box; he spoke the various roles in different voices. The floor of the stage was covered with hare skins to stop the spectators from seeing the slots along which the puppets moved. There were two plans of action: the serious part and the scenes from folk life. In accordance with this division, the Byelorussian *batleika* contained two levels. One, usually the upper one, was for serious action; the other, for interludes. A six-pointed, star-shaped lantern, made of thick paper and polished with oil, was usually carried as part of the *batleika.* This was affixed to an enormous pole and its points (or rays) were whirled around on a spindle by means of ropes

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b. The mendicant brotherhoods were laymen organized about the Orthodox Church to help disseminate the faith of that Church.—Tr.

c. *Batleika* comes from the noun *Betleyem,* meaning Bethlehem.

and pulleys. Generally, either the sun or a round, human face was painted on one side of the lantern; the other depicted the Adoration of the Magi or something similar. A candle in the middle illuminated the figures and the entire lantern. The lantern bearers and the other participants sang religious songs and Christmas carols as a prologue.

The interludes of the *batleika* consisted of various current narratives, such as jokes and humorous histories (*facetiae*), international in origin and development. These were adapted to fit the particular local conditions of the people.

As time went by, the *batleika* produced its own pattern for writing plays and its own form for producing them. The comedian, however, could insert his own interpolations, generally of a folk content and character. Being concerned with comic success among local Byelorussian audiences, the authors were compelled to increase the folk life elements constantly. The favorite and most widespread ***batleiki*** contained scenes showing the Byelorussian peasant in different circumstances; they showed his tragic conflicts with the landed proprietors and humorous scenes in which a gypsy tried to outwit and deceive him. The peasant straightens the gypsy out in his own fashion.

Often there were scenes showing a doctor, teacher or student; these characters were generally depicted as perverted and ridiculous people in conflict with the simple and genuine muzhik. Someone's wife was shown, either punished for her infidelity or punishing her husband for his drunkeness. There were humorous sketches of gypsies, swindling as they dealt in horses.

Only as the end of the nineteenth century did the ethnographers start recording *batleika* texts. This was done in the cities (where they were most Russified, particularly in their religious content). But the *batleika* was widespread; it was found even in the most remote hamlets, villages and courtyards. The *batleika* texts were frequently altered; each comedian adapted them for himself and added something of

his own. Much oral material was added to them. These included stories told by some lover of books, or by some widely travelled soldier who had had many adventures, or by some aged person who had preserved the richness of olden Byelorussian folklore. Consequently, the *batleika* contained a mixture of various influences: from books, from the people and from abroad.

This was exhibited both in language and content. The folk nature of the *batleika* under different governmental conditions might have furnished the basis for a genuine folk theater. Folk interludes, after all, were the source of the Western European theater and produced both the Italian comedy and, to a certain extent, the plays of Shakespeare.

The Byelorussian *batleika* greatly influenced the development of the Russian theater. Bessonov wrote:

> Foreign [i.e., non-Russian—Ed.] performances bore fruit among us. Because of [Simeon] Polotski[d] and similar newcomers, the court in the times of Aleksei [Mikhailovich], Sofiya [Alekseyevna] and Peter [the Great][e] was entertained by famous mystery plays of Byelorussian origin. Despite their serious content (e.g., *O strashnom sude* [On the Last Judgment]), these were sometimes called comedies. This was the beginning of our [Russian] public theater. Shortly afterwards, under the influence of the court, a genuine art theater was gradually created with foreign assistance.[3]

In more recent times, the most famous *batleiki* have been *King Herod* and *Tsar Maksimil'yan.* These were very popular, with their lavish pageantry; the people saw kings and queens in crowns and glittering vestments, knights, warriors, Cossacks, the Devil, Death with his scythe, and the Serpent-

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d. Simeon Polotski (1629-1680) was brought to Moscow from Kiev by Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich. Polotski tutored the Tsar's children and was the first man to publish rhymed and didactic verse in Moscow. Polotski's real name was Sitnyanovich.—Ed.

e. In time, this would be from 1645 to 1725.—Ed.

Uhlan,[f] peasants, Turks, gypsies, doctors, asses, bullocks, angels and trumpeters. While the action was going on, they sang sacred and joyous songs and played such instruments as reed pipes and bagpipes. There were many events, including fights, deaths and resurrections; much coarse folk humor and many puns were also present; so were satires, proverbs and popular expressions.

For the performance of *King Herod,* the stage was divided into three parts. The central section was the largest; this was for the performance itself, while the side sections were for entrances and exits. The upper stage showed the Nativity and contained hay, cows and sheep. Over the stage hung three stars of brightly colored paper. The action took place in darkness; there were no windows. The lower stage represented the residence of King Herod, with his canopied throne. Besides *King Herod,* the production contained scenes from life.

Ye. R. Romanov has described the contents of such a performance.

The action begins on the upper stage. Two shepherds in Byelorussian peasant dress approach the manager, bowing before the newborn Christ; at the same time, a chorus sings sacred songs (the so-called *kantychki*).

Then the action moves to the lower stage, containing Herod's throne. Three warriors enter. King Herod enters, crown on head and in a red robe; he sits on the throne. The chorus explains the action in song.

The upper stage shows St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary with the Child. Three kings enter. An angel appears. The chorus sings in explanation of the action. All the characters gesticulate according to the contents of the singing. St. Joseph crosses the stage, the Virgin Mary with Christ following after on an ass. An angel meets her, hails her and orders her to go to Egypt.

On the lower stage Herod summons a magician. Having

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f. The Serpent-Uhlan was a folklore character.—Ed.

learned of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, Herod sends warriors there to slaughter all the newborn infants. The warriors return and report that they have killed fourteen thousand infants, and that only Rachel would not surrender her child to be killed and has come to beg for mercy.

Rachel enters, a poor Byelorussian women in appearance, with a child in her arms. On Herod's order, they kill her child. Grief-stricken and weeping, she runs about the stage and curses Herod, predicting that he will go to Hell. She is sent away. The magician too foretells death for Herod. He in turn orders his warriors to stand in the doorways and not to let Death in. But a Catholic priest (*bastyr*) also predicts that Herod will go to Hell.

Death bursts in upon the scene, and the warriors flee. The Devil helps Death cut off Herod's head. He holds the corpse while the chorus sings:

Poor man,
Remember your final hour!
.....
Death always keeps in mind
  Every man;
He does not forget the monarch,
Or patriarch—
  Nobody.
Both monks from their cells
And princes without fear
  Death takes.
Poor man,
Do not be proud.
.....[g]

The play ends as the Devil descends with Herod below the stage.[4]

Scenes from folk life were occasionally introduced into the plays. Usually, they had little connection, if any, with the passage of the main, or serious, action. Often the scenes

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g. The prevailing rhyme form in the excerpts cited in this chapter is a very loose kind of couplet.—Ed.

from folk life were shown separately, as independent dramatic excerpts. They were generally presented in the lively language of the Byelorussian people. These scenes exhibited the full range of folk art.

The skit *Matsei and the Doctor,* for example, pokes fun at gluttony and the popular method of treating it medically. A peasant comes onstage and explains that he has fallen ill; while going about visiting on Christmas Eve, he has overeaten:

Oh! Oh! Oo-oo-oo!
Oh, my good people there,
I was at neighbor Ihnat's[h] on Christmas Eve;
Had such a good time,, I couldn't make it home.
What didn't my Maryya[i] do!
She stuck a pot on my belly,
And a nettle. She boiled up and swore,
And rubbed me in the tub like a nurse.
But, oh my God, nothing helped me
Or—what's more—suited me!
They suggested apple *kvass*[j] for me,
Fresh moss, thistles,
Oak gall, milksop—all no use—
Even beetroot *kvass,*
Savory, gillyflowers, peas
—Yes—and something more besides.
All these drinks you have to lump
And swallow down at once.
Three times I drank. It was no use—
Everything inside was worse.
Now I have thought it out, and say
"I'm off to see a doctor
So's to cure my damned tummy."
I'll give him a small sack of money.

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h. Instead of the name Ihnat, the name of the notorious local character most likely to provoke laughter may be substituted.

i. Instead of Mariya, Anna or Ul'yana—or whatever the name of the local character's wife is—may be substituted.

j. *Kvass* is any soft drink made from grain, fruit or vegetables.—Ed.

The doctor beats Matsei with a stick, adding, "Sweat, sweat, my good Matsei!" The scene ends either with the flight of the doctor or of Matsei, with a brawl between them, or with the cured Matsei singing and dancing with his wife.

There are other skits also. Romanov cites one in which a gypsy enters, shouting:

Oh! oh! Chachyn'ka, Chachyn'ka![k]
Where've you gone, my little jade?
Come here, little filly, little filly!

Suddenly, out of the wings, the horse flies at the gypsy. He is stupefied. His wife comes in:

Wife: Well, what's come over you? Got the croup, or got fat?

Husband: Neither croup nor fat. My liffle filly's trampled me. And where on earth have you been, wife?

The dialogue ends with kissing and dancing.[5]

Many skits are reminiscent of folklore motifs preserved down to the present in the art and rites of the people. The little skit, *Anton Leads the Goat,* for example, illustrates the Christmas custom of walking with a goat. *The Woman Who Tells Fortunes* is an original parody on popular exorcisms in which the woman (*baba*)[l] casts an incantation over a sleeping Cossack:

Seven winters have come and gone,
I have been clothed and fixed up
With pincers and rolls.
The sorcerers and hatters
Have sewn and ironed...
Stop, get off
My backbone....
Get up, my fine Cossack,
You handsome person!

The Merchant is a skit satirizing merchant life. *The Polish*

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k. *Chachyn'ka* is the horse's name.—Ed.

l. The word *baba* means "woman," but not in the literary sense. Although it has no exact English equivalent, such American slang words as "dame," "skirt" and "femme" approach it.—Ed.

Gentleman and the Young Lady mocks empty gentility. The local life of the people gave rise to such skits as *Two Knights;* the knights are either a Christian and a Moslem, or Alexander the Great and Porus of India. The lament of his widow over the slain Porus was filled with local complaints about the bitter lot of the wife of an evil peasant. The inconsolable grief of the woman or of hired laborers under a harsh landed proprietor is shown through irony:

Oh, my master, my master!
Oh, my beloved master!
You always loved me!
You always respected me!
Once a day you fed me.
Twice a day you beat me.
.....
I shall pull you, my little darling,
To a very deep pit!

Thus, the *batleika* approached a realistic portrayal of life. The language of the characters was particularly conducive to this; it included the lively speech of the peasants. Foreign characters lisped, stuttered, talked through their noses and made guttural sounds; they also used Polish, Tatar, German and Church Slavonic words. To be sure, the *batleika,* as a conventional form of comedy, demanded this by its very nature. Its purpose was to make the people laugh as much as possible through its entertaining sketches and protagonists.

These peculiarities, however, enabled the *batleika* to exist as a folk theater for a long time. As Bessonov stated, until the Rebellion of 1863 there was no corner of Byelorussia without its wandering buffoon and old *batleika* box. The latter had passed from hand to hand and was carefully remade or reconditioned.[6] Everywhere, particularly in the small towns, there was at least one such presentation during the Christmas season. Only the constant fighting cut short this folk entertainment in 1863.

Later, even on the eve of the First World War, scattered *batleika* players could be seen in the countryside. That war,

however, wiped out the *batleika* permanently.

Mention should be made, however, of Stanislava Korf's attempts to revive the *batleika* repertory in the Byelorussian orphanage at Vilno. Shows were put on for the children there in 1915 and 1916.

Along with the last stages of the travelling *batleika*, special puppet theaters for children were developed. The repertory created for these latter by professional playwrights was far removed from the folk repertory of the *batleika*. This was a professional theater, not a folk theater. The *batleika* is now preserved only in the memories of the oldest theatergoers. With the passing of these people, even this is disappearing. The *batleika* itself will pass into a branch of the history of the Byelorussian folk theater.

Chapter 3

THE SCHOOL DRAMA AND COMEDY

The so-called school drama was widely disseminated in Western Europe by the end of the fifteenth century. It appeared chiefly because of the practical demands connected with the study of Latin by the students of various schools. With these needs in mind, the schools hired special teachers who, besides teaching the usual Latin classes, wrote special plays in that language for presentation by the students. Gradually, these presentations became an integral part of school life. The Jesuits, desiring to take the entire education of the young into their own hands, showed special zeal for these presentations. They found that the drama was a powerful means for propagandizing their views and for instructing young students in accordance with their religious beliefs. They introduced the school drama into Byelorussia. The first performance of a school drama in Byelorussia took place at Vilno in 1574; others followed: at Pinsk in 1662; at Novogradok in 1681; at Minsk in 1692; at Slutsk in 1715; at Nesvizh in 1723; at Polotsk in 1723; at Vitebsk in 1766; and at Slonim in 1769. The other schools in Byelorussia–Uniate and Russian Orthodox–also began to use school plays which soon became widely disseminated.

These plays usually dealt with evangelical scenes or subjects from antiquity. Gods, kings and outstanding classical heroes were shown; earthquakes, hurricanes and special adventures were depicted. Many fantastic creatures were portrayed on the stage, such as spirits, dragons, devils in hell, angels in paradise, the gods of Olympus and allegorical figures. In order to attract student participation in a play, the cast sometimes numbered two hundred or more. Therefore, the author could not endow them with the characteristics and dramatic motivation which they needed.

Hence, the composition of the plays suffered, but no one involved cared particularly about art. The moral and didactic tasks clearly outweighed the artistic. The plays written were tendentious, allegorical and remote from the concrete truth of life.

The relationships in the plays were devoid of life. This caused the students to consider acting as a compulsory school activity, as a part of the curriculum. Kazimierz Wójcicki, the historian of the olden theater in Poland, relates an incident that occurred on the Jesuit school stage at Polotsk. During one performance, the student playing the role of the torso of St. John was lying on the stage with his head covered; he fell asleep and began to snore. A second student, seated beneath the stage, represented the severed head of St. John; this student began to laugh out loud, causing the whole audience to burst into laughter.[7]

Many persons in the audiences did not understand the language of these plays. The Latin language and the aims of pedagogy defeated the artistic enterprise of actors and authors alike. Some means had to be found to put life into this moribund and moralistic theater, and thus the so-called interludes (or *intermediae*) were introduced. These were short, gay sketches shown between the acts of the play. While the stage sets were being changed for the following act, these humorous skits from folk life were shown downstage in front of the curtain. Their main function was to give the audience respite from the serious and complex content of the play and to divert the people, exhausted as they were by the school drama.

Gods, kings and ancient heroes played no part in these skits. On the contrary, persons such as peasants, gypsies, soldiers, and women were depicted. Various anecdotes, humorous stories and funny tales from peasant life all offered rich material for these interludes.

All characters of so-called simple extraction spoke Byelorussian. Only those in contact with the upper strata of society

or subject to Polonization were allowed to speak a foreign language—and then, not Latin but Polish.

Thus, the interlude was both true to life and contained the language of the people. In the course of time, the interlude became so popular that it was even introduced into the textbooks on the art of the school drama. In practice, the school drama came to include a large body of interlude literature.

In the choice of interludes for a school drama, those picked usually corresponded to the play in content; this connection, however, was often approximate and sometimes quite remote. Thus, the humorous interlude about the drunken peasant who became king was usually selected to accompany the school drama of the Prodigal Son.

The Prodigal Son leaves his father's house; the peasant goes into town, gets drunk there and, on the way back, falls down by the roadside and goes to sleep. As a joke, some soldiers dress him up in royal garments. The Prodigal Son also falls asleep, among his own peoole while he is drunk. The peasant wakes up and thinks he is a king, for the soldiers wait on him. He gets drunk and again falls asleep. The Prodigal Son wakes up and discovers that his friends have robbed him; the peasant, upon waking up again, realizes that he is only a poor, ragged muzhik.

In the Byelorussian adaptation of Peter Barika's play *The Peasant Who Becomes King,* the action continually alternates between the drama and the interludes. The second variant of this play is interesting because certain Byelorussian folk songs are introduced, such as "The Big Owl Sits on One Snowball Tree, the Little Owl on Another."

Sometimes the interlude replaced the prologue and the epilogue of the play. For example, before the beginning of the Joseph comedy, a Byelorussian peasant named Ivan enters the auditorium. He is the hero of the interlude and delivers the prologue. Ivan expresses surprise at the large number of people in the audience, asking the school attendants:

> Gentlemen, what sort of thing are they having here?
> There's not going to be a wedding here, is there?

Immediately, a question-and-answer type of conversation is struck up between Ivan and one of the attendants. The latter explains the contents of the play.

"And will there be a devil with horns?" Ivan asks.

Just then, the Devil appears and begins to badger the peasant, who finds it difficult to get rid of him. The audience laughs.

During the performance, Ivan sits in the audience, making remarks to amuse the spectators who find nothing joyful in the play. After the last act of the play, there is another interlude in which Ivan is again the chief character.

The fact of the matter is that Jesuit authors represented non-Catholics as funny or even ridiculous so that the audience would laugh a good deal at other denominations. Russian Orthodox authors directed their humor against the Roman Catholics or the Uniates (Greek Catholics).[a] Take the skit in which Ivan, who is Russian Orthodox, argues against some Uniate beadles; they are trying to persuade him to accept their faith. Ivan's reply clearly illustrates the religious struggle of those times:

> Our soothing faith is good. In fact, to tell the truth, it is the most Polish—yes—and the most Uniate for the Pole, the Uniate, the landlord, the [Russian] Orthodox, and the cold muzhik. For the muzhiks, it is a good muzhik faith. Our faith is old, to tell the truth, and the world isn't young....

As much as the Uniate beadles extol the superiority of their faith and threaten him, Ivan holds his own:

> What you say is like a goat looking into the water. If your faith is both high and deep, will an old fool understand it? If this faith is bright, then we sinners won't be able to come close to it.
>
> May the Lord be praised and the Devil take fever, but I won't become a Uniate because my parents weren't, and they too

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a. The Uniate Church is a union of the Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic, recognizing the powers of the Pope. It is also called the Eastern Rite of the Roman Catholic Church. The Uniate movement began in 1595-96.—Ed.

ate bread, drank wine and weren't left without their tavern. What will this faith of yours offer me?

Ivan replies to threats of hell in purely peasant fashion:

Why, I'll get along even in hell! I'll fetch a little water and chop a little wood. I'll get really filled up on a little bread....

Only when a Uniate applies coercion and burns Ivan's finger with a candle does Ivan yield, thinking the flame is hell fire. "By God, it hurts," says Ivan. "It hurts my very soul! I will be a Uniate if that keeps me out of hell!"

This interlude scene indirectly reflects both the religious compulsion by the Uniates and peasant folk motifs. This compulsion took place in Byelorussia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Uniates, however, did not win over the majority of the people who, convinced that their way of life was correct, retained their faith together with their national character.

Despite the author's intention of fleering the muzhik in *Haŭryla-durnila,* the muzhik reveals much artless, innate intelligence and answers his antagonist boldly and logically. The author's wishes to the contrary, the peasant evokes sympathy and understanding. The fact that the muzhik agrees to become a Uniate is caused by the compulsory tendentiousness dominating the structure of all Jesuit school dramas. A sense of truth pierces this conventional tendentiousness and appears in the uprightness of the characters.

As an example of the drama in Russian Orthodox schools, scenes may be cited from a Byelorussian interlude of Smolensk. This is found in a mid-eighteenth century collection. It also has a scene describing how a slightly intoxicated peasant stumbles into a Roman Catholic church, and, catching the sound of the music, starts to dance:

And then they began to strum not as we do at *obednya*[b] but as they do at *msza.*[c] So I'd fallen into one of their

b. *Obednya* means Orthodox mass.—Ed.

c. *Msza* means Roman Catholic mass; the word is Polish and comes from the Latin *missa.*—Ed.

churches. And then they began playing: someone on the reed pipes, someone else on the bagpipes, and still somebody else on the drums. Then, meaning nothing bad, I set about dancing.

Later on in the play, there is a meeting between his son and a satirically depicted Pole.

Thus, humorous scenes from folk life were reflected in the interludes. So were the position of the peasantry, their attitude to knowledge and their outlook on life. The abyss that had opened between the laboring people and the upper strata of society and the absence of mutual understanding between them were also shown. Scenes designed to ridicule the peasant for his ignorance and stupidity expressed the identity and originality of the Byelorussian people. For native speakers of Byelorussian, Polish was a foreign language. It is debatable whether the peasant in the eighteenth-century interlude now to be cited was really stupid. Might his answers not be evidence of some wit and irony? For the most part, he obviously pretends not to understand; actually, he leads his opponents—students and educated gentlemen—around by the nose:

(*Onstage: a peasant and some students. The peasant sees them and stops....*)

Peasant: Oh, damn this road! I'm as tired as a dog! Having greeted the clear sun, the beautiful moon and you, gentlemen, I'll sit down for a while. (*He thinks of his son Bautruk and laments that such a muzhik's son cannot study. A student runs up to him.*)

Student: [*The student talks throughout in Polish and Latin.* —Ed.] *A ty, mużyk, co ty masz sprawę?* [And you, muzhik, what are you doing?]

Peasant: I'm no music [*muzyka*—Tr.], sir, I'm no horn, but sometimes I blow in my fist like a trumpet when the children go about the hut chattering from the cold.

S.: *Ale co ty masz za sprawę?* [But what are you doing?]

P.: No sir, I can't read or write. I don't know how to decide things, and if I get into an argument [*possorilsya*—Ed.]

with my neighbors, why then, the village policeman does the judging.

S.: *Czy masz jaką potrzebę?* [What are you after?]

P.: What now, my fine fellow, I haven't any camisole, all right, so that the *svitka*[d] is on my back.

S.: *Głupi chłop, jak ciele.* [A stupid fellow—like a calf.]

P.: There was a calf [*telyonok*—Ed.] but it died.

S.: *Dyskutuje, jak grochu sie objadłszy.* [He does on as if stuffed with peas.]

P.: I've children, young sir, like beans, but no bags of peas.

S.: *Darmo, jak widze groch na ścianę rzucam.* [Wrong, like throwing a pea at the wall.]

P.: But you, sir, are making a lot of fuss. Put the pea in the pot and don't throw it at the wall.

S.: *Chłop rozumu i za szelag niema.* [A muzhik is stupid.]

P.: Yes, and in fact, I have a beard like a forest and no sort of mind at all! But you, my fine fellow, know the saying: if the muzhik's cunning was not equal to the master's wisdom, the muzhiks would have died out long ago.

(*The peasant wants to buy "intelligence" for his son.*)

P.: They say, sir, that the mind fits the head. So you put something into my ear and I'll shake it all out to my son in the hut.

S.: *Sluchajże* [Listen], *verbis coepi novis.*

P.: What? What? New chains from a willow-branch? [*Iz verby tsepi novy?*—Ed.] No, no, my dear friend; no chains of any kind at all come from a willow. Touch upon Latin learning.

S.: *Czy nie chzesz być matematicus?* [Don't you want to be a *mathematicus?*]

P.: I should put that in my pipe and smoke it? [*Motat' na us*—Tr.] Keep talking.

S.: *Dobrze.* [Good.] *Sunt duo cardines coeli.*

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d. The *svitka* is a high, long Byelorussian garment.—Ed.

P.: What? What? Two whole pieces of money? [*Dva karbovantsa tselykh*—Tr.] You see, I haven't even one whole one. The village policeman shook them out.

.....

The peasant's wit is especially revealed at the end of the scene, when the student demands payment:

P.: No, my friend, you yourself know that the foolish man gives and the wise man takes, but how wise I've grown because of your learning! I won't even give you half a kopeck!

This shows us the peasant's outlook on life, his belief in animism (in the sun and moon), his mistrust of learned gentlemen, his way of life in all its bitterness, his poverty, and his lack of rights (the village policeman shook out the money). But the peasant is not shorn of his folk humor and optimism; he ultimately outwits the student.

A second interlude is also devoted to the victory of a peasant's cunning over a student. A runaway student implores a peasant in the market place to hide him from his strict teacher. The peasant ties the student up in a sack and warns him to imitate the sound of broken glass should the teacher run up and begin hitting the sack while asking what is in it.

The peasant disguises his voice and talks in Polish:

Peasant (in disguised voice): *A co to, chłopie, masz w worze?* [Say, fellow, what's in the sack?]

Peasant (in natural voice): Glass, my good sir.

Peasant (in disguised voice): *Pokaż, sam, jakie szkło niesiesz.* [Show me what kind of glass you are carrying.]

Peasant (in natural voice): No, I won't show you, my friend, because, you see, the glazier tied up the glass with a knight's knot.

Pretending that he is the angry teacher, the peasant takes a stick and begins to beat the student in the sack; the latter, in a squeaky voice, imitates the clinking of glass. Releasing

the student, the peasant says that he too has suffered, declaring, "Oh, it was bad! he knocked my teeth out and cracked my ribs as though the devil was in him!" The student is grateful for his rescue and pays the peasant a reward. The scene ends as the peasant says:

> That's how to teach these young fellows reason: I taught him well! I'll let him know how to hide from a thrashing!

The same theme of muzhik cunning and the victory of peasant resourcefulness over the man of learning is present in the interlude *The Man of Letters, the Peasant and the Braggart.* This resembles a parody on the scholastic debates of the time. Wishing to show the great amount of his foreign learning, the Braggart challenges the Man of Letters to a debate in gestures. The Peasant, Haŭryla, saves the latter. Dressed in scholar's clothing, Haŭryla replies, after the Braggart has extended his hand with one finger pointed upwards, by lifting two fingers of his own. When the Braggart lifts his arm, the muzhik drops his own. The Braggart exhibits his palm, and Haŭryla shows his fist.

Smugly, the Braggart explains that, by pointing upwards with his finger, he meant that God had created Heaven and that his opponent, by lowering his arm, added Earth, and so on. But Haŭryla replies to this:

> Wait, my lord, the sage and mystic in you does not, I see, understand anything. So, I'll teach you how to understand. It's like this: Your one finger wanted to gouge out one of my eyes, but I answered that I'd gouge out both of yours. You wanted to take me to the high gallows, but I answered that I'd bury you in the ground. You wanted to slap me on the cheek, but I answered I'd punch you in the teeth.

Interludes were written about how a muzhik outfoxed even the Devil himself. There was also one about a sorcerer who cured the Devil.

The spread of the interlude repertory was furthered by the fact that the contents of the overwhelming majority of school dramas were not closely connected with the interludes. The

latter were casually selected for each act from the general interlude repertory. Such freedom of choice was conducive to writing new interludes. The universal success of the interludes with the audiences kept forcing their introduction into the school dramas. Furthermore, the artistic capabilities of the students who took part in the school shows were demonstrated mainly in the staging of the interludes. The lively and variegated folk material of the living language afforded considerably more opportunities for artistic initiative than the lifeless and scholastic content of the school drama in a dead language. Latin was foreign and incomprehensible to the Byelorussian students. When summer came, the students (or *zhaki*[e] as they were then called) left for their vacations. They presented these shows anew in the villages, in the huts or on the squares among their own people. Understandably, they performed not the Latin dramas but only the interludes. The peasants could follow those plays which contained folk characters and muzhik protagonists.

Thus, the interlude reached the people through the students. The interlude became separated from the school drama. The *batleika* assimilated the interlude of the school drama in its own fashion and disseminated it further among the masses. All this made the transformation of the interlude into independent comedy possible.

An attempt to write comedy in interlude style was made in the eighteenth century by Kaĕtan Marashĕŭski. He was a Roman Catholic priest and the professor of poetry and rhetoric at the Zabel'sk Lyceum attached to the Dominican Monastery in the Drissa district. His *Comedy* is preserved in a collection of manuscripts dating back to 1787. In this work, Marasheŭski moved away from the unsophisticated interlude towards a genuine folk drama. To be sure, he still retained the canons of the old school drama and preserved the three unities.

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e. This is a word of West Slavic origin (cf. Polish *zak*, Czech *zak*, a pupil).—Ed.

The comedy is devoted entirely to peasant life. It is, however, moralizing in spirit and does have a veneer of Christian beliefs. The characters include the peasant, the Devil, the sinner, three children, and three brothers. The protagonist is the peasant; he speaks in the good, pure Byelorussian of the people. The Devil, as the representative of a broader outlook on life, has been everywhere—even among the highest strata of society; he speaks in Polish. There are three acts. The action takes place in a field near a forest. The play begins with a monologue by the peasant, Demka, in which he complains about his lot. This gives a realistic picture of the hard life of the peasantry:

> Oh, how wretched my life is! I walk, I walk all day so that my legs grow numb and I can't feel my arms from working with the axe. Threshing makes it still worse. I thresh from cockcrow to almost midday, and all by myself! Sure, my wife helps, but what sort of work does she do? Everybody knows woman's work; she does a bit of threshing, and then she feels ill. She sits down, lies down, gets colic, and then she goes away with a lot of noise....
>
> To hell with it, our life is wretched, for there is only suffering and we have to suffer.... If only Adam, our first father, hadn't sinned, we wouldn't work this way!.... And I haven't half a kopeck to my name! But the master doesn't see this and shouts all the time: Pay up, you son of a bitch! Pay up, you cold-blooded muzhik! Damn it, blast you, Adam! How you have ruined us, Adam!...

An innkeeper appears, looking for money from the peasant for vodka. A sharp argument ensues.

In comes the Devil, dressed like a landed proprietor. He tells the peasant that the latter is wrong to curse Adam for the muzhik himself would not have refrained from eating the forbidden fruit. The Devil proposes a test, promising to better the peasant's situation if the man fulfill his part of the bargain by keeping silent for an hour. Then the Devil reveals who he is by throwing off his attire. The peasant tries to run away, but the Devil threatens him; if the peasant does not satisfy the conditions, his soul will be carried off

to hell. The peasant's silence begins. Three children enter. They want to climb to heaven to praise God, but do not know how. A stairway is lowered, but the children do not know how to climb it. Demka shows them how in pantomime. Finally, he can no longer restrain himself, and he starts talking. The Devil wants to drag him off to hell, but the peasant begs off just this once.

In the second act, three brothers cannot climb through a narrow doorway to a treasure. Demka again fails to keep quiet.

In the third act, Demka violates the conditions by talking with the sinner. There is, in this act, an interesting scene with a bagpipe. Catching sight of a Byelorussian bagpipe, the sinner thinks that it is a snake:

Demka: What? Are you afraid, your excellency, or don't you know what it is?

Sinner: *Nie wiem.* [I don't know.]

Demka: It's no snake! It's a Russian bagpipe! You can play it....
(*The sinner does not believe this and is afraid to pick it up. Demka picks up the bagpipe and plays it.*)
Since you thought evil, you are afraid. You've never been with us fellows at the tavern and we, when we get together at the tavern, we almost tear it apart with only the sounds of our bagpipes.

The comedy ends as the Devil takes Demka to Hell. Just before the end, the author expresses his message through the peasant's lips: learn not to complain about Adam; learn to accept fate, and not to be occupied with idle chatter; learn not to be lazy, and do not make friends with the Devil and bad companions:

> Beware, muzhiks, beware! I am warning you! Don't curse either God or Adam, but curse yourselves because we are worse than Adam. He sinned—it's true—but only once, and he suffered for it, while we sin every day and don't want

to suffer! That's why we're ruined, and it's leading us to hell!...

Despite this moral and didactic conclusion, Marashĕŭski's *Comedy* could have become a post-interlude phase in the development of Byelorussian dramatic literature. This however, did not occur, and the *Comedy* remained Marasheŭski's individual effort alone. The fact of the matter is that such creative work was not the aim towards which the authors were striving. They did not have national goals and did not regard literature as a creative service to the whole people. For them it was simply a form of entertainment. When they introduced folk characters on the stage, they were prompted by a desire to mock the language of the people. Even then, Byelorussian had ceased to be a language of the state. The upper, educated strata of society were almost completely Polonized and did not consider Byelorussian a literary language. Further development of comedy was thus kept in embryo.

The school theater in Byelorussia ceased to exist after the end of the eighteenth century and the partitions of Poland. The interlude repertory was completely separated from the school drama and continued only in the Byelorussian *batleika*. The middle of the nineteenth century saw a general Byelorussian cultural renascence. Attempts were then made to revive the traditions of the Byelorussian theater. These efforts used several elements of this theatrical past.

Chapter 4

PLANS FOR A THEATER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The mid-nineteenth century Byelorussian theater is indebted to Vintsėnt Dunin-Martsinkevich. Poet, playwright and prose author of renown, this Byelorussian figure was also an actor and a director. He founded the modern Byelorussian theater. Among his works are the opera *The Peasant Woman*[a], the comedy *The Nobles of Pinsk*, and *Courtship*. All three are extremely well suited for the stage. They contain vivid characters, successful comedy situations and lively phrases from popular speech throughout the roles of the main figures. There is reason to believe that he wrote three other plays: *The Recruitment* (based on his own verse narrative, "Hapon"); *The Muzhik War* and *Marvellous Water*. For this last, as for *The Peasant Woman*, the music was written by Stanisław Moniuszko. This music has also been lost.

Dunin-Martsinkevich wrote *The Peasant Woman*, a comic opera in two acts, in 1846, using both the Byelorussian and Polish languages. As in the interludes and Kaėtan Marashėŭski's eighteenth century *Comedy*, the landed gentry talk Polish while the peasantry talk Byelorussian. In this play, however, the idea that peasant and landlord are equal is clearly expressed: God respects each alike. Also expressed is something resembling the idea of equal rights of Byelorussian with other languages. The sentimentalism of Dunin-Martsinkevich was a reflection of the new democratic currents of social thought on the eve of the Reforms of 1861.[b]

The Peasant Woman was performed on February 9, 1852 at

a. The Byelorussian title is *Syalyanka*.

b. The Russian serfs were emancipated in 1861.—Ed.

the Pol'lyak Theater in Minsk. Until the conflagration of 1884, this was located on Cathedral Square. *The Peasant Woman* was staged by Dunin-Martsinkevich and Moniuszko personally. The actors were members of the dramatic circle which Dunin-Martsinkevich had organized while working at the Minsk Catholic Consistory and at the Noblemen's Club. There he had been author, actor and director.

Two of his daughters played peasant women in this opera, while Dunin-Martsinkevich himself played the *voit,*[c] Naum. His success was so great that he began to sign his works with this name. This role was Dunin-Martsinkevich's masterpiece as an actor.

On the very day of the première, a decree was issued prohibiting shows in the "language of the common people." Despite this, the performance took place—but only because the local authorities had given their permission previously. After this, the opera was staged illegally in Bobruisk, Slutsk, Glusk, and other cities and towns.

Moniuszko's simple and deeply expressive music was filled with the rhythms and intonations of folk songs. Byelorussian in origin—he was born in Minsk province—Moniuszko lived most of his life in Byelorussia. He knew the people's way of life and their songs. From childhood on, he absorbed the motifs of Byelorussian folk music. These subsequently colored his entire work, including his famous opera *The Peasant Woman,* written in 1846. Moniuszko was closely linked with leading Byelorussian intellectuals of the day. Dunin-Martsinkevich was Moniuszko's personal friend. The composer drew on the wealth of folk songs and dances. This lent something special to his talent. In *The Peasant Woman* he developed major stage action through the music. In form, this opera is reminiscent of the German *Singspiel.*[d] *The*

c. A *voit* is a Byelorussian village elder.

d. The *Singspiel* is a play in which spoken dialogue alternates with singing, instrumental music and dancing.

Peasant Woman also used all the other techniques of opera, such as duets, arias, choruses, instrumental numbers, dances, and singing *en groupe.*

The Byelorussian public again heard their own music and speech on the stage. This was the first Byelorussian opera. It was the work of an artist of great talent and technique.

Polish music critics have discussed the influence of Byelorussian folk music on Moniuszko. Complete analyses have been made of this, such as Romuald Zyamkevich's *Stanislau Maniushka i belarusy* [Stanisław Moniuszko and the Byelorussians].[8]

As a result of further collaboration with Dunin-Martsinkevich, Moniuszko wrote the music for some of the writer's other libretti, such as *Courtship, Evening Star* [*Vecharnitsy*] and *The Recruitment.*

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Kryzhanovski, F. Lapatsinski and Maryya Kimot also wrote music to the works of both Dunin-Martsinkevich and Uladislaŭ Syrakomlya. The entire period was filled with similar Byelorussian operatic experiments. This was echoed in advanced Russian musical criticism. Ninety years ago, for example, the Russian composer and critic, Aleksandr Serov, wrote about Slavic music:

> Composers have already appeared who, like [Frédéric] Chopin, reworked Slavic elements, but who were not affected by Chopin in other fields of music.... I am speaking about Mikhail Glinka, Stanisław Moniuszko, Aleksandr Dargomyzhski and several others. Their music in any work carries the clear imprint of the "Slavic." It is therefore filled with originality, in comparison to the music of Europe.... What are the characteristics of the "Slavic" school? They include originality of melody, rhythm, cadence, and harmony, and are clearly distinguished from French, German and Italian music. They include a wealth of harmonic elaboration but avoid the dry obscurity of the Germans. They include a constant desire for truth of expression, but do not allow... [music] to serve the ends of virtuosity [alone]. Through its serious tendencies, the "Slavic" school removes all trite and tawdry effects from music....[9]

The success of *The Peasant Woman* led to many reactions in the Russian and Polish press of the day. It even led several other Byelorussian writers of the time—such as Paval Shpileŭski—to imitate Dunin-Martsinkevich. In 1857, Shpileŭski published a play in St. Petersburg which was entitled *The Reapers.* In this play, the ordinary people speak Byelorussian, but the landed proprietors speak Russian. Here too the author introduces a Byelorussian chorus with songs and folk dances. The characters and situations are very similar to those in *The Peasant Woman.*

Following the Rebellion of 1863, the interdiction imposed by the Russian authorities on Byelorussian dramatic presentations was enforced literally. This prevented the plans for a theater from developing into a permanent Byelorussian theater at that time.

Historians, however, date the new Byelorussian theater from the time *The Peasant Woman* was first presented. Thus, 1952 was to mark the centennial of Byelorussian opera and of the new Byelorussian theater.

One of the nineteenth century Byelorussian playwrights was Artsyom Vyaryha-Dareŭski. He wrote the drama *Pride,* the comedy *Wrath* and the comic opera *Sin;* all three were confiscated by the Vitebsk authorities in 1863. Heranim Martsinkevich wrote the comedy *An Occurrence Before the Colonels' Wives,* which was produced at Vitebsk in 1862.

Even the poet Syrakomlya wrote Byelorussian plays, as is indicated in Krashevski's monograph on him. Anton Lyavitski (Yadvihin Sh.) wrote a Byelorussian comedy called *The Thief or by His Own Judgment.* He hoped to stage it in Radoshkovichi, using the resources of Byelorussian young people, but he did not succeed in doing this.

Marko Krapivnitski's *After Inspection,* a one-act skit, was put on in July 1900, at Karl'sber, the estate of the Byelorussian scholar, historian and archaeologist Andrèi Snitka. It had been translated into Byelorussian from the Ukrainian by Yury Ulasaŭ. The actors were young peasants and the show was performed in a hayloft on a stage specially

constructed for the occasion. Permission for the presentation was obtained from the district police officer only under the pretext that it would be performed in Ukrainian (which was not officially forbidden).

These were the oppressive conditions under which the pioneers of the Byelorussian theater had to work and write. It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that for so long a time there was no permanent Byelorussian theater in Byelorussia.

Chapter 5

THE *NASHA NIVA* PERIOD

In 1905 the interdiction on Byelorussian publishing was ended and Byelorussian dramatic presentations were authorized. The individuals who were striving for a renascence of Byelorussian culture were grouped around the newspaper *Our Soil* [Nasha niva]. Once again appeared the idea of a Byelorussian national theater. At the beginning, this work was centered in Vilno; Marko Krapivnitski's *After Inspection* was shown there mainly because of the efforts of Frantsishak Alyakhnovich, the future Byelorussian playwright. He was aided by Ales' Burbis, Chaslaŭ Rodevich, Yustyn Murashka, Arloŭski, and Korsak. The first performance took place in February 1910 at the Railwaymen's Club on what was then called Khersonskaya Street. After the play, a chorus conducted by Lubamir Rahoŭski and a group of folk dancers under Ihnat Buinitski, the famous Byelorussian artist, presented a number of Byelorussian songs and folk dances. This first Byelorussian concert scored a great success with the Vilno public, which included many different national groupings. All the Vilno papers wrote about it, printing very sympathetic reviews and notices.

> The girls were decked out in beautiful bright woolen skirts; they wore beads, ribbons, corsets, and embroidered blouses. On their heads were beautiful knitted shawls with white bastings. The young men were all in white in Mogilev *svitki* hemmed with red fringes. They wore beautiful belts, both wide and narrow, around their waists. The others had on felt Byelorussian caps. And waves of song poured forth before the hushed and enchanted thousands in the hall.
>
> The singing revealed neither the boisterous revelry of the Russian from the Volga nor the quick playfulness of the Pole, but the soul of the Byelorussian, locked inside its very self, coming from its own old wooded and marshy land. The whole

> auditorium turned into a tempestuous national sea, all atremble with cries of "Bravo! Bravo! Byelorussians!" So deeply did the words and music of the songs affect the audience that the chorus had to sing several of them several times. Thus, people of all national groupings welcomed Byelorussian songs which had previously flowed back and forth and developed only in the fields and glades. Now, they suddenly emerged into the rest of the world. Through the noise one could hear such remarks as, "We didn't know that there were Byelorussian songs and that they were special, native, and with a spirit of their own."....
>
> Dances took place on the stage: the *lyavonikha*, the *myatselitsa*, the *yurka* and the *varabei*, accompanied by local Byelorussian music. And it must be admitted, they received great praise. The public was simply beside itself.... Every eye was glistening during the *lyavonikha*, the *myatselitsa* and the *varabei* when ten beautifully costumed couples swirled around like a fan.[10]

This initial success of Byelorussian art prompted similar concerts in other cities. Not long after the first concert in Vilno, a concert was organized in St. Petersburg with the same program, plus a recital by the Byelorussian poetess, Aloiza Pashkevich ("Tsyotka"), of her own verses. Byelorussian song and dance groups were invited to general ethnographic soirées at Vilno and in other cities.

Buinitski's whole travelling theater was organized in the autumn of 1910. It journeyed about the provinces, increasing Byelorussian national consciousness through its presentations; everywhere it evoked sympathetic understanding for its own native art. This group consisted of a dramatic circle, a chorus and a ballet troupe.

Buinitski was a self-made man of great talent. He was a noted actor and dancer and an able organizer. The history of the establishment of a permanent Byelorussian theater company is inseparably connected with his name. Wherever Buinitski and his troupe appeared, there was great excitement and animation. Individuals began to nurse fresh hopes. As was reported in *Our Soil:*

> Disna cannot recall such a gathering of the people. The intelligentsia and the masses alike all sincerely greeted the

> Byelorussians. The potent conception of a national renascence warmed and united everyone with its bright rays. It touched hardened hearts, and made tear-dimmed eyes sparkle. The first native word spoken on the stage was not greeted with a single teardrop.[11]

After the Polotsk performance, Vatslaŭ Lastoŭski, the noted Byelorussian writer, poet and publicist, wrote:

> When [artistic and national—Tr.] consciousness is awakened in the entire nation, the memory of Ihnat Buinitski will be sacred to everyone.[12]

Buinitski's theater brought tidings of the national renascence to all corners of Byelorussia. The repertory at first included only Krapivnitski's *Duped* and *After Inspection* and Karus' Kahanets' *The Gentleman's Stylish Son.* This last work, an original Byelorussian comedy, played a great part in propagandizing the Byelorussian idea; it scoffed at those people who had become estranged from their native language and, so to speak, had gone foreign.

Buinitski always took a leading part in the concert part of the presentation. He himself was a peerless master of Byelorussian folk dancing. The *lyavonikha,* the *myatselitsa,* the *yurachka,* and other dances shone with all the brilliance of folk dance art. He was as great a dancer as the incomparable modern Byelorussian artist Mikhal Zabėida-Sumitski is a singer. An orchestra of Byelorussian folk instruments consisting of a bagpipe, a violin, a pair of cymbals, and a powerful chorus singing its variegated repertory of Byelorussian folk songs in unison heightened the success of the company.

After this, the idea of a Byelorussian theater spread more and more and earned ever-increasing recognition. In many towns and villages, young Byelorussians began organizing dramatic groups and staging Byelorussian shows. The leaders of this renascence paid more and more attention to establishing a dramatic repertory.

Anton Chekhov's *The Bear* and *The Wedding* were translated into Byelorussian, along with Elisa Orzeszkowa's the *Muzhik* [*Cham*], and L. Valodz'ka's *How the Men Took Wives.*

Doletskiye's *Mikhalka* appeared. Byelorussian writers began working more on plays. Yanka Kupala's *Paŭlinka,* a comedy in two acts, had its première on January 27, 1913. Its lively dialogue and its vivid and artless folk humor enabled this play to score a great success among Byelorussian audiences at the hall of the "Sokol" Gymnastic Society at Vilno. It was followed by Kupala's *The Ruined Nest,* a serious major work in five acts. This drama demanded complicated use of the stage. It therefore marked an important step forward in the development of the Byelorussian drama towards the artistic and ideological level of that of Europe.

Along with all this, the Byelorussian theater retained its own classical repertory. Dunin-Martsinkevich's *Courtship* was staged. Maryya Kimot wrote special music for this presentation. Ales' Burbis, the director-producer, translated the Polish scenes of this comedy into Byelorussian. The première took place on January 25, 1915, at the Philharmonia Theater in Vilno. It was a great success, thus demonstrating the further accomplishments of the Byelorussian theater in acting and set designing.

The outbreak of war in 1914 forced the suspension of further Byelorussian work in the theater. The war carried off many creative individuals and hurled them into the whirlwind of the armed struggle. Many Byelorussian young people had actively and enthusiastically participated in the Byelorussian theater; they now went to the front. The leaders of the artistic renascence however, did not cease their labors, and efforts were made to realize the idea of a Byelorussian theater. Amateur theatrical activity in 1916 was centered around the Byelorussian Club in Vilno. On September 17, 1916, after a one-year hiatus in the life of the Byelorussian theater, a Byelorussian concert was presented. This may be said to mark the start of Alyakhnovich's great and fruitful career as actor, director and dramatist. Under his direction, a dramatic circle was formed; its first presentation was Orzeszkowa's *The Muzhik* on October 15, 1916. Lacking a stage of their own, this group performed at the Railwaymen's Club (now called the Workers' Club) on Lukiskaya Square

and elsewhere. Only at the end of February 1917 did the theater acquire its own stage; this was in the new quarters of the Byelorussian Club (at 28 Vilenskaya Street). After that, plays were performed weekly. True, because of the transfer of the building to the military authorities, the theater had to move again that summer; it went to what was then called Yuravski Prospekt (later renamed Mitskevich Street).

The repertory of the Byelorussian theater became richer, mainly because of Alyakhnovich. In addition to his other activities, he was an organizer and administrator and exhibited great zeal in creating the new Byelorussian repertory. His operetta *In the Antokal Section of Vilno* scored a hit during the 1914-1915 season. This was followed by other new works: *In the Country* in 1916; and *Once Upon a Time, Man'ka* and *Bazylishak* (a folk tale drama based on an old legend) in 1917. Working conditions in Vilno were difficult, however, and Alyakhnovich sought happier surroundings in Minsk:

> Dressed as a coachman, he [Alyakhnovich] accompanied some noblewomen and worked his way through the line of the old front, near Molodechno; ragged, barefoot, wounded, he reached Minsk after an eight-day journey. There he staged his *Butrym Nyamira* and played his role so well that he was an immediate hit. The Byelorussian theater of Minsk had come to life.[13]

In Minsk, having established a theater at the "Byelorussian Hut," Alyakhnovich continued his work as a playwright. A new play of his, *The Devil and the Woman,* appeared in 1918. It was followed with the tragedy *Fear of Life* in the same year and with *Uncle Yakub* in the 1918-1919 season. After a brief visit to Vilno, Alyakhnovich returned to Minsk as head of the local Byelorussian theater. His philosophical play *Shadows* came out in 1919, followed in 1920 by *The Woods Are Murmuring* and, in 1921, by *Paŭlinka's Betrothal* (a lyrical play in the style of French *vaudeville*).

Alyakhnovich returned to Vilno in 1921. The following year he wrote four new comedies: *The Bird of Happiness* (a light

comedy), *An Unfinished Drama, The Happy Husband* (a satire), and *Pan Minister* (a social satire).

Alyakhnovich's plays helped greatly in the development of the Byelorussian theater. They reflected Byelorussian life in their clear and truthful characters. Alyakhnovich raised universal human problems in his plays and presented an entire gallery of middle-class citizens and intellectuals on the Byelorussian stage.

The playwright's scope ranged from the historical and legendary past of the nation, with its folk tales, to the Byelorussian intellectuals who were his contemporaries. His dramatic legacy shows best why it is quite in order to consider Alyakhnovich as the father of the new Byelorussian drama and theater.

Theatrical activity was begun in Minsk at this time on a large scale. The efforts of the noted Byelorussian actors Uladimir Fal'ski and Flyoryyan Zhdanovich produced results. A new Byelorussian theater called the "First Byelorussian Society of Serious Drama and Comedy" was established there in March 1917. The new theater began to combine the services of young artists with those of Byelorussian actors who had previously worked for the Russian Theater in Minsk. Uladislaŭ Halubok, the famous playwright and director, also joined it. The repertory of this theater consisted mainly of Halubok's plays, such as *Hanka* and *The Last Meeting*. Performances took place at the Municipal Theater Building, then at Maksim Bahdanovich House in Lyakhaŭka, and also in the provinces. As time went by, Alyakhnovich's plays filled out the repertory.

At the same time that the theater of Fal'ski and Zhdanovich was functioning, Alyakhnovich was also working as a director at the "Byelorussian Hut" on Konskaya Square in Minsk. These two permanent, professional Byelorussian theaters proceeded to struggle for high quality in art. The Byelorussian playgoer was maturing culturally and kept demanding more from the theater. The competition between these two theaters helped to improve the quality of both the performances and the repertories.

The theater's concert program was enriched with a splendid

chorus conducted by Uladimir Teraŭski, the first Byelorussian folk-composer.

In 1918 the government of the Byelorussian People's Republic gave official support to the theater of Fal'ski and Zhdanovich. Thus, even in the period of Byelorussia's proclaimed independence, there was a Byelorussian State Theater.

Ten days after the arrival of the Soviet authorities, the theater was renamed the "Byelorussian Proletarian Theater." A week later, the "Byelorussian Soviet Theater" was opened. This combined the theater of Fal'ski and Zhdanovich with that of Alyakhnovich, and included Téraŭski's chorus. An orchestra (or rather a sextet) was also added for operas; this was conducted by F. Tkhozh.

Byelorussian theater habitués and the leaders of national culture showed the way; because of their efforts, broad projects were begun. Plans were made to establish several traveling theaters and to organize dramatic studios. The cruel Polish occupation, however, began at that time and all Byelorussian social and cultural activities were suppressed. All theatrical plans were upset. Work in the theater hibernated, as it were; the Polish occupational authorities set various obstacles in the way of the new "Society of Byelorussian Art."

Only the restored theater of Alyakhnovich was again at work. The Polish censorship, however, prohibited a whole group of Byelorussian productions, including *Paŭlinka, The Ruined Nest, The Gentleman's Stylish Son, Once Upon a Time,* and *Butrym Nyamira.* The Polish authorities also forbade the theater to travel in the provinces. Cultural and theatrical activity was restored only after the exodus of the Polish occupying forces. And only then was the Byelorussian State Theater reborn.

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2. Skaryna, Frantsishak, tr., "Premudrost' Isusa, syna Sirakhova" [The Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach (i.e., *Ecclesiasticus* in the *Apocrypha*)], Prague, 1517.

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Part II

THE FIRST BYELORUSSIAN THEATER

Chapter 6

INTRODUCTION

The Byelorussian State Theater has had two chief periods during its thirty years; the so-called theatrical discussions of 1928 and 1929 separate them. The first period contained ubiquitous restrictions imposed by the Soviet regime. Despite these, however, Byelorussian nationalists controlled many fields of cultural activity. These individuals were particularly active in such scholarly and scientific organizations as the Institute of Byelorussian Culture, the University and the People's Commissariat of Education. They exercised great influence on art, the theater, literature, and education. These were the best years of the Byelorussian theater. Ideological hurdles were overcome with difficulty, and much was done to create a new Byelorussian dramatic art. The Soviet organs and the Communist Party tried hard to subject the theater to their leveling influence. The theater, however, refused to yield at all but retained its constant concern for national culture.

It became more difficult for the theater to defend this national attitude after the Bolshevik pogrom from 1930 to 1936 against the Byelorussian intelligentsia. During those years the theater lost its patrons and protectors within the government. Elements alien to Byelorussian art began to dominate the theater, and many mistakes were made, both in the choice of repertory and in the abandonment of the nationalist trend.

Soviet conditions prevented a broad development of the national forces in art and the theater. Yet, despite this, even then Byelorussians could not help but display their gifts.

The Soviet terror ruthlessly annihilated the talents of Byelorussia. Ideological oppression defeated creative enterprise, but the people kept trying. They produced actors, writers, playwrights, directors, and set designers. Despite the Soviet terror,

their artistic accomplishments were real. At times, however, the form was distorted because genuine, national content was missing. The Bolsheviks took credit for what had really been the creative attainments of the Byelorussian people.

Bolshevism cannot create; it can only destroy. All inspiration and genius which has appeared under such a regime has come from the people, not from the Soviets. Hence, the last two gloomy decades of the Byelorussian theater (1930-1950) must be analyzed by separating the work of the Byelorussian people from the influences of the Soviet regime. The first is to be examined; the second, discarded. This is the sole approach to the cultural heritage which can accurately represent the past and the cultural activities of the people.

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Chapter 7

THE FIRST BYELORUSSIAN STATE THEATER

The Byelorussian State Theater, like the State Theater, immediately had to cope with the unceasing efforts of the Soviet press and government to influence its trends and repertory. Almost from the very beginning, the Byelorussian nationalists were forced to struggle against various Soviet groups which were trying to limit and regulate the cultural work of the theater. The nationalists had to beat off constant attacks on the Byelorussian repertory and, in the struggle, to make the Byelorussian Theater national. Working conditions were worsened by the heritage of the old, anti-Byelorussian regime.

On September 14, 1920 the Department of Art of the People's Commissariat of Education of Byelorussia announced the grand opening of the Byelorussian State Theater on the premises of the former Minsk Municipal Theater. There, Russian, Jewish and Byelorussian-language troupes shared the stage, putting on plays in turn.

Owing to political circumstances, specific demands were made on the Byelorussian theater almost as though it were a government bureau. Above all, a revolutionary repertory was called for. This is what caused the greatest difficulties.

Soviet Byelorussian drama did not yet exist. There were few non-Soviet Byelorussian plays worthy of presentation. At the start, it was necessary to use old plays, both foreign and Byelorussian. The play chosen to open the Byelorussian State Theater was *The Lynx* [Rys'], adapted from a story by Elisa Orzeszkowa.

The first two years of the Byelorussian State Theater saw its consolidation. Some of the actors had been professionals at the former Russian Governor's Theater in Minsk. Others had been amateurs on the Byelorussian stage. They all had to be blended together into a homogeneous company. The naturalistic

traditions of the old Russian theater had not yet been overcome. A Byelorussian national repertory and national forms for a new Byelorussian theater art had to be created. The People's Commissariat of Education of Byelorussia appointed Aŭstsihnei Mirovich as permanent director of the Byelorussian State Theater. Uladimir Tėraŭski's chorus, an orchestra conducted by El'kon, a ballet group under Vasil' Aleksyutovich, and a number of actors were also assigned to the theater.

During the first season (1920-1921), the plays produced included *Man'ka* and *Shadows* by Frantsishak Alyakhnovich; *The Last Meeting, Kinless, The Hut Beyond the Village, Towards the Unfathomable,* and *Hanka,* by Uladislaŭ Halubok; and *The Muzhik* [Cham] by Orzeszkowa. Byelorussian dramatic works, both translated and original, were thus an important part of the repertory. During the following season the new plays included *Adam and Eve* by Alyakhnovich, *The Ruined Nest* by Yanka Kupala and *The Educated Husband.*

On St. John's Eve, a musical play by Mikhas' Charot ("Kudzel'ka"), was presented by the Byelorussian State Theater in 1921; *Mashèka,* by Mirovich, was staged the following year. Together, these two productions constituted a landmark. They were the first indications that Byelorussian drama could be solid and original.

Charot based his beautiful play on motifs from folklore; there is a folk tale fantasy by the same name. The richness of Byelorussian folklore made possible a poetic production filled with charm and spontaneity.

Mirovich, the director, showed great tact and ability in this presentation. Before this, he had worked in the Russian theater and had absorbed the great culture of the old theaters. Mirovich was able to appreciate *On St. John's Eve;* he sensed its beauty and freshness and created appropriate forms of stage expression. For this he combined the heterogeneous elements of plot, song, dance, and instrumental music into a unified and brilliant production. Tėraŭski's wonderful melodies contributed to this. The music for *On St. John's Eve* was so permeated with

the folk spirit that it soon returned to the people. It was performed everywhere: by folk choruses, by ensembles, by individual professional musicians, and even by the masses themselves Although there were certain shortcomings in the drama--the plot was developed poorly and the conflicts between the characters were inadequately brought out--the play was a resounding success. Aŭhen Ramanovich has written the following account:

> The hall was filled to overflowing. The audience was thrilled with the soothing music, written in minor keys. They were delighted at the sets and astounded when a shaggy woodsman climbed out of a fiery hollow. The public laughed at the unrequited love of the old peasant-hermit for the young girl Paraska. They sighed at the lack of success of Uladik, the landed proprietor's adopted son, who loves Ales'ka, a country girl. The "dark spirit" of the jealous Lady Yadviha stands in their way. She too is in love with Uladik, and does not wish to yield him to Ales'ka. On the dark Eve of St. John, she throws the country girl into a pool.[1]

Folk rituals were adapted from the richest, most brilliant and most poetic cycle–that of St. John's Eve.[2] These lent the play unusual sparkle and beauty and made the presentation the most popular and interesting Byelorussian production of that time.

The public loved it; it answered the deeply-rooted need for a native theater art. Therefore the play remained on the Byelorussian stage for a long time. The theater kept winning new laurels because of this work, and the audiences kept increasing.

Mirovich showed no small ability as a dramatist. He soon wrote and produced *Mashėka.* This represented the next higher stage in the development of the Byelorussian theater and drama. Like Charot's *On St. John's Eve, Mashėka* is set against a background of folk fantasy with *rusalki*[a], witches and woodsmen. The main plot concerns Mashėka, a legendary Byelorussian peasant hero.

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a. A *rusalka* is a water nymph, which frequently figures in folklore. Both Aleksandr Dargomyzhski and Antonin Dvořak have written operas by this name.–Ed.

These productions demonstrated Mirovich's talents as a director and organizer. He had succeeded in assembling a theater company and unifying it into a close-knit ensemble.

The way towards a Byelorussian national dramatic art was shown by these two presentations. Under favorable conditions a future along these lines could have been productive and the promise could have been fulfilled. But insurmountable obstacles developed.

Attempts had been made towards originality and self-determination within the Byelorussian State Theater, and the authorities began to detect a bourgeois and nationalist danger in them. The nationalist trend of the theater was criticized by the press and the government with growing frequency. During this period, however, the organs of the People's Commissariat of Education, such as the Department of Art, the University, and the Institute of Byelorussian Culture, were run by people who took a serious attitude towards the creation of Byelorussian culture. It was therefore possible, although difficult, to produce plays which were Byelorussian both in form and in content. In addition to these, of course, the theater had to present plays from the compulsory or so-called "revolutionary" repertory. This forestalled accusations by the Communist press to the effect that the theater was out of touch with life. To be sure, this repertory was not always valuable as art.

During the 1922-1923 season, the theater performed: *Shadows* by Alyakhnovich; *Hymn of Toil* by Andreyenko; *On St. John's Eve* by Charot; *The Nobles of Pinsk* by Vintsėnt Dunin-Martsinkevich; *Towards the Unfathomable* by Halubok; *The Socialist Girl* by Tsishka Hartny; *On a July Night* by Lapitski; *Paŭlinka* by Yanka Kupala; *Mashėka* by Mirovich; *The Muzhik* by Elisa Orzeszkowa; *Torquini the Priest* by Polivanov; *Les Loups* by Romain Rolland; *Confused Saŭka* by Leopold Rodzevich; *The Devil's Disciple* by George Bernard Shaw; *Natalka Poltavka* by I.N. Kotlyarevski and *Duped* by Marko Krapivnitski. Other plays staged that year were: *The Four of Them; Spiders and Flies; The Polish Jew; The Hangman and the Son,* and *The Women's Village.*

A great majority of these plays in those early years were inadequately staged in ordinary painted pavilions or simply in rooms set off by curtains. The schematic tendentiousness of the plays in the "revolutionary" repertory--such as *Torquini the Priest, Hymn of Toil* and *On a July Night*--lowered the artistic level of the dramatic presentations. They did not always allow the theater to improve or to appear professional.

The nationalists, however, began participating in the theater more and more. Gradually, they began to dominate its art and repertory.

In the 1923-1924 season new performances of original and classic Byelorussian works took place. There was a highly successful production of Mirovich's new play *Kastus' Kalinoŭski.* Mirovich staged it himself, and the sets were by the distinguished Byelorussian designer, Oskar Mariks. They collaborated on Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* also. Other plays shown included *Mashèka, On St. John's Eve, The Nobles of Pinsk, The Women's Village, On a July Night, Torquini the Priest, Les Loups, The Polish Jew* and *Spiders and Flies.*

The historical drama *Kastus' Kalinoŭski* was a great victory for the Byelorussian nationalists within the theater. This production responded fully to Byelorussian national hopes for a native and national theater. It shed light on one of the most heroic chapters in the historic struggle of the Byelorussian people for freedom and self-determination against the tsarist enslavers. The play depicted Kalinoŭski, the Byelorussian national hero who led the Byelorussian Peasant Rebellion of 1863.

Kastus' Kalinoŭski was a major work of dramatic art written with a thorough knowledge of stagecraft. The play is exceptional in its richness of theme, its craftsmanship, its gripping, dynamic and expressively developed plot, its sharp dramatic situations and its lucid characters in their typical environment.

The masterly dramatic structure of the play, the heroic deeds of the protagonist and the continual dynamics of the action stirred the public and kept them interested and even tense. The

success of *Kastus' Kalinoŭski* raised the theater to new heights of popularity.

This was made possible by the skill of the individual actors beginning to emerge from an ensemble which had already improved and developed in quality. In this regard, the names of Uladimir Krylovich, Lidiya Rzhètskaya and Henrykh Hryhonis must be mentioned. Their acting attracted the attention of the whole theater-going public.

Mirovich directed and produced his own plays and worked hard to perfect the casts. His success was helped considerably by the mastery of Krylovich. This Byelorussian actor, who was to die at the untimely age of 41 in 1937, played the leading roles. He was an expert at bringing out the deep humanity of a character, with its actions, inner life and experiences. His technique was so expressive that his roles came alive before the astonished audiences and produced an indelible impression.

In 1924 Mirovich produced *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* in a setting by Mariks. This return to the classics was very significant for the theater. It offered material which aided the actors to develop their techniques, both individually and as a group. It also allowed the theater to experiment a good deal and showed the way to further artistic growth.

The theater sought new means of scenic expression. For this, the stage was reorganized. Instead of a single, permanent curtain let down from above, two curtains were used. The first of these covered the entire stage; the second looked like a screen of many colors. The stage was extended by transferring part of the action to the auditorium.

In order to come as close as possible to the style of Molière's theater, the footlights were removed. Over the place for the chorus scaffolding was erected to serve as a proscenium. In the center of this scaffolding a platform was constructed with steps leading below the stage for the actor's exits. This was very similar to the theater of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The performance of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* began with the appearance of a lecturer in Byelorussian national costume. He explained the principles of the performance in verse and announced the beginning and end of each act. Besides this, the actors made their entrances from the orchestra or simply from the auditorium. Thus, at the tense moment in which M. Jourdain is entertaining Dorimène and Dorante at dinner (Act IV, Scene 2), Mme. Jourdain appears on the stage from the auditorium. The "Eastern" ballet comes onstage across the platform. The participants in the Turkish interlude also emerge from the auditorium.

All the action takes place in the house of M. Jourdain. Hence, there are many decorated curtains in the center of the stage. A broad staircase was built leading to the master's room, which is set off by a curtain. Most of the action takes place close to this staircase, or on the platform nearby. At times, the action is transferred to the master's room; the curtain is then removed and both room and staircase blend into a single set. Servants move the necessary furniture and properties on and off. The chefs serve the table while performing a comic dance. The production was replete with comic situations.

Hryhonis portrayed the self-satisfied bourgeois M. Jourdain artistically, and Krylovich created a model of art in the small but grotesque role of the Mufti. Barys Platonaŭ as Cléonte, Vol'ha Halina as Dorimène, Uladimir Uladamirski as Covelle, and Aŭhen Shapko as the philosophy professor made successful debuts. Their performances bore witness to the growth of the general technique and to the aspirations of the ensemble. The Byelorussian public also was highly appreciative of Mirovich and Mariks.

The production of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme,* however, contained superfluous and borrowed elements which must be regarded as the tribute levied by the times, a concession to outside pressure. In those years a new approach was demanded for every play. The classics were revived even at the expense

of introducing extraneous elements which destroyed the very essence of art in general and of classical art in particular. This was shown most of all in the attempts to adapt the classics to contemporary demands. It was an attempt, in the phrase of the vulgar Marxist critics of the time, to pour new wine into old bottles.[b] Plays were chosen which were in accord with contemporary themes and close to current interests, such as the struggle against the petty bourgeoisie (in *Georges Dandin, Les Précieuses Ridicules* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*).

These tendencies were further strengthened by all kinds of "contemporary" insertions in the text. M. Jourdain, for example, has a suit from "Minshvei."[c] He studies spelling with the help of Yazėp Lyosik's famous Byelorussian grammar. At the end of his letter to the marquis, M. Jourdain considers it necessary to add the phrase, "With Communist greetings." He wants to walk in his new clothes through Kamaroŭka and Pyarėspa.[d] These touches were obviously the result of the influence of the so-called revolutionary theater, which destroyed all classical styles and models and introduced agitational devices extraneous to art. All this finally spoiled the classical productions.

In the Byelorussian theater, however, the classics were important for still another reason. In contrast to the inartistic plays of Soviet dramatists, they offered a valuable artistic repertory. Together with Byelorussian nationalist plays, the classics drove the anti-Byelorussian dramas out of the repertory to as great an extent as was possible. They educated the audiences from models of great art and produced

b. The vulgar Marxists, or vulgar sociologists, were critics most active in the 1920's. They interpreted all art narrowly, by its alleged relationship to the rising social groups in the class struggle. In the process, they sometimes ran roughshod over known facts. The Soviet critics of the 1930's and after have tended to repudiate them.—Ed.

c. "Minshvei" was the Minsk Sewing Factory.

d. Kamaroŭka and Pyarėspa are suburbs of Minsk.

an understanding of the poverty in art and ideas demonstrated by the plays of orthodox Soviet dramatists.

The ideological pressure exerted by Soviet groups, however, was so enormous that the theater was forced to use these obligatory plays in its repertory.

An example of this was shown in the following season (1924-1925). In addition to plays helpful for establishing a national theater, such as *The Gentleman's Attendant* by Nazar Byvayeŭski ("Yazep Dyla") and *The Smith Who Was a Governor* by Aŭstsihnei Mirovich, the theater produced a primitive agitational comedy, *The Soviet Devil* by Sergei Yur'yev and a worthless Russian play, *The Red Mask* by Anatoli Lunacharski. To be sure, even these plays were made somewhat effective by the directing of Mirovich, the sets of Mariks and the performances of various outstanding actors.

Byelorussian theater people were convinced that the constructive development of the Byelorussian theater would have to proceed otherwise. The bitter class struggle in Western Europe was treated in *The Red Mask*. Byelorussian theater people felt that such a theme did not serve the lofty aims of brotherhood among mankind or of universal art.

The predominance of such a revolutionary repertory threatened to choke off the healthy shoots of young Byelorussian dramaturgy and to drive the theater from its nationalist course. Party members and their protegés in the theater supported only this revolutionary repertory. Fortunately for the Byelorussian theater, however, leading Party and governmental officials believed at that time in the nationalist development of the theater. The People's Commissariat of Education, still under the leadership of Byelorussian nationalists, created a special commission to investigate the theater. The report of this commission declared:

> Aŭstsihnei Mirovich has done more in the field [of repertory] than could have been expected. He has presented such plays as *Kastus' Kalinoŭski*. However, there have been mistakes—such as the production of *The Red Mask*.[3]

As a result of this decision *The Red Mask* was removed from

the repertory. The commission acknowledged that the theater had adopted a trend undesirable for the culture of the Byelorussian theater. It consequently recommended that the repertory be chosen by the Theater Subsection of the Institute of Byelorussian Culture.

This was a great victory for Byelorussian art and culture. The official governmental organization which then had authority over all the theaters of Byelorussia had adopted the viewpoint of the theater people themselves. Furthermore, the Institute of Byelorussian Culture, a stronghold of art and culture, had been assigned jurisdiction over the repertory. This signified a genuine, if short-lived, victory for the nationalists in the theater.

Thematically, the most interesting new presentation of this season was Byvayeŭski's *The Gentleman's Attendant.* This dealt with the Byelorussian people's struggle for freedom against Polish oppressors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the play fascinated its audience through its interesting content, its plot and the development of its action.

Later on ideological pressure on the theater increased, and this play was considered "national-democratic" (The Communist Party used this phrase officially to mean counterrevolutionary). Together with Mirovich's *Kastus' Kalinoŭski, The Gentleman's Attendant* was taken out of the repertory.

Even in those relatively liberal years the ideological conditions of life in Byelorussia did not permit the theater to get free of a social interpretation of events in class terms. This was imposed on it gradually.

Such was the established doctrine which no one could contradict. Other views, which often conflicted with this conception of the class struggle, could be expressed on the past and the present only when screened by this doctrine. Moreover, these conceptions did not disturb the youth of Byelorussia who had grown up under the initial and romantic stages of the workers' and peasant's revolution and the workers' regime (as constituted in the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic). Many people still believed that the Revolution had given life to the

sacred dreams of the Byelorussian working masses. Its slogans and ideological postulates were not yet completely opposed to the course of life. This was the period of the NEP,[e] both in economics and in ideology. These concepts did not repel the masses of Byelorussians as much as they did somewhat later. At that time, Byelorussians still hoped to achieve national autonomy within Soviet Byelorussia. Many representatives of the Byelorussian People's Republic, which had been set up in 1918 but forced into exile, succumbed to temptation and returned to Soviet Byelorussia during the NEP period. They wished to serve the cultural reconstruction of the new Republic. Vatslaŭ Lastoŭski, Aleksandr Tsvikevich, Frantsishak Alyakhnovich, the poet Uladimir Zhylka, and a host of others came back at this time with this idea in mind. They had but little time to console themselves with the possibility of fresh work. Shortly after their return, they were accused of being Byelorussian National Democrats and were exiled to Siberia at hard labor. All this, however, shows that in the beginning hopes for Byelorussian national autonomy were high, despite all the resultant ideological postulates imposed by the Soviet regime. Consequently, it was difficult if not impossible to oppose the class interpretation of events; this was the basis of the plays and presentations at the theater.

Even Mirovich submitted to this influence; quite broadly, he outlined the elements of the class struggle in the distant past of Byelorussia in his remarkable verse drama *The Smith Who Was a Governor.* This was a concession to the ideological demands of the day. The scenes from folk life, the author's rich imagination and his use of colorful folklore material helped the Byelorussian theater to create its special national style. The true contents of the play were, however, concealed beneath a superficial layer of class explanation. This deceived

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e. The NEP, or New Economic Policy, was a period during the middle 1920's in which the Soviet regime permitted the limited return of certain forms of private enterprise.—Ed.

the official critics who liked the production. Because of this, the play remained in the theater's repertory for some time after the banning of other plays similar in spirit, content and ideas.

The nationalist struggle in the theater subsequently took different forms. The theater found it impossible to select its own repertory in its own fashion; therefore, the attention paid to the classics was increased.

During the 1925-1926 season another director from Moscow was invited to work in the theater, Nikolai Popov, noted in the past as the manager of his own Russian theater. Popov was a man of great learning. He readily understood the idea of creating an original Byelorussian theater and quickly accepted the invitation. Under his supervision, presentations of the classics continued and were even increased. This contributed to the education and to the perfecting of the company.

Popov presented during this season such plays as *El Alcalde de Zalamea* by Calderón, *The Legacy* by Podsher, and Molière's *Les Précieuses Ridicules* and *Georges Dandin.* These productions were performed according to the traditions of the old realistic theater; as a result, the texts of the plays were kept free of twentieth-century insertions.

Along with the classics, many new and original Byelorussian dramas were staged. The hit of the season was a new play by the Byelorussian playwright Mikhas' Hramyka entitled *Skaryna, Son of Polotsk.* This was dedicated to the four-hundredth anniversary of Byelorussian printing, founded by Frantsishak Skaryna

The play concentrated on Skaryna and painted a broad picture of the life of the Byelorussian intelligentsia in the "Golden Age" of Byelorussian culture, the sixteenth century. It was a model artistic and theatrical response to contemporary questions, and was connected with both Byelorussian history and with the national renascence in culture.

The following presentations of the season were of major value and interest to the Byelorussian theatergoer: *The Universal Language,* a comedy by Myslinski attacking the monarchists

and chauvinists; *The Devil and the Woman* and *Once upon a Time* by Alyakhnovich; and *The Career of Comrade Bryzhalin* by Mirovich. This last play depicted the negative aspects of life in the Soviet countryside, the obstinacy of Soviet officials and their mockery of the people. The play generalized from the shocking facts and from the offences of the Soviet authorities against the townspeople. To be sure, all this was presented under the guise of criticizing Bryzhalin's administrative extremes. At the end of the play "Comrade" Bryzhalin is unmasked and shown to be a former tsarist policeman who has climbed up through the Soviet hierarchy.

This fact, however, does not alter the gloomy picture presented. In fact, the "exposure" itself is no more than a fashionable device to end the play, introduced to evade the censorship. Otherwise, such plays would never have been produced, and the authors might have been punished.

A number of other plays were also presented, including two new ones by Popov: *Noah's Ark* and *The Unjust Trial.* Revivals included *The Smith Who Was a Governor* and *Kastus' Kalinoŭski* by Mirovich; *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme; The Gentleman's Attendant* by Byvayeŭski; and *On a July Night* by Lapitski.

During the following season (1926-1927), there were both new plays and classics. The former included *Victory* by Mirovich; Popov's production of *Local People* by Kupala; *The Whirlpool* by Aŭhen Ramanovich; *Above the Niemen River* by Hramyka; and *Darkness* by Vasil' Shashalevich. The classics included *Elga* by Gerhart Hauptmann; *Der grüne Kakadu* by Arthur Schnitzler, and *Le Mariage forcé* by Molière. The first attempt to produce a play for children was made at this time. *The Marksman Tell* by Sergei Zayaitski was chosen for the purpose. Mirovich directed it. The production was brisk, cheerful and entertaining, both for children and adults.

However, the attack on the theater by those supporting Soviet, antinational tendencies kept growing in strength. The pressure of the "Soviet public" developed to such an extent that the theater's directors were compelled to listen.

Following its initial performance Kupala's *Local People* was removed from the repertory. It was considered to reflect nationalistic theories of "originality" and other anti-Bolshevik attitudes, expressed in its attempt to depict the local Byelorussian intelligentsia, rather than the Bolshevik emissaries and their local protégés as the real representatives of the will of the people and as the defenders of Byelorussian interests. This was demonstrated in the characters of Yanka Zdol'nik, a teacher, and Alenka, his fiancée and former student.

Mirovich's national consciousness was unreliable. He submitted to the "proletarian public," and then wrote and produced *Victory,* a play devoted to the theme of the toil, life and struggle of the Byelorussian people under the Polish occupation of 1919 and 1920. The increasingly frequent demands of the Party press for a class approach forced Mirovich to introduce a number of scenes conforming to the theory of the class struggle. The playwright artificially exaggerated class conflicts in his picture of Byelorussian life. He depicted the Byelorussian gentry as traitors, thereby hypocritically serving the theories of class disintegration. The debased level of his ideas was also reflected in the art of the play. A long and involved series of events and ideas is treated separately and developed feebly in continual dramatic action. The characters were pale and, in part, schematic. The lack of unity was also shown in the settings. They lacked the harmony and organization needed to lend genuine style and consistency to the whole performance. The shortcomings of content prevented perfection even in form.

Art tolerates nothing false. Consequently, *The Dark Woods* by Mikola Il'inski, which was presented during that season, had neither art nor theater qualities. The life of those times was depicted as entirely gloomy. This prevented the author from making his Byelorussian countryside realistic, and reacted adversely on the production itself.

Of greater artistic value were the plays by young Byelorussian authors, Shashalevich's *Darkness* and Ramanovich's *The*

Whirlpool. The second of these was devoted to thirteenth-century Byelorussia. Like the play *Above the Niemen River,*[f] the theatrically interesting play by Hramyka, these two plays came to be considered by the official Soviet critics as pieces of Byelorussian counterrevolutionary and National Democratic ideology. In Ramanovich's *The Whirlpool,* such critics found an idealization of medieval feudalism, of the "Golden Age" of Byelorussian political and cultural development. The play is set against thirteenth-century court life under Mindovh, a Byelorussian Prince of Novohradok and a great unifier of Byelorussian territory. The play mainly deals with the adventures and love affairs of Prince Yury. It shows diplomatic parleys with the Crusaders, the palace intrigues of Svetach (a pagan priest) and other pictures of olden Byelorussia.

Soviet criticism, as represented by Vitali Vol'ski, later attacked the play. It was accused of attempting to create a historical basis through art for the contemporary political, intellectual and even economic ideas of the National Democrats.

The statements of Prince Yury reminded Vol'ski of the sayings of Vatslaŭ Lastoŭski, one of the greatest Byelorussian cultural workers who was among those liquidated by the Soviet regime in 1930. While still in emigration in Lithuania (i.e., before 1926), Lastoŭski published a Byelorussian magazine called *Kryvich.*[g] He wrote:

> We are *Kryvichy,* members of a Slavic tribe with its own distinctive national customs, ceremonies and characteristics. Our tribe has dwelled upon its own land for over a thousand years.... We are *Kryvichy* by blood, through our birth in the tribe, but we have settled in the forests and marshes so that those of us who have lived in the *dribva* [marsh] have come to be called *Dryhvichi* [or Dryagovichi—Ed.] 4

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f. *Above the Niemen River* depicted the life of the inhabitants of Western Byelorussia under Polish oppression in the early 1920's.

g. The *Kryvichy* were an olden East Slavic tribe who, roughly speaking, occupied the area which is now Byelorussia. The Dryhvichi, or Dryagovichi, were another such tribe.—Ed.

Lastoŭski's statement in no way contradicts the historians of the Slavic tribes. To such Soviet ideological propagandists as S. Ya. Vol'fson, however, this seemed like terrible and counterrevolutionary blasphemy. Vol'fson led pogroms against Byelorussian culture. Critics of his ilk liked to find occasions for exposing ideological deviations everywhere.

Vol'ski found Ramanovich in agreement with Lastoŭski on only one particular: the mention of Dryagovich blood by the hero of the play, Prince Yury. This protagonist turns to his servant with a lyrical confession of his fervant love for Al'dona:

> Wherever I go, whatever I do,
> Her marvellous image flashes before me.
> My hot Dryagovich blood is rebelling!

One of the pagan priests also speaks certain phrases containing the same "seditious" word, viz., "Oh, hot Dryagovich blood!" This was enough to cause the Bolshevik critic to burst into tirades of political accusations against the playwright, the theater and the producer.

In Hramyka's *Above the Niemen River,* Vol'fson found a National Democratic exposition of the social relationships in Polish-occupied Western Byelorussia. Not the Communist Party but rather the representatives of the Byelorussian peasantry, ideologically and politically led by the National Democratic intelligentsia, were depicted as the foremost fighters for freeing Western Byelorussia from social and national oppression. The intelligentsia had been given hegemony in the national liberation movement. This corresponded to the facts but not to the official position and pretensions of the Communist Party to universal hegemony.

Revivals of the 1926-1927 season included *The Smith Who Was a Governor, The Career of Comrade Bryzhalin* and *Kastus' Kalinoŭski,* by Mirovich; *The Gentleman's Attendant* by Byvayeŭski; *The Legacy* by Podsher; *Georges Dandin* by Molière; *On a July Night* by Lapitski; *The Nobles of Pinsk* by Dunin-Martsinkevich; *The Soviet Devil* by Yur'yev; *Paŭlinka* by Kupala and *On St. John's Eve* by Charot.

This was the last year that the theater operated in relative freedom. Crude ideological meddling and the prohibition of individual productions had not yet become permanent. Politics was still discussed with a cautious and patient attitude towards the fellow travellers, both in the theater and in nondramatic literature.

Chapter 8

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE BYELORUSSIAN STATE THEATER'S STYLE

The Byelorussian State Theater had its own special features in style, as shown by its settings and repertory during the above-mentioned period. These were accompanied by the considerable knowledge of the theater which had been accumulated by the Russian and European companies of the twentieth century. The Byelorussian Theater was formed as a national company. It was based on the experience of theater trends already in existence, and it utilized the scenic and dramatic achievements of other companies.

The Byelorussian State Theater drew heavily on the accumulated knowledge of other troupes and interpreted the most recent dramatic discoveries in its own fashion. This policy insured the theater's avoiding certain mistakes made by many Russian theaters at the time of the Revolution. Nevertheless, it concealed a danger: uncritical acceptance and repetition of undesirable experiments from the "revolutionary" theater. These last often diverted the theater from its immediate tasks, which were connected with national culture.

A bitter struggle arose over style. The conflict helped reveal the national character of the Byelorussian State Theater and at the same time hindered this revelation by introducing alien revolutionary innovations.

According to Aleksandr Vaz'nyasenski, three main tendencies were struggling to dominate the experimentation within the Byelorussian Theater. These were the psychologically real, the esthetic and the revolutionary. There was also a fourth, or composite group, the synthetic, combining the three others. Professor Vaz'nyasenski writes:

> The first of these, the psychological, is based on the art of "experience," as opposed to the art of "representation."

> Stage activity thus moves from the genuine and complete internal experience to the external expression of that experience.
>
> The second, the esthetic, theory tries to establish and to work out the independent and specific features of theater art, to present its own kind of performance, to show the truth in terms of theater *conventions* rather than the truth of life in the real world around it.
>
> The revolutionary theater, finally, is based on the work-principles of the experienced worker. In this regard, it proceeds from external gesture and action to internal experience.[5]

The extremes of revolutionary art led to the destruction of art. The misfortune of the Byelorussian State Theater was that it had been set up in the years when such tendencies were fashionable, when imitating the devices of the revolutionary theater was considered as being loyal and up to date ideologically.

The Byelorussian State Theater, however, did not follow any of these trends exclusively. It synthesized them and used the achievements of all of them in its repertory. This was the real reason that there was no single style in the Byelorussian Theater. Although some harm was done--mainly because of the revolutionary currents in the theater--this synthesis enriched the troupe. This applies to the best achievements of the first two trends, but more to the psychologically real tendency than to the aesthetic. The theater definitely adopted the former, and artistic success usually followed.

The Byelorussian State Theater repertory at this time synthesized the trends in theater style. There were two groups of productions: the old and the new plays. The latter had been either written especially for the Byelorussian State Theater or were translations of plays completed during the revolutionary years.

The new group of plays were varied in style. First of all there were dramas of everyday life: Elisa Orzeszkowa's *The Muzhik;* Marko Krapivnitski's *Duped;* Sergei Yur'yev's *Soviet Devil;* Uladislaŭ Halubok's *Towards the Unfathomable;* and *Woman's Village.*

All these dramas portrayed rural or urban life in the years immediately before or just after the Revolution. In *The Muzhik,* a country girl becomes a servant in town for a while. She marries a peasant fisherman, but this fails to bring the family the happiness she desires. The pure and beautiful dreams of the woman perish in her low environment.

The love of a salesgirl for a cabinetmaker is depicted in *Towards the Unfathomable.* Rural life, with the love of young people overcoming the objections of their parents—an eternal subject is shown in *Duped.*

Mirroring the new way of life sometimes served also to criticize Soviet reality. In *Woman's Village,* the Communist fails to introduce his innovations into the small town. In Yur'yev's play, there is hostility between the villagers and the Party man, whom they call the "Soviet devil."

For the most part, these plays were not Byelorussian and, consequently, the national traits of the characters were still very weakly developed. They were rather plays about international daily life. In presenting them, the theater continued the traditions of the old, true-to-life theater of the nineteenth century and of the psychologically real theater of the twentieth.

Plays by Byelorussian authors depicted the way of life comically. Aŭhen Ramanovich's *All Will Be Well* furnishes an example of this. Byelorussian rural life presented abundant material for humor and for showing popular ceremonies such as matchmaking. Here the Byelorussian Theater followed the naturalistic theater and, specifically, the Russian art theater of the early period when its goal was to reflect the people's way of life as it really existed.

Plays like Lapitski's *On a July Night,* Andreyenko's *Hymn of Toil,* Calderón's *El Alcalde de Zalamea,* and *Spiders and Flies,* had social themes; these drew the Byelorussian Theater closer to the revolutionary theater. Stress was laid on social inequality, which caused profound tragedies in the lives of the people. *On a July Night* shows love between persons of different classes--a landed proprietor and a beautiful peasant girl

whose husband is in the army. A baby is born. The husband comes home and, in a fit of drunkeness, kills the child and is sent to prison. In *Spiders and Flies* the rich do not wish to choose wives from poor families lest they become related by blood. In *El Alcalde de Zalamea* a peasant brings an aristocratic rapist to trial.

The social emphasis at times went so far that it destroyed the specific needs of art. It produced such a wretched, typically Soviet work as *Hymn of Toil.* This play attempted to illustrate, in dry, lifeless, schematic, allegorical form, the idea of the struggle between labor and capital, with the resulting victory of labor.

The influence of the revolutionary theater on the repertory lowered the quality of the theater arts as if to illustrate graphically that Soviet Communist practice and creative art were incompatible. This was but concrete evidence that Bolshevism, with its ideology, is harmful to the very nature of art.

The theater was also injured by the manner in which the classics were approached. Plays were chosen because they conformed to the ideas and ideological demands of the day. Shaw's *Devil's Disciple,* Romain Rolland's *Les Loups* and Anatoli Lunacharski's *Red Mask* were selected solely because of their revolutionary scenes and motifs. This limited the choice of classics that could be produced. Although its choice was restricted, however, the Byelorussian Theater managed to preserve the rich, psychologically real, and artistic contents of the classics.

Besides these older plays, the Byelorussian Theater was enriched by a number of new dramatic productions. One group concerned historical themes, a second, contemporary themes, and a third, motifs from the creative work of the people. Those historical in nature can be divided into types, according to their styles and literary trends: the romantic and the realistic.

The romantic plays were historical in content, but their historical quality was not identified with any particular period of the Byelorussian past. Professor Vaz'nyasenski, in the above-

mentioned article, terms this historical quality abstract. The dramatic treatment accorded to the historical material showed symbolic and romantic influences. This group includes such plays as Aŭstsihnei Mirovich's dramas *The Smith Who Was a Governor* and *Mashèka,* and Nazar Byvayeŭski's *The Gentleman's Attendant* (written under the pen name Yazèp Dyla).

The Smith Who Was a Governor presents an abstract and symbolic picture of the overthrow of the landlord's regime and the triumph of a popular regime, as represented by the smith. The play offers a broad picture of Byelorussian national life in the past. The action of *Mashèka* is replete with folk tale fantasies against which the story of Mashèka, a folk hero, is told. *The Gentleman's Attendant* generally depicts folk revolutionary movements in Byelorussian history. In all these plays the historical quality is removed from specific historical data and acquires symbolic features reminiscent of art-theater symbolism during the time of such playwrights as Ibsen, Hauptmann and Leonid Andreyev.

Purely realistic plays whose content was taken from history included Mirovich's *Kastus' Kalinoŭski* and Mikhas' Hramyka's *Skaryna, Son of Polotsk.*

Plays like Vasil' Harbatsevich's *The Wedding* and Mikhas' Charot's *On St. John's Eve* are related to dramas whose plots come from the creative work of the people. They successfully combine the national way of life, its weddings and ceremonies, with folk tales and fantasies based on the belief in witches, *rusalki,*[6] devils, and in the flowering of the fern, whose blossom (according to popular legend) brings good luck to the one who plucks it. The real was intermingled with the fabulous and the fantastic; the realism of the naturalistic or realistic theater was combined with the fantasy of the conventionalized aesthetic theater. Thus, these works were done in two styles: the realistic and the romantic. The two styles were united brilliantly, and their combination brought to the Byelorussian State Theater its most outstanding artistic successes. Had the correct attitude been taken towards a national repertory, this

combination could have proved exceptionally fruitful. Under suitable conditions--had the search for creative perfection remained uninterrupted--a genuine Byelorussian national theater and drama could have been created. The Byelorussian Theater, however, shared the fate of all other Byelorussian art. As time went on, the theater was forced off its course.

Let us now turn to the purely scenic aspects of the Byelorussian Theater during this period. In form, the theater arts still reflected the synthetic nature of the theater's entire work to a great extent. The theater had originated on the premises of the former Minsk Municipal Theater and had inherited the stage system there. Generally, a curtain was used at the performances (as distinguished from the revolutionary theater in Moscow, which had done away with the curtain). For Molière's plays, as has been stated above, the curtain was doubled or divided in two to emphasize special features of the text.

For Byelorussian plays, the curtain was given a national character. For a performance of *The Smith Who Was a Govemor, Mashèka* or *On St. John's Eve,* the curtains was artistically decorated with Byelorussian folk designs. For Calderón's *El Alcalde de Zalamea* there were two curtains; the first was quite usual, but the second was made of dark fabric and divided the stage into two unequal parts. The smaller part (the proscenium) was in front, while the larger part (the stage proper) was in back. When action took place downstage, the dark curtain was lowered to divide the proscenium from the stage proper. Thus, the style and character of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spanish theater were successfully recreated.

Generally, the stage, choir, footlights, and proscenium in the Byelorussian Theater were not altered for performances. Only for *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* was the footlight trough removed and the orchestra pit planked over, thereby extending the apron. The same thing was done for *Red Mask.*

Some of the action in both plays was transferred to the auditorium. In *Red Mask* a presidium sat on the stage and the audience represented the public. Actors scattered among the play-

goers brought their votes up to the stage.

Settings in the Byelorussian Theater were more often than not realistic, insofar as this was possible by utilizing the decorations left over from the old theater. This was far from the naturalism of the Moscow Art Theater. Verisimilitude lay mostly in the central idea itself. However, there were plays which did approximate life closely, such as Nikolai Popov's *Noah's Ark,* in which the sets and domestic details gave the complete illusion of reality.

Usually the realism of the setting was conventional. Sometimes the only decorations in realistic performances were upstage, while the walls along the wings were simply hung with dark cloths.

Sometimes the setting was wholly conventional. At such times the conventionality was a matter of principle, an idea evoked by the desire for a conventional stage style, for theatricality in the performance (as contrasted with stage naturalism). This meant that the Byelorussian Theater was growing closer to the aesthetic theater. The use of conventions, however, differed in the various plays.

In doing Byelorussian plays based upon folk motifs, such as *On St. John's Eve* and *The Wedding,* the settings followed folk tale conventions. There might be a fairy tale garden, with witches, *rusalki* and various wonders. In other presentations, such as *The Smith Who Was a Governor,* the conventional decorations conveyed realistic pictures. To show harvesting, for example, sheaves of wheat were depicted in regular rows set on a gradully rising platform. The rhythmic movements of the women reaping made it seem real.

The plays of Moliere and Calderon were set conventionally in order to preserve their special features.

The stage in the Byelorussian Theater, as in the old, true-to-life theater, was illuminated by footlights and overhead lights. During the entire performance of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* a spotlight was used to stress and supplement the variety of colors in the setting and costumes and to heighten

the significance of the situations onstage.

As an example of the influence of the revolutionary theater (such as Vsevolod Meierhold's theater), a special screen was hung over the curtain; the numbers of the acts and the title of the different scenes were shown on this screen during the presentation of *The Career of Comrade Bryzhalin.*

Almost all the performances in the Byelorussian Theater had a musical accompaniment. Each act of a play, as well as the play itself, began with an overture, which was sometimes not even indirectly connected with the action. This resembled the choral and instrumental overtures of the Shakespearean and Spanish theaters of the Renaissance and later. As a rule, however, the music was based on the central idea of the play, which it served to elaborate organically. It was thus part of the production and was closely connected with the course of the action. In the staging of *On St. John's Eve* and *The Wedding,* for example, folk rites were enacted to music; folk songs were sung in chorus and in solos, and there were also ballet interludes.

Ballet played a prominent part in the production of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (which was even subtitled "a comedy ballet"). In *Mashėka,* music recreated the stylization of the national way of life; there was an overture at the beginning of the performance. Byelorussian *lirniki*[a] entered; *rusalki* danced; songs about Christmas and other subjects were sung and folk dances were performed.

Sometimes separate instruments were used instead of an orchestra. In Alyakhnovich's *Shadows,* for example, a barrel organ lent a mood of grief to the scene of the hero's funeral; in Andreyev's *Life of a Person* the same effect was achieved by violins.

The extensive use of musical effects came from the aesthetic theater; it also reflected the influence of the music halls, the circuses, and the other forms of theater and vaudeville

a. A *lirnik* was a wandering musician who sang while accompanying himself on the lyre.

art which were then popular. But in all fairness it must be stated that the Byelorussian Theater used music in good taste and chose it carefully to serve the aims of the given presentation. Music introduced variety, enriched the performances and increased their success with the audiences. It contributed to the positive creative synthesis of the theater. Besides, in this initial period (before the autumn of 1926), the First Byelorussian State Theater was the only playhouse in the city; the Halubok Byelorussian Traveling Theater concentrated on rural districts and small towns. Consequently, the First Byelorussian State Theater had to satisfy audience demands for other kinds of theater art, such as opera and ballet. This is why the theater incorporated elements of music and dancing in its productions. Solo and choral singing and ballet numbers made the production of *On St. John's Eve* resemble a musical drama. In all these productions, however, such elements were closely connected with the plays themselves. Later, singing, instrumental music and the ballet gradually became separated from the content of the plays. Finally, independent presentations of opera, evenings of ballet and concerts of instrumental music began to take place.

Even in the 1924-1925 season, performances of rather short plays were sometimes supplemented with mixed concerts. After the autumn of 1926, more planning began to go into the latter. In that season seven symphonic concerts were given, one of which was performed by all the musicians of Minsk and dedicated to the centennial of Beethoven's death.

Special evenings of ballet were arranged. In the 1926-1927 season, the following ballet program was presented: the "Walpurgis Night" music from Gounod's *Faust;* several unusual dances consisting of "A Joyful Dance," "The Arbitrary Child" and "Promenade" (all to music by Cooper), "Cowboy Dance" (to music by Gounod), "Snukki" (to music by Pritsker), and "Seguidilla" (to music by Albeniz). The program also presented "The Polovtsian [Polovetsian] Camp" from Borodin's opera *Prince Igor.* At the start and finish of the concert this ballet

program was combined with solos from *Faust* and *Prince Igor.* The ballet numbers for the rest of the program were later replaced by others. Thus the ballet program was continually revitalized and reinvigorated.

These evenings were the first attempts to bring ballet to the Byelorussian stage. The theater hired a large number of dancers, singers and other performers for this task. This laid the foundations for the production of complete operas which came later.

In May 1927 the Byelorussian State Theater presented Dargomyzhski's opera *Rusalka* for the first time in Byelorussian. It was the first opera to be presented in that language since Stanisław Moniuszko's *The Peasant Woman* had been performed at Minsk in 1852. *Rusalka* was given under the auspices of the Institute of Byelorussian Culture. The participants included the combined choruses of the theater, the music subsection, and the Institute's own Section of the Arts--ninety-five voices in all. The opera had a deserved success. The singing of the soloists and the chorus, as well as the mass scenes, bore witness to the extensive work of the director-producer, Vyachaslaŭ Sėlyakh. The presentation of the opera allowed local operatic talent to be assembled and examined; it laid the foundations for the future Byelorussian Opera House and Ballet Theater.

The final element of stagecraft concerns acting. The practice of the Byelorussian State Theater of this period shows that the art of acting was little influenced by the new revolutionary theater. For the most part, the traditions of the psychologically real and naturalistic theaters were maintained. There was a perceptible movement towards art for art's sake, with an emphasis on theatricality. This was especially noticeable in the productions of Molière, above all in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme.* In this production the strong accentuation on the actors' art, together with the ballet and orchestral interludes, partly eclipsed the contents of the play.

This, however, did not become the main trend in the theater. The realistic traditions within the Byelorussian Theater led the players to consider their acting--like the settings for the

plays--subordinate to the content of the drama. In the Byelorussian Theater acting was not an end in itself; the style varied to suit different dramatic productions. Thus, for example, works of the psychologically real school demanded that the actor play from experience (as in the role of Blazen in *The Smith Who Was a Governor*).

Social and historical plays and plays of everyday life demanded that the actor reflect the natural conduct and personality of the character, his action and conversation. This kind of playing came from the traditions of the naturalistic theater.

The unimportant influence of the contemporary revolutionary theater was shown in such tricks as jumping about and turning somersaults. This too occurred mainly in the presentations of Molière. Such a style, however, did not become part of the actors' general technique; it was used only occasionally.

The Byelorussian Theater began to concentrate on the realistic and naturalistic interpretations of roles; it insisted on technique in acting. This was most difficult for the actor; it demanded much self-discipline, considerable skill and education in the theater, a knowledge of human psychology, and the ability both to penetrate the inner world of a person and to express it clearly and artistically on the stage; despite these difficulties, the actors acquitted themselves with honor.

An actor frequently had to be prepared to do various parts, to perform in sequence roles which differed from each other completely in form and content. Some were psychological and revealed profound experiences (such as Uladamirski's portrayal of Blazen in *The Smith Who Was a Governor*). Others were purely naturalistic and realistic (such as the same Uladamirski's impersonation of the title figure in the *Career of Comrade Bryzhalin*). Byelorussian actors mastered every task assigned to them.

All this indicated the great creative possibilities of the theater. Under the proper conditions of freedom, this could have led to an unprecedented development in Byelorussian theater arts. It is, therefore, painful to recall the attacks by

official Soviet circles and Party organs made on the theater at the time of the "discussion about the theaters." Later, in the years when the National Democrats were crushed, much of the theater's strength was dissipated and many plans for it were broken off.

Until this debacle, however, the Byelorussian State Theater surmounted its pangs, its torments and the alien and extraneous elements which had been added to its style. It mastered the synthetic patterns of theater art and moved toward creating and developing a Byelorussian national theater and repertory.

The Byelorussian State Theater was based on a synthesis of the general principles in its field. It was approaching its solemn goal--the establishment of its own particular national style. The riches of folk art were used as were the living sources of the variegated and inventive Byelorussian folklore with its tales, fantasy, folk rites, music, dances, and patterns for stage scenery and properties.

A genuine Byelorussian theater was thus made possible. Such an aim, however, was not part of the Bolshevik plan. It conflicted with the goals of the Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Individual pieces of criticism in the press of that period did not always produce prompt results in the organizations. The power of the artistic spirit in the theater did not yield but always fought for its rights. A special ideological maneuver or attack was required to smash the persistence of this power. Such was the function of the so-called "discussion about the theaters" of the 1928-1929 season.

Chapter 9

THE "DISCUSSION ABOUT THE THEATERS," 1928-1929

During the 1927-1928 season the Soviet regime began to intensify its ideological control. Capitalist elements were attacked in all fields of ideological life, including art, literature and education. The Party initiated a struggle for "proletarian ideology" as the systematized outlook of the working class, interpreted very narrowly.

The primitive attitudes of so-called political literacy were utilized to make value judgments about complicated questions of art and literature. The slightest efforts to protest or object were immediately termed hostile, thus eliminating any possibility for contradiction or of the maintenance of other opinions.

An ideological campaign was also begun against the Byelorussian Theater. Demands grew stronger for the theater to reveal proletarian ideas in its activities. The entire Byelorussian national repertory was regarded as failing to correspond to the times. Demands were made that the theater change, that it face the new period of reconstruction, and that it keep abreast of the tasks in socialist construction.

In May 1927 the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) held a special conference on questions of the theater. The conference passed a resolution demanding that all theaters re-orient themselves according to the proletarian spirit; it called upon the entire "Party and proletarian public" to follow and influence the work of the theaters. One need hardly mention that this resolution became law both for Party functionaries and for all those who worked in the arts throughout Byelorussia.

For carrying out its policies in Byelorussia—as in the other Soviet Republics—the Central Committee has many "transmission belts." First of all, there are the Communist organs in various localities (called Local Republic Committees of the Communist Party). The principle of centralism in the Party or-

ganization makes local Communist organizations subsidiary to the Central Committee in Moscow. In the first years after the Revolution, this subordination was not defined so clearly as later when the parties of the national minorities finally lost all semblance of autonomy.

In those years, the instructions of the All-Union Central Committee, after some delay, became the subject of special conferences held by the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Byelorussian Central Committee. At that time they still managed to do without any special envoy from Moscow. Later such an emissary became customary after every resolution of the Central Committee.

The local authorities were charged with working out resolutions and practical conclusions about the Byelorussian theaters. They were represented by Ales' Nekrashévich of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda. His reports and suggestions were reflected in a resolution of the Byelorussian Central Committee which was binding on all Soviet organs, since the latter were subordinate to the Central Committee. This included the Main Department of the Arts within the Byelorussian Ministry of Education and the trade union of Byelorussian workers in the arts. The Main Department of the Arts exercised jurisdiction over the Byelorussian Theater.

A managing director of the theater was appointed by the Ministry of Education and made responsible to it. He was forced to follow the line of the Party and government, although in those times he did not always have to be a Party member. Frequently, he was simply a theater specialist.

The demands made on the theater by the Party and the government were obligatory for everyone in the company, from the managing director on down. The troupe proved to be somewhat stubborn about questions of art, and it was not easy to overcome their resistance.

During the 1927-1928 season, categorical demands were made for the theater to re-orient itself, to completely renounce the national repertory, called bourgeois-nationalist, and to transfer

to "new rails" by introducing a general Soviet repertory. In order to cut the First Byelorussian State Theater off from the influence of the "National Democrats," i.e., from the Byelorussian national forces in Minsk, and to deprive it of their fruitful influence, the theater was sent off on a tour to Vitebsk, Mogilev, Gorki, and Orsha.

In Vitebsk the theater immediately came under strong "proletarian" control. The "Art Soviet" there began to function for the first time. It included representatives of the "Soviet public," members of the Party, the unions and other organizations. At the same time, mass-worker and Komsomol organizations and enterprises began trekking to the theater. All this had a bad effect on its activities. Ignorant and illiterate persons began meddling with problems of dramatics which they did not understand.

This procedure inaugurated the period of converting the company into a workers' organization; a number of persons recommended because of their work in dramatic clubs joined the company. A group of Komsomol students was attached to the technical staff. Before this, there had not been a single Party member in the theater. Now such a person appeared—Kozakov, the manager of the assembly section, who possessed that zeal peculiar to young Communists from the bottom of society. He began meddling in all details of the work done by acknowledged artists. One such craftsman was the new managing director of the theater, Vyachaslaŭ Sėlyakh—a non-Party man appointed in August 1927. Now an émigré, Sėlyakh discusses this period as follows:

> There was continual pressure upon the Byelorussian Theater as a nationalist theater. It was constant and inescapable. It did not permit the Komsomol of the theater—the "light cavalry"—to live and work. They were always meddling in the affairs of others; they kept putting spokes in the wheels and undermining the activities of the theater all the time.[7]

The vogue for all things proletarian began to be cultivated in the theater. A decisive struggle began against "bourgeois-Philistine" tastes. All work was accompanied by the slogan for a

new repertory, both revolutionary and ideologically consistent. In order to destroy the company more effectively—according to instructions from the Department of Agitation and Propaganda—the Theater's Club of Young Amateurs was used. Of course, the Komsomol had a majority in the club itself from the start. They later intensified their attacks and soon managed to seat one of their members on the Art Soviet of the Theater. Later, with the help of the Central Directorate of the Union of Workers in the Arts, they managed to hold elections for the local trade-union committee before the voting was due. The majority of candidates chosen came from the club itself.

Nikolai Popov, a director, had previously voiced opposition to the club, considering its members artistically immature. In revenge, once the club dominated the Art Soviet, it began a struggle against "Popovism." During that season all Popov's productions were withdrawn, and he himself was thrown out of the theater. A ruthless purge of the repertory was begun, which later produced a crisis in the theater itself.

Out on tour the theater once again followed the wishes of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda. It reduced its complement by releasing certain first-rate actors. Nevertheless A.B. Viner, a director from the Moscow Soviet Trade-Union Theater, and Volkov, a designer from the same theater, were later invited to join the Byelorussian Theater, as was V.A. Smeyanov of the Association of New Directors.

The tenth anniversary of the October Revolution was drawing near, and demands were made that the theater reflect the events of the Revolution. There were no Byelorussian plays on the subject. Plays by Soviet non-Byelorussian dramatists were chosen which had long since been dropped from the repertory of Russian theaters. These included *Rebellion* by Polivanov (based on the novel of the same name by Dmitri Furmanov), and *The Moon Is on the Left* by V. Bill'-Belotserkovski.

The general tendency to sovietize influenced Aŭhen Ramanovich in his play *Fallow Field,* devoted to the events of the

Civil War. The play emphasized the psychological processes of people whose way of life had been dislocated by the Revolution. It did not include the catchwords of the day and thus failed to please the Party dignitaries. At the Twelfth Congress of the Byelorussian Communist Party it was called "Philistine trash" tinted in Soviet colors and dressed in Soviet clothing.

Rebellion was hurriedly produced, and the result was not polished: the actors failed to make their roles live, artificial pathos being substituted for the profound feelings of the individual characters. Official criticism, however, made a great to-do about the production, noting a definite transition by the theater towards a repertory that was contemporary and contained themes that were true to life.

Among the plays done previously, the following candidates for quick withdrawal were presented that season: *Kastus' Kalinoŭski, The Smith Who Was a Governor, The Career of Comrade Bryzhalin,* and *Victory*—all by Mirovich—*The Gentleman's Attendant* by Nazar Byvayeŭski, *Above the Niemen River* by Mikhas' Hramyka, *The Whirlpool* by Ramanovich *The Marksman Tell* by Sergei Zayaitski, *Elga* by Gerhart Hauptmann, *Soviet Devil* by Sergei Yur'yev, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* by Molière, and a play called *Darkness.*

If these plays had not yet been removed from the repertory, it was only because the representatives of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, the Municipal Party Committee and the District Party Committee were more interested in the new productions of the theater. In order to gain control, they organized public previews for every play. Usually, this was done at the dress rehearsal, after which discussion dragged on until late at night. The participants were sometimes made to sit until morning and listen to class analyses by the new legislators of art, the Party officials. Previewers of this type first made their appearance in 1926, immediately after the preview of *Local People* by Yanka Kupala, the national poet of Byelorussia. This play was withdrawn, and thereafter no première could avoid such a general political test.

During the following season, 1928-1929, controls became more stringent. A movement began in favor of plays from the Soviet, non-Byelorussian repertory. The Byelorussian drama was forced into the narrow confines of one-sided themes dealing with proletarian factories and construction. In the entire season there were but two new productions of original Byelorussian plays. Adaptation to Soviet conditions and the demands of reality, as they were called, had begun.

Even such a distinguished Byelorussian dramatist as Mirovich wrote a play about the life of Byelorussian workers called *Spindles Will Sing.* Demands arose that playwrights use industrial themes, which were then considered most orthodox and proletarian. Ramanovich was thus seduced into writing *The Bridge,* a play about the industrialization of the country. Both these plays were staged by Mirovich with settings by Oskar Mariks. Volkov assisted Mariks with *Spindles Will Sing.*

Mirovich did all he could to lend to his productions a semblance of art and originality. Uladimir Krylovich played an honest old engineering specialist named Chuzhakoŭ, while Uladimir Uladamirski enacted the light comedy role of the timekeeper, Mukhin.

Mariks built a revolving bridge onstage. Its various positions revealed diverse situations and different platforms for the action .The mass scenes were also interesting. The director had given much thought to the problem of how to move large groups of people on the stage.

The material itself, however, was industrial in nature and did not lend itself to the broad generalizations of art. *The Bridge* and *Spindles Will Sing* contained many superfluous details from everyday life which weighed down the production and eclipsed the performers.

The other productions of the season were plays translated from Soviet Russian originals. They included Vsevolod Ivanov's *Armored Train 14-69* (staged by Viner and Smeyanov and set by Volkov), and A. Glebov's *Inga* (presented by Smeyanov and

set by D.M. Krein). Under the influence of these Russian directors, the theater was gradually deprived of the individual style which had been acquired earlier. It abandoned its previous triumphs, which had been leading it towards the art of truth and realism, and came under the influence of the simplified constructivism of certain Moscow theaters. *Spindles Will Sing* and *Armored Train 14-69* were produced completely under the influence of the Moscow Trade-Union Theater. *The Bridge* and *Inga* were done under the influence of the Vakhtangov Theater. Those were years of crisis during which this fine theater itself had temporarily yielded to the pernicious but fashionable influence of the revolutionary theater. The Second Byelorussian State Theater went through similar experiences.

The general situation in the theater caused a discussion of the artificial crisis in Byelorussian drama. Byelorussian nationalists were compelled to speak out against the danger threatening the theater with complete oblivion as a factor in Byelorussian culture and nationalism. Byelorussian cultural figures had always tried previously to defend the Byelorussian Theater from the baseless attacks of the Party press. Unfavorable reviews appeared both in the organs of the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party (*Star* [Z'vyazda], and *The Worker* [Rabochii]) and in the organ of the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Komsomol (*Red Change* [Chyrvonaya z'mena]). They discussed the remarkable new production of Mikhas' Hramyka's *Around the Terrace* at the Second Byelorussian State Theater. Immediately, Vatslaŭ Lastoŭski, Aleksandr Tsvikevich and Ales' Adamovich, noted Byelorussians connected with the theater, joined a group of writers in an effort to appeal to the public in defense of the theater. They wrote a letter to the editors of the newspaper *Soviet Byelorussia* [Savetskaya Belarus']. [8]

The critics Z'mitrok Zhylunovich (whose pen name was Tsishka Hartny) and Todar Hlybotski continued what the others had begun in the pages of the same newspaper, pointing out that the repertory of the theater excluded native Byelorussian

works in favor of translations. Their articles expressed the accumulated indignation of the Byelorussian public at this artificial situation.

In the fall of 1928, Hlybotski reviewed a production of *Armored Train 14-69* expressing doubt about the expediency of presenting translations rather than native plays. In his articles, "On Our Criticism" [Pra nashu krytyku] and "Down with Anecdotes" [Davoli anekdotaŭ], he tried to give his own ideas about the Byelorussian Theater. Zhylunovich shared these opinions in his own article, "Notes of the Time" [Zaŭvahi k chasu].

In "Down with Anecdotes," Hlybotski wrote:

> The first and most immediate need is for a repertory. There are no plays acceptable for production in our academic theater. None. ...And if we turn to plays which seem suitable, what do we find? We find translations of plays which have long since gone off the boards in Moscow and Leningrad, where they have managed to grow old or boring: *When the Cocks Crow; The Moon Is on the Left, Rebellion, The Breach, Armored Train 14-69,* and *Soviet Devil.* This is a whole flood on which these works, like separate tossing skiffs, demand attention (if, in general, any kind of undernourished thing can deserve attention). *Armored Train 14-69* and *The Breach* are good plays; they marked an epoch in the Russian theater. But has our own theater really sworn to develop only within those areas which the Russian theater has presented to us?[9]

The Byelorussian intelligentsia considered the theater a major factor in culture and education. It was supposed to help bring about national enlightenment and to make the audience respect its own history and national traditions. It was supposed to lead to a renascence of national consciousness, to create a Byelorussian national ideal and to acknowledge its own place within the universal culture of the West. Byelorussia is the westernmost of the East Slavic lands; it has always lent a sympathetic ear to the echoes of Western European cultural movements and ideas. These had often been influential in the national past. Western culture was stigmatized by the Bolsheviks as bourgeois and corrupt. Unable to preach that culture

openly, Byelorussian cultural figures were forced to do what they could under the screen of defending their own national culture.

The theater had abandoned its original repertory. Soviet, non-Byelorussian plays now dominated it. All this forced Byelorussian cultural figures to declare themselves opposed to foreign domination. They defended the original repertory and their native dramatic heroes.

"Why," continued Hlybotski, "should Byelorussian playgoers find the struggle of Siberian partisans (as in *Armored Train 14-69*), or that in far-away Fergana (as in *Rebellion*) more important than their own native champions?" He called for a complete about-face towards original Byelorussian works. "Have we only a few plays," Hlybotski went on, "that might be produced? ...The time has arrived to show the originality of our theater."

The predominance of the translated repertory could, according to Hlybotski, lead to a dangerous disease for Byelorussian culture. "The chief thing," he wrote, "is not to allow the defects of the contemporary theater to spread and infect the healthy parts." With the enthusiasm of youth, he advocated the most radical measures in the struggle with this evil. "We must sweep out of the Byelorussian theater both the anecdotes and those who write them." Hlybotski demanded *academic* qualities from the Second Byelorussian State Theater (his article dealt mainly with that theater). "We may rightfully demand that the Byelorussian Academic State Theater really give us *academic things*" (Hlybotski's italics). He suggested presenting the plays of Romain Rolland and such Byelorussian dramas as *The Whirlwind in the Swamp* by Mikhas' Zarètski, *Scorned People* by Leopold Rodzevich, and the entire work of Yanka Kupala. He also recommended a number of Ukrainian dramas, "since everyone is so critical of Byelorussian plays."

This suggestion was later interpreted as revealing the consolidation of Byelorussian and Ukrainian nationalists,

a charge which was allegedly verified later by the imaginary liaison between the Union for the Liberation of the Ukraine and the Union for the Liberation of Byelorussia. The activity of those bodies was supposedly unmasked at the time of the Ukrainian trials and the mass arrests of Byelorussian intellectuals between 1930 and 1933.

These later conclusions were arrived at with the aid of the punitive organs of the GPU. They were preceded by a certain amount of ideological preparation. The Bolsheviks deliberately fanned the statements by Hlybotski and Zhylunovich into a major discussion of the theaters.

For the Communists, this was the time for a convenient and long-awaited pogrom against the Byelorussian national ideology in culture and the theater. The Party press in Minsk—notably the *Star*—and Party officials seized upon these modest statements of ideology and talked about them as if they represented great dangers to the theater from counterrevolutionaries and National Democrats. Hlybotski and Zhylunovich were accused of aspiring to tear Byelorussian culture away from proletarian Moscow and of having tried to libel everything proletarian, "ideologically foremost" and Bolshevik which had come from the fighting center. They were accused of being oriented towards the capitalist West, a charge which was already considered a major offense in itself. The Bolsheviks stunned their opponents with political accusations and created an atmosphere of unbearable hostility towards all signs of original Byelorussian culture. Such conditions facilitated their decisive attack against everything national and Byelorussian in the theater. They considered any manifestation of Byelorussian cultural originality to be bourgeois-nationalistic and counterrevolutionary. The "proletarian public" and all employees of the theater were called upon to uproot all elements of Byelorussian nationalism ruthlessly and completely.

The actors silently, passively and furtively rebuffed the members of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda

who had been sent to conduct the Bolshevik campaign. Meetings were held at the theater on the subject; propagandists from the Department exposed "Hlybotski-ism" in the theater, searching out those actors who had sympathized with Hlybotski. The active members of the Communist Party and the Komsomol in the troupe obligingly furnished testimony by informers and undercover agents. Nevertheless, the company held out for a long time. Finally, in 1930, practical conclusions brought about the arrest of a number of the theater's personnel, including Flyoryyan Zhdanovich, a leading actor, and the playwrights Byvayeŭski, Hramyka and Vasil' Shashalevich.

Following the discussions about the theaters the original Byelorussian repertory gradually disappeared. The First Theater's national features and its original place in the Soviet Union have been allowed to fade away. From that time on, the entire history of the First Byelorussian State Theater concerns the struggle against its previous trend of nationalism. Its chorus was forbidden to appear in national costume or to sing Byelorussian folk songs exclusively. The choral repertory was ordered changed; contemporary songs by Soviet composers were now included.

In Stalin's formulation, national culture is "socialist in content but national in form." In Byelorussia, however, the struggle against the National Democrats was actually aimed at a national form of Byelorussian culture. The fact is that the new Byelorussian culture came from the flesh and blood of the Byelorussian working masses and their working intelligentsia. Even before the Revolution, there were no major Byelorussian capitalists, factory owners or landed proprietors. As a rule, such people came from either the Russian or Polish provinces or from abroad. Such people were the very ones who opposed the creation of a Byelorussian republic and the encouragement of Byelorussian culture. Intellectuals from either the rural districts or from among the urban workers preserved their native language and ties with the folk; they

created Byelorussian culture. They could not have created a bourgeois, capitalist culture; to have done so would have contradicted their nature and their opinions—especially in Soviet Byelorussia. All these accusations of "bourgeois qualities" are more than ridiculous; they do not deserve to be dignified by criticism. The Bolsheviks did not need truth, but rather a campaign for its own sake.

The Bolshevik pogrom against Byelorussian culture was aided by S.Ya. Vol'fson, a pseudo-Marxist Academician who wrote a number of articles against counterrevolutionary National Democrats of his imagination. Vol'fson criticized mainly the form rather than the content of Byelorussian culture. This made it easier for him to find deviations; content was more closely connected with the people. He found counterrevolution in the following (among others): the geometric ornamentation of the Byelorussian folk art of weaving; the border designs of the collars on Byelorussian folk-embroidered skirts and blouses, and the use of cornflower patterns.[10] Later, in 1931, even the Byelorussian Central Committee of the Communist Party was compelled to condemn Vol'fson's ideas. In a special resolution, Vol'fson's ideas were termed a "Great Power deviation."

Vol'fson's harmful conceptions sowed suspicion among Party members for a long time. They were accompanied by enmity towards the national form of Byelorussian culture and produced harsh, destructive results for the entire subsequent cultural life of Byelorussia.

In earlier seasons, the new Soviet, non-Byelorussian plays had been accompanied by old productions from the best years of the First Theater, which enjoyed unbroken success. These plays included *Kastus' Kalinoŭski, The Smith Who Was a Governor, The Career of Comrade Bryzhalin, The Gentleman's Attendant, Skaryna, Son of Polotsk,* and *Above the Niemen River.* During the 1929-1930 season all these plays were termed "National Democratic," removed from the repertory and forbidden.

The Party press hinted vaguely that these plays had been

written according to a National Democratic conception and maintained that they idealized the past, did not sufficiently differentiate between classes in the conflicts which they depicted, and concealed the principle of class struggle.

Skaryna, the first printer, was called a Jesuit. Kalinoŭski, the leader of a national rebellion by the Byelorussian peasantry in 1863, the first herald of "muzhik truth," and the publisher of the first newspaper in Byelorussian, failed to suit the local Bolsheviks. He was a reminder of the Byelorussians' past love for freedom and of the traditional struggle for it. After all, he might have become a contaminating example for our own times. In Byelorussia, persons were forbidden even to mention the name of their national hero, lest it become real and eclipse the authority of the new Soviet leaders. Though forbidden in Byelorussia, the figure of Kalinoŭski continued to captivate audiences in Moscow, Leningrad and other Russian cities in which the film of that name was kept on the screen. Regardless of the ban in Byelorussia, Aleksandr Shestakov did not pass up the opportunity of presenting him as one of the honored heroes of the Byelorussian nation. Professor Shestakov's *History of the U.S.S.R. (Short Course)* [Istoriya SSSR (kratki kurs)] was for a long time the only textbook on Russian history, so it was obligatory. It circulated among institutions of learning from the elementary through the graduate level in the entire Soviet Union (including Byelorussia). Until the end of the Second World War, however, the name of Kalinoŭski was officially forbidden in the art, drama, scholarship, and literature of Byelorussia itself.

Later the Nazi occupation authorities also forbade a revival of Mirovich's *Kastus' Kalinoŭski.* Thus, the shadow of the national champion frightened both of the totalitarian dictators and oppressors.

During the Second World War, there was a return to patriotic slogans. Patriotic propaganda was still authorized just after the war. Only as a result of this fact did the Bolsheviks return to Byelorussia her right to her own national heroes—Kalin-

oŭski, Skaryna and Mashėka. The latter two received a new class interpretation in plays by Mikhas' Klimkovich and Vitali Vol'ski and were allowed to appear again on the Byelorussian stage. D.A. Lukas' new opera was presented at the Byelorussian Opera House and Ballet Theater in Minsk. This time it was dedicated to Kalinoŭski, its protagonist.

However, Mirovich's remarkable dramas, *Kastus' Kalinoŭski, Mashéka* and *The Smith Who Was a Governor*—like Hramyka's *Skaryna, Son of Polotsk*—were not staged thereafter.

The discussion about the theaters resulted in a final ban on everything of which the theater could be most proud, everything which had facilitated the progress of Byelorussian art. The removal of this repertory brought with it the end of the "Golden Age" of the Byelorussian theater. A long, gray, humdrum life began. No steady light illuminated the theater now; there were only individual flashes of relative glory. One of these was its success in June 1930 at the All-Union Olympiad of the Arts in the U.S.S.R.

Chapter 10

AN IMAGINARY TRIUMPH: THE FIRST BYELORUSSIAN STATE THEATER IN MOSCOW, 1930

The 1929-1930 season brought only two productions of plays by new Byelorussian dramatists—*Glass Factory* by Ryhor Kobets and *Between Storms* by Z'mitrok Kurdin. Together with the translation of Yanovski's *Fury*, these works represented an artificial dramatic apotheosis of the whole Soviet system. They dealt with inventiveness, the shock worker movement, collectivization, the life of the Red Army, and other subjects. These plays were written according to the demands and recipes of Marxist criticism.

Glass Factory was entirely devoted to the theme of production. The play seemed like an answer to the never-ending and intrusive demands for a working class theme. It dealt with the workers' inventiveness, showing a group of them in a modest-sized glass factory located in a small and remote town. The foremost workers dedicate themselves to raising production, but they are hindered, as in all Soviet plays, by the class enemy and by backward elements among the workers themselves.

The experience gained from the production of Aŭhen Ramanovich's *The Bridge* was used by D.M. Krein in setting *Glass Factory*. A glass-fusing furnace was erected in the center of the stage, which especially pleased the workers in the audience.

Glass Factory was Kobets' maiden effort. He was aided by a Byelorussian writer assigned to him, who reworked the play. Aŭstsihnei Mirovich, the director, was aided by L.G. Rakhlenka; together, they managed to find a number of new dramatic devices and situations which aided the actors. U.N. Krylovich was particularly outstanding as the worker-inventor, Maroz, who seeks to facilitate the labor of the glass blowers. Uladimir Uladamirski was splendid in the

role of Tsyhanok. Henrykh Hryhonis, as Khadyka and M.A. Zoraŭ, as Skryloŭ—two master glass blowers—were also good, as were Vera Pola as Skryloŭ's daughter Lyuboŭ and Barys Platonaŭ as a force pump operator named Shuneika.

The industrial material itself, however, caused an over-abundance of naturalistic details, which interfered with the artistry of the actors and lowered the over-all value of the production. The audience was frequently unable to see the action or the actors because of the details. In terms of theme and general composition, and especially in terms of the production, *Glass Factory* repeated much that had been done in Mirovich's *The Bridge* and *Spindles Will Sing.*

Between Storms was devoted to life in the Red Army. Dybaŭ, its protagonist, has been attracted by the romantic elements of the Civil War. Through him, Kurdin shows the general disillusionment with the "peaceful" period of Soviet construction. The very title seemed to indicate both the temporary nature of the "peaceful" period in Red Army life and the training of the Army for its future military tasks. The theme of the play is the transformation of Dybaŭ into his own negation. The plot, however, is too heavily burdened with naturalistic details. The clear and lifelike character of Dybaŭ alone was of interest. The play later attracted the attention of the Theater of the Red Army in Moscow and was produced there.

The motif of disillusionment with the Revolution deserves special mention. It is reflected in Dybaŭ and Alena, the wife of the regimental commander. Both have remained attached to the past, the Civil War period, the only time when they had been able to satisfy their romantic longings and escape from the narrow confines of reality to the world of heroic exploits. The turbulent events of the first years after the Revolution allowed them to overcome the humdrum quality of everyday life by giving themselves entirely to something big. They had not realized the breadth and depth of the aims for which the Civil War was fought; they saw only that positive action—

the release of the energy which their active natures had accumulated—was possible. Alena sought only romantic adventures in the heroics of those days. She says:

> You, I, and the machine gun are on the cowcatcher of the locomotive. We're tearing along at full speed. The rails are trembling and swaying. Look! Look! We're racing down a hill. There are no stations, no switchmen—and we're doing more than a mile a minute. Ahead of us are the tempest, the night and the spring. At that time, Andreika, I didn't notice where the Revolution was—or the spring, or my nineteen years! Everything was all mixed together.

And now the romantic days of the Revolution are over. The ordinary days of peaceful reconstruction begin. Such a period is not for those seeking romantic ecstasy. Workaday activity returns with its monotony. Soviet reality attracts neither Dybaŭ nor Alena. They crave a more colorful existence. Alena declares enthusiastically:

> How I would like to be in a sleigh now! Yes, with little bells! The blizzard would whirl, and I'd go in whatever direction the horses' noses point—even to the Devil's wedding!

Alena longs for a different life; she seeks a way out of Soviet reality. The author involves her with some *Nepmen*[a] and she meets her end. He assigns a different fate to Dybaŭ, who also finds no pathos at all in the humdrum existence of the Red Army. The painstaking daily work of the Army leaves him unsatisfied. The official demand was for heroics in the present, but Dybaŭ is completely repelled by the government bureaucracy of Soviet reality. He remarks.

> Delay and red tape everywhere! Your world-wide revolution has been pigeon-holed! It's been shelved in the Comintern! It's over, comrades, faded out for a thousand years! Bumped off!

Dybaŭ's brilliance and persuasiveness in the first half of

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a. *Nepmen* were private traders allowed to exist in the U.S.S.R. after the Civil War and before the First Five-Year Plan (roughly, 1923-1928). They were so called because they thrived during the period of the NEP (New Economic Policy).—Ed.

the play make the playgoer identify himself with the protagonist. The play tries to transform Dybaŭ into his own negation and, in this, it is hardly convincing. The experienced theatergoer, who had a mind of his own, scarcely believed that such a metamorphosis was natural. The scholastic thesis of the dialectic about the transition of thesis to antithesis in the character of Dybaŭ remained unproved. The force of his original attitude was far more powerful, beautiful and convincing then his final, artificial love for Soviet construction. This last arose from the author's own purpose. In the final scenes of the play, Dybaŭ delivers a doxology in praise of reconstruction. This is deliberately tendentious—brought in to make it possible for the play to be produced.

Glass Factory and *Between Storms* together were no landmark in the development of the First Byelorussian Theater. Compared to productions of the past, they would have attracted no great attention had it not been for a series of coincidences.

During the summer of 1930, the First Byelorussian State Theater was invited to Moscow to participate in the All-Union Olympiad of the Theaters and Arts in the U.S.S.R. The Party leaders acceded to the wishes of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party. They found nothing better to represent Byelorussian theater arts than *Glass Factory* and *Between Storms.* The First Theater set out for Moscow on June 14, 1930.

The stages of the Second Moscow Art Theater and the Theater of the Revolution were used for the Byelorussian productions. On June 25, *Glass Factory* was performed to a packed house. Leading figures from the world of art and criticism were among those present.

The production was exceptionally well received. The Moscow press printed a series of enthusiastic articles and reviews. "A theater coming to the fore," one reviewer called it. [11] "Enormous Success of the Byelorussian

State Theater," another entitled his piece.[12] All the Moscow newspapers remarked on the merits of the production: its good ensemble work, its excellent staging of crowd scenes, and its fine acting—particularly that of Krylovich as Maroz. Later, the critics discovered in *Glass Factory* "a great victory for socialist realism" on the stage.

Moscow's most outstanding critics of the drama and of art in general admired the "invincible course of worker and proletarian themes" in the theater. This coincided with the period of greatest sociological vulgarization in Soviet art studies. RAPP[b] slogans about proletarian art and worker themes were then at their apogee, and all the idols and high principles of pure art were treated as philosophically idealistic and bourgeois. Those who understood art were completely disorganized. The reign of oversimplification had begun, amidst much shouting from the Party. Even the eminent old art specialists on the Olympiad jury wished to please the regime. They were apprehensive lest they show themselves out of touch with the "proletarian epoch," so they waxed enthusiastic over both *Glass Factory* and *Between Storms*.

They failed to use their authority to show the theater that it was wrong both in abandoning its former traditions and in rejecting its old national repertory. They failed to show dangers hidden in its neglect of national art forms. They failed to tell the theater that an original repertory and dramatic style were needed. Instead, these functionaries of art became ecstatic over the questionable successes of the theater. Their citation reveals their complete failure to understand

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b. RAPP—the initials stand for the Russian form of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers—was an organization which attempted to dominate Russian literature and criticism by setting itself up as literary spokesman for the Communist Party. The latter, speaking for itself, dissolved RAPP in 1932, purged its chief (Leopold Averbakh), and aided in setting up the SSP (Union of Soviet Writers).—Ed.

the development of the Byelorussian theater. They were ignorant both of its earlier achievements and of its crisis at that time. They did not know the great artistic and dramatic possibilities of the Byelorussian people, of which tokens had already been given.

Their decision is interesting in light of the development of the Byelorussian theater. It exemplifies the Party's political influence on art, hidden beneath the benign mask of an impartial jury. It proves that Moscow controls the art of all the Soviet national minorities. It shows that the separate republics have no autonomy whatsoever, particularly in cultural fields such as art and the theater.

From its opening lines, their citation defended and justified—in every way possible—the recent crushing of the nationalists in the theater. This revealed the source from which that purge had drawn its inspiration. We quote this document in full:

CITATION TO THE FIRST BYELORUSSIAN THEATER

At the First All-Union Olympiad, the First Byelorussian State Theater has presented the plays *Glass Factory* by Kobets and *Between Storms* by Z. Kurdin. Its choice of repertory and its productions have given the theater definite ideological character.

The jury states with gratification that the theater has carried on a successful struggle to overcome National Democratic tendencies. It has approached the problem of national art not through stressing the exotic details of olden times but through studying the working class of Byelorussia today. This, plus its penetrating and contemporary themes resolved according to national conditions—such as rationalization, the five-day week and life in the Red Army—makes the theater akin to the entire working class.

Noting the high artistic merit of the theater as expressed by:

1. Fine direction that succeeded in blending all elements of the presentation;

2. The ingenious (though somewhat cumbersome) setting which demonstrated major potentialities;

3. The smoothness of the company, which brought out the social significance of the characters;

4. The purity of the language and its skillful presentation on the stage;

Noting all this, the jury considers it necessary to call the attention of the theater to its shortcomings, which consist of:

1. A somewhat unsystematic selection of music which did not always correspond to the action.

2. Insufficient attention to the movement of the actors onstage.

Without deciding the creative method of the theater in advance, the jury deems it necessary to warn the Byelorussian Theater that it is in danger both of exaggerating in the direction of psychologizing and of a naturalistic delving into the decadent attitudes of elements within it that are alien to the working class.

On the whole, the jury declares that the First Byelorussian State Theater is a clear proof of the rapid growth of Byelorussian national culture, which became possible only after the October Revolution, and has unquestionably stimulated the growth of national consciousness among Byelorussians beyond the borders of the U.S.S.R.[c]

Feliks Kon, Chairman, Olympiad Organizational Committee.
[Signature], Chief Secretary of the Olympiad.
[Signature], Secretary of the Olympiad Jury.[13]

Moscow
July 11, 1930

As a result of this success, the theater and Kobets himself were awarded medals; the play was translated into Russian, Ukrainian and other languages, and produced in a number of other Soviet theaters. There was sadness only among the workers in the arts within Byelorussia. Woeful thoughts and reflections on the fate of theater arts disturbed all the creative personnel of the theater. An imaginary success

c. Before the collapse of Poland in 1939, Western Byelorussia was governed from Warsaw.—Ed.

brought no joy. Only a short while before, all the former, genuine successes of the theater had been slandered and violently mutilated.

Kobets's decoration must not be considered as a reward for Byelorussian playwrights. He was by no means characteristic of them. His play had been written in Russian! It was translated by a Byelorussian writer who worked with him, refashioned the play to suit the needs of the stage, and remained anonymous. Kobets himself had been a half-literate worker not long before. After his lucky day, Kobets did not write another play of any importance. Soon afterwards, he went to Khabarovsk in the Soviet Far East and began writing scenarios. During the mass arrests of Byelorussian writers in 1936, he too disappeared within the vaults of the NKVD.

The whole history of awards to the theater and of the citation had pernicious consequences for the theater during the years which followed.

Chapter 11

QUESTIONS OF CREATIVE METHOD

The citation of the First Byelorussian State Theater on July 11, 1930, included a number of statements which helped determine the activity of the theater during the following years. The jury stipulated that they were not deciding questions of creative method in advance. Yet they had to give a number of instructions even about that.

The national Byelorussian level was considered from the ideological and political point of view. The jury thought it necessary to stress most their approval of "the successful struggle to overcome National Democratic tendencies." How had such tendencies been manifested? The jury gave no lengthy definition. Only casually did they defend their remark that the Byelorussian Theater "has approached the problem of national art not through stressing the exotic details of olden times, but through studying the working class of Byelorussia today."[14]

Thus, the national features that had recently appeared in the theater were all declared to be "exotic details of olden times." The way of life of the Byelorussian working class was still inchoate. It had no customs or traditions but was somewhat backward. Yet, this was set up as an ideal for playwrights. Only worker themes were considered urgent. All this, of course, was a mechanical application of the Party theses about tasks of the Five-Year Plan and industrialization, with their need to reflect the life of the working class in art, drama, and literature.

The main purpose was to renounce the highest past achievements of the Byelorussian Theater as something national. The citation gave clear instructions about creative methods:

> The jury deems it necessary to warn the Byelorussian Theater that it is in danger both of exaggerating in the di-

> rection of psychologizing and of a naturalistic delving into the decadent attitudes of elements within it that are alien to the class struggle.[15]

These statements were picked up and elaborated in various ways by all the Moscow dramatic critics who wrote about the Byelorussian Theater presentations. Moreover, this was the period in which criticism of the Moscow Art Theater school and of psychological realism in the theater was intensified. In 1931, the word "realism" was not yet used in connection with the theater and literature. RAPP considered the psychological realism of the Moscow Art Theater as a philosophically idealistic trend in art and belittled it as "psychological rummaging." Psychological realism was said to contradict the tasks of proletarian art. The latter proclaimed the "method of dialectical materialism" to the point of compulsion. No one could explain clearly just what this method consisted in. The Marxist-Leninist Talmudists tried scholastically to decipher the Leninist dialectic on the development of contradictions out of unity, on the splitting of unity and the struggle of opposites. Yet none of them could reveal the secret of this method even up to the time when the slogan of socialist realism replaced it. (This followed the proclamation of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) on April 22, 1932, about the dissolution of literary organizations.)

There was a certain change in attitude towards the Moscow Art Theater after the success of its production of *Armored Train 14-69* in 1927. The Moscow Art Theater's creative principles still caused doubts in the minds of a number of RAPP critics. That theater was considered a citadel of right-wing bourgeois and aristocratic art.

In 1931 Stanislavski's system was still considered philosophically idealistic and nearly reactionary.[16] It would have been most difficult to foresee that the government was officially to admit that this system was a trailblazer for the entire Soviet theater. On the contrary, the search for "Stanislavskiism" and "psychological rummaging"

was the subject of many articles in *On Literary Guard* [Na literaturnom postu]. (This was the organ of RAPP, which Leopold Averbakh edited.)

As if in unison, the Moscow critics all seconded this. Among the many critics, Pyotr Markov deserves special mention. His remarks clearly tend to deny national form and Byelorussian stylistic features in the theater. He supported the official struggle in Byelorussia against everything *original.* Markov also announced a campaign against originality in art, which he belittled as ethnographical. He completely overlooked the fact that these ethnographic elements had been basic parts of the past artistic style in the theater. They had been organically transmuted into new qualities of style and had never been considered self-sufficient. At that time, everything inspired by the genius of the folk impressed the vulgar Marxists as "the influence of petty-bourgeois elements." Hence, there were warnings against being attracted by the "museum pieces" of the past. Even those entrusted with the fate of Soviet art later rejected such nonsense. At that time, Markov praised the new trend of the Byelorussian theater:

> The Byelorussian Theater has definitely avoided one danger threatening all the national minority theaters. It has not lapsed into a narrow ethnography in a single production. Some national minority theaters replace the national with the ethnographical. They obtain their effects not through a formally penetrating expression of the class essence in a play, but through the beautiful and variegated ornamentation of ethnographic numbers, ceremonies and dances. Contemporary themes are lightly and simply masked with refined melodies and dances, and with the unusual details of unexpected movements and fading songs. The Byelorussian Theater opposed to this narrowly ethnographic tendency, which has traces of petty-bourgeois influence, a desire to participate in the contemporary drama. It has observed the progressive significance of the theater. It is false neither through enthusiasm for the past nor through museum-like preserving of old peasant customs. It opposed to this tendency a strong and clear-cut line which set con-

> temporary themes with contemporary dramatic methods. Without denying the beauty of national customs, the Theater has approached them artistically; this is one of its chief merits.[17]

Markov had reservations about "the beauty of national customs," but they in no way mitigated his clear tendency to deny the variety of local color with all its meaning for national minority theater arts.

The writings of the Moscow dramatic critics on the Olympiad revealed a second pernicious tendency. They tried to persuade the theater to break with the established method of psychological realism. Over a number of years, Aŭstsihnei Mirovich, the director, had been trying to establish a company of actors belonging to a definite school. All the critics who wrote about the Byelorussian Theater gave Mirovich his just deserts. Markov writes:

> The fulcrum of the theater is correct, and so is its school for actors. ... The theater has paid much attention to training its actors. Their style has little that is stereotyped and much that is genuinely serious. There are no distortions and pretensions. A character is created clearly and effectively.
>
> Mirovich is the head of the theater. His services have been enormous. As a director, he is experienced and intelligent. The theater undertakes its formal explorations with a will. ... The First Byelorussian Theater has achieved something. The clarity and purity characterizing its productions allow us to hope that its future will be productive. The theater is in the first row of those which participated in the Olympiad.[18]

RAPP persistently demanded that class factors be stressed in depicting characters. This concept began to take root among the critics. *On Literary Guard* and *Literary Gazette* had sharply criticized the "theory of the living person" not long before. The theory had been developed by one of the leading RAPP critics, Vladimir Yermilov. He tried to use the profound psychological techniques of the Moscow Art Theater; these depicted a character with all his tints and shades. Yermilov tried to combine them with the new interests of the

time; he tried to avoid the threats of schematism and oversimplification in Soviet literature. RAPP struggled against Voronski's theories for a number of years. Voronski stressed the primacy of an artist's spontaneous impressions as a person over the conditions of social life. This resembled the "theory of the living person" (which was aimed against the schematic depersonalization of creative literature). It finally involved that pillar of RAPP, Yermilov himself. After a number of evasions, he was obliged to acknowledge that his theory was philosophically idealistic, and it was publicly condemned by RAPP itself.

Stronger and stronger grew the demands for *partiinost'*[a] in approaching the phenomena of everyday life. A class interpretation of events and a social depiction of characters were demanded. All this was reflected in remarks about the creative method of the Byelorussian Theater. Markov himself called the attention of Byelorussian directors to the need for "a sharper and more precise manner of delivery":

> New problems include directorial elaboration on methods of acting in order to reveal social content. ... The external expression of character is not sufficiently sharp or forceful. The actors' company has matured satisfactorily during the year. ... The theater ought now to think deeply about the internal development of its actors, about the enrichment of its social and artistic consciousness which inevitably demands such *penetrating formal expression.* ... The outstanding actors of the troupe, [U.N.] Krylovich and [Uladimir] Uladamirski, have never before feared such training. It has now become organically necessary.[19] [Italics added.]

These ideas were not accidental. Markov stuck to them consistently although he often modified his demands, flavoring them with new verbal effusions:

> Mildness of stage expression is a trait of the company. Having established it as part of the actors' technique, the director must now incorporate it into another scheme.

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a. *Partiinost'* (literally, "party-ness") is defined by the standard Soviet dictionary (Ushakov) as that which corresponds to the spirit of the Communist Party, its program and its ideology.—Ed.

> Having established its clarity and simplicity in stage expression, he must at the same time improve the intensity and expressiveness of the acting.[20]

Markov failed to consider the special features of the school of the Byelorussian Theater. This had been formed under the influence of the Moscow Art Theater and the Maly Theater of the same city—two of the best.

As early as the autumn of 1923, the First Byelorussian State Theater had participated in an agricultural exhibition at Moscow. At that time, the theater gave what were then its best plays—*Mashèka* and *On St. John's Eve*—on the open premises of the exhibition grounds, in a number of Moscow workers' clubs, in the *Zamoskvorech'ye* Theater[b] and even in the Kremlin. They were warmly greeted by the Moscow press. The critics' analyses in many ways helped the theater to define its own creative character. Both knowledge of the work of the two best Moscow theaters and attendance at and study of the best presentations of the most important theaters were very important for the Byelorussian Theater. Real creative study, improvement of the actors' work and general betterment of theater techniques date from this period. All this was obviously turned to good account in the productions which followed (such as *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* in 1924).

Mirovich always trained the cast in the spirit of realism; he achieved a high level of craftsmanship. His efforts were directed towards building a company united by a common striving both for a life-like manner and for psychologically motivated conduct on the stage. Of course, the influence of constructivism and formal explorations caused Mirovich to deviate somewhat. His directing at times revealed the skills of the old, prerevolutionary play which had been plotted from everyday life. He adhered to the details of real life,

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b. "Zamoskvorech'ye" (literally, "Beyond the Moskva River") is that section of the city which lies south of the main part of town and on the right bank of the river.—Ed.

so much so that he sometimes approached naturalism. Mirovich, however, was extremely sensitive to the spirit of the times. He changed his principles as a director under the influence of new trends. He was often too hasty in adopting the latest accomplishments of the theater world. Thus, constructivist sets were made for *Glass Factory;* they used devices which Nikolai Akimov had introduced in Moscow. Mirovich, however, entirely purified them from whatever was cloying and esthetic. (Markov found it necessary to remark on this.) Essentially, however, Mirovich remained a realist in the tradition of the Moscow Art Theater.

In 1930, these principles could not be regarded as beyond criticism. Markov discovered a number of shortcomings in Mirovich's directing technique. They chiefly concerned the social emphasis on a character. Markov wished to satisfy his own ideas as to the creative method of the theater, so he questioned the adequacy of Mirovich's knowledge of the contemporary Soviet theater. Mirovich himself had been educated by experience. Apropos, Markov wrote:

> No matter how Mirovich follows the conceptions of contemporary theatre knowledge, he *has not yet fully mastered them.* His plays, therefore, have contradictions within themselves. A narrow naturalism frequently invades his constructive settings and the plot often conceals the play's social significance.
>
> Naturalism frequently colors the plays and they then become calmer and more peaceful than they were intended to be. Consequently, the plays of the Byelorussian Theater, *purely insofar as directing is concerned, need their social essence intensified.* [Italics added.][21]

Such a demand, of course, corresponded to the artificial intensification of the class struggle which had produced the policy of liquidating kulaks in rural areas and the bourgeoisie in urban ones. Political slogans were mechanically transferred to the world of art, and discussions of art began to sound like discussions of politics. Critics demanded a sharp distinction between the heroes and villains.

All the official praises of the Olympiad for the Byelorussian Theater had two major, though indirect, targets: (1) the

past of the theater, which had been national in both form and content; and (2) the realistic school of theater cultivated by Mirovich. Let us remember the cruel criticism to which the masterpieces of the Byelorussian Theater had recently been subjected. It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that Mirovich soon had to leave the First Byelorussian State Theater.

Suffice it to recall what official Party criticism wrote about him a few years later. This clearly shows the reasons which induced him to leave the theater—his cherished brainchild, which he had raised and cared for, and which, in turn, was so fond of him. Vitali Vol'ski wrote in 1934:

> One of the most famous plays, Mirovich's *Kastus' Kalinoŭski* furnishes an obvious example of National Democratic tendencies in the drama. This was produced by the First Byelorussian Theater in 1924 and played through 1930. The work was completely devoted to the aims which the National-Democratic leadership of the theater had demanded of it. Its basic purpose was a conscious distortion of history by means of idealizing Kastus' Kalinoŭski, who was a petty-bourgeois revolutionary participating in the Rebellion of 1863. The National Democrats wished to build a nationalistic cult around him as a hero for the entire nation.[22]

Mirovich accidentally managed to escape the pogrom against Byelorussian intellectuals in the 1930's. He did not, however, succeed in staying with the theater, despite all his services, the high quality of his work, and the triumphs of the Byelorussian State Theater on its Ukrainian tour of 1931. The new leadership of the theater regarded him with hostility and suspicion. Hence, in 1931, he was forced to apply to the Ministry of Education for a release from his duties. The request was granted, although he had long been an artistic leader, educator, playwright, director, and producer. At the same time, V.A. Smeyanov left the theater and Byelorussia permanently. This cultured and thoughtful young director had helped Viner stage *Armored Train 14-69*. He himself had done Yanovski's *Fury* and Glebov's *Inga*.

The departure of these two became apparent in the subsequent activities of the theater. Two actors, L.G. Rakhlenka

and M. A. Zoraŭ, took over the daily work of directing.

In 1932 L. M. Litvinaŭ was asked to be the chief director. Mirovich's departure was a blow to the Byelorussian tendency of the theater as such. Coupled with Litvinaŭ's appointment, it challenged and condemned all the former creative aspirations of the theater which had come from realism and the Moscow Art Theater.

Litvinaŭ was of a completely different school. Long an opponent of Stanislavski's realistic method, which he called "uninspired," he favored the constructivism and biomechanics of the left-wing theaters. Mirovich had brought up the Byelorussian Theater on the traditions of genuine realism. Litvinaŭ now sought to saddle it with the devices of formalism (which he termed heroic and romantic). Thus, Litvinaŭ apparently rejected all the past accomplishments of the theater. It is not surprising that the entire company resisted his efforts. Litvinaŭ, however, used his position in an attempt to overcome their opposition.

A duel lasting many years began between the company and Litvinaŭ. Its echoes could be heard two full decades later. For a number of years the company had to fight for psychological realism. Sometimes the actors won, sometimes Litvinaŭ. Their dramatic successes were by and large due to the fine and profound acting, which rescued even weak plays. Through their true and realistic characterizations, the actors overcame Litvinaŭ's unusual principles of staging. The material from real life and the scenic realism enabled some presentations to avoid a few of Litvinaŭ's pernicious notions.

Kuz'ma Chorny's *Our Country* furnishes an example of this. The language of the play is rich and genuine; its first half is realistic. This fact, in combination with the actors'

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c. "Biomechanics" was the name which the famous director Vsevolod Meierhold gave to his technique. *Ushakov* defines it as the system of acting based on the "science of motion of animals and people."—Ed.

feelings, compelled Litvinaŭ to yield to a realistic interpretation (although he found it basically unacceptable). Litvinaŭ succeeded in overcoming the creative opposition of the cast in such productions as *Jacquerie* by Prosper Mérimée, and *The Adolescent* by Denis Fonvizin[d]—productions on which P.A. Danilov helped. The application of heroic and romantic principles in these productions indicated that he understood romanticism formally and superficially. Litvinaŭ did not penetrate the inner world of a character. Instead, he concentrated entirely on the external splendor of the performance and on the various interludes, thus destroying the unity of the play. A number of contrived effects replaced the genuine action of the drama. In *Jacquerie,* the revolutionary movement of the French peasantry was shown only externally, through movement. A large crowd of extras fussed about the stage. They tried to create the proper atmosphere by shouting, making noise, and all talking at once.

Both plays were pallid and forced. The audience grasped neither one—and, by that time, they were sufficiently versed in questions of the theater. Litvinaŭ's experimentation was invariably rejected by the company. At the first opportunity, the personnel of the theater rebelled against his methods. They supported their own psychologically real principles.

The company always considered Litvinaŭ's experiments as an attempt to destroy the specific character of art, with its reflection of objective reality and its truth to life. This, of course, does not mean either that the actors were not seeking new ways of doing things or that the former leadership (as represented by Mirovich) had feared to experiment. The opposite was true. The old management had sought a

d. Fonvizin was an eighteenth-century Russian playwright—perhaps the first of any importance. This particular play has been translated under the title of *The Young Hopeful.* (See *Masterpieces of the Russian Drama,* ed. by George R. Noyes, New York, Appleton, 1933.)

new style, a new creative method, a national form and innovations in the esthetic staging of ideas. *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, The Smith Who Was a Governor, The Bridge,* and Mirovich's other productions give evidence of this. They were all searches which did not disrupt but rather reaffirmed the school and style of the theater; they were a synthetic transmutation of the highest attainments of the theaters in Moscow.

Chapter 12

DRAMA AND THE ACT OF APRIL

The chief difficulties facing the theater have always concerned ideology and repertory. This is true today. Such questions fell outside the jurisdiction of the theater itself and became general problems in Byelorussian art. The regime was dictatorial and its ideological pressure ceaseless.

There were mass arrests of Byelorussian intellectuals in 1930. The OGPU "unearthed" an imaginary organization called the "Union for the Liberation of Byelorussia." The Party and other organizations were purged of so-called harmful, National-Democratic, kulak, degenerate, and counter-revolutionary elements in one fell swoop. A number of playwrights and other writers were swallowed up by the OGPU. All this produced a crisis of its own in the drama. Writing plays became dangerous. A situation was created which is well described in the following lines of the modern Russian poet, Boris Pasternak:

> O vainly in the days of the Great Soviet,
> When ranks of highest passion were deployed,
> Did they give up the calling of the poet—
> For it is dangerous if not left void.

The year 1931 brought not a single important production. The theater spent much of its time touring the Ukraine. RAPP systematically intensified its badgering of fellow-travelers[a] in literature. In Byelorussia, this was done by BelAPP[b], which aspired to lead all art and literature, including even the Party-inspired criticism of such individuals as Lukash

a. "Fellow-travellers" in Soviet usage indicates those persons who provisionally accepted the Soviet regime without being Party members.—Ed.

b. The Byelorussian Association of Proletarian Writers [Belaruskaya Asatsyyatsyya Praletarskikh Pis'mennikau].—Ed.

Bėndė. VAPP[c] instructions poured forth from Moscow and were mirrored in Byelorussia by the resolutions of BelAPP against every kind of shift or deviation from the general line set by Leopold Averbakh. The obstacles to genuine creative work kept increasing. Writers, especially dramatists, were paralyzed by the danger of geing caught in a deviation. Creative work had become nearly impossible. Literature was in great need of a change and a revitalization. Writers had to have at least a semblance of being able to work without being baited by RAPP directives.

On April 23, 1932, there was a meeting in the Kremlin of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) at which Averbakh read a report on the situation in literature. Stalin himself, surrounded by the entire Politburo and the high aristocracy of the Party, listened patiently to Averbakh's bragging. The RAPP leader talked about the successes of VAPP in creating a proletarian literature and about the struggle against the bourgeois danger in art and literature. At the conclusion of his speech, there were no remarks and no questions. Averbakh left the gathering in high spirits. How astonished he must have been to see the front pages of the newspapers on the following morning! The Central Committee had decided to reorganize the associations in art and literature. VAPP and its auxiliary organs in art, music etc., were all dissolved.

To be sure, the reasons for all this were concealed. In the first place, they did not so much concern the Party's professed concern for literature as its desire to assemble all poets, prose writers and dramatists into one group: The Union of Soviet Writers.[d] The new association could be more easily subordinated to Party policy. Secondly, Stalin wanted to remove Averbakh, who was a talented demagogue, a phrasemaker, and a dogmatist. It had reached the point that all RAPP critics

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c. The All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers [Vsesoyuznaya Assotsiyatsiya Proletarskikh Pisatelei].—Ed.

d. *Soyuz Sovetskikh Pisatelei,* abbreviated SSP.—Ed.

cited Averbakh in proof of their orthodoxy and seldom mentioned Stalin (whose remarks on literature were rare). Insignificant as this was, Stalin could not bear it.

This action ended the interesting creative organizations of the right-wing fellow-travellers: *The Mountain Pass* [Pereval] in Moscow, and *Flame* [Polymya] and *Loftiness* [Uzvyshsha] in Byelorussia. All writers were herded together into one kolkhoz called the Union of Soviet Writers. This produced a potential danger which later became actual: all literature was reduced to the same level.

The declaration, however, was favorably received by most writers. The liquidated organizations had conducted pogroms. Their downfall gladdened the fellow-travellers, and there were hopes for a better and more liberal period in the offing. The literary journals in both Moscow and Byelorussia were filled with statements by fellow-travellers who now hoped to return to literature. The Byelorussian Central Committee published its variation of the declaration; in Byelorussia, associations in art and literature were also reorganized. The ban imposed by RAPP and BelAPP on a number of writers, branded as right-wing, kulak and reactionary, was removed.

Socialist realism became the dominant style of Soviet literature. This gradually produced depersonalization in literature and the drama. The repertory of the theaters was in such a terrible state that the Party and its agencies were compelled to look into it. Former fellow-travellers were now urged to write for the theater.

Chapter 13

THE PATRIOTIC THEME AND SOCIALIST REALISM

In 1932 Kuz'ma Chorny wrote a play called *Our Country,* based on the dramatist's own novel of the same name. Chorny, a very talented writer, had belonged (until shortly before) to *Loftiness,* the association of right-wing fellow-travellers. He was not a Party member.

A struggle was going on against the National-Democratic interpretation of patriotic ideals, which was belittled as bourgeois. Therefore, the theme of the play became especially important. The Byelorussians had been oppressed for centuries, and this theme had always been most prominent in their literature. The greatest poets of the Byelorussian renascence were patriots: people like Frantsishak Bahushèvich, Yanka Luchyna, Yanka Kupala, Yakub Kolas, Maksim Bahdanovich, Ales' Harun, Z'mitrok Byadulya, and their numerous successors.

The peasant associated his country with his birthplace or his own piece of land. The problem of owning land dominated his psychology. He had known centuries of bondage and social dependence on Polish landowners. Kolas has best expressed this connection in his epic, *New Land.* His hero Mikhal always associates his long-cherished desire for land with hopes for independence:

> To buy a bit of land—his corner,—
> No more to have to serve a lord.
> To live a new life free from worry!
> His property—that's what it's based on!

Such were Mikhal's hopes and aspirations all his life. They accompanied him to the grave—unrealized.

The patriotic theme itself has indirectly guided the imagination of all Byelorussian writers even during the Soviet period. Let us note the title of Chorny's play. By 1932, there could be no discussion—once a play had been written—about how its theme had been realized. The plot could be resolved

only in accordance with the official Party line. Chorny was an author who had previously been regarded as a right-wing fellow-traveller; he had to be extremely careful not to lapse into a nationalist deviation or to breathe a single word that might be used to accuse him of that mortal sin. Nevertheless, his work possessed great ideological character, although it was tendentious and did have both trite situations and bombastic internationalist tirades. It was most warmly received by the officials.

In his 1934 report on Byelorussian dramaturgy, Vitali Vol'ski discussed *Our Country:*

> In this work, the author elaborates on problems of international importance. His art consistently unmasks and disarms the bourgeois concept of nationality and private property; the author uses Byelorussian material entirely. In his effort to show the national character of this material, he approaches a positive dramatic solution to the problem of national form.[23]

Leafing through the play, one can easily trace how the author tried to explain its events and characters. He used the official viewpoint in regard to bourgeois and nationalist deviations. One can see him trying to place his characters in situations conforming to proletarian internationalism.

Despite the fact that Chorny's play was hailed by the critics as a great artistic triumph, Chorny's ideological consciousness did not engender reality. The reviewers liked the idea that, in any case, a prominent fellow-traveller had joined in their propaganda. But the play was didactic and homiletic despite Chorny's skillful prose and the various interesting and significant details taken from real life. Everything was adjusted to the bias of the play, which thus destroyed the artistic fabric. During the years of bondage, all Byelorussian literature has been stereotyped under slogans. First, it was, "Old Byelorussia," then "The Fight Against the Enemies," and finally "The Victors' Triumph." The protagonists wavered at first, but in the end they found the way to the Revolution. All this was reflected in *Our Country.*

The action begins in a small town shortly before the First

World War. A fair is going on at the crowded market place in front of the town hall. Leopold Hushka, a German subject from Silesia, has been chased off an estate by its owner. Leopold sells his last garment and his shoes in order to raise a deposit for some land. He thinks owning land is the only way out of the situation:

> I am going to buy land. *(His face lights up with hope.)*... I've thought about myself. Why does a man not live but just rot? And I answered myself—because he has no property. No matter what kind of talent you have, if you don't have something of your own to fall back on, you don't count....
>
> Only a little bread—that would be enough. Just as long as the land is mine, as long as no devil has the right to tell me, "You're a subversive; go jump in the lake."

Leopold's son Adam is a worker and a revolutionary. Adam tries to talk his father out of buying the land, which would only become a new burden. Leopold, however, replies with all his old conviction: "A hired man's a slave, and I don't want to be a slave any more!" Adam's words do not convince the older man at all. Influenced by a Bolshevik named Yevel' Tsivin, Adam tells his father: "We must seize the land, not buy it." In the scenes showing Adam's conversations with Tsivin, one can clearly see the author's vain efforts to depict the character of Bolshevik revolutionaries. Both men talk in abstract and unnatural language that is scarcely convincing. They talk about Adam's discussion with his father in pathetic and bombastic tones:

Adam: Today father told me: "I have one yoke," he says. "I'm buying land. I have another one too—I'm wiping away the family's tears, amusing them by ploughing the land with my forehead." But I, his son, I've got a third yoke as well: looking my father in the eye! When I met him today, it was just like someone had put a ton of something on my back. It was as if all generations, all our ancestors—a thousand times removed in the depths of history—rose before me in all their sorrow.

Tsivin: Patience, Adam, you'll get used to it.... It's difficult to break open the ... age-old prisons. I have confidence in you

Adam: Trust me, old pal!

During the action of the play, Adam is arrested and jailed for his revolutionary activity. Leopold buys land through a kulak named Survila. The latter takes advantage of Leopold's position as an alien—he has no rights—to force various obligations on the Silesian. Through the police officer, Survila postpones Leopold's naturalization as long as he can in order to deprive old Hushka of the land.

Leopold's attitude changes unnaturally; his sudden shift in outlook is completely unmotivated and psychologically unjustified. This coincides with three events that provide a real holiday for Leopold: the marriage of his daughter, Maryika; the final arrival of his naturalization papers, and Adam's return from prison. Leopold stands up, wineglass in hand:

Leopold: I have waited for this day a long time! And what a day it is! What a moment! *(Sings)*

God, let us be lucky
As with others, so with us!
As with others, so with us!
In the good, the easy year
We will all the family cheer.

Suddenly, at this highpoint in Leopold's life, someone bursts in with unexpected news: "It's war! Everyone must join the army!" Leopold unexpectedly declines to back his new country:

Leopold: Adam is not going to fight for a foreign land. I'm not a citizen here.

L's wife: You are a citizen now.

Leopold: Land .... Citizenship .... Adam out of jail .... Maryika married .... What country are we fighting for? I don't need that sort of land ....

In the next scene, he goes to the police officer and turns down his citizenship:

Leopold: I don't want citizenship! I don't need land! Maybe I'd be happier if I hadn't stuck to this country but had gone back to Silesia .... Maybe it would have been better for me there!

Police Officer: Hushka! What are you muttering? And on such a day!

Leopold: On such a day! On such a day I still have hours to work in Survila's field. That the sort of day it is! *(Steps back slowly, and speaks quietly.)* Not on this side do I have to fight....*(Stands squeezing his fist.)*

CURTAIN

Why did Chorny need such a character for his play? Leopold is not a Russian subject. His father had participated in an uprising of the Silesian weavers and had, in his time, fled to avoid persecution.

In Byelorussia today, the choice of such a hero would be considered a cosmopolitan deviation. And such a protagonist in general, who rejects his citizenship in troubled times, could not be depicted on the stage other than as a foreign agent. In the atmosphere of officially cultivated patrotism, such a character would evoke a most strange and unpleasant impression.

But times were different in 1932. All facets of internationalism were exhibited, while all concepts of local nationalism were abolished. Leopold was particularly well suited to illustrate the Leninist idea that the proletariat had no country of its own. By selecting such a figure, the playwright insured himself in advance against all possible accusations that he had chosen his characters exclusively from a Byelorussian milieu. In the past, he had often been accused of that by such literary judges as Lukash Bėndė and Ales' Kuchar.

Chorny continues to debunk the "bourgeois" concept of one's own country with considerable tendentiousness in scenes showing front-line fraternization between Adam Hushka and a German soldier named Eduard Laver. Neither wants to fight and both are revolutionaries. *"Kamerad! Bruder!* We won't fight!"

Aided by Laver, Adam knocks down and bayonets his own officer after the Russian, performing his patriotic duties, has ordered Adam to fight. This really typifies the Bolshevik propaganda which broke up the army and destroyed the front during the First World War. Next comes a scene showing the Bolsheviks demoralizing the rear. Tsivin incites the workers

to walk out of the defense plants. The government sends troops to the factory, so he suggests that the workers pretend to work in order to get rid of the guards—and then there will be another walk-out.

Chorny makes some naïve efforts to balance his picture with a dose of humanity and an awareness of the other aspects of life. Tsivin deftly plays upon Maryika's feelings as a mother; he pretends to be interested in her baby and goes up to the cradle:

> *Tsivin: (To Maryika)* Is this your child? What's his name? *(He amuses the baby.)* Victor, Vic! *(He walks away from the cradle.)*

By deliberate flattery and cajolery, he persuades the woman to deliver messages for the Party. He uses her as a link to the workers. This is like the portraits of Stalin with a little Kazakh Pioneer girl in his arms and the hypocritical caption about happy childhood "under the sun of the Stalin Constitution!"

Under Tsivin's influence, Leopold begins mouthing the catchwords of revolution with increasing frequency. He becomes an involuntary instrument for Tsivin's propaganda.

There is no trace of his past hopes for work and land. He has basically become a rebel against all the old foundations of the world and, for no reason, against God Himself:

> They say ... they want to get rid of a few working hours. But I'd tell them: get rid of everything that drives a living man into the ground. Get rid of the Tsar! Get rid of ... God! ... What's my Adam suffering for at the front? What's Pavel Nyamira rotting in the trenches for?

Later, Leopold is arrested for having hidden Tsivin. He is questioned by a colonel of police. There, Leopold delivers unnatural tirades in praise of the Revolution; he justifies disorganization, blood and confusion; he calls for the overthrow of the Tsar and of God; he expresses a desire to see the judge on the gallows, and he predicts the Revolution. At this time, the strikers put on a demonstration. The beginning of the Revolution frees both Leopold and Tsivin from prison.

The former greets the Revolution by ripping off the colonel's shoulder straps. The officer, like an obedient rabbit, gives in without a murmur. All three acts are written as if to illustrate Lenin's thesis that the bourgeois revolution must be transformed into a proletarian one.

Leopold's wife dies as does his daughter's baby; its mother is in prison because of her revolutionary activities. Even these personal misfortunes are explained by terming the laws passed since the February Revolution inadequate! Leopold dreams of a second revolution, which would free everyone from both the landowners and the prosperous peasants. He even calls the latter kulaks, although the word was introduced only later. The kulaks Survila and Mazavetski used freedom and immunity to enrich themselves; they cut down forests and seize land. Leopold decisively condemns his son-in-law, Pavel Nyamira for his kulak and acquisitive tendencies:

> *Leopold: (To Nyamira)* Your throat feels freedom; you want to gorge down the whole world for nothing, but you won't! A few other go-getters will show up. You'll fight like wild beasts.... I'd make another revolution!

Chorny wished to debunk humanism, neutralism and love of mankind as such. From a Party viewpoint, they interfered with the Revolution. So, he portrays a humanist in Syamyon Mareina, a musician. Mareina dreams about a generation which will possess an innate hatred for blood and tears and will believe in human brotherhood. He also has waited for a revolution, prayed for it and connected it with his own thoughts about a better world. Reality refutes his dreams. What he has seen makes him flinch. He "gets tripped up," as Leopold says, in his vain effort to convince the infuriated masses to respect mankind:

> *Mareina:* Nothing can be done as long as men will wash their sores in blood. Blood will be blood forever. Mankind must come to happiness without it. Human blood is holy.
>
> *Leopold: (Bitterly):* There are different kinds of blood. One is pure; the other stinks like something putrid.

This is the logic of Chorny, a Soviet fellow-traveller. Such

recitals, however necessary, served to justify Bolshevik knavery during and after the Revolution, when millions of human lives were sacrificed to the Communist Moloch. The protagonist of *Our Country* served that god also.

The dramatist illustrates the conflict between nationalism and internationalism in a particularly obvious way in one scene; Nyamira is convicted of beating German prisoners.

Leopold and his daughter turn out to be such convinced internationalists that they throw Nyamira, her husband, out of the house. He is a nationalist who has shown enmity towards foreigners:

Leopold: (To Laver): Who beat you?

Laver: Many.... I don't know.... I don't know.... Many. *(He glances at Pavel Nyamira.)* He struck me first. *(He catches at his own breast.)*

Leopold:
Maryika: *(To Nyamira.)* You?

Nyamira: We took a lot a long time from the landowners, and the other skunks. And now foreigners get in here. Here they've already seen to their own. Let him go back where he was born! We aren't chasing the landowners away for them! A man is drawn to the place he was born. *(To Nyamira.)* Go home and make a revolution there!

Leopold: (To Nyamira): Beat it! Some time later you'll come to us and ask for something. *(Nyamira collects his things.)*

Maryika (To Nyamira): Make sure you have everything!

A playgoer can scarcely believe that, in the conditions of freedom which followed the February Revolution, a wife could so easily part with her husband for high-minded reasons alone. It is just as hard to believe that a man condemns his son-in-law for trying to enrich the daughter's family.

These conflicts do not follow from life. They are simply the product of a poor creative imagination caught in the vise of ideological pressure. The third act ends in a manner typical of Soviet mass-appeal drama. It contains a debased specimen of false declamation in praise of the Revolution—which this time is proletarian—and a doxology of internationalism.

In addition, the characters go no further than to complain

of the hungry life and hard labor of the past. Chorny needs a German soldier in order to talk about the international nature of the Revolution.

All the major sympathetic characters talk in the same words. Their theme is, "Workers of the world, unite!"

Laver (with a slight accent): I was driven to fight. I don't know for whom or what.... For my sweat in the mine.... We will make a revolution for the hungry children.

Leopold: For his sweat. For the hungry children and his family's hunger. For my hunger. ... For my bloody callouses. ....We've fought for hunger both here and in Silesia. Long live the Revolution—here, in Silesia, and everywhere else!

Tsivin: We have gone hungry from childhood on. We've struggled in Silesia and here. But we will make a revolution! It will be our revolution, and then all the foreigners will go with us, because those who work, who fight for our revolution, are *not* foreigners! We're with your Adam.

Leopold: I'm going with you! You and I!

The second revolution, about which so much has been said, takes place. Mareina, the musician, is killed by a bullet from behind a corner while he is protesting against bloodshed. Despite Chorny's intentions, this somehow symbolizes the violent, inhuman and inexorably cruel nature of events. Cool and dispassionate about the death of a good man, Tsivin pays no attention to the reports of the musician's death but proclaims that power has been seized. Leopold, along with Tsivin, hails the event and raises the Red banner. Everyone yells "hurrah."

This detailed analysis of the most important scenes in *Our Country* has been given to show what stifling ideological schemes writers began using in order to occupy their places in the drama and theater. How far drama departed from the truth of life merely to please a definite bias! And how lifeless it was even when talented playwrights undertook to write it! Yet Chorny knew the life of Byelorussian villages and towns well. The first two acts contain many lively scenes which are true to life. They testify to the author's keenness of observa-

tion and his splendid use of the living, colloquial language. Clarity of speech, perhaps, is Chorny's chief virtue as a writer.

However, all the other ingredients of the play come from the ideological scheme; they are weak and unworthy of the author's name. Even the Bolshevik critic Vol'ski—once he had noted the urgency of the theme—how full the play was of great and penetrating concepts and its genuine dramatic values—could not omit mentioning a number of its shortcomings. Of all the characters in the play, the Communist critics preferred Tsivin (for obvious reasons). They noted his calm reserve, his affable ease in behavior and conversation, his meditative circumspection, his inner willpower, his revolutionary strength, and the firmness of his convictions. The author was reproached even here, however; he had not developed Tsivin in relation to the unfolding class struggle and socialist construction. "Tsivin disappears from the play immediately after the seizure of the town hall," writes Vol'ski; "his powers are not expressed in practical application."

On the other hand, the character of Adam Hushka was considered static and insufficiently lifelike. He is shown as a revolutionary from the first, and so he remains to the end without any further development. Neither his growth nor his progress is shown. Vol'ski concludes:

> The third and fourth acts generally have little vitality. They are more superficial and less individualized. They seem superfluous, unnecessary, adjusted artificially by the author to his previous material.[24]

Thus, even Soviet criticism could not avoid mentioning the lack of organic connection between the two parts of the play. The first half was relatively realistic, but the second was completely artificial and written according to a scheme which deliberately excluded truth to life.

Such were the results of socialist realism in the drama. This is what happened when artists depicted life not as they saw it, but as it was seen in the teachings and doctrines set forth by the leaders and theoreticians of Communism. Goethe

beautifully expressed the primacy of life over doctrine when he wrote:

> Grau, teurer Freund, ist alle Theorie,
> Und grün des Lebens goldner Baum.

The force of this statement increases when doctrine turns out to be false and has long since been repudiated by life. No talent is powerful enough to fit life into the Procrustean bed of doctrine. Doctrine cannot be dressed up at all, except in pale, lifeless schematizations.

Aŭhen Tsikotski wrote rather good music for the play, which was based on folk melodies. This, however, could not improve it much.

In *Our Country,* the actors emphasized the first two acts. They tried to inject some movement into the drama. Uladimir Uladamirski brought internal strength and expressiveness to the role of Leopold Hushka. Irena Zhdanovich played Maryika with deep feeling. H. P. Hlebaŭ impersonated Pavel Nyamira with much skill and conviction. Nyamira is the most convincing character in the play. He is supposed to be a villain, a peasant nationalist, and a future kulak. Yet the author is actually expressing the peasant's age-old yearning for his own farmstead and his own way of doing things. The peasant thinks of his country as something concrete and tangible which is bound up with his own piece of land.

Nyamira becomes unfit for further military service after saving the life of an officer named Iotka. He returns home from the front and attacks the war; the first word on his lips is "land":

> Land, wet from the rain! It smelled as if it had just been ploughed. The war was far away. It was over for me. Let them do what they want. Let them all fight. Let them lie in their trenches. There's no more war for me—no more front, no more trenches. Let them do what they want out there, Maryika. Now we have land, and we don't need anyone or anything else.

Hlebaŭ spoke these words as if he had penetrated deeply into Nyamira's psychology of private property. Along with Nyamira, the audience sensed the odor of the land, ploughed

up in the springtime, damp and swollen from the rain, soft, warm, and ready for the seed.

Years of personal toil had enabled the peasants to build up their private holdings. These, however, were broken up and the process became especially intensive in 1932. The author's skill made the audience feel the profundity of the peasant's tragedy. They had long dreamed and hoped for their land. Land, covered with their sweat, formed the main meaning of life for the entire peasantry.

Leopold Hushka dreamed of owning his land all his life. Suddenly, as if in accord with a nod from above, he buries all his dreams for the abstract and intangible Revolution. How unnatural this is!

The audience compared Pavel Nyamira and Leopold Hushka. It was easy to see the extent to which the history of the two revolutions had been distorted for the sake of Soviet ideology—especially when Hlebaŭ played Nyamira. It became completely obvious that the peasants supported the Revolution in the hope that the land would be completely handed over to their private use. The figure of Nyamira made one remember that only the possibility of getting land attracted the peasantry to the Revolution. This contrasted unfavorably with what was going on then, in 1932. Such was the second, the hidden, message of the play; it came from Chorny's genuine realism. This second theme was truly worthy of the stage. That it was not depicted openly, thoroughly and consistently is not Chorny's fault.

Both the times and the general conditions of Soviet life created insurmountable obstacles to any free flight of thought or creative activity. Socialist realism demanded that the events of the past and present be expressed in terms of a "third reality"—the future—and from the standpoint of *partiinost'*. This prevented even great artists from being objective; it led them far away from the truth and the logic of facts.

Chapter 14

THE DEBACLE OF 1936 AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The various campaigns and measures taken by the Party and the government over a number of years interfered with the work of the theater, and distracted it from the immediate problems of production. Despite the dissolution of BelAPP and similar organizations, the troupe was still considered as a means of artistic implementation for the measures taken after every new resolution or swerve in policy. Thus, from 1931 through 1936, special acting brigades toured the towns and districts in the provinces of Gomel', Minsk and Vitebsk, on instructions from the Party and the government. Performances were staged in the countryside for the peasants, in Red Army camps for the soldiers and in factory clubs for the workers.

In the summer of 1936 the theater was divided into three brigades which traveled over the main waterways on barges and motorboats in order to perform for the raftsmen and lumberjacks. During the collectivization period the actors often took a special propaganda program out to the kolkhozes to help in the sowing and harvesting campaigns.

In 1936, elections were held for the Supreme Soviets of Byelorussia and of the Ukraine, and in the following year there were elections for the local Soviets in Byelorussia. In both cases the theater participated in the electoral campaign. The resultant atmosphere of crisis and clamor sapped a good deal of the theater's creative energy. The chief obstacle to the theater's work remained the lack of worth-while Byelorussian plays.

Large-scale arrests removed more and more of the new playwrights. Several young dramatists were taken away in the double wave of jailings in 1933. The theater and drama were particularly hard hit by the mass arrests in November

1936, at which time most of the remaining Byelorussian writers were taken into custody. The NKVD had combed the streets of Minsk, Vitebsk, Gomel', Mogilev, and the other cities of Byelorussia. Among those taken by the NKVD to disappear forever were: Tsishka Hartny (pen name of Z'mitrok Zhylunovich), a veteran of Byelorussian letters; Mikhas' Charot (pen name of Mikhas' Kudzel'ka), author of the much discussed musical play *On St. John's Eve;* Mikhas' Zarėtski (pen name of Mikhas' Kasyankoŭ), author of such popular successes as *Whirlwind in the Swamp, White Roses, Symon Karyzna,* and *Naya*; Vasil' Stashėŭski, author of a number of plays produced by the Third Byelorussian State Theater; Uladislaŭ Halubok, veteran Byelorussian playwright who organized and guided the theater bearing his name; Vasil' Shashalevich, author of a number of plays that were well known in Byelorussia, such as *Darkness, Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell, Symphony of Wrath, Wolves' Nights,* and *The Swarm*; Yanka Bobryk, poet and screen-writer; Anatol' Vol'ny (pen name of Azhhirėi), poet and screen-writer; Barys Mikulich, the young playwright who wrote *Rotfront*; Ryhor Kobets, author of *Glass Factory, At the Gates,* and the motion picture scenario, *Seekers of Happiness;* Dailidovich, the poet and dramatic critic; who used the pen names Ales' Dudar and Todar Hlybotski; Andrėi Aleksandrovich, poet and playwright, author of *Pressure,* a play in verse and Yanka Nyomanski, Todar Klyaihtorny, Symon Baranavykh, Platon Halavach, Syarhei Hrakhoŭski, Andrėi Mryi, Valery Marakoŭ, Vasil' Kaval', Yanka Skryhan, Zyama Pivavaraŭ, Stanislaŭ Shushkevich, Ales' Bahun, Yanka Tumilovich, Yury Haŭruk, Syarhei Darozhny, Arkadz' Dyarkach, Syarhei Famin, Ales' Zvonak, Nina Vishneŭskaya, Paŭlyuk Shukaila, Uladimir Khadyka, Syarhei Rakita, Yury Lyavonny, Mikola Hvazdoŭ, Yazėp Vazyorny, Charnushėvich (whose pen name was Mikola Khvedarovich), Al'bert Paŭlovich, and a number of other writers.

Some authors had previously helped train the new dramatists.

Of the former, those who had already been picked up by the OGPU included Uladimir Duboŭka, Yazėp Pushcha, Maksim Harėtski, Symon Khursik, Mikola Nikanovich, Kanstantyn Vashyna (whose pen name was Lukash Kalyuha), Syarhei Astreika, Stsyapan Likhadiyeŭski Uladimir Zhylka, Ales' Salahub, Nichypar Charnushėvich, Funk (whose pen name was Ales' Harodnya'), Arkadz' Mardvilka, Ales' Vechar, Z'mitrok Pavarotny, Z'mitrok Vitalin, Ales' Bul'byanik, Syarhei Rusakovich, Mikhas' Mazurkevich, Mikhal Klyuchanovich, Vatslaŭ Lastoŭski, Ales' Lyazhnevich, Mikhas' Hramyka, Nazar Byvayeŭski (whose pen name was Yazėp Dyla), and others. Such well-known actors as Anton Krynitsa (known on the stage as Floryyan Zhdanovich) and Zhydovich also perished.

In this connection, a number of other figures in Byelorussian culture ought to be remembered also. The OGPU has caused them to vanish. They include Uladimir Tėraŭski (the first national composer of Byelorussia); Mikola Kas'pyarovich and Professor Mikola Shchakatsikhin, the art critic; Professor Aleksandr Vaz'nyasenski, Professor V. Machul'ski, Uladimir Charzhynski, Stsyapan Nekrashėvich, Ales' Nekrashėvich, Adam Babarėka, Professor Mikhail Piotukhovich, Professor Ivan Zamotsin, Syarhei Zambrzhytski, Usevalad Ihnatoŭski (the Academician who committed suicide on the eve of his arrest), Ales' Adamovich, Mikola Krasinski (the former director of the Second State Byelorussian Theater), Anton Balitski, (the head of the Ministry of Education of the Byelorussian S.S.R.), Antos' Platun, Ales' Charnushėvich, Yanka Byal'kevich, Z'mitrok Daŭgyala, Professor Branislaŭ Epimakh-Shypila, Uladimir Pichėta (the historian and Rector of the Byelorussian State University, who was allowed to resume his work outside Byelorussia after he finished his term of exile), Professor Yazėp Karaneŭski (rector of the university), Professor P. V. Kharlampovich, Professor Mikola Azbukin, Professor Piotra Buzuk, Academician Haŭryla Harėtski, Professor Lyavon Tsvyatkoŭ, Professor Pyatro Il'lyuchonak, Academician Uladimir Shcharbakoŭ, Associate Professor (*Dotsent*) Yanka Maruk, Associate Professor Vasil' Drushchyts, Professor

Adam Mitskevich, Associate Professor Syarhei Myaleshka, Professor Aleksandr Tsvikevich, Dr. Ivan Tsvikevich, Al'herd Shlyubski, Z'mitrok S'nezhka, Arkadz' Smolich, Aleksandr Krutalevich; the literary critics Fèliks Kuptsevich, Makar Shalai, Pyatro Khatulyoŭ, A. Byarozkin, Yakaŭ Branshtein, and Symon Levin.

One must not neglect to mention the names of Byelorussian cultural figures belonging to *Brotherhood* (Hromada). This was a mass party of the peasants and the people in general which existed in Western (non-Soviet) Byelorussia. Members of *Brotherhood* arrested in 1933 included Symon Rak-Mikhailoŭski, Dr. Ihnat Dvarchanin, Pyatro Myatla, S. Baran, Mikhal Bursevich, Flehont Valynets, Yazèp Haŭrylik, Pavel Valoshyn, Academician Branislaŭ Tarashkevich, Leopold Rodzevich (the dramatist from Western Byelorussia), Makar Kraŭtsoŭ (the poet from Western Byelorussia), and Anton Lutskevich, a veteran social worker and literary critic in Vilno who was murdered by the Bolsheviks after their occupation of Western Byelorussia in September, 1939. The names of the others are legion.

Some playwrights who had been sharply criticized for ideological deviations in the recent past tried to redeem themselves by admitting and condemning their supposed errors. Shashalevich is a case in point. His *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* had been considered nationalistic. The playwright fell in the first wave of the 1930 arrests. After several months of pretrial incarceration in the prisons of the OGPU, however, he was released.

Shashalevich learned his lesson and pretended to change according to the demands of the times. His *Symphony of Wrath*, written in 1933, concerns the fate of an artist with a strong personality who refuses to yield to fate and preaches the freedom of art. His protest against conditions which suffocate artistic freedom and human feeling is considered rebellion by the authorities and he is jailed. Even in prison, however, his creative activity continues. Obviously the playwright was protesting Soviet conditions. His use of an original kind of Aesopian language is entirely understandable.

In order to deceive the vigilant censorship, he transferred his locale to the West. The play was approved, staged, and scored a hit. To be sure, this device did not pull the wool over the eyes of the NKVD. One of that organization's "black crows" [trucks] picked up Shashalevich in November 1936.

Mikhas' Zarėtski was also vilified in his time; he was accused of all the mortal sins of National Democracy. Back in 1929, he had introduced them into his *Kryvichy* novels and into his sketches entitled *Journey to a New Land.* To redeem himself, the author wrote a new novel called *Vyaz'mo.* Mikhas' Zarėtski called the play he based on this work *Symon Karyzna,* after its protagonist. The play was published in 1935 and was produced by the First Byelorussian State Theater at about the same time.

Zarėtski called his play a dramatic tale in four acts. The action was set in a year of great change. The numerous characters were of various social positions. Symon Karyzna, a school principal, is an intellectual, a romantic dreamer. As the struggle for collectivization proceeds, he is found guilty of a kulak deviation and is expelled from the Party.

This was the artistic reflection of what had taken place throughout the Byelorussian countryside in 1930. It included the Party policy during collectivization and the forced enrollments in the kolkhozes.

Zarėtski's art shows to advantage against the mediocre background of Soviet drama. The playwright knew how to depict character in a few expressive phrases. His works were good theater; the plots were controlled with skill and the overall concepts were realized effectively. The characters were developed exclusively by means of their talk. Although they frequently lacked a sufficient degree of individuality, capable actors could make them important and convincing. They always wish to see mankind in its brightness and beauty, as if through the prism of Zarėtski's personal outlook. His heroes always avoid the drabness of daily life; they are people of strong passions and glowing ideals.

Naya, Zarėtski's final play, must have been staged on the

eve of the playwright's arrest in 1936. It concerns a little gypsy girl, an orphan, who lives among coarse and indifferent people. Advertisements for the new play were in the show windows around town, but the author had already been jailed. Suffering from stomach ulcers and emaciated almost beyond belief by incessant nocturnal questionings, he awaited his fate in solitary confinement inside the Minsk prison of the NKVD.

Dailidovich (whose pen names included Ales' Dudar and Todar Hlybotski) was among the first arrested, in 1929, because of his articles on questions of the theater and his poem, "Our Land is Cut Down." The former had played an unfortunate part in the discussions of the theater in 1928; the latter was circulated in manuscript. He was sentenced to only two years of administrative exile in Smolensk. Not being involved in any large group, he was sentenced individually by a commission of three OGPU judges. This saved him from the mass arrests of 1930. In 1936, however, he was jailed a second time. He was then linked to a large group of anti-Soviet literary figures, and he was accused of belonging to a counter-revolutionary organization dedicated to overthrowing the Soviet regime and setting up an independent Byelorussian Republic. He was then sentenced to a long term at hard labor. As far as literature was concerned, he ceased to exist.

The mass arrests of 1936 decimated the ranks of Byelorussian playwrights, paralyzing creative work for many years. They instilled fear into those who remained, engendering a slave psychology. Even today, that psychology remains an insurmountable obstacle to an original drama, free of clichés and tendentiousness.

Henceforth, a servile, adjustable kowtowing to current policy hovered over all Byelorussian plans for the drama like an inexorable fate. All the high prizes awarded by the government, its medals, its signs of distinction, and its praise of plays and productions exhibit this clearly. These creations lack any trace of freedom and inspiration. No kind of critical retribution can evoke the rejected, forgotten and banished spirit of creative inspiration.

Chapter 15

THE REHABILITATION OF MIROVICH'S PRINCIPLES

The scarcity of Byelorussian plays forced the theater to devote still more attention to Soviet, non-Byelorussian plays and to the classics. During the years preceding the German invasion, the following plays were among those presented:

1) Aleksandr Ostrovski's *Wolves and Sheep* directed by L.G. Rakhlenka (1936);

2) Molière's *L'Avare* directed by Rakhlenka;

3) Gorki's *The Last Ones* directed by M. Zoraŭ;

4) A dramatization of Pushkin's novel *The Captain's Daughter* directed by Lyavon Litvinaŭ to help celebrate the centennial of Pushkin's death (1937);

5) Gogol's *The Inspector General* [*Revizor*] in Kandrat Krapiva's Byelorussian translation;

6) Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in Kandrat Krapiva's Byelorussian translation (both of Krapiva's translations were made to help celebrate the theater's twentieth anniversary on September 14, 1940);

7) Ostrovski's *Guilty Without Guilt;*

8) Ostrovski's *Late Love;*

9) Lope de Vega's *El Perro del Hortelano (si no vieran las mujeres)* (presented under the title *Dog in the Manger).*

Unquestionably, the classics gave the troupe great opportunities to show its skill and culture. The personnel could work more freely, not having to look over their shoulders at the paralyzing demands of ideology. Acting could be more spontaneous, more in accord with their ideas and techniques.

In *The Captain's Daughter*, Uladimir Uladamirski acted Pugachov[a]—that sly, powerful, purposeful, keen-witted and

a. Yemelyan Pugachov led a rebellion against Catherine II in 1773-75.

resourceful muzhik who wanted to become the tsar. Uladamirski was exceptionally eloquent and artistically convincing. The part of Savelich, the servant, was played with warmth and humor by Henrykh Hryhonis; Irena Zhdanovich as Masha, the Captain's daughter, and Barys Platonaŭ as Grinyov, the narrator, performed well.

H. P. Hlebaŭ set a high standard in his portrayal of Harpagon in the Molière play.

Zoraŭ's direction of Gorki's *The Last Ones* revealed his outstanding ability. In 1920 the theater had presented Gorki's *The Lower Depths* as one of its first productions. Now, twenty years later, the theater returned to Gorki, this time with considerable experience and stage knowledge. The production of *The Last Ones* showed the actors' talents in such a way that literally no part was poorly done. Irena Zhdanovich in particular was moving and tragic. The theater worked on a new production of *The Last Ones* throughout the summer of 1939 under I. M. Rayevski, a Moscow director.

Rakhlenka proved his mettle as a director by his work on Bill'-Belotserkovski's *Life Calls,* Ostrovski's *Wolves and Sheep* and Molière's *L'Avare.* He had entered the First Byelorussian State Theater after completing his studies at the Leningrad Institute of Theater Arts in 1929. During his first year in the theater, he had assisted Aŭstsihnei Mirovich in staging *Glass Factory* and had then begun to follow Mirovich's realistic principles.

After Mirovich's departure, Rakhlenka and Zoraŭ continued the work Mirovich had begun in educating the acting company and increasing the skill of its members. Actors themselves, Rakhlenka and Zoraŭ had great respect for the traditions of the theater. Working with the other actors, they carried on the creative activities of the theater. Their efforts served as a barrier against Litvinaŭ's attempts to lead the theater to biomechanics and constructivism and to make it a theater of the social mask, of stylization and of a mock declamatory style. (Litvinaŭ considered all these factors

as elements of his heroic and romantic theater.)

Thanks to Zoraŭ and Rakhlenka, the theater preserved its personnel and its personality. All the sins of the theater concerning repertory and ideology must be ascribed to external causes.

In 1936 *Pravda* published articles against the formalism and naturalism allegedly found in the productions of Dmitri Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* and his ballet *The Limpid Stream.* On November 15, 1936, *Pravda* attacked the so-called falsification of the national past in Demyan Bedny's play *Heroes of Yore* [Bogatyry] as put on at Aleksandr Tairov's Kamerny Theater in Moscow. All this gave rise in Byelorussia to a great number of meetings held by intellectuals in theater and literary life. They discussed formalism and naturalism in Byelorussian drama and literature. The Minsk journal, *Literature and Art* [Litaratura i mastatstva] was filled with articles which sharply criticized the formalistic and naturalistic caprices of Litvinaŭ and other directors.

Of course, as is inevitable during campaigns, there were far too many heated and impetuous accusations. Much was criticized which resulted from the search for new forms, devices and methods for enhancing the techniques of actor and director alike. This produced the danger of levelling and depersonalizing all Soviet stage art, which Vsevolod Meierhold, the great master of the Russian stage, at a meeting of theater people held shortly before his arrest in 1938, termed "complete, stifling mediocrity."

The criticism of formalism and naturalism resulted in Litvinaŭ's being displaced as the artistic head of the First Byelorussian State Theater. He was reduced to the ordinary rank of director and Rakhlenka was appointed artistic head of the theater in 1937. Thus, the troupe emerged victorious from its five-year duel with the headstrong Litvinaŭ. Once the Moscow critics had freely handed out advice to the Byelorussian State Theater; they wanted "directorial insight"

and a more "penetrating formal expression" of character. This attitude was now completely discredited.

Moscow began to acknowledge and canonize the system of Stanislavski. Such an action automatically caused the discrediting of all other systems for the theater, even in Byelorussia. On the credit side, Stanislavski's system was profound, artistic and undoubtedly the best of its kind. On the debit side, the universal adoption and canonization of just one system precluded further experimentation.

A new and hidden danger came into being. Stanislavski's system, if applied with no discrimination, would affect theaters using different forms and methods; such troupes would become subordinated to an alien, and sometimes antithetical, system. This meant the death of many trends in the theater which were labelled formalistic or esthetic (such as the theaters of Meierhold and Aleksandr Tairov in Moscow). It meant the end of seeking and of creative activity.

Kowtowing to standards sanctified in Moscow assumed particularly obvious forms in Byelorussia, because of Byelorussia's dependent position.

Nevertheless, the old principles of Mirovich were rehabilitated and this introduced certain consoling elements. The original Byelorussian school for training actors had been cultivated by Mirovich; it too was now respected once again.

To be sure, this did not, unfortunately, touch the ideological aspect of the theater's earlier work. The interdiction and condemnation of its National-Democratic trends of the past continued, ominously and inexorably, to impede original development.

Chapter 16

THE CARROT-AND-STICK POLICY IN THE THEATER ARTS

Until 1935 all theaters and showplaces were directly subordinated to the administrations on art affairs of the ministries of education in all the republics. The ministries of education in the separate republics were formally independent; there was no Ministry of Education for the entire Soviet Union. Hence, leadership in matters of art apparently was not under direct control by Moscow. On the other hand all the resolutions of the Party and government in Moscow were compulsory directives for all the republics and for all the local theaters, as were articles on questions of art in *Pravda, Izvestiya, Komsomol'skaya pravda, Literary Gazette* [Literaturnaya gazeta], and *Soviet Art* [Sovetskoye iskusstvo].

They were binding upon local Party Departments of Agitation and Propaganda and the local administrations on art affairs of the ministries of education. Even this system, however, failed to satisfy those in the Soviet capital. They had to deprive the local republics of even this purely formal autonomy in art. In 1935, a government decree created a single, all-Union, governmental Committee on Art Affairs Attached to the Council of People's Commissars of the U.S.S.R. Part of this organization was the Main Administration of Theaters. Corresponding theater administrations were set up in the individual republics and subordinated to the Committee.

Since 1936 Byelorussia has had its own Administration of Art Affairs attached to the Council of People's Commissars (now called the Committee on Art Affairs Attached to the Council of Ministers) of the Byelorussian S.S.R. The decisions of the Committee on Art Affairs of the U.S.S.R. in Moscow are binding on the Byelorussian group also.

True, the government formally supervises the theaters and art in general by having people in theater life discuss all

their problems. Art societies, dramatists' sections in the Byelorussian division of the Union of Soviet Writers, meetings of troupes, etc., exist for this purpose. But they usually get together to revise or strengthen their work, or for another reason: to make people aware of every shift in the Party's policy to art. Some statement or other from *Pravda* denouncing deviation is discussed or sometimes simply a decree of the Party or government about economic questions completely unconnected with art. Usually such general meetings are preceded by meetings of the Party and Komsomol at which everyone is required to show his support of the Party line and his resourcefulness in hunting out the indicated "isms" in local dramatic criticism. At these meetings, roles are assigned for speeches at the general meetings. In the general meetings, Party and non-Party people alike thunder against shortcomings, uncover each others deviations, and thank the Party for its "wise" and timely revelations. Those convicted of deviating repent and vow to reform. Some who are insufficiently repentant receive another scolding from the indignant meeting. Finally, a unanimous resolution is passed, calling upon all workers in the given region to hearken to its wise counsels. It condemns all those who have deviated and cringingly expresses its "boundless gratitude" to "the great and the wise" for granting expiatory grace of such historical significance. All this guarantees a semblance of solidarity of workers in the arts with Party policy.

Generally, no one disagrees openly. But, from time to time, those who disapprove covertly are ferreted out and exposed. The dirty work is usually done secretly by undercover organs of the police whose informers are all over. The stick is public reproach and the so-called practical conclusions which follow. The carrot exists for those resigned and patient people who suit the authorities. They receive personal emoluments, free vacations at health resorts and awards of decorations and Stalin Prizes. The abundance of Stalin Prize laureates and award winners in the arts may, perhaps, serve to show how widespread this serf psychology is now.

Chapter 17

HISTORY AND POLITICS

In the mid-thirties a combination of circumstances renewed Soviet interest in historical themes both in literature and in the theater. Pokrovski's anti-historical school was discredited; *Pravda* attacked the falsification of the past in Demyan Bedny's play *Heroes of Yore* [Bogatyry]. These events reflected the Party's new attitude: the rekindling of Soviet patriotism. Russian patriotism had been repressed for years while the struggle was going on against the bourgeoisie and imperialism. Now, however, it appeared as the official ideology but with a new—a Soviet—emphasis. This removed the unwritten ban on historical themes in the drama.

All this was reflected in Byelorussia through the partial amnesty granted historical themes. Those dealing with the distant past had been forbidden since the struggle against the Byelorussian National Democrats. Some themes of this kind were now allowed on the Byelorussian stage. Plays in which they appeared included Z'mitrok Byadulya's *Nightingale,* Mikhas' Klimkovich's *Katsyaryna Zharnasyok* and Kandrat Krapiva's *Partisans.* Krapiva's play dealt with the comparatively recent Polish occupation of Byelorussia.

These plays resulted from the policy of bribery and flattery towards those writers who had by some miracle survived the debacle. Under the usual practice a theme for a play would be suggested to a writer; he would be given a substantial advance and a permit to go to "Sasnoŭka" (a special home for creative writers located in the beautiful summer resort area not far from Minsk). The theater's literary department would hold systematic consultations with the playwright; together, they would discuss the completed parts of his play ensuring conformity both to the ideological demands and the needs of the stage. This method of creative collaboration

soon became quite common. Obviously, it acquainted the dramatists with the requirements of the stage, which was good. Its defects, however, outweighed its merits. Dramas became limited ideologically, and dramatists were no longer responsible for their own work. Playwrights merely carried out the social command—the greatest evil of Soviet art. An effort was made to hide the traces of social command;[a] it became fashionable to approach major writers with suitable themes. It was hoped that the skill of such people could manage to conceal the nakedness of the ideological scheme. The analysis of Kuz'ma Chorny's *Our Country* has already shown the distortion of the recent, revolutionary past. Later, the Bolsheviks used history as an auxiliary means in developing their newly-hatched patriotism.

Byadulya was the dean of Byelorussian letters. He was on the staff of *Our Soil* and later was a member of *Loftiness.* He published his tale, "Nightingale," in *Loftiness* (the journal of the organization of the same name) in 1927. His brilliant prose was flavored with an original and romantic attitude to the past life of the people. The story's protagonist combines Byadulya's ideas with a genuine folk concept: the hero who is able to imitate birds and animals.

The tale describes the people's life at the start of the nineteenth century. Byadulya depicts the entire gallery of character at *Pan*[b] Vashemirski's court in the most graphic style. The tale is particularly interesting in its discussion of the landowner's theater, the acting personnel of which were all serfs.

Byadulya received a "command" to adapt his story for the stage and, accordingly, wrote a play about a peasant uprising. The characters and scenes of the tale served only

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a. "Social command" is considered in the U.S.S.R. to be the order given by the working class to its artists (as interpreted by the Communist Party and the Soviet government).—Ed.

b. *Pan* (pl.: *pany*) is the Byelorussian word for Mr. or lord.

as exposition in the play, preparing the audience for the final scenes in which the people's wrath bursts out. The landowner's palace is set on fire by the rebellious peasants; all the gentry are arrested, and "Nightingale," (the nickname of the hero) leads a retreat to the forest before troops can reach the site of the uprising.

The presentation was put on in time for the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution. Evidently, this made Byadulya and the theater accentuate the revolutionary significance of the play.

The characters in the play include two men, Adam and Yazėp. Adam burns with the desire to take vengeance on the Polish gentry for the people's sufferings. Yazėp, a cooper, has more advanced views and resembles a prototype of a working-class leader. He opposes the unorganized, spontaneous attacks against the Polish gentry; he thinks that the time is not yet ripe. He warns "Nightingale" not to shed blood needlessly, saying,

> What will happen when there are no more Vashemirskis? Others will lord it over us. If all the people opposed all the gentry, my boy, I'd go with you singing as if I were headed for a wedding. That's right! And I'd pay them back for everything with no regrets. ...
>
> But the people are still just like this hemp.... You take it in your hands and break it. We must twine the people into one unit, like a strong rope made out of this hemp. But you and I, my boy, we are only hairs of that rope. They'll grind our bones into flour. The people's tears are not just rain water; their blood is not just a puddle on the road. Understand? If your kindness makes our blood flow in rivers, you will hang yourself on an aspen tree like Judas.... Is that clear?

Young and passionate, Adam wants to inflame the nation through his personal example. For Yazėp, the most important thing is the search for justice to the muzhiks. "Nightingale" asks where justice is and Yazėp answers him unequivocally; he summons "Nightingale" to take national vengeance:

> Perhaps it's in the Tsar's bosom or, perhaps, in the ashes that will be left from the estates of the gentry. Then we'll

> talk with whomever we have to about justice for the muzhiks. We have stakes and pitchforks.... We will have courage. ... We'll finish our murderers off like swine.

After these conversations, there are skirmishes between the young men of the village and the servants of the gentry. The landowner has ordered the latter to destroy the huts of those who refuse to obey his order to move to sandy, stony places. The steward is killed, but his murderer is not found. An uprising is staged in the final act, and a people's trial of the gentry is proclaimed. To the gentry, assembled for a ball, "Nightingale" announces:

> We have come to judge you for our tears, blood, lashes, and tortures.... in a court of the people. Every *Pan* Adam will be judged by his serf Adam. Bring them in....

Thus, even a historical theme did not free the writer from his obligation to make history contemporary. It had to be shown from the viewpoint of class struggles and popular movements leading to later revolutionary action. An objective approach was impossible. History was dressed up in a contemporary style.

The best part of the production, perhaps, was its revival of the beloved folk games, rites and dances which had once been so popular. Scenes that were true to life lent the play color, brightness and vitality. *Pan* Vashemirski's theater was most interesting; the actresses, who were all serfs, bore such classical names as Terpsichore, Melpomene, Polyhymnia, Urania, and Calliope. Guillaume, a foreign ballet-master, has taught them to curtsy with a "little angelic smile" to express their "sincere" gratitude to *Pan* Vashemirski.

The 1938 production of Klimkovich's verse play, *Katsyaryna Zharnasyok,* was similar. This play was set in the middle of the sixteenth century. As if to spite the National-Democratic idealization of the Byelorussian-Lithuanian state, Klimkovich chose to deal mainly with the rise of the gentry in Byelorussia. He dwelt on their efforts to subjugate those peasants who had not yet lost their right to leave their prince. The people rise up in answer to the gentry's per-

fidious intrigues. Klimkovich had to satisfy the internationalists and to refute the alleged National Democrats. Therefore, he repeatedly stressed the fraternal participation of Russian and Ukrainian cossacks in the rebellion of Byelorussian peasants. His shots at the National Democrats were all really blanks; no one had ever denied Ukrainian participation in the anti-Polish revolts of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, Byelorussian rebellions were an original reaction to the Ukrainian uprisings which stimulated them. They were facilitated by the common fate of Ukrainians and Byelorussians under one government. The author simply invented the "fraternal aid" given by the Russians. Ideology had to be adhered to; as the folk saying goes, "Gorged wolves make for safe sheep."

Katsyaryna Zharnasyok, like *Nightingale,* afforded a major opportunity to show folk art. Its verse form permitted a good deal of music, so a number of new songs and dances were written. I.M. Ushakoŭ, a young Byelorussian artist, did the sets. All this did not conceal the historical tendentiousness in the whole scheme: the harsh past, the struggle and the people's triumph. This pattern became so deeply rooted that even dramatists of indubitable merit and talent did not dare to destroy it. History offered theatergoers only a facet of contemporary politics. Because of this, it became a counterfeit which deserves to be called "pseudo-history."

Chapter 18

TERROR JUSTIFIED BY THE STAGE

The terror of 1937 and 1938 engendered a new social command in the drama. Plays were written about the alleged hostile activities of the various class enemies, the so-called enemies of the people.

The outstanding Byelorussian example of this was Eduard Samuilyonak's *Death of a Wolf*, which was produced in 1939. Samuilyonak was a talented writer who died young. Soviet critics praised his "profound manner of handling the eventual death of man's sense of private property."[25] The play stood out against the mediocrity of Soviet drama in general. It possessed craftsmanship; it built its action around a number of exciting plots; its language was rich and colorful. Many of its scenes and characters had life and humor. Yet, it all served to justify the cruel and inhuman NKVD reign of terror in Byelorussia.

In fact, the entire play seemed to teach the audience that its enemies were active all over and were often elusive. One had to be vigilant to seek them out. The "valorous" organs of the NKVD served to clean this hostile filth out of Soviet society!

The play takes place on a kolkhoz at the frontier. This is supposed to represent the entire Byelorussian republic (which is also on the frontier). Enemies are active on the collective farm. All the farm members hunt the hostile agents but, for a long time, with no success. The enemy is wily, cunning, elusive, and perfidious. Only the aid of the NKVD border guards[a] enables the peasants to unmask the activities of their enemies, including Ababurka (the representative of the

a. The NKVD, in addition to its other duties, also guards the Soviet frontiers.—Ed.

regional Party executive committee), Kharkevich (a woodsman), and Vyrvich (a husbandman). Great acting ability was squandered to show the hostile class nature of these characters.

Hlebaŭ expended his most brilliant talents to reveal the wolf-like grasp which the play ascribes to Kharkevich. Uladimir Uladamirski was exceedingly resourceful in bringing out Ababurka's most typical traits: he was a vile, impudent, ridiculous, petty tyrant. Kastus' Sannikaŭ directed the play in consultation with I.M. Rayevski of the Moscow Art Theater.

A number of sympathetically portrayed folk types helped the production to score a hit. They include old Anisim, an avid fisherman, who dreams of catching the hundred-pound fish he has long been after in time for the holiday table. Stsepanida, the poultry woman, jealously guards her fowl from the encroachments of her own husband, who is arranging the holiday feast for the anniversary of the kolkhoz.

But none of this saves the theatergoer from the annoying sensation that the play is an apologia for the anti-humanistic terrorism associated with the name of Yezhov. Many hundreds of thousands of Soviet intellectuals were wiped out. Science, education, administration, agriculture, and even the Party itself were emasculated. Millions of children were orphaned and the happiness of countless homes was destroyed. At that time, everyone realized that those shown as enemies were, in reality, like any other honest toilers; they worked untiringly for their families, not for glory. They had a sense of responsibility and, like everyone else, they were frightened and unhappy. The theatergoer knew from what was going on around him that they too were victims of the terror, like their friends, relatives and co-workers who disappeared daily and even hourly as a result of the ceaseless visits of the NKVD. "Today, it's so and so," the theatergoer thought, "tomorrow may be my turn."

The inner, inarticulate protest of the playgoer, however,

could hardly prevent *Death of a Wolf* from being included in the repertory of many theaters both inside and outside Byelorussia. It is performed in the Soviet Union even today. A. Glebov translated the play into Russian. The result was considered one of the best Soviet dramas and was published in an anthology of Soviet drama.[26]

Chapter 19

SOVIET STYLE FRIENDSHIP

A new figure appeared in Byelorussian drama during the 1930's: Kandrat Krapiva, whose previous fame had come from his prose and verse satires. After 1933 he wrote a number of plays which were all produced. In 1934, his *End of a Friendship* was staged; in 1937, *Partisans;* in 1947, *Together with the People;* in 1950, *Larks Are Singing;* and in 1953, *Interested Party.*

Krapiva, like Z'mitrok Byadulya, was quickly forgiven his membership in *Loftiness.* Having the quick, sharp mind of a peasant, he joined the left wing of *Loftiness* at the first signs that the group was being criticized, thus helping to effect a split in the organization. A number of leading poets and critics were forced out of it and eventually *Loftiness* was liquidated as an organization. The subject matter of all his works shows his unusual flair for urgent problems. He always grasps whatever is most important, whatever is demanded by the policy of the moment, whatever can guarantee his success.

His first effort was *End of a Friendship.* Great ideological battles had just finished inside Byelorussia. For a number of years, the "citadels of National-Democratic counterrevolution" had been undergoing purges; these included the Academy of Sciences, the Writers' Union, the theaters, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Agriculture. Having already arrested a number of the earlier commissars, the Communists now imprisoned their successors. Take the case of Pryshchepaŭ, once the Minister of Agriculture for the Byelorussian S.S.R. He was arrested and exiled early for having tried to divide the land into small farmsteads and individual holdings. His efforts were considered to indicate a kulak policy. After this, a number of other ministers were arrested, as were their deputies, the heads of departments, agronomists, and others.

People were gripped by fear. Slander and denunciation flourished. There could be no open friendships under such conditions. Betrayal and frame-ups awaited everyone. People began to speak more guardedly—even at home. The government officially encouraged denunciation of even one's closest relatives. What is the value of the disgraceful immortalization of Pavlik Morozov, who denounced his own father? His grandfather later killed him, but the boy has become a hero for Soviet propaganda. Monuments have been erected to him, while plays and poems are still dedicated to him.

Such conditions destroyed the bases of the family, of love and of friendship. They smashed everything upon which the moral principles of mankind had been based for thousands of years. Breaking one's vows, betraying and slandering one's friends became common. Any act of treachery was justified by the class interests of the proletariat and by the building of communism. The rejection of the old morality took particularly loathsome forms.

Krapiva contributed his bit to the cause. His play, *End of a Friendship,* was a problem play, dealing with friendship, the family, parents, children, and love. The main characters in the play are Anton Lyutynski, a Deputy Minister, and Karneichyk, the director of a factory. The struggle against the Polish occupation in 1919 would seem to have cemented their friendship forever. During those times, Karneichyk once lay wounded in Lyutynski's house when a Polish corporal came snooping around. It would have been sure death for Karneichyk had he been found, but Lyutynski, then a teacher, risks his own life to allay the Pole's suspicions. Lyutynski manages to find a doctor to operate on Karneichyk's hand, warding off infection and possible death. Lyutynski shelters Karneichyk and takes care of him until he is completely better. Karneichyk declares:

> When Lyutynski saved me from the White Poles, he looked death in the face and was not frightened. I gave him my word of honor as a partisan when I left that when he needed me

most I would be with him and would not forsake him even though death should threaten me.

More than ten years pass. Fate again throws the old comrades together. During the interim, Lyutynski has outstripped his friend. He has been to the university and holds a high post in the Ministry of Agriculture. Karneichyk, thanks to his Party card, has become a factory director. He discerns Lyutynski's doubts about the correctness of Party policy on collectivization. Lyutynski is sent to the countryside to supervise the struggle against the kulaks, but fails to show them the toughness, cruelty and lack of mercy which the Party demands.

Karneichyk has a sweetheart in the Komsomol named Nas'tsya who eavesdrops on Lyutynski's conversations with his father in the municipal gardens. The old man is a former kulak who has been dispossessed. She tells Karneichyk, who thus learns of Lyutynski's kulak origin. Instead of warning or advising his friend, Karneichyk gets in touch with the Secretary of the Party Committee, a man named Nodelman. Secretly, they examine every step that Lyutynski has ever taken. At the same time, Karneichyk visits Lyutynski's family, saying that he is an old friend. Finally, Lyutynski experiences a Party purge, which is to decide his life or death. The time has now arrived when Lyutynski needs Karneichyk most. Karneichyk is quite conscious of this, declaring, "Today, when Lyutinski needs me most, I have not come forward and I am not saving him."

This is only the beginning. Karneichyk hurls himself on Lyutynski like a rapacious vulture on its defenseless victim; he exposes his one-time friend's lies and his sabotage inside the Ministry of Agriculture (in collusion with the kulaks) which he characterizes as a betrayal of the working class, of world revolution. His speech is a striking example of Communist perfidy and demagoguery. It rejects all concepts of human friendship and defames all ideas of nobility in human relations. Karneichyk justifies his conduct with some skillful, dialectical rubbish about new principles of friendship. He sees friendship as something based only on adherence to one

social principle, to the community of class and Party interests.

In his speech, he touches on a number of questions obliquely, for example, how is friendship maintained? what creates the watershed between friendship and hatred? what should guide a Party member in defining the bases of friendship? He manages, incidentally, to let the dialectic speak highly of himself as he tries to ascertain why Lyutynski, once a man of noble deeds, has now become an enemy. It seems that the two men fought against the Polish occupation for completely different ideals.

Even then Karneichyk had discerned the property owner, the "beast of prey" in Lyutynski. Later on, this trait came to dominate the latter's personality. Eventually, it led him to fight against the Party on behalf of the kulaks and Pryshchepaŭ's ideas. Karneichyk, with the adroitness of a Party scholar, resorts to sophistry in order to avoid honoring his obligations to his friend:

> *Karneichyk:* How did it happen, comrades, that I did not keep my word of honor as a partisan? I decided not to after long, agonizing meditation and sleepless nights. I couldn't sleep. I lay with my eyes open and thought about friendship. What is friendship? Is it eternal, as I once read in novels? Have I the moral right to overstep my friendship with Lyutynski? And I remembered my conversation with Comrade Nodelman. At that time, we came to the conclusion that friendship is founded upon the community of class interests. But then I began to think about my friendship with Lyutynski; it seemed that although he had saved me from death, I had to ruin him. Such a thought made me ill, but I could not escape it. And then, when for perhaps the twentieth time, I began to think about our friendship, the circumstances under which it had started came to my mind. There I lay in the storeroom wounded. And my hand was making me miserable. There I was, a young fellow who didn't want to be crippled. I was terrified when I thought of the pain I would have to endure. And, in spite of all this, I allowed them to cut off my hand. I myself begged them to do it quickly because infection had already set in and was threatening my entire body. Then I finally understood. My hand was just like Lyutynski. The same thing would have to be done with him. ... There was only time left for me to see

that my friend had perished for good and that there was no hope of saving him. I began watching him more closely and checking the facts. And it soon became obvious that our friendship had died long ago, especially inside Lyutynski. There was no basis for it.

Lyutynski: But didn't I fight alongside you?

Karneichyk: Yes, we fought against our common enemy, but not for the same thing. You fought to chase the landlords out and let the kulaks have complete freedom. At that time, I was unable to see into your soul, and I didn't notice that in its darkest recesses there was a small but rapacious beast in you. I didn't see that you were a dyed-in-the-wool owner of property. You entered the Red Army and the beast was warmed inside your overcoat. You entered the Party and hid it under your Party card. This beast was the reason you failed to give yourself wholeheartedly to the Revolution but only jumped on its running board so that you could jump down at the first curve. And that was the NEP. Then, the beast crawled out into the open and began to profit, grow and get fat. Pryshchepaŭ, the Minister of Agriculture, stroked its shining coat. And you yourself, with his blessing, zealously dedicated yourself to the principles of small landholdings. You began to build cages for other beasts. Soon there was a fresh wind and the beast scented danger and hid. Now you might have bid it good-bye, but you failed to change your mind, you failed to pluck the wild beast out of yourself, and it has devoured the Communist within you!

Lyutynski (indignantly): This is demagoguery!

Karneichyk: You want facts? I'd keep the facts on five such Communists in order to kick them out of the Party! You were carried away by organizing ways of farming; you boasted that you'd show up all the republics. Comrade Naporka has shown us the cages that have come from that. The counterrevolutionaries profited by your political blindness. In the winter, during the collections of grain, you wiped away the kulaks' tears. You began whimpering with them and complaining that the Party was wrong to liquidate them. Kulak complaints blinded you and deafened you so that you failed to hear the moaning of the workers inside the fascist prison; you failed to see the tens of millions of unemployed who were starving and freezing to death on the streets of the chic European capitals. Your actions postponed the day of their salvation. You could not cut the um-

bilical cord that tied you to your kulak father, whom, by the way, you helped to get rich. And when he was finally dispossessed, you had no courage to tell the Party about it. You even hid from me—your friend! About ten days ago, when I saw you with your father on the square, you tried to persuade me that your father had been unjustly dispossessed. But for once I didn't believe you. Comrade Nodelman and I had checked that business. Your father was dispossessed a year ago, and rightly so. But you began to protect him from the Soviet authorities. You wrote your friend, Barnatovich, the head of the regional Department of Agriculture, complete instructions on how to remove the chairman of the Agricultural Soviet from office and how to return your father's property to him. You declared war on the Soviet authorities. Just think: for one kulak, you exchanged the entire world revolution! (*To the audience*) Lyutynski, comrades, betrayed not only me. He betrayed all of you; he betrayed the whole working class and its Party! (*To Lyutynski*) How wrong it rubbed me to hear your lying about your father! How you wriggled out of it! You had the impudence to lie, thinking that Nas'tsya and I would support you. You relied on our friendship! You thought it would be a bond strong enough to pull me into the swamp with you! No, my fine friend, the bond is broken and you are heading for the swamp by yourself! I've figured you out down to the last detail, my friend! The Party has long since had no room for you, ex-Comrade Lyutynski! (*He goes into the hall.*)

Krapiva found even this inadequate. He further punishes Lyutynski by alienating the man's family. Lyutynski's wife, an honest schoolteacher named Natal'lya, rejects him, as does Yury, his ten-year-old son. Evidently, not only Soviet society but also the genuine Soviet family has no room for an opportunist. Lyutynski descends from the rostrum and, stony-faced, walks down the aisle to the door. As he passes Natal'lya, she gets up and is scarcely able to hold back her tears:

Natal'lya: So you've fallen, Anton! I gave you my hand, but now... I won't go to your hut....

Yury: Papa, it means that you defended the kulaks, you opportunist....

Lyutynski walks on without answering. Natal'lya draws the child to her and kisses him. Yury weeps quietly.

Everyone feels that the man is going to his death. He is left with no friends, no wife and no son. He has no one to ask for help, and nowhere to find support or sympathy. He has become a persecuted outcast. The family bewails not the loss of its man but the fact that Party infallibility has not triumphed inside him. No matter how false the author's bias, his work is powerful. It shows that man has no rights in Soviet society. It demonstrates the unprecedented perfidy of friends; it reveals the dissolution of family ties and other bonds, which is possible only in a social structure with no respect for the human personality.

Despite Krapiva's intentions, his play protested humanistically against the state's violation of human rights and human personality. As a mirror, it was distorted, but it nevertheless reflected the mass purges of the First Five-Year Plan [1928-1932] and the tragedy of those who had submitted to this awful purgatory.

With all its approval of the play, Soviet criticism could not help noting that the playwright "wrote more from purpose than from life."[27]

Chapter 20

FROM THE HEROIC DRAMA TO THE COMEDY OF SOVIET MORES

In 1937, Kandrat Krapiva's *Partisans* was staged at the First Byelorussian State Dramatic Theater. It was published in the same year.

Partisans completed the cycle of historical plays which included Z'mitrok Byadulya's *Nightingale* and Mikhas' Klimkovich's *Katsyaryna Zharnasyok*. Krapiva's *Partisans* was a heroic drama dealing with the Byelorussian struggle against Polish occupation in 1919. The play showed two irreconcilable camps: the people (fighting against the occupying forces), and the collaborators (kulaks, nobles and Polish gentry). Strictly speaking, the play is episodic rather than continuous. Whatever cohesion it possesses comes from the fact that many of the same characters appear throughout. The author was mainly interested in mass scenes and in clashes between the two different groups.

The play has many characters. Among them are Danila Dril (the commander of a partisan detachment); his mother; his sister; Bazyl' (a peasant); Bazyl's granddaughter, Nas'tsenka; Batura; Ryhor; Mikhal and Khalimon (partisans); Skiba Kuzin (an underground Party worker); the Yandrikhoŭski family (gentry); Marhun (a kulak) and his daughter Katsyaryna, and Shmihelski (a nobleman). Yet not one of them is a finished piece of work.

Krapiva does rather better with Ryhor than with anyone else in the play. Ryhor is a poor man, an old friend of Danila's, and hopelessly in love with Katsyaryna (whom he dreams of marrying). Under her influence, he does not follow his comrades into the forest. As the action proceeds, love and friendship struggle within him. The principle of private property fights against his sense of duty. The climax comes

when Katsyaryna's father suggests that she visit Ryhor late at night. She tries to find out Danila's whereabouts. (Actually, he is hidden within Ryhor's house.) A large reward has been offered for Danila's head. Katsyaryna's feminine charms seem to have an effect on Ryhor. She discovers Danila asleep behind the curtains. Ryhor almost lets her persuade him to kill Danila. The idea of wealth plus Katsyaryna is just about to possess Ryhor. At the decisive moment, however, the traitor becomes an avenger. Humanity conquers private property. Ryhor kills not Danila, but the greedy and predatory Katsyaryna. This scene contains all the allurements of a cheap melodrama, but once again the actors saved the situation. I. Shatsila's Ryhor was reserved and attentive. He did not let Danila persuade him to join the partisans. All his thoughts concerned Katsyaryna. He deliberates:

> What am I doing badly? I love the girl and want to marry her. I want a little land to live with her on, peacefully and happily. Is that really a major sin? I don't want to hurt anybody.

Without any affectation, artificiality or undue emphasis, Shatila sparingly and dramatically revealed the difficult conflict inside Ryhor. The artistic tact of the director and the fine acting of Shatsila enabled the theater to avoid melodramatic situations. The actors and staff managed to conceal the shortcomings of the play: its schematic arrangements and its primitive conflicts. The production was more important than the play. It was directed by L.G. Rakhlenka and set by Barys Malkin. These two men, together with the actors, supplied what the play lacked. Vera Pola brought humanity to her role. She depicted Katsyaryna's cold, reasoning and calculating character as a specific kind of human nature. A. Baranoŭski enacted Bazyl' well. His old man was kind, ridiculous and wise in his own way. H. Hlebaŭ as Khalimon showed considerable comic talent. Uladimir Uladamirski was great in the difficult role of the courageous Danila, a part which Krapiva did not develop much. Danila is symbolic rather than real. That the role was a success resulted from

Uladamirski's ability to create a character and to round it out through his own talents.

Compared with *End of a Friendship, Partisans* was something of a success for Krapiva as a playwright. Although he was niggardly in using psychological characteristics, he nevertheless revealed that he could create figures based on them.

The dramatic elements are combined with a certain strain of humor. Krapiva can produce comedy even at the most tragic times. He comes up with jokes, funny scenes, successful turns of phrase, or witty definitions based on folk humor. Tendentiousness, however, debases the cognitive meaning of the play and fetters Krapiva's outstanding talents.

But there was one time when the playwright's tasks corresponded somewhat to the real situation, when Krapiva succeeded in displaying his great ability in writing comedy. This was towards the end of 1938, when Yezhov's terror had so inundated the Soviet Union that one anonymous denunciation sufficed to make a man disappear. The entire country sensed the groans and the blood of the tortured everywhere. The atmosphere in institutions had become unbearable. People were afraid not only of speaking but even of thinking. The offices of the Soviet dignitaries, such as Molotov, Voroshilov and even Stalin, were besieged by complaints from millions of relatives about unjust arrests, trials and exiles. The nation was undergoing a tremendous tragedy, and it grumbled inwardly. The Kremlin, frightened at the results of national dissatisfaction, decided to ease up on the terror and to heap all the blame for it on its officials—those specialists in slander and denunciation whom the Kremlin itself had nurtured and cultivated. At the end of 1938, a resolution was published by the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) condemning slander. A campaign was begun to unmask those who practiced it. Soon, even Yezhov himself was taken away—not long after he had been deluged with praise as one of Stalin's foremost assistants!

The anti-slander campaign made it possible for Krapiva to

write *He Who Laughs Last* in 1939. It was a timely and successful satire. The author successfully employed the political atmosphere of the moment to create a real masterpiece of Byelorussian drama. The play included some material criticizing Soviet unreasonableness in eliminating scholars and those intellectuals with roots in the people. These valuable individuals were replaced by any talentless person who held a Party card. Taking advantage of their Party membership, all kinds of impostors and rogues tricked their way into scholarly organizations and compromised scholarship. *He Who Laughs Last* became an unconscious satire of the sycophants and informers who flourish within the Soviet Union. The playwright, as it were, pointed out the criminal Soviet groups and made the playgoer look around. The public saw a number of typical Party pseudo-pundits, sycophants, slanderers, and adventurers. In real life, the people had to endure much at their hands; hence they were glad to see such characters in comic situations. Enmity poured forth in outbursts of laughter.

The action of the comedy takes place in a geological institute. The head of the institute is Harlakhvatski, a Party member. He has bungled his last assignment in Kiev and his friends have had him tucked away in a cozy corner of Byelorussia. As director of the institute, however, Harlakhvatski has to do scientific work, but he has no talent whatsoever. The resourcefulness of a swindler and his predatory, everyday cunning, however, are enough. He forces Tulyaha, a cowardly colleague, to write a scientific paper in Harlakhvatski's name.

The Soviet system of finding everyone guilty of some kind of deviation strikes fear into the old, honest, scholarly Tulyaha. He does not even dare to publish his own scientific papers lest they prove mistaken. He seems to personify morbid terror. It starts when some new acquaintance scrutinizes him suspiciously and remarks that Tulyaha looks like a cer-

tain Colonel Padharetski, who had served under Denikin.[a]

Under any other circumstances, this could hardly have excited the man. In the Soviet Union, however, everyone is familiar with the fact that all "former people" are arrested and liquidated. Hence, the incident seemed ominous to Tulyaha. It paralyzed his will. How reminiscent this is of the downtrodden petty functionaires whom Gogol, Dostoyevski and Chekhov wrote about. Such people were always frightened by the powerful of the world and were always afraid that something might happen!

Harlakhvatski uses this hypertrophied cowardice. The next step is to work on Professor Chornavus; his opinion may be decisive in judging Harlakhvatski's "scientific work." This is why Harlakhvatski circulates slander about the professor's allegedly hostile activities. The result is immediate. Publishers reject his book and learned societies refuse to assist him. His daughter, a student, is hounded by questionings. Harlakhvatski alone attaches no importance to all this. Others swallow it but he, the author of the slander, knows what sort of a "saboteur" Chornavus is. He conspicuously treats him well, even offering him financial remuneration. Naturally, Chornavus is moved by such sincere friendship, sympathy and understanding from the Party member who heads the institute. He has been accustomed to seeing them all as stranglers of freedom; now, totally unexpectedly, he finds a certain humanity and is deeply moved by it.

But the play was written within the Soviet Union. Therefore, Levanovich and Vera, the Communists in the institute, give moral support to both Tulyaha and Professor Chornavus. Otherwise, the play would never have reached the boards. Encouraged by them, Chornavus sends his work to Anikeyeŭ, a well-known scholar, for the latter's opinion. It is favorable, but Harlakhvatski gets hold of it. (He and Chornavus are

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a. General Denikin commanded one of the anti-Communist armies which unsuccessfully sought to defeat the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War.—Ed.

both called Aleksandr Pyatrovich.) Thus, Harlakhvatski provides himself with a favorable review for his "scientific" work of the future.

The day is set for Harlakhvatski's report. This is the time when Tulyaha's liberation from his paralyzing cowardice begins. Tulyaha is greatly insulted and humiliated; he starts to sober up. He has reached the limits of human endurance and cowardice. Uladimir Karpaŭ describes this scene with some color:

> The crowd breaks into the office. Seated on the sofa are Zyolkin's disshevelled secretary and pale, lost Tulyaha. The crowd is unaware that Harlakhvatski has dragged the coward in through a window only a minute before, threatening to "unmask" him. Harlakhvatski has forced Tulyaha to admit an error made by someone else.
>
> The hapless Tulyaha is agitated and depressed. His hands are squeezed together, as if in prayer. His head is to one side. His eyes blink quickly and perplexedly. It seems as if the crazy laugh of Harlakhvatski's wife, in her flashy and tasteless attire, is beating him like a lash. He is ready to sink into the earth.
>
> "So, you're with someone else, you good for nothing," Zyolkin jealously shouts at his own "spouse." (Zyolkin is a rogue and a slanderer in Harlakhvatski's service.) She pushes him aside and manages to leave almost quietly. The wrath of the insulted husband seeks issue.
>
> "I'll get even with you right now, my fine fellow," says Zyolkin to Tulyaha. Zyolkin approaches the coward threateningly, his fists clenched.
>
> All Tulyaha can say is, "What do you have against me, Comrade Zyolkin?" These words contain everything: the pain, the fright and the pitiful request for forgiveness. ... When the coward closes his eyes in despair, he expects to be beaten. He hunches his shoulders up. The public punishes him with its laughter.[28]

Humiliations awaken his self-respect, which had previously been doped by fear. Tulyaha begins to wonder whether all this befits an honest man. Let Harlakhvatski be afraid; he is a scoundrel and a parasite! In his indecision, Tulyaha turns

to Levanovich and Vera. They back him up. This gives him courage. Cowardice is only the result of solitude (the scapegoat of everything honest and noble in Soviet life). This is the fate faced by many hundreds of thousand thinking people. The author unconsciously reveals the tragedy of intellectuals surrounded by Soviet rabble. When there are people who trust a man and wish to help him, he recovers his courage and his personal dignity (even if only temporarily). His cowardice and loneliness vanish. This is what happens to Tulyaha. He now burns to revenge the old outrages against himself. He conceives the idea of writing some inconceivable rubbish for Harlakhvatski and letting him expose himself before all the specialists.

At the council of scholars, Harlakhvatski reads a report with all the hauteur of a savant on a newly discovered prehistoric animal. He illustrates his talk with bones which the janitor brings in from the garbage. Amidst general quiet and attention, Harlakhvatski nonchalantly trots out such scientific terms as *Svintus grandiosus,*[b] invents the "Penza Geological Period," and brings up all sorts of absurdities, totally unaware of his impending exposure. One cannot help comparing this with Molière's *Malade imaginaire.*

Tulyaha listens to Harlakhvatski in silence. He is smiling. He can hardly refrain from showing his inner triumph over both the pseudo-scientist and his own cowardice. Every new blunder by Harlakhvatski evokes a motion of triumph in Tulyaha's eyes and body.

Once unmasked, Harlakhvatski immediately loses all his aplomb. Tulyaha passes by him, head high. The janitor picks up a bone, which was so recently such a valuable scientific exhibit, and gives it to the dog. Harlakhvatski and the slandering Zyolkin are shown to be enemies of the people and are arrested. Everything seems to work out all

b. *Svintus* in Russian is a word coined by theological students by tacking a Latin ending to the root of the Russian word for *pig. Svintus,* however, is applied only to people.—Ed.

right. The playgoers alone are not reassured. They leave the theater with renewed hatred for everything base and foul which is so prevalent within the Soviet environment. This may be the most important thing in the play. P. Litinski, a Moscow critic, called the comedy "disturbing," and wrote:

> Krapiva does not transform tragedy into vaudeville as [Nikolai] Virta has done in *Slander*. In the latter play, Akim Akimovich Propoteyev, the one-time slanderer, gives Antony Ivanovich Proskurovski some rough days, but everything is straightened out. Can one [not (?)] laugh at the events depicted by Virta? Things do not seem so inoffensive in *He Who Laughs Last*. Slander and enmity are not identical, but cowardice, baseness, greediness, and unalloyed expediency are their powerful allies. Proskurovski represents an incomprehensible temptation, but Harlakhvatski represents retribution for our tolerance of such people. Virta's characters cannot worry about anything; Krapiva's remain worried because all this can be repeated if they permit it.[29]

The production of *He Who Laughs Last* was a new triumph for the Byelorussian theater and drama. It was staged with genuine taste by I.M. Rayevski and Rakhlenka. The settings were magnificent. Harlakhvatski's office was adorned with the skeleton of some fantastic animal and a complete collection of ugly-looking bones. Rakhlenka himself played Harlakhvatski. He showed the adroit, predatory adventurer equipped with a Party card and a knowledge of how to turn someone else's weakness to his own advantage. He dexterously uses the incipient struggle against slanderers to boast that he may be the only person not to attach any importance to the slander against Chornavus. While he reads articles on the struggle against the slanderers, he attentively studies the reactions of his audience in order to be better able to lead them around by the nose.

H.P. Hlebaŭ, who played Tulyaha, transmitted fear and terror to the theatergoers. These are the conditions people live under in a police state. Tulyaha, an honest man, is terror-stricken and cowardly in his relations with the omnipotent Soviet dignitaries. He is a generalization of great

power. At one time, Tulyaha's gratitude is so strong that he is almost ready to kiss the hand of the man who declares that he does not believe all the gossip. This brush-stroke shows the entire tragedy of the Soviet intellectual. In the same way, Karpaŭ was right when he said, "The figure of Tulyaha tops off that sad and humdrum series of petty functionaries created by Gogol and Chekhov."[30] Of course, no Soviet critic has the right to show the conditions of Soviet life which so repeatedly produce the Tulyaha-type among intellectuals. One cannot, therefore, agree with Litinski's conclusion:

> Cowardice is a burden only for the honest man; if a man is honest through and through, he will eventually find means for getting rid of his cowardice.[31]

Tulyaha's cure comes strictly from Krapiva's censor-like imagination. Whatever limited resemblance it might have borne to reality occurred only during the brief period following the resolution of the Central Committee against slanderers. That time passed quickly. A few dozen slanderers were tried for show, and then the previous situation returned. Once again there was eternal fear of the omnipotent Soviet magnates and of unexpected visits from the NKVD.

Krapiva ran the whole gamut of comedy with his sarcasm, badinage and humor. He combined intensive action with clearly defined characters. His biting satire was supplemented by clever situations and profound psychological analysis. The comedy as a whole presented a gallery of the diverse types and temperaments in Soviet society. Reality was generalized successfully, which guaranteed long popularity for the play.

Such a bitter satire could hardly have appeared earlier. It had an even smaller chance of appearing later—say, after the war, when the Zhdanov reaction had set in throughout art and literature and even such harmless writers as Mikhail Zoshchenko were baited.[c] *He Who Laughs Last* is surely an

c. Andrei Zhdanov spoke out sharply in 1946 against what he considered the unduly strong, contemporary, "bourgeois" influence upon Soviet art.—Ed.

irate, passionate protest against the strangulation of man and science in totalitarian society. Of course, its form had to be something possible under such conditions. It included Aesopian language and other methods of protective coloration in art. Moreover, the play was written by a man who was still not a Party member.

The author depicted his characters with extreme cleverness. Of course, he covered this up by bringing in the two Communists, Vera and Levanovich, to insure himself against being charged with deviation. Yet, the sympathetic figures are not convincing, while the unsympathetic ones are clear and lifelike.

The play was helped by the fact that the theme was presented at just the right time. This was why the play earned success and official approval; both Hlebaŭ and Krapiva were awarded Stalin Prizes in March 1941. Krapiva has since become a permanent figure in Byelorussian dramaturgy. His plays are put on by all the theaters of Byelorussia. *He Who Laughs Last* has been translated into Russian and into the languages of many Soviet national minorities. It has been presented in the provinces and at the Moscow Theater of Satire.

Between 1939 and 1945, the Byelorussian State Theater gave 172 performances of *He Who Laughs Last.* It was presented at the ten-day celebration of Byelorussian art in Moscow in 1940. Thus, the play has long been part of the Byelorussian Theater's repertory, and Tulyaha, Harlakhvatski and Zyolkin have become well-known figures throughout Byelorussia. Its significance in arousing opposition within Soviet playgoers has kept growing. For a long time to come, critical material can still aid the hidden aims of liberation held by peoples now under Soviet rule.

Chapter 21

THE TEN-DAY FESTIVAL OF BYELORUSSIAN ART IN MOSCOW

In 1938 the First Byelorussian State Theater began to prepare for a ten-day festival of Byelorussian art in Moscow, an event which took place in 1940. At the festival the theater staged four plays: Kandrat Krapiva's *Partisans* and *He Who Laughs Last;* Eduard Samuilyonak's *End of a Wolf;* and Gorki's *The Last Ones.* Officially the productions were a great success. The Moscow press was filled with favorable reviews, especially of the acting. An editorial in *Theater* [Teatr] was generous in its praise of the cast:

> This company would do honor to many Moscow theaters. It possesses unity, brilliant individuals and artistic excellence. We have seen superb actors, including such first-rate persons as U[ladimir] Uladamirski, [H. P.] Hlebaŭ, L.[G.] Rakhlenka, V[era] Pola, and L[idiya] Rzhėtskaya.[32]

The directing of certain individuals was also praised. In 1930 the Moscow critics had objected to the organic unity of the productions (which came from the Stanislavski school); they now praised it.

> The actors of the Byelorussian Theater superbly sense the style of their plays. Their playing is not forced. They grasp the nature of their plays beautifully. Their dialogue is natural, and they really know how to move and how to live on the stage. Their acting is not transparent, but it is genuinely organic and effective.[33]

This time, the critics paid unanimous tribute to the realistic art of the company. *He Who Laughs Last* won the highest praise:

> The production of *He Who Laughs Last* must be called brilliant. Here is a play which belongs in the repertory of many Russian theaters.[34]

In 1948 when V. Zalesski, a noted Moscow critic, analyzed the new presentations of the theater, he demanded a return to

the productions of 1940. The distinctive features of the theater, he wrote, were expressed by combining the gentle lyricism of Byelorussian poetry with a sense of passion, a subtle national humor, intense dramatic action, a fine plasticity, an expressiveness of the characters and a simplicity and sincerity of performance. Zalesski called the First Byelorussian State Theater the "incarnation of all the originality of Byelorussian national culture."[35]

This assertion is far from true. In Soviet conditions, the theater could in no way be the "incarnation of all the originality of Byelorussian national culture." The spirit of Byelorussian cultural originality was constantly persecuted and stifled. Towards the end of the prewar period, the theater became firmly consolidated. It was acknowledged to have a more profound psychological design than it had had earlier. Its acting technique was clear, strict and sober. The style of the Moscow Art Theater was used, but the First Byelorussian State Theater had its own special traits. It possessed a good ensemble and a fine knowledge of the drama.

The actors and directors whom the theater had assembled and trained were its most valuable asset, raising Byelorussian theater art to a high level. By their skill they had to conceal the artistic weakness of the Soviet repertory. The theater achieved its fullest artistic development with the classics, in connection with which the directors and actors were then less restricted by political regimentation.

In June 1941, on the eve of the German invasion, the theater left Minsk to tour the U.S.S.R. It was thus preserved as a unit. The Germans soon occupied Minsk, and the theater was cut off from its home and its country for three years.

Chapter 22

THE THEATER DURING THE GERMAN OCCUPATION

Information about Byelorussian state theaters from 1941 to 1944 is very scanty. The main Byelorussian troupes were far behind the lines. The First Byelorussian State Theater was in Tomsk in Western Siberia; the Second, in Uralsk; the Byelorussian Bol'shoi Opera House and Ballet Theater, in Gor'ki (Nizhni-Novgorod). The Byelorussian Children's Theater and over a dozen of the so-called Collective Farm and Soviet Farm Regional and District Theaters were overrun and scattered by the unexpected rapidity of the German advance and occupation of Byelorussia.

The first information concerning the activities of Byelorussian theaters during the war appeared in an anthology covering the session of the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences held on March 12 and 13, 1942, in Kazan'. In his speech at this meeting entitled "The Patriotic War[a] and the Byelorussian Intelligentsia," Yanka Kupala declared:

> Byelorussia's oldest theater—the First Byelorussian State Theater—is carrying on its fruitful work in Tomsk. It consists of the best actors on the Byelorussian stage: [H. P.] Hlebaŭ, [Henrykh] Hryhonis, [Uladimir] Uladamirski, [A.] Baranoŭski, [Barys] Platonaŭ, [Stsyapan] Biryla, [Irena] Zhdanovich, [Vol'ha] Halina, [Lidiya] Rzhetskaya, and Mironava. The troupe is staging its finest productions, such as *He Who Laughs Last* by K[andrat] Krapiva and *La Patrie* by Sardou. ...
>
> The Second Byelorussian Theater is in Uralsk. This talented troupe has been preserved in its entirety. It is staging such fine productions as *Man with a Gun* and *Chimes of the Kremlin* (both by Nikolai Pogodin), *Above the Niemen River* by Mikhas' Hramyka, and *Irynka* by Kuz'ma Chorny.
>
> The Byelorussian State Jewish Theater is working in Kirghizia [in Central Asia]. The Byelorussian Opera House and Ballet Theater is active in Gor'ki [Nizhni-Novgorod].[36]

a. I.e., the Second World War.—Ed.

During the war, periodicals dealing with the theater were suspended, even in Moscow. *Theater,* for example, ceased publication. The press carried very little on the theater. It is known, however, that a number of old productions were revived. The First Byelorussian State Theater worked on others, chiefly new Soviet plays such as Konstantin Simonov's *Russian People* and *Fellow from our Town,* Aleksandr Korneichuk's *Front,* and Leonid Leonov's *Invasion.* The entire troupe went to the Narymsk region of Western Siberia aboard the S.S. "Voroshilovsk." They presented excerpts there from Krapiva's *Partisans,* Gorki's *The Last Ones,* Aleksandr Ostrovski's *Guilty Without Guilt,* V. Halaŭchyner's *Lesson of Life,* L. Rakhmanov's *Restless Old Age,* Aleksandr Afinogenov's *Mashen'ka,* and the other plays already mentioned. There were also special evenings of Byelorussian song, dance and instrumental music.[37]

The theater also gave hundreds of concerts and performances for soldiers and partisans at the front, in hospitals, at new projects, and in defense plants. Brigades of Byelorussian actors visited numerous sectors of the front to encourage the fight against the fascists.

What was happening during this time in occupied Byelorussia? The German army of occupation showed hostility and ignorance to the Byelorussian heritage. On June 23 and 24, 1941, German bombers barbarously destroyed almost all the cultural establishments in Minsk. Once the capital of Byelorussia had been taken, the German command began plundering all the archives, museums, libraries, and art galleries which had not been destroyed from the air. A unique collection of Byelorussian art, the Slutsk sashes at the castle of Prince Radziwill, a collection of old Byelorussian pictures and engravings, and the fine examples of foreign art at the Minsk gallery, were all carted away. This was done by German officers with the connivance of the town commandant.

The occupying authorities billeted soldiers in the building of the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences. They tossed

out all the manuscripts of both old and modern Byelorussian literature and destroyed phonograph records of folklore and other material. The soldiers in the building burned part of the books in the libraries of the Academy's various institutions. Most of the volumes, however, were simply stolen and taken to Germany.

German civil authorities replaced the military. Requisitions were increased and limitations on all facets of life reached unprecedented proportions. The intelligentsia especially suffered. Cold, hunger and the Gestapo terror paralyzed creative activity. The German secret police butchered the playwright Mikola Il'inski, the writer Ryhor Murashka, M. Ye. Kroshner, composer of the ballet music for *Nightingale,* Pyayun (the pen name of Novik, the Western Byelorussian poet), Academician S. Ya. Vol'fson, and others.

The handful of enthusiastic idealists who had sacrificed everything to art and the theater encountered unprecedented obstacles. Art and education were put under the control of a certain Siwitza [Sivitsa], a functionary of the Reichskommissariat for Byelorussia. Until the very end of the German occupation, he forbade publication of Byelorussian books and kept both the University and the Academy closed. The chief German censor was an obtuse and ignorant blacksmith.

The theater had to eke out its miserable existance with a very limited repertory. The first blow against the theater came in the autumn of 1941. Aŭstsihnei Mirovich's *Kastus' Kalinoŭski* was forbidden, despite the fact that this popular favorite had already received its dress rehearsal. The new Minsk Byelorussian Theater consisted of actors from the various Byelorussian theaters who had remained behind. They had shown great enthusiasm in preparing *Kastus' Kalinoŭski.* The play had not been seen in Minsk for over a decade—ever since the Bolsheviks banned it. The participants had rejoiced in the idea of once more presenting Byelorussia's favorite heroes. This spirit fused the makeshift company into an ensemble.

The dress rehearsal evoked special enthusiasm. There was every promise of a cordial reception from the public. On the day of the première, however, the Reichskommissariat telephoned the theater management: *Kastus' Kalinoŭski* was once again forbidden! The troupe at first hoped they had misunderstood. After all, the Bolsheviks had also banned the play. It would seem therefore that the anti-Communist authorities should welcome the production. The directors tried to appeal to the Byelorussian public. A delegation was formed to try to influence the Germans, who refused, however, to receive it. The Byelorussians were given to understand only that the theme of rebellion and its leader Kastus' Kalinoŭski could not be shown on the stage. The example might prove catching and become dangerous, inasmuch as partisan activities were beginning.

Thus the Nazis agreed with the Communists; national consciousness was to be suppressed. The Germans recommended limiting the repertory exclusively to plays from life which avoided anything of vital importance. This minimized its possible variety. Only the classics and the plays of Frantsishak Alyakhnovich could satisfy such demands.

In this regard, Alyakhnovich was fortunate. Almost twenty years had elapsed since the incipient Byelorussian theater had presented his plays. Before 1939, the boundary between Western Byelorussia (ruled by Poland) and Soviet Byelorussia had been a political watershed. The rich dramas of Alyakhnovich were considered outside the sphere of the Soviet theater. When Alyakhnovich went to the Byelorussian S.S.R. to work in 1927, he was arrested and sent to a concentration camp on the Solovetsk Islands in the far north. He returned to Poland in 1933 and published a book entitled *In the Claws of the GPU,* which was translated into many languages. All this caused a definitive ban on his entire output. The Minsk Byelorussian Theater revived his plays briefly during the German occupation, and they again won great public acclaim. *In the Antokal Section of Vilno* (his musical comedy), *Happy*

Husband (his comedy from life), and *Pan Minister* (his satire on Byelorussian life) brought back to the Byelorussian stage models of genuine and unbiased theater. They contained much folk wisdom. Their rich, lively and sapid humor was an escape from war, destruction and the horrors of occupation.

The comedy of *In the Antokal Section of Vilno* comes from the day-dreaming of a post office clerk about wealth and an unexpected legacy. It was real theater and very suitable for Shchansnovich, the talented, thoughtful and experienced actor who played the role. All the other actors also performed well, especially Hovar-Bandarėnka as Yuzik and Zameshyna in the small but significant role of the gossipy neighbor woman.

Pan Minister once again made the public remember its comic situations and laugh heartily over them. Its protagonist is the unlucky pretender to the office of a Byelorussian minister. The Minsk public found the entire farce especially lucid and funny because the occupation had brought to Minsk and other cities a great influx of people who wanted to become ministers of state—just as in the play. The new arrivals were mainly old emigrants and people from Western Byelorussia. The playgoers were amused to recognize among the characters several politicians who were all too well known in Byelorussia during those terrible years. Such were the conditions under which the plays of Alyakhnovich were revived in Minsk.

The Bolsheviks could not forgive Alyakhnovich for his book *In the Claws of the GPU,* for the success of his plays at the Minsk Byelorussian Theater, for his new dramatic fantasy entitled *Whether You Twist Around or Not, You Have to Die* (1943), and for his memoirs of the recent Bolshevik occupation of Vilno.[b] (This last was published in *New Path* [Novy shlyakh], an illustrated bi-weekly, at the beginning of

b. Vilno was part of the territory seized by Soviet forces when Poland collapsed in September 1939. The Germans occupied it shortly after they invaded the Soviet Union in June, 1941.—Ed.

1944.) On March 3, 1944, Alyakhnovich was brutally killed by Bolshevik partisans in his own apartment at Vilno. The Byelorussian theater lost one of its veterans, an enthusiastic participant in all the theater enterprises which immediately followed the Revolution, one of the founders of the new Byelorussian theater, an expert dramatist, and the first historian of the Byelorussian theater.[38] The list of sacrifices to the Bolshevik terror was augmented by a name of permanent significance to Byelorussian culture.

The repertory of the theater during its two seasons included, besides Alyakhnovich's plays, Vintsènt Dunin-Martsinkevich's old comedy *The Nobles of Pinsk* and Doletskiye's gay comedy *Mikhalka.* It also featured such Western European classics as Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe,* Gerhart Hauptmann's *Die versunkene Glocke,* Molière's *Le Médecin malgré lui,* Carlo Goldoni's *The Innkeeper's Wife* [*La Locandiera*], Heinrich von Kleist's *Der zerbrochene Krug,* and Ibsen's *Doll's House.*

Natal'lya Arsen'neva's new translation of *Die versunkene Glocke* was done with wonderful subtlety and understanding. The text rang out from the stage with all the music of the Byelorussian language. The same poetess later did brilliant translations of the libretti for Bizet's *Carmen,* Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte,* Tchaikovsky's *Yevgeni Onegin,* von Weber's *Der Freischütz,* and Johann Strauss's *Der Zigeunerbaron.* She was also the translator of *Der zerbrochene Krug.*

Because there was then but one troupe in Minsk, the synthetic theater was revived; opera and ballet were performed as well as drama. During those awful years, the Minsk Byelorussian Theater did not cease to create new works of valuable art. It aimed to bring the light of art to the city and its inhabitants during those years of darkness.

But sinister powers interfered with this work. On June 22, 1943 a mine exploded during a performance, placed beneath the orchestra seats by Bolshevik partisans. Several people were killed and hundreds of innocent people were burned or wounded. The theater was closed for repairs during the fol-

lowing nine months. Life in occupied Minsk became even gloomier. Not until April 2, 1944 did the Minsk theater reopen with a production of Alyaksei Turankoŭ's opera *On St. John's Eve.*

In June 1944, shortly before the return of Soviet troops, the Minsk Byelorussian Theater once again showed its creative vitality by producing *Wasted Life* by a young Byelorussian playwright named Todar Lebyada, the author's first play. It dealt with Soviet reality and showed events from an avowedly anti-Bolshevik viewpoint. The author did not have to resort to Aesopian language, understatement, allegory, or other such devices: he showed the ulcers of Soviet reality openly. From this point of view, the play is extremely important. It has a place on an unforgettable page in the history of the Byelorussian theater.

Chapter 23

A PLAY DEALING WITH THE NATIONAL TRAGEDY

The Minsk première of Todar Lebyada's *Wasted Life* took place on June 3, 1944; three weeks later, the Germans began evacuating the city. This was the last opportunity for the stage to tell the truth about Bolshevik reality. For many years the Soviet public had been given pastoral idylls about the "prosperous" life on the kolkhozes. Happy collective farmers kept uttering their gratitude to the government and paid tribute to the wisdom of the Party and its leaders. The dramatic conflict was between the idler and the hard-working collective farmers, between backward and progressive elements, or between the mass of workers and hostile groups. At the end of the play, the idlers were disgraced, the backward elements had caught up, and the enemies had been unmasked and rendered harmless. The kolkhoz principle triumphed. This varnishing of reality obscured all the genuine contradictions of life and made the stage tell lies.

The real life of the countryside during the period of collectivization was now presented at the Minsk Byelorussian Theater. It was a revelation of considerable power and novelty. *Wasted Life* deals with the family of a Byelorussian peasant named Andréi Padarozhny. It reflects the tragedy of the entire Byelorussian peasantry during the period of kolkhoz serfdom. It removed the curtain and astonished the public by showing those sides of life which had previously been carefully concealed.

The plot of Lebyada's play is simple. The prologue shows a meeting of peasants at the start of the collectivization drive. Stsyapan Dyshla, a rural organizer and a Party member, is agitating for the formation of a kolkhoz. His threats and appeals are answered by murmurs of dissatisfaction. Only the slackers and idlers—like Khvyados Halota and Vintses'

Paskudny—agree to join the kolkhoz: they want a share of what belongs to the prosperous peasants. Andrėi Padarozhny is one of the latter, and he refuses to join despite the threats. His fate is a sad one. He is arrested and exiled to Siberia. As the child of "an enemy of the people," Andrėi's daughter Maryya loses her job at the school. She goes home to her mother. The rural soviet orders the confiscation of all Andrėi's property, and Ahata (his wife), Maryya (his daughter), and Yuzik (his son) are dispossessed. Maryya tries to hang herself, but Mikhas', a young man who loves her, prevents her suicide.

The play closes by showing the evacuation of prisoners during the war, seven years later. A group of prisoners is led along a road. Tired and hungry, they stop to rest. Among them is Andrėi who has spent seven years at hard labor and was arrested again near his home district while on the way to see his wife and children. The prisoners are being taken deep into Russia. An air attack disperses the convoy. Andrėi remains where he is, for he has no strength to get up. His son, Yuzik, is in the Red rear guard. Yuzik discovers his father and tells him the terrible story of the family's further ordeals, including the death of Ahata. Maryya and Mikhas' now encounter the exiled Andrėi and help him reach Ahata's grave. There Andrėi makes a dramatic farewell to his wife, demanding revenge on the society that has ruined his family's life. The following scene shows the punishment of Paskudny and a commissar. The former wants to burn the people's property; the latter symbolizes those responsible for national misery and disaster.

The play contains some comic scenes also, which depict the abnormality of life under the obtuse and narrow-minded local Soviet grandees. Paskudny—that active participant in the kolkhoz—is constantly proclaiming his irrelevant devotion to the Party. Dyshla mouthes stultifying phraseology, and Halota is a parasitic sycophant. Such scenes as those in the smithy and those showing Prakseda, the "spy" in the local Soviet, enliven the action and endow the shading of life with a fine humor.

The entire company performed well under the direction of Vyachaslaŭ Sélyakh. The production had unity and style. The tragedy of Andrèi's position was well enacted by Vaz'nyasenski.[39] Altuf'yeŭ's settings offered a fine diversity and originality. M. Shchahloŭ wrote accompanying music. The lighting and sound effects, depicting fires, bombs and the din of airplanes, were well done.

The *Byelorussian Gazette* [Belaruskaya hazèta] called the production a "brilliant triumph" and the "outstanding presentation" of the theater. The reviewer hailed the play's realism, its absence of "false tendentiousness," its "sense of moderation," and the fact that it was genuinely touching. "It is the cry of a soul in agony," the article concludes.

The critic predicted that the play would be a great success. He advised the public to see it and congratulated the theater on its latest accomplishment. The article associated this success with the idea of establishing a Byelorussian national theater free of any debasing and spurious propaganda. The reviewer quoted the inspiring words of Maksim Harètski (a leader of the Byelorussian cultural renascense):

> The stage should show Byelorussians who they are, what they have been, what they are, and what they might be. It should call for a new life and—dear Lord—the suffering Byelorussians, once they know how to break the chains of servitude, will know how to cry out, "Byelorussia is alive!" so forcefully that the ageless walls of servitude will crumble like the walls of Jericho. The duty of our writers is to show Byelorussians that they are wandering in a virgin forest, and to point out the road to the fields of a free life.[40]

In all fairness, it must be noted that Harètski's remarks are scarcely appropriate to Lebyada's play. In the first place, *Wasted Life* is in no way connected with any national problems. It deals with Soviet rural life in general, although its characters and locale are Byelorussian. Secondly, one swallow does not make a summer. Thirdly, the technique of the play is far from a model of Byelorussian dramaturgy. It is rather the sort of thing that Halubok was doing during the

revolutionary period. Its conventions were those of the melodrama, and its success was predicated on an undiscriminating public. The play was originally written for the amateur theater at National House in Vitebsk and was presented there in 1942. Only later was it brought to Minsk and rewritten specifically for the professional theater. There were still, however, some traces of primitivism.

The characters are either good or evil, and the names of the villains stress their characteristics. Dyshla means a "connecting rod," Paskudny means something really vile, and Halota means "meager." None of the negative characters is fully characterized in the text.

The sincerity of the play's protest against kolkhoz slavery made *Wasted Life* unique. The company managed to conceal the weaknesses of the play. This was the first response in the drama to the growing demand that the stage depict the negative aspects of Soviet reality truthfully.

The Bolsheviks studied the power of the play and evaluated it in their own fashion. Those actors who were unable to get away in time were hanged as traitors on Theater Square.

The public will long cherish the scenes depicting national torment and retribution. The play called for the rejection of a vile life. It shed the light of truth, although momentarily, on the darker aspects of life. The temptation of work in freedom may be stifled or inundated in torrents of propaganda, but it will burn forever in the secret recesses of the soul of playwright, actor and theatergoer. Dark forces will never put it out.

Chapter 24

THE EMIGRE THEATERS

March 25 is the anniversary of Byelorussian independence. At the Michelsdorf Displaced Persons' Camp in Western Germany, Todar Lebyada's *Wasted Life* was presented on that date in 1948. The director was the same Vyachaslaŭ Sėlyakh who had staged it four years before.

Myalentseŭ wrote the accompanying music. The production was a hit not only in Michelsdorf but in such other DP camps as Freiman, Mittenwald, Lutensee, and Regensburg. A Byelorussian chorus of twenty-four voices accompanied the troupe and gave its own concert. The following year, Selyakh's group of singers and actors travelled to the new Byelorussian Displaced Persons' Camp at Backnang in Western Germany.

A number of plays were put on, including *Wasted Life;* Frantsishak Alyakhnovich's *Happy Husband;* Yanka Kupala's *Paŭlinka;* and Vintsėnt Dunin-Martsinkevich's *The Nobles of Pinsk.* There were also some colorful dramatizations of Byelorussian folk rituals, such as the harvest festival (*Dazhynki*) and the rites for St. John's Eve. The latter, with its traditional campfires and dances, had first been presented at Regensburg in 1946. These productions attracted many persons from all three western zones of Germany. The harvest festival recreated the idyll of the countryside in all its charm and beauty. Folklore numbers alternated with a program of professional art. Folk subjects, dances, ballet numbers and choral work were all presented. Sėlyakh himself played a merry old rake—a jester and reveller who frequented the village evening parties. His gaiety and humor were warmly received by the audience.

The chorus attracted the attention of the main office of the International Refugee Organization and specialists collecting folk songs for the American Academy of Sciences. As a re-

sult, many songs were recorded at Backnang on August 18 and September 9, 1949.

Most of the participants, like the majority of displaced Byelorussians, have since emigrated to the United States. Sĕlyakh later revived his chorus and theater at South River, New Jersey, where a concert of twenty-five singers was presented on June 25, 1950. Sĕlyakh directed Alyakhnovich's *Happy Husband* on October 10, 1950, the first Byelorussian dramatic presentation in the United States.

For years, Mikola Kulikovich, the composer, headed a second Byelorussian group in Western Germany, a theater and vaudeville ensemble which had been formed in the autumn of 1944 when Sĕlyakh set up a Byelorussian concert and vaudeville group called "Byelorussia Lives." Its purpose was to serve the Byelorussian population in the *Ostarbeiter* camps and the camps for young Byelorussians taken to Germany. The group included a female quintet that sang in folk music style, a ballet ensemble, vocal and instrumental soloists, and comedians. After Germany surrendered, the troupe went to Regensburg and then to Michelsdorf, where they formed a new concert and vaudeville group under Kulikovich. The soloists include Natal'lya Chamyarysava, Barbara Verzhbalovich and the Myalentseŭ sisters. Aŭhen Kavaleŭski, the actor and playwright, was also a member. A number of others joined the troupe, including the talented young ballerinas Vera Filipava and Leakodiya Veraksa. The troup played in all the DP camps in the British and American zones with success.

The group did not limit itself to genuine Byelorussian art. It was influenced by Russian vaudeville forms from the old Miniature Theater in St. Petersburg and from the Troitski Theater (which Kulikovich must have frequented in his youth). The *lubok* (a dance) was not specifically Byelorussian (not to talk of the *csardas* or the eastern dances). Conditions in postwar Germany, however, demanded a light and diverting repertory. Kulikovich tried to pour the old wine of

folk art into the new bottles of contemporary vaudeville style.

In New York, where most of the members of this troupe now live, they continue to serve Byelorussians through their concerts on holidays and at Byelorussian gatherings. Kulikovich is still in charge. The voices of Nadeya Hrode and Mme. Verzhbalovich are heard in the U.S.A. Byelorussian art lives again in their performances, even on foreign soil.

Chapter 25

IN THE NAME OF YANKA KUPALA

The Germans were driven out of Byelorussia in the summer of 1944; Minsk was liberated on July 3. The Byelorussian theaters returned to their native soil: the Second Byelorussian State Theater went back to Vitebsk; the First Byelorussian State Theater, the Byelorussian Opera House and Ballet Theater, and the Jewish Theater of Byelorussia returned to Minsk.

The theater was comparatively well treated before the new ideological drive began at the end of 1946. Several ideological concessions made during the war were retained, including the return of nationalism, with its hero, Kastus' Kalinoŭski. Moscow temporarily continued to permit the slogans of national liberation which had helped in the struggle against the Germans. Libretti were written for two operas: *Kastus' Kalinoŭski* and *Alesya,* which were performed on November 7 and 8, 1947, at the restored Byelorussian Opera House and Ballet Theater.

Vitali Vol'ski wrote a play called *Mashèka,* which dealt with that legendary popular hero who is traditionally associated with the city of Mogilev, a theme which at one time had been forbidden.

Mikhas' Klimkovich wrote the libretto for *Kastus' Kalinoŭski.* He was also the author of a play about Frantsishak Skaryna, the first Byelorussian printer and educator. At the beginning of the 1930's, this theme had also been banned. Mikhas' Hramyka's play, *Skaryna, Son of Polotsk,* and Aŭstsihnei Mirovich's two dramas, *Kastus' Kalinoŭski* and *Mashèka* had then been dropped from the repertory.

During the war, the Department of Agitation and Propaganda reversed its position on Byelorussian heroes. All the ideological sins of the 1930's were temporarily forgiven. At one time, Bolshevik hacks had transformed Skaryna into a

medieval Jesuit, but he now became a great humanist, heralding the leading ideas of his times. In the thirties, Kalinoŭski was belittled as a petty bourgeois hero; he now became a national hero, representing the progressive love which Byelorussians have had for freedom in the past.

It was at this time that Kanstantsyya Buila, a veteran Byelorussian poetess of the *Our Soil* period, turned up in Moscow. She was the author of "I Love Our Land," a poem which had become the hymn of Byelorussian patriots. Her book of verses, *Mound Flower,* appeared in 1914, yet she published nothing further until 1941. She now wrote a number of powerful and patriotic pieces about the beauty of Byelorussia. None of them said a single word about kolkhozes, Stalin's commissars or socialist transformation. Mme. Buila asserts her faith in Byelorussia as something eternal, marvelous and immutable—the heritage of centuries. It is as if the Soviet regime and Stalin's five-year plans had never existed. Only the German, the "foreign bandit," evokes wrath and hatred:

My Byelorussia, the foe's driven back
Among us will he find neither shelter nor leaven.
Never will murderers, robbers or hangmen
Live 'neath the tent of our beautiful heaven. (1943)

All the writers again spoke of their love for Byelorussia. Patriotic motifs appeared in the work of even such orthodox Soviet poets as Pyatrus' Broŭka, who wrote *Kastus' Kalinoŭski* and *Belarus',* poems connected with the struggle against the Germans. A certain rehabilitation of the forbidden past was thus permitted. All in all, it seemed for the moment like a second Byelorussian renaissance. This tendency was encouraged by the renaming of the two best Byelorussian state theaters for the two national poets. After the war, the First became the Yanka Kupala Theater; the Second, the Yakub Kolas Theater.

There had been a theater training school in Minsk before the war. A special, college-level institution, the Byelorus-

sian Theater Institute, was set up there under Mirovich in 1945 to train actors and directors.

These events made many hope that the restrictions on Byelorussian culture would be eased. Those authors and playwrights who had somehow survived the terror of Yezhov and the fury of war now returned to Byelorussia, and eagerly set about writing new plays and translating both the classics and contemporary works; many new plays were added to the repertory during the next two years.

The new works included Klimkovich's *Georgi Skaryna,* Kandrat Krapiva's *Dear Person,* Vol'ski's *Mashėka,* and Ales' Kuchar's *Hostages.* The theater revived a number of its earlier productions, among them Krapiva's *He Who Laughs Last,* Kuz'ma Chorny's *Irynka* and Yanka Kupala's *Paŭlinka.* The foreign plays included Ostrovski's *Hard-Earned Bread,* Gorki's *The Last Ones,* Krapiva's translation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* and J.B. Priestley's *He Has Come.* Plans were made to present Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard,* Griboyedov's *Wit Works Woe,* Lope de Vega's *Dog in the Manger* [*El Perro del Hortelano*], and Calderón's *Foolish for Others but Wise for Oneself* [*La Boba para los Otros y Discreta par si*].

The Yanka Kupala Theater was so named for reasons of propaganda. Its Byelorussian character was to be stressed in order to win public confidence. The war had convinced the Bolsheviks that international slogans were not popular, and they therefore resorted to posing as the defenders of Byelorussian interests, using this protective coloration particularly with intellectuals and non-Party specialists in positions of authority. The names of Kupala and Kolas—neither of whom belonged to the Communist Party—were needed to demonstrate the alleged unity of the people during the war. After the conflict, there was no need to stimulate patriotism, but the two names were retained as part of the accepted etiquette. This interpretation is confirmed by the presentation of Kupala's *Paŭlinka.* Written in 1912, the play was staged repeatedly in the 1920's. Nevertheless, Kupala's two master-

pieces, *Ruined Nest* and *Local People,* were not produced. The latter was prohibited as early as 1926. It appeared in the third volume of Kupala's collected works (1927). After that, however, it never appeared and was not mentioned in any study of his plays. It is in none of the numerous Russian editions of his poetry, nor is it in any collection of his dramas.[41]

Aŭhen Mazal'koŭ published a monograph on Kupala in Russian which was honored with a Stalin Prize, but he too maintains complete silence about *Local People,* despite a special chapter on Kupala's plays.[42] Yet he examines such minor works as *In-Laws, Paŭlinka* and *Ruined Nest* rather carefully. No doubt Mazal'koŭ did not wish to deal with a work which the Soviet regime considered seditious and had forbidden; otherwise, his monograph could not have been published in Byelorussia. Fortunately, however, Kupala's complete works are available abroad, a fact which prevents the Bolsheviks from suppressing *Local People* with complete success.

Why is *Paŭlinka* alone honored? Kupala wrote far better plays, yet *Paŭlinka* has been staged for a number of years. In 1948, it was one of the five best productions which the First Byelorussian State Theater performed on its tour of Moscow; *Pravda* praised it highly.

The use of the playwright's name has forced the theater to retain at least one—any one—of his four plays. The last two, *Ruined Nest* (1913) and *Local People* (1924), tend to be nationally conscious. The temptation of freedom and independence for Byelorussia was potentially dangerous for the Soviet government.

Ruined Nest is associated with the destruction of the country. A landowner expels the family of Lyavon Zyablik, a Byelorussian peasant, from its permanent home. Zyablik has watered the land with the sweat of his brow. Now his hut is destroyed. The family hopes for justice from the courts; meanwhile they live in cold and hunger among the ruins. Their hopes prove baseless. Lyavon commits suicide.

His daughter, Zosya, deceived and humiliated by the son of a landowner, goes mad. Symon, Lyavon's oldest son, sets fire to the nobleman's estate. He sets out at the call of the unknown for a "big meeting." He is looking for the truth of life, and takes Zosya with him. The mother goes begging with an old man.

Family tragedy grows into national tragedy. The play was written in 1913. At that time, the influence of Chekhov and Gorki, with their drama of mood, and that of Andreyev, Sologub and Blok, with their symbolism, was in the air. *Ruined Nest* presents a broad and moving picture of injustice in prerevolutionary Byelorussia, which is based on real life. Its validity may be even greater today. The lyricism of the way of life shown flavors all the attitudes and conversations of the main characters, and the play becomes universally meaningful in its angry protest against every kind of oppression.

Lyavon and Marylya personify humility and patience. The Old Man is reminiscent of Luka in Gorki's *The Lower Depths*. He represents reconciliation with the old way of life. Symon, however, is one of the many heroes whom young Byelorussia was producing. Unafraid to look the truth in the eye, he protested and struggled. Zosya, with her dreams of faded love, is like Shakespeare's Ophelia. Danila follows art with all his being and speaks mostly of his violin.

He is the prototype of the hero in Kolas' famous poem, *Symon the Musician,* which climaxes the development of that traditional figure in Byelorussian literature. The language of *Ruined Nest* is national.

Local People deals with the time of the Civil War, in which Byelorussia was occupied several times. The author called it "tragi-comic scenes from recent Minsk life in four acts." It was an attempt to write a comedy in farce and caricature. The grimness of life itself during those years had prompted the form. Kupala spared none of the invading armies. The Germans, Poles and Bolsheviks all received their just deserts. Mikita Znasilaŭ is the protagonist of the satire. Before the

Revolution, he was a collegiate assessor[a] in the office of the governor. Znasilaŭ adapts himself to all the occupiers. There is a complete gallery of villains who impede the Byelorussian renascence, who are opposed by characters from young Byelorussia (the main theme of the poet's entire work.). They include Yanka Zdol'nik, a teacher, and Alenka Haroshka, his student who becomes his fiancée.

Kupala develops the concept of his drama broadly, using the rich material of the times when people revealed clearly the complete essence of their daily existence and emptiness. Farce, caricature and exaggeration were used to mock the whole collection of human derelicts. Kupala's knowledge of people and his realistic techniques, however, overcame the exaggerations and caricatures to mold a number of living characters. Heroes and villains are delineated sharply. There are also a number of philosophasters. The dialogue is lively and colorful, the language rich.

As presented in 1926, the play was a bitter satire in the style of real-life farce. It was understood to mean that Kupala did not accept the Bolshevik Revolution. *Local People* repeats Kupala's old motif; he protested against the oppression of his country by both its neighbors, who used the introduction of culture as their pretext. This theme had rung out powerfully in his poem "To the Enemies of True Byelorussians" (1912):

Enough of the culture of West and East!
The price Byelorussia has spent is the same.
Your sucking our heart out has never yet ceased--
Such is your nature and such is your aim!
. . . . . .
We've had enough of your leavings and bones
Of greeting all strangers with curtsy and bow!
We are not transients for here are our homes.
The time to blaze trails to our freedom is now!

a. Peter the Great established a system of fourteen ranks for the Russian civil service which lasted until 1917. The "collegiate assessor" was the eighth grade from the top.—Ed.

This is the voice of a Byelorussia that was young and growing. This is why the Bolsheviks are silent about Kupala's best plays, why they have dug up his first plays instead. Yet *Paŭlinka* (1912) and *In-Laws* (1913) have long since lost their significance for the theater of today. Both plays were written at the start of Ihnat Buinitski's *Our Soil* theater. They were intended for amateur theaters and are, therefore, on the level of the gay vaudeville then current.

In-Laws presents no major problems at all. The action deals with two tipsy peasants named Sinitsa and Kutas. Each of them sleeps "by mistake" in the other's bed and with the other's wife. It ends happily when Mateika and Katsyaryna, their grown-up children, become engaged. A number of games, songs and dances supplement the unpretentious plot. The folk background presents extensive opportunities for hearty, natural humor and for the wealth of folk language. Mazal'koŭ has written: "The theatricality of *In-Laws* has established it firmly within the repertory of Byelorussian theaters."[43] To say the least, this is doubtful. Aŭhen Ramanovich asserts that the best actors of the theater received their training from *Paŭlinka* and *In-Laws*.[44] We can understand the initial success of *Paŭlinka* in 1913 (it was done by the Byelorussian students at the University of St. Petersburg), for the play presented something new at that time. It was hailed enthusiastically by a large audience of both Russians and non-Russians. Young people presented Kupala with a gold watch inscribed, "To Paŭlinka's father from the Byelorussian students." We can understand the success of *Paŭlinka* later the same year in Vilno and Radashkovichi. At Vilno, the First Byelorussian Dramatic Association staged the play and Buinitski himself was one of the actors. At the Radashkovichi fire house, the author had to take a number of curtain calls.[45] The First Byelorussian State Theater presented *Paŭlinka* for the first time on September 16, 1920. One cannot but agree with Mazal'koŭ: "the play captivates reader and audience alike with its rich, striking folk language and its purely Bye-

lorussian folk humor." Of course, there may be a certain amount of reality in the satiric characters. There is Adol'f Bykoŭski, for example, a nobleman who disdains everything native to his own country and prefers the "fashionable" Polish dances and romances.

In themes, characters and construction, the play contained much that was primitive and out of date for the Byelorussian theater, coming as it did after the plays of Mirovich, Hramyka and Krapiva. A return to *Paŭlinka* was at best marking time or returning to the old amateur theater.

Its plot is simple. The usual theme of unhappy love and compulsory marriage is resolved by Kupala in his own way. Paŭlinka, the daughter of Stsyapan Krynitski, loves Yakim Saroka, a teacher. Her father wants her to marry Bykoŭski. The play ends neither with a forced marriage nor with a love match. Just when Paŭlinka is ready to flee her father's house in secret to elope with Saroka, news arrives that he has been arrested for political unreliability. Paŭlinka's father blurts it out himself, saying Saroka has been "arrested for the posters." The girl begins to understand Krynitski's hints and threats, saying:

> They have arrested Yakim! They have arrested my beloved lion! My own father has ruined the person who is dearer to me than life itself! Blind beasts! [*She crumples to the ground like a sheaf. Confusion. Cries of "Water, water!"*]

Bykoŭski is mistaken for the abductor of the bride, and is thrown out of the house. The triangle ends in a catastrophe with social complications, bringing originality to Kupala's treatment of a hackneyed theme.

The way of life and the personal traits are done well. Ivan Zamotsin has observed:

> [The colorful dialogue] builds the characters into individual figures, like the rich strokes in a Flemish painting. It gives a complete picture of life in two tones: one natively Byelorussian, and the other borrowed from the West and conditioned by Polish influences.[46]

Kupala's language is emotional and expressive. A single turn of speech determines an entire situation or illuminates the entire psychology of a character. In its depiction of reality and human psychology, *Paŭlinka* transmits the flavor of life. That is the source of its power. The conversation of the heroine is sometimes joking and keen witted; at other times, it is genuinely sad as she dreams of happiness.

Her parents and their neighbors also come alive. Saroka is weaker; he is too much of a philosophaster. So is Bykoŭski, a dandy and braggart who embodies emptiness and frivolity.

A parte remarks make the play conventional, but they sound anachronistic in the realistic theater of today. A plethora of songs and dances turn Act II into a vaudeville show. Lyavon Litvinaŭ stressed this element in his production of the play, making *Paŭlinka* even more outdated and weakening the small element of serious thought which the play still retained.

Bykoŭski, as played by Barys Platonaŭ, was both ridiculous and pitiful in his inner vanity and useless existence. There is something of Chekhov's Belikov (from "Man in a Case" [Chelovek v futlyare]) in him. Indeed, the device used to characterize him comes from Chekhov's story. On a clear day, Bykoŭski goes to Paŭlinka's with his rubbers on and his umbrella in hand.

Raisa Kashėl'nikava played the heroine with a light humor intermingled with the lyricism and wisdom of folklore. Tenderness and genuine lyricism distinguish Paŭlinka from similar figures in the Ukrainian comic tradition. Hlebaŭ, as Prantsish Pustarevich, and Uladimir Dedyushka, as Stsyapan Krynitski, rounded out the cast.

Nevertheless, the subject had long since been seen, felt and milked dry. The return of *Paŭlinka* and the oblivion of Kupala's later work do not promise any progress to the theater. It is meaningful only insofar as it reveals what Moscow wants of the Byelorussian theater. If any traditional Byelorussian dramas are to be done, let them be harmless; let

them omit all the questions of nationalism and national liberation.

Therefore, Yanka Kupala is permitted in Byelorussia today only in a castrated version, devoid of any national ideas. That is the way in which the author has been used as propaganda since 1942 (when he died). That is the way in which he appears in Vasil' Vitka's *Happiness of a Poet.* In 1952 the theater bearing his name presented this play dealing with his life and works. Vitka conceals those aspects of Kupala's work showing him as the prophet of the recent Byelorussian national renascence and the herald of self-determination for Byelorussia:

> Family of falcons, you soar through the sky
> Leaving the graves of our fathers below!
> For you, Byelorussia, the hour is now nigh--
> To the head of the family of Slavs will you go! (1913)

The last act of the play concentrates on the Soviet period. In reality, however, that is when Kupala was broken and subjugated. During the short time he was under arrest in 1930, the poet attempted suicide. He remained silent for a number of years and was then forced to join the throng which eulogized the regime and kowtowed before it. The poet in the play is far from the real, the unfalsified Yanka Kupala!

Chapter 26

THE BEST PRODUCTION OF GORKI

The revivals of Gorki's *Last Ones* and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* at the Yanka Kupala Theater deserve some attention. *Last Ones* was brought back several times. Between M.A. Zoraŭ, the Byelorussian director, and I.M. Rayevski, formerly of the Moscow Art Theater, there was accord, which improved the artistic realism of the Yanka Kupala Theater. In *Last Ones,* the theater succeeded in using Gorki's psychological development of character to show his stern and courageous realism. There was good reason to agree with those critics who saw the production when the theater toured Moscow in 1940 and 1948 and who considered it the best production of the play in the Soviet Union.

Last Ones concerns the impending death of the old social order. The theater treated the conflict between the two generations of the Kolomiitsev household as a social drama. The entire family—Ivan Kolomiitsev, his older children Nadezhda and Aleksandr, and even his excellent, thoughtful brother Yakov—seemed to be an assertion in art that the old order was doomed. The upper class, aristocratic and bourgeois at the same time, was degenerate morally, physically and politically. This is the meaning of Gorki's play. The theater brought it out as fully and as penetratingly as possible.

The characterization of Lyubov by Raisa Kashėl'nikava was especially dramatic. Kashėl'nikava used Lyubov's obvious physical abnormality to bring out her inner beauty and noble character most powerfully. The same technique was used by Vol'ha Ĥalina as Sof'ya, Irena Zhdanovich as Vera, and Barys Platonaŭ as Pyotr. Uladimir Uladamirski, who played Ivan, stressed his failings, his weakness of will and the results of these qualities—ruthlessness and cruelty disguised as magnanimity, gaiety and apparent levity. Barys

Kudraŭtsaŭ as Aleksandr and L. Shynko as Nadezhda also showed the moral depravity of the Kolomiitsevs.

The inflexibility of Soviet orthodoxy made the critics retreat from their respect of Gorki. They reproached Stsyapan Biryla for over-emphasizing the illness and suffering of Ivan's brother. In analyzing Yakov, critics even found a "tribute to naturalism." V. Zalesski wrote:

> [Stsyapan Biryla] has been too greatly attracted to the subjective experiences of the character. His approach has been too sympathetic. He has forgotten what is most important, that the character is to be presented in a fashion which is socially and historically truthful. He has forgotten that his first task was to show how perverted his healthy humanity had become inside this tender-hearted gentleman.[47]

For some reason, Zalesski did not believe such a man to be possible. He deliberately concludes that Yakov, "by all these sacrifices, conceals evil and all the crimes of his brother, the vileness of Aleksandr, and the baseness of Leshch and Nadezhda."[48]

The Byelorussian theater was lucky in that it stood above Party criticism. The latter always wishes to describe man as a mere appendage of the social group in every respect. The plays of even such a late representative of the prerevolutionary Russian tradition as Gorki, allowed the actors to break the chains of a narrowly sociological approach to man's inner world. Hence, the production revealed man's inner world which Soviet plays had lost.

Chapter 27

DUEL BETWEEN REALISM AND ROMANTICISM: THE "SCHILLERIZATION"[a] OF SHAKESPEARE.

Lyavon Litvinaŭ first presented his revival of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* on September 14, 1940, the twentieth anniversary of the First Byelorussian State Theater. The production was renewed exactly five years later. It was shown in Moscow for the second time in 1948. Aŭhen Ramanovich, a Soviet critic, mistakenly thought this to be the first presentation of Shakespeare in Byelorussian: "Shakespeare has *for the first time* [our italics] begun to speak out in Byelorussian."[49] Evidently, political considerations had weakened the author's memory. Ramanovich was a playwright, a historian of the Byelorussian theater, and a direct participant in its activities from the start. Surely he must have known that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had been a success at the Second Byelorussian State Theater (of Vitebsk) in 1926. During the 1927-1928 season, the play was brought to Minsk. It remained on the boards for years and was hailed enthusiastically by delegations from Western Europe. Ramanovich's absent-mindedness came about only because this extremely interesting and original production was later considered formalistic and National Democratic in its methods.

Litvinaŭ's directing of *Romeo and Juliet* showed a more romantic Shakespeare—somewhat like Schiller. To be sure,

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a. "Schillerization" is a Soviet term of opprobrium. It comes from two letters which Friedrich Engels wrote to Ferdinand Lassalle in 1859. In one, Engels defines "Schillerism [as] making individuals the mere mouthpieces of the times." In the other, he writes, "According to my views on the drama, the realistic should not be overlooked because of the intellectual elements; Shakespeare should not be forgotten for Schiller." (Marx and Engels, *Literature and Art, Selections from Their Writings*, New York, International Publishers, 1947, pp. 48, 54.)—Ed.

for all the realism of human feelings and passions, Shakespeare also had his own lofty pathos and hyperbole. He tended to make broad generalizations. However, this is a long way from Schiller's narrow rationalism and abstract romanticism, as it is from the false rhetoric and declamatory pathos with which nineteenth-century actors performed their heroic roles. The true task of the Shakespearean director of today is to seek genuinely artistic means with which to express the emotional power of the plays. Efforts to simplify Shakespeare and to avoid his pathos in favor of low traits must not be countered with the other extreme of interpretation, the romantic impoverishment of his characters. Unfortunately, this is just what Litvinaŭ did. The result was especially perceptible in the secondary roles: Tybalt, Friar Laurence and Mercutio.

Friar Laurence conveys the tragic contradictions of life:

> The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb;
> What is her burying grave, that is her womb.
> . . . . . .

This, however, did not fit the rigid notions held about the character. So, the speech was simply omitted, and Laurence's world of ideas was thereby impoverished. Stsyapan Biryla transformed the friar from a meditative and philosophical monk in to the personification of goodness and justice. The character lost its variety. I. Shatsila as Tyblat, and P. Pekur as Mercutio were also one-dimensional. The Tybalt was merely a rake, a bully and a dueller. The Mercutio was only a bragging, animated, impertinent, and self-confident young man. Pekur reflected little of the Renaissance, with its gaiety, grace, elegance, intelligence, sensitivity, and easy humor.

Barys Platonaŭ's Romeo, however, was really done in the round. He was more than just an impassioned lover with lofty lines; he was a man who knows how to think, to love and to hate, and who wreaks vengeance for the death of his friend. Mikhail Morozov[b] termed this Romeo, "a Hamlet with

b. Mikhail Morozov (d. 1952) was by far the best Shakespeare scholar in the Soviet Union.—Ed.

a book." There was rationality in this characterization, along with all the "Schillerism." Romeo was shown to be courageous and thinking—worthy of the pure, noble love of a Juliet.

As Juliet, Irena Zhdanovich was charming. She overcame the fact that she was much older than Shakespeare's character, and supplemented Romeo's courage well.

Dmitriyeŭ's music and setting blended well with the pomp and theatricality of the entire production. It was both romantic and realistic at the same time.

Litvinaŭ once again showed his tendency to romanticize. Yet the company had obviously attempted and demanded realism. Shakespeare's artistic power saved Litvinaŭ from disaster and preserved him from devastating criticism. The artistic success of this production was reflected in the favorable reviews which it earned during the tour of Moscow in 1948.

Chapter 28

THE NEW IDEOLOGICAL OFFENSIVE

The period of ideological concessions did not last long. Only a year after the end of the war the Party began to show concern about Westernizing tendencies in various fields of culture. Prerevolutionary, Western European dramas and historical plays had crowded dramas on Soviet themes off the boards. Literature was again developing a tradition of critical realism. Playwrights and other writers were sometimes bold enough to criticize shortcomings in everyday life. The war and close contact with the West had made independent thought possible. New and Draconian measures were needed to change the general trend of thought once again—and with greater force than before the war.

The role of the Soviet Arakcheyev[a] was taken by one of the Party leaders, Andrei Zhdanov. Zhdanov prepared a number of resolutions which became the decrees of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) on questions of literature, the drama, the cinema, and music in 1946 and 1948. These resolutions were the beginning of an unprecedented reaction in all fields of Soviet intellectual life, and have set repeated purges in motion. During the past several years, these purges have paralyzed any independent development in art, drama and literature.

The Central Committee passed three resolutions: "On the Periodicals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*" (August 14, 1946); "On the Repertory of Theaters of the Drama and on Measures for Its Improvement"(August 26, 1946); and "On the Motion Picture *Great Life*" (September 4, 1946). In Byelorussia, as

a. Arakcheyev was an official under Tsar Aleksandr I, who was hated for his system of forcible military colonization, and whose name has become synonymous in Russia with bureaucratic despotism.—Ed.

elsewhere in the Soviet Union, these decrees let loose a flood of critical productions. At the start of 1947 a wave of criticism and purges hit all the facets of ideological life including the high schools and universities. Art, literature, drama, and the theater were most affected. It was decided to organize conferences at the republic level on the development of criticism and the implementing of Party declarations in the various fields. Accordingly, Yakovlev, Anufriyev and other reliable officials from the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee were ordered to Byelorussia from Moscow. Buhayev (Propaganda Secretary for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia), Il'yushin (Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Byelorussian S.S.R.), officials of the Academy of Sciences and of the Union of Soviet Writers of Byelorussia, producers and many other individuals aided the Moscow representatives in their work.

A campaign was begun to root out manifestations of bourgeois thought and morality, as manifested in kowtowing and servility towards bourgeois culture, and nationalistic interpretations of history. *Star,*[b] *Literature and Art* [Litaratura i mastatstva] and other organs of the press were filled with articles urging attacks on deviations in literature, drama and the theater. "Ideological deviations capable of creating attitudes alien to Soviet society"[50] were discovered in the work of such figures as Il'lya Hurski, Edzi Ahnyats'vet, Mikhas' Klimkovich, Kandrat Krapiva, Maksim Tank, Pimen Panchanka, Anton Byalevich, and Kanstantsyya Buila.

Krapiva had won the Stalin Prize. Now he was subjected to criticism for his *Trial by Fire* (1941) and *Dear Person* (1945). It was recalled that *Trial by Fire* had given less emphasis to the Second World War than to the drama of the three main characters: Natal'lya, Karanevich and Perhud.

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b. *Star* [Z'vyazda] was the organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia, of the Council of Ministers, and of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian S.S.R.

The behavior of the characters has no social or political motivation. The critics had previously praised this feature of the play, which was supposed to show the altered relationships within a socialist and classless society. But that had changed. Krapiva was now to be reproached. The traditional triangle was too restricted to express the great struggle of the Soviet people. Krapiva was too objective, too lacking in political consciousness and high principles.

The critics subjected *Dear Person,* a satire, to bitter analysis. It seemed that the resolution of the Central Committee was directly applicable:

> As a rule, Soviet people in these plays are portrayed as being abnormal caricatures, primitive and uncultured, with Philistine tastes and morals, whereas the villains are endowed with sharper features and are strong, resolute and resourceful. The events in such plays are often presented in a false and contrived manner, as a result of which the plays give an incorrect, distorted view of Soviet life.[51]

The protagonist of *Dear Person* was called simply "a criminal type." Nevertheless, the playwright was almost reproached for justifying and propagandizing such views:

> The author sets forth in detail the anti-Soviet views of a swindler and forces the audience to listen to Zhlukta's banalities and slanderous fabrications about Soviet people.[52]

Criticism of Mikhail Zoshchenko's satires in Russia and Ostap Vishnya's work in the Ukraine mentioned Krapiva, but there was one difference: Krapiva was a Stalin Prize laureate who had held a Party card since 1941. He remained active in the field of literature. Zoshchenko, who was not a Party member, did not. The resolution on *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* simply excluded him from the literary world as a "vulgar person from the dregs of society" for his "maliciously rowdy interpretation of reality accompanied by anti-Soviet outbursts."[53]

In *Dear Person,* Krapiva introduces a representative of the Soviet aristocracy, Zhlukta, a swindler, rogue, egoist, self-seeker, and opportunist *par excellence.* Zhlukta escapes from the draft and runs off to the city of X where he sets up a

"protection office." He speculates and uses a complex and clever system of services in order to place everyone in his debt and acquire the reputation of being a "dear and pleasant" person. His philosophy is simple:

> First of all, I want to live.... To live, despite everything else.... Hence, my rule: Get away from any place where you might perish. Get away from the bombings, the front, and the draft.... And since I am alive already, I want to stay alive—like a human being.

Neither conscience nor the choice of means, nor the exploitation of human weaknesses restrains him; in any person, he sees only the animal. Fear of the criminal code alone holds him back for as much as a moment. He delights in debauching or slandering others. People who are unscrupulous and indifferent to everything but food and drink form a suitable milieu for cultivating Zhluktas.

The antagonist of such a character is Yazva, a playwright. Krapiva shows how a play is written, how the plot, situations and characters are defined, typified and developed to an original and dramatic conclusion. In the course of the play, Yazva is both character and playwright. He sets down what happens in his notebook, organizes the material, jests or mocks at the characters, studies them, and instructs them. He influences Klaŭdiya Petrovna (Zhlukta's wife) to acquire a sense of values. She was a giddy woman corrupted by a carefree life. She has fluttered through life like a butterfly; she had been concerned only with her beauty and the style of her dresses.

Yazva exposes Zhlukta, and the dramatic conflict is based on their opposition. At the start and finish of the satire, Krapiva and Yazva seem to blend together. During the course of the action, the invisible shadow of the dramatist leads the characters forward. Yazva himself seems to overcome the contradictions in his material. He creates new relationships among the characters and lead them to the denouement.

Although Zhlukta is eventually exposed and arrested, the playgoer is left with an unpleasant after-taste. The theater-

goer knows that such vulgar types flourish in Soviet society. The author had plucked them from life and transferred them to the stage. The play was written when Krapiva still found it possible to create satire to some extent.

There was no room for satire after the resolutions of the Central Committee and the censure of Zoshchenko. Thereafter, satire was declared to be in opposition to the aims of the theater and drama, which were called on to portray the positive features of Soviet people, "the life of Soviet society in its unceasing motion forward, in every way to promote the greatest growth of the best aspects in the character of a Soviet person,"[54] and "actively to propagandize the policy of the Soviet government."[55]

The persecution of satire has long stifled the desire of playwrights to write either satire or comedy. Krapiva has switched over to serious plays, where there is less danger of being attacked for deviation. Silence reigns supreme in both dramatic and non-dramatic satire.

But even in the serious drama, the voice of Byelorussian playwrights has grown softer. Whatever has been written since the Party resolutions on the theater is far from real. It is simply the manufacture of plays by literary bureaucrats.

Chapter 29

AFTER THE RESOLUTIONS

As a result of the Party resolutions, the theaters had to stop performing plays by contemporary Western dramatists and to intensify their work on Soviet plays of the day. The Yanka Kupala Theater presented a number of Russian plays which were performed all over the Soviet Union. Among them were *Muscovite Character* by Anatoli Sofronov; *Governor of a Province* by the Tur Brothers and L. Sheinin (staged by Kastus' Sannikaŭ); *Those Who Go to Sea* by Boris Lavrenev (staged by Lyavon Litvinaŭ); *Russian People* and *A Fellow from Our Town* by Konstantin Simonov; *On the Steppes of the Ukraine* and *Platon Krechet* by Aleksandr Korneichuk; *Restless Old Age* by L. Rakhmanov; *Conspiracy of the Doomed, or In One Country* by Nikolai Virta (staged by Litvinaŭ), and *The Family* by I. Popov (staged by Sannikaŭ).

The Byelorussian drama was called on to create contemporary characters. The theme of the theater was defined as the theme of the simple Soviet person, the theme of the people. The attraction of the distant past was sharply limited. The chief historical theme became the recent struggle of the Byelorussians against the German occupation. During 1947 and 1948 the Yanka Kupala Theater presented three new plays about partisan activities during the Second World War: Kandrat Krapiva's *Together with the People,* Arkadz' Maŭzon's *Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ,* and Ales' Kuchar's *This Happened in Minsk.*

Together with the People illustrates the collapse of a talented playwright, forced to abandon satiric plays for serious drama. Krapiva's attempt to show Alyaksei Turankoŭ, the best composer of Byelorussia, in an unfavorable light was miserable and unscrupulous. Turankoŭ had written the operas *Flower of Happiness* and *St. John's Eve.* Before the

war he had been awarded the Order of Lenin for his outstanding services to Byelorussian opera.

Turankoŭ was an old man. He lost his wife in the flames of Minsk and could not get out of town himself. He wrote *St. John's Eve* and the music for some folk songs during the occupation so as not to die of hunger. After Soviet forces returned, the aged composer was arrested upon the first false denunciation because he had remained under the occupation.

Krapiva portrays him in *Together with the People* under the name of Shkurankoŭ,[a] a surname which stresses the character's selfishness. It is similar enough to the name of its prototype to show unequivocally whom Krapiva had in mind. The playwright contrasts Shkurankoŭ to Hudovich, another composer who remains in occupied Byelorussia. The latter stays behind for valid reasons; he remains in the tragic environment where his wife has perished. In reality, of course, this was why Turankoŭ had stayed behind. In the play, however, these reasons are transferred from Shkurankoŭ to the positive hero. Under the Germans, Hudovich writes a patriotic Soviet opera called *Happy Lot.* Unlike Shkurankoŭ, he refuses to collaborate (as if writing folk songs or operas based on fairy tales and folklore were cooperation with the enemy!). Shkurankoŭ agrees to write music and Hudovich declines. To be sure, Hudovich works just as hard, but he is reconstructing the piano version of *Happy Lot* (which was lost when he was bombed out).

After a shell fragment kills his wife, the lonely Hudovich finds shelter with Bronya, his niece. Krapiva would have us believe that she takes care of the "prominent composer and patriot." The young woman personifies Soviet concern for people in the arts and sciences. Nothing can break Hudovich's will. He indignantly declines all the Germans' proposals. Neither threats nor bribes can break him. Lyuba, a girl

a. *Shkurnik* in Byelorussian is a self-seeker.—Ed.

partisan who had been his student, helps him reach the partisans. They manage to get him through the lines into Soviet-held territory. There he can complete his opera and benefit the nation.

The play is serious, but its false tones are melodramatic. The presentation intensified Krapiva's sentimentalism and melodrama. Sannikaŭ, who staged it, yielded to cheap effects, of which Krapiva had given him a good number. The spirit of false melodrama and pseudo-psychology of the nineteenth-century provincial theater clashed harshly with the contemporary characters of the play.

The main scenes are false. One example is the scene in the town park. The Gestapo is marching a crowd of partisans to the gallows past Hudovich, who is playing the violin. These men and women wear thick grease paint. The men show rage and hatred; they are clenching their fists. The women are wailing. The faces of all those condemned are tortured and blood-stained. This adds nothing to the horrors of the occupation. It only shows that the director and designer had bad taste.

The unreality of the situation and of Hudovich's character is obvious. His exploits are merely talked about. Hudovich withdraws into himself. He reveals himself only in conversations with Bronya (who has fallen in love with him), with the partisan girl Yuliya, and when he plays the violin. One has to take the author's word that Hudovich is writing *Happy Lot.* There are people who were in Minsk during the occupation. They know that no one can talk seriously about anyone's writing music in secret during those terrible years—let alone someone's writing works which glorify Soviet society. Hudovich is passive, contemplative and ineffective. Even so talented an actor as Uladimir Uladamirski could not make him credible. A contrived play does not receive a good production. Evidently, however, those in charge of the theater were of a different opinion.

In the summer of 1948, the production was played in Mos-

cow. Several critics reviewed the play favorably. V. Zalesski, however, had the courage to admit that it was unworthy of the theater. "In this production," he wrote, "the theater has gained nothing but has lost a good deal."[56]

Chapter 30

THE HALF-TRUTH ABOUT THE PARTISANS

Ales' Kuchar had written only critical articles before the war. He adroitly adapted himself to current policy by damning the works of writers under arrest but praising authors who were officially approved. He was almost the only one of the many dozens of Byelorussian literary and dramatic critics who did not disappear into oblivion. More and more profitable ventures came his way, such as the editing of the annual chrestomathies of Byelorussian literature for all classes of the secondary schools.

From 1933 on, Kuchar was chief literary consultant to the investigation bureaus of the OGPU. From 1937 on he was the chief literary advisor to the prosecuting attomeys at various tribunals. His indictments were the formal bases for condemning dozens of the Byelorussian authors arrested in 1936.

After the war, he became a playwright. His play *This Happened in Minsk* was staged by the Yanka Kupala Theater. The artistic poverty of the play was counterbalanced by the reality of its material and the cunning with which facts were adjusted to suit it.

The play concentrates on the activities of the Byelorussian partisans as they prepared to murder Wilhelm Kube, the General Commissar for Occupied Byelorussia. Hitler's deputy was killed in his apartment on September 22, 1943. The Byelorussian partisan girl who had been serving as his maid placed a mine in his bed. This exploit cost the people of Minsk many hundreds of executed hostages. Entire blocks of the city were surrounded by Gestapo men, and everyone living in those areas was carted off and shot. Those who had done the deed, however, managed to remain in hiding. Today, they are glorified in Minsk as heroes of the partisan struggle.

How does Kuchar treat all this? He had done a great deal

of work in conjunction with the literary department of the theater. Nevertheless, the detective story structure remained. The play concentrated on scenes showing how the murder was planned. Maryna Kazanich, the heroine, and Anna, a partisan girl, are developed fairly interestingly. Kuchar labored to personify Party leadership in Maksim Ivanovich, the Secretary of the underground District (*Oblast'*) Committee of the Party. This man carries out orders from Moscow and begins the war on the railroads. The result of Kuchar's travail, however, is pale and expressionless. The partisan gatherings, the underground meetings of their leaders, the arrival of Maksim Ivanovich with rewards and assignments are all artistically unconvincing.

One can barely term some of the characters artistic. Henrykh Hryhonis, a People's Artist of the Byelorussian S.S.R.[a] played Vasya Trafimchik, an old postman, who dreams of the time when he will again deliver letters in liberated Minsk. I. Shatsila, an Honored Artist of the Byelorussian S.S.R., filled the role of Yakavenka, a partisan who has been widowed by the Germans, but does not lose his spirit. P. Pekur, an Honored Artist of the Byelorussian S.S.R., enacted the role of mischievous Petsya Verkhavodka. Uladimir Kudrèvich impersonated the ardent Kolya, and Stsyapan Biryla, an Honored Artist of the Byelorussian S.S.R., played Kolya's father, Professor Deyeŭ, who aids the partisans.

Lidiya Rzhètskaya, a People's Artist of the Byelorussian S.S.R., portrayed Anna Ivanova, a strong and brave woman, kind to her friends but cruel and implacable to her enemies. Perhaps the best performance was that of Irena Zhdanovich as Maryna Kazanich. This character was less influenced than the others by doctrine. The actress tried to show the modesty of the young girl as she progresses towards her

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a. The Soviet Government has a system of titles for actors. They are (in descending order), People's Artist of the U.S.S.R.; Honored Artist of the U.S.S.R.; People's Artist of the local republic; and Honored Artist of the local republic.—Ed.

heroic deed. Purity, nobility of spirit and youthful zeal were all there.

The play as a whole, however, lacked free development of action. The author was too eager to show Party leadership first and foremost. He overemphasized the Party and Komsomol affiliations of his patriots and thus deprived them of any spontaneous and human charm. All his characters seem to be on leashes. There are no independent persons in the play. They all do only what they have to do in fulfilling their assignments. The old letter carrier posts leaflets. Kolya Deyeŭ blows up the electric power station. Shura Vil'klyatski hoists a picture of Stalin above the city. Maryna Kazanich kills Kube. They all accomplish their missions.

The partisans did blow up trains and buildings. They did kill German soldiers and officers, and they did distribute leaflets. All this does reflect reality to a certain extent. But the banal scene of raising Stalin's portrait and the communiqué praising the Party and the Komsomol are completely false, tributes to a postwar fashion. The partisan movement was really far more spontaneous. It was not so unified, and it included many people who were simultaneously both anti-German and anti-Soviet. Hence, the Soviet plays about Byelorussian partisans during the Second World War contain half-truths rather than the whole truth.

The Yanka Kupala Theater had frequently consulted with the dramatist in the past to see that his play satisfied all the demands of the stage and of the Party policy. After the 1946 resolutions, not one play could avoid this procedure. The theater meddled in all the details of *Together with the People, This Happened in Minsk* and *Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ.* The preliminary work with Arkadz' Maŭzon on *Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ* was especially careful. The play, written in bombastic blank verse, concerned an exploit of Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ, a Byelorussian hero. Zaslonaŭ was a stationmaster in charge of the secret partisan brigade in occupied Orsha.

In the variant performed, there was much pathos and

rhetoric. Both are fundamentally opposed to realism, to creating the heroic in its true environment. The first task of the literary department of the theater was to free the play of bombast, declamation and abstractness in order to make the growth of the characters and the development of the action seem both true and natural. But it was more difficult to give the play that seemly appearance which would have shown that the Party conducted all the actions of the partisans. In this, the theater and author failed repeatedly. The production was ready for staging when it was set aside for reworking in order to develop and strengthen its Party principle. Nevertheless, the première evoked some remarks in the Party press that the Party leadership had been inadequately depicted. The play was later rewritten again.

Maŭzon finally managed to approach the aim thrust upon him in the script for a film on the same subject. He strengthened the leading role of the Party as much as he could. He even depicted Yu. Tolubeyev, the Secretary of the Byelorussian Central Committee, personally giving Zaslonaŭ his assignment at partisan headquarters.

Eventually, the production of *Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ* provoked a storm of excitement in the official press. It was called a landmark, just as Ryhor Kobets' *Glass Factory* had been back in 1930.

Another play about the partisan hero Zaslonaŭ was *Middle Course* by Kastus' Hubarèvich and I. Dorski, which was produced at the Yakub Kolas Theater in Vitebsk. Moreover, a film was made about Zaslonaŭ at the "Belarus-fil'm" studios in Minsk. Mikola Aladaŭ composed *Andrèi Kas'tsenya,* an opera, on the same theme.

The words of Yanka Kupala inscribed on the portals of the stage are the leitmotif of the entire production:

Partisans! Both men and women!
Byelorussia'a native sons!
For the slavery and the shackles
Carve up Hitler's dirty beasts
So they will never rise again!

Seven hundred partisan detachments had fought against the Germans in Byelorussia. For these veterans, the play showed familiar events. Barys Platonaŭ as Zaslonaŭ used his extraordinary talents to avoid false pathos and to show Zaslonaŭ in a severely realistic manner. His character was a simple, ordinary individual with no bombast or deliberate heroics. The actor strove to reveal the inner strength of the hero in every turn of his head, in his restrained use of gesture and in his brief dialogues. Such a person might the real hero have been—a national avenger against the occupying forces. But these traits were completely insufficient for Party principles or Soviet doctrine. They were simply the features of a man with a genuine, inner strength of will and nobility of spirit. The playwright's instincts and conscience long resisted giving Party characteristics to Zaslonaŭ, but he could not stand his ground against the current political trend. The pressure finally forced him to compromise. The play is good insofar as its concept is preserved and its characters are prompted by life and the instincts of the dramatist. Everything that weakens its artistic impact, everything that comes from the false ideas attached to it, must be blamed upon the pernicious Soviet policy towards art.

Satiric emphases and grotesqueness in depicting the Germans clashed with the insistence of the theater on showing the inner world of the characters and searching for typical generalizations. Neuhaus, the Gestapo chief, and Hart, the chief of the military department, were depicted as moral monsters, like the Nazis in Aleksandr Fadeyev's *Young Guard* and Il'ya Ehrenburg's *Storm*.[b] However, the grotesque devices and the absence of conviction interfered with the credibility and reality of Neuhaus, as played by P. Ivanoŭ. Consequently, his duel with Zaslonaŭ had no dramatic tension. The character of Kroplya, a worker, was not true to life. This made H.P. Hlebaŭ, who played the role, invent certain individual idio-

b. *Young Guard* and *Storm* are two Soviet postwar novels dealing with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.—Ed.

syncrasies in drinking vodka and chatting. Evidently such a half-truth also forced Irena Zhdanovich as Anya Krushyna and Uladimir Uladamirski as Aksanich to slip at times into the conventional romantic mannerism of the exaggerated gesture and the forced voice.

Soviet critics accepted this half-truth as a great truth, however. The play as a whole was called genuinely national and patriotic. They saw in it the triumph of *partiinost'* in theater art. The production was praised as the theater's outstanding postwar achievement. And the play was translated into Russian and many of the national minority languages spoken in the U.S.S.R. Sannikoŭ, the director, was praised highly. In 1948, *Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ* was awarded a Stalin Prize.

Chapter 31

THE MOSCOW TOUR OF 1948

The Yanka Kupala Theater toured Moscow during the summer of 1948. Five of its productions were shown there: Arkadz' Maŭzon's *Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ*; Kandrat Krapiva's *Together with the People;* Yanka Kupala's *Paŭlinka;* William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* and Maxim Gorki's *Last Ones.* The building used was the Moscow Art Theater, where once Anton Chekhov's *Sea Gull* and Gorki's *Lower Depths* had received their world premières. There the voices of Konstantin Stanislavski and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, of Ivan Moskvin, Ivan Kachalov, Mikhail Tarkhanov, and Leonid Leonidov had once resounded.[a] Now, upon that very stage, Barys Platonaŭ, H.P. Hlebaŭ, Uladimir Uladamirski, Irena Zhdanovich and other performers played their roles in Byelorussian.

The tour received much attention in the press. The artistic merits of the company were recognized anew. There was official enthusiasm about the theater in terms of Stalin's policy towards the national minorities. A number of dramatic critics examined the activities of the theater more closely, however. They perceived its special features and tried to write constructive criticism. V. Zalesski wrote a serious article about the theater in *Theater* magazine.[57] He was exacting about every detail, but was nevertheless pleased with the productions. Zalesski declared that the company set a good example for all the other Soviet theaters:

> The company contains brilliant and resourceful individuals. Its ensemble has unity and is one of the best in our country. The actors are superbly aware of the style and spirit of the plays they do. Their performance of dialogue has skill and

a. Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko founded the Moscow Art Theater in 1898. The other names belong to famous actors associated with the Moscow Art Theater.—Ed.

> beauty. Above all, they really know how to live and to be effective on the stage.[58]

Almost all the critics who wrote on the theater commented on its artistic maturity and ensemble work. Zalesski wrote:

> The tour of the Yanka Kupala Theater in Moscow during July 1948, has met with great artistic success. It has completely confirmed that the theater has a creatively mature and well integrated company which is more than equal to any contemporary Soviet play or any of the Russian or Western European classics.[59]

Zalesski felt that the theater's basic technique was its blending of lifelike realism with emotional romanticism. He called for a strengthening and a further development of this "main line." He condemned *Together with the People* as a deviation from it.

The attack on Western dramatists, however, was already under way. This was evident in Zalesski's comments on the theater's preference for Western European works, particularly its annual productions of Spanish playwrights. He irately accused the theater of underestimating the Russian classics. Zalesski criticized its repertory for not including a number of Russian plays and for containing only one play by Gorki. He declared: "If the classical repertory is to be expanded, the very first thing to do is to include the Russian classics." This was a trite accusation that the theater was lagging behind in the socialistic transformation of the country. It was reminiscent of RAPP's demands for industrial and kolkhoz themes in the early 1930's. Zalesski disliked the fact that most of the theater's plays concerned intellectuals rather than collective farmers or industrial laborers. He sermonized:

> But Byelorussia is a country of kolkhozes and industries! Minsk, the capital of Byelorussian S.S.R., the city where the theater's home is, has been transformed under our very eyes into a great and powerful industrial center of the Soviet Union. The theater must not forget that! The audience demands this, and its own interests demand this!

Dependent Byelorussia had to hearken to the voice of Moscow. There was no appeal. One can imagine what harm this has done the theater.

Chapter 32

THE "PEOPLE'S ARTISTS" AND THE "HONORED ARTISTS"

During the 1920's and 1930's, the First Byelorussian State Theater had an actor of really exceptional talent named Uladimir Krylovich. His brilliance was a great aid in making Aŭstsihnei Mirovich a successful director. Krylovich took the leads in many classical and contemporary plays. During the theater's tours of the Ukraine and elsewhere (within the Soviet Union), Krylovich always earned acclaim from the playgoers and praise for the theater's performances. The actor's career was cut short by his untimely death in 1937, when he was forty-two, and his powers were at their peak. He was the first to be awarded the title of Honored Artist of the Byelorussian S.S.R.

Bribery was widespread even in the 1930's as part of the carrot-and-stick policy. During the 1940's, the various titles were handed out systematically. Among the most important directors of the theater, Mirovich and Kastus' Sannikaŭ became People's Artists of the Byelorussian S.S.R. N.A. Kavyazin was made an Honored Artist of the Byelorussian S.S.R. and Mikola Mitskevich was made an Honored Art Worker of the same republic. This last title was also given to Oskar Mariks and I.M. Ushakoŭ, the designers at the Second Byelorussian State Theater (of Vitebsk). Several actors in both theaters were made People's Artists or Honored Artists of the republic. The titles were also given to certain members of the Byelorussian Opera House and Ballet Theater. All these awards and titles were of little aid in forming the actors' individual techniques. The actors were all reduced to the same level and attached even more firmly to the official course of state policy. They had given up their individual styles in exchange for high-sounding titles. These were all

links in the same chain. All the theater arts were being debased to the same insipid style, that of so-called socialist realism.

The thirtieth anniversary of the Byelorussian S.S.R. took place in 1948. By decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. on December 30 of that year, Barys Platonaŭ (of the Yanka Kupala Theater) and Pavel Malchanaŭ (of the Yakub Kolas Theater) were made People's Artists of the U.S.S.R., for their outstanding services in developing the Soviet art of the theater.

People's Artist of the U.S.S.R.—not merely of one republic—is the highest title in the Soviet Union. H.P. Hlebaŭ (who had played Tulyaha in Krapiva's *He Who Laughs Last*) and Larysa Aleksandroŭskaya, the opera singer, had been awarded this honor previously. Until 1948, Platonaŭ and Malchanaŭ had held the more modest title of People's Artist of the Byelorussian S.S.R.

The Party, the trade unions, and the theater administrations played an important role in handing out the titles. It was they who suggested the candidates for the government to confirm. Of course, all this was predicated upon political spotlessness. On the other hand, the careers of both Platonaŭ and Malchanaŭ were certainly closely connected with the First and Second Byelorussian State Theaters.

Platonaŭ had joined the First Theater when it started. During his school days, he had sung in a choir and played the Ant in a stage adaptation of Ivan Krylov's fable, "The Grasshopper and the Ant," produced at the Minsk Municipal Russian Theater. Before joining the First Theater, Platonaŭ had participated in the dramatic circle attached to the so-called "Byelorussian Hut," in 1920 the center for the cultural, musical, theatrical, and literary activity of young Byelorussians.

Maladik, the literary magazine of the club, was the embryo for the later review *Young Generation* [Maladnyak]. The chorus, dancing and plays linked the young people to the cultural life of the country. Platonaŭ responded at once when he

heard that the new theater was hiring actors and was one of the first to be accepted permanently.

For over three decades Platonaŭ studied to perfect his skill. He was given important roles, such as Christian (in the old-fashioned melodrama *The Bells*),[a] Cléanthe (in Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*), Domb (in Mirovich's *Kastus' Kalinoŭski*), and Juan (in Calderón's *El Alcalde de Zalamea*). His Rihorka (in Mirovich's *Victory*) was filled with glittering comedy and the flavor of the stage.

His great skill was demonstrated further in such roles as Yeriskin (in *Rebellion,* by Polivanov, after the novel by Dmitri Furmanov), Shuneika (in Ryhor Kobets' *Glass Factory*), Neznamov (in Aleksandr Ostrovski's *Guilty Without Guilt*), Grinyov (in the stage adaptation of Pushkin's *Captain's Daughter*), Pyotr (in Gorki's *Last Ones*), and Carlos van der Not (in Victorien Sardou's *La Patrie*). Platonaŭ endowed his roles with psychological motivation and individual characteristics. His Grinyov was tender, loving and lyrical, yet steadfast and courageous. His Carlos van der Not was ardent and impetuous, but yet tragic. The actor perceptively revealed the subtle character of Pyotr in *Last Ones.* His psychological devices were reminiscent of the tradition set by Ornelev. His Neznamov (in *Guilty Without Guilt*) was sensitive and rebellious simultaneously. Platonaŭ's Nikolai Shablov (in Ostrovski's *Late Love*)–like Neznamov–was revealed through psychological penetration into the inner world and the outer expression of the character. These were shown in his behavior, his impetuous movements, his gestures, and the changes in his thoughts and attitudes.

This acting principle is revealed most fully in the classics. Examples of it were seen in Platonaŭ's portrayal of Shakespeare's Romeo or of the title role in Ostrovski's *Bal'zaminov's Wedding.*

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a. *The Bells* is the title which Leopold Lewis gave to his English translation of *LeJuif Polonais* by Erckmann-Chatrian (Emile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian).–Ed.

The actor's talent grows pale when he does the Soviet "positive heroes."[b] The Soviet plays had no broad or profound general conclusions to offer through art. Their situations were artificial and the protagonists behaved unnaturally. All this prevented the talented actor from being convincing and lifelike. There is the example of *Front,* Aleksandr Korneichuk's play about the war. Ognyov, a young general, is resolute, broad-minded, and firm in his beliefs. He is called upon to be the "positive hero." Despite all Platonaŭ's talent, Ognyov remained lifeless. This is why Platonaŭ does contemporary roles so rarely.

His comic characters are more successful. Platonaŭ has a sense of timing and of feeling. He frequently resorts to sharp, satirical devices (such as grotesque caricatures) if they do not contradict the spirit of the play. This was how he revealed the vapidity and uselessness of Adol'f Bykoŭski in Kupala's *Paŭlinka.*

As Zyolkin (in Krapiva's *He Who Laughs Last*), Platonaŭ showed a genuine talent for comedy. As Zhlukta (in Krapiva's *Dear Person*), however, he was a more sedate and objective villain. His Zhlukta neither exaggerated nor exposed. Remembering the title of the play, Platonaŭ depicted an externally dear and attractive person. Zhlukta's transgressions themselves condition the audience's attitude towards him. This contradicted both the *partiinost'* in an actor's performance and the demand that he must show his own relationship towards his part. Both Krapiva and Platonaŭ were criticized after the Party's resolutions on the theater came out.

Much of Platonaŭ's success in his rise to the top of the Soviet theatrical hierarchy came from his performances in two roles: the title role in Arkadz' Maŭzon's *Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ,* and Maksim Ivanavich in Ales' Kuchar's *This*

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b. "Positive heroes" in Soviet literature are the protagonists of works of art who in some way, such as inventing something, successful leadership in some field, etc., make a positive contribution to the Soviet cause.—Ed.

Happened in Minsk. The actor tried to avoid anything pompous, stilted or bathetic. His Zaslonaŭ was ordinary, simple and modest, but he was inspired from within and kept his spirit even at the most difficult moments. He had no external traits of heroism at all which let the import of his deeds be transmitted all the more. Were it not for his Party affiliations, this Zaslonaŭ might have been a reflection in art of the national struggle against the German usurpers.

Platonaŭ's realistic and psychological acting was used for propaganda incompatible with the aims of the theater. This is the tragedy of others as well. It is the story of such People's Artists of the Byelorussian S.S.R. as Uladimir Uladamirski, Henrykh Hryhonis, Lidiya Rzhètskaya, Irena Zhdanovich, L.G. Rakhlenka, and Vol'ha Halina. It is the tale of such Honored Artists of the Byelorussian S.S.R. as Vera Pola, Uladimir Dedyushka, I. Shatsila, P. Pekur, and Stsyapan Biryla. It is the tragedy of the more honest actors who have no such titles.

Audiences evaluate performers according to their acting, not their titles. Theatergoers are tired of the huge numbers of laureates and honored actors. They do not read the dazzling titles on the posters. No titles can alter the spontaneous public boycott of contemporary Soviet plays. The classics and plays on historical themes come first.

That is why Molière's *L'Avare,* Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* Ostrovski's *Late Love,* Lope de Vega's *El Perro del Hortelano,* and even Yanka Kupala's *Paŭlinka* (which is antiquated and by no means perfect) remain on the boards. That is why contemporary plays never last more than two or three performances.

Chapter 33

PLAYS BY ARTISANS RATHER THAN BY ARTISTS

Byelorussian playwrights have been paralyzed by their lack of freedom since the Party resolutions on art. It has become impossible to write simple, human dramas—the comedies and tragedies of life—with no bearing on current politics. Drama has become the hand-maiden of politics. Every new declaration has caused policy to veer so much that the earlier resolutions have been swept away. Naturally, playwrights wish to avoid the invisible rocks and eddies created by changing policies and the various kinds of ideological purges. One way of avoiding dangerous problems was to treat themes from the Second World War against a non-Byelorussian background. This device saved the dramatist from accusations of being nationally limited, reduced his contact with the ticklish political problems of the day, and lessened the risk of being forced out of his profession. Nevertheless, it was difficult to avoid slipping, even here. Optimism was obligatory in regard to the Soviet Army and the events connected with it. Even the most tragic war scenes had to be depicted optimistically, with no doubts as to the ultimate victory. Vsevolod Vishnevski had created the model of such an "optimistic tragedy"[a] long before.

T. Pichuzhkina, a young dramatist, studied this demand for her *Stones of Sevastopol* which concerns the defense of the city and Lyuba Bystrova, a spectacular, seventeen-year-old heroine. The military events in the Sevastopol sector are transformed into a decorative background for this "girl hussar." Lyuba is a hoyden. She always behaves as if she were in the middle of endless entertainments, evening dances

a. Vishnevski's *Optimistic Tragedy* deals with events of the Russian Civil War. It is a tragedy because the hero dies, but it is optimistic because his cause prevails.—Ed.

and athletic meets rather than in a war. Whether she is being bombed, is disguised as a boy aboard a warship, is in her half-ruined home in town, or is in a front-line pillbox as the Germans attack it, she dances! The soldiers gaze upon her, beat off the assault and also dance! The young heroine's fearlessness shows how careless the dramatist was over the spiritual maturity of her character. The use of antiquated vaudeville devices in a contemporary heroic drama resulted in something like a farcical operetta. Under the harsh conditions of Soviet life, this was strange, unnatural and completely alien to Soviet art. The official, compulsory optimism produced a journeyman-like model of how to use old dramatic devices for showing the new ideology on the stage. The bankruptcy of the whole business was thus reaffirmed.

Soviet critics had long welcomed optimism. This time, however, even they pointed out the cacophony between the old devices of vaudeville and the harsh heroics of reality.

The same artisan spirit was seen in Mikhas' Klimkovich's *All Power to the Soviets.* In his past works, Klimkovich had been preoccupied only with staying within the official Party interpretation of the October Revolution in Byelorussia. So it was with this play. The author had to libel and to defame all the other parties to please the Bolsheviks. To this end, the author introduces two Communists: Myasnikov, who is idealized in every way, and Pralyhin, a railwayman from St. Petersburg who is serving in the army. There are scenes in which Lenin and Stalin appear. The author went to extremes to show the growth of revolutionary attitudes among the soldiers and the peasants. The anti-Bolsheviks, all shown as villains, include the representatives of the Byelorussian *Rada,*[b] the Mensheviks, the Socialist Revolutionaries, and the neutrals. The *Rada* is presented as an agency of the Anglo-American and the German capitalists.

In order to gloss over this lie with some art, the author had to bring in some adventures and deliberate, but interest-

b. *Rada* means "council" in Byelorussian.—Ed.

ing, diversions. Pralyhin loves Nadeya Starytskaya, the daughter of another railwayman. The author, however, has so mingled her fate with a number of harsh and improbable situations that the playgoer soon senses that the work is artisanship and counterfeit. At one point, Nadeya is almost burned alive in a cellar, but Pralyhin rescues her at the last moment. Again, while she is dying, she prevents the destruction of an armored train en route to help the Minsk Bolshevik Soviet suppress the national movement. These are the condiments with which Klimkovich seeks to hide the poverty of his ideas and the falseness of his work. History is replaced by pseudo-history, or rather by contemporary politics directed at the past.

Pyatro Hlebka's *Light from the East* deals with the same kind of false history. He has the same mission: to defame Byelorussian cultural figures oriented towards the West and to contrast them with those oriented towards the Bolshevik East. The play depicts the Civil War in Byelorussia as a struggle between these attitudes. Despite the author's obvious ability, the tendentiousness of his play weighs heavily upon his entire concept.

Two bad plays on kolkhoz life also appeared, like an immediate response to the resolution which the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) had adopted in February, entitled, "On Measures for Developing Agriculture in the Postwar Period." The two plays were *Dear Guest* by Yury Rudz'ko and *On the High Road,* by Tsimokh Krys'ko. Both are striking examples of the social command; both are devoid of life and barren of inspiration. *On the High Road* could never even get produced. Such was the result of the Party's appeal to the playwrights.

The efforts of other dramatists, such as Kandrat Krapiva, were no better. Social command lacked inspiration and incited disgust. The laws of art have wreaked their vengeance through the potboilers which have triumphed in the Soviet theater of recent years.

Chapter 34

PRIMACY AND VIGILANCE

There has been a postwar campaign to root out so-called bourgeois survivals and kowtowing to the bourgeois culture of the West. It has been accompanied by asserting the primacy of Russian and Soviet knowledge. The government declared that it was necessary to protect its state secrets. This caused a new campaign for increased vigilance in safeguarding scientific discoveries. Soviet scientific achievements were not to be disseminated abroad. Thoughts, studies, discoveries, and scholarly writings—everything—became a state secret.

The Byelorussian drama responded with a play called *Professor Volzhyn's Manuscript,* written by L.G. Rakhlenka, one of the leading actors and directors of the Yanka Kupala Theater. The play has some dramatic value since it was written by a master of stagecraft.

The work elicited sharp criticism. G. Osipov, a Moscow critic, called it depraved and harmful: "The play cannot be performed on the Soviet stage."[60] Such was the conclusion of this strict and vigilant protector of Soviet ideological orthodoxy.

Volzhyn, a professor of microbiology, is asked to present the problem of honor and the primacy of Soviet science. In his family circle, he becomes indignant at the hubbub in the American press about the latest discoveries in microbiology. As a "sincere Soviet patriot," he indicates the superiority of Soviet microbiology and promises to publish his latest work. But it so happens that an important part of his manuscript has disappeared. Extensive searches are begun for it. The professor, his wife, his daughter, and Col. Baravin are all occupied with them exclusively. The professor is perplexed. He cannot even remember where he generally keeps

his manuscripts. Is the usual place in the middle drawer of his study at home or in the table beneath the report at the institute? "Who the hell knows where they can be?" Professor Volzhyn asks himself. The play, of course, could not have done without the aid of security agencies. Only their ever-watchful eye could uncover the true reason for what has happened and expose the culprit. It turns out that Dr. Starasel'ski, the professor's son-in-law, had invited an American agent named Harry Page to his home and had given to the latter a part of the manuscript. This is the same Starasel'ski with whom Volzhyn had clashed earlier in the play. The patriotic professor had made speeches in praise of Soviet science, but Starasel'ski exhibited kowtowing and servility towards foreign culture. The play thus ascribes treason to a man whose outlook on life is cosmopolitan.

The conflict between the two attitudes provides the fillip to develop the action. It is intensified by the dramatic tension of hunting for the manuscript. The desire to find it and to expose whoever has taken it occupies a number of scenes. Volzhyn's daughter, Maryya Stsepanaŭna, persuades her husband to confess.

Soviet criticism saw these scenes as a departure from the theme of Soviet primacy in science and as changing the play to a melodrama. The critics grew particularly indignant over the scene describing Starasel'ski's experiences. "What a terrible life I live," says Starasel'ski, "but what else is to be done?" The playwright's timid efforts to endow Starasel'ski with human traits elicited an angry rebuke from Osipov. The critic accused Rakhlenka of depicting a "criminal and scoundrel as the innocent sacrifice of his own credulity and cowardice."

The worst periods of RAPP vulgarization come to mind as one reads Soviet criticism written during 1949. "Why are these notes of pity and sympathy for the criminal necessary? They distort reality and orient the public incorrectly,"[61] Osipov declared.

The critic analyzed the play by measuring the hero's behavior according to Party theses. This led him to condemn the play because Volzhyn himself remains at large. According to this critic, the professor should have been punished "for his criminal negligence." In the drama, however, Col. Baravin shakes hands with Volzhyn and pays him a number of compliments. Consequently, Osipov condemned the play most severely and denied that it had any significance at all in teaching people to be vigilant. Thus, neither problem treated in the play is resolved according to the demands of the Soviet drama.

Rakhlenka's attempt to keep pace with whatever was contemporary ended sadly. He had responded to a vital issue of the day, but he had not learned how complicated the demands were. He had made his characters too human. Principles did not overcome the characters completely. The social command was not fulfilled satisfactorily. Politics caused the failure of the play.

Chapter 35

COSMOPOLITAN AND NATIONALISTIC DEVIATIONS

The struggle against kowtowing to foreign elements continued into 1949. Soviet dramas on present-day themes had been greatly encouraged. Nevertheless, there was a certain objective barrier between propagandistic potboilers and the stage: the art of dramatic criticism. The very existence of a competent non-Party criticism lessened the influx of schematism into literature. The critics sharply condemned many plays which the Party needed for propaganda. This is why *Pravda* and *Culture and Life* [Kul'tura i zhizn'] gave the signal for a campaign against the so-called cosmopolitans. Such dramatic critics as Yuzuf Yuzovski, Gurvich, G.N. Boyadzhiyev, and Varshavski were attacked as being antipatriotic. The persecution of competent, non-Party critics had begun—under the pretext of fighting seditious cosmopolitanism.

In Byelorussia many critics were affected by this campaign. In March 1949 the Party held an open meeting of the Union of Soviet Writers of Byelorussia which lasted for several days. Pavel Karalyoŭ, the secretary of the Union, consulted with the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Communist Party of Byelorussia. Then, talking for the officials of organization, he delivered a speech exposing the "anti-national activities" of a group of Byelorussian critics whose attitude was allegedly cosmopolitan. M. Model' was accused of heading the dramatic critics who supported "rootless cosmopolitanism."[62] He was charged with formalism, aestheticism, kowtowing to the West, and slandering Byelorussian art. Other critics attacked at the same time included Ya. Hertsovich, Lukash Bėndė, V. Hal'peryn, M. Smolkin, L. Barah, Ales' Kuchar, Ye. Meyerovich, and Aŭhen Ramanovich. Directors rebuked included Lyavon Lit-

vinaŭ, and V. Halaŭchyner. Ramanovich was in charge of the literary department at the Yanka Kupala Theater. He was accused of discriminating against Byelorussian plays. Kavalyoŭ accused Model' of worshipping Meierhold and calling this famous Russian, "the greatest master of the Soviet theater." Model' had waxed ecstatic over Hol'faden's harmful plays (which Halaŭchyner had staged in Minsk at the Jewish Theater of the Byelorussian S.S.R.). Halaŭchyner himself was called a formalist and an esthete who had always staged plays for entertainment and had never done anything really important. As a result, the Jewish Theater of the Byelorussian S.S.R. was closed.

Litvinaŭ was reprimanded more than any other director. He was accused of struggling against the Moscow Art Theater, of attacking the realistic method of Konstantin Stanislavski, and of defending Meierhold's biomechanics and constructivism.[a] He was charged with trying to hinder the production of present-day Soviet plays. Litvinaŭ was alleged to have distorted Yanka Kupala's *Paŭlinka* by neutralizing its revolutionary content and transforming the play into a vaudeville.

Kuchar was accused of denying Gorki's influence on Yanka Kupala. He had written that Kuz'ma Chorny learned his art not from the Russian and Byelorussian classics but from French authors.[63]

It has been impossible since then to discuss any Western influence on Byelorussian literature or on the Byelorussian drama. On the other hand, the study of the Russian classics and the works of Soviet playwrights must be mentioned. Thus, a critic of Chorny must forget that the author studied Balzac and remember that he studied Gorki. In discussing Kandrat Krapiva, one must consider Russian satirical drama. Konstantin Trenyov's *Lyubov' Yarovaya* is now supposed to have influenced all the plays written about the Civil War in Byelorussia.

The Second Congress of the writers of Byelorussia was

a. Meierhold had long since been discredited by this time.—Ed.

held from June 20 to June 24, 1949. Pyatrus' Broŭka, the First Secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers of the Byelorussian S.S.R., spoke, calling attention to the report by Husaraŭ, the Secretary of the Party Central Committee of Byelorussia, at the Nineteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Byelorussia. Husaraŭ had mentioned the struggle against ideological deviations. Evidently, it was becoming something permanent in Byelorussia; the Party has not considered relaxing it for even a moment. By 1949 the attempt to root out the National-Democratic ideology was entering its third decade. Yet repeated exposures and condemnations of this attitude were necessary because it kept coming back to life. How does Husaraŭ define the heresy which has given the Communist Party of Byelorussia no peace for over twenty years? He declared:

> We have exposed the nationalistic theory of a "single current" which describes Byelorussian history as a process that moved forward without any class struggle. We have criticized the works of various literary critics who grouped Byelorussian patriots (both writers and other cultural figures) together with such Byelorussian nationalists as Ales' Harun and Yadvihin Sh. [Anton Lyavitski].
>
> We have exposed the false nationalistic theorizing which imagines that the light of culture came to Byelorussia not from the East but only from the West, which fancies that Byelorussian culture grew up not under the powerful progressive influence of Russian culture, but was sown in Byelorussia by figures from Polish aristocratic culture and the Roman Catholic Church.
>
> We have also exposed and condemned a third nationalistic theory, the one about the "golden age" which Byelorussia supposedly experienced as part of the Lithuanian and Polish feudal states in its economic, political and spiritual development from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries.[64]

As to the Byelorussian drama, Broŭka emphasized "the bitter struggle against bourgeois nationalism, formalist interpretation, schematism, and oversimplification." When

the time came for him to discuss accomplishments in the drama, there were only a few productions which he could name. Besides the plays of Arkadz' Maŭzon and Kandrat Krapiva, which have been treated above, he mentioned *Ray of the Future* by Vasil' Vitka, *Bread* by Il'lya Hurski, *Song of Our Hearts* by V. Paleski, and *Flower of Tyan'-Shan'* by Makar Paslyadovich and M. Hortsaŭ.

Thus, after the Party's resolutions on the theater, dramaturgy failed to improve. It continued to stagnate. Social command produced only colorless and miserable plays written by artisans of the drama. The theater and drama were devoid of life, which was replaced by a cloying and idealized substitute run by the Communist Party.

Chapter 36

THE BLIND ALLEY OF CANONIZATION

The ideological purges continued, and the original Byelorussian repertory fell apart. The years 1950 and 1951 together brought only four new plays to the Yanka Kupala Theater: *Citadel of Glory* by Kastus' Hubarėvich; *Larks Are Singing* by Kandrat Krapiva; *Before Dawn* by Andrėi Makayonak, and *Happiness of a Poet* by Vasil' Vitka. Shortly before the dress rehearsal, the last mentioned play was sent back to Vitka for revision.

The rest of the repertory consisted of classical and contemporary plays. The old productions that were renewed included Aleksandr Ostrovski's *Late Love,* Lope de Vega's *El Perro del Hortelano,* Molière's *L'Avare,* and Ales' Kuchar's *This Happened in Minsk.* There were many new productions of Soviet non-Byelorussian plays during 1950 and 1951, including *Voice of America* by Boris Lavrenev, *Alien Shadow* by Konstantin Simonov (directed by Lyavon Litvinaŭ), *Lone House in the Alley* by the Tur brothers (staged by Kastus' Sannikaŭ), *Marvelous Treasure* by P. Malyarevski (put on by L.G. Rakhlenka and with music by Aŭhen Tsikotski), *Family* by I. Popov (directed by Sannikaŭ), *Lutonin Family* by the Tur brothers and I. Pur'yev (staged by Sannikaŭ), *Escape* by D. Shcheglov (put on by V. Kukht), and *Grove of White Hazel Trees* by Aleksandr Korneichuk (staged by P. Sushko). The two classical plays presented in new productions were Ostrovski's *Bal'zaminov's Wedding* (staged by H. Hahava) and Anton Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard.* Before the end of the 1950-1951 season, the theater offered the first Byelorussian translation of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (as adapted for the stage by Volkov). During the following season, the theater concentrated on non-Byelorussian plays such as *Deep Are the Roots* by James Gow and Arnaud d'Usseau, *Day of Wonderful Illu-*

sions (whose author we are unable to identify), *Makar Dubrava* by Korneichuk, *Prague Is Still Mine* by Yu. Burakovski and *October* by M. Chiaŭreli and M. Bol'shintsev. There was to be another ten-day celebration of Byelorussian art in Moscow during February of 1953. To prepare for it, the Yanka Kupala Theater had to bring back Vitka's play on the life of Yanka Kupala, *Happiness of a Poet.* The theater also worked on three other plays for the same purpose: *Larks Are Singing,* Aleksandr Griboyedov's *Wit Works Woe* (as translated by Krapiva) and *October.* In 1953, *Interested Party* by Krapiva, *Excuse It, Please* by A. Makayonak and *Ruin of Pompeyev* by N. Virta, were produced.

During the 1950-1951 and the 1951-1952 seasons, the theater spent much time on the road. In 1950 it travelled through Byelorussia for six months, visiting 30 towns and giving 233 performances and 50 concerts before 120,000 people. During this time, its building in Minsk was undergoing renovations. In the summer of 1951, the theater toured Odessa, Nikolayev and other Ukrainian cities. It visited the sailors of the Black Sea Fleet and the workers of the André Marty machine construction plant. In Odessa the theater gave over 40 performances and 16 concerts.

Furthermore, the theater held conferences in the factories and on the kolkhozes which were devoted to discussing its own productions. After the Party's resolution on art, such conferences became more frequent. The conferences were like a return to RAPP.

Public control of the work done by the theater was encouraged and the critics stepped up their activities. In 1950 Litvinaŭ was again criticized for his cosmopolitan deviations (as he had been the year before). He was accused of recidivism in his staging of *Alien Shadows.* At a meeting of theater personnel he renounced his confession of 1949 (in which he had admitted making mistakes through the years). Litvinaŭ's chief fault, it was asserted, lay in his distortion of cosmopolitan characters. Litvinaŭ had underestimated the problems

inherent in fighting these agents of imperialism.

Playwrights had already been having difficulties in doing their work. The same obstacles now began to affect actors and directors as well. The critics showed mercy neither to individuals nor for services rendered.

Sushko, a young alumnus of the Moscow Theater Institute was given the task of staging Korneichuk's *Grove of White Hazel Trees.* It was a real problem. How could he make a good show out of a stereotyped Soviet Ukrainian comedy? In order to give the play some life, he brought in a crowd of costumed Ukrainian young people to sing and dance. This local color added nothing but the beauty of Ukrainian mud huts, embroidered blouses and the traditioned hopak. Ethnography could not supply what had been left out.

Sannikaŭ has been the chief director of Byelorussian plays during the past few years. He has done Hubarėvich's *Citadel of Glory,* Krapiva's *Larks Are Singing,* and Makayonak's *Before Dawn,* the latter a dramatic response to a Communist campaign which aspires to portray the "struggle for peace" of the French toilers. It is loaded with the usual attacks on insidious Anglo-American imperialists and with other Communist propaganda. Its value as art is altogether dubious. Sannikaŭ's first two productions are more interesting.

Hubarėvich had been associated with motion pictures, both as a script writer and a critic. He succeeded in doing nothing worthwhile in the field, although he had shown some talent. He collaborated with I. Dorski on *Middle Course,* a play about Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ presented at the Yakub Kolas Theater in Vitebsk. In 1950 the Yanka Kupala Theater staged his new play, *Citadel of Glory,* which dealt with the heroic defenders of the fortress at Brest Litovsk shortly after the German invasion of the Soviet Union.

It is officially stated that Hubarėvich used materials found during postwar excavations at the site and that notes of the garrison were found which permit the reconstruction of what the defenders were thinking.

Judging from the design of the play, it is heroic drama, showing the psychology of ordinary people who perform great deeds. Towards the end, however, the drama becomes conventionally heroic. The influence and habits of film writing are apparent both in the scenes and the situations. The characters tend to freeze in heroic poses. This is the case with the return of Lt. Alyaksei Nahanaŭ, who gets killed early in the play. It applies to the way a girl reads Gorki's "Girl and Death" before she dies. It shows up in the sculptured grouping of the condemned prisoners, in the manner the spotlight picks out Nahanaŭ's white shirt, and in the way the red banner waves against a background of the dawn. This is all motion picture technique, which transforms the play into an abstract and bathetic drama of a battle.

Throughout the work, Commissar Kalesnikaŭ keeps uttering spectacular phrases and abstract, patriotic speeches about military valor and honor. The scenes which purport to show the leading role played by the Communists in the army are especially pompous. Of course, the author had not right to omit the leading and "inspiring" role of the Communists. It is for this reason that the Commissar is the protagonist of the piece. He is a broad-minded, intelligent educator with simple habits. His convictions are calm but firm, and he knows both how to listen to people and how to lead them. He is on most friendly terms with his wife. In other words, he is the incarnation of all possible virtues. Towards the end, when the survivors decide to blow up their casemate, they pledge allegiance to their regimental colors. Neither the stronghold nor the military banner shall fall to the enemy. The scene is replete with the usual hypocrisy and pseudo-theatricality.

Barys Kudrautsaŭ played Kalesnikaŭ. He declaims clichés about Communist valor, falls to his knees and kisses the banner as if it were a pagan god. He then speaks a grandiloquent soliloquy, with gesticulations. The orchestra plays. The flag is solemnly carried away. The words of the pledge

inspire the soldiers with new energy. More important, it seems to strengthen their faith in the Party. The play becomes absurd when a soldier named Katushka asks Kalesnikaŭ to admit him into the Party:

> *Katushka:* Comrade Commissar, ... the whole company has a request to make of you. Take me into the Party!... I want to go into battle as a Communist!
>
> *Kalesnikaŭ:* Why the whole company?
>
> *Katushka:* All the Party and Komsomol people in our company have perished. There are none of them left. And the soldiers want to go into battle under the command of a Communist.

Such a scene destroys whatever bits of truth the play has presented earlier. It kills all verisimilitude, just as the acting kills movement and naturalness.

Uladimir Uladamirski played the role of Yermashoŭ, the old regular in command of the fortress. He is collected and efficient. Uladamirski was more faithful to realism than anyone else in the cast. He dies early, and therefore does not have to be onstage for the final scenes. He thus preserves the character whom he has created.

Uladimir Kudrèvich played Nahanaŭ, and A. Baranoŭski, Katushka. The play and the production made them act on the heroic plane described above. I.M. Ushakoŭ, the designer, abandoned his native simplicity for this production and began to play around with ruins. The military action is set near a ruined cathedral, with its frescoes, its marble sepulchre, and its mutilated statues of the saints. There are some comic scenes. At one point, the envoy who brings the flag of truce is blindfolded. The Russians keep proffering him the staff of his white flag. His attempts to grasp it are greeted with general guffaws from the soldiers. This brings a little realism into a play that is otherwise quite conventional. The conventionality may be a result of Hubarevich's inability to transmit the atmosphere of the constant fighting offstage, a failure which lessens the tenseness of the action. The characters were based on facts that had really occurred during the war. Yet even here, the ideological canons interfered

with their development. The principles and the postulates of the Party made the play false.

Krapiva's *Larks Are Singing* is perhaps the best evidence that the Byelorussian drama is now in a blind alley. The play was produced at the Yanka Kupala Theater. Krapiva is the leading and most prolific Byelorussian dramatist now writing. His decline shows the general situation in the theater and drama of Byelorussia. *Larks Are Singing* deals with kolkhoz life, showing a conflict between representatives of two kolkhozes. Pytlevany is ambitious and dreams of receiving a medal. His opposite number is Tumilovich. The former strives for the material security of his collective farmers, each of whom receives about nine pounds of bread and eight rubles per working day. The latter emphasizes the general economy as represented by a club, new homes and electricity. His collective farmers receive less than seven pounds of bread and only four rubles per working day. The plot begins when a bride at one kolkhoz refuses to join her groom on the other. She wants to know first which farm is better. Tumilovich and a group of his most active collective farmers examine Pytlevany's kolkhoz under various pretexts. They find shortcomings in his work and call them to the attention of the Regional (*oblast'*) Committee of the Communist Party and the Argicultural Department of the Regional Executive Committee. Pytlevany's medal is revoked. Party interference, however, helps Pytlevany to straighten out the work of his kolkhoz. In the end, Nas'tsya marries Mikola Veras, a brigade leader, and everyone is happy.

Pytlevany becomes the matchmaker. The bride agrees to go to the kolkhoz where the groom lives. Nas'tsya's mother, Aŭdotsya Vyarbitskaya, announces her ultra patriotic views and shows her exceptional understanding of the public interests. She says:

> Children are needed not by a mother alone. Others need them, and so does our country. That is why we raise them. Our country is a greater mother than I.
>
> You helped them understand these mistakes, so help them

to get straightened out. It is not only for them, but for all of us as well, and for our country.

This lifeless figure of a progressive woman is apparently accepted as depicting the new human being produced under new social conditions.

The end of *Larks Are Singing* is in itself a model of that stereotyping which has killed art in Byelorussia and in the rest of the Soviet Union.

It is a specimen of sycophancy—something which Krapiva himself had once satirized. The play is idolatrous; it defies a fetish. This is how it ends:

Aŭdotsya: Thank our own father, Stalin, my children, for your happy lot. May he bless you on your great journey. (*Nas'tsya and Mikola bow low before Stalin's portrait. Lida and Katsya begin a song about Stalin. Everyone else joins in, singing,* "The people composes a beautiful song about Stalin the wise, their own favorite.")

(*CURTAIN*)

All this banality is crowned with the compulsory worship of Stalin which finishes not only the play but also the Byelorussian drama. Such an ending leaves nowhere to go. It is a closed circle. Artistic silence and complete stagnation are next. Can prizes really alter the poverty of ideas and of artistry in the play?

In March 1952, Stalin Prizes were awarded to Sannikoŭ (who staged it), to Barys Platonaŭ (who played Tumilovich), to Uladimir Dedyushka (who impersonated Pytlevany), to Lidiya Rzhétskaya (Aŭdotsya Vyarbitskaya), to Lidiya Drazdova (Nas'tsya Vyarbitskaya), and to V. Pola (Paŭlina Bokhan). For Platonaŭ, by the way, this was the second time he had been so honored. The Vakhtangov Theater of Moscow also presented *Larks Are Singing* during the 1951-1952 season.

Chapter 37

THE PURGE GOES ON

The Byelorussian cultural life of the 1950's has begun with the same endless ideological purge and the continued uprooting of bourgeois and nationalistic deviations. A new wave of criticism and purges followed the article in *Pravda* during 1951 which attacked the nationalist distortions in "Love the Ukraine," a poem in Ukrainian by Volodimir Sosyura.

In Byelorussia such poets as Maksim Tank, Pyatro Hlebka, Pyatrus' Broŭka, Anton Byalevich, and Kanstantsyya Buila were accused of similar deviations. The work of Mme. Buila was criticized most harshly for its ideological distortions of the concept of Byelorussia. It was alleged to contain archaic scenes depicting the eternal characteristics of the people and the country with no regard for socialist transformation. Her poem, "My Byelorussia," had been praised most highly and immediately after the war as a model of lofty patriotism. When it was published in an anthology of her work called *Dawn* [S'vitan'ne] during 1950, *Star* [Z'vyazda] attacked it[65] for failing to express the friendly ties between Byelorussia and the great Russian nation. *Star* now declared that she had neglected the friendship between the various Soviet peoples and was thus nationally limited. By "our country," she understands Byelorussia alone rather than the entire Soviet Union. Byelorussia for her was not so dear as any other fraternal republic, but was "the most beautiful," "the dearest and peerless." Even her nature verses provoked indignation in the literary analyst: they showed a spirit alien to the Soviet people. She had written about the spring, distant and beautiful, and about how the ploughed field dreams of its new lot. This made the Party critic suspicious that her fantasies were hostile. He therefore ser-

monized about the "glorious spring of Communism" and the "era of socialism" as the "spring of mankind." "The Soviet people has never even dreamed of any other spring," the critic concludes "penetratingly" and in orthodox Soviet fashion.

Thus the minor ideological concessions made to literature and to authors during the war came to an end. The first shoots of a new national content, scarcely breaking through the alien layers built up over the years, were killed off by the artificial frosts and the bitter cold of new purges.

The December 1951 issue of *Star* reaffirms this censuring of Byelorussian literature and drams. Alienation from the "great cultural heritage of the great Russian nation" and from the present has become the fashionable theme of criticism. Every underestimation of Soviet topics, the return to the past, and the lack of intensive work are all considered nationalistic deviations or cosmopolitanism.

Party directives and Soviet life are so devoid of inspiration that new artistic and dramatic work has practically ceased. The Soviet press itself has admitted the unsatisfactory situation in the arts (in a fit of critical inspiration). *Star* observed editorially:

> It must be admitted that many Byelorussian writers and figures in the plastic arts and in music are involved but weakly with life. They are not studying profoundly enough the essence of the processes of our development. They are not looking ahead to the tomorrow of our country. This is one of the main reasons that the Byelorussian drama, for instance, lags behind. Byelorussian playwrights have not delighted audiences even once this year with a single play about our republic today, about the historical significance of the events and processes going on in the Soviet land right now. Surely it is clear that a profound study of the many facets of Soviet reality by the playwrights, and a courageous involvement in life would give them hundreds of impassioned themes and would suggest hundreds of truthful plots.[66]

The playhouses were not alone in being charged with lagging behind Soviet life. Composers, musicians and other

kinds of theaters were also accused of the same fault:

> One cannot overlook the fact that to this day Byelorussian composers have not written any opera about the work of the Byelorussian people after October [1917], that the theaters of the republic have staged very few plays on the life of the people today.[67]

A new cue has been given by the Moscow press.[68] Allegedly, the creative stagnation in Byelorussia is explained by the theory of lack of conflict in Soviet life. Newspapers used criticism of the theory as a pretext for confessions which shed light on the lamentable state of the drama and of the theater:

> The most backward sector in Byelorussian literature is the drama. During the past year [1951], the Byelorussian theaters have not put on a single, new, original Byelorussian play. Among literary critics and playwrights, the theory has grown that our life was devoid of conflict. This theory has led certain writers to renounce the truth of life and has made them unable to depict vital occurrences realistically. A shallow knowledge of life and a dread of sharp conflicts has produced schematization in plot and pallor in characters.
>
> One must add that the board of the Union of Soviet Writers of the Byelorussian S.S.R. does little to help playwrights. It does not fight to fulfill their potentialities. The Dramatists' Section also cares little about making its members more mature. It does not discuss the complex questions dealing with the development of the Soviet drama.[69]

Interestingly enough, the same article admits that all satire has ceased, as was inevitable after Zoshchenko had been censured in 1946 and Krapiva's satires had been attacked in Byelorussia during 1947. Satire is inevitable linked to criticism of the environment. It is therefore the most dangerous kind of creative activity. *Star* blames the end of Byelorussian satire on the same "theory":

> The "theory" that our life is devoid of conflict has harmed other genres of Byelorussian literature. This is particularly true of satire, which has scarcely developed at all during the past few years. But the tasks of Communist construction demand all kinds of satire. They need potent satire, which would be a brave, thorough and unsparing

> revelation of survivals from the past in the popular consciousness, of everything which hinders our invincible movement forward.[70]

The trouble was that one could scarcely find any Soviet author foolhardy enough to write a bold and satirical exposé. Playwrights and other authors will find the ostracism of Zoshchenko sufficiently instructive for many years to come.

Other articles declared that literary and dramatic criticism were lagging behind the demands of life. The critics were charged with not struggling for the further maturing of literature and the drama. They were accused of straggling in the fight against bourgeois nationalism. This theme is discussed these days at Party, Komsomol and Soviet assemblies, conferences and deliberations. There is now no way in which to show one's natural love for one's own country. Friendship with the Russian nation must be stressed constantly, as well as the predominant influence of Russian literature on the development of national minority cultures. The dominating role of Russian culture must be acknowledged, a fact which is really leading to the eradication of the non-Russian cultures. The weakening of the native Byelorussian repertory reflects this process. Soviet Byelorussian culture is being reduced to one level and is losing its identity. The Byelorussian language is still permitted to exist in certain areas, such as the schools, the theater and literature, yet it is becoming more and more of a formality. According to Stalin's formula, it is only one official form for expressing the content of socialism.

On the other hand, the national ferment among the people cannot be uprooted. There are 180,000 official Soviet propagandists in Byelorussia who have struggled against nationalistic deviations for years. They have been aided by all the organs of governmental propaganda, including art, literature and the press. Nevertheless, the Soviet government has not yet succeeded in eradicating the Byelorussians' feelings for their native land, its natural phenomena and its people. The two symbols of nationalism in the official banner of the

Byelorussian S.S.R. are interesting. These are the woven pattern and the two national colors, green and red. It all seems to agree with the Byelorussian nationalists of the middle 1930's who found expression in the poem of that fine writer, Uladimir Duboŭka, entitled, "Oh Byelorussia, My Sweetbriar." The green is here associated with the green leaf, symbolizing the revival of life in young Byelorussia. The red is linked with the flowering of Byelorussian culture and the attainment of national self-determination.

In 1930 Duboŭka was removed and sent to a concentration camp as a nationalist. But in 1951, his ideas achieved their indirect culmination in the emblems of the Byelorussian state flag.

Dramatists have no confidence in their work. They have no guarantee against being annihilated by criticism in the Party press. Most important of all, playwrights are denied any theme connected with their love for their country and their people. All this has removed the final stimulus for writing new plays.

Cultural activities continue to be carried on in the Byelorussian language. Its very existence will always be a beacon. It will attract the nation's talents and will provide an increased stimulation for new figures to replace those who have been liquidated. Its national attributes will always awaken creativity. These attributes include the obvious existence of the Byelorussian republic, its national flag, its representation at the United Nations, and the existence of its national art and literature. The theater occupies a leading position in regard to over-all values, both cultural and national. The fate of Byelorussian culture in general depends on the outcome of the great and protracted duel between it and Bolshevism. Its fate depends on its persistence, its stubbornness, and its ability to stand up for its own values. The Yanka Kupala Theater has existed for over thirty years. It has faced terror, roadblocks, interdictions, and ideological oppression. Despite all this, it has been

loyal to art and defended it, a fact most evident in its acting technique. This can now be shown only negatively by leaving the obtrusive world of reality for that of artistic abstraction. The government understands this, and it has attacked all manifestations of this original way of protesting the violation of art. Nowadays, even a lack of political orientation and of ideas is systematically destroyed and uprooted. Let us not even mention the nationalist ideology. Therefore, the duel of the state against the theater and the arts becomes especially tense and tragic. In any case, however, the actors and directors of the Yanka Kupala Theater could be an important factor in a free, Byelorussian national culture of the future.

Numbered Notes to Part II

1. Ramanovich, Aŭhen, "Pratsa i budni belaruskaha pershaha dzyarzhaunaha tėatru za dzesyats' hod yaho isnavan'nya (1920-1930). Narys'" [The Work and Daily Life of the First Byelorussian State Theater During the Ten Years of Its Existence (1920-1930). A Sketch], *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, No. 4, 1931.

2. See first note on p. 3 above.

3. Ramanovich, *op. cit.*

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20. *Ibid.*

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24. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

25. Vol'ski, Ramanovich, Aŭhen [Romanovich, Yevgenii], and Sedegi, A., "Dramaticheskiye teatry Belorussii. Kratkii ocherk"

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Part III

THE SECOND BYELORUSSIAN STATE THEATER (RENAMED THE YAKUB KOLAS THEATER AFTER WORLD WAR II)

Chapter 38

INTRODUCTION

The temporary rise of culture during the first decade of the Byelorussian Republic was strikingly reflected in the creation of the Second Byelorussian State Theater and in the theater's early history.

This renascence in Byelorussian literature, music, theater art, drama, science, and education, was accompanied by a growth of national consciousness among the population, and an awakening of keen interest in knowledge and creative effort in all spheres of cultural life. It also brought about an influx of great numbers of young people to cultural activity of every kind.

Talented writers, playwrights, actors, artists, scientists, and teachers emerged from among the people. Numerous literary organizations were formed, among which were *Young Generation* (Maladnyak), *Loftiness* (Uzvyshsha), *Flame* (Polymya), *Flash* (Problesk), and *Literary Commune* (Litaraturnaya Kamuna) (the Byelorussian counterpart of the extremely experimental Russian "LEF."

Loftiness formulated its aim as the creation of a literature and an art of the highest standard, works that would live for all mankind and all ages.[1] The same desire to combine the national and the universal in an academically perfect form marked not only the literary work of the members of *Loftiness* but also that of some members of the *Flame* and *Young Generation* and of the other representatives of the new Byelorussian literature.

The Second Byelorussian State Theater revealed similar tendencies in many of its productions. Its early years (1926-1928) were inspired by the struggle for academic perfection, and marked the highest development of Byelorussian theater culture. Its productions of those years posed questions of the

specific characteristics of the Byelorussian theater—of creating a national style and an independent Byelorussian school of theater art.

The Soviet policy of gradual strangulation of the freedom of art encountered a growing opposition from those associated with the theater. The history of the struggle waged by this company for its principles is a vivid illustration of the fact that Bolshevism, with its narrow *partiinost'* and doctrinaire frame of mind, is hostile to the very fundamentals of genuine art and creative freedom.

The later forcible lowering of standards to the level of typical Soviet theater, pursuing so-called socialist realism, sheds light on what is in store for theater art under conditions of creative slavery. This situation makes it particularly important to note the manifestations, however slight, of a spirit of freedom and opposition in a land where none was tolerated. Living in the free world, we often fail to realize how difficult, if not impossible, it is to say "no" under a totalitarian yoke. Our special respect should therefore be paid to those persons and groups occupied with culture in the Soviet Union who had courage enough to resist the general trend and fight for their creative individuality. These persons and groups, with the help of allegorical allusions and Aesopian language, or sometimes even within the forms of established Soviet art, were able to express their opposition to the existing tyranny, to resist the overwhelmingly powerful spiritual pressure, to retain their spiritual values and to express them in one form or another, taking advantage of every loophole left open by the twists and turns in the policy of the Communist Party. It is no accident that in Soviet Byelorussia all traces of the early work of the Second State Theater have been carefully destroyed, or that the most important pages in Byelorussian theater history are concealed from the people. It is our duty to restore the truth, to show what the Second State Theater was like in its best years, and what it might have been if it had had the freedom which is incompatible with a totalitarian regime.

Chapter 39

THE STUDIO PERIOD

A year after the opening of the First Byelorussian State Theater at Minsk in November 1921, the authorities established the Byelorussian State Institute of Theater Art. The Institute's task was formulated as training and developing Byelorussian and Jewish[a] actors with the help of the vast experience of the best Moscow theaters. Two drama studios were organized at the Institute—one Byelorussian, the other Jewish. In the beginning, great plans were made. It was hoped to create an opera house with an opera company and a drama studio attached to it. These extensive plans, however, had to be temporarily abandoned because of material and financial difficulties during the postrevolutionary period in Byelorussia. The vast scheme was reduced to a single objective: the training of an acting company.

The student body of the studio was made up of the best members of amateur groups and a few young actors from the First Byelorussian State Drama Theater (A. K. Il'inski, Kastus' Sannikaŭ, O. Ye Vashkevich, Mikola Mitskevich, and S. M. Stanyuta). No idea of creating the Second Theater entered into original plans, and the project was conceived simply as a means of training new, thoroughly prepared replacements for the acting company of the First Theater. Only after five years of combined study of theater art and joint work on the production of plays, when the studio pupils developed into a single and well-integrated ensemble, was it decided that it would be bad policy to disperse members among other companies.

Thus, upon the completion of their five years' training

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a. Before Hitler's invasion, there was a very large Yiddish-speaking Jewish population in Byelorussia.—Ed.

and stage practice, the entire membership of the Byelorussian Studio, numbering thirty-four persons, was decreed by the Commissariat of Education in 1926 to be the Second Byelorussian State Theater. The city of Vitebsk was chosen as the permanent location of the new theater.

The preliminary work of the studio was important in determining the course followed by the Second Theater, and therefore merits our attention.

From the first day of its existence the Studio was confronted with a problem: which school of acting as practiced by what outstanding theater was to be chosen as a model and subject of its study? It was obvious that the new Byelorussian theater needed, and would benefit by, the experience, knowledge and culture accumulated by the Moscow theaters over several decades. Nor did study of the past contradict Soviet policy (as expressed by Lenin), which considered it necessary for the new Soviet culture to assimilate, after critical evaluation, the heritage of aristocratic and bourgeois culture. The numerous theatrical trends in postrevolutionary Moscow ranged from the Moscow Art Theater to Meierhold's Theater.[b] This made the choice rather difficult.

However, the Byelorussian Studio made its choice immediately. It expressed its preference for the school of theater art cultivated by the most accomplished theater in Soviet Russia: the Moscow Art Theater and its First Studio (which later was to become the Second Moscow Art Theater). The stage work, both in theory and practice, of Konstantin Stanislavski, one of the most outstanding theater figures of our age, together with his system of acting, was the guiding spirit in the Byelorussian Studio's work.

The leader of the Moscow Art Theater expressed great sympathy for the idea of a Byelorussian Studio. Men of high culture, like Stanislavski and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko,

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b. The Moscow Art Theater was considered a stronghold of realism (in the traditional sense of the word). Meierhold's Theater was characterized by frequent innovations.—Ed.

were free of the prejudiced, supercilious attitude towards other peoples which is characteristic of men of lesser stature. Stanislavski always preached the doctrine that all peoples must know one another and study the creative laws of human nature which are common to all.

This priest and leader of the Russian art of the theater became the artistic conscience also for the national minorities whose numerous dramatic groups received their training at the Moscow Art Theater and its Studios. Despite the fact that this training came as a task set by the government, it also answered the independent desire for a higher theater art among all the peoples of the country. The Moscow Art Theater reflected this attitude in its practice of taking the studios of other Soviet nationalities under its aegis. Furthermore, a theoretical basis was given to this practice by Stanislavski, who declared:

> Down with art that distorts the creative nature of man as an artist. Let us all help each other in getting to know the spirit of every nationality. Let every nation, every nationality, reflect in art its subtlest national and human traits, and let every one of these arts preserve its national colors, tones and special features. Let the spirit of every people reveal itself in this process. A good national play, well staged and played by good actors of its nation will best reveal the spirit of its people.[2]

This noble understanding of the tasks of the arts and theater of national minorities, with its tolerance of national potentialities of the non-Russian peoples, found its practical realization in the training of students of numerous Soviet non-Russian dramatic Studios by the Moscow Art Theater during the postrevolutionary period. The special effort stemming from this attitude went on, it must be remembered, side by side with the major activity involved in establishing several Moscow Art Theater Studios as independent theaters, such as the Second Moscow Art Theater, the Vakhtangov Theater and the Realistic Theater. After these theaters had been set up, the other studios of the parent theater continued their work, and eventually founded several provincial theaters.

Chapter 40

IN THE SERVICE OF ART AND NATIONAL REVIVAL

The first year (1921-1922) of the Byelorussian Studio's work was devoted mostly to theoretical study, carried on under the guidance of A.P. Bondarev, an actor of the Moscow Art Theater who served as chief artistic director. Staging was taught by B.M. Afonin, an actor of the First Studio, and by Maria N. Uspenskaya, an actress of the Moscow Art Theater, among others.

Towards the end of the first year a considerable number of the teaching staff of the Studio went with the Moscow Art Theater company on a tour abroad. They were replaced by V.S. Smyshlyayev, a stage director of the Moscow Art Theater, who was appointed chief director of the Studio, and by such actors as A.G. Geirot, S.V. Giatsintova and V.A. Gromov.

Organizational defects caused difficulties in the work of the Studio during its first two years. The appropriations provided by the People's Commissariat of Education were inadequate. The main difficulty, however, was the absence of permanent headquarters. As described by a member of the Studio in an article in *Maladnyak* [Young Generation] (No. 5, 1924), classes were conducted at the former restaurant *Praga,* the Ukrainian Club, the students' hostel, the Lapukhin plant in Ostozhenka, the Borokhov Club on Lubyanka Square, and Smyshlyayev's own apartment.

Studios did not take on a more normal aspect until the beginning of the third year. Stanislavski always preferred students with no previous training, so that it would be unnecessary to destroy habits of conventional acting and so as to permit a more direct and complete assimilation of Stanislavski's own system. In this respect the Byelorussian Studio was almost above reproach. The majority of students

had been amateurs in their own countryside. They had a rather low general level of education and lacked any special theater training. On the other hand, they all wished ardently to devote themselves wholeheartedly to art. They received every word or thought about the theater as a profound revelation which must be taken on faith and which admitted of no analytical reasoning.

The administrative chief of the Studio was a Byelorussian playwright and stage director, Ales' Lyazhnevich who had been appointed by the People's Commissariat of Education of Byelorussia. Lyazhnevich not only abstained from any interference with the artistic training, but even used his authority to create the necessary atmosphere of devotion to art.

Smyshlyayev trained the group in the spirit of the free artist who is not linked to the interests of any social group or party. During those first years after the Revolution there was still comparative freedom in the field of art; the directors and teachers of the Studio were entirely free to state their own ideas and to indoctrinate their students with them. At one time Sullerzhitski, the great teacher of the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theater, had tried to indoctrinate his students with the ideals of brotherhood in art and withdrawal from the vanities of daily life in the name of high Christian ideals. Similarly, teachers at the Byelorussian Studio tried to inculcate their followers and adherents of the pure high art of the Moscow Art Theater; they tried to build a new fraternity whose strength and unity was based on its faith in the highest ideals of the theater. In the process of studying the Stanislavski system and applying it on the stage, a new, lofty world of art they had never known opened before the Byelorussian students. One of the members of the Studio in 1923 wrote:

> This new world engulfed the young spirits. New strings were set vibrating inside them. The timid chords of art, unnoticeable to alien ears, began sounding within them. The chords gradually evolved into a melody which, with

> time, had to grow stronger and louder in order to awaken our land whose people, under foreign domination, have lost faith in themselves.[3]

The same article states that the students absorbed the Stanislavski system into their flesh and blood—that it became part of their being.

Here one fact deserves special notice: the complete absence in those years of a Marxist-Leninist education for the actors. During the first years of Soviet rule, no study of Marx's doctrine or of any so-called political grammar was ever considered at the Studio. The cult of the free artist fostered at the Studio ruled out submission to the influence of the everyday struggle for life or of politics. The artist had to be above both the empty life around him and its social problems. Moreover, membership in the Communist Party or the Komsomol was frowned upon as bad manners. In the eyes of the students, devotion to pure art was incompatible with membership in the Communist Party or the Komsomol. As a result of this attitude, students who had been members when they enrolled in the Studio, resigned their membership in the name of service to pure art. The few who refused, or were slow in resigning, were boycotted by both teachers and student body regardless of the quality of their class work, talents or congeniality.

Thus, from the very beginning, admission was barred to Communist Party doctrines, and all other ideological postulates preventing a student from being a free and independent artist were also ruled out.

On the other hand, a consciousness of their national traits and a desire to make their art serve the ideals of the Byelorussian national liberation and renascence constantly occupied and stirred the young actors. Both in statements by Lyazhnevich and in reports and reviews by the press, there were constant reminders that the Byelorussian theater was *original* in its own way, and that members of the Studio must be conscious fighters for this national, specifically Byelorussian, art in the theater.

This trend found particularly vivid expression in an article by Z'mitrok Byadulya; he was a prominent official of the People's Commissariat of Education of Byelorussia, editor of the magazine *Our Soil* [Nasha niva], and one of the oldest Byelorussian writers and students of the theater. He wrote in *Soviet Byelorussia* [Savetskaya Belarus]:

> Our theater studio found itself between two trends: the right-wing school of Stanislavski and the left-wing school of Meierhold. Which was it to choose? Of course, Stanislavski.
>
> The principal aim of the teaching staff of the school is to create a specifically Byelorussian theater; this will be its greatest value. *The future Byelorussian theater will succeed to the extent that it is exclusively Byelorussian.* [Italics added] Here is the lode star which our Studio must follow. Every member of this Byelorussian Studio is the future creator of a specific Byelorussian school of the theater. The Studio must create its own Byelorussian orchestra which will play *only* Byelorussian music.
>
> As regards the major repertory, we will not be interested at the beginning in seeing Shakespeare, Cervantes, Schiller, Molière, etc. on the Byelorussian stage. We can see them on any stage. From the Byelorussian boards, give us first only what is Byelorussian.[4]

Thus Byadulya gave the problem of national repertory its most positive formulation. Consciousness of national manumission, faith in the liberating aims of the Revolution, and the principles of national renascence dictated the demands for a national creative effort in all spheres of national life and culture, including the theater. The extreme character of this demand may be justified for such an early stage of development; the urgent need for a national repertory would warrant eliminating all other aims, and would cast doubt on the temporary usefulness of the classical repertory. Byadulya's views were seconded by the dramatic critic of *Young Generation* [Maladnyak]:

> For the Byelorussian theater to achieve its own character is one of its greatest tasks, the very meaning of its existence and value.... The Socialist October Revolution which

> has given the working people of the oppressed national minorities an opportunity for a national existence, gives their art the right to demand a similar opportunity.[5]

The five years of training received by the Byelorussian Studio under the Moscow Art Theater demonstrated that a harmonious accord between the aims of high theater art and the creation of a national theater was possible. By its preparatory work, its change-over to the Second Byelorussian State Theater, and its fruitful work during its two theater seasons the Studio proved the possibility of creating a genuine national Byelorussian theater on an academic level.

The Studio's work on plays began with *Devil and the Woman,* a one-act play by Frantsishak Alyakhnovich, and *The Inquisitive Watchman,* a dramatic sketch after Cervantes. These plays, however, were like laboratory projects for the practical work of the students; they were not worked out completely for stage presentation.

Real work on play production and building a repertory for the Second Byelorussian State Theater commenced with the study and rehearsal of the folk play *Tsar Maksimil'yan.* This was the first play to be properly worked out by the students. They studied all elements of the production, including the costumes, scenery and musical background. The entire group showed much enthusiasm in working on this old folk play which is quite popular in Byelorussia and which was familiar to every member of the Studio from the *batleika* repertory.

Other plays worked on by the Studio were taken from the classic repertory, including *The Bacchae* by Euripides, *Midsummer Night's Dream* by Shakespeare, *Eros and Psyche,* by Jerzy Żulawski (translated from Polish into Byelorussian by Yanka Kupala), and short sketches adapted from stories (*The Harbor,* from Maupassant's "La Vierge aux Vents," and *The Barber from Bireagu* by Max Mell). Partial work was done also on a number of productions which included *Hiawatha* by Longfellow, *Sakuntala* and *Won for Bravery* [Urvasi], *Two*

Chatterboxes based on a story by Cervantes, and also several original Byelorussian plays: *Astap* by Andrėi Globa, *In Bygone Times* by Il'ya Bėn and *Aprametnaya or The Kingdom of Hell* by Vasil' Shashalevich.

The folk play *Tsar Maksimil'yan,* as written by Aleksei Remizov and further adapted by a member of the Studio, Mikola Mitskevich, had its first public performance in Moscow on May 24, 1924. The Moscow audience received the production most favorably and the Moscow press also gave it several laudatory reviews. In June of the same year the play was given in Minsk. But the Minsk public, brought up on traditions of the realistic theater of everyday life, showed considerable reserve. They still regarded new trends in the theater as odd and not entirely comprehensible. Even later, when the Studio became the Second Byelorussian State Theater, its productions in constructivist style had only a cold reception in Minsk.

Working for its last two years in Moscow (1924-1925) and 1925-1926) on a classic repertory (*Bacchae* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*), the Studio revealed itself as a strong ensemble without any markedly outstanding individual performers.

In the spring of 1926 the Studio held its graduation ceremonies. The graduates numbered thirty-four persons and included the following: Tatsyana Bandarchyk, V. Barysevich, M. Vasileŭski, Z. Vyaliki, L. Hepner, A. Il'inski, Raisa Kashėl'nikava, I. Katovich, A. Korbush, Ya. Labanoŭskaya, M. Labanoŭski, H. Lanhina, A. Lahoŭskaya, Mazaloŭskaya, Mulyaŭka, Pavel Malchanaŭ, Mikola Mitskevich, Barys Rahavenka, A. Radzyaloŭskaya, Kastus' Sannikaŭ, Mikola Syan'ko, Pyotra Syarheichyk, S. Stėl'makh, S. Stanyuta, S. Skal'ski, V. Tyshkevich, Yaŭkhim Chaikoŭski, N. Charnazyomava, and L. Shynko.

In the fall of 1926 the entire body of Studio graduates went back to Vitebsk and began work under the name of the Second Byelorussian State Drama Theater.

At the time the company arrived in Vitebsk it had three plays completely ready for presentation: *Tsar Maksimil'yan, Bacchae* and *Midsummer Night's Dream.* The remaining plays in the Studio's repertory, which required further work, were taken over by the Second Theater for completion and later performance.

Chapter 41

GUARDING CULTURE AND THE ETHICS OF ART

To head the Second Byelorussian State Theater, local authorities appointed Mikola Krasinski, director of the Theater Subsection of the Institute of Byelorussian Culture. The theater was thus placed under the salutary influence of an institution which had the highest standing in the work of building Byelorussian culture.

To guide the theater in all matters of art, Suren Khachaturov, a stage director of the Moscow Art Theater, was invited. His leadership insured the theater's following the course pioneered by Stanislavski.

The theater opened its first season at Vitebsk on November 20, 1926 with Bėn's *In Bygone Times* and Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream.* The opening coincided with the Byelorussian Academic Conference for Reform of Byelorussian Spelling. Later, during the Soviet government's fight against the Byelorussian national movement known as Byelorussian National Democracy, this conference was to be denounced as a congress of all "counterrevolutionary" National-Democratic forces in Byelorussia. Invited to attend the conference, and taking part in it, were numerous Byelorussian scholars living abroad. Only a short time before they had been either members of the Byelorussian émigré government or acted as its emissaries in various countries of Western Europe. These men included such prominent Byelorussian émigré political figures as Vatslaŭ Lastoŭski and A. Halavinski from Lithuania; Kastus' Yezavitaŭ and Uladimir Pihuleŭski from Latvia; and Uladimir Zhylka from Czechoslovakia. The hall in which the Academic Conference met was decorated with canvas spreads of red and white—the white, red and white Byelorussian national flag under which the movement for independence of Byelorussia was carried

on in 1918. Proletarian emblems and portraits or busts of the revolutionary leaders were completely absent.

In his half-hour opening speech, Anton Balitski, People's Commissar of Education, did not even find it necessary to credit the Communist Party with a leading role in the cultural revival in Byelorussia. Even at that time, when revolutionary freedoms were still operative, this action was a defiance of the Party which claimed sole leadership in all spheres of life and culture.

The opening of the Second Byelorussian State Theater took place on the day when all members of the conference, which had just closed, were still in Minsk. Thus it was possible to invite them all to Vitebsk to attend the opening of the theater. Everything inside the theater reflected the national spirit of Byelorussian culture. Even the attendants wore uniforms resembling costumes worn in the palaces of the old Byelorussian nobility. The presence of the entire membership of the conference at the opening of the theater indicated the importance with which it was viewed, and emphasized and symbolized the theater's academic character and prominent place in the cultural life of Byelorussia.

The solemnity of the occasion, however, was marred by the local Communists. At Minsk, the capital of Byelorussia, the foreign visitors had been treated with diplomatic tact. Their sentiments were not assailed by underscored proletarianism and Communist speeches, nor did they have to listen to the "Internationale" which was customary at all Soviet ceremonies, or to stand applauding for long stretches of time. The entire conference was conducted in a business-like atmosphere where discussions of scientific papers and problems of reforming Byelorussian spelling were paramount.

At Vitebsk, however, local "Party Comrades" decided to show off their strict Communist convictions. In the official greeting to foreign visitors, emphasis was laid on their being representatives of countries which were still non-Soviet, bourgeois and therefore second-rate, so to speak. The "Inter-

nationale" was played repeatedly, compelling foreign visitors to rise to their feet each time. All the speeches were given in strict Communist spirit to please local Communist authorities, and the theater orchestra was so demonstratively Communist that it annoyed the company and its art director, Khachaturov. In the orchestra's behavior Khachaturov saw a breach of the great principles of art in which the theater company had been brought up; therefore, he wrote a letter to the musicians which was filled with sincere anxiety for the future of the theater and its art.

Made up of local musicians who had not had the benefit of the Moscow Art Theater's training, the orchestra, in Khachaturov's opinion, needed an explanation of the aims of the theater and the principles professed by the company. His letter is of considerable interest as a document confirming the unison of the high ideals of the school of art represented by the Moscow Art Theater and of the aims of Byelorussian national art which the theater was called upon to serve. At the same time the letter confirms the incompatibility of these aims with the understanding of theater and art within the narrow limits of party and provincial mentality as displayed by the agencies of the Soviet government. The letter read as follows:

Dear Comrades,

Members of the Orchestra:

I congratulate you on the opening of the theater. This is a major event not only for the cultural and public life of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic but for our entire Soviet Union. For five years the young group of actors, working with enthusiasm and youthful emotion, has been contributing to the cause of the new Byelorussian Theater. With the same enthusiasm and unflagging energy it is now starting the second page of its Book of Genesis. You have been brought into our artistic family for joint creative work. Yesterday we had our opening. ... All the objective conditions seemed to make failure inevitable. ... The actors did not have a wink of sleep for three days and three nights, being busy in "the kitchen" of the theater, i.e., doing what is not visible to the audience. ... Thirty-four other persons and myself were consciously

getting ready for a fiasco because we could not stop time. Ours is a thorny path, and more than once we will witness our failure. Such is the capricious nature of Art.

Yesterday will be of good service to us. It is an asset on our balance sheet because our mistakes must help us to learn and grow. In a theater, the first and main thing is the company of artists. Yesterday it was the last. ... I say all this to you, dear Comrades, in order to warn you at the beginning of your responsible work and to bring you into the circle of ideas, desires, hopes, and dreams of the true creators of this enterprise, the actors of the company. They to you, and you to them, are brothers in art. Join them closely in one artistic family—a family of free, enthusiastic artists, organically and essentially bound each to the others, and together do cultural work of enormous importance. In our family, you are young, and just starting out—watch us and learn from us. Remember that this theater is the offspring, the flesh and blood of the Moscow Art Theater—the first, the unique theater not only of the Soviet Union but also of Western Europe. Its fathers and leaders include Konstantin Stanislavski, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, V.I. Smyshlyayev and others—"their name is legion."

Watch with sharp eyes and be sensitive and attentive to everything related to the art life of the theater. Remember that the theater lives in Vitebsk, i.e., in the provinces, far removed from the capital and its *alma mater.* This makes it all the more necessary for us to be vigilant watchmen guarding culture and the ethics of theater art.

Yesterday was the first slip in the direction of an unhappy theater. Our theater-ship has sprung a leak and revealed shoddy and provincial workmanship. Hold fast and firm, taking the cue from your comrades in the troupe; help one another and let the true and real character of the theater be a reflection of the artistic body as a whole—a free union of artists bearing the Idea of Beauty to the playgoer.[6]

This letter is the earliest evidence of the hard and drawn-out struggle which the Second Byelorussian State Theater began for the principles of art "bearing the idea of beauty to the playgoer," an art free from the world of political passions.

The lofty thoughts expressed in Khachaturov's letter were to find a deep response in the hearts and minds of the young actors. Party functionaries with their heartless economic doctrines would not find it easy to restrain the youthful impulse towards art and to silence the artistic conscience of the actors. Echoes of this unequal struggle produced much of universal significance in the history of the Byelorussian Theater.

Chapter 42

THE ACADEMIC PERIOD

The Second Byelorussian State Theater played in Vitebsk during its entire first season (1926-1927), and only on rare occasions went to Polotsk, Mogilev and other Byelorussian cities. During that season the Theater gave a total of 97 performances, of which 79 were given at Vitebsk.

Plays produced were as follows: *Midsummer Night's Dream* by Shakespeare; *In Bygone Times* by Il'lya Bėn; *Tsar Maksimil'yan* after Aleksei Remizov; *Astap* by Andrėi Globa; *Eros and Psyche* by Jerzy Żulawski; and *Bacchae* by Euripides. To this list must also be added the short sketches included in "an evening of miniatures": *Harbor* (after Guy de Maupassant's *La Vierge aux Vents*); *Barber from Bireagu* by Max Mell; *Devil and a Woman* by Frantsishak Alyakhnovich.

The next season the theater played at Minsk where it gave ninety-two performances, among them a number of newly produced plays: *Tsar Maksimil'yan* was given fourteen times; *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* by Vasil' Shashalevich, three times; *Astap*, six times; *Midsummer Night's Dream*, eleven times; *In Bygone Times*, eight times; *Around the Terrace* by Mikhas' Hramyka, fourteen times; and *When the Cocks Crow* by Yur'in, twice. In addition to the performances given at the Municipal Theater in Minsk, the Second Theater often staged its plays in factories and workers' clubs, bringing its activity close to the people.

Former Studio pupils, actors Mikola Mitskevich, Kastus' Sannikaŭ, P. Syarheichyck and Yaŭkhim Chaikoŭski, were now able to take over the whole work of staging.

Productions presented during the first two years of the theater's work marked the highest point of its artistic development. This was the period when its art was of a truly academic standard. In its spiritual and intellectual aspirations, this

was then the most national Byelorussian theater. A further development of this achievement during the first two years would have created a characteristic Byelorussian art style in the theater. Everything the theater did was marked by a conspicuous freedom in its choice of theatrical form and plays. Even later Soviet critics have been unable to skip over the fine quality of the Second Theater's productions:

> The fine craftsmanship of the actors' performances from the very first days of the theater's existence, showed the audience that the young company had thoroughly absorbed much of the heritage of Russian theater culture and especially of the rich stage experience of the Moscow theaters. Hostile nationalist elements, however, which made their way into the leadership of the cultural reconstruction in Byelorussia, tried, and at times not without success, to utilize the new theater for purposes of exercising an ideologically foreign, bourgeois and nationalist influence on the audience.
>
> To this end an appropriate "original" repertory was chosen for the theater—a repertory consisting of plays which are not worthy of being mentioned. From reactionary points of view, too, the theater in its first years interpreted such classical works as Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Euripides' *Bacchae*. In the theater itself, among its body of actors, all kinds of reactionary theories and mystic teachings were preached. [7]

Still later, Soviet critics completely ignored the original national repertory of these years. Thus the most remarkable pages in the history of Byelorussian theater art are in danger of complete oblivion. Documents of the greatest value dealing with the history of this exceptionally fruitful period of the theater have been destroyed completely because they are unacceptable to the later trend of Soviet policy in art. Hence the necessity, in our opinion, for collecting these materials and restoring the true picture of the Second Byelorussian Theater in order to counteract the distorted image which is drawn by Soviet critics today.

Chapter 43

UNDER THE SIGN OF THE KNIGHT'S SHIELD

During the first two seasons of the Second Byelorussian State Theater its repertory was made up of plays which varied greatly in style and content. Included were classical and modern plays, old and new Byelorussian plays (such comedies are the *Gentleman's Stylish Son* by Karus' Kahanets, *Devil and a Woman* by Frantsishak Alyakhnovich, and *Nobles of Pinsk* by Vintsènt Dunin-Martsinkevich), historical plays and finally, one-act plays (which were staged mostly at workers' clubs).

The theater's first production was the historical folk play, *Tsar Maksimil'yan.* This play was adapted especially for the Second Theater by one of its actor-directors, Mikola Mitskevich; he used Aleksei Remizov's version as a basis and added the written records of the folk play from Minsk and the Rechitsa District of Byelorussia's Gomel' Region. Use of the subtly stylized Remizov version and the Byelorussian folk variants made the production considerably more effective on the stage. Running through the play is the theme of eternal struggle between the people and autocratic tyranny. This theme has always been of direct and immediate significance for the Byelorussians, the stepchildren of the Russian empire. In the theater's production, it became associated with the struggle of all working people against social and national inequality, the struggle for equal rights in life for everybody. The idea of the production as seen by the artistic directors of the Second Theater themselves, was stated in the following program note:

> The oppressed people have suffered the autocracy of Tsar Maksimil'yan for a long time and have come to put up with it (the Chorus' songs of welcome); like a spider, the tyranny tangles everyone in its web and subjugates people in order only to satisfy its own interests and desires. Time

> passes—years, centuries, millenia—but the oppressed people bear it all, only seeking "the painful age-old justice." At last this justice comes. A mighty knight arrives, destroys the autocracy and kills Tsar Maksimil'yan. This basic idea, which runs through the entire play, is reflected not only in the dialogue and action, but in the settings as well. The stage construction symbolizes a spider. On closer examination, one clearly discerns the spider: the center (Tsar Maksimil'yan's throne) stands for the spider's head, the middle part for the spider's body, and on both sides are evenly spaced steps and hand-rails for its legs and cobweb."[8]

As produced by the theater, *Tsar Maksimil'yan* had two acts and an interlude. The first act opens on a scene showing the people rendering homage to Tsar Maksimil'yan.

The entire cast come onto the stage and take their places on the stage construction. Tsar Maksimil'yan himself occupies a place in the center both of the stage and the superstructure. The chorus sings a song of welcome, glorifying the Tsar:

> To a Tsar of our own with a golden crown,
> Yes, yes, yes, with a golden crown,
> We give him the crown, he sits on the throne,
> On the lofty throne, which is so ornate.
>
> Oh, we have given a crown made of gold,
> Yes, to the Tsar over us,
> Yes, to the Tsar over us.
> Yes, the noise grew as the ball flew
> Yes, the ball flew,
> Bee-fierce it came through,
> And arrow-sharp too.
> . . . . . .
>
> Glory, glory, glory,
> To Tsar Maksimil'yan
> Honor, praise, and glory.

Against this background of popular sentiments, a tragic conflict develops on religious grounds between Tsar Maksimil'yan and his son, Adolf. Adolf refuses to worship pagan gods. For disobeying his father, he is condemned to death; Brambeŭs, the executioner, carries out the sentence.

In the second act, the people's admiration for the Tsar gives way to disappointment and disaffection. The tyranny with which he has been oppressing the people and furthering his personal interests arouses their indignation and makes them change their attitude towards him:

> Just take a look, yes, our good people,
> And see what it is, this justice of tsars,
> This justice of tsars, of Maksimil'yan's,
> He had but one son, and that son was destroyed!

Against the background of these popular moods, the first scene of Act II shows a desperate argument between Anika, the Soldier, and Death, in which the Tsar's loyal servant loses his life. In the second scene Tsar Maksimil'yan struggles with Tsar Mamai[a] and appears to be getting the better of his opponent. But in the third scene of Act II, a heroic Knight, who personifies the people, avenges the death of the Tsar's son and the people's suffering by killing Maksimil'yan. The result satisfies the people's craving for "painful, age-old justice."

Clearly the story is serious in intent. But as in any folk drama, such as the *batleika,* important events are presented side by side with comic skits of social or historical content. Similarly, *Tsar Maksimil'yan,* as staged by the Second Theater, shows Maksimil'yan's coronation, his wedding to Venus and his treatment by his chief physician; there is also an amusing satirical scene of the priest and deacon who have lost their wedding ritual book, after having used it as payment for drinks, and are obliged to rattle off the service without the book. These skits are not always, perhaps, joined together firmly enough by the logic of the plot, but no such demands should be made on a *batleika* type folk play; otherwise its specific character would be lost. The authors of

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a. To Russians, the name Mamai brings up folk memories of the Tatar Khan of that name who ravaged Russia before he was defeated at Kulikova Field in 1380. His conqueror was Prince Dmitri of Muscovy, surnamed "Donskoi."—Ed.

Tsar Maksimil'yan did the right thing in preserving the folk style and characteristics of this play as it had been performed in the old days at the market place with alternating serious scenes and interludes. It is therefore difficult to agree with Aleksandr Vaz'nyasenski's demand for "an expressive dramatic treatment."[9] There is error in the very comparison of this dramatic work with several other Russian and West European dramas embodying the same ideas ("social and revolutionary" according to Professor Vaz'nyasenski's terminology), as there would be in generally applying the criteria of one form of literature to other forms; each one has its own character, and follows its own laws of development. Professor Vaz'nyasenski wrote:

> The play *Tsar Maksimil'yan* lives among the people to this day and is sometimes acted as a *batleika.* Its text is in the process of constant change to answer the demands of changing times. The treatment of this play by the company of the Second Theater is in the spirit of the social tendencies of our times; it is in complete harmony with the treatment it received in the folk theater. But embodying a certain social and revolutionary idea, this play is produced side by side with a number of other plays, both Russian and West European, which embody the same ideas in an artistically satisfying manner. Against the background of this revolutionary repertory on social themes, *Tsar Maksimil'yan* must have expressive dramatic treatment. It must be a true play with unity of action in both its main and secondary situations. The treatment of the main situation of the play fully satisfies the demands of dramatic art and holds the audience spellbound from beginning to end; however, this cannot be said of the dramatic organization of the secondary scenes and details, which is far from complete. The theater must continue work on creating tense and expressive action in the small scenes and interludes. The art-conscious dramatist must never forget that strong, energetic action unifying all parts of the play, both large and small, in a single integrated whole, constitutes the basis for all drama.[10]

Professor Vaz'nyasenski's demand is correct as regards the art of drama in general; if applied to this particular case, however, it would only wipe out the specific characteristics

of folk drama; it would lead to the elimination of its important element, the interlude. Without this it would cease to be folk drama.

Work on *Tsar Maksimil'yan* began during the Studio's training period in Moscow, under the general artistic guidance of Smyshlyayev himself. The direction was by Barys Afonin and Smyshlyayev; scenery and costumes were by L. Nikitin, and the music was by A. Olenin.

Production of this play revealed an exceptionally high level of acting and theatrical culture in the Second Byelorussian Theater. As in several of its other productions during this period, the Byelorussian Theater did not confine itself to following the road of the realistic and psychological school of the Moscow Art Theater or of trying to assimilate all that had been achieved by the Second Moscow Art Theater. It also brought within the orbit of its stage experience the best achievements of other theaters; it adapted many elements from Meierhold's theory of biomechanics in acting, constructivism in stage sets, and as a general aim, the conventionalized theatricalism of Vakhtangov.

The production of *Tsar Maksimil'yan* was marked by a richly underscored theatricalism, a great sublety in the acting, a striking sense of humor, and a perfect smoothness of the ensemble.

The opening performance served to unfold the program of the young theater. The shield of the heroic knight, bearer of the people's concept of justice in *Tsar Maksimil'yan,* became the basis of the emblem of the Second Byelorussian State Theater. Following the example set by the emblem of the sea gull[b] used by the Moscow Art Theater, the knight's shield appeared on all posters and official documents of the theater. The seemingly abstract character of the knight's shield became a symbol of the people's vengeance on their

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b. From Chekhov's play of the same name, which was the Moscow Art Theater's first hit.—Ed.

oppressors, and expressed the idea of the people's national awakening and of the renascence in Byelorussian culture.

To realize fully the national significance of this emblem, one must recall that the coat of arms of the Byelorussian national movement, the so-called "Pursuit" (*Pohonya*), also pictures a knight on horseback holding a shield and a sword, ready to charge in defense of his land and his people. The Byelorussian poet Maksim Bahdanovich expressed the idea of the national awakening in the poem *Lithuanian Pursuit* in which the Knight's sword is called upon to stir the Byelorussians to a consciousness of their national individuality and independence.

At the time *Tsar Maksimil'yan* was produced in the Byelorussian version it did not arouse the biased hostility that distinguished Soviet criticism in later years. On the contrary, both in Moscow and Vitebsk the production was greeted with enthusiasm and appreciated as a major artistic achievement. After the studio performance of May 24, 1924 in Moscow, the Moscow press commented favorably on the Studio's work. One critic wrote:

> The lights go out, and the flashing beams of a colored spotlight strike the actors of the young Byelorussian Studio. They are dressed in marvelous costumes and are scattered upon the steps in a tempestuous wave of sentiment and temperament—fiery in song and dance. It becomes evident that the company's acting gifts, as well as the work of the director and artist, justify the sweeping expanse of the effort; they overcome not only the space of the hall, but also a thousand people in the audience.[11]

Evening Moscow [Vechernyaya Moskva], it must be admitted, proved more orthodox in the Soviet sense. Even at that time the same newspaper found it necessary to point out that the play's subject matter was not directly and immediately related to the problems of the day. The newspaper noted favorably only the single "anti-religious" episode in the interlude with the priest and deacon:

> Remizov's text should of course have been treated much more freely. The interludes, one notes regretfully, have not

> been made use of in the necessary and easily realizable spirit (except for single anti-religious episode). The production lays special stress on being apolitical and aesthetic. This is its second weakness.[12]

The demand for a freer treatment of the texts of classical and folk plays was characteristic of the postrevolutionary years when everything was changing, and the extreme revolutionary groups were declaring that the classics were dated and doomed to be thrown overboard from the ship of revolutionary art.[c] Free treatment of classics and plays in general, in imitation of the talented innovator Meierhold was seen in many theaters, and became a customary demand of the new drama critics.

Star [Z'vyazda], the organ of Byelorussian Communists, also appraised the production according to this double-entry bookkeeping; it praised the artistic side and pointed out ideological errors in its content as if one were independent of the other. *Star* wrote:

> The production as a whole is a true product of artistic culture; from the actors to the designer, everybody contributed to the success of the production. As a result of the joint efforts and of everyone's personal interest, the performance was fresh and vigorous. The theater's ideological errors, however, demand attention and must not be permitted in works to come.[13]

The Byelorussian nationalists greeted the production rapturously, regarding it as a guarantee that Byelorussian culture was advancing towards the all-European ideal and world culture. A review by Z'mitrok Zhylunovich in *Soviet Byelorussia* remarked about Tsar Maksimil'yan's traveling on a Minsk horse-drawn street car.

A few years later, Soviet surveys of the history of the Second Byelorussian State Theater declared productions of

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c. Shortly before the First World War, a school of Russian literary figures, the Futurists, called Pushkin "incomprehensible" and demanded that he, Tolstoy and Dostoyevski be thrown from "the ship of modernity." The Futurists tried to ride to literary power on the coattails of Communist power after 1917.—Ed.

this early period to be hostile in spirit; it then became impossible to comment favorably on the production of *Tsar Maksimil'yan,* even though mention was still permitted. This was in contrast to the fate of two of the theater's other productions; *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* by Vasil' Shashalevich and *Around the Terrace* by Mikhas' Hramyka. The authors of those plays were jailed and their very names declared "unworthy of mention."

Unable to ignore completely the artistic qualities of *Tsar Maksimil'yan,* a drama critic of 1940 yet managed to belittle them in the following way:

> The solution of the problem of production in regard to ideas and their artistic realization cannot be regarded as successful. The folklore material of a market place folk play such as *Tsar Maksimil'yan* was used by the theater for creating a formalist aesthetic, stylized show far removed from genuine folklore. Principles of over-refined stylization, the ideas of fate and doom, love and death in mystical interpretation—these special features of the aesthetic theater found extensive application in the first period of this Theater's creative work, especially in *Tsar Maksimil'yan.*[14]

At least it is gratifying to note that in 1940 the author of this survey dared to mention the production at all. At one time, it had been branded "National Democratic and counter-revolutionary."

Chapter 44

WINNING EUROPEAN ACCLAIM

A high water mark in the work of the Second Byelorussian State Theater was its production of *Midsummer Night's Dream.* The play was directed by the theater's art director, Valentin Smyshlyayev; the scenery and costumes were designed by L. Nikitin, and music was provided by V. Sokalaŭ-Fedotaŭ. The production was distinguished by a particular sense of unity and style. The theater succeeded in retaining the lightness and fairy tale quality of Shakespeare's comedy in the acting and especially in the scenery.

The ancient Greek style of the stage sets and costumes was a triumph of imagination and pictorial loveliness. There was a complete illusion of a fairy-tale world of fascinating beauty. The scenes in the forest, in which lighting effects were used extensively, had the genuine magic of a fairy tale. With the help of moving spotlights the scenes were changed rapidly, giving the play a highly dynamic quality.

The slim white columns seemed unreal against the black velvet background, and the white, translucent houses seemed to be floating in space. The human beings on the stage appeared like shadows, moving in space like elves, gracefully and rhythmically—soaring into the air on black wires invisible against the backdrop.

This was the theater's best production, employing the principles of stylization and constructivism; it earned much fame for the Byelorussian theater in other countries. Delegates from various organizations in Western Europe who visited Byelorussia in those years were unanimous in regarding this production as a great artistic achievement. For example, Dr. Zdeněk Nejedlý of Czechoslovakia, an authority on history and the history of music, after seeing Midsummer

Night's Dream in 1927, noted his impressions as follows:

> Under the great impact of the performance of *Midsummer Night's Dream,* carried off artistically both in matters of acting and direction, I wish the State Byelorussian Theater the greatest success in their future. I am convinced that future development of the Byelorussian theater along these lines will add to the credit not only of Byelorussia but also of the entire world of art.[15]

The extent of Dr. Nejedlý's enthusiasm can be judged also from his remarks to members of the company backstage:

> I expected to see much, but what I saw tonight exceeded all expectations. It is difficult to understand how your new theater was able to rise to such heights so quickly. Don't take it as a compliment, but your production would have been a great event in Prague, too. People would have flocked to see you if you had gone to Prague. Our National Theater [Narodní Divadlo] would have been packed to the rafters and there wouldn't have been a seat to be had.[16]

Another representative of the same delegation, Dr. Bartošek, made the following statement:

> The Byelorussian State Theater is in no way inferior to Moscow theaters either in acting or direction. ... The extraordinary development of Byelorussian art after the tsarist oppression is the result of the Revolution; it is also clear that by its closeness to the people, the Byelorussian Theater serves the same Revolution.[17]

On his return to Prague, Dr. Nejedlý, in both his printed and spoken statements, repeatedly confirmed his impressions on the subject. On December 17, 1926, he declared in Prague (in his report, *Political and Cultural Attainments of Byelorussia*):

> The Byelorussian theater has attained a very high level of development, despite its youth. Soviet Byelorussia has four state theaters, of which one is a Jewish theater. During my stay in Minsk, the Byelorussian State Theater was giving Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream.* The production was perfect. I have never seen a better one in all my life. Its vitality and organized unity were particularly striking. Even our best "National Theater" in Prague has nothing to equal it.

> It is difficult even to list these major attainments in a short speech. Their significance increases when one realizes that the conditions for its development were extraordinarily unfavorable. These conditions were caused to no small degree by Byelorussia's rapacious neighbor, Poland, which has stifled all manifestations of Byelorussian cultural life.[18]

Among the reviews published was one by Z'mitrok Zhylunovich, the veteran Byelorussian writer, playwright, literary and dramatic critic. He noted the unity of style in all details of the production, the finesse of acting, and the high inspirational quality in the treatment of the play.[19] Criticism, however, also included those Soviet critics who stressed the propagandistic ideas of a theater rather than its skill on the stage. Of course, the production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* could not respond to desires that classics be made contemporary through artistic adaptation to the issues of the day. Even in Moscow, where one might have expected greater respect for art and its traditions, the press was dissatisfied with Shakespeare's play because its content did not correspond to the interests of Soviet life and the tasks of the revolution in culture. *Our Newspaper* [Nasha gazeta] bewailed the fact that the director had not revealed any critical approach to fantastic phenomena; its critic found that the action and characters had not been unmasked satisfactorily. He was afraid lest the audiences believe the fairy-tale plot to be real. Hence his groundless reproach of the production:

> The entire production is immature and reveals a dichotomy. Two mutually contradictory tendencies destroy the unity of the play. An ironic approach to the scenes in Athens and of the Athenians in the woods is appropos and even necessary. Taking this fairy-tale plot seriously sounds queer. (This occurs in almost all the scenes in the woods, with the fairies, etc.).[20]

Uladimir Lilin, the critic for the *Star,* simply rebuked the theater for not using Shakespearean interludes to insert contemporary themes about the evils of the day. Hence he found the show a mere phenomenon of art, or simply a beau-

tiful spectacle irreconcilable with a utilitarian approach to art. This duality shows up in his writing:

> In comparison to previous productions, *Midsummer Night's Dream* is certainly a step forward. This is true about the production on the whole. Yet, the audience remained indifferent to it—for a simple and understandable reason. *Midsummer Night's Dream* is only a beautiful spectacle. The theater was unable to incarnate its essence. To tell the truth, this could have been done by using the interludes to introduce something contemporary.[21]

Vitali Vol'ski, another Party critic, noted the divergence between the artistic values of the play and its social significance. He concluded that "the former in no way bring the production close to the masses. Both in content and in tendency, the production remains alien to the audience."[22]

Desiring to parade their ideological orthodoxy, the dramatic critics demanded that the theater express some ideological postulate. This not only confused the public but also handicapped the directors and the company. In subsequent years these demands became a scourge to the Second Theater; they eventually destroyed its striking individual features. The production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* in those subsequent years, like everything that was best in this theater's history, was branded as "National-Democratic," not because of its specific content but because of its supposed general philosophy of "affirming the subconscious, the elemental, and the intuitive."[23] The closest examination of the production, however, shows that it would hardly be possible to admit that this was its philosophy.

Absurd statements of this nature enjoyed one advantage—neither Shakespeare, nor the directors of the production were in a position to disprove them. Hence, a Soviet critic writing in 1940 could say without fear of contradiction: "Abstract time (despite the antique stylization of the décor and costumes), symbolism, escape from reality to the illusory world of poetic dreams. Such was the basis of this production."[24]

Thirteen years had passed. Neither the theater's direc-

tors, the members of the Second Moscow Art Theater who remained at liberty, nor the very fact that the comedy had been produced, could possibly be described in 1940 in the already dated and threadbare term, "the National-Democratic counterrevolution." But to be on the safe side, the critics naturally had no desire to give up vilification of this remarkable production. This had taken on the character of a tradition. The bugaboo of the reactionary philosophy of idealism was clamped on the production to insure the critics against a possible charge of the terrible sin of liberalism and tolerance of a hostile ideology. Since their attacks involved a writer of the genius of Shakespeare, their farcical criticism of his work only placed them in a particularly invidious, pitiful and comic position.

Chapter 45

SAILING THE CLASSICAL COURSE

The same stylized and constructivist treatment marked two other remarkable classic productions of the Second Theater in its first season: *Eros and Psyche* by Jerzy Żulawski and *Bacchae* by Euripides.

Eros and Psyche was directed by Barys Afonin, with settings by L. Nikitin. This Polish play was translated into Byelorussian by the national poet Yanka Kupala. The story, in which love and the soul are symbolized by the two principal characters, derives from ancient Greek myths and was given its final ancient form by Apuleius. Żulawski borrowed from the latter a number of scenes: Psyche loses Eros with whom she has fallen in love, and in a protracted effort to find him, never loses hope. Finally, after great trials, her search ends in triumph. Żulawski gave the story many new twists and weighted it with deeper significance. Writing at that time, Ye. I. Barychėŭski, a scholar of great and subtle erudition in the field of world literature and the author of the first Byelorussian works on the theory of literary genres, gave the following interpretation of the play's philosophy:

> 1. The path of Psyche's long and painful wanderings is identified with the historical path followed by humanity.
>
> 2. To the image of the human soul (Psyche), ever in motion, ever seeking distant goals, and to the image of love (Eros) that ever kindles our spirit and calls us forward, is added the third image—that of Blax (a Greek word meaning sluggish, careless and stolid). Blax personifies the powers of narrow-mindedness, self-satisfaction, and deception which obstruct the path of Psyche, who personifies the better elements of mankind.
>
> The originality of the artistic concepts is manifested in an equally original form, in a poetic work described by its author as a stage narrative.

> Both Psyche and Blax are indestructible characters who only change their appearance in every age. The richness and variety of scenes permit the audience to range over the whole history of mankind in its most important periods; they make this play extremely interesting as a spectacle. The compositional concept—to show the struggle between Psyche and Blax in the changing ages—awakens thought regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with the author's interpretation of history and its different epochs.[25]

Professor Barychėŭski's analysis of Żulawski's play suggests that the thoughts stirred in the minds of Soviet playgoers must have been far from favorable to the Soviet system. The noble aspirations of Psyche coincide with the best aspirations of humanity; they encounter not only a lack of understanding but the actual opposition of Blax, the personification of dark, low, material interests. Under Soviet conditions, the play was perceived as the scenic embodiment of the struggle between idealism (Psyche) and materialism (Blax). The Communist guardians of ideological orthodoxy could hardly view without protest the character of Blax pictured to personify everything that was barbarous, repulsive and base—factors which have been and are now obstructing the progress of humanity towards the high ideals embodied in its science, philosophy, literature, art and other forms of creative endeavor. These ideals inspire the intelligentsia and help to educate and advance man. To the guardians of communism, it was clear that hidden behind the symbols of Zulawski's play was an attempt to discredit materialism and set idealism against it as a philosophic system. The Soviet theorists of materialism repeatedly protested against this simplified and mechanical interpretation of materialism as a system that denies high ideal aspirations and reduces everything to material economic facts; in practice, however, the comprehension of materialism among most Soviet Communists in those years was far below the required level. Many persons held that materialism was the basis of the world outlook of the proletariat and was therefore progressive, while idealism characterized the views of the bourgeoisie and

was therefore reactionary. As seen by Communists, the play enshrined idealism in Psyche and condemned materialism in Blax. Hence the conclusion was drawn that the play was reactionary.

The public was unprepared to perceive the significance of such philosophically saturated plays, and indifferent to the most dramatic situations, it was completely confused by the severe criticism of the play in the Soviet press. Instead of being helped to follow the theater and rise to a higher stage of cultural progress and understanding of a genuine work of art, the Soviet audience was fed press denunciations of "reactionaries and idealists" in the theater; as a result, it felt even cooler toward the productions. After reading these unfavorable reviews, Soviet trade unions and public organizations refused to buy tickets for their members; this is an important factor in the economics of Soviet theaters. After a few performances to an empty house, plays like *Eros and Psyche* were withdrawn from the stage.

In a brief account of the development of the Second Byelorussian State Theater a Soviet writer mentions the production of *Eros and Psyche;* he finds it necessary, however, to confine himself to pointing out the alien nature of the play.

> At the basis of this production lay the idealistic thesis that everything earthly leads to self-deception, disappointment and destruction, and that only the soul (liberated of everything earthly) can save the world. This stage story of Żulawski's harmonized with the ideas and artistic aspirations held by the theater during this first period. A heavy pall of mysticism shrouded this production.[26]

Similar Communist disapproval followed the production of Euripides' *Bacchae,* directed by Valentin Smyshlyayev, with scenery and costumes by B. Matrunin and music by A. Aleksandrov. Once again the theater was taken to task for its uncritical approach to the classics and for treating the characters as Euripides himself had seen them, instead of introducing elements from the contemporary scene and thus overcoming the idealistic view of real life by the ancient author. *Bacchae,*

like the other productions of this group, was declared far removed from and unacceptable to the modern Soviet audience.

The bitterness of critical attacks on the theater in connection with *Bacchae* even increased as a result of the theater's insistence on a respect for the classics that ruled out all attempts at change and adaptation. The characteristics and peculiarities of ancient plays were attributed to the school of art represented by the theater; this created a wide but artificial gulf between the theater and the Soviet public. Neither the theater, nor Yuli Dreizin, the outstanding Byelorussian classical scholar who translated the play, could eliminate either the laws of fate which hang over the characters of all ancient tragedies or the cult of Bacchus. Nevertheless, the half-educated critics in the Communist press turned even this fact against the theater. In the 1940 anthology, which has already been mentioned, the production of *Bacchae,* too, is explained by the idealistic and aesthetic views of the Second Theater:

> The treatment of Euripides' tragedy set out to prove the impossibility and futility of man's struggle against fate and its laws. Pentheius, the man who dares to engage in a struggle with Dionysos, the god, is severely punished. He dies by the hand of his own mother. This plot of the ancient tragedy, together with its background, the cult of Bacchus, was used by the theater for a production organically close in its spirit and aesthetic characteristics to its predecessors.[27]

Chapter 46

REALISTIC PLAYS

Along with these examples of true art, the Second Byelorussian State Theater also produced two realistic plays: *In Bygone Times* by Il'lya Bėn and *Astap* by Andrėi Globa. These plays provided the company with few opportunities for creative imagination: hence their productions must be classified among the theater's less distinguished. Their selection can be explained only as an unavoidable concession to the demands of the Soviet public.

In Bygone Times was directed by Barys Afonin and had sets and costumes by L. Nikitin. It was a melodrama from the life of Byelorussian serfs in the early part of the nineteenth century. The play lacked striking characters or dramatic situations; as a substitute for this, it had too many realistic and ethnographic details. Its central theme was the suffering of peasant serfs, who were shown as a homogeneous mass with no class differences. This view of peasantry brought criticism of the play in the Soviet press. In 1929, when the play was acted at Gomel', it came under vigorous attack for not paying adequate attention to the growing struggle within the peasantry itself. A dramatic critic for a Gomel' newspaper wrote:

> The author lumps together events from the era of serfdom with no perspective of the future, i.e., he shows them statically, not in the process of development. ... In short, the ideological and artistic value of the play approaches zero.[28]

This review was written later, when demands were already appearing that the past be depicted from the standpoint of revolutionary development and class differentiation. But before that, there had been favorable reviews which noted the social appeal of the play and the artistic merits of acting and direction.

Astap was directed by V. Gromov and G. Novski and had

scenery and costumes by A. Blagonravov. The play was based on "Homespun Coat," a short story by the Byelorussian novelist, poet and playwright Kudzel'ka (writing under the pen name of Mikhas' Charot). The action of the play takes place in the heyday of the New Economic Policy (NEP). Astap is a young man in a homespun coat, who hails from a village and personifies the folk concept of unsophisticated good nature; after serving in the army and joining the Communist Party, he makes his way to Moscow. There, with the help of a friend and his own Party card, Astap rises to great heights in officialdom. Under the influence of his new surroundings he loses his simplicity and naturalness. His inexperience and weakness of will allow him to succumb to the machinations of a "speculator" and a prostitute. In his social advancement he turns his back on his family, his village, his fellow peasants, and even the girl, Marysya, with whom he had once been passionately in love. When his fellow villagers and, later, Marysya come to visit him he refuses to recognize them and turns them away. He is ashamed to admit that, like the visitors, he is a simple peasant. The comedy ends with the arrest of Astap, who is completely tangled up in his affairs.

This was the first play to be produced by the Second Theater which dealt wholly with Soviet life. Facts and events familiar under Soviet conditions were reflected in the play, as is confirmed by numerous reports in the newspapers of those years. The play's defects were not that its characters were atypical or that the life it pictures was not true to fact. The actual trouble lay in the author's choice of stereotyped situations which were deficient in color and striking detail. The play lacked a strong plot involving all characters and capable of captivating the audience. The author did not completely overcome and artistically transform the newspaper clichés which had been so evident in "Homespun Coat."

The play gave but an indirect reflection of local Byelorussian conditions. The Byelorussian atmosphere was suggested only by the external elements of some scenes, such as the

harvest songs in the first act, the scenery and the costumes. On the other hand, *Astap,* perhaps more than any other play, expressed a definite tendency towards the defense of one's specific nationality. It was a disguised protest against the leveling effect of central authority. Although naïve in themselves, the idealization of "the original purity and naturalness" of the peasant, and the underscoring of the darker sides of life in a big city, contained a germ of the defense of a distinct Byelorussian nationality. This defense would later be open and quite vocal during the controversy over the Byelorussian Theater. In the later works of several writers (such as *The Kryvichy* by Mikhas' Zarėtski) the question was to assume major proportions. Which culture, that of the East or the West, should Byelorussia follow? The tendency in Byelorussian literature to follow the West soon resulted in such a work of fiction as *Wind from the East* by Ales' Dudar, which openly condemned an orientation towards the East, i.e., Moscow, as perilous and threatening the loss of the specific national character of Byelorussian culture.

The significance of the Second Theater's production of *Astap* was to be fully revealed only later, during the war declared by the Communist Party against an orientation towards the West. The changed attitude was to produce a Byelorussian work by Yanka Limanoŭski with an identical title, *Wind from the East,* but with an entirely different philosophy.

In the beginning, the critics did not yet recognize these tendencies in Globa's play; they noted mainly its dramatic and realistic aspects. *Star* pointed out that the play was already dated and that as drama, the work was far from perfect. The newspaper declared:

> The theme of the play is somewhat dated: today it cannot be regarded as contemporary. Furthermore, the story and its stage realization do not reveal enough merit to keep the play in the theater's repertory for a long time. The plot of *Astap* is a repetition of several Russian plays of a few years ago such as *The Souffle.* All such plays had their point only during the first years of the NEP.[29]

In another publication, V. Vol'ski pointed out that the character of Astap lacked psychological justification and completeness, while the picture of life bordered on exaggeration and tendentiousness.[30]

Writing in *Star* a few months earlier, after a performance of *Astap* in Vitebsk, another critic had come to a different conclusion:

> *Astap* is a play of great potentialities, thanks to the fact that it deals pointedly with the problems of today such as bureaucracy and other shortcomings in the work of our public institutions. The play draws some very typical characters (a village Communist, peasants, a speculator). Since the author focused his attention on defects in the work of Soviet institutions, only the bad sides are shown, and the achievements of the Soviet system are played down. As an unfinished and highly exaggerated piece of work, the play leaves an unpleasant aftertaste.[31]

Thus the theater's turning to Soviet themes did not save it from endless criticism on the grounds that it was divorced from the Soviet life of the day and the problems which preoccupied Soviet audiences. It was the theater's misfortune that there was a decided shortage of original contemporary plays.

On the other hand, when the theater presented stage material of merit, the audience ignored the reviewers, who were compelled by their official position to be critical, and it greeted such productions with sincere delight. *Tsar Maksimil'yan, Midsummer Night's Dream* and other productions not only won high praise in the pages of *Soviet Byelorussia,* published in Minsk, but were also given enthusiastic notices by local correspondents. The Vitebsk newspaper *Dawn of the West* [Zarya Zapada] wrote as follows about *Devil and the Woman* by Frantsishak Alyakhnovich after a performance at a Lutasnyansk school:

> We have never had a performance like this before. ... It's hard to believe that these were actors—everything seemed so real. The actors, too, appeared to be, like ourselves, peasants. We now have enough to talk about for a whole month.[32]

A similar reaction was noted after a performance of the same play at the Dvina Factory in Vitebsk.[33]

As mentioned earlier, the theater had a program of sketches which had been prepared years before, during its Studio period. These included Byelorussian plays (*Devil and the Woman* by Alyakhnovich and *Gentleman's Stylish Son* by Karus' Kahanets) and West European plays (*The Harbor,* based on Maupassant's *La Vierge aux Vents* and *The Barber from Bireagu* byMell). It was these plays that the theater gave on its appearances before workers' and peasants' audiences; they were always hits.

Together with the success of other productions this was proof of the fact that the gulf between the theater and the Byelorussian audience was created artifically by the Communist Party and its press.

Chapter 47

THE THEATER'S NOTABLE VICTORY OVER THE PARTY

Before the Theater's first season ended, important events had taken place. In May 1927 a conference was held on theater problems by the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The Department adopted a resolution calling upon all Party organizations to fight bourgeois tendencies in the theaters of the Soviet Union. The Communist Party and various Soviet organizations began showing more interest in theatrical work. Their main interest was to spot and criticize tendencies regarded as ideologically alien to the Soviet system.

In the Moscow Art Theater, and particularly in the Second Moscow Art Theater, this new Communist policy resulted in a struggle between what were called the young and the old elements of both companies. In the Second Moscow Art Theater this developed into a fight between opponents and supporters of the psychological school of Mikhail Chekhov, a conflict which spread to the Second Byelorussian State Theater. As in the Second Moscow Art Theater, the majority of members of the Vitebsk company remained faithful to the principles of the two Moscow Art Theaters, whose creative workers had given Byelorussian troupe training and experience for many years.

It is to the credit of the Byelorussian actors that they regarded every attempt at revision of the Moscow Art Theater's traditions as sacrilege and blasphemy against art.

The local trade union committee, together with the active Communist members of the union, passed a resolution condemning the ideological position of the Second Moscow Art Theater and the "uncritical" support of the Moscow Art Theater's system by the Second Byelorussian State Theater. The resolution read:

> The joint meeting of the Communist Party's local committee and active union members of the Second Byelorussian State Theater having considered the conflict at the Second Moscow Art Theater, unanimously sides with the minority which is waging a struggle for an *actor-public worker.* Having received its training in Moscow under the guidance of the actors and directors of the Second Moscow Art Theater, our theater knows that the Moscow Theater has great artistic achievements to its credit, but also bears a corrupt ideology which is not in accord with our times. Our active union members note that this corrupt outlook, with its slogans about "priests of art," non-class art, and so forth, has somewhat influenced and has been partially reflected in our theater also. *Protesting against the behavior of the Second Moscow Art Theater towards its revolutionary minority, we demand a consistently public-spirited solution to this problem.* Long live the actor-public worker! Long live the October Revolution in art! [34]

Having been passed at the meeting against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the company, this resolution failed to get a sufficient number of supporting signatures. It was signed by only fifteen persons out of the hundred members in the company; of the fifteen, only a few were actors. Apparently alarmed by this show of independence on the part of the theater's company, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia instructed Ales' Nekrashévich, a staff member of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, to convene a meeting of the actors of the Theater, at which he accused the company of idealistic views which were far removed from contemporary life, of the aestheticism of art for art's sake, of National-Democratic tendencies, and of similar sins.

Members of the company defended their point of view resolutely and boldly. The year was 1927; freedom had not yet been completely killed, and one still had the right to hold non-Communist views, particularly on such neutral matters as art; the company therefore saw no need to change its basic attitudes in theater art or to revise its system of acting.

The gulf between the theater and the public was explained

by the actors as the result of lack of public cultural preparation in appreciation of complex works of art. Furthermore, some of the speeches by members of the company contained the assertion that Byelorussian culture was incomprehensible and alien to the proletariat. Therefore, listening to the opinions of the latter was not worthwhile. Every art, it was argued, required a definite level of cultural sensibility for its appreciation. The playgoer has to be educated, pulled up to the high level of theater art, instead of being frightened away by unfavorable reviews filled with empty if loud phrases from the "political grammar." The theater needed serious, pointed and competent dramatic criticism. In this connection, Soviet playwrights were also censured.

In his later report, Nekrashevich summarized his impressions of the meeting and his conclusions:

> All the speeches made at the meeting can be boiled down to the following statements:
>
> 1. the theater's basic ideas are absolutely right;
> 2. the gulf between the theater and the playgoers is the result of the fact that the public has not yet matured sufficiently to appreciate the high art of the Moscow Art Theater. The theater has no right to descend to the culture-lacking level of the public; the public had to mature to the level of the theater;
> 3. the theater is not to be held responsible for its selection of plays. The selection was influenced by the low level of Soviet plays which has so far lagged behind the theater.
>
> When the question was asked why the theater had shown no interest in the revolutionary patterns of our cultural heritage but chose largely plays of the symbolical or romantic trend, the answer was: "The dramatic works chosen by the theater present extensive opportunities for the actor's training, whereas revolutionary plays, even of classical standard, provide no such opportunities."[35]

M. Krasinski, chief director of the Second Byelorussian State Theater, also made a speech at the meeting, in full accord with the opinions expressed by the actors.

After vigorously rejecting the attempt to put the theater under Communist tutelage, the acting body of the theater, as represented by its stage directors, boldly proclaimed its own views regarding artistic trends in the theater; they made it clear that the theater would follow the school of so-called "stylized realism."[36]

In other documents of the period, the Second Byelorussian State Theater was described as "a theater of heroic romanticism."[37] The phrase suggested the heroism of the contemporary period blended with the romanticism of the Byelorussian character.

These seemingly contradictory definitions will be found perfectly appropriate when the guiding principles of the Second Moscow Art Theater are recalled, for this theater was dual in its approach. On one hand, it followed Stanislavski's system with its emphasis on the psychology of the character, the highly sensitive art of acting and the smooth teamwork of the whole ensemble. On the other hand, following in the footsteps of Yevgenii Vakhtangov, it repudiated naturalism and details of trivial everyday life and stressed the theatrical nature of the stage performance. Many of its productions were in fact done in a stylized and constructivist form. However, the treatment of plays in no way contradicted the principle of over-all artistic truth which the actor was called upon to express with all the finesse and resourcefulness of the acting craft at his command. Moreover, even the parent Art Theater was not entirely against stressing the pathos of revolutionary romanticism. This was demonstrated in its staging of *Armored Train 14-69* by Vsevolod Ivanov, a production which played an important role in bringing about a change in the attitude of the Soviet government toward the Moscow Art Theater.

The Second Byelorussian State Theater had to justify its existence under Soviet conditions. It was obliged to resort to protective coloration, to define its aims and methods by

such revolutionary phrases as "heroic romanticism." This was officially interpreted as "heroism of the contemporary epoch." What was more important, in thus formulating its aims, the theater did not abandon its aims of creating an original national theater for expressing "the romanticism of the Byelorussian character," and of staging works of national content dealing with characters and plots drawn from the depths of national history and contemporary life and reflecting the essence and significance of the Byelorussian national renascence.

This trend produced its first and most valuable fruits in the next season. Many of the hopes placed in the theater during its Studio days in Moscow were then triumphantly realized.

Chapter 48

A FAIRY TALE WITH THE NATIONAL IDEA

The Second Byelorussian State Theater opened its second season on October 16, 1927 at Minsk.

The list of plays announced for the season showed the theater's determination to hold on to its national and artistic principles and to ignore all demands for a change in repertory along approved Soviet lines. These demands had been voiced repeatedly during its season at Vitebsk; they became even more insistent after the Communist Party's conference in May on theater problems, especially after conclusions had been drawn about how to apply its decision to Byelorussia.

The theater was eager to produce more Byelorussian plays; the new season contained a number of new plays by contemporary Byelorussian writers, in addition to the previous season's productions which included: *Tsar Maksimil'yan, Midsummer Night's Dream, Eros and Psyche, In Bygone Times, Astap, The Barber from Bireagu, Harbor, Two Chatterboxes,* and *The Inquisitive Watchman.* An announcement of new plays included the following: *Around the Terrace* by Mikhas' Hramyka; *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* by Vasil' Shashalevich; *Wolf* by Hramyka (dealing with the life of a Byelorussian village on the eve of World War I); *Hiawatha,* a dramatization by N. Ognyov; *The Green Midge and the Gnat with a Big Nose* by Mikola Mitskevich; *Angelo, Tyran de Padoue* by Victor Hugo; *The Tale of Robin Hood* by Sergei Zayaitski; and also a special and refurbished program of Byelorussian comedies containing the sketches *Gentleman's Stylish Son* by Karus' Kahanets, *Devil and the Woman* by Frantsishak Alyakhnovich and *Nobles of Pinsk* by Vintsent Dunin-Martsinkevich.

The second season opened with *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* by Shashalevich, which was adapted and staged by Mikola Mitskevich. Like *Tsar Maksimil'yan,* this produc-

tion was conceived in a form that was both stylized and constructivist. The set represented a spider's web and was made of ropes. In the web sat a sorcerer, dressed in red to symbolize his thirst for blood. By way of contrast the knights were dressed in light colors.

Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell responded to the need for staging a fairy tale. It tells the story of a little girl, Alyonka, who meets a sorcerer and is put to sleep by him, remaining thus until the knights appear and rescue her. In its composition, the play resembles Maeterlinck's *L'Oiseau bleu* as produced by the Moscow Art Theater.

In Shashalevich's play all components of the tale served to express certain ideas of the Byelorussian national renascence. Both the author and director wanted the play to show the struggle waged for many centuries by the Byelorussian people against national and social oppression by the Polish and Russian landlords and officials. The author disguised his ideas in a heavy shroud of symbolical and allegorical images, but no Byelorussian intellectual could doubt that Alyonka personified the very soul of oppressed Byelorussia; the hero Yanka and his brother knights stood for the Byelorussian national intelligentsia awakening the people from their age-old slumber. They would bring "the keys lost by the Dawn" and thus restore the native tongue to children who had previously been obliged to use a foreign one.

The play also rejected the Communist Party's claim to universal guidance; it claimed that only the forward-looking Byelorussian national intelligentsia were leading the people to a national renascence. It called upon the people to free themselves from national oppression and to achieve freedom and well-being.

In other words, in a greatly disguised form, the play embodied the National-Democratic ideology which was soon to become the main target of the struggle waged by the Commu- Party of Byelorussia. *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* was shortly afterwards suppressed and copies of the script

were destroyed so that today none can be found anywhere. (The same fate befell the score of the musical drama *On St. John's Eve* by U. Téraŭski which was produced at the First Byelorussian State Theater.) Because of this fact, *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* is never mentioned in histories of the Byelorussian theater and information about this interesting play grows ever scarcer. It is desirable, therefore, to put on record the story of *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell.* Our sources include material given allegedly for Communist criticism by V. Vol'ski[38] and Ales' Nekrashévich.[39]

The play begins with an old man telling a story to two children, Paŭlyuk and Hanul'ka. The story is a variant of a folk tale and is used here to develop the action in a romantic and symbolic form.

The old man opens with a kind of preface in which, speaking in characteristic folk-tale style, he tells of the sudden disappearance of the beautiful girl Alyonka on the eve of her marriage to Yanka. Yanka's search for her all over the world has been unsuccessful. The old man proceeds to tell of the sorcerer who has acquired great wealth and has built himself many palaces, but cannot attain happiness. The sorcerer turns to Aprametnaya[a] for advice, and she tells him his soul will find peace when he marries the girl Alyonka. But to steal Alyonka he must go to the land in which she lives and cast a spell over it. The sorcerer follows this advice, and dressed as a beggar, goes in search of Alyonka.

Here, as in *L'Oiseau bleu,* the two young listeners, Paŭlyuk and Hanul'ka, fall asleep and become characters in the tale, going through all the trying experiences required by the progress of the story.

Paŭlyuk and Hanul'ka lose their way in the dark forest and come upon a witches' sabbath held by the sorcerer's

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a. The word "Aprametnaya" has a dual significance. It is a female proper name, and it also means the Kingdom of Hell. Hence, roughly speaking, it is a Byelorussian female equivalent of Hades in Greek mythology.—Ed.

servants. The sorcerer has already captured Alyonka. When the children ask him to show them the way out of the forest, he undertakes to help them but soon turns them into dogs, putting an interdiction on them "not to speak a single word in their native language for three hundred years," and to forget their native land.

Thus deprived of their human tongue, that is of their national characteristics, the children become oppressed by the sorcerer.

The sorcerer's captive, Alyonka, hears the children's cries and tries to run away with them to their homeland. But they are captured by the sorcerer who, after an attempt to win Alyonka over by various gifts, puts her to sleep as he tells her a symbolical dream about her country:

> You will now see your homeland soaked in blood; your people groan under the burden of war, and weep pitifully as they are strangled in a vise and destroyed. You will see your father beaten to death, your brother killed, your old white-haired mother forced to beg for alms.

In the meantime, Alyonka's lover Yanka, continuing his search for her, summons his brother knights and tells them what he has learned of her fate.

Yanka and his brother knights set out to all parts of the world to wage a battle for freedom. The shields of these heroic knights carry the Byelorussian emblem, the cornflower, which the poet Maksim Bahdanovich has described as the symbol of the beauty of the people's spirit. His weaver-women of Slutsk—in the poem of the same name—admire the nature of their own land, forget their strict orders to follow Persian patterns and weave in their native cornflower. Also in his short story, "The Apocrypha," Christ wandering with St. Peter over Byelorussia excuses the presence of the cornflower in a rye field by pointing out the need for spiritual food. Man does not live by bread alone.

Yanka and the knights of the cornflower decide to liberate the people's soul from the foreign yoke, but their efforts provoke the dark forces to self-defense. As Yanka approaches

the sorcerer's palace, the witches and six slave knights previously captured by the sorcerer work hard to fortify the place. (Here there is a hint at thousands of Byelorussians who served their oppressors from the east and west). The sorcerer turns out to be stronger than Yanka. With the help of his slaves he disarms and chains his assailant.

The sorcerer's underground kingdom is triumphant. One of his handmaidens, the Black Lily, however, falls in love with Yanka. Yanka rejects her love, insisting that he wants to remain a free man, but his lofty idealism only intensifies the Black Lily's feelings, and she liberates him at the cost of her own life.

His freedom regained, Yanka rescues the two children who recover the power of human speech, and awakens Alyonka, i.e., the country as a whole. The awakened national consciousness in the people's soul rouses the whole people and aids them in regaining their liberty. Announcing his determination to fight for the complete overthrow of the dark forces, Yanka dreams of Alyonka's love. But the dark forces are far from accepting defeat. They pursue Yanka, Alyonka and all the other liberated prisoners and engage them in battle. This time, thanks to Yanka's heroic knights, the dark forces are finally routed, and Yanka announces to his followers that it is now sowing time, an announcement which symbolizes the coming of a new era in the life of the oppressed nation.

The play has an epilogue in which the old man explains to the two children that what they saw was only a dream. But Paŭlyuk and Hanul'ka want to know where Yanka is now. The play thus ends by posing the question: What is the fate of the people's soul? Has the national intelligentsia realized its cherished hopes? Has Byelorussia achieved a life free from national or social oppression? The children's curiosity in the play's epilogue remains unsatisfied; their questions are unanswered.

The old story teller refrains from giving an affirmative answer, and no negative answer could have been given openly

because of the Soviet censorship. Hence the silence of the old sage who expresses the wisdom of the people themselves. Instead of an oral answer, the old man begins to play his lyre; his tune is a sad, ancient melody full of anxious longing in which the people pour out the woes of their life in subjugation.

Such is this folk tale transformed into the bitter reality of our time. Never before had the Byelorussian public witnessed such a daring ending in a play; it expressed profound dissatisfaction with Soviet rule and a desire to intensify the national revolution in Byelorussia. The production of *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* is one of the finest pages both in the history of the Byelorussian theater and in the history of the struggle for liberation in Byelorussia.

No wonder that the production evoked hostile notices from orthodox Soviet critics.[40] Their sharply critical attack on the play stirred hostility towards the Second Theater among the working and lower middle-class groups of the population. The day after its première, the play was withdrawn from the repertory. Only the efforts of Anton Balitski, the People's Commissar of Education for Byelorussia, who came to the play's defense, made it possible to restore the play to the repertory and keep it there for over six months. The head of the People's Commissariat considered the play acceptable from the official point of view, but not altogether intelligible to the mass audience.[41]

For a number of years after *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* had appeared on the stage of the Second Byelorussian State Theater, it was a constant target for critical Communist attacks as an example of National-Democratic drama. This attitude found its sharpest expression in Ales' Nekrashèvich who, under the circumstances that existed, became the sole historian of this theater during the first decade of its existence. He expressed the Soviet official point of view most completely when he wrote in 1934:

> In its essence this was the program of the entire Byelorussian interventionist counterrevolution, for does not the

> treatment of Byelorussia's history and her liberation resemble here the treatment of this history by the foreign intelligence agent and ideologist of Byelorussian nationalism, Ihnatoŭski?
>
> Does not all this resemble a calumny by the Byelorussian White-Guards of the Communist Party's role in the liberation and creation of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic? Finally, does this not contain a definite orientation towards fascist Poland and a picture of Poland as the only force which is supposedly liberating the Byelorussian people from oppression by the Moscovites (the roles of the Black Lily and the sorcerer)?
>
> This whole work reeks with a savage hatred of everything Russian, since in discussing the national oppression of Byelorussians in the days of the tsars, *the play contains not a single word about the role of the Russian working people in the liberation of Byelorussia.* All this counterrevolutionary falsehood was cleverly disguised by all kinds of deviltry which made this play wholly unintelligible to the broad masses of working class playgoers who, otherwise, would undoubtedly have discovered the counterrevolutionary essence of this impertinent nationalist sally of the theater. The clever disguises, however, did not interfere with the comprehension of this would-be philosophy by the nationalistically minded elements of the Byelorussian intelligentsia.[42]

Such were the opinions expressed about *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* after 1930 when, after the mass arrests of Byelorussian National Democrats, it became fashionable to accuse the Byelorussian intelligentsia of counterrevolutionary tendencies. In 1927 these charges had not yet been hurled so openly. Criticism of the play was confined largely to reproaches that the theater had divorced itself from the working class audience and engaged in aimless romanticism. The reviewer in *Star* criticized the theater for not reflecting on the stage, clearly and fully, the conditions of the new Soviet life which would have countered the petty-bourgeois influences that no longer answer the needs of the time.[43]

Critics began talking about the theater's turning away from the aims and tasks which as a national and revolutionary thea-

ter it had been called upon to pursue. All these criticisms really amounted to the assertion that the Second Theater was "ideologically backward." Vol'ski wrote:

> One has a feeling that the theater has not yet found the right, ideologically consistent line in choosing its plays. It has not yet found the method for combining artistic value with social significance in its production.[44]

Vol'ski considered the production of *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* to be particularly indicative of the ideological defects of the Second Theater. While expressing a high opinion of the artistic side of the production, he believed this in itself was not enough to salvage the play.

> Life itself has demonstrated to the leaders of the theater that a play conflicting with the reality we see around us is predestined to failure, regardless of its cost or the skill of its performers.[45]

Many newspaper reviews reflected the opinions of the broad masses of playgoers who were not sufficiently cultivated to appreciate the complex stage images. These playgoers, for instance, expressed a naïve bewilderment at the meaning of the heroic knights, who struck them as lacking clarity and reality, and as being out of harmony with the ideas of class struggle impressed on them by Soviet schools and the "political grammar" which had formed the prism through which they saw the entire past of their country.

Opinions of cultivated playgoers who understood and valued the artistic achievements of the theater were rarely printed. Reviews by Party critics dominated the scene. And these Party reviews, of course, showed little interest in the artistic aspects of the plays produced. Hence the demands on the theater were narrowly and aggressively utilitarian. Indifference to the formal, artistic aspects of the play as performed, and extreme emphasis on ideological or class content of the play colored most of these appraisals. One critic wrote:

> In the development of the theater the most important thing is its content which must reflect the life of the working people. In other words, it must be a class theater setting

> itself those didactic aims needed in the cultural reconstruction of the country. This is the end towards which it is impelled by its revolutionary origin and by the peasant and worker origin of the members of its company.[46]

It is not surprising that, from the point of view of such utilitarian demands, the production of *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* was, in the eyes of many workers and Communist dramatic critics, too abstract, dull, lifeless, and colorless. In one newspaper the critic went so far as to say that the play was "a pretty nasty thing."[47]

The average Byelorussian playgoer, having failed, under the weight of unfavorable notices in the Communist press, to perceive the meaning of the play, also remained cold to the artistic innovations introduced in staging it. Yet in this sphere the Second Theater scored many successes. In addition to its ingenious setting, which has been mentioned earlier, the directors made wide use of ballet and musical interludes aptly completing the symbolic treatment of the play. The remarkable accompanying music was composed by A.T. Grechaninov. The entire action unfolded to muted melodies which harmonized with the mood of the scene. The characters' costumes also changed accordingly. As a whole, the production was stylistically unified both in its stage settings and in its unfolding of action.

Chapter 49

DRAMA OF THE GREAT BREAKUP

The unfavorable reception given *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* and the insistent demands of the Soviet government and Communist Party for a change in its ideology made the Second Theater give serious consideration to its repertory. As a result the theater turned to a play entitled *Around the Terrace* by the Byelorussian playwright Mikhas' Hramyka.

True to the principles of a national theater, the Second Byelorussian State Theater refrained from producing Soviet non-Byelorussian propaganda plays which were becoming more and more frequent on the Soviet stage. Instead, it chose a play which seemed to satisfy the theater's two requirements: first, *Around the Terrace* appeared to deal with the problems of the day; second, it was an original play and thus saved the theater from the necessity of obtaining a translation. At the same time the play was the work of a famous and talented Byelorussian playwright and promoted the theater's national interests.

In its theme *Around the Terrace* is close to the best Russian Soviet plays such as *Lyubov' Yarovaya* by Konstantin Trenyov, *Yelena Tolpina* by D. Shcheglov, and *Breach* by Boris Lavrenev. Like these plays, *Around the Terrace* deals with the great breakup which the Revolution brought to the lives of the Byelorussian intelligentsia and masses.

The story of the play takes place after the February 1917 Revolution on the eve of the Bolshevik October upheaval. In the center of events is the family of Barnevich, landowner, retired admiral and former governor.

On the Barnevich estate everybody is disturbed over recent events and expects some fateful ending. Barnevich himself is a typical monarchist and a dyed-in-the-wool conservative; he curses the February Revolution and dreams of restoring the

old regime. His eldest son Mikola, an officer who hates everything revolutionary, returns home. He is a member of a regimental committee and fights the chaos caused by the Revolution. The author had to show Mikola negatively as a character devoid of any political convictions. In the beginning he is opposed to General Kornilov;[a] later he takes part in liberating him. Siding with the counterrevolutionary forces, he is killed by his own soldiers.

Barnevich's second son, Hennadi, is represented as a soft and impractical intellectual. He lives in a world of dreams, studies the history of the French Revolution, but does not know how to harness a horse. In a riot of peasants he is arrested by a plain peasant woman.

Barnevich's daughter Manyunya, in contrast to her brother, Mikola, is high-strung. She sincerely believes in liberal ideas and has great sympathy for the peasants, particularly for the peasant girl Tatsyana who, towards the end of the play, turns out to be the illegitimate daughter of old Barnevich.

The plot thickens when Baryka, a sailor, returns from the front to a village near Barnevich's estate. He has served abroad on the *Aurora.*[b] Dedicated to the revolution, Baryka represents the revolutionary proletariat. A gardener named Sysoi, who has been in the army, personifies the peasantry, and learns about revolution from Baryka. The ex-sailor and ex-soldier are supported by the "people" of the neighborhood as well as by Manyunya and even the Governor's brother Andrėi.

The two groups clash. The peasants want to seize Barnevich's estate, while Barnevich secures the aid of Turko-Tatar soldiers and of his son Mikola.

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a. Kornilov was a tsarist general who tried to overthrow the Russian Provisional Government from the right, shortly before the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government from the left.—Ed.

b. The *Aurora* was a cruiser in the Russian navy which the Bolsheviks controlled at Petrograd during the revolution. It was instrumental in the Communist capture of the Winter Palace there.—Ed.

Running parallel with this social antagonism is a secondary theme, that of a family breakup against the background of the Revolution. Baryka starts courting Manyunya who returns his feelings, thus drawing her still further away from her family. Another family problem shapes up as Mikola, ignorant of the peasant girl Tatsyana's origin, seduces her; this leads to Tatsyana's eventual suicide, and Mikola's death when the peasants promptly attack the estate and overcome and arrest its defenders.

The play ends with the arrival of Barnevich's brother, Andréi. Being a supporter of the Revolution, he succeeds in persuading Baryka and other revolutionaries to release their prisoners. They do so good naturedly, expressing sympathy with the gentry's plight. At the same time, Baryka triumphs in his pursuit of Manyunya whom he lifts in his arms and carries into the garden as she keeps saying "Kiss me! Kiss me!"[48] There is a touch of banality in this scene which adds to the unsatisfactory effect of the whole finale. The early development of the plot does not prepare the audience for the sudden about-face of the revolutionary peasants who, under the influence of Andréi's speech, release their prisoners. This sort of ending savors too much of a *deus ex machina.*

But towards the end, the play also grows considerably in its psychological significance, particularly in old Barnevich's distress at losing his son, a scene imbued with tragic pathos. The villain is suddenly found to be the victim of tragic circumstances. He is revealed in the unexpected depth of his suffering as a father. His great hopes for his son as the defender, successor and upholder of the family honor and traditions are wiped out at a single stroke.

Barnevich's deep humanity evoked sympathy in the audience, just as Mikhail Bulgakov's *Days of the Turbins* when played at the Moscow Art Theater evoked similar emotions in the audience through the sacrifices borne by its anti-Communist and counterrevolutionary protagonists. But unlike *Around the Terrace, Days of the Turbins,* after having been

withdrawn from the stage, was later given another chance in 1932. It was revived as a gesture of magnaminity by Stalin in response to a personal appeal from its author to cease hounding and baiting him in the literary world. However, it must be added that permission for revival applied only to the Moscow Art Theater.

There was one major reason why *Around the Terrace* could not possibly get official approval. Humane and magnanimous treatment of the enemies of the Revolution, laying bare the inner, spiritual tragedy of representatives of the old world, could not possibly be reconciled with the communist doctrine of ruthless extermination of the enemy. Immediately after its first performance, *Around the Terrace* was attacked bitterly in several organs of the Communist press.

The regular dramatic critic of *Star,* writing under the signature "L," entitled his review "Near the Terrace or On the Terrace?"[49] The regular critic of *Red Change* [Chyrvonaya z'mena], organ of the Byelorussian Komsomol, wrote a derisive review of the play under the title: "It Turns—but Where Does It Take Us?"[50] V. Vol'ski contributed a similar review to *Worker* [Rabochii].[51] "L" wrote:

> [The aim of Hramyka's play was] to picture the year 1917, i.e., the struggle of the working people of Byelorussia for the October Revolution. Actually, the author has occupied himself largely with picturing the sentiments and breakup of an aristocratic land-owning family. He also tries to show the turmoil stirring the peasants and the growth of revolutionary events. But this attempt lacks vigor and gives only a feeble picture of the sentiments of the masses. ... Hramyka's mistake is that he paints what goes on not around the terrace, but on the terrace itself.

Vol'ski criticized the author for seeing the October Revolution through the eyes of the classes which were withdrawing from the social scene, and not of the proletariat, the class rising to power. In passing, the reviewer denounced the unnatural and false character of Baryka:

> The romantic talk between the Baltic seaman and the landowner's niece about Beethoven is simply unimaginable.

> His constant conversations on the role of the intelligentsia in Socialist reconstruction (that in 1917!) seem to be nothing but amusing anachronisms.

According to Vol'ski, the play depicts the October events in the villages in a one-sided and unconvincing way. One of the numerous episodes of spontaneous revolt is turned by the author into a perfectly organized revolution in which everything goes according to plan. Very false, too, is the administration of the estate seized and run on well-rationalized communist principles as set up by the peasants, together with all their talk about creating a model commune. "The play," wrote the critic, "is undramatic, artificial and implausible."

Alongside these unfavorable notices, there were others in the press that were favorable; supporters of the Byelorussian theater as an expression of original Byelorussian culture still existed. The forward-looking section of the Byelorussian intelligentsia found the production of *Around the Terrace* an important and significant event in the theater life of Byelorussia. *Soviet Byelorussia* printed favorable notices of the play by reviewer A. V. and Todar Hlybotski, the eminent fighter for development of the Byelorussian theater along independent national lines. Summarizing his conclusions, Hlybotski wrote:

> As a whole, the production of *Around the Terrace* makes the best possible impression on the audience and, in our opinion, is one of the richest contributions to the treasury of the Byelorussian theater.[52]

Numerous members of foreign labor delegations visiting Byelorussia, expressed a similarly high opinion of the artistic merits of the play and its production. In Byelorussian circles where great value was attached to the development of a national theater, it was felt something had to be done to protect the Second Theater from undeserved attacks in the press by the communist freebooters. It appeared the only available way was to hold an open public discussion conducted by authoritative representatives of various sections of the public. To start the ball rolling, an open letter appeared in *Soviet Byelorussia* advancing a number of arguments

in defense of the theater and signed by such prominent figures in the building of Byelorussian culture as Vatslaŭ Lastoŭski, Ivan Tsvikevich, Ales' Adamovich, Mikhas' Zarėtski, Andrėi Aleksandrovich, Ales' Dudar, and Anatol' Vol'ny. They wrote:

> Dear Comrade Editor,
>
> We request that the following be published in your newspaper:
>
> An unhealthy atmosphere has recently been created around the work of the Second Byelorussian State Theater. From its very beginning the young Byelorussian Theater has met with several unwarranted attacks and slanderous fabrications. It must be admitted that with its first performances at Minsk this theater may not have produced an entirely favorable impression on casual playgoers or on the constant supporters of Byelorussian theater. But after the first performance of *Around the Terrace,* which is one of the most important productions of Byelorussian theater, the attitude towards the Second Byelorussian State Theater has assumed the character of unhealthy criticism. This criticism is directed not at correcting certain mistakes made by the theater, but *is a systematic and deliberate distortion of facts* aimed at complete destruction of the Second Byelorussian State Theater. Without attempting here to give an analysis of the disgraceful review by one "L" in *Star,* No. 278 and the utterly ridiculous and childish notice by Taŭbė in *Red Change* we only want to stress that these reviews are entirely based upon some personal grounds, and to a large extent, put the moral and intellectual nature of critics in an unfavorable light.
>
> It is our opinion that in order that these facts may be thoroughly considered, it is desirable and necessary to organize as soon as possible a public discussion of the latest production of the Second Byelorussian State Theater—a task which should be undertaken by the Union of Art Workers of the Byelorussian S.S.R.[53]

However, the high hopes of those who wrote the letter were not fulfilled. Shortly after the letter was published, it was officially interpreted as an organized effort in defense of native Byelorussian theater related to Byelorussian "National Democra- which was just beginning to be viewed as a dan-

gerous movement. In later years, the signers of this letter (whose names appeared alongside that of Lastoŭski, a former émigré and the one-time head of the Byelorussian government-in-exile) were taunted for joining hands with "the former head of a White-Guard government. The very fact that they sent a joint letter for publication in the press was viewed as evidence of an active National-Democratic counterrevolutionary movement.[54]

In 1930, when Hramyka had been under arrest for some time, an article by Orest Kanakotsin (a staff member of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia) finally revealed the reason why *Around the Terrace* had been so severely criticized by the Party ideologists. It turned out the author had violated Party doctrine by failing to show the guiding role of the Bolshevik Party in the 1917 Revolution; he had made the intelligentsia, as represented by the doctor brother of Barnevich, the moving spirit of that revolution.

> The author substituted for the force of a revolutionary movement the influence of a single intellectual, the doctor brother of a rich landowner. He represented the Bolshevik sailor as a young liberal burying himself in the psychological problems of the landowner's family, a part of which, according to the author, has become infected by the revolutionary spirit. The play is not only defective but actually harmful.[55]

After a critical appraisal of this kind in 1930, the play was naturally taken out of the Second Byelorussian State Theater's repertory. This had not happened in 1927, however. All that was done then was to make some revisions. Moreover, the play found a defender in no less a person than Balitski, the People's Commissar of Education for Byelorussian as well as in several other prominent Communists. Thus, Vasilevich, Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia, came to the defense of Hramyka's play:

> There are shortcomings in *Around the Terrace.* But the great step forward from *Aprametnaya or The Kingdom of Hell* to *Around the Terrace* is evidence that the Second

> Theater is stubbornly seeking what we need.[56]

In 1927-28, the last year of freedom of the NEP era, it was still possible to state one's own views and to defend works that came under severe criticism from a section of communist circles. Totalitarization of all forms of art was still in an embryonic stage. Extremes of criticism were regarded as bad form even among the highest Party circles; the more ethical Communists still had the courage to disagree with intolerance and browbeating on the part of the less cultivated and more dogmatic representatives of the Party.

This is why Vasilevich, with all the authority due his position as Second Secretary of the Party organization of an autonomous republic, could dare to defend even the authors of the open letter and condemn the drama critics mentioned in that letter:

> The work of the theater must be criticized in a firm and matter-of-fact way—and there is enough in it deserving criticism; criticism, however, must not be used for political and national purposes.[57]

Thanks to all this, a revised version of *Around the Terrace* managed to stay in the Second Theater's repertory until 1930. In that year, however, a wave of arrests swept the Byelorussian intelligentsia; an imaginary organization, the Union for the Liberation of Byelorussia, was supposedly uncovered. Hramyka was accused of belonging to it. Following these events, not only *Around the Terrace* but many other plays previously given by the Second Byelorussian State Theater came under a ban as works inspired by National-Democratic aims. This was equivalent at the time to a charge of being counterrevolutionary.

Chapter 50

CONTRIBUTION TO STAGECRAFT

The production of *Around the Terrace* completed the first and best period of the Second Byelorussian State Theater. It would therefore be appropriate to pause for a brief analysis of the characteristic features and the individual style of the work of this theater.

Both its actors and directors had absorbed the best traditions of the Moscow Art Theater school. But it did more than to reproduce this heritage in its creative work. The theater could not pass up many other new ideas and achievements of the contemporary theater during the first postrevolutionary decade; it was a particularly stormy time in theater art, which was seeking new pathways and new styles.

In this respect the Second Byelorussian State Theater greatly resembled the First. While the Moscow Art Theater school and its traditions dominated most of their productions, both theaters maintained an open mind on other ideas; they adopted whatever had impressed them in the achievements of others. Naturally, on local soil and in the local repertory these borrowings took on national colors. They often resulted in a Byelorussian style like that of any other theater with roots in Byelorussian folk art and national psychology.

A survey of the principal productions of the First and Second Byelorussian State Theaters reveals their common stylistic traits. First among them was the synthetic approach to the problem of the play's acting and scenery. In the opinion of all who have written of the Second Theater, its artistic achievements were very high. Aleksandr Vaz'nyasenski has written:

> If shortcomings must be noted in dealing with the theater's repertory, staging and scenery offer only achievements. In any case, everything done by the theater in stagecraft shows only an unswerving determination to attain utter perfection.[58]

Vaz'nyasenski finds that the stagecraft of the Second Thea-

ter developed along two lines: the realistic and the constructivist.

Realistic staging was given to the plays *Astap, Breach, When the Cocks Crow,* and a few others. In putting these plays on the stage, the theater used the tested method of the psychologically real theater as exemplified by the Moscow Art Theater. In these cases, the Second Theater sought to create the illusion of perfectly real surroundings, introducing such details in sound as the lapping of waves against the ship's sides when mutinous sailors throw one of the ship's officers overboard. The same realism had marked the action in Mikhas' Hramyka's *Around the Terrace.*

Even more satisfying from the artistic point of view were the productions in constructivist style. Here a synthesis was achieved in the search for a greater expressiveness as practiced by the Meierhold school of theater art; the emphasis was on theater conventions, and the desire to preserve truth to life and verisimilitude in the spirit of the Moscow Art Theater. Even the realistic production of *Around the Terrace* had elements of constructivism in its stage form. The central part of the stage revolved independently, thus permitting a rapid change of action without a change in scenery. The principle of theatricality and stage convention was operated before the eyes of the audience who could watch the changes onstage which are usually concealed behind lowered curtains.

Tsar Maksimil'yan and *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* were treated in a completely constructivist style. In *Tsar Maksimil'yan* the action took place on a constructivist set representing a spider's web. The Tsar's throne, symbolizing the spider's head, occupied the center of the stage. The part of the stage around the throne was the body of the spider, while the symmetrically arranged steps and handrails below stood for the spider's legs and cobweb.

In staging *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell,* a set was made of ropes representing the spider's nest. The sorcerer occupied the center of the nest, resembling the grim-visaged

Mephistopheles in his red vestments—a symbol of his despotism. As a contrast, the knights were clad in light colored costumes, pleasing to the eye and suggesting a liberator's role.

Changes in the constructivist set of *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell* took place in agreement with the course of action. Spreads of red canvas, which were used in the second act to cast shadows on some parts of the nest or the cobweb, underscored the changes: the rise of the light liberating forces against darkness and oppression, and their temporary triumph. The military costumes of the sorcerer's retinue, with their decorations, armor and ships, stressed their being associated with the sorcerer as bearers of authority.

As in the theater of frank stage conventions, sound effects and music served to express the play's symbolism. In *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell,* musical interludes were very prominent. The entire action proceeded to the sound of muted music in complete harmony with the mood on stage.

In the production of *Tsar Maksimil'yan* music underscored the rhythm of the acting to point up particularly important moments in the play, and brought all impressions into a unified whole.

The Second Theater made fairly wide use of light for focusing the audience's attention on various phases of the unfolding action. Like music, lighting performed the same active function of unifying all the elements of the performance into a unified whole while lending a dynamic quality both to the action itself and to the actor's performance.

In the matter of acting, the Second Theater was a direct follower of the psychological school of the Moscow Art Theater with that theater's emphasis upon naturalness.

In this respect it continued the struggle against acting stereotypes which had been begun by the Moscow Art Theater. The Second Theater's productions revealed an ardent attempt to endow the setting itself with a spiritual quality and to make the actors transplant themselves inwardly into the characters they portrayed. On the other hand, some of the

plays (and they were quite numerous) produced by the Second Theater frequently required frank stage symbolism and constructivism. The very characters in several plays done by the Theater were symbolical in nature. This demanded a certain stylization to reveal the inner essence of what was represented and to present a phenomenon through a symbol or sign. It opened the way for a theater of frank symbolism. The actor was made to remember that he was constantly before an audience in the midst of artificial stage sets. Acknowledgment of these premises dictated the necessity of resourcefulness in acting and complete command of technique. The actor of the Second Theater successfully combined the art of natural acting developed by the Moscow Art Theater with the art of "biomechanics" as practiced and taught by the Meierhold school. Plays in the Second Theater's repertory often demanded not only portrayal of the inner spiritual world of the character and identification with that character, but also various physical exercises, such as gymnastics, acrobatics, training in sports and dancing (for example, in *Tsar Maksimil'yan, A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell*).

In casting a play, the Second Theater followed Meierhold's principle that each actor is subordinate to the interests of the ensemble. Consequently the top actors in the company often appeared in minor roles, or even walk-on parts. This practice did not prevent the growth of artistic talent in the company, but gave an opportunity to every talent. The company developed a group of actors of outstanding ability which included Pavel Malchanaŭ, A. Il'inski, and Syarheichyk. Equally conspicuous was the directorial talent displayed by a number of directors who rose from the ranks of actors. This group included Mikola Mitskevich, Barys Rahavenka, Kastus' Sannikaŭ, Syarheichyk, and Yaŭkhim Chaikoŭski.

The high standard of acting and stagecraft in the Second Theater was universally admitted. This aspect of the theater evolved values of permanent importance, and advanced the

entire history of the Second Byelorussian State Theater. The creative life of this theater in subsequent years was wholly the result of the inexhaustible traditions of culture in the theater's company and of its feverish, though often futile, attempts to defend its artistic individuality.

Chapter 51

THE IMAGINARY MENACE OF NATIONALISM

The defense of Byelorussian theater by as high a Communist official as Vasilevich, the Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party, was an encouraging fact for all those active in furthering Byelorussian culture.

On the other hand, it stirred the activity of all opponents and enemies of Byelorussian national self-determination; they protested against the imaginary menace of Byelorussian originality. There were a considerable number of such opponents, including Russian officials of the tsarist regime who had remained in Byelorussia after the Revolution and the Russianized Byelorussians who had found their way into the Communist Party and had been appointed to many key posts in the autonomous republic. Naturally, with war against so-called great power chauvinism[a] as the official policy, it was impossible for them openly to oppose Byelorussian culture as such. This also applied to nationalizing both the regional schools and the entire administrative mechanism of the republic. Communist policy called for these measures. The fight against National Democracy had just begun; it gave these elements the opportunity to carry out essentially destructive work in the young state. The eight years between 1920 and 1928 had not been long enough to disseminate Byelorussian culture throughout the national life.

a. "Great power chauvinism" is the communist phrase for a certain political sin. As used in the Soviet Union, it means an inordinate and vociferous love for things Russian as such, to the detriment of the cultures of Soviet, non-Russian peoples. Its counterpart among the non-Russians was generically termed "bourgeois nationalism." They both were attacked vigorously and repeatedly. Soviet critics would no doubt consider Byelorussian National Democracy to be a form of "bourgeois nationalism."—Ed.

In this atmosphere of clashing views, the words spoken by Vasilevich sounded a tocsin to the Byelorussians not to forget for a single moment the objective of creating an original, nationally unique and authentic Byelorussian culture. In a speech made in 1928 at the First Congress of the Byelorussian Association of Proletarian Writers, the same Vasilevich, cloaked in the authority of the Communist Party on behalf of which he spoke, called upon the writers to create a national Byelorussian literature. Indirectly he raised his voice against attempts at reducing Byelorussian culture to the role of a handmaiden to Moscow's policy, against turning Byelorussian literature into a servile echo of Russian literature, and against a slavish dependence on Moscow. Here are his words:

> Persons who demand today that we be satisfied with what we already have, reflect the Byelorussian republic as only duplicating the others, and Byelorussian literature as echoing other literatures. They fail to understand that a specific Byelorussian quality exists, that it already has and always will have its own place. It is impossible to do without it—to shake off the Byelorussian characteristic quality, which exists and will continue to exist—as it is impossible to escape the fact that, today, plays in translation do have, and will continue to have, their place in Byelorussian theater.[59]

Having such supporters of national culture in the Communist Party as Vasil' Vasilevich, Anton Balitski, Usevalad Ihnatoŭski and several others, the Byelorussian writers Todar Hlybotski and Z'mitrok Zhylunovich (the latter under his pen name, Tsishka Hartny) published articles in defense of an independent national choice of plays for Byelorussian theater. Their articles appeared in 1928, the year when Soviet non-Byelorussian plays seemed on the verge of flooding the Byelorussian theater because of orders from above. Hlybotski's articles[60] and his reviews of such plays as *Armored Train 14-69* by Vsevolod Ivanov and *Breach*, by Boris Lavrenev were supported in print by Z'mitrok Zhylunovich;[61] they elicited numerous responses from all over the country. The extent to which questions of the growth and shaping of the national art had developed among Byelorussian theatergoers can be seen

from the struggle waged for such a national art. The local provincial press was extremely alive to these questions. For instance, echoes of the sentiments expressed in the articles of Hlybotski and Zhylunovich were found in articles by Lazar Kaplan in *Dawn of the West* [Zarya Zapada] published in Vitebsk and the Mogilev notes by Andrėi Aleksandrovich who protested against adapting for the Byelorussian stage the worst examples of prerevolutionary Russian dramatic literature.

"Must our theater follow in its development the same path followed by the Russian theater?" asked Hlybotski, protesting against the flood of translations that had begun to inundate Byelorussia about 1928, stopping the progress of native Byelorussian drama. We will not enter again into the details of the theatrical controversy which was discussed in the part of this volume dealing with the First Byelorussian State Theater. It will be appropriate, however, to mention some further documents directly relating to these questions.

The writings of Hlybotski, Zhylunovich and others impressed the Communist powers as indicating the rise of a new danger of National Democracy. In December 1928 the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party therefore held a special meeting of its Bureau. Overruling the opposition of the Second Secretary of the Party (Vasilevich) and the other Communists who defended original Byelorussian culture, the Central Committee on December 17, 1928 adopted a Party policy of inflaming class warfare and suppressing hostile ideologies and those who held them. For the first time the existence of National-Democratic tendencies in the cultural life of Byelorussia was asserted openly; the people were called upon to fight these tendencies. The resolution read:

> In connection with the decisive unfolding of Socialist cultural reconstruction there has been, especially of late, an infiltration into our cultural reconstruction of the National-Democratic tendencies of capitalist elements in spite of our decisive offensive against them; these tendencies are bound up with the intensification of the class war. They turned up in the recent discussion of theatrical questions.

Hlybotski's articles contained:

(a) Attempts to fence off Byelorussian culture from the cultures of other national minorities of the U.S.S.R. and, even more important, from Russian culture; this is nothing less than setting the two cultures against each other, and leads to a departure from Lenin's clear formulation of the principle:

"When we speak of the culture of the proletariat, [we must realize that] setting off Ukrainian culture as a whole against Great Russian culture also taken as a whole, is the most shameless betrayal of the proletariat's interests for the benefit of bourgeois nationalism.

"If a Ukrainian Marxist permits himself to fall under the influence of the wholly legitimate and natural hatred to Russian oppressors to the point where he carries over even a part of this hatred, if only an alienation from the proletarian cause, to Russian workers, then this Marxist will, by his very act, bog down completely in the swamp of bourgeois nationalism."[62]

The separation of Byelorussian culture from the culture of other peoples of the U.S.S.R., in this case from Russian culture, is, under conditions of proletarian dictatorship, all the more harmful in that one Socialist culture being built today is set off against another such culture.

(b) Attempts to juxtapose the national form and the proletarian content by advancing the so-called theory of "independent national culture" are a distortion of the Party's formula: "culture that is national in form and proletarian in content" and represent a National-Democratic point of view.

The Bureau of the Central Committee, however, notes:

"The Party favors an independent development of Byelorussian culture, bringing out all the creative powers of the Byelorussian people, a wide use for the Byelorussian socialist culture which is being built, of all the values of world culture, a decisive break with traditions of provincial narrowness and slavish imitation, and creation of new cultural values worthy of the creative activity of a major class. The Party, however, seeks the realization of this aim not by setting off Byelorussian culture against the cultures of other peoples, but by fraternal cooperation of workers and peasants of all nationalities in building a world proletarian culture to which the Byelorussian working class will contribute its share."

> In addition, the Bureau finds Comrade Zhylunovich guilty of a political error and reprimands him for it.[63]

Under the plausible excuse of fighting "provincial narrowness" and building "world proletarian culture," these Party decisions all but destroyed the illusion that it was possible for Byelorussian culture to develop along independent national lines; a very heavy blow had been given to the belief of the Byelorussian people that it was possible for an autonomous Byelorussia to co-exist in the single Soviet state, the U.S.S.R. Outlawing the principle of national Byelorussian culture ushered in a whole series of pogroms in the field of Byelorussian art, literature and the theater. The vast majority of older and more distinguished workers in the field of Byelorussian culture were accused of sympathy with the bourgeois West, preaching the classless uniformity of the Byelorussian nation, idealization of the national differences of the Byelorussian people, national romanticism, theories of art for art's sake, formalism, aestheticism, national exoticism, stylization of "reactionary" aspects of folk art, and other similar "deviations." All these accusations were made on *a priori* grounds without taking into account the specific circumstances of the local development. No attention was paid to the actual character of the young Byelorussian culture, the creation of people who came from the working class, with centuries of oppression in their past, democratic in their very essence, and reflecting the tendencies of the Byelorussian national, social and cultural liberation. Opposition to this culture was unthinkable even from the viewpoint of Marxism and Leninism, for it was none other than Lenin who as early as 1916, while utterly rejecting the principle of patriotism in application to mature "bourgeois" countries, had made an exception for the backward peoples of Eastern Europe, especially for the Byelorussians and Ukrainians. Lenin wrote:

> In Western countries, the national movement is in the past. In England, France, Germany and so forth, the native land has already played its role, and in those countries the

> national movement therefore cannot act as a progressive factor lifting new masses of people to a new economic and political life. There, history is faced not with a change from feudalism or patriarchal primitivism to national progress and the cultural and political freedom of "the native land," but with a change from an outlived, capitalistically over-ripe "native land" to socialism. In Eastern Europe the situation is different. For the Ukrainians and Byelorussians, for instance, ... awakening of the people to a mastery of their own native language and literature ... is still continuing. Defense of "the native land" here can still be defense of democracy, of political freedom against the oppressing nations.[64]

The writings of Stalin himself, during whose dictatorship the destruction and suppression of Byelorussian cultural forces began, also assert the right of all nationalities to autonomous development as well as the right of secession, which was later written into the Soviet Constitution. In his work "Marxism and the National-Colonial Question," Stalin wrote:

> A nation can settle its affairs according to its own will. It has the right to arrange its life on the principles of autonomy. It has the right even to secede. A nation is sovereign, and all nations have equal rights.[65]

In this connection it is worth recalling the first constitutional act, "Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia," signed by Lenin and Stalin in December 1917; it proclaimed the equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia and their right to independent development including the right of secession and the creation of independent states, and it abolished all national privileges and restrictions. The Soviet Constitution also guarantees the free development of all peoples making up the Soviet Union. Numerous facts, however, among them the entire history of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and the culture of its people, have given concrete evidence of the failure to make the declared rights of national minorities effective in practice. The debacle of Byelorussian culture during the years 1928-1936 demonstrated the bankruptcy of the policy of the Communist Party with regard to the minority nationalities.

The fact that in spite of the numerous pogroms in Byelorussia, schools conducted in the Byelorussian language, Byelorussian art, literature, the press, and theater continue to exist, is only proof of the force of national sentiment and its powers of resistance. In its fight against the Byelorussian national movement, the Communist Party encountered strong opposition from the masses of the people and the intelligentsia. The work of a large number of poets, writers and playwrights, such as Yanka Kupala, Uladimir Duboŭka, Yazep Pushcha, Uladimir Zhylka, Vasil' Shashalevich, Mikhas' Zarėtski, Mikhas' Charot, Zhylunovich (Tsishka Hartny), Kuz'ma Chorny, Ales' Dudar, and others, furnished many examples of courageous protest against spiritual slavery. The Byelorussian theaters did not remain on the sidelines. In subsequent years the Second Byelorussian State Theater was revealed not only in its work on the stage but also in its attitude towards the new Communist policy, with the entire company demonstrating its protest sometimes openly and at other times in more devious ways.

The concealed struggle of the members of the Second Byelorussian State Theater against Bolshevik strangulation of creative freedom and for national independence of its art, wrote an important page in the common struggle of the Soviet peoples for free national development.

Chapter 52

THE BREAKING UP OF THE SECOND THEATER

The campaign of denunciation of creative trends in the Second Byelorussian State Theater was appraised by the Communist writer Ales' Nekrashévich as "an act of vigorous resistance of proletarian public circles to bourgeois-nationalist tendencies in the theater."[66]

> [This] did not teach the theater anything, except perhaps still greater skill in disguising itself under the excuse of not being able to get better plays. . . . The necessity of decisive measures for bringing a healthy spirit into this young theater company has become apparent.[67]

Thus he justified in advance the administrative action which came immediately afterwards. Towards the end of the second season, the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Communist Party decided it was high time to give special consideration to a complete reorganization of the Second Theater. It compelled the People's Commissariat of Education to remove the theater's director and bring new blood into its management and direction. Complying with the demands of the Party, the new administration made drastic changes in the repertory policy of the Second Theater. A stream of Soviet non-Byelorussian Soviet plays poured onto its stage. A young Moscow director, S. Rozanov, was appointed to head the company. A number of plays expressive of Byelorussian national sentiment were banned. To mark the change of policy, a Byelorussian translation of the Soviet Russian play *Breach* by Boris Lavrenev was selected as the first work to be staged by the new director. Scenery and costumes were designed by H. Hol'ts; music was composed by Polovinkin. The young director, Rozanov, treated the play in a style that can be described as a combination of realism and constructivism. He could not resist the temptation, however, to turn the "negative" characters into sheer

caricatures. For example, the scenes of the visit of a delegation headed by an admiral and the scene in the home of Bersenev, captain of a cruiser, were presented with emphasis, typical for the Soviet theater of that period, on the so-called "decomposition" of the bourgeoisie.

In the treatment of other characters the director was closer to reality. The color and dynamics of the mass scenes and the more skillful interpretation of characters, together with the dramatic tension of situations on stage, constructivist sets and fine acting, assured the success of the production. The high opinion of the play held by the local Communist leaders (who controlled the fate of the Second Theater) was due to political considerations stemming from the substitution of a proletarian approach in plays for the former National-Democratic approach. The rapture with which this event was greeted was most fully expressed by Lyavon Litvinaŭ in a review published in the Party newspaper *Star.* The first to notice a change in the work of the theater, *Star* viewed the production of *Breach* as the beginning of a new period in the theater's work and credited this change to social trends and the demands of the Soviet public. Litvinaŭ wrote:

> The broad masses of working people must and will see this ringing performance which is as refreshing as a sea breeze. The theater should remember that *Breach* is also its own breach; that it is the pioneer along a new path; it must take a firm stand in favor of plays of social significance and take more care in its choice of formal models, both as to the production as a whole and as to the actors' performances. Let there be, first of all, more self-criticism; second, more culture and skill in acting and staging; third, a newly created original revolutionary repertory; and fourth, greater ties with the Soviet public. These should provide slogans for the Second Byelorussian State Theater, one of the richest sources of theater culture in the B.S.S.R.[68]

The play which followed *Breach* was Yur'in's *When the Cocks Crow,* also a translation from the Russian, which unmasked the "treasonable role" of the German Social Democrats. It was primitive and schematic and offered no means

by which the actors and directors could develop their talents, yet Mikola Mitskevich, the director, Hol'ts the designer, and I. Hitharts, who wrote the music, did their best to create a semblance of art. They tried to have second-rate actors take the leads. However, the devices of using separate situations for external effect and of interpreting the villains with masks—or even grotesquely—made the production uncharacteristic of the school and trend of the Second Byelorussian State Theater. The smoothness of the ensemble and style was destroyed, a fact, however, which did not bother the Communist reviewers who were guided by political considerations exclusively. On the basis of these two productions of the 1927-1928 season, the Party critics generally concluded that the theater was being reorganized to conform to the demands of new times, that it was leaving its old, anti-Soviet path. Ales' Nekrashèvich summed up the results of the season as follows:

> 1. The theater has seriously begun to reconstruct itself. It is being transformed from a counterrevolutionary and National-Democratic stronghold into a genuine Soviet theater. Such a reconstruction has been the result of the fact that the theater was harshly criticized by the proletarian public.
>
> 2. The theater has begun to free itself of the bad traditions held by the Moscow Art Theater. It has begun to look at them critically and to seek ways in which to synthesize its own school with the contemporary repertory. Yet the process of searching itself shows certain formalistic tendencies.
>
> 3. The theater has gradually begun to approach those theatergoers who are workers and to work mainly with them and for them.
>
> 4. The theater, like all the other theaters, has experienced a crisis in its repertory and has neither found nor trained its own playwrights.[69]

The sum total of the criticism showed that the crisis was a serious one, and one which had been artifically provoked by external meddling in order to subordinate the theater to aims that lay, to a certain extent, outside art. A breach en-

sued between the theater itself and the principles to which it had adhered during its first two years. All this told on its later work in which its genuine character was constantly clashing with alien tendencies imposed upon it.

These were the complicated circumstances under which the theater began its third season, that of 1928-1929. This season was spent touring Gomel' and Mogilev.

The theater began the season in Gomel', presenting *Tsar Maksimil'yan, In Bygone Times, Around the Terrace* (in a new version), *Breach, When the Cocks Crow,* and an evening of one-act plays. The new plays announced included *On the Eve of Spring* by Mikola Il'inski, *Rails Are Humming* by Vladimir Kirshon, *Hiawatha* by Nikolai Ognyov and *Property* by S.G. Rozanov (after "Courtyard," a story by A. Karavayeva.

On the Eve of Spring was the only new Byelorussian play of the season. People who cared about Byelorussian culture could not look on this fact with indifference. Hlybotski expressed their protest against such a situation. *Soviet Byelorussia* carried two of his articles, "On Our Criticism" and "Down with Anecdotes," in the fall of 1928. In them he strongly protested against the way in which the number of Byelorussian plays in the repertory was being reduced, dubbing any talk about a lack of plays for the repertory as anecdotes which did not correspond to the facts. Hlybotski deplored the inundation of Russian plays which were outdated even in their native land, such as *Armored-Train 14-69, Breach, Rebellion, Moon Is on the Left, Soviet Devil,* and *When the Cocks Crow.* He suggested replacing them with the best models of classical and contemporary Byelorussian plays by such dramatists as Yanka Kupala, Leopold Rodzevich and Mikhas' Zarėtski. He also suggested using Ukrainian plays and Western European dramas, particularly those by Romain Rolland.

Hlybotski declared:

> *Armored Train 14-69* and *Breach* are good plays; they marked an epoch in the Russian theater. But must we de-

> velop along the lines which the Russian theater has shown us? Why should a Byelorussian playgoer find the struggle of the partisans in Siberia more important than his own fighters?[70]

This statement began the discussions on the theater which have been discussed in Part II, above. Nor was Hlybotski alone in his views. A number of writers and public figures supported his position. Most of the actors in the Second Byelorussian State Theater also supported the idea of developing Byelorussian culture nationally. There was reason for Ales' Nekrashèvich to warn about the dangers of Hlybotski's views to the theater.[71] The company expressed their attitude by stubbornly refusing to condemn Hlybotski's articles at meetings convoked by the Party and by trade unions to win the company's approval for the official stand.

Eventually the combination of the Party, the Komsomol and the trade unionists from the non-acting personnel of the theater forced the company to accept a resolution which formally condemned Hlybotski's speech. This was done by different subterfuges. Even then, however, it was done with a stipulation as to "why the questions had been stated so sharply."[72]

Practically speaking, the theater was whole-heartedly with Hlybotski in the defense of original art. Manifestations of this attitude were, in Nekrashèvich's words, "frequent and forceful enough."[73] It was shown in the theater's resistance to staging such schematic Soviet plays as *On the Eve of Spring* and *Rails Are Humming.* Nevertheless, the plays were the main productions of the third season. The new course of the Party called for staging plays about class differentiation in the countryside and in town, and for struggling towards the new forms of Soviet life.

On the Eve of Spring was staged by Rozanov, with costumes and scenery by N. Aizenberh and music by Oranski. There are two interrelated main plots. Platon, a demobilized veteran of the Red Army, returns to his remote native village in Polesie. Matsei, a kulak, and Yaŭkhim, a former shopkeeper, control the village by means of a middle peasant, Pilip,

the head of the village Soviet. Matsei uses his windmill to exploit the entire village. The local Komsomol members, with Platon as their leader, decide to replace it with an electric power station. Artsyom, the village inventor, dreams of the time when their village will even have its own radio station so that America will be made to hear the girls of the village singing.

Matsei regards all these maneuvers of the young people as a danger to his own well-being and decides to hinder them by discrediting Platon. Platon is in love with Paraska, the daughter of a member of the village Soviet. He is taking lessons from the local schoolmistress in reading and writing. Wishing to conceal this fact, he takes his lessons only at night. At the time Matsei's own son is courting Paraska. Porkhaŭka, the village chatterbox and fortune teller, tells Paraska that Platon has a secret rendezvous with the schoolmistress. From jealousy Paraska agrees to marry Anton although she does not love him. Everyone comes to the wedding. Platon is embarrassed at having taken lessons from the schoolmistress. Paraska agrees to leave her husband, but he kills her for faithlessness. The kulaks attribute the murder to Platon. After a tense struggle the truth comes out. The Komsomol members and Platon conquer.

The play was a model of the new, Soviet melodrama, and the critics hailed it as an attainment of the new Soviet theater.[74] The workers, influenced by the press, were enthusiastic about it.

During the next two years the policy of the government changed. The play ceased to respond to reality and became anachronistic. When it was shown in Moscow during 1931, the critics there criticized it as outdated.

Rails Are Humming also added nothing to the reputation of the theater. It was staged by Rozanov and Kastus' Sannikaŭ; the scenery and costumes were by Hol'ts, and Mosoloŭ wrote the music. The production was prepared within two months so that the première would be ready for the tenth anniversary of

the Byelorussian S.S.R. This play, like Kirshon's other dramas, later disappeared from all surveys of the theater's activities. Kirshon had been liquidated by the police as an enemy of the people.

Rails Are Humming resembled many other Soviet plays. It concerned the harmfulness of engineers who had been trained before the Revolution and of intrigues by Nepmen,[a] depicting the struggle of the working class for Soviet principles. Its villains, such as Parshin, a Nepman, were overdone to the point of caricature, just as in *When the Cocks Crow.*

The Party press praised Kirshon's play as continuing the line of *Breach.* It was seen as further evidence that the theater was getting rid of its National Democratic tendencies.

The Party and trade-union organizations of the Gomel' area undertook a campaign to popularize the theater and organized ticket buying by organizations such as the factories. In Gomel' alone the theater gave 75 performances to over 50,000 playgoers; for the most part, the public consisted of workers, students and soldiers.

Polesie Pravda [Paleskaya praŭda], the local newspaper, reviewed the productions favorably, terming the Second Byelorussian State Theater a theater of the working-class spectator, and printing reviews of its performances by workers. When the theater left Gomel' it was accompanied by several hundred workers who expressed their gratitude for its protracted work among workers and soldiers.

There was another side to the coin, however. It was clear that the Gomel' area demanded Byelorussian art. Only a short while before, in 1926, it had been appended to Byelorussia, and this was its first encounter with the art of the Byelorussian people.

Those plays which were most successful in Gomel' came from the original Byelorussian repertory. They included

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a. Representatives of private enterprise during the period of the New Economic Policy.—Ed.

Around the Terrace and *Tsar Maksimil'yan*, although Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* was also popular. Of course the Gomel' public had no chance to see the best production of the theater, *Aprametnaya or the Kingdom of Hell*, which had already been withdrawn and forbidden. Mogilev also received the theater warmly.

Chapter 53

INTENSIFICATION OF THE REPERTORY CRISIS

During the theater's fourth season (1929-1930), the crisis in its national repertory became still more acute, and the importance of translations increased. Throughout the entire season not one new Byelorussian play was staged. Only Byelorussian plays which had already been produced filled the gap in any manner at all. These included *In Bygone Times* by Il'lya Bèn, *Tsar Maksimil'yan, Around the Terrace, On the Eve of Spring* and the evening of Byelorussian one-act comedies. *Breach, When the Cocks Crow,* and *Rails Are Humming* were also put on. As to the newly translated plays, premières were held for Sergei Zayaitski's *Simple Hearts,* Kirshon's *City of the Winds* and Valentin Katayev's *Vanguard.*

The interest of the theater in operetta-type plays forced it to turn again to *Simple Hearts* which had already been rejected once. As adapted by Mitskevich this play presented the theater with an opportunity to create a vivid but conventional production. Its director was S.G. Rozanov; Khodasevich designed the sets and costumes. In a formal and artistic sense the production was interesting.

The play takes place in a small town crowded with people—or rather former people[a]—of every kind who are dissatisfied with the Soviet regime or hold a grudge against it. They all live solely in the hope that the regime which they hate will soon be over. This hope is utilized by the active opponents of the Soviet regime, who try to organize some sort of local *coup d'état.* A kind of conspiracy is organized. The Komsomol

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a. "Former people"—Gorki's story of that name has been translated as "Creatures Who Once Were Men"—were individuals who had filled important posts in society or in the government before the Revolution, but whose talents were not being used by the Soviet government.—Ed.

members and the young people of the town find out about it. To prevent it from succeeding, they themselves act out a pretended *coup.* Once they clash with reality, the inhabitants become afraid of their own plan. They hasten to declare that, strictly speaking, they have nothing special against the Soviet regime, that they grumble from time to time only out of habit, and that they do not need any kind of a *coup* at present. The play ends with the triumph of the young people and their procession across the stage in parade.

The theater put a good deal of work, time and creative invention into the production, using constructivist settings.

In Vitebsk the production was warmly received. Towards the end of the season the theater visited Minsk, where the public also showed interest in the production. Scarcely any two groups of playgoers reacted to it in the same way. The trade-union officials, the members of the Komsomol and the Party members accepted it, in the main, as a mocking exposé of philistinism and narrow vulgarity. The ordinary public, however, could find not a few elements in the play which expressed its own dissatisfaction with Soviet practices.

There was a second and a sadder cause for the long and scrupulous work of the actors on *Simple Hearts.* At the very beginning of the season a large group of young actors poured into the theater; they had been educated at the Leningrad Technical School of Theater Arts. They were all accepted by the theater to overcome the shortage of actors caused by the wholesale discharge of former actors, who had either shown special ardor and persistence in defending the principles of the Moscow Art Theater, where they had received their training, or, as Ales' Nekrashévich defined it, had "actively opposed the reorientation of the theater and hindered it in every possible way."[75]

The Party leadership was trying to paralyze any protest against the coercion of art by means of such administrative methods as these. Finally open protest and struggle were overcome. The theater was led away from its inherent crea-

tive paths. What had previously been a single ensemble of actors was destroyed by the removal of those unorthodox people who had disagreed and by the introduction of a large group of new actors whose schooling and education were completely different.

It was for this reason that the theater had to work on *Simple Hearts* somewhat longer than usual. Only the incredible ardor, the persistence and the endurance of the director-producer and of all the others who participated in the production finally made possible some kind of ensemble and the smoothing out of unevenness of techniques.

The production was a relative success because the material of *Simple Hearts* was good theater. This could not be said about the productions which followed, *City of the Winds* and *Vanguard,* (both of which were staged by Rozanov). The old habits of performing a role psychologically conflicted completely with the pathos and heroics of the Civil War as depicted in *City of the Winds.* They also contradicted the careful art of the young new actors, who were more drawn to the revolutionary theater of masks and gestures. These contradictions were also reflected in the production of *City of the Winds.* The public disliked it, and the play did not remain long in the repertory of the theater. The production of *Vanguard* revealed similar contradictions. The theater began committing sins of schematism and examining roles superficially. This situation was aggravated by the imperfections in the dramatic material itself. A new staff in the old company violated the smoothness of the actors' technique and destroyed the unity of the ensemble. The result, a general lowering of the theater's standards, was not slow in appearing. The work of the directors and the general creative guidance of the theater grew weaker. Administrative pressure on the theater was not followed by the unexpected improvement but rather by disruption and the impoverishment of all repertory work. The oblivion into which the national repertory had fallen during the season was accompanied by a repudiation of the classi-

cal repertory as well. As a result the best Byelorussian directors of the theater were forced to remain idle for a lengthy period.

The lamentable situation of the theater towards the end of its fourth season could not be ignored by even such an enthusiastic supporter of the Party, of the new course, and of the reorganization of the theater as Nekrashévich. Despite his complete approval of the theater's progress towards contemporary themes and its growing feeling for those playgoers who were workers, his conclusions about the season included the following points:

a) the repudiation of the classical repertory by the theater and the harmful effect of this phenomenon upon the young artists of the theater;

b) the slackening of the theater's work in creating an original repertory. Ryhor Kobets' *Glass Factory* had been intended for the Second Byelorussian State Theater, but it was not produced there;

c) the destruction of the ensemble and the lowering of standards because the new actors had come from a different school; and

d) the failure to understand the task of struggling against the National-Democratic repertory and the retention by the theater of such National-Democratic productions as *Around the Terrace,* and of other plays containing strong National-Democratic tendencies, such as *Tsar Maksimil'yan.*[76]

Chapter 54

THE PREWAR DECADE

The numerous arrests of Byelorussian National Democrats in 1930 and the exile of many Byelorussian cultural figures served as a new occasion for purges in literature, drama and the theater. The very fact that many dramatists and others active in the arts had been arrested was, in the eyes of doctrinaire Soviet people, genuine proof that dangers of a nationalist deviation existed in the arts. The people stubbornly refused to believe in the guilt of those who had been arrested and exiled, yet propaganda kept calling for a fight against national deviationists and for the eradication of their heritage. As a result of this campaign the Second Byelorussian State Theater was deprived of its entire former repertory. Not to mention Vasil' Shashalevich's *Aprametnaya or The Kingdom of Hell,* which had been forbidden earlier, *Tsar Maksimil'yan, Midsummer Night's Dream,* Il'lya Bén's *In Bygone Times,* and Mikhas' Hramyka's *Around the Terrace* were removed from the repertory before the 1930-1931 season.

The theater remained Byelorussian only in its language. The plays themselves had been translated from the Russian. Original Byelorussian plays disappeared from the boards almost entirely. The plays of Soviet Russian playwrights gushed forth in infinite numbers. Only rarely was the repertory adorned with isolated plays by pre-Soviet Russian or, even more rarely, Byelorussian or classical Western European dramas.

An attempt was made to compensate for the miserable quality of the theater's work during the first years after the debacle of 1929-1930. The reviewers eulogized the methods of socialist competition and shock work, which had allegedly come into the practice of the company at that time. In reality, however, they had a grievous effect on the work of the theater, bringing all creative work in art down to the same level.

During the production of Vsevolod Vishnevski's *First Cavalry Army* in the 1930-1931 season, the theater received the valuable Red Banner award from the Minsk garrison of the Red Army as well as a large number of messages and testimonials from the Red Army House in Minsk. Vishnevski's play was directed by V. Tezavrovski, with sets by Matrunin and music by Starokadomski.

The theater began to carry on social and political work with the public. Thematic exhibitions were organized in its foyer and corridors. Leaflets were issued for the public, and debates were organized.

In 1931 the Second Byelorussian State Theater went on tour to Moscow and Leningrad. Boris Lavrenev's *Breach, First Cavalry Army,* Il'lya Hurski's *Stokers,* and Mikola Il'inski's *On the Eve of Spring* were performed.

A desire to contrast the West with Moscow and an orientation towards Western European culture were ascribed to the National Democrats, who had embodied the new, socialist culture. Therefore the theater's Western European repertory was greatly curtailed. During the decade from 1931 to 1942, a few productions of Western European classics appeared briefly in the theater. During the time of the struggle against formalism, Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro* was subjected to criticism because its characters had been portrayed formalistically. The director of the production was reproached for having used a classical work as an excuse for empty formalistic trickery. On the other hand, there was a sign that relapses into formalism were being overcome and that the theater was on its way towards an authentic, socialist art. Approval was granted to plays translated from the general Soviet repertory, such as B. Romashev's *Fighters* (directed by V. Darvisheŭ), Aleksandr Korneichuk's *Death of a Squadron* (staged by Honored Artist K. Zubaŭ), Konstantin Khal'fin's (Finn) *Nonsense,* Vladimir Kirshon's *Marvellous Alloy,* and Nikolai Pogodin's *Man with a Gun* (directed by A.B. Viner and Tamarin). Russian Classics were also approved, such as Aleksandr

Ostrovski's *Woods* and *Girl with No Dowry*[a] (directed by Darvisheŭ), S. Naidenov's *Vanyushin's Children* (directed by P. Syarheichyk), and Gorki's *Philistines* (staged by Viner and Tamarin).

During these years the theater produced comparatively few Byelorussian plays. Foremost among them were Hurski's *Stokers* (1930), Andrėi Aleksandrovich's *Pressure* (1932), Mikola Il'inski's *Spring* (1932), Yakub Kolas' *War on War* (1936), and the same author's *In the Forests of Polesie* (1937). There was also a program of Byelorussian comedies: Vintsėnt Dunin-Martsinkevich's *Nobles of Pinsk;* Yanka Kupala's *In-Laws;* Eduard Samuilyonak's *Death of a Wolf;* Pyatro Hlebka's *Above the Berezina River,* and Kuz'ma Chorny's *Irynka.*

What produced such impoverishment in the repertory of the theater? According to several critics, the theater had lost contact with the dramatists, had been doing little to bring new playwrights to the fore, and had shown no initiative in cooperating with them. But the reasons that the repertory had become so miserable were not connected with the theater at all. The fact is that the artificially inflamed campaign against National-Democratic tendencies kept growing more acute over a number of years, making it impossible for dramatists who had their own ideas to work. Freedom of the spirit was killed. The best dramatists were either arrested or silenced. Some of them hardened their hearts and, despite their homesickness, left Byelorussia, trying to lose themselves in the impersonal mass of the Soviet nation. In order to save their lives, they tried to get as far away as they could from this terrible frontier republic. The spectre of an imaginary intervention from abroad haunted the dull minds of Party people. The slightest nationalist deviations were connected with it.

The Director of the Department of the Arts under the Byelorussian Ministry of Education in 1934 was Khaim Dunets, a man who had shared in the pogroms against Byelorussian culture. Later, he himself was accused of being a Trotskyite and

a. This play is also known as *Poor Bride* in English.—Ed.

was liquidated. At this time, however, he was still at the height of his power. Dunets wrote:

> The theaters of Byelorussia were subjected to strong influences from the National Democrats at the stage under discussion. This was especially true of those whose cadres consisted of people who had not undergone a thorough Soviet schooling. The National Democrats sought to preserve in the theaters the spirit and traditions of the intimacies of life, of the romantic and symbolic theater, of the theater which served the "god of art," and, at that, the art of "original," "national," romanticized Byelorussian days of yore. The political aspirations of the National Democrats in the theater were exposed by the Party in a series of very severe battles with an enemy camouflaged by the national flag. The hidden meaning behind the ignoring of Russian drama in the theaters and the orientation towards Western culture was deciphered and clarified. All this is now in the past, but it must not be said that all the roots of the National Democrats have been torn up or that all their traces have been liquidated in the theaters of the Byelorussian S.S.R. One need only recall that the Commissariat of Education was compelled to remove Mikola Mitskevich, the artistic director of the Second Byelorussian Theater, in 1934 because the formalistic and National-Democratic tendencies in his work had brought the theater to a precarious situation.[77]

Could a normal creative life exist under such troubled circumstances? There was so much that was unexpected and dangerous for dramatists! And could this really be changed, could the repertory of the Soviet theaters be enriched by a governmental announcement that contests were being organized among the writers of the U.S.S.R. for the best plays?[78] Nevertheless Aŭhen Ramanovich wrote that this contest "encouraged Byelorussian dramatists to work."[79]

Consultative bureaus were organized consisting of directors, dramatic critics and literary experts. Creative assignments were carried out. Creative evenings were held to acquaint the authors of works in progress with the plan and to have them report on their progress. These had a second purpose also: to analyze the playwrights' creative paths and to help them, through the criticism of their comrades, to consider and acknowledge their errors of the past. They were also to

note successes and attainments and to base their further work on them.

All this could at best give only a recurrent coaching of the dramatist on how to comply with political doctrine and the contents of anemic dramatic hybrids, far from the truth of life and deprived of any authentic creative inspiration or depictive power. The government resolution about the contest itself conceived of drama as a weapon for propaganda. It began as follows: "Giving special significance to the theater as one of the most effective means for educating broad masses of the workers politically, ..."[80]

One cannot unite certain things. One cannot fuse the task of creating highly artistic plays for the theater with the purpose of educating the masses in the spirit of socialism. The two are mutually exclusive. The nature of art is such that it avenges any destruction of its laws by means of potboilers and mediocrity.

The repertory of the theater was scrutinized after the start of the so-called reorientation. Its earlier trends had been nationalist and original, and its earlier aspirations had been towards pure art, but these were forcibly renounced. The new repertory furnished incontestable proof that the inscrutable paths of art and totalitarian practice are incompatible.

Chapter 55

ILLUSTRATIVE DRAMA

Before providing a brief characterization of the leading Byelorussian plays performed at the Second Byelorussian State Theater during the course of the prewar decade, it will be enlightening to discuss a significant admission by one of the Soviet playwrights, Il'lya Hurski. Hurski, who was himself occupied with supplying plays to the theater that were consistently orthodox and Soviet in character, admitted that the artistic standards of Soviet drama had fallen. Thanks to his Party card he directed the Department of the Arts under the People's Commissariat of Education. Later, after the Union of Soviet Writers of Byelorussia had come into being, he guided its Dramatists' Section. Hurski nevertheless demonstrated a courage which is rare among people of his type and in his position. In *Literature and Art* [Litaratura i mastatstva] —which he edited—Hurski publicly acknowledged the miserable quality of the Soviet dramas written during the First Five-Year Plan,[a] comparing them unfavorably with the National-Democratic drama. His words were a confession that the Byelorussian drama had been confined by the Party to an artistic blind alley. Hurski wrote:

> Our contemporary drama, except for a few basic plays, is a more or less successful illustration of some thesis or other of our Party or of the dictum of a politician.
>
> It is sufficient to recall the so-called dawn of the Byelorussian nationalist drama to become convinced that there were many playwrights then who boldly posed a number of questions, each in his own way. Take such plays as V[asil'] Shashalevich's *Aprametnaya or The Kingdom of Hell,* A[ŭhen] Ramanovich's *Whirlpool,* M[ikola] Il'inski's *Snow-Maiden,* and others. The playwrights had sufficient boldness. They found the specific artistic means of propagandizing the ideas of the bourgeois nationalists.[81]

a. 1928-1932.—Ed.

In this symptomatic confession, the following points are interesting:

1) the assertion of the former dawn of a national dramaturgy, and of its artistic perfection both in the sense of content (boldly posing the questions), and in form (the specific artistic means);

2) the open confession in the press of the weakness of the Soviet dramaturgy called upon to replace the forbidden dramas of the National Democrats.

One must confess—to Hurski's credit—that his diagnosis was correct. He included in it a correct enough indication of the reasons which had brought forth these anemic works of drama. This correctness becomes still more obvious if it is realized the author could not talk openly about the real and basic reasons. This would have led to censuring the Party policy in art. He was forced to limit himself to a rather tame definition. Between the lines, however, he does indicate the very essence of the reasons for this malignant ailment to the thinking reader, playgoer and playwright. Drama had been converted into the handmaiden of politics. The recurrent political and economic campaigns, begun in 1930, systematically sought to shake all the bases of the life of the country and the people. All outlets for free and creative work by dramatists, all means for the reworking of themes which they had freely chosen, were closed. Limits were set up according to what was convenient to the Party and urgent in the sense of thematically reflecting the struggle for socialism. All this impoverished the drama in quantity and, even worse, destroyed its artistic quality. The contents of editorials from *Pravda* and Party resolutions on numerous economic questions began to be obligatory for every poet, writer and playwright. New plays began to appear in the theaters, but they came neither from the vibrant emotions of the living, human heart, from individual and personal meditation and observation, nor from a profound generalization by the author about his experience. They came from cold reason, which was called forth to define more exact-

ly all the complexity of life in the Procrustean bed of Party theses.

Hurski's own plays, *Stokers* and *Mother,* Andrèi Aleksandrovich's *Pressure,* Mikola Il'inski's *Shoots of Springtime,* and even Yakub Kolas' *War on War*—not to mention other plays staged at the Second Byelorussian State Theater during the first years of this new course were models of such lifelessly illustrative plays and productions.

The production of *Stokers* during the 1930-1931 season reflected the influence of the TRAM[b] school in the theater, popular at the time. It was a simplified trend whose purpose was to represent the working collective on the stage without isolating the strong and clear figure of the hero. It substituted bombast and external revolutionary declarations for the internal world and experiences of the human being. It used the style of posters and slogans. During the course of several years, it debauched many theaters, not to speak of the special ones set up for young working people.

In response to Party orders, Hurski tried to create sharp satire in *Stokers.* The play burlesqued the National Democrats. The playwright had the task of exposing their social and political essence, of tearing the masks off those whom the Party considered to be agents and weapon-bearers for foreign interventionists and of revealing those who had inspired them—Poincaré and Pilsudski (they were not talking in terms of Anglo-American imperialists then). Capitalist France and fascist Poland were the chief targets of Soviet propaganda, which was just beginning during the First Five-Year Plan. In the play there are interventionists' helpers inside the country, including kulaks, spies, saboteurs, National Democrats, and agents supposedly preparing for foreign intervention. The leading role of the Party was reflected by—among others—Asmoloŭski, a Communist who is president of his trade-union committee, and Silin, the secretary of the Party cell. However, none of them is a

b. From TRAM, an abbreviation in Byelorussian for *Tèatr Rabochai Moladi* (Theater of Working Young People).

living, concrete character; they are all abstract patterns of Party qualities. The hero of the play is a depersonalized worker of the stokers' collective. The dynamics of the play are those of the collective, of mass scenes. The action of the workers' collective itself fills the entire play. But this is not the sum of living individuals in typical circumstances, but a single unity of workers' situations, interests, and ideas, a depersonalized chorus of schematized mannequins, uttering slogans and hackneyed phrases. The villains alone are somewhat individualized, such as Shchukin, a National Democrat, and Ivanoŭski, director of the electric power station.

Stokers was the worst example of Soviet drama to be produced by the theater. It was matched, however, by *Pressure,* Aleksandrovich's play in verse, which the theater produced in 1932. Aleksandrovich aimed to show the work of the Komsomol in production as aiding the Party in the socialist construction of a wood-processing factory. The play included the struggle for the Plan in industry and finance; the struggle for standardized houses for the workers; the struggle for the Five-Year Plan, and for socialism. The many other problems mentioned include the struggle against the class enemy and sabotage; the backwardness and irresponsibility of those seasonal workers who had fallen under the influence of the kulaks: the re-education of an engineer who had been a saboteur; the struggle with survivals of the old life and morality; inventiveness; the training of cadres; the struggles with the newest forms of covert sedition by the kulaks; the struggle with natural calamities (floods, in this case); and the Komsomol at leisure, in winter sports, out-of-town excursions in the summer, etc.

However, *Pressure,* like *Stokers,* had an active and dynamic collective as its hero; no individual characters were sketched out clearly. The protagonists included Kiril Antanovich, the factory director, and Klim, the Secretary of the Party collective. They were pale, inert and of little significance. Their speech was colorless, dry and carried little conviction.

The antagonists—Kandral', Zaremba, and others—were more convincing.

Not one of the problems touched upon received its dramatic denouement in the play. Everything was given schematically, superficially, and in simplified fashion. But the troubles connected with the theme of inventiveness were generally given in the light tones of a musical comedy. From the standpoint of its special traits in composition, the play was a long closet-drama rather than a play with a consistently developed plot.

Vitali Vol'ski, the critic, found fault with the depiction of the Komsomol in the play, claiming that its significance as a helper of the Party was exaggerated. He declared that the guiding role of the Party and of Party organizations was not apparent behind the actions of the Komsomol members, a failing which came close to Trotskyism, although it did not go that far formally. Aleksandrovich was then (1932) definitely considered a leading proletarian writer. His turn for liquidation came only in 1938.

Il'inski's *Spring* is another illustrative play, but with a difference. The first two plays which we have examined were written in response to demands for a contemporary theme dealing with workers. *Spring* was devoted to the theme of collectivizing the countryside. Its production was the response of the playwright and the theater to the Party's demand for help through the arts in establishing those strongholds of planned economy, the collective farms.

The author tried to depict this process by showing a sharp class war inside the collective farms themselves against the sabotage of the kulaks and against counterrevolutionary groups supposedly connected with the National Democrats in town. This was an echo of the struggle against the Prishchepovites.[c]

The author concentrated on the problem of re-educating the middle peasant and on the middle peasant's role in the process

c. Prishchepovites were followers of Pryshchepoŭ (Prishchepov), formerly Minister of Agriculture for Byelorussia. He directed a policy of creating farmsteads and was arrested in 1930.

of socialist reconstruction in the countryside. However, the very same signs of primitivism, immaturity and superficiality, of a failure to reason things through, and of the absence of any integrated action deprived the author of the artistic means which were needed. The situations are solved schematically and in stereotyped fashion. The characters are masks rather than figures in a work of art. Characters are artificially fitted into far-fetched situations rather than having the latter flow logically out of the conduct and character of the people in the play.

The actors had to bear the entire onus of the play's failure. They tried to save the play and the theater, to save the author and their own company from the shame of total failure, but they did not always succeed. An untruth, even in its most elegant form, sickens the public and is often proved wrong by itself. Even Yakub Kolas, the important writer and dramatist and the national poet of Byelorussia, was unable to protect himself from this danger. He gave the theater his plays *War on War* (1936) and *In the Forests of Polesie* (1937).

Chapter 56

TALENT AND DOCTRINE

Many of the peculiarities and shortcomings in the dramatic works of Il'lya Hurski, Mikola Il'inski and Andréi Aleksandrovich can be explained by their lack of dramatic talent. The conscious subordination of creative intentions to political theses only increased the drabness of their writing. But one cannot deny that Yakub Kolas (whose real name was Kanstantyn Mitskevich) had genuine talent. He was a writer of merit and his plays were famous. His monumental works of the prerevolutionary period and of the early postrevolutionary years included the epic, *New Land;* the long poem, *Symon the Musician;* the novel, *In the Forests of Polesie,* and a great number of other tales and stories which have been included in many anthologies. All these bore witness to his great lyrical and epic talent. His dramatic works, the weakest parts of his writings, include *Anton' Lata, On the Path of Life* and *Strikers.* The latter presents a dramatic account of the underground conference of teachers which took place in 1906, for participating in which the author served three years in prison before the Revolution.

In an artistic sense Kolas did not fall so low anywhere else as he did in *War on War,* staged at the Second Byelorussian State Theater in 1936 under the direction of V. Darvisheŭ.

Kolas reworked this play several times, and printed three of its variants.[82] Nevertheless he did not achieve artistic finish. The conception of the play, like its action and characters, had been subjected to the sclerosis of sloganeering and axe-grinding. The play was planned and arranged according to theses which had been given previously, concerning the revolutionary ferment in the Russian army during the First World War.

The protagonists of the play make accusatory speeches and

judge the tsarist government and its creatures. Budan-Ryl'ski, a *zemski nachal'nik*[a] and reserve officer, kills Maryna, a teacher, and the fiancée of Ales', a Bolshevik, at the end of the play

Patap Dumaka, a miner, denounces priests, the tsar's police guards and his native land as bourgeois prejudices. He demands a path for the workers and landless peasants. Under his influence, even the peasant Mikhas' promises to square accounts with the Radziwill magnates upon his return from the front.

Ales', who has been mobilized to the front, is against the war from the outset. In conversation with others he suggests that they fight those who have started the war and who are driving the human herd to death and destruction. He then develops into a Bolshevik agitator and an adherent of violent revolution. His fiancée, Maryna, is a front-line nurse, who objects timidly to his defeatist inclinations. Ales' remains deaf to her arguments and stays at the front only in order to carry out his demoralizing work as a Bolshevik agitator. The interests of the country, he feels, are the interests of the exploited classes. He rejoices in advance over the possible defeat of tsarist Russia:

> *Maryna:* Aren't you mistaken in being a defeatist? The enemy has put a knife against Russia's heart.
>
> *Ales' (disenchanted):* It was not worth looking for me in order to express such a truth. That is what is preached by the priests, the merchants and the generals. I stopped believing in it long ago. And if Russia—that is, tsarist Russia—were struck in its very heart, I would merely welcome it. I am staying here not because there are desertions from the front but because there are desertions from what is going on at the front. If you love and respect me, then love the work I am doing.
>
> *Maryna:* I love you, Ales', but I also love the truth. Where is the truth?

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a. A person who, in prerevolutionary days, combined in himself administrative and judicial functions dealing with the local peasantry.—Ed.

Ales': You ask where the truth is? I arrived at it over a thousand roads. I arrived at it through my tortures and the sufferings of millions, through misery, the lack of rights, tears, and blood. Now it is clear to me: past a bourgeois-democratic revolution and on to a socialist revolution. Do you believe that truth?

Maryna (lets her head fall, speaking softly and timidly): And if that truth shows the way to still more blood?

Ales' (severely): It's all the same whatever way we take, as long as it gets there.

Maryna: War has made you take a cruel attitude to people, Ales'!

Ales' (softly): You are mistaken, Maryna; war has taught me to love people even more and when you speak that way, your voice comes to me as if from far away. ...

From further explanations, it becomes clear that Ales' and Maryna have already been revolutionaries for a long time, only Ales' appears to be more fanatically inclined. He consciously represses his own personal feelings in the name of the common cause. This is the infallible commissar of the future in the short leather jacket so frequent in the Soviet literature of the first years after the Revolution and Civil War.

Maryna (with bitter resentment): And did it [Maryna's voice] ever reach you otherwise than from far away?

Ales' (heatedly): Why do you reproach me so, Maryna? Be honest with yourself. ... Such was the time when we waited for the revolution together and when we did everything we could to bring it closer.

The character of Maryna still preserves something human in its meditations and doubts about the fate of the people. Ales' speaks in the language of Leninist pamphlets, the drab language of Bolshevik leaflets and decrees with their categorical quality and infallibility:

Maryna: I confess, dear Ales', I sometimes am afraid that revolution in wartime might lead the country to destruction.

Ales' (with a bitter laugh): That's how the tsar's ministers talk: pacification first, and then reforms.

During the course of the action, Ales' adapts the name of Shabura, a dead soldier, in order to hide his work as a propagandist more successfully. This work attains its zenith when the soldiers revolt in a group under the leadership of Ales'. They organize a meeting and listen approvingly to the long speeches of Patap Dumaka, the Bolshevik agitator.

These scenes could serve, in a relative way, as material indicating the breakdown and disintegration of the front as a result of the activities of the Bolshevik agents among the masses of soldiers. The scenes served a dual function. On the one hand, according to the author's conception, they showed the growth of consciousness among the masses of soldiers; on the other hand, according to objective reality and in spite of the author's intentions, they showed that the Bolsheviks were guilty of destroying the front during the period from 1914 to 1917. The scene of the soldiers' meeting illustrates the demagogic lie, arrayed in pompous, sonorous phrases, by means of which the Bolsheviks attracted the masses of peasants and workers in uniform who were inexperienced in politics and semi-literate or illiterate:

> *Patap Dumaka:* Comrades, the Revolution[b] began two months ago and we are still rotting in the trenches. During this time, many people from different parties have visited here. What do they tell us? They appeal to us: "Give battle, free soldiers! Defend freedom, our heroes!" They all play the same tune: the Mensheviks and the SR's[c] have now become the bosses—but they jump to the bourgeois flute. The Milyukovs[d] still would like to take the Dardanelles with our hands. In short, comrades the end of the war is not in sight. And how do we, the soldiers, look at the war? We—and you can write this down—have one wish: to get it over with as

b. The reference is to the February Revolution which unseated the Romanov dynasty in 1917.—Ed.

c. SR's: Socialist Revolutionaries.

d. Pavel Milyukov (1859-1943), a leader of the Kadet, or Constitutional Democratic, Party, favored continuing the war against Germany.—Ed.

quickly as possible.

Voices: That's right! It's true!

Patap: Who is backing us up in this? Who is expressing our most painful wishes, our thoughts, and our feelings? Only one party—the party of the Bolsheviks! It is our party, it is —that party is—ourselves, the workers, the peasants, the bitter paupers, and the hungry ones. And the Bolsheviks say to us, "Soldiers! End the war for yourselves! Fraternize with your enemies; they are the same as you—workers and peasants. See that all power goes to the Soviets." Are they right, the Bolsheviks?

Voices: Right!

Patap: So comrades, we ourselves will see that the war ends. Let's carry out fraternization, organized by whole units. That will bring peace and the end of the war closer. *(touches a bundle of newspapers.)* Here, soldiers, is our own soldiers' paper for you, the *Pravda of the Trenches.* It is written by people who are for peace, for our brother soldiers, for the people, and for real freedom. They tell us who the people are that stand for a war of pillage and where they are taking us. ...

Voices: Yes, it's clear! We are for the Bolsheviks! We will end the war ourselves.[83]

In the play there is much tribute to the policy of the times. The slogan of negating war as such did not meet current requirements. This was definitely reflected both in the title of *War on War* itself and in the statements by the characters. Everyone knows that the wars carried on by Bolsheviks are termed wars of liberation by them, but wars of defense against their own acts of aggression they term imperialistic. There could be no room now for pacifistic motifs.

Let us now take up the speech of Ales', whose fiancée has just been killed by Budan-Ryl'ski, the officer.[e] Ales' rather coldbloodedly and calculatingly uses this action to accuse

e. In order to show the dark features of the representatives of the old social order, the author has Budan-Ryl'ski kill Maryna for distributing Bolshevik leaflets.

the Provisional Government—which has just been overthrown—of crimes. He makes a number of remarks expressed in ringing and accusatory phraseology. He stands beneath the false colors of fighting for that truth for which the people have been searching since time immemorial:

> *Ales' (shakes the package):* Here, comrades, are documents of human suffering, blood and tears! And this is all that is left to me in memory of the person who was dearest to me! ... Here is a particle of the frightening tale of the struggle for our truth. *(pause.)* Comrades! People who have lived by this truth frequently have perished for it, but the idea of truth lives on. Through the torture chambers of the police, prison, exile, and forced labor, through tears and blood, it has come by a thousand paths in order to lead us away from the darkness that has been ours since time immemorial, the anguish and the poverty. We have fought for it with our own blood. We have written it in flaming letters today on Bolshevik banners!

The play finishes with a campaign of the Red Guards. Behind their column walk the people and, to the light-hearted sounds of an accordion, they sing a rather primitive song about the struggle against their overlords and oppression, and about Lenin, who opened their eyes to peace and happiness. The song ends with an appeal to the working people to show themselves in all their might and breadth. Grandfather Mikita looks on at the troops in envy. He tells Aslav, his friend, how he regrets that age prevents him from joining the soldiers so that, "together with them [I can] obtain [my own] share and a free life. Oh, old age!"

War on War repeated the theme and ideology of Kuz'ma Chorny's play, *Our Country,* still being given at the First Byelorussian State Theater in 1932. Artistically, Kolas' play was rather a step backwards when compared with the earlier play. The theater applied all its art towards making the production appear realistic. The actors strove to make the characters vivid and lifelike, giving the Soviet critics some basis for approving the play. The theater was even listed in the Red Book of Honor in the name of the Eleventh Congress of So-

viets of the Byelorussian S.S.R.

A further step in the process of winning the great and respected names of Byelorussian literature for the theater was the production of another play by Kolas, *In the Forests of Polesie,*[f] which V. Darvisheŭ directed, for the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution.

The play was based on one of the writer's tales, "Quagmire," which depicts the struggle of the inhabitants of Polesie against the White Polish occupation. The theme of the Byelorussian struggle against Polish rule has always been a popular one. In the play Kolas expressed his own hopes and love for freedom. He succeeded in creating the bright and vivid character of an inhabitant of the dense woods of Byelorussia: Grandpa Taras, to whom the author gives much folk wisdom, humor, good nature, honesty, heroism, and attachment to his native places, but no special philosophizing on politics. His hatred for the army of occupation grows gradually under the influence of the soldiers' violence and arrogant actions. He struggles against the invaders at the head of a band of partisans.

Aleksandr Il'inski revealed all the essential qualities of an actor to captivate the public through the typical traits of Grandpa Taras. A series of living and vivid little scenes from folk life supplemented this broad picture of national life. They preserved its original aspect and the colors which Kolas had learned so well during the years of his own life as a teacher in Polesie before the Revolution.

The Second Byelorussian State Theater achieved a certain success in turning its attention to the older Byelorussian comedies. Such one-act satires as Dunin-Martsinkevich's *Nobles of Pinsk* and Yanka Kupala's prerevolutionary dramatic sketches, *Paŭlinka* and *In-Laws,* were produced by Pavel Malchanaŭ in 1936. These returned the theater to the source

f. Polesie is a geographical district north of the Pripet Marshes. After the Second World War, the Poles ceded their part of the area to the Soviet Union.—Ed.

of the original traditions of the Byelorussian theater and to the aims of the earlier years, the reflection of what was true to life. To do this it created realistic characters and used the language of the people, which is saturated with humor, wisdom and a gentle lyricism. The success of the Byelorussian skits in the theater recalled anew the earlier traditions of the theater, when it had shunned ideological tasks and sought out the real paths of a free theater.

In 1938 the task was thrust on the theater of presenting Lenin and Stalin in a translation of Nikolai Pogodin's play, *Man with a Gun.* Lenin was played by Malchanaŭ, Stalin, by Aleksandr Il'inski, and the soldier, Ivan Shadrin, by N.P. Zvyozdachotaŭ. These roles are extremely dangerous for actors but, according to the critics, they were done excellently. Nevertheless the production was not without incident. P. Syarheichyk acted the role of the Socialist Revolutionary Kerensky, with more art than was demanded for a villain. He thus eclipsed the "leaders." Syarheichyk had to remove the excess of zeal from his interpretation of the role.

In 1939 the Second Byelorussian State Theater had to follow the First in the staging of Eduard Samuilyonak's play, *Death of a Wolf,* a play which justifies terror and aims at convincing the public that the enemies of the people on a kolkhoz are dangerously real and active.

Pyatro Hlebka's play, *Above the Berezina River,* was staged by V. Aksyonaŭ in 1940, continuing the line begun with Pogodin's *Man with a Gun.* The play presented the Byelorussian public with Bolshevik leaders as heroes. This time, Sergo Ordzhonikidze was chosen as the protagonist; Zvyozdachotaŭ played the role. The play depicts once again episodes from the struggle against the White Polish army of invasion in 1919. The new program of reviewing the entire history of the Civil War in order to nullify all of the genuine heroes, and to ascribe all actions to Stalin alone took the form here of depicting Ordzhonikidze as a very close comrade-in-arms and faithful friend of Stalin's. In the play, Ordzhonikidze, as Stalin's en-

voy, leads the Byelorussian people and the Red Army against the common enemy. Ordzhonikidze is shown as an able general, who facilitates the taking of Borisov, a strategic stronghold on the road from Orsha to Moscow via Smolensk. He delays the Poles for a long time at the Berezina River, thus safeguarding the further operations which bring about their collapse. The play tended to show that Ordzhonikidze's actions were guided by the will of Stalin.

Hlebka, the author, was a master of Byelorussian verse, who had previously been an active participant in the liquidated literary association *Loftiness*. He later was correctly considered a leftist revolutionary poet and fellow-traveller, and then a Soviet poet. Hlebka was at that time still seeking forgiveness for his old sins by choosing a current Soviet theme. The play was saved from failure by the relatively high standards of culture which were the heritage of the *Loftiness* group. This school had encouraged mastering the heritage of world culture and the creation of a literature with universal significance. The general culture of language and verse eased the tasks of the theater to a certain extent. It was striving, according to the official version, to create a production which was romantically elevated and realistically truthful.[84]

The Soviet critics based their remarks about the play on the production. The production was acknowledged as a work of art national in form and socialist in content. It was acknowledged that the Second Byelorussian State Theater "has matured creatively and has shown itself capable of solving great and responsible artistic problems by means of genuine art."[85]

The thoughtful and observant playgoer, however, could arrive at different conclusions from the same production. He did not rejoice in the substitution for his own national heroes of artificial heroes alien to Byelorussia and grafted upon it. Sergo Ordzhonikidze and his like were created by the inventiveness of an author who was aspiring to satisfy the Bolshevik elite. The talents of such highly skilled actors as Aleksandr Il'inski, N.P. Zvyozdachotaŭ, Pavel Malchanaŭ, and

P. Syarheichyk, were wasted. The labors of the talented director Aksyonaŭ, of the designer V. Kisimaŭ, and of the composer A.V. Bahatyroŭ were in vain. In reality the production was far from being "realistically truthful." Aside from the language of the characters and the external details of the situation in their essence and spirit, productions of this sort included nothing national. They in no way revealed the national psychology and outlook on life, or the special local features.

In its final season before the Second World War the Second Byelorussian State Theater presented Kuz'ma Chorny's play *Irynka,* which deals with the reunion of the Western Byelorussians with Soviet Byelorussia. The former has been in Poland for twenty years. Through the fate of Irynka, his heroine, Chorny's aim was to show the aspirations of the Western Byelorussians toward reunion in a single Byelorussian state, allegedly created by Stalin. The talent of the fine writer and playwright in many ways transcended this scheme and filled the play with living, human scenes and characters.

The company of the Second Byelorussian State Theater was least guilty of all in this profaning of the idea of national art. Because of this, it had all the makings of a purely national theater. It was culturally mature and had great stage experience; it possessed a school, and a talented and hard-working company. It was willing and able to work in the authentically national direction of great art. The circumstances which arose forced it to put on plays alien to its character and to change the style and content of its work. When the Second World War involved the Soviet Union, the theater had one indubitable value. This outstanding group of actors and directors pledged themselves to preserve the company throughout all wartime vicissitudes. The group insured the return of the theater to Vitebsk, its own city, immediately after the liberation of that place from the German usurpers. The separation of the theater from Vitebsk during the occupation of that city seemed unfortunate, but turned out for the best. The theater was protected against the risk of dispersion during the time of the occupation.

Chapter 57

THE YAKUB KOLAS THEATER

From 1941 until the summer of 1944 the Second Byelorussian State Theater was forced into exile in Russia. For two years it worked in the city of Uralsk. It then went to Orekhovo-Zuyevo, a town near Moscow, and also visited Moscow itself. The theater performed frequently before the soldiers and the wounded in the hospitals. More than six hundred of the so-called "patronage" (*shefski*)[a] concerts and performances were given in hospitals and for Red Army units in the field. The repertory of the theater included Lavrenev's *Breach*, Trenyov's *Lyubov' Yarovaya*, Pogodin's *Man with a Gun*, Vishnevski's *First Cavalry Army*, Romashev's *Fighters*, Korneichuk's *Death of a Squadron*, Popov's *Great Strength* and *Family*, Vishnevski's *1919--The Unforgettable Year*, Simonov's *Russian People*, *Fellow from Our Town*, and *So It Will Be*, Leonov's *Invasion*, the play, *Summer in Moscow* by Chervinski and Mass. The following pre-Soviet Russian and Western European classics were staged: Ostrovski's *Girl with No Dowry*, *Christmas Comes but Once a Year*, *Late Love* and *Woods*, Gogol's *Inspector General*, Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, Tolstoy's *Living Corpse*, Gorki's *Yegor Bulychov*, and Goldoni's *Diverting Adventure* [L'Avventiure onorato].

On tour in Moscow during 1944, the Second Byelorussian State Theater presented two Byelorussian plays: Kandrat Krapiva's *Trial by Fire* and Vitali Vol'ski's *Nes'tsérka. Philistines*, by Gorki, and *Abai*, a play translated from the Kazakh of Mukhtar Auezov and Sobolev were also presented.

In 1944 the Second Byelorussian State Theater returned to the ruins of Vitebsk immediately after military units had routed the German army of occupation. In place of the second city of

a. Roughly speaking, patronage performances appear to have been the Soviet equivalent of our own USO.—Ed.

Byelorussia in both size and importance, only a burned-out site was left. There had been ceaseless fires and bombardments, two evacuations of the city, the removal of the population, and mass sacrifices to the German reign of terror. The mass of those people still alive had scattered, saving themselves from the horrors of war. When the Red Army arrived in the city, there were four hundred people there.[b] The theater building, where the company had worked for fifteen years, had been turned into a heap of ruins.

The building which had formerly been the Metal Workers' Club was, by some miracle, left untouched. This building, beyond the Dvina River, was given to the returning theater. Under the Germans it had been in the ghetto region. The infamy of the German crimes and murders of a peaceful population in this building spread throughout the city. On the walls, there were still traces in blood of those victimized by the Gestapo terror. People still talked about the building in whispers.

The premises themselves were not at all adaptable to permanent use as a theater. The stage was shallow and of small size with no scenic machinery whatsoever and with no room in which to store settings and costumes when they were not in use. Beyond the coulisse, the space available was incredibly small. The acoustics were bad. The hall itself was neither large, roomy nor comfortable. The lobby was cold. In addition, public attendance was hampered by the fact that all the roads to the theater passed over the single remaining bridge to the suburbs. Under such circumstances, it is readily understandable that the first performances did not play to a large number of playgoers.

Upon its return the theater immediately put on productions of A. Surov's *Far from Stalingrad,* Simonov's *So It Will Be,* Vol'ski's *Nes'tsėrka,* and other plays. As the population be-

b. The population of Vitebsk had been 167,400 in 1939. (See "Vitebsk," *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya,* 2nd ed., Vol. VIII, p. 193.

gan returning, the work imposed on the theater increased. Gradually attendance grew. The theater was almost the only hope and comfort in the joyless and miserable life amidst the ruins. In those hard times the desire for creativeness and the aspirations to create the illusory world of art flamed up even more strongly. In recognition of this fact the theater made the content of its new productions more profound, a development which corresponded to the short-lived comparatively liberal course of national policy which came about because the masses of Byelorussians had to be inspired with national patriotism as a weapon in the struggle against the German armies of occupation. An outer sign of this new course was the adoption by the Second Byelorussian State Theater of the name of a national poet of Byelorussia, Yakub Kolas, just as the First Byelorussian State Theater had taken the name of another national poet, Yanka Kupala. This action gave the Yakub Kolas Theater the importance of a citadel of Byelorussian culture in the theater and inspired it to new work. Pavel Malchanaŭ, an actor and one of the theater's founders, was the chief artistic director of the theater. During the short interval before the resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party about dramatic repertories in August 1946, the Yakub Kolas Theater experienced a certain renascence in its work. In addition to drama in translation, a number of original Byelorussian plays appeared in its repertory: Kandrat Krapiva's *Trial by Fire,* Ales' Kuchar's *Hostages,* Vitali Vol'ski's *Nes'tsėrka* and *Mashėka,* and others. The process of new artistic achievements in the Yakub Kolas Theater reached its climax in 1947 with the production of Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* in a Byelorussian translation by Yury Haŭruk.

As a dramatist, Vol'ski had attracted some attention with his play *Marvellous Fife,* which had been successfully produced by the Byelorussian Children's Theater in Minsk in 1940. Vol'ski continued to use folklore motifs and subjects in his new play, *Nes'tsėrka.* The protagonist of the play is the hero of many Byelorussian satirical stories and folk tales,

a gay and resourceful prankster, a popular favorite. The objects of his riducule are the haughty and pompous landlords and their stupidity and boastfulness, the outwitted nobles, the greediness of judges, and other human vices. The vital wisdom and the inexhaustible folk optimism, the easy intelligence and the sharp mockery of imperfections are all united in the hero, Nes'tsėrka. He is wise, clever and crafty but, when necessary, naïve, goodhearted and trusting, In his actions he is guided not by mercenary motives but by a natural wish to help a friend in misfortune and to vindicate the truth, even at the risk of punishment. Nes'tsėrka helps his friend Yuras' to marry Nas'tsya, the girl whom Yuras' loves, despite the wishes of her mother and the intrigues of Pan Samakhval'ski,[c] a clever charlatan. Aleksandr Il'inski, who played the title role in the production, once more proved himself to be an outstanding actor. His gift for light comedy corresponded psychologically to the folk character whom he was depicting. His acting was particularly outstanding in the scenes on the premises of Pan Baranoŭski, in the debate with the glaziers, and in the court. Many other scenes were also full of humor, irony and a subtle ridicule. The remoteness of the theme of the play from what was contemporary saved the dramatist and the theater from having to insert contemporary bias into it—apart from the obligatory motif of social inequality, a theme, however, which has been characteristic of all Byelorussian folk works from time immemorial because social contradictions were present in the very life and history of Byelorussia.

In 1946 the production of *Nes'tsėrka* by N. Loiter was awarded a Stalin Prize. Aleksandr Il'inski became a People's Artist of the Byelorussian S.S.R.

The same year brought still another award to the theater, for its production of Gogol's *Inspector General,* which received first prize in a survey of Russian classics in Byelorussia.

Ales' Kuchar's play *Hostages,* as produced by the Yakub

c. Samakhval'ski comes from *syabe samoha khvalits'* (to praise)

Kolas Theater, underwent a completely different fate. The production had been shown during the war in Orekhovo-Zuyevo and Moscow and later in Vitebsk. It was warmly received everywhere. This was the first Byelorussian play of a series on the theme of the so-called national avengers, a theme which became popular after the war. The subject was taken from a real tragedy which had taken place in the family of a partisan leader. An old man named Minai had fought against the Germans and was well known throughout Byelorussia. His children were taken by the Germans as hostages and were killed. The conclusion of the play is not closely connected with the place of action or the facts. Before the Germans come to his village, Minai goes to the woods while his brother Nichypar remains behind. Nichypar considers himself neutral. The author, of course, says nothing about the fact that the majority of the peasants remained in their villages in the hope that the end of the kolkhoz *corvée* was coming and that they would begin to live free lives as agricultural laborers. Nichypar considers himself outside the struggle and hopes that he will not be touched. The Germans put him in charge of the village. But the same Germans violate his daughter and throw his wife and his brother Minai's children into prison as hostages. Nichypar becomes convinced that he must not remain neutral. When Minai leads his detachment to storm the German garrison and save his children, Nichypar joins him and enters the war against the Germans. The invaders kill Minai's children, and Minai, together with his detachment, annihilates their garrison. The play finishes with an apotheosis of the fight for one's own country and people.

The author introduces a number of characters from the people. The peasant Shabanok bears a grudge against the Soviet regime because he was sentenced to six months in prison for striking a team leader. Shabanok had caught the team leader cheating on the number of working days. The author makes this peasant take to the woods when the Germans attempt to recruit him for their police. Here Kuchar says nothing about

the situation of thousands of peasants who had suffered under the Soviet regime and had fled or survived exile in concentration camps. These thousands did really enter German service at first. Only later did they lose their faith in German intentions and understand the Germans' colonial aspirations. They then found themselves under a dual yoke. The Germans set entire villages afire with people in them; the Bolsheviks had agents who were conducting a reign of terror. These people then chose to take to the woods as a way out of their desperate position. The author could not, of course, introduce an opponent of the Soviet regime. This would have shown the terroristic system of mass arrests in operation. Therefore, instead of the more numerous groups of peasants opposing the Soviet regime, he substituted the unpretentious figure of a petty offender in Shabanok. There was no danger in ascribing the dominance of patriotic feelings over self-interest to such a person.

Zina, Nichypar's daughter, is shown as a girl who loves to dance and to make merry. She quickly forgets her beloved, who has gone off to the Red Army. Guided by a will to live, she goes to the Germans voluntarily. Lyuba, Nichypar's second daughter, is a romantically inclined girl with an unjustified love for a dry and boring commissar.

The play was directed by Mikola Mitskevich, designed by Oskar Mariks, and had music composed by A.V. Bahatyroŭ. All took great pains to give the play the tone of a heroic folk drama.

N.P. Zvyozdachotaŭ brought to the role of old Minai the features of a national avenger and warrior. He potrayed Minai as a deeply human individual, ennobled by his personal tragedy.

P. Syarheichyk, as Nichypar, tried to show the turning point in the consciousness and psychology of Nichypar. He attained a certain verisimilitude in his depiction of the man's regeneration.

Pavel Malchanaŭ, as Shabanok, endowed the character with

living and spontaneous features. On the other hand the German characters were not typical. The author was guilty of showing them as passive and reasoning, and they were deprived of the German spirit.

The composition of the play suffered from its multitude of themes, but the limited amount of truth that was still possible in the war years was reflected in the production to some extent. Because of this fact, the first moves in the postwar campaign of ideological purging were attacks on Kuchar's *Hostages* and Krapiva's *Dear Person.* On November 11, 1947 the Moscow newspaper *Culture and Life* carried a notice by P. Klimov and Ts. Tsvetkov entitled, "On the Shortcomings of the Press Propaganda and Literature of Byelorussia," which was immediately reprinted in the local press of Byelorussia.[86] It laid down the principle for an ideological purge in Byelorussian literature, art and drama. This is what Klimov and Tsvetkov had to say about *Hostages:*

> Instead of showing the leading sons of the Byelorussian people in the struggle against the German armies of occupation, the author of the play *Hostages* concentrates on traitors and betrayers of the country. Furthermore, the author artificially makes honest collective farmers and the representatives of the village young people, who have been educated under the Soviet regime, into these traitors and betrayers. That Nichypar, an honest collective farmer, becomes an active accomplice of the Germans, and his daughter Zina a concubine of German officers, is completely incomprehensible and unjustifiable.
>
> The play also distorts the characters of the partisans. The commander of the partisan detachment, Minai, is shown only as a suffering father whose children have been arrested by the Germans. The partisan Mikalaichyk, an assistant professor of literature, is shown as a drunkard; the partisan Karenchyk, as a thief.
>
> The play *Hostages* distorts the picture of the struggle by the Byelorussian people against the German usurpers.[87]

On August 26, 1946, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party adapted a resolution entitled, "On the Repertory of Theaters of the Drama and on Measures for Its Improvement." Thereafter, articles began to appear in the press

which were critical of the Byelorussian theaters. The repertory of the Yakub Kolas Theater was reviewed and purged. The official explanation of this action was that the productions eliminated consisted of purposeless, petty and anti-artistic works which had no content of ideas. As a result, the following productions were withdrawn: Kuchar's *Hostages,* an evening of one-act comedies including Tristan Bernard's *Le Petit Café,* Dykhavichny's *Honeymoon Trip* and *Fakir for an Hour,* and Raskin and Slobodskoi's *Man They Sought.* Ostrovski's *Late Love* and *Christmas Comes but Once a Year,* and Vladimir Il'yenkov's *Square of Flowers* were also dropped. The pretext given for omitting these dramas in translation was that the productions were old and had lost their sparkle.

The 1946-1947 season was spent in reviewing the theater's entire work. Many of the productions that had been left in the repertory were re-examined from the viewpoint of ideological demands and renovated with significant alterations in the way they were directed. The chief slogan of the theater became: "face the contemporary." The old productions retained included Gogol's *Inspector General,* Pogodin's *Chimes of the Kremlin,* Gorki's *Philistines,* and Vol'ski's *Nes'tsërka.* During the first season after the resolution, there were new productions of Surov's *Far from Stalingrad,* P. Nilin's *In the Wide World,* Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* and for the anniversary of victory, Konstantin Simonov's *Russian Question.* All these productions were shown by the theater during its tour of Minsk in the summer of 1947. Furthermore, the theater presented an American play, *Deep Are the Roots,* by James Gow and Arnaud d'Usseau. Aleksandr Dovzhenko's play about the plant-breeder Michurin, entitled *Life in Bloom,* was also in the repertory of the theater.

Only *Hamlet,* however, was a hit. The production expressed the short-lived enthusiasm that the Yakub Kolas Theater possessed immediately after the war. It is essentially a unique and unrepeatable achievement of the theater in art during the postwar period. As such it deserves special consideration.

Chapter 58

THE HUMANISTIC HAMLET

The production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at the Yakub Kolas Theater was completely ready before the Party adopted its resolution on questions of the theater. It was only a coincidence that *Hamlet* was shown immediately afterwards, during the 1946-1947 season. The success of this production reflected the short-lived enthusiasm which the theater experienced as a result of the ideological concessions made to it during the war. Therefore, it was unjust that the jury of reviewers ascribed this success to the beneficent action of the resolution taken on August 26, 1946. According to the critics, the resolution produced a more severe attitude in the company towards its productions and assured their long life on the stage.[88] Z. Fel'dman asserts that the theater turned to the contemporary as a result of the resolution and that its strivings to keep in step with the times were reflected not only in its work on contemporary Soviet drama but even in its production of *Hamlet*.[89] Of course, this assertion is completely false. Fel'dman knew quite well that the Yakub Kolas Theater's production of *Hamlet* had been prepared before the ill-starred decree. The decree was only a stumbling block on the road to great art. It resulted in the crisis in dramaturgy and in the theater for which the critics, with their theories of conflictless drama, must now pay so severely. *Hamlet* was a success mainly because of Pavel Malchanaŭ's portrayal of the title role, but credit is also due to the other performers and to the work of B. Bebutaŭ as the director, as well as to the return of the theater to those principles of the psychological school which it had learned from the Moscow Art Theater. The success was based mainly on Shakespeare's brilliant tragedy itself. The play furnished noble material for revealing the creative individuality and the artistic ability of the theater and the actors. These,

and not the resolution of the Central Committee of the Party, were the factors which produced the results about which Fel'dman wrote:

> The importance of this production greatly exceeds the scope of a provincial city. Byelorussia is justly proud of it as a fine production of national art. The production is a significant accomplishment on the way to the theater's mastering of Shakespeare.[90]

The Byelorussian theater's interest in Shakespeare has always been great. It started with the production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* by the same company in 1926. During the postwar period the theaters of Byelorussia have presented *Romeo and Juliet* at the Yanka Kupala Theater, *Othello, King Lear* and *Twelfth Night* at the Russian Theater of the Byelorussian S.S.R. The provincial and regional theaters also duplicated the Shakespearean productions of other houses on their own stages, following the stage experience of the Moscow and Leningrad theaters.

The Yakub Kolas Theater's production of *Hamlet* introduced many new elements. Malchanaŭ depicted Hamlet in tragic contemplation of the world around him.

Malchanaŭ's potrayal destroyed the idea which had been growing through the centuries that Hamlet is a weak-willed pessimist, characterized by weakness, indecision and "Hamletism." Malchanaŭ as Hamlet was a man who is strong by nature. He has enough "will and strength and means" to act. But he is basically a thinker whose spontaneous reactions are subjected to reason. He delays his vengeance in order to comprehend the entire depth of the vice in which the world surrounding him is wallowing, in order to comprehend the full measure of evil. As Malchanaŭ performed the role, Hamlet communicates his genuinely humanistic feelings to the public. His famous soliloquies—"O that this too, too solid flesh would melt," and "To be or not to be" and his "Alas, poor Yorick" speech show the depth of his conflict with a world which fills him with loathing. The Hamlet of this production was characterized by an unusual creative

and contemplative enthusiasm, by internal activity. Malchanaŭ marvellously portrayed every action of his heart and brain which eventually leads to his deeds. He solved the question of Hamlet's lack of will in a historical and philosophical manner. He thus answers the questions about the complexities and contradictions of Hamlet's character. Malchanaŭ succeeded to a surprising extent in showing Hamlet's character in all its facets.

Thanks to the profound and psychologically penetrating performance of Malchanaŭ as Hamlet, the force of the actor's mastery rose above theatricality, showiness and the wealth of directorial resourcefulness with which Bebutaŭ had made the production glitter.

One can hardly agree with the categorical statement by Fel'dman that the production was given "in the tradition of the heroic theater."[91] It is truer to say that the successful union of good theater with the deep and fine concepts of the director is what took place.

In all fairness, however, it must be admitted that Malchanaŭ's acting was not matched by that of the other performers. Aleksandr Il'inski, as Polonius, was not always successful in restraining his talent as a comedian. N.P. Zvyozdachotaŭ, as Claudius, was too intent on rendering the external impressiveness of the king. Il'inski as Polonius and A. Shèleh as Laertes were somewhat "Hamletized"—i.e., made to appear similar to Hamlet's humanistic feelings and thoughts.

Ye. Bebutova's sets reproduced the era.

Malchanaŭ's Hamlet—like his other classical roles, such as Bobchinski in Gogol's *Inspector General,* and like his many Byelorussian characters—was a faithful reflection of the principles of psychological transformation. Malchanaŭ was highly successful with these techniques. In him, the Yakub Kolas Theater retained the living traditions of its first years, when it had shone with a number of perfect classical productions, including Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream.*

In connection with the thirtieth anniversary of the Byelorussian S.S.R. in 1949, Malchanaŭ was awarded the title of People's Artist of the U.S.S.R. He had previously been a People's Artist of the Byelorussian S.S.R., a lower title. The Soviet government, however, scarcely had in mind the "outstanding services" of the actor in *Hamlet* when it awarded him this title. Most probably, the role was not even involved in the evaluation of his services to the Byelorussian theater. One need only remember his acting in contemporary Soviet plays, in which the actor had to perform at the price of lowering the level of his matchless skill.

The theater's success with *Hamlet* showed that the company was capable of first-class work. The production took place in ruined Vitebsk, yet it symbolized a revived interest in art and life.

Chapter 59

THE STIRRING UP OF COMPULSORY CREATIVENESS

The Yakub Kolas Theater underwent a new ordeal in 1949. That year was spent in an exceptional effort by the company to rebuild its work in accordance with the new decree of the council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. entitled "On the Curtailment of State Subsidies to the Theaters and on Measures for Improving Their Financial Status." The Yakub Kolas Theater was located in a ruined city, with a greatly reduced population. For the theater, the box office was now the sole source of revenue. The problem of attracting the public was most difficult. This situation would have presented no special hardship had the theater been free to choose an effective repertory—one including mainly classics, which the public loved and patronized willingly.

But things worked out differently. The Central Committee's resolution, "On the Repertory of Theaters of the Drama and on Measures for Its Improvement," bound the theaters chiefly to the contemporary Soviet repertory. In the Soviet Union, there is good reason for the fact that Soviet plays as a rule are unable to attract the public after two or three performances. The playgoers, even those who actively supported the Soviet regime, seek from the theater basically a relaxation from the boredom of everyday affairs and the drabness of Soviet daily life. They seek clear-cut characters, the bold conflict of ideas and feelings, and scenes which take them away from Soviet reality to a certain extent. They are attracted mainly by the classics, with their depiction of a lofty life, or by the comedies of the realists who lived in past centuries, with their bold revelations and their wealth of critically assimilated reality. The acknowledged longing for a different, a more ideal and human life, does not always guide them. The idyllic depiction of Soviet life sickens the playgoers and induces bore-

dom. But the decrees are binding. Therefore, of the twenty-six plays which the theater presented during the three years after the decree of August 26, 1946, seventeen were by Soviet dramatists.

The theater presented five new productions in 1947, ten in 1948 and eleven in 1949. In order to produce such a number, the theater had to introduce new working conditions. The planning of the plays, the strict rehearsal schedules which had been instituted, the use of rehearsals both for individuals and for groups, the introduction of ceaseless work helped to increase the number of productions. Trips to the surrounding area and the regional towns and cities bacame common.

A variety of forms and methods was resorted to in working with the public. First of all, the question of how to utilize the theater better for Communist educational purposes was discussed with public organizations. In conjunction with the theater, Party and trade-union organizations were required to conduct creative meetings of the theater personnel with workers not less often than once a month. Mass elucidation of the theater's work to organizations of playgoers developed on a scale which had never been seen before. To every group of enterprises and establishments, supernumerary agents were attached for the distribution of tickets. They carried on their work in the shops and in brigades during the shifts. Many enterprises had a "Theater Day."

All these measures, and mainly the frequent tours of the theater, assured full coffers, although with some difficulty. According to the manager of the theater, the transition to complete financial responsibility was completed by the end of 1949.[92] His own figures, however, bear witness to the lack of popularity which Soviet plays had among unorganized playgoers, i.e., those who were not under any pressure and could freely choose what they would see. Thus, only 20 per cent of the financial plan was filled in January 1948; 38 per cent in February; 68 per cent in March and, in the following months, 80, 90 and 98 per cent. Only the 1949 plan was ful-

filled by 100 per cent. At the same time, the burden on the actors grew greater and became extraordinarily fatiguing. Giving forty-five plays a month and, in addition, rehearsing new plays up to fifty times in all under the conditions of socialist competition among the units of the theater is nerve-wracking and harassing to the actor. Of course, there were more "productions," but this fact hardly made the growth of technique and the art of the stage possible. Instead it converted the production of works of art into a kind of production of material things. This stirring up of forced creativeness in the theater was fraught with dangerous consequences for the acting company and for the style of their work. Such, however, are the mechanics of Soviet life, which is directed through instructions from above and decrees with an obligatory and categorical force.

Chapter 60

JOURNALISTIC, PROPAGANDISTIC PLAYS

Plays in translation have dominated the repertory of the Yakub Kolas Theater during the past few years. They include Simonov's *Russian Question* and *Alien Shadow*, S. Mikhalkov's *I Want To Go Home*, Ye. Petrov's *Island of Peace*, an evening concert connected with Pushkin, Yu. Chepurin's *Conscience*, Korneichuk's *Grove of White Hazel Trees*, A. Gron's *Party Candidate*, I. Pur'yev and the Tur brothers' *Lutonin Family*, Aleksandr Sukhovo-Kobylin's *Marriage of Krechinski*, Ostrovski's *Truth is Good but Happiness is Better*, Lope de Vega's *La Illustra Fregona* [The Noble Kitchen-Maid, presented under the title *Girl With a Pitcher* (Devushka s kuvshinom)], I. Popov's *Great Strength*, and such plays as *Her Friends* and *Certificate of Maturity*. New Byelorussian plays produced by the theater during these years include Kastus' Hubarevich and I. Dorski's *Middle Course;* V. Paleski's *Songs of Our Hearts;* Arkadz' Maŭzon's *At the Threshold;* Kandrat Krapiva's *Larks Are Singing;* Paleski's *When the Gardens Bloom;* Hubarevich and Dorski's comedy *Alazan Valley;* and Yanka Kupala's *Ruined Nest*.

Middle Course concerns the struggle of the Byelorussian partisans against the fascist usurpers and the hero of this struggle, Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ. *Songs of Our Hearts*, chosen as the play to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Byelorussian S.S.R., deals with the toil of the Byelorussian working class during the postwar years in the regeneration of cities which had been ruined by war. Maŭzon is considered the best of the postwar dramatists writing about the Byelorussian partisans. His *Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ* was produced by the Yanka Kupala Theater in Minsk. Almost all the theaters of Byelorussia copied *Larks Are Singing* after the Yanka Kupala Theater had done it.

Ruined Nest, produced by the Yakub Kolas Theater towards the end of 1951 to celebrate its silver anniversary, is the best production by that theater during the past few years. Carrying out the decree about theater repertories, the majority of the Soviet Byelorussian plays has been written for the purpose of aiding the Party in solving the political and economic problems of the nation. An example of this tendency is *When the Gardens Bloom* in which Paleski depicts the campaign for collectivization in Western Byelorussia, which had become Soviet only in 1939. Between 1930 and 1936, the "class enemies" had been shown as the agents of Polish, English, French, or occasionally Japanese imperialism. Now the play accused the "enemies" of being mainly agents of American imperialism and the Vatican.

In 1950 the Party began to pay special attention to the struggle for organizing and strengthening the collective farms in Western Byelorussia. Paleski, who wrote the play, and Mikola Mitskevich, who staged it, sought to show the general conflicts of the countryside in Western Byelorussia and the variegated and complicated world of people whose strength had been enlisted for the "new life of the collective farms." In both the play and the production, every turn of events, every situation and every character were given social and political significance. As usual, the play presents the progressive people of the countryside and shows the leading role played by the Communists and the Komsomol members in setting up kolkhozes. The author wrote the play after the resolution of the Central Committee on the drama; he had learned all the latest demands well.

In the play, Ahnyoŭ, the Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Party, was played by N.P. Zvyozdachotaŭ. He is depicted as a far-sighted political guide of the masses, perspicacious in his planning. He is demanding, but loquacious in connection with the young Communists and Komsomol members whom he has educated. Even Kuzhal', a young Communist, Saŭka, a Komsomol member, and Snapok, a poor

farmer, become agitated, start to shirk, and withdraw their promises to join the kolkhoz in the face of threats from the kulaks. Ahnyoŭ chats calmly with the peasants, teaches them how to draw the poor and middle farmers into the collective, and skillfully organizes the fight against the kulaks. He points out organizational mistakes to Kuzhal', who represents the kolkhoz, and sweeps aside all the excuses of Mataronak, a middle farmer, and of other middle farmers who do not wish to surrender their horses and grain to the collective. Zvyozdachotaŭ brings to his hero a mass of traits and of shadings which underline Ahnyoŭ's good relations with people. He tries, throughout the production, to show the idea that the role of the Party is to lead and to guide.

Under the conditions of Western Byelorussia, such productions could only have the reverse effect from that desired. There the public could see indirect evidence on the stage that collectivization was unpopular and not Byelorussian. The Party, aided by people of Ahnyoŭ's type and by his helpers, both voluntary and involuntary, had forced collectivization on the people. Of course, the play contained one standard character: the old man who is enthusiastic about the kolkhozes, in order to illustrate the thesis about the alleged unity between the Party and the people. Zenon, a bee-keeper, was played by Pavel Malchanaŭ. Obsessed with the dream of a "happy life on a kolkhoz," he goes to study the experience of the better, older collective farmers in the eastern regions of the Byelorussian S.S.R. in order to transmit it to the young collective farmers of the western regions. In the story of his trip, he loses all sense of proportion; he exaggerates, and he himself asks to be "checked" if he starts lying.

Snapok, a poor farmer, was played by Aleksandr Il'inski. Snapok travels a complicated path. At first, like his wife, he is the weak-willed slave of the Roman Catholic Church and the kulaks, but he arrives at a realization of his fate. Within him the "new, Soviet person" has taken shape. Ahnyoŭ advises him not only to sweep out the church building, but to

sweep impurities out of it. Snapok obediently fulfills the task of becoming an informer and helps to uncover the conspiracy of Rachkevich and the "American spy," Todar Zavalotski.

Mataronak, a middle farmer, was played by I. Matusevich. He is careful to a certain extent but, as one would suppose of a middle farmer, he cautiously, vacillatingly and meditatively decides to favor the kolkhoz.

The new campaign in 1949 was against so-called bourgeois nationalism and cosmopolitanism in Byelorussia. It elicited similar characters in the life of the stage. Todar Zavalotski, an American spy and a bourgeois nationalist, occupies the central spot in the play as if he were the soul and inspiration for the enemies of the kolkhoz. He is shown as a leader of the kulaks, and a "deputy" of both Wall Street and the Vatican. Pretending to be an unfortunate father in search of his missing children, he is, according to the play, a fascist wolf in sheep's clothing. He assigns the task of killing Kuzhal', who represents the collective farm, to Kuz'ma Sipach, a kulak. Zavalotski enters into an agreement with the Catholic priest, Rachkevich. They are devoted to the warlike and imperialistic plans of the "American reactionaries." A. Trus, who played Zavalotski, sought to reveal the bestial appearance of this strong and dangerous enemy.

P. Syarheichyk, who portrayed Father Stafan Rachkevich, tried to reveal the hostile, two-faced, and pharisaical character of the priest. He offers to help Ahnyoŭ in organizing the collective farm. In his soft, insinuating voice, and with his pose as a stern and majestic shepherd of the soul, he explains his Soviet patriotism and conceals his real plans. But he threatens Sipach, the kulak, with damnation from above should Sipach not succeed in joining the collective farm "on the sly" in order to harm it from within. In the church, he is instantly transformed into an innocent sheep. He sacrifices Zavalotski in order to get rid of the traces and thus save himself. The Soviet critics were generally pleased with Syarheichik's performance and with the way he had portrayed the

character. They were nevertheless dissatisfied at his failure to overcome the shortcomings of the play. One of them wrote:

> The actor T. Syarheichyk does not succeed in overcoming the weak parts of the role in which the author, in his search for melodramatic effects, infringes artificially on truth to life. The signs of his workmanship are especially evident in the scene with Nadeika. Here, with a frame-up in mind, the priest explains to his illegitimate daughter, by playing on her feelings for religion and the family, that she must carry out an important assignment. No matter how Syarheichyk tries to justify this scene a skeptical "I don't believe it" accompanies his every false step.[93]

The Soviet critics lavished their praise unrestrainedly on the militant, journalistic and propagandistic roles in the play which were directed at the solving of concrete political problems. They were enthusiastic about its Bolshevik trend and about the way in which attention was concentrated on the social and political traits of the characters. They hailed its bold selection of forms by which to reveal the class nature of the characters. Praise was particularly high for Zvyozdachotaŭ, Malchanaŭ, Il'inski, Trus, Syarheichyk, and Matusevich for their acting. Osipov wrote:

> The actors playing these roles do not squander their talent on trifles. They do not yield to the temptation of a light, comic success and "winning" stage devices. They devote their art to a just portrayal of the social nature and fate of the roles which they play.[94]

It turns out, however, that a number of actors in this production committed sins against objectivity. Their offense was to depict human beings rather than class mannequins. The culprits included I. Hanusevich as Kuzhal', Shèleh as Saŭka, a member of the Komsomol, Syan'ko as Franya, and Z. Vyaliki as Kuz'ma Sipach. Osipov continued:

> [These] actors fail in regard to lifelike details. They use their personal charm to play a good man "in general." They forget that, under the circumstances produced by the class war for collectivization (which is indicated), such objectivistic characterizations distort life and offer nothing to the public.[95]

Following the doctrine of *partiinost'*, the critic reproaches the actors for failing to understand the essence of their roles. He warns them that "without clear-cut political characteristics, the art of a character becomes lifeless, anemic and amorphous."[96]

It is exactly the doctrine of *partiinost'*, however, which is responsible for the lifelessness of Party functionaries in dramas of this type. This is the reason that the Party people—the collective farm representative Maryna, played by M. Byalinskaya, and Leshchyn', the Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Party played by Zvyozdachotaŭ—are so unsuccessfully characterized in *Alazan Valley* by Kastus' Hubarėvich and I. Dorski. (The production of this play was also directed by Honored Art Worker of the Byelorussian S.S.R., Mikola Mitskevich.) And yet, the production of *Alazan Valley* was considered to be a good, patriotic show. This lyrical comedy pictures a Soviet idyll, illustrating the theme of friendship between the peoples of the U.S.S.R., the unity of their interests and their patriotism. In it the age-old themes of love and duty were reinterpreted in new Soviet material. Shota Guliashvili, a Georgian, and Ostap Polishchuk, a Ukrainian, participate in helping the collective farmers of Byelorussia. They fall in love with Byelorussian girls, Lyuba and Halya, who come from the kolkhoz. They are faced with a dilemma: should they remain with their sweethearts and betray their own kolkhoz, or should they return home and forfeit their personal happiness. In the comedy the problem is solved by the following consideration: the characters feel that the entire Soviet land is theirs, including both their own kolkhoz and all others. The dramatic conflict is done away with by the decision of both the protagonists to stay on in Byelorussia. Shota, an experienced gardner, stays to teach the art of growing grapes for wine. Ostap remains to cultivate the growing of Ukrainian watermelons in Byelorussia.

Good performances by the actors and vigorous work by the director insured the success of even this production. The

play itself was weak in that it did not correspond to the realities of the harsh life lived by the peasants on the kolkhozes. But such was the extent of the unquenched demand for laughter, after satire had been censured by the resolutions of the Central Committee, that even this comedy was favorably received both by the public and by the critics. The comedy was called lyrical, and for good reason. Its characters are called upon to summon the public to tender and sensuous emotions rather than Gogolian laughter through tears. This is in no way reminiscent of the sharp, accusatory comedy and the keen-witted satire of Kandrat Krapiva in his comedies *He Who Laughs Last* and *Dear Person.* The times for such satire were irretrievably laid to rest by the Zhdanov reaction in literature. Malenkov himself, speaking from the rostrum at the Nineteenth Party Congress, called for satirists of the type of Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin and Gogol. The binding political categories, Draconian censorship, extensive suppression, and constant vigilance on behalf of ideological infallibility in *Pravda* and among the army of orthodox Soviet critics constitute insuperable obstacles to the birth of authentic satire and comedy. This will be true as long as the system itself exists. And so long will the theater be doomed to stage more or less clever falsifications as serious drama and comedy. Their success will depend on the skill of the actors and directors and on the degree of the dramatist's own technique and resourcefulness. It will depend on how well the playwright can construct his artificial situations for the stage and how well he can arrange his prefabricated characters.

Only the fresh wind of authentic freedom could rehabilitate the right to works which have been freely inspired by the highest values of mankind.

Chapter 61

THE PLAYS OF YANKA KUPALA AT THE YAKUB KOLAS THEATER

Criticism of the so-called nationalist deviations developed in all the Soviet republics after the article in *Pravda* attacking Volodimir Sosyura's poem, *Love the Ukraine.* This was accompanied by an even closer binding of all non-Russian peoples to the usual Russian conceptions of the history of both ideas in general and of philosophy in the art and literature of these peoples. In all areas of activity, it became obligatory to accentuate the role of the Russian "older brother." Facts are often contradicted, such as in the statement that the Russian nation helped in the struggles of all the others for liberation. This is already growing into a direct menace of a new Soviet Russian nationalism and imperialism. The plausible pretexts for it include the aid, the beneficial influence and the instructive and elucidatory role which the Russians allegedly have played. Such ideas eventually lead to the concept of the Russian nation as a leader. This approaches the totalitarian assertions of master nations.

This policy is strikingly reflected in the many articles about the influence of Russian literature on Byelorussia. Within limits, such statements would not be surprising. Obviously they reflect the inevitable facts of the literary process. Everything is measured by the same yardstick, however. In everything, the same influences are discerned, and this threatens Byelorussian culture with the loss of its character and originality. The production of Yanka Kupala's drama *Ruined Nest* at the Yakub Kolas Theater in Vitebsk for the theater's silver anniversary reflected these tendencies.

In the old Second Byelorussian State Theater, two dramatic sketches of Yanka Kupala's had been kept on the boards for years. In 1936 the theater staged a special evening of sketches.

Two of Kupala's plays, *Paŭlinka* and *In-Laws*, were on the program. Compared to the other Soviet plays, these skits were attractive, although somewhat outdated. Kupala's talents as a dramatist have been discussed in Part II of this work; they found a suitable reflection in these productions. The plays offered a gay and fascinating bit of relaxation for the public, and they were rewarding material for the actors who had been waiting for living stage plays with no bias and no propaganda. The spectators and the actors of the Byelorussian theater had long desired to renew *Ruined Nest* on the stage. Before the war, however, this had been impossible because of the fight against the National Democrats.

After the war, the name of Yanka Kupala, as it were, bound the theater bearing it to the dramatic legacy of the poet. The Party leadership, however, wished the Yanka Kupala Theater to be satisfied with only one of his plays, *Paŭlinka*.

Ruined Nest, one of Yanka Kupala's best and most significant plays, was written after the First World War. The policy of increasing the use of the poet's name, both within and outside of Byelorussia, finally forced the Yanka Kupala Theater to turn its attention to this work. It was truly ironic that the premiere of *Ruined Nest* in 1951 appeared at the Yakub Kolas Theater rather than at the Yanka Kupala Theater.

According to articles published in *Soviet Byelorussia*, one may conclude that this work of Kupala's was staged because A. Skibneŭski, the director, had come up with a new interpretation. The tendency to revise Kupala's texts becomes evident from the title of Pyatro Hlebka's piece on the subject. It is called, "Play Read Through in a New Way."[97]

First of all, this revision is manifested in the definite striving to stress and bring out motifs of the social struggle and the protest against the enslavement of the peasants by the landlords. It is further evidenced in the tendency to conceal the symbolically expressed motifs of the struggle for national liberation. The call of the Unknown Man to go "to the gathering," to the great meeting, on behalf of the land of his fathers

is associated by the playwright with the national congress. The poet loftily, heatedly and in inspired fashion devoted all his work to this idea. In the drama, Symon, the protagonist, does go. Yanka Kupala's poem, "To the Gathering," clarifies what had been only a general and symbolical appeal in *Ruined Nest.* In the poem he wrote:

To the gathering, to the ominous, tempestuous gathering of
the entire nation,
Go, oh plundered and shackled nation!
Go, as an equal among equals, you are on call,
Give back to the court your injuries, tears and blood.
How the landlords and kings forced the sweat out of you,
How the tsars drove you away from your fathers' land,
And how the unchained slaves are covered with blood,
And how you collapse in the unequal struggle,
How they cut your country up into bits,
And how you perish with your children at the hands of
the hangman.
Bring out everything in the court, at the gathering of
the entire nation,
Go, oh plundered and shackled nation![a]

(December 29, 1918)

In the play Lyavon Zyablik is a character who is searching for the truth. In an unjust single combat with a landlord, he perishes. Here they drag in Lenin's words on the process of the ruination and impoverishment of the broad masses of peasants. This process, Lenin said, made proletarians of them and placed them on the path of revolutionary struggle. And, as if in agreement with Lenin's ideas, the character Symon is endowed with all the traits of a revolutionary; his original naïve protest is transformed into an active struggle for the revolution. The influence of Maxim Gorki's romantic protagonists on the characters of the play is stressed to such an extent that Symon begins to resemble them completely. He is proud, inflexible and sure of his victory over a world of oppression. In the play, despite the text of the play, Symon's fight is connected with the general Russian fight. Pyatro Hlebka in re-

a. These lines are in alexandrine couplets in the Russian text.

viewing the play especially stressed the positive work of the director Skibneŭski for his search through all the works of Yanka Kupala for appeals in favor of an all-Russian front in the fight against tsarism. Hlebka declared:

> It turns out that this figure [the Unknown Man] is met in many of the poet's works. Thus, for example, he appears in the dramatic poem *Spending the Night* as a revolutionary who appeals to the people to struggle against "autocracy." In the verses entitled "There" he shows the Byelorussians the example of the Russian nation which has revolted against the "Tsar and the hangman, capital" [in these lines:] "Enough sleeping. Rise up in friendly fashion. Go there and help them." Hence, the theater has presented a highly-principled and, in our view, the most faithful solution to the character of the Unknown Man. He is a revolutionary who is summoning his Byelorussian brothers to the all-Russian struggle.
>
> Gorki's ideas about the brave Danko, the ideas of Russian revolutionary thinkers that the combined efforts of all the national minorities can overthrow the hated tsarist system are the essence of the Unknown Man. This has been shown well at the Yakub Kolas Theater.[98]

Apparently, the policy of denationalizing Soviet Byelorussia had really gone far. It had gone so far that Party spokesmen ceased to observe that such assertions lowered the unique national characteristics of Kupala's works. These absorbed and reflected specific local conditions and the age-old Byelorussian dream of national self-determination. But it is not in style now to look for national and cultural values in poetry, or for its values in terms of ideas. The value of older Byelorussian literature is measured not by its uniqueness and originality but only by the degree to which it corresponds with the ideas of Russian social thought and the ideas held by the Revolutionary Democrats,[b] the Communists, or their predecessors.

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b. By "Revolutionary Democrats," Soviet critics indicate those figures of Russian culture during the nineteenth century who opposed the tsarist regime from the left but lived before Marxism began to spread in Russia. Some of the most important literary critics of those times are classified under this heading.—Ed.

Still, despite this biased presentation and the director's interpretation, the show basically remained *Ruined Nest,* the masterpiece of Yanka Kupala as a dramatist. The production attracted the public and caused a new and widespread interest in the works of the poet. The folk content of the drama is taken from the most essential sources for writing plays. These sources lie in the constantly palpitating contradictions and conflicts in Byelorussian life, both social and national. The folk content makes the work an extremely valuable gift from the theater to the Byelorussian public.

Hlebka also writes about the warm reception which the audiences gave Kupala's play at the Yakub Kolas Theater. The company did all it could to let the show justify their hopes. Thanks to the absence of the usual agitational and propagandistic flights of fancy the show sounded fresh, clear and impressive. A. Sheleh as Symon, Aleksandr Il'inski as the Elder, and P. Syarheichyk as Lyavon deserve special commendation. The drama in Lyavon's soul is transmitted with a few, laconic brushstrokes. In the scene where he leaves his family before his death, the actor remembered how to transmit human psychology profoundly. Ya. Matsisava, a young actress, played the role of Zosya, Symon's sister. She revealed the profound and complicated character of a girl given to beautiful dreams and to her imagination in contrast to the cruel world in which she has to live. Naïve, and with poetry in her heart, she trusts her love for the son of a landlord. The boy, however, tramples her pure feelings into the mud.

L. Hepner as Danilka and A. Lahoŭskaya as the mother successfully filled out the gallery of characters in *Ruined Nest.* In harmony with the actors' ensemble, the directorial work done by Skibneŭski was also distinguished by a vitality and a laconicism in the means he employed.

The decision to include *Ruined Nest* in the ten-day festival of Byelorussian art in Moscow during 1953 made it necessary to devote still more attention to perfecting it. In 1952 the director and actors were working on a detailed revision of the

final scene. It was cut and the artistic and musical accompaniments were improved. More attention was given to the mother, the landlord's son and Danilka. Shéleh and Syarheichyk, the actors, were relieved of the declamatory bathos which their performances had contained earlier.

Thus the production of *Ruined Nest* attained a high level of art, the result of long and hard work on the part of the actors, the designer, the composer and the director. It was worthy of Yanka Kupala, yet one can only regret that this work was not accompanied by a more scrupulous approach to the text; supplementary material was used.

Work on restoring Kupala's dramas in all their scope will be the task of the free Byelorussian theater of the future. Today, *Local People*, his most powerful dramatic satire, is still forbidden. The free Byelorussia of the future will produce it once again.

Chapter 62

THE SILVER ANNIVERSARY AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

In the autumn of 1951, the Yakub Kolas Theater celebrated its silver anniversary in Vitebsk, with a ten-day celebration featuring what were considered the best productions of the theater. These included Kupala's *Ruined Nest,* Krapiva's *Larks Are Singing,* Vol'ski's *Nes'tsėrka,* Gorki's *The Lower Depths,* Lavrenev's *Breach,* and H. Mukhtarov's *Allan's Family.*

A large exhibition was set up in the lobby of the theater, showing maquettes, sketches, decorations, and costumes. However, there were almost no displays devoted to the first and most fruitful years of the theater. Mention of this golden age of the theater was now accompanied by invariable comments on "dangerous aesthetic and formalistic waverings," and "serious creative errors."[99]

Recent reviewers of the theater's work have not even ventured to name the theater's early presentations. They consider it less risky to begin by mentioning *Breach,* a production considered to indicate that the theater was progressing towards a Soviet attitude and was becoming dedicated "to the propaganda of the most advanced contemporary ideas, to the great deed of building communism," as G. Osipov, the critic, defined the aims of the theater. He continued:

> As early as 1928 the theater created a clear and realistic production of Lavrenev's *Breach* in which there was a decisive break with the formalistic principles of *Tsar Maksimil'yan* and several of its other productions.
>
> The years of the Stalinist five-year plans were spent by the Byelorussian Theater of Vitebsk in further overcoming its mistakes of formalism and aestheticism, and in the fight for establishing realism.[100]

Thus the history of the Second Byelorussian State Theater was depicted as a process of continually overcoming and getting rid of its earlier principles.

All those who carried out research on the history of the Byelorussian theater were afraid lest they be found guilty of deviations. There was no scholarly freedom; Byelorussia was deprived of even such books as those which had begun to appear in the other Soviet republics, such as the Ukraine.[101] As a result, there is ignorance about the past of these theaters even now. Even I. Dorski has a completely hazy idea about the history of the Yakub Kolas Theater—and he was recently appointed as its administrative director. He wrote an article in 1950 which reveals an astonishing lack of information; he declared that the theater had been "created from a group of Byelorussian actors who had graduated from the Lunacharski State Institute of Theater Arts."[102]

This is a deliberate distortion and falsification; apparently, however, it suits the Soviet regime. It can be explained only by a desire not to talk about anything unpleasant, such as the real mentors of the Byelorussian Studio Theater. These instructors had come from the Second Studio of the Moscow Art Theater, but that was liquidated in 1936 as an enemy of the Soviet regime in the theater. Soviet critics do not wish to discuss those who have continued the psychological school begun by Mikhail Chekhov. They want to keep silent about the theories of art propounded by Leopold Sullerzhitski. The liquidated theater had a glorious company trained on the theories of both Sullerzhitski and Konstantin Stanislavski. To this day, there is no substantial study or interpretation of the culture of the Moscow Art Theater, with its national idiosyncrasies and its individual, creative searches for style and form. The present study has been written outside the Soviet Union and hence was composed without access to many important sources. Yet it is the first attempt at a free and unprejudiced survey of what really happened from the time the Byelorussian theater was founded to the present. A more thorough study of the subject will have to wait, even within Byelorussia itself.

In 1952 the Yakub Kolas Theater lost its leading actor, director and organizer when Pavel Malchanaŭ went to Minsk to

join the troupe of the Yanka Kupala Theater. Malchanaŭ is a People's Artist of both the Byelorussian S.S.R. and the U.S.S.R. The purpose of his going to Minsk was to enact the role of Lenin in the play *October,* by M. Bol'shintsev and M. Chiaŭreli. Malchanaŭ also played Pavel Kruhlyak in Aleksandr Korneichuk's *Makar Dubrava. October* was to be shown in Moscow as part of the ten-day celebration of Byelorussian art there at the start of 1953. Because Lenin and Stalin were shown in the play, both these roles were performed by People's Artist of the U.S.S.R. Barys Platonaŭ played Stalin. I. Sudakov, an important Moscow director and a People's Artist of the Russian S.F.S.R., who also participated in the production, has now become the chief director of the Yanka Kupala Theater.

Thus the heart was torn out of the Yakub Kolas Theater in the name of political expediency. Malchanaŭ had been the prime mover who inspired the company. He had directed a number of productions and had acted many of the main roles. His departure was a major blow to the company; earlier, it had lost many of its best actors during the purges.

The company of the Yakub Kolas Theater was strong enough to endure even this loss. Important activities lie ahead. The theater would be able to weather many other political storms and ideological difficulties as well. Its aim was to keep faith with its ideals of a national and artistic theater on the academic level. Such had been its aspirations in its youth when the theater was an organization of high promise. Byelorussian national art was now undergoing an ordeal; it was defending its right to exist in extremely difficult conditions of intellectual subordination and compulsion.

Data dealing with the theater at the beginning of 1953 mention certain new activities associated with the repertory and art. In January and February of that year the theater appeared in Minsk with all the plays which it had prepared for the ten-day celebration in Moscow. The company looked upon these preparations as an important test; it viewed them as a way in

which to improve the quality of its ideas and technique. The Nineteenth Congress of the CPSU resolved to fight against drabness, against the lack of ideas and against falseness in art and literature; this forced the theater to pay special attention to its choice of plays. The criteria used were social and artistic significance. In addition to Kupala's *Ruined Nest,* which has been discussed above, the theater presented Gorki's *Enemies* in 1952. I.M. Rayevski, a professor and director of the Moscow Art Theater, was consulted by the theater in its work on this production, as was V. Rindin, the chief designer for the Vakhtangov Theater.

Thanks to Rayevski, the Yakub Kolas Theater was able to renew its acquaintance with the theory and practice of Stanislavski's system. Rayevski and Rindin also aided the Yakub Kolas Theater in revising its productions of *Nes'tsėrka, Ruined Nest* and *Alazan Valley.* These were also to be presented at Moscow during February 1953 as part of the celebration already mentioned. Many roles were entrusted to more experienced performers. In some productions, the way in which certain characters had been played was altered. New songs, dances and choruses were written to improve the music which Mikola Churkin, Isaak Lyuban, and Markevich had written for the productions. New sets were designed for all the presentations by Nikolayev and Krol'. Not everything in this revision was good. The deliberate strengthening of the struggle-and-protest theme in Kupala's *Ruined Nest* scarcely helped to reveal his dramaturgy. The differences between the landlords and the nobility, in Vol'ski's *Nes'tsėrka,* were emphasized; the justice of this stress is debatable, however. The theater was obliged to study all the desires and observations of the critics; these were expressed by the audiences at public sessions and at the so-called creative gatherings. Usually the thoughts expressed were banal, and conflicted with the experience of skilled artists. On the whole, however, the repeated contact with the actors—those masters of Moscow Art Theater culture—favored the aims of the Yakub Kolas Theater.

The company wished to return to its unique creative method and to rally its actors and directors around the common desire to improve techniques and to attain perfection.

At the time it was preparing for the ten-day period in Moscow, the Yakub Kolas Theater showed a renewed interest in plays that had just been written. Towards the end of 1952 the theater prepared a new Byelorussian comedy, Kastus' Hubarèvich's *Simple Girl,* which Mikola Mitskevich directed. At the start of 1953 Ales' Kuchar's *Troubled Hearts* was presented, in response to the persistent demands that a play be given concerning the Byelorussian working class during recent years.

In 1953 the theater also presented *Storm,* a play about the Civil War by V. Bill'-Belotserkovski, *Third Youth,* a play about Soviet scholars by the Tur brothers, and *New Times* by G. Mdivani. Pre-Soviet Russian plays included Leo Tolstoy's *Fruits of Enlightenment* and Maxim Gorki's *Vassa Zheleznova.* Byelorussian dramas revived in new versions included Yakub Kolas' *In the Forests of Polesie,* Krapiva's *Trial by Fire,* Vol'ski's *Mashèka,* and Hlebka's *Light from the East.* The management had been delaying Hlebka's play for years as a form of political insurance in art affairs.

An enumeration of the recent presentations done by the Yakub Kolas Theater reflects the continuing crisis in the Soviet drama. The theater had certainly desired to work with dramatists and scrutinized their plays as if they were vital works. Yet new titles remained rare; most of the plays put on were not new. In all likelihood the prolonged creative sclerosis which crippled Soviet dramaturgy earlier will long be a difficult obstacle for the Yakub Kolas Theater.

Numbered Notes to Part III

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3. R----ch, M., "Maskoŭskaya studyya belaruskaha dzyarzhaŭnaha tèatru" [Moscow Studio of the Byelorussian State Theater], *Savetskaya Belarus'* [Soviet Byelorussia], Minsk, February 26, 1922.

4. Byaduly'ya, Z'mitrok, "Kuz'nya belaruskaha mastatsva" [Smithy of Byelorussian Art], *Savetskaya Bělarus'*, Minsk, No. 205-220, 1923. Italics in original.

5. M., "Belaruskaya studyya ŭ Maskve" [Byelorussian Studio in Moscow], *Maladnyak* [Young Generation], Minsk, No. 5, 1924, p. 106.

6. *Polymya rèvolyutsyi* [Flame of the Revolution], Minsk, No. 5, 1934, pp. 129-130.

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8. [Program Note,] *Zarya zapada* [Dawn of the West], Vitebsk, December 12, 1928.

9. Vaz'nyasenski, Aleksandr, "Druhi belaruski dzyarzhaŭny tèatr" [The Second Byelorussian State Theater], *Uzvyshsha*, Minsk, No. 6, 1929, p. 99.

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15. *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, No. 8, 1927, p. 33.

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17. *Belorusskaya kul'tura* [Byelorussian Culture], anthology (in Russian and German), Minsk, Belorusskoye obshchestvo kul'turnoi svyazi s zagranitsei [Byelorussian Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries], 1928, p. 71.

18. *Polymya,* Minsk, No. 1, 1923, p. 206.

19. Zhylunovich, Z'mitrok, "Pra 'Son u letnyuyu noch'" [On *A Midsummer Night's Dream*], *Savetskaya Belarus'* [Soviet Byelorussia], Minsk, No. 271, 1926.

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22. Vol'ski, Vitali, "Na lozhnom puti" [On a False Path], *Rabochii* [Worker], Minsk, November 2, 1927.

23. *Iskusstvo sovetskoi Belorussii,* p. 39.

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27. *Ibid.,* p. 40.

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30. Vol'ski, "O spektakle 'Ostap'" [On the Show *Astap*], *Rabochii,* Minsk, No. 83, 1927.

31. R----n, I., "Astap" [Astap], *Z'vyazda,* Minsk, No. 67, 1927.

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33. *Ibid.*

34. *Polymya rèvolyutsyi,* Minsk, No. 5, 1934, p. 137.

35. *Ibid.,* pp. 137-138.

36. *Ibid.,* p. 138.

37. *Polymya,* Minsk, No. 7, 1927, p. 168.

38. Vol'ski, *Prablemy belaruskai savetskai dramaturhii* [Problems of Byelorussian Soviet Dramaturgy], Minsk, Akademiya navuk [Academy of Sciences], 1934, pp. 10-12.

39. Nekrashèvich, Ales', "Belaruski druhi dzyarzhaŭny tèatr" [The Byelorussian Second State Theater], *Polymya rèvolyutsyi,* Minsk, 1934, Book 5, pp. 139-141.

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45. *Ibid.*

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47. *Uzyshsha,* Minsk, No. 6, 1929, p. 109.

48. *Polymya rėvolyutsyi,* Minsk, No. 5, 1934,p.142.

49. L., "Kalya tėrasy tsi na tėrase" [Around the Terrace or On the Terrace], *Z'vyazda,* Minsk, No. 278, 1927.

50. "Krutsitstsa, a shto dalei" [It Turns, but Where Does It Take Us], *Chyrvonaya z'mena* [Red Change], Minsk, No. 165, 1927.

51. Vol'ski, "Okolo tėrrasy" [Around the Terrace], *Rabochii,* Minsk, No. 106, 1927.

52. Hlybotski, Todar, "Pra spėktakl' 'Kalya tėrasy'" [On the Show *Around the Terrace*], *Savetskaya Belarus',* Minsk, No. 270, 1927.

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65. Kurhan, Ya., "U desyatuya sumnyya ukhodki" [In the Tenth Year of Sadness], *Kalos'se* [Ears of Grain], Vilno, No. 3, 1939, p. 143, citing Stalin, Josef, *Marksizm i natsional'no kolonial'ny vopros* [Marxism and the National-Colonial Question].

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   c) *Vaina vaine* [War on War], *Polymya rėvolyutsyi,* Minsk, No. 10, 1936, pp. 40-91.

83. Cited in *Polymya rėvolyutsyi,* Minsk, No. 10, 1936, pp. 73-74.

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Part IV

ULADISLAU HALUBOK'S BYELORUSSIAN TRAVELLING THEATER

Chapter 63

ULADISLAU HALUBOK'S BYELORUSSIAN TRAVELLING THEATER

> The actor's glory is generally short-lived. He leaves nothing behind him but his name. The painter leaves pictures and drawings as his witnesses; the writer, books, but the actor leaves only memories. The curtain comes down and the actor is transformed into nothing. Succeeding generations can only talk about his talent, but they have no way of confirming it for themselves.
>
> —Lyuis, *Aktyory i stenicheskoye iskusstvo* [Actors and the Art of the Stage].

In the history of the modern Byelorussian theater, there are two people who especially deserve to be remembered by their contemporaries: Frantsishak Alyakhnovich and Uladislaŭ Halubok. They were the Byelorussian playwrights who created the new Byelorussian theater; one might call them the Byelorussian Molières. They were prime movers as playwrights—they wrote many dramas—as the organizers of Byelorussian theatrical troupes, as actors, directors, producers, and administrators. Halubok even designed sets and costumes. Their work was the basis for the permanent Byelorussian theaters.

There was a time when there was no suitable dramatic literature in Byelorussian (aside from some minor comedies by Vintsént Dunin-Martsinkevich, and Karus' Kahanets, and some skits and plays by Yanka Kupala). This was when Alyakhnovich and Halubok appeared on the scene with a great number of new serious plays and comedies. Their quality was higher than that of all the dramas which had preceded them. Most important of all was the fact that they presented the new Byelorussian theater with the dramatic material which it needed.

Alyakhnovich and Halubok raised and carried the traditions of the Byelorussian theater on their shoulders. They made

these traditions the meaning of their entire life work. In the variety of their activities in the theater, Alyakhnovich and Halubok deserve to be compared with many figures of the European theater during the Renaissance. These older figures also frequently combined many functions in one person. They were authors, actors, directors, and set designers.

Halubok's activities alone gave rise to his Byelorussian Travelling Theater. He organized it, gave it its direction as a travelling folk theater and educated its staff of actors. Almost single-handedly, he created its repertory which is so rich in titles. He was active as actor, playwright, director, designer, and manager for many years.

The basis for the start of the Halubok Theater was laid during the years of the First World War and the revolutions which followed. At that time the repertory of the "First Byelorussian Association of Serious Drama and Comedy" consisted, for the most part, of works by Halubok. Later a special troupe of actors emerged, thanks to Halubok's talent as a director and organizer.

The official history of this theater began on August 15, 1920. At that time an announcement was made in Minsk that "a troupe of Byelorussian actors directed by U. Halubok" would perform at the Byelorussian Club. Thus the Halubok Theater, until its liquidation in 1937, was the oldest Byelorussian theater. The First Byelorussian State Theater (now called the Yanka Kupala Theater) opened its doors only a month later, on September 14, 1920.

In contrast to the First, and later the Second Byelorussian State Theaters (which served mainly the urban public), the Halubok Theater undertook to serve the most remote settlements in Byelorussia. The theater travelled to small cities, to out-of-the-way settlements of workers and to the most remote villages in order to carry on its work of serving the people through their national culture. It played in clubs, schoolhouses and sometimes even peasants' haylofts.

The sets for the productions of the Halubok Theater were

not complicated, since the actors were unable to carry the necessary properties and decorations with them to distant villages. Sometimes no stage equipment whatever was used during the performances. Yet the theater was received warmly wherever it went. The rural public was neither sophisticated nor demanding, and it greeted the productions of the Halubok Theater with enthusiasm. Aleksandr Vaz'nyasenski has pointed out the parallel with the Shakespearean theater in sixteenth-century England:

> This contemporary playgoer, like his distant ancestor, was very modest in his demands of the theater. It has already been observed that the settings and costumes were generally simple. Sometimes they were totally lacking or did not correspond in the slightest to the action taking place on the stage.
>
> In such cases, the director used the devices which the English theater had used. He went out on the stage and told the public that the setting should include an ice-floe, but none was available and, therefore, the spectators would have to imagine one. Then the performance would begin. ...
>
> This is reminiscent of the board with "London" written on it which an attendant of the English theater carried to the proscenium and fastened on the curtain before the start of Elizabethan plays. It had to show the public where the action was taking place.
>
> As in Shakespeare's times, the playgoer was not demanding. He filled the spaces at the footlights and at the prompter's box. ... He was everywhere: in front of the actors, on both sides and behind them. Attracted by the performance, he sometimes stuck his head through the window of the stage decorations and looked on from there until the actors noticed him.
>
> In general, he was very attentive to the stage action and, like Shakespeare's audiences, frequently forgot that he was seeing action on the boards and not in real life. Thus when the hero of a drama had to be dealt a blow from behind during the course of the plot, the playgoers frequently would get out of their places and, wishing to warn the hero of the danger, would start prompting him: "Look out, in back of you! In back of you!" Or—another example—the hero might need cigarettes but, in accordance with the demands of the play, he has forgotten them. Suddenly, a member of the audience

> would get up, open his cigarette case, and offer the actor a cigarette. ... All this speaks of the close and living ties between the theater and the spectator which also characterized the theater in Shakespeare's times.[1]

The comparison of the common traits and conditions of Halubok's theater with that of the Western European Renaissance had been made by Adam Babarèka,[2] a Byelorussian literary critic, as early as 1925 (in *Soviet Byelorussia*). S. Margolin used the same analogy in 1927, writing:

> Halubok's troupe is widely known both in Byelorussian rural districts and in Byelorussian factories. Everything in this theater is naïve and primitive. Frequently, before the beginning of one of the acts, Halubok, in the tradition of the "Shakespearean theater," would tell the public the time and place of the action. His words replaced the needed decorations. And the playgoer, just like the audience at the Globe Theater in Elizabethan England, would fervently imagine that he saw a cave, a castle, or an ice-floe.[3]

Immediately after its establishment the Halubok Theater became very active. The number of its performances grew from year to year. There were 42 during the last four months of 1920; 173 in 1921; 225 in 1922, and 253 in 1923. Between 1921 and 1927, the Halubok Theater gave 1230 performances and 240 concerts, reaching an audience of over one million people.

Towards the end of its career or, rather, at the time it was liquidated in 1937, the Halubok Theater had given several thousand performances before several million people. The majority of its concerts and other presentations were given under conditions of endless travelling from place to place. The Halubok Theater made enormous contributions towards acquainting the masses of people with Byelorussian culture. This was especially true during the period from 1921 to 1932, when it was sometimes referred to as the "Theater on Wheels." The theater became genuinely national; it was a beloved and desired guest in every corner of Byelorussia. The theater awakened the aesthetic feelings of the people, and helped to form their mass love of the stage. This was true especially

of the peasants and the unskilled young people. The theater appeared in places which had never seen a theater before—or, possibly, since.

The chief service which the peasants demanded of the travelling theater was that it be national both in form and content. No other theater was so alive or so closely connected with the folk as Halubok's, and its repertory reflected this fact. Most of the plays had been written by Halubok himself During its first two years, the theater frequently played in the Minsk area. It staged the following plays of Halubok's at that time: *Court, Scribe's Name Day, Innocent Blood, Prince Kacharhin, Spark of Former Love, Guest from Prison Labor, Bloodstained Tax, Dear Guests, Bigamists, Faded Flowers, Behind the Brick Wall, Hanka, Pan Surynta, Foundling, Cultured Mother-in-Law, Vasil' Khmel', Deacon's Matchmaking, Bridegrooms, Malicious Dames, At the Health Resort, Peasant Happiness, Murderers, Ray of Happiness, Kinless, Raftsmen,* and *Golden God.*

The repertory of this theater during its first two years also included other plays. Six were by Alyakhnovich: *Once Upon a Time, Shadows, Fear of Life, Devil and the Woman, Man'ka,* and *Woods Are Murmuring,* based on V.G. Korolenko's[a] story of the same name. The repertory also included *After Inspection* and *Duped,* both by Marko Krapivnitski, *Mikhalka* by Doletskiye's, *Gentleman's Stylish Son* by Kahanets, *Paŭlinka* by Yanka Kupala, *Anton' Lata* by Yakub Kolas, *Nobles of Pinsk* by Dunin-Martsinkevich, *Affectionate Beauty* by M. Hurski, and *Mikita's Bast Shoe* by Mikhas' Kudzel'ka.

Thus, of the forty plays in the repertory of the theater during those first two years, twenty-five were by Halubok himself. Most of them had realistic themes, depicting rural life. The living language of the people, and the variety of characters and situations made the success of these productions possible. Halubok was responsive to the demands of the peo-

a. Vladimir Korolenko (1853-1921) was a famous Russian author and publicist best known for his short stories.—Ed.

ple; he wrote his plays in a melodramatic style and reflected peasant life in a naturalistic style. As a playwright, he worked mainly in two genres: the skit and the melodrama, the latter being the more important.

This cultivation of the melodrama was no accident. During the first years after the Revolution, interest in the genre was growing everywhere. Anatolii Lunacharski[b] commented publicly that the melodrama had taken roots in the Soviet theater as a "genuine folk art."[4] The melodrama suited the tastes of the huge masses of new playgoers from what had been the lowest levels of society—workers, peasants, apprentices, and petty functionaries. For the first time the art and culture of the theater were reaching these people. Melodrama dealt with the abstract idea of the rule of good over evil. Its method was to contrast the heroes and the villains in a naturalistic fashion. It usually contained many buffoons, murders, shootings, deafening sound effects, and pathos-laden declamations. Halubok, of course, did not shy away from these. He constructed his plays on the sharp contrast between the principles of good and evil. For the most part, he developed his subjects so that the former triumphed. As Vasil' Tepin has observed, this suited the folk masses' demands for a healthy optimism.[5] The ultimate victory of the just, of good over evil, of heroes over villains, was shown clearly and attractively on the stage. It always provoked stormy applause and won success among the masses.

Halubok's melodramas generally solve this dramatic conflict with the triumph of justice, as in *Pan Surynta.* Sometimes the representatives of truth and justice are weak, and they perish, but even then, there is an abstract moral, a humiliation of evil, as in *Hanka.* Halubok often brought social motivations to the conflicts which developed during his plays; these dealt with the differences between the rich and the poor. They found a lively response in the Byelorussian peasantry,

b. Anatolii Lunacharski was the first Commissar of Education for the Russian S.F.S.R. He died in 1933.—Ed.

who had been enslaved for ages. This may be the reason why *Hanka,* Halubok's social melodrama, was performed over five hundred times during the first five or six years of his theater.

It ought to be mentioned that the social characteristics of the conflicts which Halubok depicted never approached the communist conception of class warefare. His attitude to life was more a reflection of the way the folk conceived it. His heroes accepted the Revolution itself as something which would improve their character and eliminate the idiocy of rural life.

Soviet critics like Ales' Zvonak—to mention a recent one—have expressed their opinions of the non-proletarian and non-Bolshevik views held by Halubok. They state that Halubok's *narodnik*[c] ideology led, in the long run, to national narrow-mindedness. Zvonak wrote:

> The abstract conception of revolution as something bright but yet unclear, which so often turns up in the plays which Halubok wrote during those years, is categorically the result of the immaturity of his ideology and the fact that his outlook on life had not yet been formulated. Despite all the progressiveness and the subjectivity of his revolutionary ideas, the Halubok of those years had no clear and complete understanding of the tasks and the great significance of the proletarian revolution. He was still soaked in *narodnik* tendencies. The playwright's class consciousness was not yet on the level at which the class tendencies of his plays and their political ideas could be determined. Therefore, despite all the positive functions of the plays which he wrote during those years, they are definitely limited by a characteristic national narrow-mindedness. Constructed exclusively from national material and from the life of Halubok's people, they are still not permeated with that spirit of internationalism which the proletariat brought with it during the first years after the October Revolution.
>
> Halubok perceived in the Revolution a certain element which was exclusively peasant in character and directed towards the liberation of the "people" in general from the "rich"

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c. The *narodnik* movement was a late nineteenth-century Russian political group which idealized the people and the nation. The word *narod* in Byelorussian and Russian expresses both ideas.

> in general. We see no class understanding of ideas or political clarity in any of his plays. The ideals which the dramatist preaches are extremely hazy. People fight so that their "own village might live better," or that "the birches might rustle happily," etc. In short, Halubok's acceptance of the Revolution in his plays is strictly that of a *narodnik* and a petty bourgeois.[6]

As in any other melodramas, Halubok's plays had many unexpected meetings, shootings and deaths. Good and evil are usually defined sharply at the very beginning of the play. The author uses stage directions to explain how much time has passed between the various parts of his play. Halubok frequently dealt with the entire way of life and with the customs of the people as well as with social and public problems. In his *Raftsmen,* there is a common plot; the raftsman Andrèi loves the daughter of Yankel, a Jew, without success. In his *Murderers,* on the other hand, Halubok shows a change in love which accompanies a sermon that the patriarchal system of family relationships should be preserved. His *Foundling* and *Kinless* deal with people born out of wedlock. His *Court* is a true picture of life in a prerevolutionary court; in it, the habits of the rural administration are satirized. The characters are caricatured also in *Scribe's Name Day.* In *Deacon's Matchmaking* and *Bridegrooms,* the rural nobility are depicted comically. *Madonna of Pinsk* was an anti-religious play and can be considered as a tribute to Soviet themes. His *Crab* was also devoted to the life of the oppressed peasantry.

In his skits and dramas Halubok reveals himself as a moralist wishing to improve the way of life, the customs, human nature, and interpersonal relations. The majority of his plays does not at all fit, in their ideas and contents, within the framework of Soviet themes. Hence, Zvonak had to admit that "these works had no political bias or acuteness."[7]

Zvonak drew harsher conclusions about Alyakhnovich's *Shadows* and *Fear of Life.* He scrutinized them because, to him, they were evidence that the theater contained plays of a reactionary ideology which was opposed to the October

Revolution:

> In the play *Shadows,* this rabid hatred for the Revolution is given in veiled and mystical terms. Its symbolism is transparent. This hatred is particularly perceptible in the mystical ghost which appears onstage, in the author's name, in the prologue to each act. Alyakhnovich's stifled and masked protest against the proletarian revolution is clearly displayed through the conglomeration of all kinds of ghosts, terrors and mystical phenomena seen in the play.
>
> The same thought is expressed in *Fear of Life,* a play of Alyakhnovich's put on by Halubok's troupe in 1920.
>
> This play also shows the course of an intellectual. The Revolution has pulled the rug out from under him. Here the thought is clearly expressed that the Revolution has brought death, hunger, illness, and unhappiness. Symon, an urban Philistine, grasps at everything possible but cannot endure the pressure of terror, hunger and hopelessness which the Revolution has brought. He dashes around in wild terror, but finds no way out. In hope and madness he makes a sacrifice to the Revolution, killing his son. His program of life is expressed by Kazyuk, another Philistine in the same delirious drama.
>
> One must think that this work and other such plays by Alyakhnovich of a clearly counterrevolutionary tendency could have been staged only because Halubok himself was not so politically educated and far-sighted as to understand their complete harmfulness. Furthermore, it must be added that, in the first years after the Revolution, the Byelorussian nationalists popularized Alyakhnovich's plays every way they could in the hope of raising their heads. For example, the First Byelorussian State Theater presented these plays and others like them at that time.[8]

Alyakhnovich's plays were not the only ones guilty of opposing the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet regime. Strictly speaking, Halubok's own work was inspired by ideas of a folk renaissance and by his desire to improve the quality of national culture. The Party and its struggles never interested Halubok or his characters. Hence it was more than chance that Alyakhnovich's plays—and later the plays of other dramatists opposed to communism—should be produced

in Halubok's theater. Halubok himself had neither the time nor the opportunity to become acquainted with communist doctrine. His art was the product of self-education and practical work. According to Mikola Kas'pyarovich, Halubok was born in Lesnaya on May 3, 1882, the son of a railroad worker. He attended schools in Minsk passing his final examination in 1906. Years of self-education followed. He went to work at the age of thirteen, first, as a salesman in a store, and later as a clerk for the railroad.[9]

From the first days of the publication of the Byelorussian newspaper *Our Soil,* Halubok was a constant contributor. His stories attracted the attention of well-known critics, among them Yefim Karski,[10] a member of the Academy, and Maksim Harètski.[11] Halubok's star shone brightest, however, in the theater and drama, to which he devoted himself entirely from 1915 on.

The Ukrainian travelling theaters of the turn of the century had a great influence on the impressionable nature of young Halubok. At that time Ukrainian troupes used to tour Minsk, Gomel', Vitebsk, and other Byelorussian cities. They would show such Ukrainian plays as *Give the Heart an Inch and It Takes a Foot, Cloud* and *Don't Go, Hritsa, to Evening Parties.* For the most part these were naturalistic melodramas or comedies which enjoyed a great success among the people. Marko Krapivnitski, a Ukrainian writer of comedies, had a major influence on Halubok, as did such dramatists from the *Our Soil* group as Kahanets and Kupala, and the drama of the Buinitski Theater. There were comparatively few playwrights among the contributors of *Our Soil,* however. Halubok decided to fill the gap himself. His writings became more powerful; the new theater which he had created needed new, Byelorussian plays.

Strictly speaking, Halubok was an entire theater in himself, because of the many functions which he fulfilled in connection with putting on the plays. Thanks to his many talents, he was the mainspring and the soul of every new undertaking

attempted by the theater. His toil, energy and inspiration were inexhaustible, enabling the theater to overcome all obstacles. In his memoirs, Halubok wrote about the first year of his theater:

> In the first years, the troupe consisted of workers from enterprises in Minsk, of normal school students, and of members of the Halubok family [his wife and their three children]. Generally, the troupe numbered about seventeen. Among the actors were Busel, Blazhėvich, Lazarchyk, and Markhel'. In addition to these, the writers [Mikhas'] Charot, [Vasil'] Stashėŭski, [Ales'] Dudar, and [Ilary] Barashka acted in the troupe. The members of the company combined acting with their daily work in the factories or at school because the work in the troupe did not pay anything. Despite the difficulties which the company had to endure (such as the absence of premises upon which to rehearse and a shortage of stage properties), it furnished the chief political education of the workers in the Minsk area—including such suburbs as Pyarėspa, Lyakhaŭka, and Kamaroŭka—for the railroad workers, units of the Red Army, and kindergartens. It moved with its simple props from one end of town to the other. We had to work at completely unsuitable locations. In the work of our theater at such times the audiences played an active role. They helped to acquire all the properties which the productions needed. Some brought in furniture; others brought in benches, stools, lamps, and other items. The actors themselves refitted the stage, designed the decorations, and did other work because the company had no stage-hands or set designers. Technical conditions forbade the inclusion of costume plays in the repertory of the theater. The understaffed theater was forced to stage the primitive and schematic plays which the Byelorussian repertory already possessed.[12]

These were the conditions. It was in the short intervals occurring between the various parts of the intensive daily work that Halubok managed to create his dramas. Haste sometimes demanded that he drop his work and study the roles together with the actors before the scenes for a new play had been completed, before the characters had yet been developed to their full strength. Sometimes this occurred when only the general line of the plot had been outlined, when the characters were still undeveloped, and the dialogue had just been begun.

At such times, the entire company seemed to participate in the further working-out of the play. It advised the author in various ways and he, in working, made corrections and alterations to suit the needs of the stage. Halubok's plays frequently lacked polish, but the author always changed and reworked them to suit the tastes of the public.

Tėpin has left us interesting reminiscences of this aspect of Halubok's character, and relates how Halubok was always striving for perfection. Halubok and Tėpin collaborated between 1922 and 1924, when they were both at the Byelorussian State University. At that time Halubok was working as a cashier in the office there. Tėpin wrote:

> Having a good deal of free time after his duties, Halubok used it to polish his plays. He made notes, compiled the plans for new plays, thought up the contents for various acts, inserted corrections and alterations in his texts, rewrote the roles for the actors of his troupe, and invited his university colleagues to the next showings.
>
> Halubok was especially interested in the opinions and impressions of the public which was cultured enough to qualify as judges for his plays. This included the professors and other members of the staff at the Byelorussian State University. Halubok wanted not only their general impressions but also their concrete advice, their corrections and improvements of the form and content of his plays. If it was indicated that some of the acts were too diffuse, that the dialogue did not completely depict the position or experiences of particular characters, or that the form or content of a play was oversimplified, he immediately pencilled out the places indicated or wrote relevant remarks in his notebook. Then, without laying the play aside, he would rework the places indicated according to the observations which had been made; sometimes, the changes would be very substantial.
>
> Thus, the spectator who saw a given piece of Halubok's staged more than once was pleasantly surprised to observe the large number of new things in a play which he had seen before. Because of this, the content of his plays started out in a certain fluid condition and acquired permanent form only gradually, after a number of performances.[13]

This constant fluidity and variability in form and content

is the reason that very few of Halubok's dozens of plays have been printed. He was in no hurry to publish them, his chief aim being to create a new repertory. Thanks to the intensity of his work as an author, the theater always had a new and original Byelorussian play to put on.

This was the original Byelorussian theater with its own unique repertory, and the people loved it and respected it greatly, considering it their own theater, dear to them and close to them in its form and content. And its soul and inspiration was Halubok himself, who was spoken of as the "synthesis of the Byelorussian theater."

As an actor, Halubok learned and understood well the demands which mass audiences made on the actor and the theater. In both his writing of plays and in his performing, he held to the traditions of the melodrama and the naturalistic comedy. Tėpin has defined his acting as a style containing sharp features which corresponded to the melodramatic genre which so sharply contrasts heroes and villains. He wrote:

> He [Halubok] acted simply and stressed the dramatic moments sharply, in the style of the old, provincial actors of the 1870's and the 1880's. He acted in this style not because he had no better models for acting but only because he knew that this was the most effective style in rural districts.[14]

Halubok's theater did much to popularize both professional and folk art. Generally, after the main play of the evening, the theater presented a short, one-act comedy or, more frequently, a short concert. The same actors performed Byelorussian dances and songs to the accompaniment of Byelorussian national musical instruments, such as the cymbals, *zhaleika,*[d] and violins. Halubok himself took part in the center of his trio with an accordion. All the participants wore colorful national costumes. The music used was chiefly by Uladimir Tėraŭski.

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d. A *zhaleika* is a musical instrument which consists of a cow's horn with two reed pipes inserted into it. The pipe is made from a reed of a fine, hollowed-out sapling.—Ed.

Rumors that Halubok's troupe was coming to a village or hamlet would spread rapidly before its arrival. On performance days the peasants, especially the young ones, would come a long way with all their families to see Halubok, to hear their own language on the stage, and to see the brilliant Byelorussian folk dances, such as the *lyavonikha,* the *kryzhachok,* and the giddy *myatselitsa.* At the very sound of the *myatselitsa* they would start dancing. The actors also had to be make-up men, singers and dancers, as well as good hikers able to do the five or ten miles from the railroad station while carrying their instruments and properties. Mechanical transportation was still only a dream for them at that time.

Every hut was hospitably thrown open to the guest artists. After the concerts, the cast no longer had to drag their props themselves, for the peasants vied with each other in offering their aid and services.

The concerts and performances by Halubok's Theater awakened a desire for culture in the most remote places. The villagers imitated the songs and dances which they had heard and the young people began to organize choral, dramatic and musical circles. The Halubok Theater was swamped with letters from out-of-the-way places asking for help in plays, in music for songs, in make-up, and in organizing their own amateur theaters.

In 1925 a plebiscite was held to decide whether to unite the Gomel' district to Byelorussia. Formerly the area had belonged to the Russian S.F.S.R. The decision of the area to join Byelorussia was influenced to no small extent by the widespread tours of the Halubok Theater. It created an excellent impression in its visits to Gomel', Novo-Belitsa, Rechitsa, Khoiniki, Chechersk, Dobrush, and a host of other settlements in this region. The theater also toured beyond the boundaries of the Byelorussian S.S.R. as well. It visited Bryansk, Klintsy, Starodub, and Novozybkov, which are ethnographically Byelorussian areas, and Smolensk (all of which are today within the boundaries of the Russian S.F.S.R.).

Halubok was also a marvellous storyteller. The author remembers Halubok's speech at the Usevalad Ihnatoŭski Byelorussian Normal School in Minsk during 1928. In a lively and fascinating manner, the artist told of the path he had travelled towards art, about the work of the travelling theater, and about interesting incidents which had occured during the numerous trips of the theater throughout the countryside. He especially warned the students against their mistaken idea that the life of an actor was easy and pleasant. He stressed the necessity for fundamental training and for the hard work required before an actor could attain success.

The performances of the Halubok Theater were, for many persons, their first encounter with art. The theater elicited a great change for the better in the spiritual life of the public, stimulating the audiences to think about the phenomena of the world around them. It nurtured in the hearts of young people lofty aims and inspired useful activity, thus developing young idealists from whom the new Byelorussian intelligentsia were to emerge. They were the cultured élite who expressed themselves in the short-lived cultural renaissance of Byelorussia which took place between 1920 and 1928, and which was later smothered.

During the first five years of its work, the Halubok Theater had no opportunity to pay sufficient attention to the infusing of new plays into its repertory or to perfecting its work on the stage. New plays came in only during the 1927-1928 season. At first, such original Byelorussian plays were used as Mikola Il'inski's *Dark Woods,* Harchynski's *On a July Night,* Aŭstsihnei Mirovich's *Kastus' Kalinoŭski,* Halubok's own *Madonna of Pinsk* and *Crab,* and Miraslaŭ Irchan's *Provocateurs.* Ales' Lyazhnevich adapted Ferdinand Duchêne's *Tamil'la* in Byelorussian.

During those years the theater enlisted two outstanding Byelorussian actors as directors: Flyoryyan Zhdanovich and Mikola Mitskevich. Thanks to the directorial activity of these two, the Halubok Theater grew more popular than ever and be-

gan to improve its formal skills on the stage. The directors paid special attention to mounting the productions in national forms. They used the ethnographic elements of folklore and folk art in altered form. However, this healthy trend of the theater's activities was not allowed to develop freely. New discussion concerning the theater and a change in Soviet policy were taking place in connection with the national aspirations of Byelorussia. This theater had to share the general fate. The Party press began to reproach the theater in 1929 for allegedly holding out against the demands of life. These attacks increased in number, and demands were made for a review and reconstruction of the theater's repertory to suit the needs of the reconstruction period. In 1929 *Star* wrote:

> The main shortcoming of the Byelorussian State Travelling Theater is its lack of forceful playwrights to aid it. To this day, the entire repertory of the theater (aside from three or four plays) consists of works by U. Halubok which, for the most part, were written several years ago. We need a repertory to help in the socialist reconstruction of the countryside, which would have social and political significance, and which would answer today's demands. ... The theater is now faced with the difficult problem of selecting and establishing a repertory. During these years, the cultural level of the countryside has developed so, that the present repertory of the Byelorussian State Travelling Theater can no longer satisfy it.[15]

Star was seconded by *Red Change,* the newspaper for young people.

During the period when the fight against the National Democrats was beginning, the theater was criticized for its nationalistic form of production and portrayal of character. It was rebuked for using elements from the old way of life, for ossified ethnographical idiosyncrasies, archaic survivals, uncritical use of folklore forms, ethnographical use of ceremonies, and idealization and romanticization of national forms of art. According to the Marxist critics, the national form had lost its earlier individual traits and had acquired new ones, born of socialism and the life of the working class. The peasantry, which preserved its national idiosyncrasies for the most part,

was considered as a petty bourgeois class which deserved to be treated as the representatives of a backward ideology and of outdated forms of folk art. National forms began to be treated as something pertaining to the kulaks, something reactionary. The doctrinaire Bolsheviks demanded a full retreat by the Halubok Theater from its earlier repertory, which they regarded as interfering with the education of the actors for a new approach to Soviet reality.

In this way by 1930 the Halubok Theater was forced to include Soviet non-Byelorussian plays in its repertory. Yuri Yanovski's *Fury*, Glebov's *Necktie*, Ivan Mikitenko's *Dictatorship*, together with Stashėŭski's new Byelorussian play *Whirlwind*, were the chief productions of the 1929-1930 season.

The theater, however, was not prepared for staging Soviet plays. One felt the absence of integrity and artistic unity in its productions of them. The elements of the Soviet plays were not coordinated, nor were their ideas. Hence they were schematic, poster-like, and unconvincing in their characters. The Soviet repertory did not permit the realization of the theater's capabilities. The directors had to make up for the shortcomings of the plays with formal refinements and devices using the actors' skill. Because of this fact Mitskevich's staging of *Necktie* and *Dictatorship* was sharply criticized for formalism and naturalism.

Demands were made that the theater abandon scenic naturalism and formalism, that it undertake stage realism. The pressure on the theater grew especially strong towards the end of 1931. Kastus' Sannikaŭ, a new director, was invited to the theater in 1931 in order to revise its repertory.

Soon there was another step in the long series of measures to reconstruct the theater, one which was especially sad. The Council of People's Commissars of the Byelorussian S.S.R. decided that, beginning with January 1, 1932, the theater would no longer travel but would be renamed the Third Byelorussian State Theater, to be permanently located in Gomel'. This action signified the end of the golden period during which

Halubok's Theater had flourished. The bright, romantic youth of the Halubok Theater was over. It had been a national, popular, genuine, and enthusiastic ensemble worthy of the name of its creator and manager. Thus, the Halubok Theater entered Byelorussian theater history. For having created it, the Council of People's Commissars of the Byelorussian S.S.R. named Halubok a People's Artist of the Byelorussian S.S.R. Making the theater a non-travelling one signified the official legitimization of its downfall. This was the start of the struggle which ended with its liquidation in 1937.

In 1932 Halubok, while retained as the managing director of the theater, was relieved of all his directorial work. The theater received suggestions that it throw out those parts of its earlier repertory which it was still performing. Halubok's own works were to be replaced with a general Soviet repertory, and thus the theater lost its individual folk character and was transformed into a theater of the usual Soviet type. The actors were also replaced. Most of the earlier ones, who had been trained by Halubok himself, departed. They were replaced by people from Soviet training-schools for the theater. The newcomers brought with them traditions alien to the former practice of the theater. Their habits and outlook contradicted the traditions of a folk theater. Of the old-timers who had been with Halubok from the beginning, the theater still retained Zhyroŭski, U.I. Dedyushka, Bylich, Busel, Vasil' Shashalevich, Nestsyarovich, Kachynskaya, Blazhėvich, and Vaz'nyasenski. In 1933 the company was joined by artists who had different backgrounds and qualifications, including Harėlaŭ, Svircheŭski, Shynko, Vashkevich, and Danilovich.

Sannikaŭ, the new director, undertook to set the theater on the road to realism—in the Soviet use of the word. This was reflected in the new repertory. In the 1932-1933 season, the Third Byelorussian State Theater put on plays devoted to the problems of educating the new human being, including Pogodin's *Dear Friend,* Serebryakov-Tarvid's *Enthusiasts,* Mikitenko's *A Girl of Our Country,* and Kirshon's *Court.* There was

one Byelorussian play in this group, Z'mitrok Kurdin's *Counterattack.*

Dear Friend deals with Soviet young people who obediently carry out the will of the Party. *A Girl of Our Country* concerns defense and the attitude to the old technical intelligentsia. *Counterattack* discusses the class war of foreign workers.

During the 1934-1935 season, the Third Byelorussian State Theater staged Levin's *Story of Five Tails,* Ivan Kocherha's *Watchmaker and Chicken* and Shkvarkin's *Someone Else's Child.*[e] It also put on a prerevolutionary Russian play, Aleksandr Ostrovski's *Profitable Place,* which Kandrat Krapiva had translated into Byelorussian. It presented such new Byelorussian plays as Halubok's *Ricochet* and Eduard Samuilyonak's *Sergeant Drob.*

The Soviet critics especially liked Mirovich's staging of *Watchmaker and Chicken.* This Ukrainian play had been considered the best done at an all-Soviet competition, and therefore did not evoke the doubts which the critics usually expressed in relation to anything new. The craftsmanship of Mirovich, an old hand in the Byelorussian theater (especially as a director), was felt in Gomel'. He undertook the production of *Watchmaker and Chicken* and brought much of artistic value to the production. The individualized characters, the dramatically skillful staging, the theatrical expressiveness and the perfect acting of the oldest performers of the theater—Zhyrouski, Dedyushka, Bylich and Busel—brought a certain glitter, clarity and fascination to the production. It was evaluated as the highest achievement of the theater on the road to maturity in art and ideas. Digressing from the official point of view, it must be acknowledged that the usual miserable Soviet philosophy was keenly enriched in this play by the outstanding skill of the director and the playing of the actors.

Ricochet and *Someone Else's Child* produced a completely different reaction. Both were produced by Rozanov, who had

e. This play has been translated into English under the title of *Father Unknown.*—Ed.

formerly been a director at the Second Byelorussian State Theater. He had left the latter theater because his work had shown ideological deviations. Both these productions were declared to be failures, a result of the heritage of the past. In *Ricochet,* Halubok tried to write a new play on the theme of socialist construction of the countryside. The orthodox critics, on guard for ideological infallibility, discovered false ideas and improbable situations in it connected with the kolkhoz. According to these critics, Rozanov had intensified the shortcomings of the play. Instead of a deep revelation of the plans, ideas and contents of both plays, the critics discovered cheap, formalistic devices, the retardation of the rebuilding of the theater, and a backsliding to errors of the past. Furthermore, elements of formalism were found in the interludes, the dance numbers and the stage effects which had always been part of the Byelorussian theater. From the moment war was declared against formalism, all the devices of synthetic art became especially dangerous for the development of the new style of socialist realism.

The critical attacks on the theater eased up for a while after Sannikaŭ's production of *Sergeant Drob.* This presentation was timed for the fifteenth anniversary of the theater, which took place towards the end of 1935. It was considered an approach to a heroic and monumental art which would reflect the heroics of the present day. This fact somewhat modified the tone of the press. The critic Zvonak wrote the usual, obligatory praise for the "all-embracing formula of socialist realism." His conclusions about the future prospects of the theater were optimistic:

> In the general course of Byelorussian theater culture, the Third Byelorussian State Theater, with Halubok at its head, is far from last. It is one of the leading builders of a socialist theater culture, one of the active participants in building socialism in its own sphere, the sphere of art.[16]

Thus by 1936 the Halubok Theater was considered as completely reconstructed to suit the needs of the time. Apparently no one foresaw the tragic end which was soon to overtake it.

The pitiful end of Halubok as a participant in the theater and, later, of his theater itself, is indicated in an article referring to the anniversary of the Halubok Theater:

> At the end of December [1935], there was a special session to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the Third Byelorussian State Theater. This theater is under the guidance of its founder and permanent manager, People's Artist of the Byelorussian S.S.R. Uladislaŭ Yazėpovich Halubok.
>
> This theater has played to about four million people. It has proved very popular with the workers and the collective farmers of Byelorussia. Its repertory includes both the plays of such Byelorussian dramatists as Stashėŭski, Kurdin, Halubok and Samuilyonak, and those of dramatists from other fraternal [Soviet] republics.
>
> On the fifteenth anniversary itself, two notable actors, A. Zhyroŭski and K. Bylich, were awarded the title of Honored Artist of the Byelorussian Republic by the People's Commissariat of Education for the Byelorussian S.S.R. The work done by the guide of the theater and by a number of its artists has been observed with bonuses and certificates of appreciation.[17]

Such was the enthusiasm with which the press wrote about the theater at the start of 1936. Halubok himself, however, was not so optimistic. He recognized quite well that his favorite child, the travelling folk theater, was irretrievably receding into the past, since it had been repudiated and eliminated by a governmental act of 1932. His heart was not in the new course of a standardized Soviet theater. Creative freedom had been removed, and with it went the earlier zeal and enthusiasm.

On the anniversary itself, Halubok decided to recall the past once again and triumphantly appeared as the commander in Kurdin's *Counterattack*. Its success exceeded his expectations. However, this successful performance alone could not console the melancholy artist who had such indefatigable capabilities.

A celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the Third Byelorussian State Theater was held in Gomel' at the end of December 1935. Halubok, on the platform, listened with indifference to the monotonous and standardized official speeches of greeting from the numerous organizations of Byelorussia.

Finally it was Halubok's own turn to speak. Rising, almost reluctantly, from his place he slowly walked up to the lectern and, quietly but distinctly, began to talk. The speech is reproduced here as one of those present remembers it:

> My dear comrades, associates, well-wishers of our Theater, and ladies and gentlemen:
>
> I am glad to see all of you gathered here together on this special day. Fifteen years of theater work is no small period on the calendar. Fifteen years full of creative work in the theater acquire special significance for us who are in it. For us, this time contained a long series of rehearsals, trips, performances, and concerts. The fruits of our thinking and feeling have been embodied in a whole series of productions, which we have always striven to present to a constantly changing audience in as great a number as possible. The interests of the people, their wishes and tastes, their hopes and troubles, have always been with us. This is what produced the travelling folk theater. We have given it everything: our time, wishes, energy, and ability. We have spared neither our strength nor our means in order to see it flourish. The people accepted us and valued us. This brought great happiness to the actors and the theater. We were accepted, sought and loved by those for whom we were working. And today, when our theater is being honored, let me go back to the past in my mind, to the times of the theater on wheels, to which I am giving its due. I thank fate that it did not begrudge my playing a certain role in creating this theater. Today, I would like to be frank and to express my veneration for the past of our theater, for the first half of its existence. We heard no reproaches then that we were formalistic, or petty bourgeois. We were not obliged then by different interpretations of recent realism. We simply worked and refused to get tired. Everyone helped us in our work on the folk theater. Everywhere, at the heights and at the depths of society, we felt this interest and attention. The peasant who travelled many miles to our theater brought with him the love and gratitude of a people and often aided our cultural mission in some way.
>
> We had freedom of choice in our repertory and the right to choose our own forms. Our productions were subjected to no attacks from the press. Not a single ideological doctrine was saddled on us as obligatory. We created from the experience of

our lives, as prompted by our thoughts, our feelings, and our clear consciences. Whatever was thought by the Byelorussian people as it awakened from its long, national slumber was thought by us, the actors of the theater. We felt, as the people did, the still recent national and social enslavement of the Byelorussian toilers in the fields and mills. They were striving with all their might for a resurrection of culture, and we were obliged to satisfy this legitimate demand.

Some praise has been expressed here for the productions of our present theater. For the most part, it has come from the young people, who do not know the history of our theater. They did not see our productions when we were wandering from village to village, from hamlet to hamlet, and entertaining the common people. These youngsters know about our past and about how the critics have distorted it—portraying it as a hazy and indefinite prehistorical period—only by hearsay. And I, comrades, am taking the risk of revealing myself to you here as someone going backward, someone left behind in human art when I confess that I would prefer to repeat our old ways again and again, without changing them one iota, and once again to experience all the joys and sorrows of our youth, a youth so full of hopes of sincere creative enthusiasm, and of the charm of the early years. I quite understand my position before you as a romantic with no potentialities. The wheel of development cannot be stopped or turned back. But such is my sluggish heart that it does not accept and does not share your enthusiasm about our recent years. When I compare the last five years of our theater with its first five years—alas—the comparison does not favor the more recent period. We have renewed the repertory, the personnel and the methods of work. But, together with this, we have killed very much of the living fabric of theater art. It strikes me, both in our theater and in many other theaters, that much has become mediocre and impersonal. We no longer have the energy and the enthusiasm with which we at one time gave ourselves to the art of the theater.

What is wrong, comrades? Is it possible that we are not guided by those ideas for which we had so much enthusiasm in the dawn of our youth? And is it possible that the great ideas of our age are not vital to us? But a certain coldness, indifference, lack of interest, and carelessness in theater affairs has permeated our work. I will not elaborate on the reason for this or on who is responsible for the situation. But

look around you at all the productions of our theater during the last five years. The critics were dissatisfied with many of them, seeing in them ideological deviations and formalistic exaggerations. But you know, speaking conscientiously, we ourselves are even more dissatisfied.

This applies in equal degree to those productions of ours of which the press has approved. They all are artificial, and do not bear the mark of heartfelt work in their form and content. My own recent plays are no exceptions. We have lost that creative touchstone which is present only in company with the free impulse to create. The way to the past is barred; the new has not acquired a quality worthy of authentic theater. The search for ways out to a new, major art is hindered by a number of circumstances. I would like to draw your attention to them so that we might find the solutions together. At one time, such questions were decided informally, by means of sincere talks within our company. At present, there is a multitude of additional, intervening links without which not a single decision may be taken. Therefore, I am asking that they be aided as well as the public.

Help us to find ourselves again. Summon us to be those whom you would like to see. Relieve us of the administrative functions which burden our work. And I can assure you that we will more than justify your trust in us. Trust and freedom are perhaps more necessary in creative work than anywhere else. Our company has already been enriched by fifteen years of creative experience. It can and must attain much more through its free daring. Resolve to wish us success on this road and, in the name of the theater, let me express its sincere gratitude and thankfulness for the attention which you have shown on the day of its fifteenth anniversary.

Thank you, comrades.[18]

Halubok's speech finally revealed to the Soviet public that this national artist of Byelorussia was inclined towards the opposition. Before then, he had concealed his feelings deep within him. Apparently this gave the NKVD reason to keep an eye on his work and to increase the vigilance of its numerous informers. The result did not take long to appear. On the night of November 1, 1936 a wave of mass arrests of the Byelorussian intelligentsia took place. Halubok was among those arrested by agents of the NKVD. After a preliminary confine-

ment of many months he was condemned and exiled as a political opponent of the Soviet regime.

The Third Byelorussian State Theater did not long survive the arrest of its chief. In 1937 it was liquidated by a decree of the Department of the Arts under the People's Commissariat of Education of the Byelorussian S.S.R. At that time people with Party cards dominated this department, people who were alien to Byelorussian art and the Byelorussian people. They were carrying out the campaign which Moscow was preaching to close or merge many of the theaters.

Zealous administrators controlled the fate of the arts of Byelorussia along lines set by the Party. They decided to let their administrative zeal shine and to show that they were in step with the Moscow fashion. As a result of a stroke of the pen, the Byelorussian theater with the most glorious past was liquidated. Together with the arrest of Halubok and the liquidation of his theater the very idea of a folk theater in Byelorussia perished. All recent attempts to create theaters such as the numerous so-called kolkhoz and *sovkhoz* (state farm) theaters cannot be considered a realization of the folk theater of Halubok's type. Before the Second World War these kolkhoz and state farm theaters grew like mushrooms. Despite that fact, however, they basically served propagandistic ends and could not reach the artistic level of their predecessor, the Halubok Theater. Furthermore, the network of these theaters was constantly changing. They were disbanded and created anew, or transferred to the provinces. Their chief shortcoming was their lack of a new, acceptable, fullblooded Byelorussian national repertory.

As for Gomel', it lost its Byelorussian theater for adults, nor has one been established there in the postwar period. Gomel', the third largest city in Byelorussia, had to be content with the Russian provincial theater, if one does not count the Byelorussian State Puppet Theater for Children which worked there under Babushkin. Incidently, Mogilev, Brest-Litovsk and Grodno, other Byelorussian cities, present the

same picture during the postwar period. They have no permanent Byelorussian theaters, but they do have permanent Russian theater companies. This is especially true of Western Byelorussia. All this indicates that the Party, aided by Russian theatrical art, is carrying out a policy of Russification.

Concerning Halubok's subsequent fate, Vasil' Budimer has published some recent information on the subject. It appears that at first Halubok was in administrative exile in the large combine-manufacturing center of Kokhma in the Ivanovo-Voznesensk district. In 1937 he even appeared in productions of the local dramatic circle, using the pseudonym of *Kvetka* (Flower). But in the same year he was exiled again to the town of Minusinsk in Siberia. There he tried to find Krinitsa, an actor who had been previously arrested, in the vain hope of initiating some theater activity. After a month and a half, Halubok was sent to a concentration camp near Tashkent, in connection with the new and stricter attitude toward political opponents instituted by Nikolai Yezhov, who was then head of the NKVD. In 1938 Halubok was a forced laborer, working on the construction of the Chirchikstroi Nitrate Factory. Under the scorching sun and burning winds of Central Asia, the former People's Artist of Byelorussia was forced to dig out hard earth from Trench No. 9 and cart it away in a wheelbarrow. In 1939 he was among the many carried off to a construction job near Bukhara. At this point all trace of him vanishes. It was thus that the pride and glory of the Byelorussian theater perished in Central Asia. Budimer, who saw all the productions of the Halubok Theater, has defined the general importance of its activity. He writes:

> I think that neither the First, nor the Second Byelorussian Theater, nor the Byelorussian Opera House did for the Byelorussian masses a part of what Uladislaŭ Halubok, the national actor of Byelorussia, accomplished over a twenty-year period. He had enthusiastic actors and an unwavering friend, Busel, who was also an enthusiastic actor. By this we do not at all wish to belittle the role of the Byelorussian theaters with their high cultural and artistic significance. We are not pre-

pared to cast aspersions on the talent of Larysa Aleksandroŭskaya, that People's Artist of the U.S.S.R. and famous singer.
We bow our heads before the talent of the late artist Krylovich as well. He performed the role of Kastus' Kalinoŭski thoughtfully and marvellously. We respect the actors Uladamirski, Hryhonis, Rzhėtskaya, and Zhdanovich, the prima donna Mlodek, and the many other outstanding artists of the Byelorussian theaters. But all of them, with all their talents, did not console and please the collective farms and the workers whom fate had scorned. Their work and activity was limited to Minsk and occasional tours of the other main cities. The disinherited Byelorussia of the peasants and the kolkhozes did not see them, hear them or know them.
Therefore, only Halubok–"Kvetka"– has the right to be honored as the genuine national artist of Byelorussia.[19]

Today, in the U.S.S.R., the name and works of Halubok are strictly prohibited. All traces of the fact that he once existed are being obliterated. In the free Byelorussia of the future, the name of Uladislaŭ Halubok will be restored to the nation in grateful memory and will once again assume its proper place in the history of the Byelorussian theater.

Numbered Notes to Part IV

1. Vaz'nyasenski, Aleksandr, "Suchasny belaruski tėatr" [Contemporary Byelorussian Theater], *Uzvyshsha* [Loftiness], No. 3, 1927, p. 170.

2. Babaréka, Adam, "Belaruski narodny tėatr" [The Byelorussian Folk Theater], *Savetskaya Belarus'* [Soviet Byelorussia], Minsk, 1925, cited by Ales' Zvonak in "Shylyakhi razvits'tsya BDT-3" [Paths of Development of the Third Byelorussian State Theater], *Polymya rėvolyutsyi* [Flame of the Revolution], Minsk, No. 1., 1936, p. 147.

3. Margolin, S., "Minsk–stolitsa Belorussii" [Minsk, the Capital of Byelorussia], *Prozhektor* [Spotlight], Moscow, No. 10 (128), 1927.

4. Lunacharski, Anatoli, *Teatr i revolyutsiya* [Theater and the Revolution], Moscow, 1924, pp. 93-96.

5. Tepin, Vasil', "Uladislaŭ Halubok" [Uladislaŭ Halubok], *Belaruskaya hazėta* [Byelorussian Newspaper], Minsk, No. 4 (122), January 18, 1943, p. 3.

6. Zvonak, Ales', "Shlyakhi razvits'tsya BDT-3" [Paths of Development of the Third Byelorussian State Theater], *Polymya rėvolutsyi*, Minsk, No. 1, 1936, p. 151.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

9. Kaspyarovich, Mikola, "Uladislaŭ Halubok" [Uladislaŭ Halubok], *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, No. 7, 1929, pp. 141-149.

10. Karski, Yefim, *Belorussy* [Byelorussians], Moscow, 1921, Vol. III, pp. 386-387.

11. Harėtski, Maksim, *Dramaturhi. Historyya belaruskai litaratury* [Playwrights. A History of Byelorussian Literature], 2nd ed., Moscow and Leningrad, 1924, pp. 336-342.

12. Zvonak, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

13. Tepin, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Zvonak, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

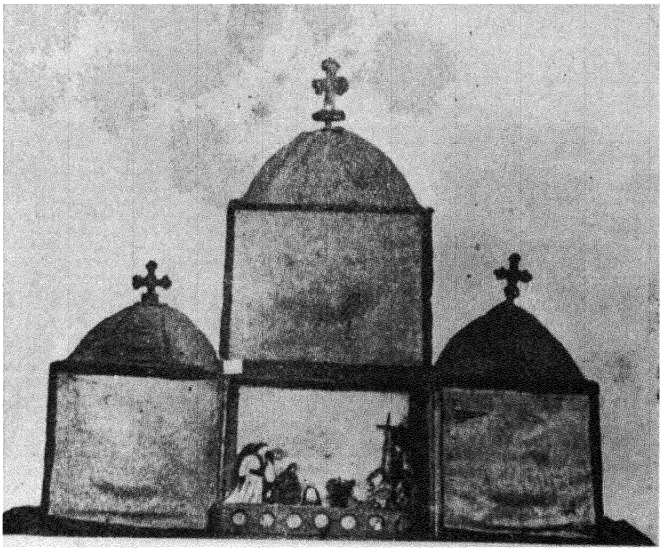
16. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

17. "15 let tret'yemu belorusskomu teatru" [Fifteen Years of the Third Byelorussian Theater], *Teatr i dramaturgiya* [Theater and Dramaturgy], Moscow, No. 1., 1936, p. 56.

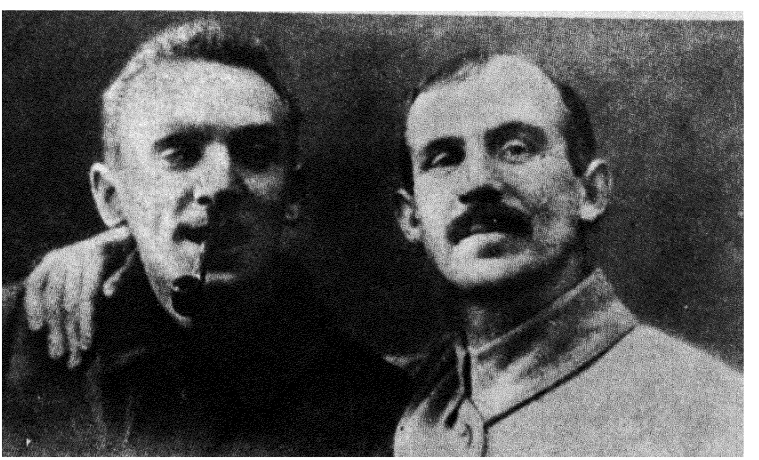
18. *Novy shlyakh* [New Path], Minsk, No. 12, 1944, pp. 14-15.

19. Budimer, Vasil', "Uladislaŭ Halubok—narodny artyst Belarusi" [Uladislaŭ Halubok—People's Artist of Byelorussia], Bats'kaŭshchyna [Our Country], Munich, Nos. 15-16 (94-95), 1952.

PLATE I



Front view of a ***batleika***. Vitebsk Museum.



Frantsishak Alyakhnovich and Uladislaŭ Halubok (Minsk, 1918).

PLATE II



H. Dush-Dusheŭskaya, a Byelorussian actress (1910).



The group who organized the Society of Byelorussian Drama in 1917. In the center, (above), is F. Zhdanovich. Uladislaŭ Halubok is standing in a long, native garment by the birch tree. Paŭlinka Myadzelka is under the banner in the center. To the left of the banner is Fal'ski. To the right of the banner is Zhuraŭski. Others in the photograph include Ivanoŭ and V. Vashkevich. The Society was organized in 1917. In 1918, the People's Secretariat of the Byelorussian People's (pre-Soviet) Republic granted the troupe a monthly subsidy and declared it to be the Byelorussian State Theater.



Poster announcing the opening of the Byelorussian State Theater on September 14, 1920.

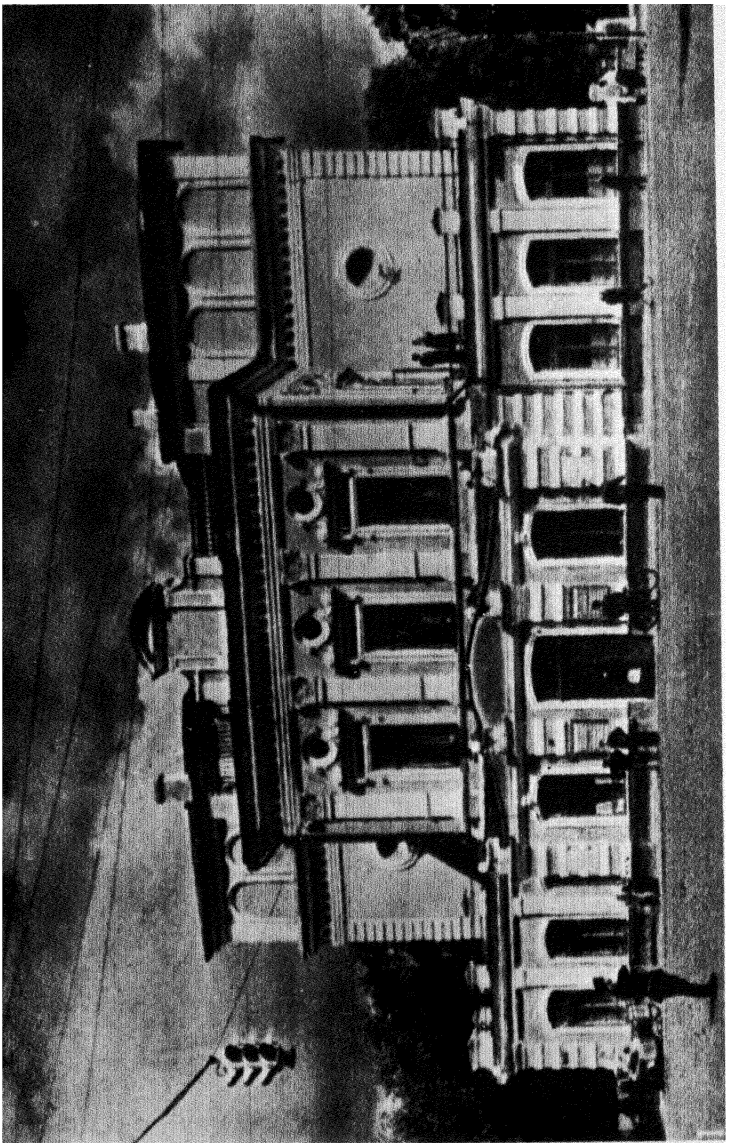
PLATE IV

PLATE V



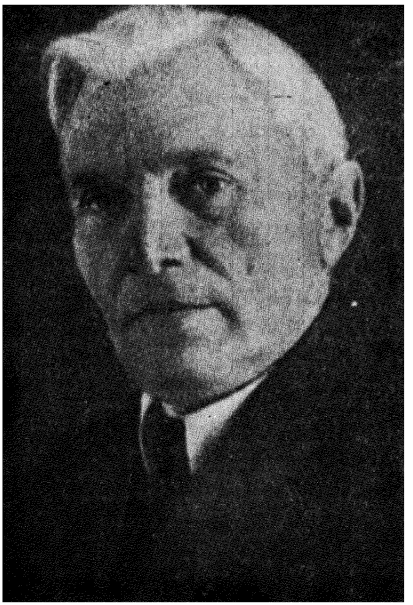
The Byelorussian Chorus attached to the Byelorussian State Theater. In the center is the composer, Uladimir Tėraŭski, who conducted it.

PLATE VI

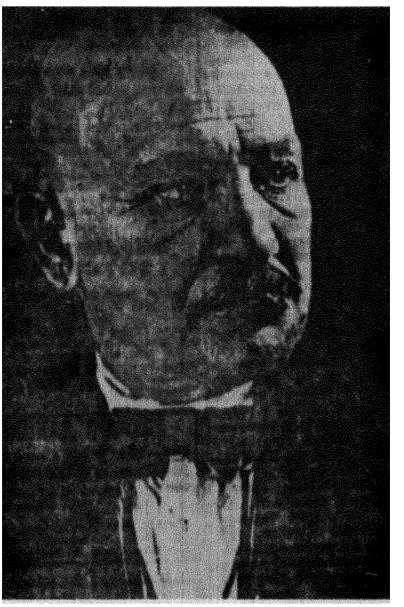


Building of the Byelorussian State Theater in Minsk.

PLATE VII



Aŭstsihnei Mirovich, Byelorussian playwright and director.

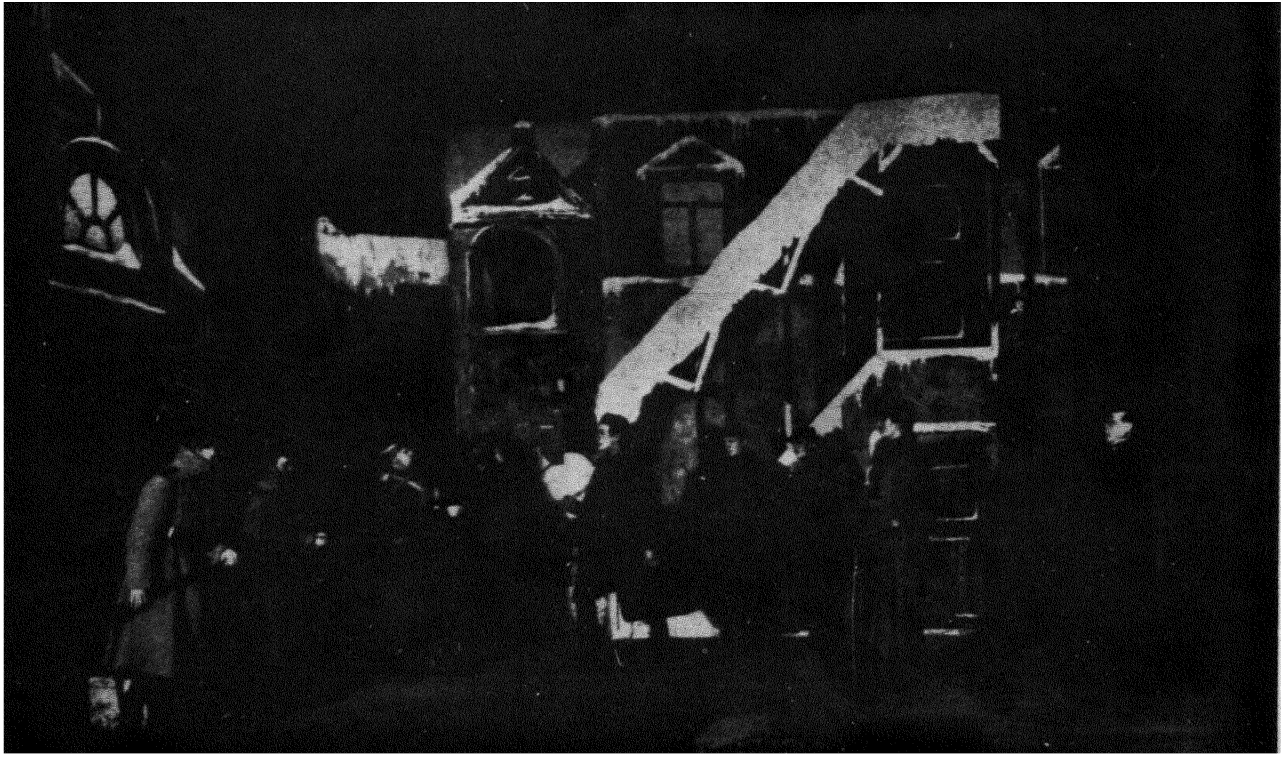


Uladimir Tėraŭski, a Byelorussian national composer. He wrote the score for the musical drama, *On St. John's Eve*. He was arrested in 1938 and exiled.



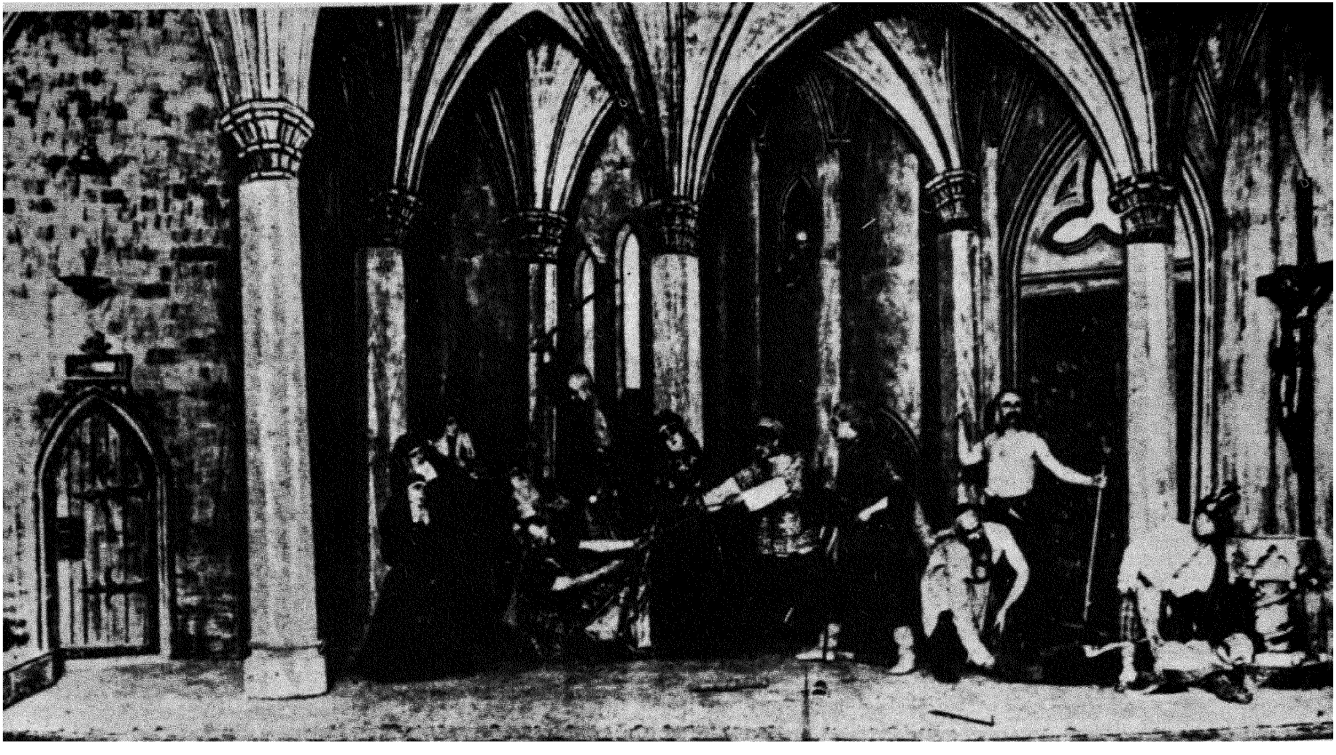
Scene from the production of *On St. John's Eve* by Mikhas' Charot (pseudonym of Kudzel'ka) in 1921.

PLATE VIII



A scene from *Kastus' Kalinoŭski*, by Aŭstsihnei Mirovich, as produced at the First Byelorussian State Theater (Minsk, 1924).

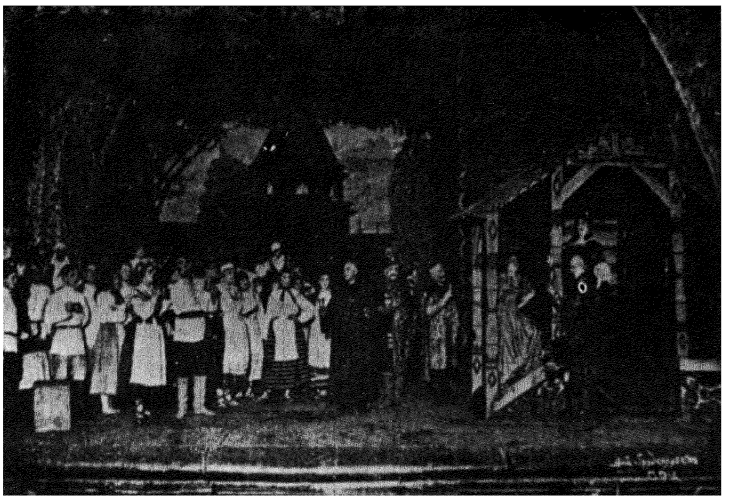
PLATE IX



A scene from *The Gentleman's Attendant* by Nazar Byvayeŭski (pseudonym of Yazėp Dyla), at the First Byelorussian State Theater (Minsk, 1925).

PLATE X

PLATE XI

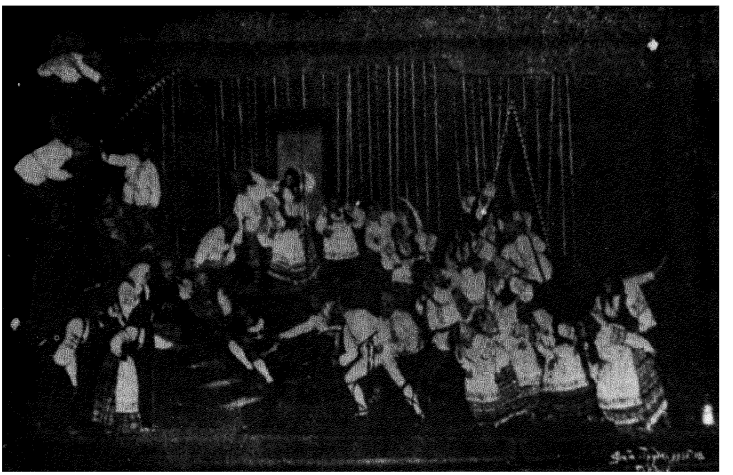


A second scene from *The Gentleman's Attendant* (Minsk, 1925).

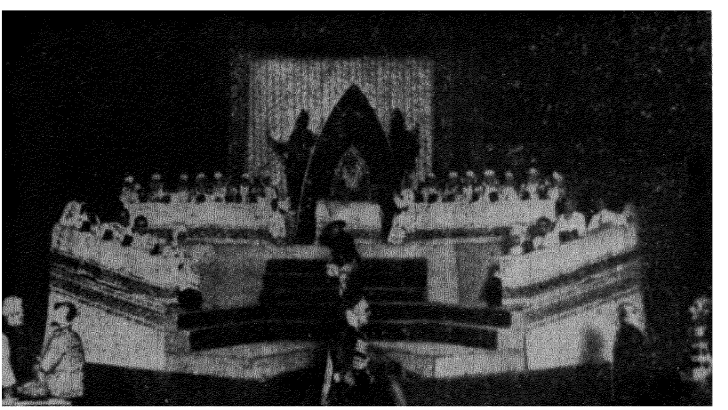


A scene from *The Smith Who Was a Governor* by Aŭstsihnei Mirovich as done at the First Byelorussian State Theater in Minsk in 1925. It was staged by Mirovich, with sets and costumes by Oskar Mariks.

PLATE XII

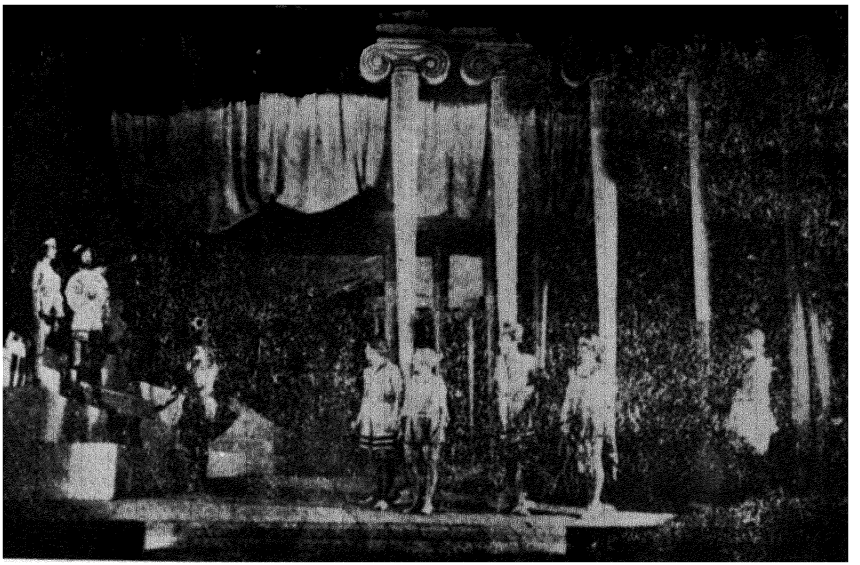


A second scene from *The Smith Who Was a Governor* (Minsk, 1925).

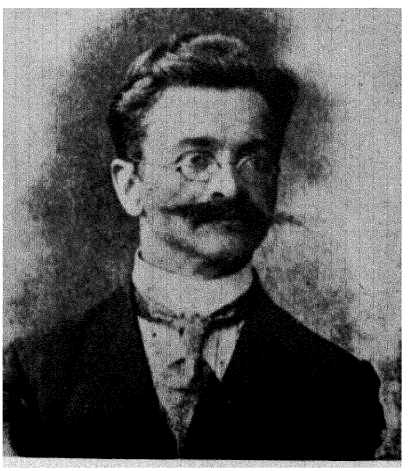


Act III of *The Smith Who Was a Governor* (Minsk, 1925).

PLATE XIII

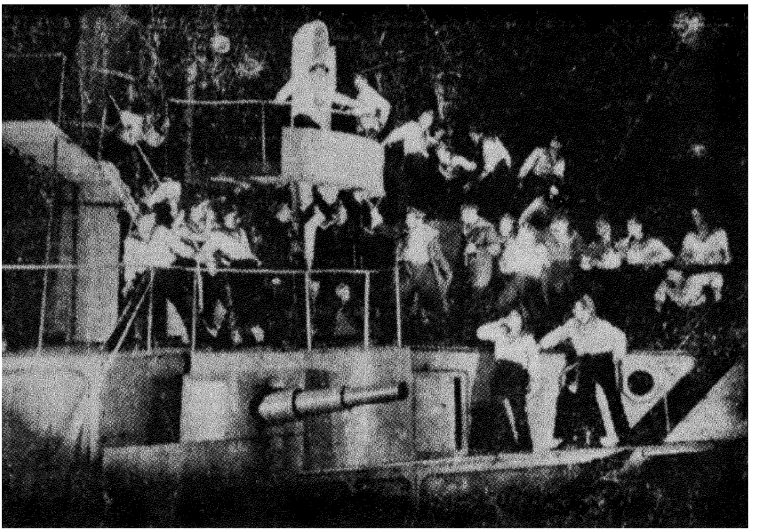


A scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Second Byelorussian State Theater (Vitebsk, 1927).

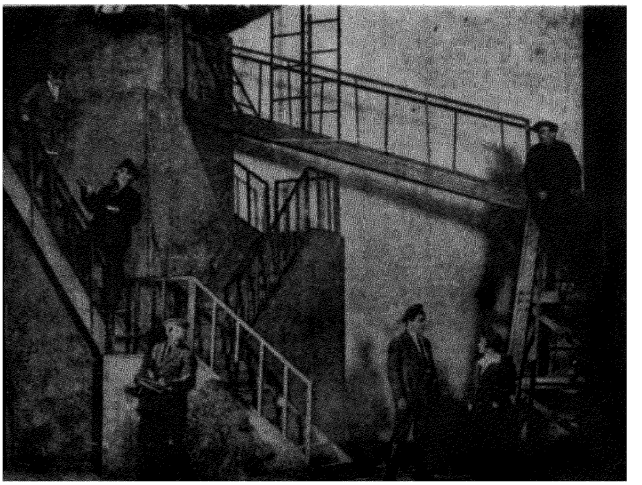


Al'bert Paŭlovich, poet and playwright.
He was arrested and exiled in 1938.

PLATE XIV



A scene from Boris Lavrenev's *Breach* at the Second Byelorussian State Theater (Vitebsk, 1928).



A scene from *The Bridge* by Aŭhen Ramanovich at the First Byelorussian State Theater (Minsk, 1929).

PLATE XV

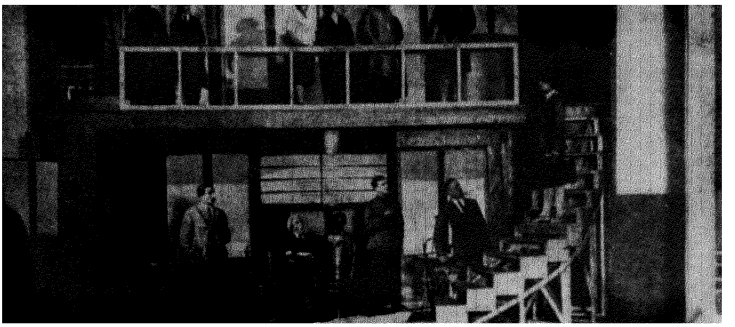


Yazép Dyla (Nazar Byvayeŭski, pseudonym), playwright and theater figure. He was arrested in 1930 and was exiled.

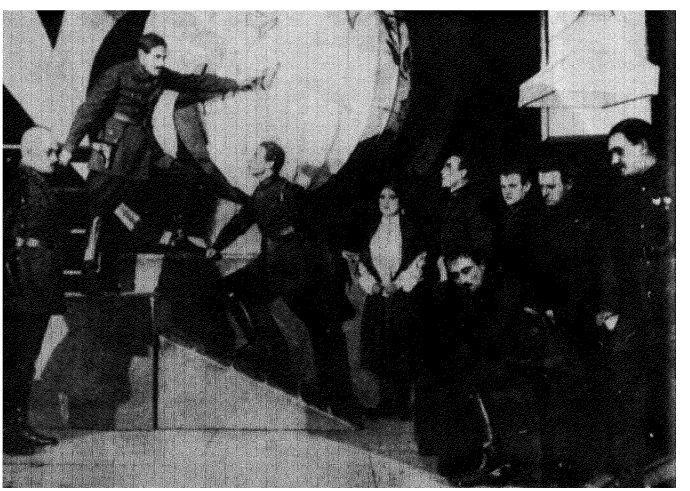


Mikhas' Charot (pseudonym of Kudzel'ka), poet and playwright. He was arrested in 1936 and shot.

PLATE XVI

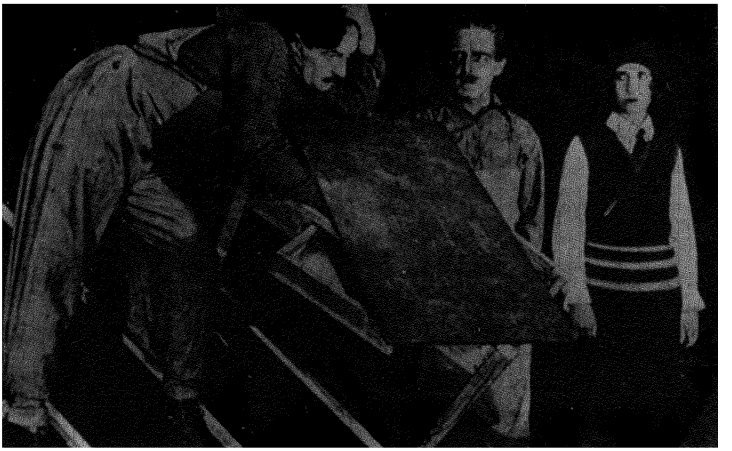


A scene from *Inga*, by A. Glebov, at the First Byelorussian State Theater (Minsk, 1929).

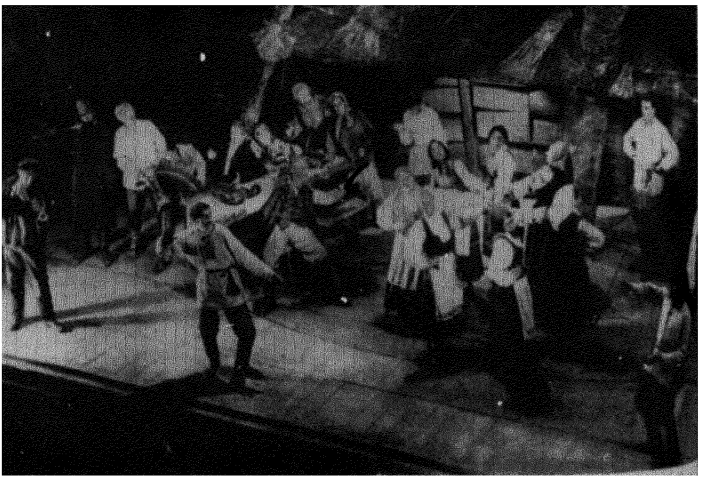


A scene from *Between Storms* by Z'mitrok Kurdin, at the First Byelorussian State Theater (Minsk, 1930).

PLATE XVII



A scene from Il'lya Hurski's *Stokers* at the Second Byelorussian State Theater (Vitebsk, 1931).

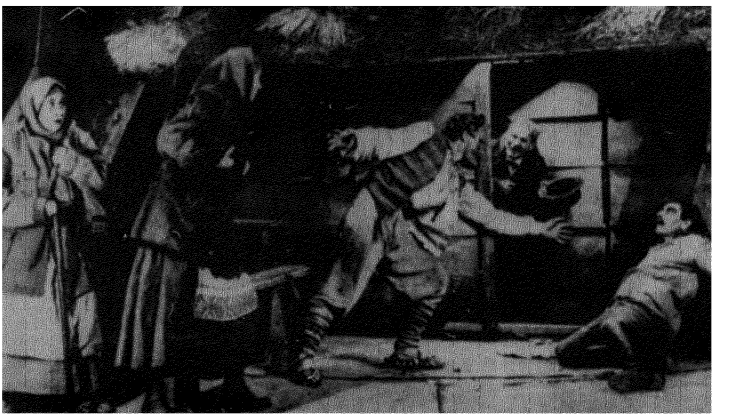


Act I of *Native Land* by Kuz'ma Chorny at the First Byelorussian State Theater (Minsk, 1932).

PLATE XVIII



Act II of *Native Land* (Minsk, 1932).

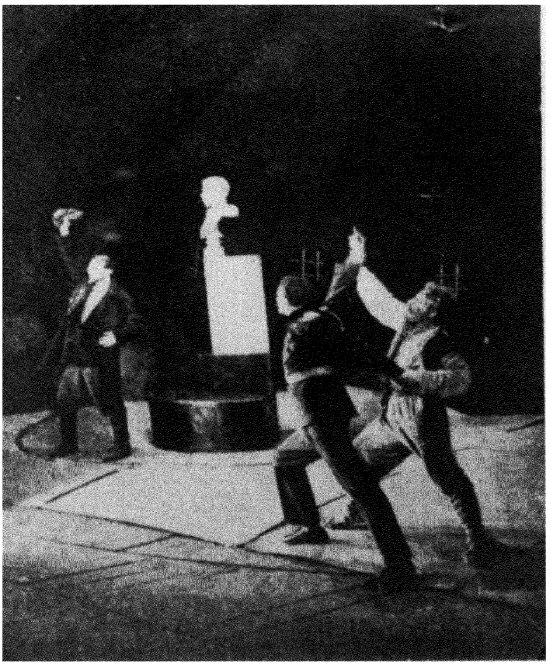


Act III of *Native Land* (Minsk, 1932).

PLATE XIX

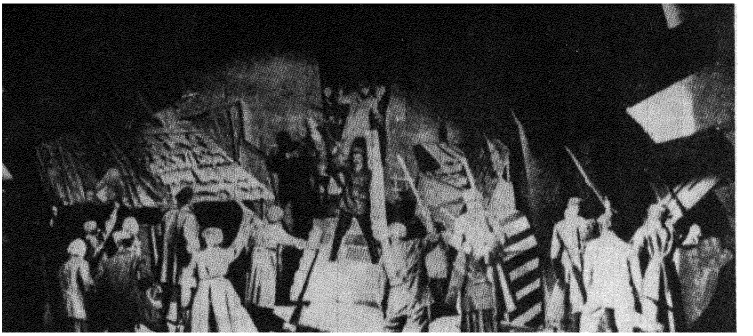


Another scene from *Native Land* (Minsk, 1932).

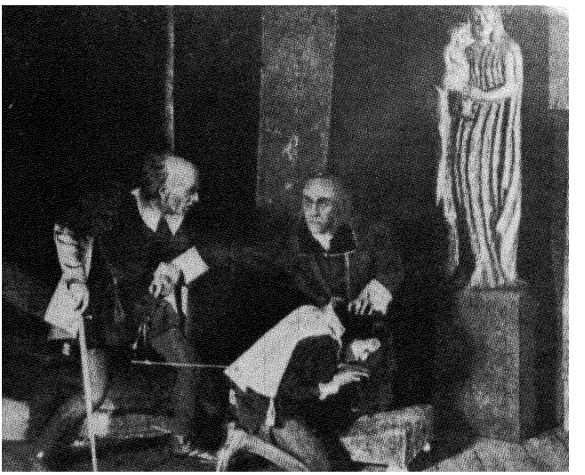


The finale from *Native Land* (Minsk, 1932).

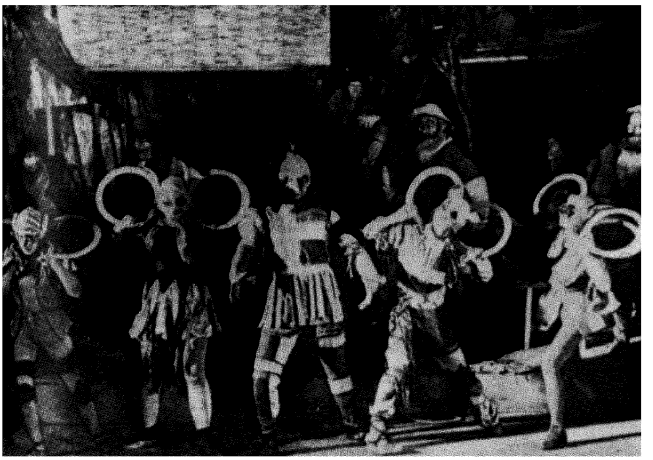
PLATE XX



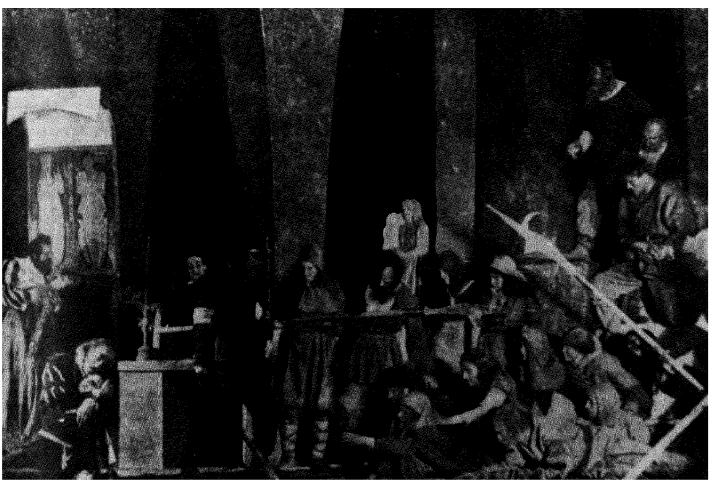
The epilogue to *Native Land* (Minsk, 1932).



Act I, Scene 2, from *La Jacquerie*, a play after Prosper Mérimée, at the First Byelorussian State Theater (Minsk, 1934). It was staged by Lyavon Litvinaŭ, and the settings and costumes were done by M. Aksel'rod.



Act I, Scene 3, from *La Jacquerie* (Minsk, 1934).



Act II, Scene 4, from *La Jacquerie* (Minsk, 1934).

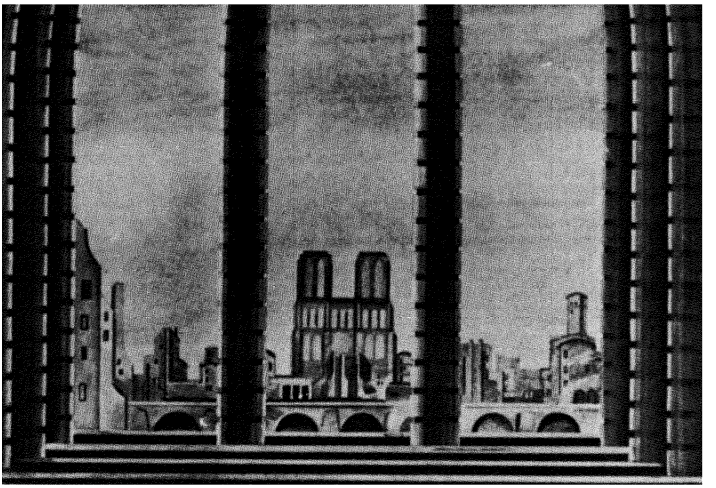


Tsishka Hartny (pseudonym of Z'mitrok Zhylunovich), poet, playwright and author. He was arrested in 1936. He died in prison.



Mikhas' Zarėtski (pseudonym of Kasyankoŭ), author and dramatist. He was arrested in 1936 and exiled.

PLATE XXIII



Maquette for a scene from *Magnanimity*, by Halaŭchyner, at the First Byelorussian State Theater (Minsk, 1935).



A scene from Kurdin's *Counterattack* at the Third Byelorussian State Theater. Uladislaŭ Halubok plays the Commander; Kachynskaya plays the Nurse, and Dedyushka plays the Red Army man (Gomel', 1936).



People's Artist Pavel Malchanaŭ (on the right) as Hamlet, and Aleksandr Il'inski as Polonius in *Hamlet* at the Yakub Kolas Theater (Vitebsk, 1947).



People's Artist H. Hlebaŭ as Tulyaha in *He Who Laughs Last* by Kandrat Krapiva, at the First Byelorussian State Theater (Minsk, 1939).

PLATE XXV

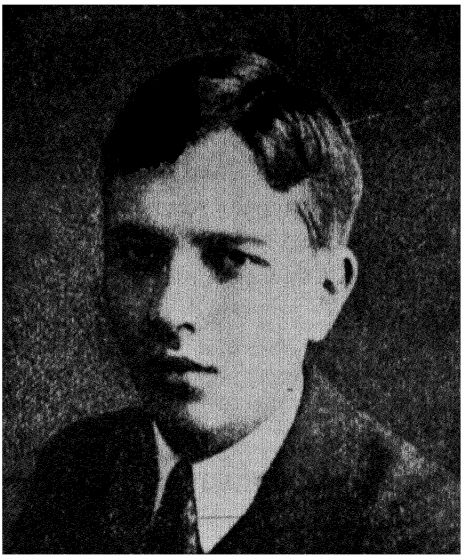


U. Pal'cheŭski as Heinrich, and Mme. P. Rotter as Ravtandalein in Gerhart Hauptmann's *Die versunkene Glocke* at the Minsk Municipal Byelorussian Theater (1942).

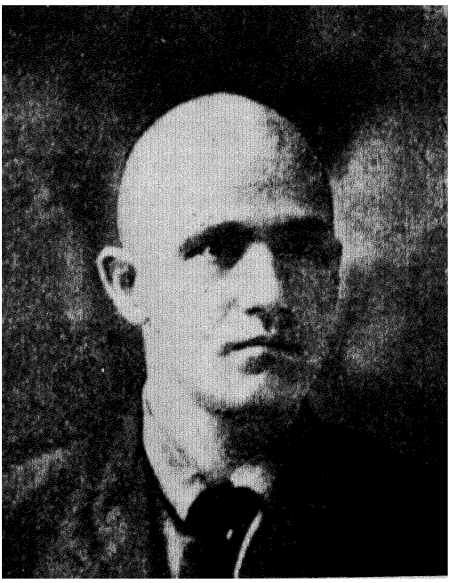


V. Hovar-Bandarénka and Nestsyarovich in Frantsishak Alyakhnovich's *In the Antokal Section of Vilno* at the Minsk Municipal Theater (1942-1943).

PLATE XXVI



Ales' Dudar (pseudonym of Dailidovich), poet and dramatic critic. He was arrested in 1936 and exiled.

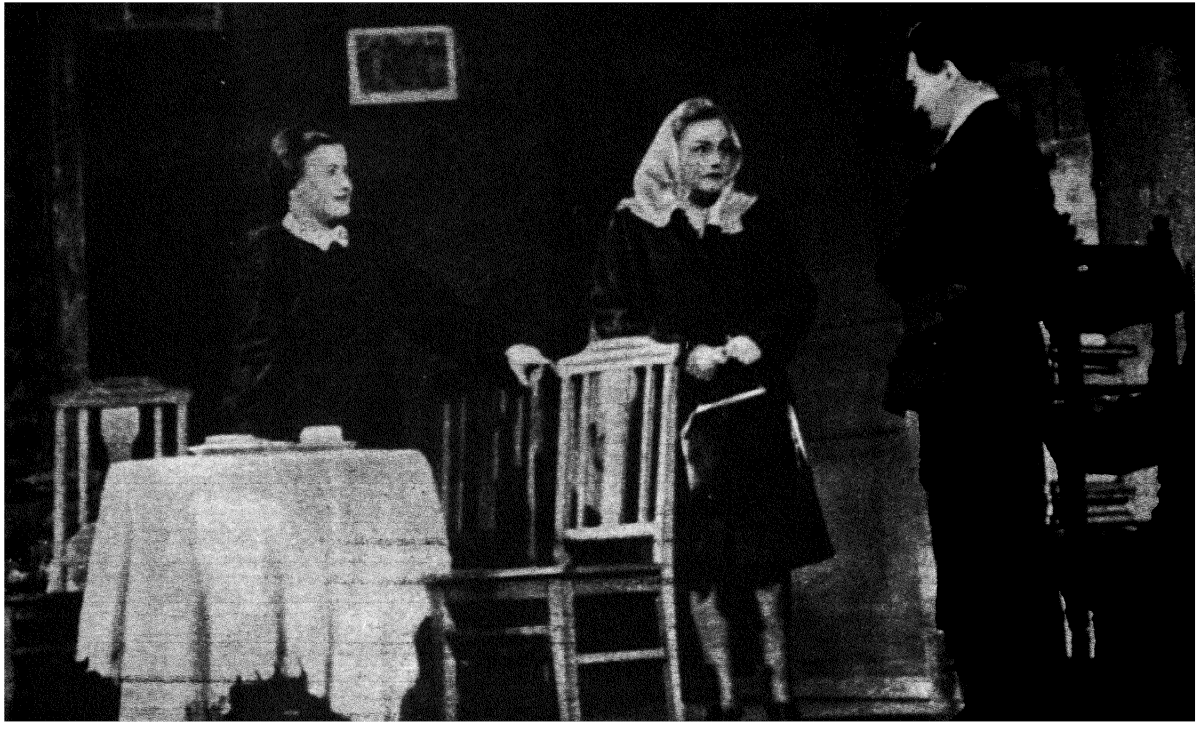


Maksim Harétski, writer, playwright and historian of Byelorussian literature. He was arrested in 1930 and exiled.

PLATE XXVII



Finale from A. Maŭzon's *Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ* at the Yanka Kupala Theater (Minsk, 1948).



A scene from Ales' Kuchar's *This Happened in Minsk* at the Yanka Kupala Theater. Lidiya Rzhėtskaya enacts Hanna; Irena Zhdanovich is Maryna, and Barys Platonaŭ plays Maksim Ivanovich (Minsk, 1948).

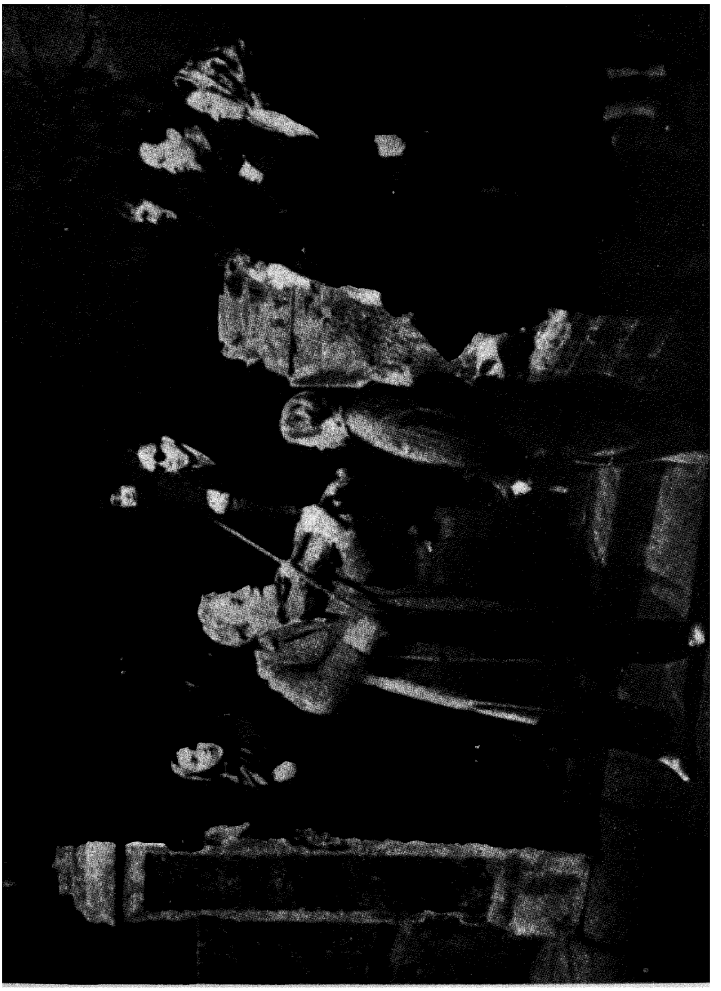
PLATE XXIX



Kuz'ma Chorny (pseudonym of Ramanovich), author and playwright. He was arrested in 1938 and died on November 22, 1944.



Mikhas' Hramyka, poet and playwright. He was arrested in 1930 and exiled.



Scene at the Minsk Municipal Square, from Kandrat Krapiva's *Together with the People*.
Yanka Kupala Theater (Minsk, 1949).

PLATE XXXI



Vasil' Stashĕŭski, author and playwright. He was arrested in 1936 and exiled.

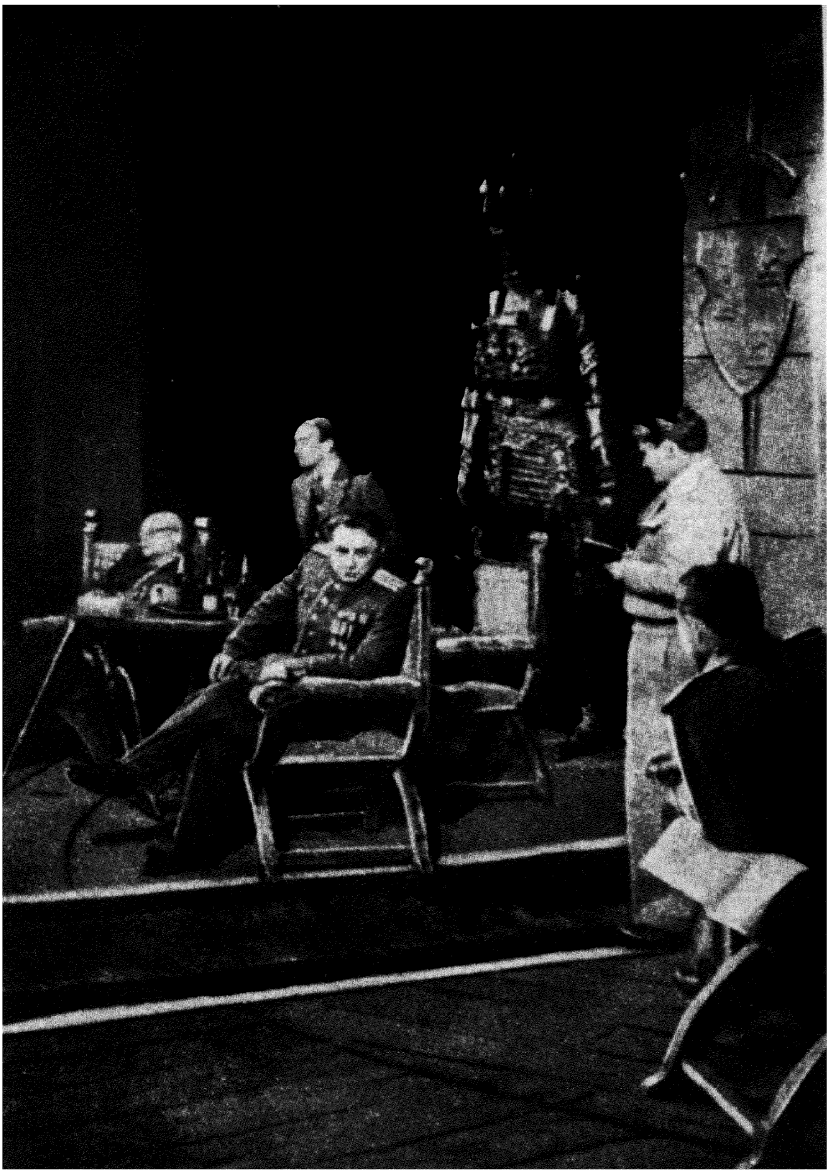


Ryhor Kobets, playwright. He was arrested in 1936 and exiled.



V. Pola and H. Hlebaŭ in a scene from Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Duenna* at the Yanka Kupala Theater (Minsk, 1949)

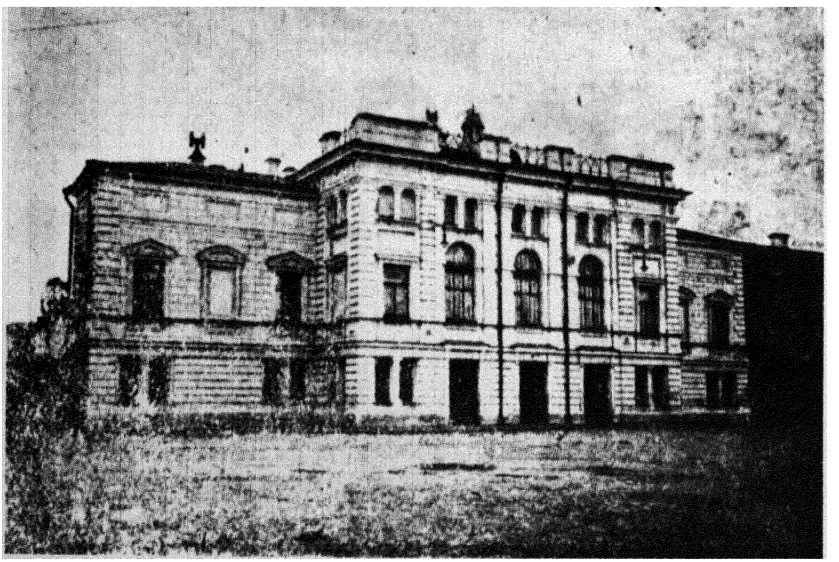
PLATE XXXIII



Scene from *Governor of a Province* by the Tur brothers and L. Sheinin, at the Yanka Kupala Theater (Minsk, 1949).



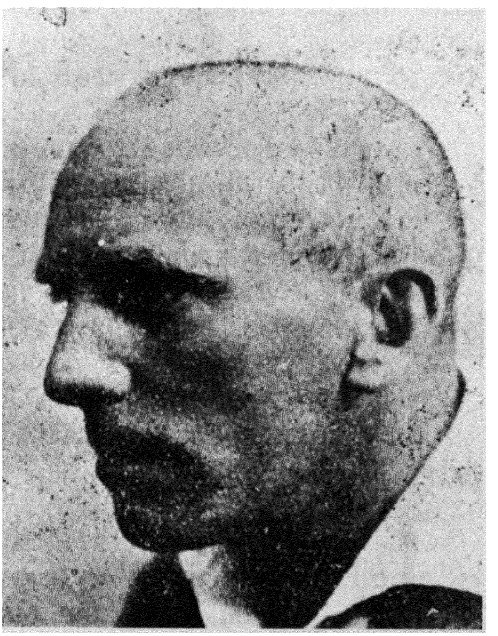
People's Artist Aleksandr Il'inski as the Old Man in Yanka Kupala's *Ruined Nest* at the Yakub Kolas Theater (Vitebsk, 1951).



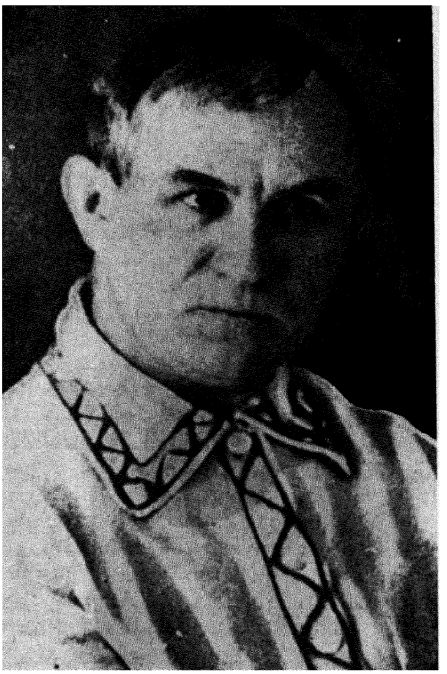
Building of the Second Byelorussian State Theater in Vitebsk. It was burned down during the Second World War.



Andrêi Aleksandrovich, poet and playwright. He was arrested in 1938 and exiled.



Frantsishak Alyakhnovich, playwright. He was killed by a Bolshevik hireling in Vilno on March 3, 1944.



Uladislaŭ Halubok, People's Artist of Byelorussia. He created and guided the Halubok Theater, which later became the Third Byelorussian State Theater with its permanent location in Gomel'. He was arrested in 1936 and exiled.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AND

INDEXES

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note: This bibliography is divided into three sections: BYELORUSSIAN DRAMATIC LITERATURE, BOOKS ON THE BYELORUSSIAN THEATER, and ARTICLES ON THE BYELORUSSIAN THEATER. In some cases the entries are incomplete because many of the sources are not obtainable in the United States. However, the references have been presented in as complete a form as possible under existing conditions.

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b. Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1934.
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_____, *Chort i baba* [Devil and the Woman]:
a. *Vol'naya Belarus'* [Free Byelorussia], Minsk, No. 32, 1918;
b. *Stsènichnyya tvory* [Dramatic Works], Vol. I, Part II, Minsk, 1918.
A one-act comedy.

_____, *Dryhva* [Marsh], Vilno, 1926. A drama in five acts.

_____, *Dzyadz'ka Yakub* [Uncle Yakub]:
a. Vilno, Vilenskaye vydavetstva, 1919;

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*All works are in Byelorussian unless specifically noted otherwise. More than one publication reference is given whenever possible.—Ed

b. *Belaruskaye zhyts'tsyo* [Byelorussian Life], Vilno, Nos. 2-7, 1919.
A dramatic picture in two acts with songs and dances.

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b. *Stsėnichnyya tvory* [Dramatic Works], Book II, Minsk, 1924.
A stage picture in two acts.

_____, *Krutsi nya krutsi—pridzetsa pamyartsi* [Whether You Twist Around or Not, You Have To Die]:
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b. *Run'* [Shoots], Minsk, No. 2/3, 1920.
A play in two acts.

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b. *Novy shlyakh* [New Path], Minsk, No. 15 (27), 1943;
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A one-act fantasy.

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c. Translated into Russian by I.P. Pikulev under title of *Rodina,* in *Teatr narodov SSSR* [Theater of the Peoples of the U.S.S.R.], Moscow, No. 1, 1934.
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b. *Baby-likhadzeiki* [Malicious Women];
c. *Byazrodny* [Kinless];
d. *Byaz'vinnaya kroŭ* [Innocent Blood];
e. *Darahiya hos'tsi* [Dear Guests];
f. *Dushahuby* [Murderers];
g. *Dvuzhėntsy* [Bigamists];
h. *Hos'ts' z katarhi* [Guest from Prison Labor];
i. *Iskra byloha kakhan'nya* [Spark of Former Love];
j. *Knyaz' Kachėrhin* [Prince Kachėrhin];
k. *Kul'turnaya tsyoshcha* [Cultured Mother-in-Law];
l. *Muzhychaye shchas'tse* [Peasant Happiness];

m. *Na kurortse* [At the Health Resort];
n. *Pinskaya madonna* [Madonna of Pinsk];
o. *Pramenchyk shchas'tsya* [Ray of Happiness];
p. *Plytahony* [Raftsmen];
q. *Rvachy* [Self-Seeking People];
r. *Rykashėt* [Ricochet];
s. *Vasil' Khmel'*;
t. *Za muravanai s'tsyanoi* [Beyond the Brick Wall];
u. *Zavyaŭshyya kvetki* [Faded Flowers];
v. *Zalaty bob* [Golden God];
w. *Zalyoty dzyaka* [Deacon's Matchmaking];
x. *Zhanikhi* [Bridegrooms].

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a. *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, No. 5-6, 1923;
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———, *Pes'ni nashykh dzyon* [Songs of Our Days], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1930. A play in three acts.

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———, *Chyrvonyya rozhy* [Red Roses]:
a. *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, No. 1, 1926;
b. *Vypisi z belaruskai litaratury XIX i XX st.* [Selections from Byelorussian Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries], ed. by Uladimir Dzyarzhynski, Minsk, Belaruskaya dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1926.
Four dramatic scenes of the old life.

———, *Hapon i Lyubachka, Uzvyshsha* [Loftiness], Minsk, No. 5, 1929. Scenes from life.

———, *Mutėrka,* reprinted from *Nasha niva* [Our Soil], Vilno, 1921. A play.

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_____, *Khvali zhyst'tsya* [Waves of Life], *Zazhiynki* [Harvest Holiday] an anthology, Moscow, 1918. A drama in three acts.

_____, *Na styku* [Crossroads]:
a. *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, No. 3, 1926;
b. *Prysady* [Highway Trees], Minsk, 1927.
A play in five acts.

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Herasimovich, see Vir, Yazèp.

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a. *Polymya rèvolyutsyi* [Flame of the Revolution], Minsk, 1940;
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A play.

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A play.

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———, *Kalya tėrasy* [Around the Terrace], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1929. A drama in four acts.

———, *Nad Nyomnam* [Above the Nieman River], Minsk, Archives of the First Byelorussian State Theater, 1926. A play.

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———, *Vino bushuye* [Wine Creates an Uproar], *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, No. 7, 1929. A comedy in four acts from contemporary life.

———, *Z'mitrok z Vysokaye Budy* [Smitrok from Vysokaya Buda], *Vol'naya Belarus'* [Free Byelorussia], Minsk, Nos. 33-35, 1918. A drama in four acts.

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———, *Tsytadėl slavy* [Citadel of Glory], Minsk, 1950. A play staged at the Yanka Kupala Theater.

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A play.

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———, *Patryyoty* [Patriots], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1939. A play.

———, *Novy horad* [New City]:
a. *Maladnyak* [Young Generation], Minsk, Nos. 1-3, 1930;
b. Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1931.
A play.

———, *Svaty* [Matchmakers]:
a. *Polymya rėvolyutsyi* [Flame of the Revolution], Minsk, No. 4, 1935;
b. Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1937.
A play.

———, *Svaye lyudzi* [One's Own People], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1946. A play.

———, *Valodzya Vyarbitski* [Valodzya Vyarbitski], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetsyva, 1940. A play.

———, *Vyasna* [Spring], translated into Russian under the title of *Vesna*, Minsk, 1937. A play.

———, *Vybranyya tvory* [Selected Works], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1951.

Hurski, Mikhas', *Padlasaya krasulya* [Affectionate Beauty], Minsk, Halubok Theater, 1921. A comedy. Mimeographed.

Il'inski, [illegible], *Kavali zhyts'tsya* [Forge of Life], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1930. A play.

———, *Les tsyomny* [Dark Woods], Minsk, First Byelorussian State Theater, 1926. A play. Mimeographed.

———, *Lipen'ka* [Linden Tree], Minsk, 1925. A play.

———, *Na pradves'ni* [On the Eve of Spring], Minsk, First Byelorussian State Theater, 1926. A play. Mimeographed.

———, *Na sud hramadzki* [At the Public Court], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1930. A play.

———, *Perad s'vitan'nem* [Before Dawn], Minsk, 1928. A play.

———, *Run' vyasnovaya* [Shoots of Springtime], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1930. A play.

———, *S'nyahurachka* [Snow Maiden], Minsk, First Byelorussian State Theater, 1927. A play for children. Mimeographed.

———, *Ulasnas'ts'* [Property], Minsk, 1935. A play.

———, *Vyasna* [Spring], Minsk, 1932. A play.

———, *Yak Mikita i Panas pratsavats' pashli u Kalhas* [How Mikita and Panas Went to Work at a Kolkhoz], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetsyva, 1930. A play.

Ivanoŭski, Vatslaŭ, see Doletskiye.

Kahanets, Karus', (pseudonym of Kazimir Kastravitski), *Modny shlyakhtsyuk* [Gentleman's Stylish Son]:
a. St. Petersburg, 1910;
b. *Zbornik stsėnichnykh tvoraŭ* [Anthology of Dramatic Works], Vol. I, Part II, Minsk, 1918;
c. *Khrystamatyya novai belaruskai litaratury* [Chrestomathy of New Byelorussian Literature], ed. by I. Dvarchanin, Vilno, 1927.
A one-act comedy from life.

———, *Syn Danila* [Danila's Son], *Sakavik* [March], Osterhofen, Germany, No. 1, 1947. A historical drama in three acts.

———, *U inshym shchas'tsi nyashchas'tse skhovana* [In the Other Fellow's Happiness, Unhappiness is Hidden]:

a. Vilno, Belaruskaye vydavetskaye tavarystva, 1919;
b. *Vypisy z belaruskai litaratury* [Selections from Byelorussian Literature], ed. by V. Dzyarzhynski, Minsk, 1923.
A play.

Kalenta, Mikhas', *Utsyok z turmy* [Escaped from Prison], *Malady araty* [Young Plowman], Minsk, Nos. 5, 7, 8, 1925. A play in three acts.

Kashel', T., *Pashantsavala* [Lucky], *Malady araty* [Young Plowman], Minsk, No. 18, 1926. A comedy in three acts.

Kastravitski, Kazimir, see Kahanets, Karus'.

Kavaleŭski, Aŭhen, *Nespadzyavanyya zaruchyny* [Unexpected Betrothal], Western Germany, 1946. A skit.

_____, *Novahodny hosts'* [Guest for the New Year], *Sakavik* [March], Osterhofen, Germany, Nos. 1 and 2, 1948. A dramatic study.

_____, *Shapka-nevidlyadka* [Invisible Cap], Michelsdorf, Western Germany, Krinitsa, 1947. A play in two acts for older children.

_____, *Vyasyoly maistra* [Happy Master], Osterhofen, Western Germany, 1948. A skit.

Klimkovich, Mikhas', *Adplata* [Vengeance], *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, 1947. A play.

_____, *Georgi Skaryna, Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, No. 7, 1946. A trilogy.

_____, *Katsyaryna Zharnasyok*, Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetsyva, 1938. A dramatic poem.

_____, *Na vilenskim shlyakhu* [On the Vilno Road], *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, 1947. A dramatic poem.

_____, *Usya ŭlada savetam* [All Power to the Soviets], Minsk, 1947. A play.

Kobets, Ryhor, *Huta* [Glass Factory]:
a. *Maladnyak* [Young Generation], Minsk, Nos. 8-10, 1929;

b. Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1930.
A play.

———, *Na zastave* [At the Frontier Post], *Polymya rėvolyutsyi* [Flame of the Revolution], No. 12, 1935. A comedy in five acts.

———, and Anatol' Vol'ny, *Ratui, Bozha* [Save, Oh God], *Chryvonaya Belarus'* [Red Byelorussia], Minsk, Nos. 14-17, 1932. A comedy.

Kolas, Yakub (pseudonym of Kanstantyn Mitskevich), *Anton' Lata:*
a. *Vol'naya Belarus'* [Free Byelorussia], Minsk, Nos. 27-28, 1917;
b. *Zbornik stsėnichnykh tvoraŭ* [Anthology of Dramatic Works], Minsk, Vol'naya Belarus', 1917.
A comedy in two acts.

———, *Na daroze zhyts'tsya* [On the Road of Life], *Zbornik stsėnichnykh tvoraŭ* [Anthology of Dramatic Works], Minsk, 1917.
A play.

———, *U pushchakh Pales'sya* [In the Forests of Polesie], Vitebsk, 1937. Tr. into Russian by N. Bogdanov, Moscow-Leningrad, 1939.

———, *Vaina da pabednaha kantsa* [War to a Victorious Finish], Act I, "Mobilization":
a. *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, No. 2, 1927;
b. *Polymya* No. 11, 1931.

———, *Vaina vaine* [War on War]:
a. *Polymya rėvolyutsyi* [Flame of the Revolution], Minsk, No. 10, 1936;
b. Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1938;
c. In Russian translation as part of his *Sobraniye sochinenii* [Collected Works], Vol. IV, Moscow, 1952.
A drama in four acts.

Koŭsh, Svyataslaŭ, *Rahvalodava kryŭda* [Rohvolod's Shame], *Baranavitskaya hazėta* [Baranovichi Newspaper], Baranovichi, 1943.
A historical drama.

———, *U kalyadnuyu noch* [On Christmas Eve], Watenstedt, Western Germany, Belaruski dapamohovy kamitėt, 1946. A play for children.

Krapiva, Kandrat, *Izbrannyye dramy* [Selected Dramas (in Russian translation)], Moscow, GIKhL,* 1953.
[Includes *Partisans, He Who Laughs Last, Trial by Fire, Together with the People,* and *Larks Are Singing.*]

_____, *Kanets druzhby* [End of a Friendship]:
a. Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1934;
b. *Belaruskaya savetskaya litaratura dlya 9-10 klyasaŭ* [Byelorussian Soviet Literature for the Ninth and Tenth Grades], ed. by S. Vasilenak, Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1935;
c. Translated into Russian under the title *Konets druzhby,* Moscow, GIKhL, 1936.
A play.

_____, *Khto s'myayetstsa aposhnim* [He Who Laughs Last]:
a. Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1939;
b. *P'yesy* [Plays], an anthology, Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1946.
A play.

_____, *Mily chalavek* [Dear Person], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1945. A play.

_____, *Partyzany* [Partisans]:
a. Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1937;
b. *Belaruskaya proza i dramaturhiya* [Byelorussian Prose and Plays], an anthology, Minsk, 1948;
c. *P'yesy* [Plays], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1946.
A play.

_____, *Proba ahnyom* [Trial by Fire]:
a. *P'yesy* [Plays], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1946;
b. Russian translation in almanac *Belarus'* [Byelorussia], Moscow, *Sovetskaya Belarus',* 1944;
c. (Selections in Russian translation) *Belorusskaya literatura* [Byelorussian Literature], ed. by S. Vasilenok, Moscow, Uchpedgiz, 1952.
A play.

*Gosudarstvennoye Izdatel'stvo Khudozhestvennoi Literatury [State Publishing House for Belles-Lettres].

_____, *Pyayuts' zhavaranki* [Larks Are Singing]:
a. *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, 1950;
b. Russian translation in *Zvezda* [Star], Leningrad, No. 4, 1951;
c. Russian translation in anthology *Sovetskaya dramaturgiya* [Soviet Dramaturgy], Moscow, 1950.
A play.

_____, *P'yesy* [Plays], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1946.

_____, *Z narodam* [Together with the People], Minsk, Yanka Kupala Theater, 1949. A play.

_____, *Zatsikaŭlenaya asoba* [Interested Party], *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, No. 2, 1953. Also published separately, Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1953. A play.

Kuchar, Ales', *Hėta bylo ŭ Minsku* [This Happened in Minsk], *Polymya* [Flame], No. 3, 1950. A play.

_____, *Nespakoinyya sėrtsy* [Troubled Hearts], Vitebsk, 1953. A play staged by the Yakub Kolas Theater.

_____, *Zalozhniki* [Hostages], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1946. A play.

Kudzel'ka, Mikhas' (Mikhas' Charot, pseud.), *Danilka i Ales'ka* [Danilka and Aleska], *Zbornyk stsėnichnykh tvoraŭ dlya dzitsyachaha tėatru* [Anthology of Dramatic Works for the Children's Theater], Minsk, 1920. A children's play in two acts with singing.

_____, *Mikitaŭ lapats'* [Mikita's Bast-Shoe], *Stsėnichnyya tvory* [Dramatic Works], Book I, Minsk, 1923. A comedy in two acts.

_____, *Na Kupal'le* [On St. John's Eve], in the archives of the Yanka Kupala Theater, Minsk, 1921. Libretto for a musical drama done at the First Byelorussian State Theater.

_____, *Pastushki* [Shepherds], *Zorki* [Stars], Minsk, No. 1, 1921. A children's play in two acts.

_____, *Son na balotse* [Dream in the Swamp], *Stsėnichnyya tvory* [Dramatic Works], Book I, Minsk, 1923. A fantasy in one act.

Kupala, Yanka, *Advechnaya pes'nya* [Age-Old Song]:
a. St. Petersburg, 1910;
b. in his *Zbor tvoraŭ* [Collected Works], Vol. IV, Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1928.
A dramatic poem in twelve scenes.

———, *Dramaticheskiye proizvedeniya* [Dramatic Works] in *Izbrannye proizvedeniya v 2-kh tomakh* [Selected Works in Two Volumes (in Russian translation)], Vol. II, Moscow, 1953.

———, *Na papase* [At the Lodging for the Night]:
a. *Zbor tvoraŭ* [Collected Works], Vol. IV, Minsk, 1928;
b. *Khrystamatyya novai belaruskai litaratury* [Chrestomathy of New Byelorussian Literature], an anthology, ed. by I. Dvarchanin, Vilno, Belaruskaye vydavetskaye tavarystva, 1927.
A drama.

———, *Paŭlinka:*
a. St. Petersburg, 1913;
b. *Stsėnichnyya tvory* [Dramatic Works], Part I, Minsk, 1918;
c. *Zbor tvoraŭ* [Collected Works], Vol. III, Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1927;
d. *Zbor tvoraŭ* 2nd ed., Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1932;
e. revised edition, Minsk, 1937;
f. (Abridged version) in *Khrystamatyya novai belaruskai litaratury* [Chrestomathy of New Byelorussian Literature], ed. by I. Dvarchanin, Vilno, Belaruskaye vydavetskaye tavarystva, 1927;
g. *Vybrannyya tvory* [Selected Works], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1952;
h. *Zbor tvoraŭ u chatyrokh tamakh* [Collected Works in Four Volumes], Vol. III, Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1953.
A comedy in two acts.

———, *Prymaki* [In-Laws]:
a. *Run'* [Shoots], Minsk, Nos. 5/6, 7/8, 1920;
b. *Zbor tvoraŭ* [Collected Works], Vol. III, Minsk, 1927;
c. *Zbor tvoraŭ*, 2nd ed., Minsk, 1932;
d. Published separately, Minsk, 1936;
e. *Zbor tvoraŭ u chatyrokh tamakh* [Collected Works in Four Volumes], Vol. III, Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1953.
A dramatic joke in one act.

———, *P'yesy* [Plays], translated into Russian, Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1940.

———, *Ras'kidanaye hnyazdo* [Ruined Nest]:
a. Vilno, 1919;
b. *Zbor tvoraŭ* [Collected Works], Vol. III, Minsk, 1927;
c. *Zbor tvoraŭ*, 2nd ed., Minsk, 1932;
d. *Vypisy z belaruskai litaratury 19 i 20 st.* [Selections from Byelorussian Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries], ed. by V. Dzyarzhynski, Minsk, 1926;
e. *Bats'kaŭshchyna* [Our Country], Munich, Nos. 40 (119), 41 (120), 47/48 (126/127), 49 (128), 50 (129), 51/52 (130/131), 1952, and No. 1/2 (132/133), 1953;
f. Published separately, Munich, 1953;
g. *Vybrannyya tvory* [Selected Works], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1952;
h. *Zbor tvoraŭ u chatyroky tamakh* [Collected Works in Four Volumes], Vol. III, Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1953.
A drama in five acts.

———, *Son na kurhane* [Dream on a Mound]:
a. St. Petersburg, 1912;
b. *Zbor tvoraŭ* [Collected Works], Vol. IV, Minsk, 1928;
c. *Vypisy z belaruskai litaratury 19-20 st.* [Selections from Byelorussian Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries], ed. by V. Dzyarzhynski, Minsk, 1926.
A dramatic poem in four scenes.

———, *Tutèishyya* [Local People];
a. *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, No. 2 (10), and 3 (11), 1924;
b. *Zbor tvoraŭ* [Collected Works], Vol. III, Minsk, 1927, pp. 89-192 (removed from subsequent editions of his collected works by the Soviet censorship);
c. *Bats'kaŭshchyna* [Our Country], Munich, Nos. 3-16, 1953;
d. Published separately, Munich, 1953.
Tragi-comic scenes from the Minsk of the recent past, in four acts.

———, *Vybranyya tvory ŭ trokh tamakh* [Selected Works in Three Volumes], Vol. III, Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1937.

———, *Vybranyya tvory ŭ adnym tome* [Selected Works in One Volume], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1952.

———, *Zbor tvoraŭ ŭ 4 tamakh* [Collected Works in Four Volumes], Vol. III, Minsk, 1953.

———, translator, see: Moniuszko, Stanisław, *Halka* and Zulawski, Jerzy, *Eros i Psyche.*

Kurdin, Z'mitrok, *Kontrataka* [Counterattack], Third Byelorussian State Theater, Gomel', 1953. A play. Mimeographed.

———, *Mizhbur'ye* [Between Storms], Minsk, 1930. A play staged at the First Byelorussian State Theater.

Lastoŭski, Vatslaŭ, *Adzinoki* [Alone]:
a. Kovno, Kryvich [Krivichian], 1926;
b. *Dumy i kroŭ* [Thoughts and Blood], anthology of poetry, [place of publication not given], Western Germany, 1950.
A scene from the life of Frantsishak Skaryna.

Lebyada, Todar, *Zahublenaye zhyts'tsyo* [Wasted Life], Montreal, Ab"yednan'ne Belarusaŭ, 1952. A drama in three acts.

Leika, K., *Snatvorny mak* [The Sleep-Inducing Poppy], Vilno, 1912. A scene for children's theaters.

Lyavonny, Yury, *Nechakanaye* [Unexpected], *Malady araty* [Young Plowman], Minsk, No. 10, 1926. A joke from rural life in one act.

Lyazhnevich, Ales' (Byazdol'ny, Ales', pseud.), *Novyye ŭskhody* [New Shoots], Minsk, 1927. A play in six acts.

———, *Tamila,* Minsk, 1927. A melodrama in five acts after the novel *Tamil'la* by Ferdinand Duchêne, with costumes and decorations for each act.

———, *Z dymam--pazharam* [Where There's Smoke, There's Fire], Act I, *Zmahan'ne* [Fight], Part I, Minsk, 1924. A drama in three acts.

———, adapter, see Markov, V.

Makayonak, Andrèi, *Na dos'vitku* [Before Dawn], Minsk, 1952. A play.

———, *Vybachaitse, kali laska* [Excuse It, Please], in Minsk, 1953:
a. *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, No. 7, 1953;

b. Translated into Russian under title of *Kamni v pecheni, Teatr* [Theater], Moscow, No. 10, 1953.
A comedy staged at the Yanka Kupala Theater.

Marashėŭski, Kaėtan, *Kamėdyya* [Comedy], written in 1787, in *Khrystamatyya pa historyyi belaruskai litaratury* [Chrestomathy on the History of Byelorussian Literature], Part I, ed. by Maksim Haréts ki, Minsk, 1926.

Markov, V., *Vorozhba* [Fortune-Telling], Byelorussian adaptation of this Russian play in two acts under the title of *Varazhba,* adapted by Ales' Lyazhnevich, Minsk, 2nd ed., 1927.

Maŭzon, Arkadz', *Kali razykhodzyatsta shlyakhi* [When the Roads Separate], Minsk, 1950. A play.

_____, *Kanstantyn Zaslonaŭ,* in the anthology, *Belaruskaya proza i dramaturhiya* [Byelorussian Prose and Plays], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1948. A play.

_____, *Na paroze* [At the Threshold], Archives of the Yakub Kolas Theater as staged there, Vitebsk, 1948. A play.

_____, *Troye z adnaho kaledzha* [Trio from One College], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1951. A play.

Mazurkevich, Yazėp, see Tikavy, Ya.

Mikulich, Barys, *Rot front* [Red Front], Minsk, 1935. A play.

Mirovich, Aŭstsihnei, *Kar''yera tavarysha Bryzhalina* [Career of Comrade Bryzhalin], Archives of the First Byelorussian State Theater as staged there, Minsk, 1926.

_____, *Kaval'-vayavoda* [The Smith Who Was a Governor], Archives of the First Byelorussian State Theater as staged there, Minsk, 1925.

_____, *Kastus' Kalinoŭski,* Minsk, 1924:
a. Archives of the First Byelorussian State Theater, Minsk;
b. (Acts I and II only) *Novy shlyakh* [New Path], Minsk, Nos. 11 (48) and 12 (49), 1944.
A historical drama staged by the First Byelorussian State Theater.

_____, *Lyon* [Flax], Minsk, 1933. A play.

_____, *Mashéka,* Archives of the First Byelorussian State Theater as staged there, Minsk, 1922. A drama.

_____, *Peramoha* [Victory], Archives of the First Byelorussian State Theater as staged there, Minsk, 1926. A play.

_____, *Try ètapy* [Three Stages], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1928. A play.

_____, *U vesnavuyu noch* [On a Spring Night], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1928. A play in three acts.

_____, *Zapyayuts' veratsyony* [Spindles Will Sing], Archives of the First Byelorussian State Theater as staged there, Minsk, 1928.

Mitskevich, Mikola, *Chamu Yanka ŭ kamunu paishoŭ* [Why Yanka Went to the Commune], *Maladnyak* [Young Generation], Minsk, No. 4, 1924. An agitational joke in one act.

_____, *Mushka-zelyanushka i kamaryk—nasaty tvaryk* [Green Midge and the Gnat with a Big Nose], Archives of the Second Byelorussian State Theater as staged there, Vitebsk, 1937.

_____, *Tsar' Maksimil'yan,* Archives of the Second Byelorussian State Theater as staged there, Vitebsk, 1926 (also staged in Moscow, 1924). A dramatic revision of a folk subject.

Mitskevich, Kanstantyn, see Kolas, Yakub.

Moniuszko, Stanisław, *Halka* [Girl], translated from the Polish original into Byelorussian by Yanka Kupala under the title of *Hal'ka;* in Kupala, *Zbor tvoraŭ,* Vol. IV, Minsk, 1928.

Muzyka, Symon, *Kupal'le* [St. John's Eve], *Maladnyak Kalininshchyny* [Young Generation of the Kalinin Area (of Byelorussia)], Klimovichi, Nos. 3 and 4, 1926. A play in three acts.

_____, *Na ŭskhod* [In the East], *Maladnyak Kalininshchyny* [Young Generation of the Kalinin Area (of Byelorussia)], Nos. 5 and 6, 1926. A play in one act.

Orzeszkowa, Elisa,
[On a Winter Evening], translated from Polish into Byelorussian by Vlast under the title of *U zimovy vechar*, St. Petersburg, 1910. A play in one act.

———, *Cham* [Muzhik], translated into Byelorussian under the title of *Kham*, St. Petersburg, 1910. A play.

Paleski, V., *Kali zats'vitayuts' sady* [When the Gardens Bloom], Yakub Kolas Theater, Vitebsk, 1950. A play. Mimeographed.

———, *Pes'nya nashykh sėrtsaŭ* [Song of Our Hearts], Yakub Kolas Theater, Vitebsk, 1949. A play. Mimeographed.

———, *Shto paseyesh, toye i pazhnesh* [As Ye Sow, So Shall Ye Reap], Minsk, 1953. A play staged at the Russian State Theater of the Byelorussian S.S.R.

Paŭlovich, Al'bėrt, *Vasil'ki* [Cornflowers]:
a. Vilno, Belaruskaye vydavetskaye tavarystva, 1919;
b. *Khrystamatyya novai belaruskai litaratury* [Chrestomathy of New Byelorussian Literature], an anthology, ed. by I. Dvarchanin, Vilno, Belaruskaye vydavetskaye tavarystva, 1927.
A drama from contemporary life in five acts.

Pichuzhkina, T., *Kamen'ni Sevastopalya* [Stones of Sevastopol], Minsk, 1948. A play.

Pas'lyadovich, Makar, and M. Hortsaŭ, *Kvetka Tsyan-Shanya* [Flower of Tsyan-Shan'], *Polymya* [Flame], Minsk, 1949. A play.

Rakhlenka, L. G., *Rukapis praf*ė*sara Volzhyna* [Professor Volzhyn's Manuscript], Minsk, 1948. A play.

Ramanovich, Aŭhen, *Horad u polymi* [City in Flames], Minsk, Belaruskaye dzyarzhaŭnaye vydavetstva, 1930. A play.

———, *Kryvaya ablona* [Fallow Field], Minsk, First Byelorussian State Theater, 1928. A play. Mimeographed.

———, *Most* [Bridge], Minsk, First Byelorussian State Theater, 1929. A play. Mimeographed.

———, *Paleshuki* [People of Polesie], *Belarus'* [Byelorussia], Minsk, No. 5, 1945. Scene from a play.

———, *Shchyras'ts' i abman* [Sincerity and Deceit], Minsk, 1924. A play.

———, *U pushchakh Pales'sya* [In the Forests of Polesie], Minsk, 1939. A play staged by the Byelorussian Opera House and Ballet Theater.

———, *Vir* [Whirlpool], Archives of the First Byelorussian State Theater as staged there, Minsk, 1926. A play.

Remizov, A. M., *"Tsar' Maksimil'yan" po svodu V. V. Bakrylova* [Tsar Maksimil'yan in the Codex of V. V. Bakrylov], Vol. III, 1920.

Rodzevich, Leopold, *Dos'vitki* [Before Dawn], Vilno, 1922. Dramatic scenes.

———, *Fabryka bal'shavikoŭ* [Factory of the Bolsheviks], scenes from the play *Daloŭ panoŭ* [Down with the Landlords], *Radavaya Run'* [Soviet Shoots], Minsk, No. 2, 1924.

———, *Konski partrėt* [Portrait of a Horse], *Stsėnichnyya tvory* [Dramatic Works], Book I, Minsk, 1923. A joke in one act.

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II. BOOKS ON THE BYELORUSSIAN THEATER AND DRAMA*

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III. ARTICLES ON THE BYELORUSSIAN THEATER AND DRAMA*

Note: When Byelorussians write in Russian, their names are generally Russianized. It is as if, for example, the works of a German named Karl Stein were to appear in English-language translation under the name of Charles Stone, Carl Stone, Karl Stone or possibly all three– but *never* under the name of Karl Stein. The same situation applies to Russians writing in Byelorussian.

*Works in Byelorussian are marked with an asterisk (*) immediately after transliteration of their titles.

To clarify matters as much as possible, it has been decided to give special treatment to those authors whose writings have appeared in a language other than their own. The great majority of such authors are Byelorussian; in such cases, the Byelorussian forms of their names are listed first, and the corresponding Russian forms follow in brackets. Thus, Uladislaŭ Halubok, for example, is listed in this way: Halubok, Uladislaŭ [Golubok, Vladislav].

It is to be noted that—as in the example given—one or both of the person's initials may be changed in the translation from Byelorussian to Russian or vice versa. The alphabetizing of names affected in this bibliography is done according to an English transliteration of the Byelorussian form (for Byelorussian authors in the category concerned), and by English transliteration of the Russian form (for Russian authors in the same category). In cases where it has proved impossible to determine whether an author is Byelorussian or Russian, he is treated herein as a native speaker of the language in which his writings appear.—*Ed.*

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Russian

А	а	a	К	к	k	Х	х	kh
Б	б	b	Л	л	l	Ц	ц	ts
В	в	v	М	м	m	Ч	ч	ch
Г	г	g[1]	Н	н	n	Ш	ш	sh
Д	д	d	О	о	o	Щ	щ	shch
Е	е	e[2]	П	п	p	Ъ	ъ	"[5]
Ё	ё	yo[3]	Р	р	r	Ы	ы	y
Ж	ж	zh	С	с	s	Ь	ь	'
З	з	z	Т	т	t	Э	э	ė[6]
И	и	i	У	у	u	Ю	ю	yu
Й	й	i[4]	Ф	ф	f	Я	я	ya

Note. The transliteration tables do not apply to some proper nouns, e.g., Byelorussia, Tolstoy.

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1. v in genitive endings.
2. When initial and after ь, ъ and all vowels except ы, e = ye; after ы, e = e.
3. After ж, ч, ш, and щ, ё = o.
4. Omit in terminal кий of proper names.
5. Omit when terminal.
6. When initial, unaccented.

Byelorussian

А	а	**a**	І	і	**i**	Ў	ў	**ŭ**
Б	б	**b**	К	к	**k**	Ф	ф	**f**
В	в	**v**	Л	л	**l**	Х	х	**kh**
Г	г	**h**	М	м	**m**	Ц	ц	**ts**
Ґ	ґ	**g**	Н	н	**n**	Ч	ч	**ch**
Д	д	**d**	О	о	**o**	Ш	ш	**sh**
Е	е	**e**	П	п	**p**	Ы	ы	**y**
Ё	ё	**yo**	Р	р	**r**	Ь	ь	**'**
Ж	ж	**zh**	С	с	**s**	Э	э	**ė**[1]
З	з	**z**	Т	т	**t**	Ю	ю	**yu**
Й	й	**i**	У	у	**u**	Я	я	**ya**

1. When initial, unaccented.

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ERRATA
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v	10 from top	"The Debacle in the Theater"	"The Breaking Up of the Second Theater"
3	footnote a.	Orthodox secular	Soviet secular
4	" c.	See p. xiv	See p. xxii
6	" e.	See Footnote 2.	See Footnote a., p. xx
27	8 from top	He does	He goes
51	1 " "	like the State Theater	as the State Theater
73	19 " "	curtains	curtain
123	16 " bottom	*(To Nyamira.)*	*(To Laver.)*
211	10 " top	Ivan Kachalov	V.I. Kachalov
234	10 " "	de-	dei-
235	15 " "	highly	highly during
236	11 " "	drams	drama
324	12 " bottom	Soviet non-Byelorus-sian Soviet plays	Soviet non-Byelorussian plays
334	4 " "	unexpected	expected
360	footnote c.	(to praise)	(to praise oneself)
403	11-10 from bottom	by Doletskiye's	by Doletskiye
437	2 from bottom	Il'inski,	Il'inski, Mikola
450	7 " top	1926	1946
459	3 " bottom	stalas'ts'	stalas'ts'*
460	12 " top	Belarusi"	Belarusi"*
461	1 " "	tėatru	tėatru*
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485	2 " "	*Chiaŭreli, M.,	Chiaureli, M.,
493	13 " "	(Sh. Yadvihin,	(Yadvihin Sh.,
497	10 " top	*Rakhmoanov, L.	Rakhmanov, L.
500	11 " "	*Tur Brothers	Tur Brothers
500	14 " bottom	yany	pany
502	9 " "	Add:[*The Polish Jew* may be Erckmann-Chatrian's *Le Juif Polonais.*]	
505	11 " "	Kachalov, Ivan, Russian stage director, 211	Kachalov, V.I., Russian actor, 211