THE TRENDS IN THE REPERTOIRE OF THE MOSCOW ART THEATER

FROM 1917 TO 1941

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 1963

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department
of
Slavonic Studies

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September, 1965
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Date September, 1965.
When the Moscow Art Theater appeared in New York in 1924, it was the apostle of a new dramatic naturalism bent on depicting man's inner torment through an intense psychological probing.

Some forty years later, one of the world's greatest art theaters occupies only an insignificant position in the world of art. Why is this so? It is the purpose of this dissertation to answer this question by a careful analysis of the trends in the repertoire of the Moscow Art Theater.

An analysis of the repertoire reveals several major trends in the Theater's repertoire after the Revolution of 1917. These trends are revealed through performances in the following areas:

(a) Russian classical plays;

(b) Adaptations of Russian classical novels;

(c) Translations of West European classical plays;

(d) Mikhail Bulgakov and his controversial plays;

(e) Modern Soviet drama.

An analysis of carefully selected plays from each trend reveals how the Moscow Art Theater was systematically sapped of all its inner vitality and enslaved to a regime. The resultant loss of creative endeavour and the Theater's reliance on the Russian classics in the years following World War II confirms the indivisibility of art and freedom.

Some of the Moscow Art Theater's trends were established before the Revolution of 1917. This dissertation therefore, begins by tracing the Theater's repertorial trends since the first performance in 1898.
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INTRODUCTION

In the 1890's Russia experienced a remarkable period of intellectual fervor and renovation. It was illustrated clearly by a modernist movement alive with the latest in artistic tendencies and theories. The young men and women of the 1890's were enchanted with the Western symbolists and decadents. They praised estheticism and art for art's sake and looked into the future for new modes of literary and artistic expression. In a land of eternal snow, literature gradually returned to neoromanticism with its emphasis on the individual. Individualism, a devotion to the fantastic, refined sensitivity and sensualism all took diverse forms in the various arts. In painting, the earthy and often tendentious canvases of the populist painters with their lifeless social messages were replaced by experiments in light and colour that leaned towards impressionism. In music, a constellation of national composers lead an era of new harmonizations and reform in a dying operatic art.

By the close of the nineteenth century, the foreign influence had left its mark on Russian culture. The young bloods passionately discussed the French symbolist poets from Verlaine to Rimbaud, the Scandinavian dramatists and novelists from Ibsen to Hamsun, the German philosophers from Nietzsche to Wagner, and many other models. Despite the diversity of the movement it was unified by a common rejection of the past and an adventurous spirit of search and discovery. There was
an intense desire for innovation in a period that has been called the "dying days of a delayed spring."

In the theater, the discontent with the conventional repertory and worn out settings was accompanied by a feeling that production and acting were out-dated and had lost all of their original creative force. There were many new ventures into the realm of theater. Among these ventures were the Theatre Libre, in Paris, and Germany's Meiningen Company. Both aroused a fervent interest and seemed to point in the right direction for the Russian stage.

Before these ventures, Russia had been in the shadow of the ever present Imperial Theater. Both the Maly, in Moscow, and the Alexandrinsky, in St. Petersburg were typical examples of conservatism in repertory and production. A major freedom was felt, however, when in the field of theatrical arts the monopoly of the Imperial theaters was abolished. Now there was an influx of young actors who had graduated from the newly established schools of theater which had been born in the period between 1880 and 1890. These eager young people intensified the general atmosphere of expectation. It was against this background of excitement and expectation that the Moscow Art Theater was formed.
CHAPTER I

THE MOSCOW ART THEATER BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

Origins of the Moscow Art Theater

On a cool evening in June 1897, K.S. Stanislavsky and V.I. Nemirovich-Danchenko met in a private room of the Slavic Bazaar Restaurant on Nikolskaya Street in Moscow. The two men held an eighteen-hour non-stop all-night conversation the outcome of which was the Moscow Art Theater. Stanislavsky summarized their complaints against the mediocre theater of their time:

We protested against the old manner of acting, against theatricalism, false pathos, declamation, artificiality in acting, bad staging and decor conventions, the emphasis on the new productions that spoiled the ensemble work, the whole system of presentations, and the insignificant repertoires of the time.¹

Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko was a successful playwright. By 1897, he had written six successful plays. The people in his plays are nearly all from the middle class - literary men, lecturers, young officers, but he developed a theme which Ostrovsky had failed to write on, the conflict between the older and younger generations.

The actors and actresses of the Maly Theater regarded him as their own dramatist. The plays were written in the old style. Nemirovich-Danchenko supplied a dramatic exit for a Maly actor, Muzil, in the third act of his play, Ultimate Freedom. At this point in his career as a playwright, Nemirovich-Danchenko had not reached the point where he could portray the truth of life on the Imperial stage.

¹ Stanislavskii, K.S., Moia zhizn' v iskusstve, p. 328.
Toward the end of the 1890's, he was appointed to teach acting in Moscow's Philharmonic School which had grown in opposition to the Imperial Schools. Here he found that the actors were faced with the problem of finding plays in which they could be truthful to life. During the eight years he taught in the Philharmonic, he produced some of the best of Ibsen's plays, which had never been produced in Moscow. One of his pupils, Olga Knipper, had left the Imperial Theater because she could not master the stifling conventional style of acting. This woman, who was later to become Anton Chekhov's wife, was doomed to obscurity but the advent of the Moscow Art Theater was to make her famous in pre-and post-revolutionary Russia. Other pupils were Ivan Moskvin and the famous post-revolutionary producer, Vsevolod Meyerhold.

Nemirovich-Danchenko believed that teaching was an excellent way of learning. He became dissatisfied with the plays he wrote in the old style and for the first time in Russian history he held a dress rehearsal between 1894 and 1895, in his play, Gold.

Lensky, who headed the offshoot of the Maly Theater, the so-called "New" Theater supported him in his experiments with new, fresh, colourful and theatrically relevant sets. Both Nemirovich-Danchenko and Lensky were aware of the decay of the Maly's historical supremacy in the Shchepkin tradition of life-like acting and the Gogol-Ostrovsky tradition of truthful plays.

In 1885, the Meiningen Company of German actors under the direction of Kronek, arrived in Moscow. This company had several good
actors but their ensemble acting was famous and was more important than their profound true to life acting. They proved to the Russian stage that art could be true to life. Both Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko were impressed. Stanislavsky wrote:

I consider what the Meiningen people brought us to be good, that is, their directorial devices for showing the essence of a production. For that, I shall be most grateful to them. It will always live in my art. In the life of our Society (for Art and Literature) and particularly in myself, the Meiningen people brought about a new and important phase.²

The Imperial censorship with its prevailing conservatism and control over the theaters made it nearly impossible to express true to life acting on the Russian stage. The poor professionals were frustrated in their attempts to found a private theater. An amateur would help to change all this.

Konstantin Sergeyevich Alexeyev, came from a family of keen amateur actors. By 1897 his reputation as a brilliant amateur and producer was well-known to Muscovites under his stage name of K.S. Stanislavsky. He was a superb showman, whose awe-inspiring presence and acting ability made him a favourite of the Russian intelligentsia.

In 1888, he spent a large part of his inheritance in bringing into being Moscow's Society of Art and Literature. The purpose of this organization was to stage amateur and other shows for the enjoyment of the upper middle class and the wealthy aristocratic audience.

² Stanislavskii, K.S., Moia zhizn' v iskusstve, p. 328.
Stanislavsky was not the first to establish a new theater circle on new principles. He was aware of the existence of other troupes that made him quicken the formation of the Moscow Art Theater. In the provinces of Siberia and the Volga district a famous troupe had formed in 1885, under the leadership of Pyotr Petrovich Medvedyev. Another famous troupe had been formed in Kiev in 1891 and was headed by Nicolai Nicolaevich Solotsov. Both troupes were famous for their first class ensemble presentations and their historically accurate interpretations of Count Alexei Tolstoi's famous plays. With this competition on the horizon Stanislavsky hastened to form his own art theater.

Stanislavsky began his career in art with great operatic ambitions. These ambitions were hurdles in his attempts to perfect his acting. The great producer and theater historian, Theodore Komissarzhevsky had trained his voice and the famous Maly actress, Glikeria Fedotova, had helped him in his study of acting.

At the professional Maly Theater, the director, A.P. Lensky, became alarmed at Stanislavsky's search for new heights in a genuine true to life art. The idea that anything new could be created was sacrilege. The Maly administration saw themselves as high priests occupying the temple of Russian theater. Lensky cried out that Stanislavsky would overtake and conquer the Maly. The free man in the free land of the new theater was to defeat the conservative bureaucrats in the Department of Theater. The age of private theaters was beginning and all the great leaders would come from them.
The Moscow Art Theater's First Production, Tsar Fyodor

Alexei Konstantinovich Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor* was a historical drama depicting the pathetic destiny of Prince Fyodor, the weak and delicate son of Ivan the Terrible. Unlike his father, Fyodor was unable to reign and struggle against the intrigues of the power hungry nobility, the Boyars. His downfall and the end of the Rurik's dynasty came when the Boyar, Boris Godunov ascended the throne.

The task was to recreate the Moscow of the Time of Troubles. Actors, painters and members of the acting staff organized expeditions to monasteries, local fairs and old provincial towns, where they bought wooden plates, cloth, cups, dresses and objects of the 16th century. The troupe worked day and night in museums and succeeded in borrowing authentic robes and jewels.

From the first rehearsals, both men had formulated and practiced the basic requirements. Stanislavsky's idea was of an artistic ensemble shaped to perfection by the organizing will of the director. All the elements of the performance must present a unified harmony and nothing could be left to chance or improvisation. Nemirovich-Danchenko conceived the play as an artistic whole in which the pictorial, the musical and the verbal merged. Each actor was required to find his position in the whole. There were to be no outstanding stars. Stanislavsky put an end to the routine of building a production around an actor.
The Moscow Art Theater opened on October 14, 1898. Tsar Fyodor, was not only a historical play, but a historical event. It was a revolutionary event in the history of Russian theater. The crowd was astounded and enthusiastic over the production. The public saw on stage the exact replica of the Tsar's quarters in the Kremlin.

Stanislavsky was capable of even more historic realism. He presented a scene where the disgruntled Boyars feast at plates of goose, beef, fruit and vegetables, while slaves rolled in barrels of wine and mead. Throughout the entire scene an illusion to life was created by natural conversations, the blending of gestures, costumes, words and perfect settings. An old beggar sang a song of ancient Russia. The music for the song was written by Alexander Grechaninov, a famous Russian composer.

The acting was simple and true to life. Ivan Moskvin played Fyodor, and the Tsarina was played by Olga Knipper. The play was a tremendous success despite the critical reviews of the era that accused Stanislavsky of "extremes of naturalism." The play ran to a full theater capacity for over three years and over one hundred performances.

This historical realism formed an important trend in the evolution of the Moscow Art Theater. Throughout the development of the repertoire, it will remain a conservative feature of all the historical plays. The same method of research and authenticity was applied in The Merchant of Venice, Julius Caesar, and Othello. In Julius Caesar, the entire troupe went to Rome to wander the narrow streets and to gaze at the Forum.
For Othello, the troupe visited Cyprus with its ancient battlements.

After the production of Tsar Fyodor, Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko looked for success in Shakespeare's plays, but these dramas were not well attended and the Theater lost money. In December 1898, the Moscow Art Theater produced Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's The Sea Gull.

Chekhov and his Influence on the Repertoire

This was a departure from the historical play to the truly modern play. The same principle of realistic detail was used in creating a psychological mood still within the principle of "faithfulness to life."

In The Sea Gull, which had been a failure in the Alexandrinsky Theater in 1896, the Moscow Art Theater found its most distinctive feature. In the course of years this feature proved to be its most successful: the rendering of emotions and psychological nuances through a very special blending of significant detail with a new manner of acting, supported by teamwork, artistic settings and a thoroughly planned, meticulously organized production. Chekhov's plays met the artistic aspirations of Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavsky. Chekhov, himself, saw in the directors and actors the only people who could understand and portray his own theatrical aims. It was a "marriage" between the playwright and his interpreters.

The Sea Gull was a success, but the Theater ended in 1898 with a 45,000 ruble deficit. The great millionaire and philanthropist, Savva Morozov, invested over 200,000 rubles with the result that all the shareholders doubled their investments. All the actors and Chekhov,
were shareholders in the Theater. It became the custom of the Moscow Art Theater to stage only three to five new plays a year and it relied largely on repeat performances of its well-established repertory.

Chekhov's plays came to occupy a place of honour in the Theater's repertory. The Three Sisters was first performed on February 13, 1901. It was similar in mood to a previous play of Chekhov's, Uncle Vanya.

The Three Sisters was written at a time when Chekhov was fully aware of his own dramatic style and of innovations used in his plays by the Moscow Art Theater. Stanislavsky's producer's-copy of The Three Sisters reveals suggestions for alterations in Chekhov's script. Chekhov made the alterations in order to suit Stanislavsky's scenic presentations. The Cherry Orchard was requested by the Moscow Art Theater. Chekhov worked long hours over this play relating the characters and scenes to the theater that portrayed his characters so well.

Contemporary Dramatists in the Repertory

After the success of Chekhov's plays, the Moscow Art Theater continued to choose plays by contemporary dramatists.

The Theater presented nine dramas by Ibsen and four plays by Hauptmann. Most of these plays dealt with the struggle against injustice and the dream of improving human society. The Theater was thus instrumental in opening a window to the world of western democracy and the teachings of the socialists.

In 1900, Stanislavsky staged Ibsen's, An Enemy of the People.
Stanislavsky felt that the hero, Dr. Stockman, was a just and honest man with an idea and a friend of his country. The Moscow Art Theater was not a great institution of social and political ferment. The Theater brought Ibsen, Hauptmann, Knut, Hamsun, and Gorky to the Russian people because it wanted to be a "teacher of society." The Theater defended the poverty stricken and oppressed and indicated that a time was coming when Russia would have a system subordinated to the principles of social justice.

Gorky and his Influence on the Repertory

The Tsarist regime hindered the production of Gorky's first play, *The Philistines*. The Moscow Art Theater was under suspicion; the author, under police surveillance, and the play was forbidden by the Minister of Internal Affairs. In 1902, the play was shown with corrections.

In *The Philistines*, Gorky showed the conflict between the old, out-dated and bankrupt social system and the new and more just one that should replace it. Gorky came from the dregs of society, and his plays featured the poor, the humble and the oppressed. Gorky wrote for the Moscow Art Theater at Chekhov's suggestion. Gorky admired both the Theater and Chekhov who had been an inspiration for him. Gorky's dreams were close to that of the Theater's. His plays, *The Philistines*, and *The Lower Depths*, were protests against the gross injustices of Russian society.
Gorky's second play, *The Lower Depths*, written on request of the Moscow Art Theater, was a theatrical triumph. It is a terrifying and gloomy play. The action takes place in a flophouse inhabited by various human wrecks: prostitutes, drunken actors, fallen gentlemen, a low class locksmith and his dying wife, a Tartar, and many others. Nearly all the characters are influenced either for good or evil, by a pious, but malignant "consoler" named Luka. Luka, is a peasant pilgrim who raises hopes that can never be fulfilled. The atmosphere of dirt, crime, and despair reminds one of Count Leo Tolstoy's *The Power of Darkness*. Gorky did not attack these pitiful characters, rather he attacked the society that made them.

Stanislavsky merged the elements of naturalistic details with a romantic halo. His company visited various flophouses in Moscow and the actors followed their real-life models. The flophouse setting was so realistic that people in the front row were afraid of catching lice.

Gorky's drama resembled Chekhov only in its lack of a consistent plot and in some impressionistic touches. Gorky's characters, however, were not shadows, but full-blooded and treated in a romantically exaggerated way. Gorky possessed as a dramatist, a certain brutality and roughness. His robustness, rhetoric, and social passion contrasted with Chekhov's restraint and lyricism.

The Moscow Art Theater went through several stages of experimentation. Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko were accused of
copying reality and portraying only realism. The Moscow Art Theater soon embarked on a course of lofty psychological realism.

**Early Experiments in Allegory and Psychology**

The Theater was the first Russian theater to experiment in the world of fantasy, mysticism and symbolism. The plays of Hauptmann, Ibsen and Maeterlinck were staged in a search for new forms of scenic expression far removed from the devices of naturalism. The Moscow Art Theater found the devices of the impressionistic stage. In 1908 they staged Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*, a symbolistic play.

The story revolves around a poor woodcutter's children, Tyltyl and his sister Mytyl, who seek the blue bird of happiness on Christmas Eve. They are accompanied by the allegorical figures of Milk, Fire, Water, Bread, and Light, as well as by their Cat and Dog. They first hunt for happiness in the past. In the land of memory they find their grandparents kept alive by the children's thoughts. They visit the kingdom of the future where the Cat tries to destroy them. Finally they arrive home to find the blue bird of happiness there. They give the bird to a sick child. The child receives joy, the children have found happiness in giving and the bird flies away.

The theme of the play grows as the children search for happiness. Throughout their journey they are watched by the dark forces of the Universe, waiting to throw humanity back into the depths of evil.

Maeterlinck saw man's story as a lonely adventure in a hostile
world. All the symbolism was lost, however, in the panoramic splendor of the Moscow Art Theater's production. The play was a failure.

In 1909, the Moscow Art Theater staged Leonid Andreyev's *Anathema*. It was his greatest play and reflects the gloom and despair in his own life.

In the prologue, Anathema sits at the gates of heaven demanding knowledge. He asks: "What kind of god has created this world?" He receives no answer. He goes to live with a saintly David Leizer, a Jew who gives his love, and four million ruble inheritance to the poor. David does good quietly and unobserved. The people seek him out and worship him. When his wealth is gone, the mob stones him. The epilogue shows Anathema again at the gates. He is told that "David has his immortality," to which he replies that David's name men will be murderers. After thirty-seven performances the play was forbidden because it gave a too favourable picture of the Jews, and a free will's interpretation of God was considered dangerous. The play was obviously a moral triumph for the Moscow Art Theater.

In 1910, Nemirovich-Danchenko produced an adaptation of Dostoevsky's immortal *The Brothers Karamazov*. It was probably the zenith of the Theater's achievements in subtle moods revealing the most complicated windings of human psychology. The staging was even more remarkable than the actors' presentation. There was an absolute economy of outer staging. The stage was almost barren. Nemirovich-Danchenko placed a tree on the stage against a foreground of a lonely
path. These objects represented the decor for a field. A table, a dozen chairs, and a cloth suggested a dining room. The presentation was staged against a background of neutral cloths, hints and details that created a symbol no matter where the action occurred. After the 1917 Revolution, the Theater used this technique to transmit a tremendous power of concentration on the inner revealings of the drama through the acting. The naked actor was exposed upon the moist soil of a naked earth.

Gordon Craig and the Shakespearian Experiments

The Moscow Art Theater continued their experiments into non-realistic presentations and in 1911, Shakespeare's Hamlet was produced.

Gordon Craig, a famous English director and innovator, was invited to Moscow to direct this production which was probably the Theater's boldest experiment. Craig believed that an actor could be replaced by a supermarionette and he rejected experience as a criterion for the stage. On these points he differed with Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavsky.

Craig was opposed to any flat decor. He believed that the actor's three dimensional body demanded a definite sculpture and architecture on the stage. Stanislavsky had overcome flat, dimensional decors long before Craig's arrival in Moscow. Craig's contribution to the Theater and Russian theater in general was the abstract primitivism of three dimensional shapes on the stage.
Craig's production of *Hamlet* is particularly interesting. The basic elements on the stage were screens of coarse, undecorated canvas. Sometimes these large sheets of canvas were decorated with gold. Various combinations of huge but narrow screens were used to hint at corners, towers, palace halls, narrow streets, and other places. These versatile props of square and neutral shapes helped to augment Craig's excellent lighting effects. Craig insisted that the music and lighting and the movement of the architectural forms must present a single musical quality. Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko welcomed this synthesis of lighting, music and stage architecture that was completely new to the Russian stage.

The Moscow Art Theater continued with the unreal presentations. In 1913, they produced Leonid Andreyev's *Yekaterina Ivanovna*. It was a success but the drive for the unreal was expended. The Moscow Art Theater returned to the classics such as Saltykov-Shchedrin's *Death of Pazukhin*, in 1915 and in 1916-1917, an adaptation of Dostoevsky's *Village of Stepanchikovo.*
Russian Classics on the Stage of the Moscow Art Theater

A detailed analysis of the plays in the repertoire of the Moscow Art Theater reveals five distinct trends which are not arranged in a definite chronological order. These major trends are the presentation of: Russian classical comedy and drama, adapted Russian literary classics, West-European classics, the plays of Mikhail Bulgakov, and modern Soviet drama.

Within any one trend it is possible to list many plays. For the purpose of this thesis only the outstanding presentations have been chosen from each trend.

The first trend in the repertoire represents the attempts of the Moscow Art Theater to portray the great plays of the classical playwrights. Their plays continued to be shown long after the Revolution of 1917. The most popular classical playwrights on the stage of the Moscow Art Theater were: Alexander Ostrovsky, Anton Chekhov, Maxim Gorky, and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin.

Ostrovsky's plots, backgrounds and characters are highly dramatic and are drawn from the world of the greedy and headstrong merchants, the selfish gentry, a backward peasantry, and the corrupt officialdom. He deals with vices such as greed, lust, fraud, bribery and tyranny, coupled with crimes and strong passions. His plays expose the vice and stagnation of immense areas of Russian society. These plays are not problem plays but first and foremost theatrical dramas and comedies. Ostrovsky is the most popular Russian dramatic
writer on the Soviet stage today but his plays are hardly known outside of Russia. The plays which I have chosen to represent the Russian classics on the stage of the Moscow Art Theater include the realistic style of Ostrovsky's: The Burning Heart, Talents and Suitors, The Thunder Storm, and Bread by Labour. Each play represents a different class from the social milieu.

The Burning Heart

During his lifetime, Ostrovsky wrote forty-eight plays for the Russian stage. Many of these plays revolve around the lives of the merchant class and the "chinovniki". One of his most successful comedies on the merchant and "chinovniki" classes is The Burning Heart.

The playwright faithfully presented the life of the merchant class. He skillfully portrayed their domestic life and their relationship with other classes of society. The Burning Heart, is reminiscent of one of his most famous dramas, The Thunder Storm. The action of both plays takes place in the sleepy provincial town of Kalinov on the banks of the Volga river. In both plays Ostrovsky clearly portrays the characters of the merchant petty tyrants or samodurs. In The Thunder Storm, the 'dark kingdom' is revealed. In The Burning Heart, the playwright reveals a grotesque on the petty tyrants and their way of life.

As the action of the play unfolds, the characters become true-to-life. The main characters are the merchant samodur, Kuroslepov, his stupid and illiterate wife, Matrona, Kuroslepov's daughter, Parasha,
his clerk, Narkis, and a rich contractor, Khlynov, and the mayor, Gradoboyev.

In the comedy, two forces collide: the new awakening social force in the person of Parasha, and the force of conservatism, rude traditions, and tyranny represented by Kuroslepov, and his wife Matrona. These opposing forces are the main conflict throughout the play. Two generations also collide and react in the persons of Kuroslepov, the older generation, and the contractor Khlynov, a member of the young generation.

The main figure in the play is Parasha, Kuroslepov's daughter. Parasha's fate resembles that of Katerina, in The Thunder Storm. The action of both plays takes place in the town of Kalinov. Parasha is surrounded by the rude, oppressive environment of her father, stepmother, and her friends. Parasha only sees their rudeness, injustice and ignorance. Her stepmother, Matrona, devours her in unbearable tyranny.

Parasha's positive character and lofty interests are a sharp contrast with her negative rude environment. Parasha tries desperately to break with the domestic tyranny around her. She tries desperately to find something new and refreshing. Freedom is the most worthy goal for her and she is prepared to meet it by doing anything or going anywhere. Fearlessly, and passionately, she falls in love with a young man, Vasya Shustry. In Shustry, she sees her only saviour and defender. Shustry, however, proves to be weak and is incapable of
defending himself. For him, she is ready to sacrifice her honour, everything she possesses, and to leave forever the home of her parents to follow Shustry into a soldier's camp as a soldier's wife. Parasha is not afraid to meet hardships and difficulties. Unfortunately, she does not find her answer in the weak-minded Vasya. She becomes bitterly disappointed in him and finally chooses to live with Gavrilla, an honest and faithful clerk who works in Kuroslepov's shop. She opposes the will of her stepmother, Matrona, and bravely defends herself and her freedom. She finds a suitable man in Gavrilla and leaves the realm of the dark kingdom.

Parasha's character is sharply contrasted against the character of her stepmother, Matrona. Matrona is the petty tyrant wife of a petty tyrant merchant. She is uncultured, illiterate, rude, a cowardess, and a complainer. She tries to dishonour, belittle, and insult her stepdaughter. Matrona, herself, is dishonourable, unfaithful, and involved in a love affair with one of Kuroslepov's clerks, Narkis. Narkis cheats her, insults her, and makes her steal large sums of money in the form of blackmail from the unsuspecting Kuroslepov (his name means 'blind chicken' in Russian). Narkis constantly threatens to reveal her if she fails to make a payment. She is afraid of him, and continues her affairs with him. Matrona causes other weak and innocent people to suffer for her thefts. Her speech is saturated with rude insulting expressions. She says to her husband: "Tell me, you sleepy-eyed dog, isn't that my business to look after her (Parasha)?" Another example is: "Wasn't it I who looked after your
dirty snout (to her husband)?" 

By his origin, Kuroslepow is a son of degenerate generations of merchants. He is well-known among the merchant circles. He is a drunkard and incapable of managing his property. The only joys left to him are drinking and spending all day in bed. At times, he becomes mad and is completely incapable of telling night from day. He either is happy to see a new day arrive or despondent at the thought that the sky might fall down, and he will perish. Kuroslepow cannot understand or believe that his wife is unfaithful to him and steals his money. He pitilessly attacks the weak and innocent Vasya Shustry, suspects him of theft, and sends him to jail. He has no respect for his wife or his daughter. His speech is also full of rude expressions. He wants his daughter to marry a wealthy merchant without even considering the girl's feelings or the man she must marry. This is the ironic life of the petty tyrant or "samodur".

The representative of officialdom or the chinovniki in this comedy is the mayor of the town, Gradoboyev (his name means 'city beater' in Russian). Ostrovsky used the name of the younger brother of Gogol's Gorodnichy. Gradoboyev takes bribes, is greedy and unjust. He knows that Vasya Shustry is innocent but he will not help him. He is used to covering up the sins of the rich merchants and other people for a considerable sum of money. He is not paid enough as a mayor, so he lives on bribery. He cannot imagine another source of income and therefore he advises the helpless and defenseless Vasya
to be quiet. Gradoboyev likes to boast how gallant he was in the Turkish wars. He tells fictitious stories to make up for his inadequacies while eating and drinking at the expense of his hosts. He is a parasite who fears the merchant class so much that he even thinks of quitting his position as mayor.

The clerk, Narkis, is a boor typical of Russia during the 1840's. He is a shop clerk assisting in Kurosleпов's store. According to his own words he came from a poor coachman's job to his clerk's position by cheating and blackmailing Matrona. He wants to marry the beautiful high-spirited Parasha, and enlists Matrona's aid. He lives with Matrona, is in love with Parasha, and dreams of becoming a merchant on Matrona's money. He ridicules Matrona pitiously. Finally his dark and dirty affairs are discovered and his hope for a happier life and a career are destroyed.

Khlynov occupies a prominent position in the comedy. He represents a new generation. He is a young, wealthy, contractor with plenty of money and nothing to do. He is unable to think up means of entertainment suitable to his position. Other people think for him and carry out his stupid pranks on unsuspecting innocent people. He bails the hapless Vasya out of jail and turns him into a clown. Khlynov's diplomacy is to drink a great deal and involve many of the townspeople in his drunken orgies. He likes to boast and show others the power of his wealth.

Vasya Shustry is shown as a weak and defenseless person. He is the son of a bankrupt merchant. When Parasha tries to persuade
him to go away with her and leave their environment, he finds himself incapable of breaking away and beginning a new life. He is constantly waiting for something to happen but he does not know what he is waiting for. He hopes that his father's business will improve and that will make him happy. He does nothing to help his father, he just hopes the business will improve. When he is arrested for stealing money, he goes to jail without any resistance or complaints. He is innocent but prepared to serve in the army as punishment. When Khlynov buys his freedom, he readily becomes a minstrel and a clown. Khlynov orders him to play on a flute and he begins to play in front of his master and Parasha. Parasha, in tears demands he stop this nonsense. Vasya is spineless and completely lacks a will of his own. For these reasons Parasha leaves him and goes to live with Gavrilla.

Gavrilla is a shy and honest person. This simple clerk loves Parasha and is ready to follow her anywhere. He is able to sacrifice his life for her. When the play ends he is victorious and wins Parasha.

The end of the play is happy. The dark kingdom is defeated and Parasha is awarded with an honest, capable lover.

The Moscow Art Theater first presented the play in 1926. It was a moderate success with Ivan Moskvin playing the part of Khlynov, and K. Yelanskaya playing the part of Parasha.

Talents and Suitors

In the second half of his creative endeavour, Ostrovsky focused his attention on the theme of the Russian theater with its characteristic
small people: honest workers, "the raznochintsi", (intellectuals who did not belong to the gentry), and poor actors. The provincial actors lived out a pitiful existence. Ostrovsky wrote *Talents and Suitors* in order to present a truthful picture of an actor's life. Ostrovsky is supposed to have remarked to Dobrolyubov that there were many talented actors and actresses in his time, but they spent their ability and talent fruitlessly. This comment describes Russian provincial theater life in the 1870's.

It was common for the audience attending a theater not to fathom the value of talented actors or even art itself. Such people exist in the play in the persons of Prince Dulebov, Baken, and others. The people who managed the theaters had no conception of a true art theater. For instance, Migayev, the owner of the theater, in order to please Prince Dulebov, asks the talented and innocent actress Negina to leave the theater. The reason for her dismissal is simple. Negina, an honest sensitive woman, refused to be the Prince's mistress. The Prince was reckoned as an important personnage not because of his ability to evaluate art or understand it, but simply because he was rich.

The representatives of the actor's world have a moral substance and a sense of their own dignity which contrasts with the wealthy and privileged people in high social positions. The actors in this play have a profound love toward their art which is incomprehensible to the rich provincial boors.
Meluzov, a raznochinyets, is portrayed as a positive hero. He is a poor man who constantly struggles against the society of the libertine noblemen. He goes about trying to teach the simple principles of enlightenment. He has his own world of happiness which is not understood by the empty and narrow-minded people around him. He has dreams and conversations on "the scientific movement" and the "success of civilization." His moral superiority over the evil environment which surrounds him is evident in these words: "I am enlightening you, and you are all libertines."

The actress Negina and the raznochinyets, Melusov are two creatures in love with each other and art. They meet the inevitable difficulties in their life which must separate them. In sorrow, she leaves her love, Melusov. The actress was attracted by a rich man, and runs away with him on a first class train. Her career would be finished if she were to marry the poor student, Melusov. After she says farewell, Melusov leaves the impression of a man on the edge of a precipice who is going to lose his balance before he falls into the abyss. "I am not yours my dear, it's not possible Peter," she says. These words leave the audience with the feeling that there is no return to their past love. These famous words express her hardness of heart but at the same time they show a deep grief towards the inevitable. She leaves the man who offered to teach her. He is laughed at by her uneducated admirers and by everyone who attends the theater. She really enjoyed his teaching because her mind and life were made better.
Her career, however, was more essential than the love of Melusov, despite the fact she loved him as deeply as her acting.

Melusov succumbs to a deep depression realizing that there is an abyss between them. His soul is tortured and only the words of the provincial boor, Baken, drive his thoughts away from ending his life. Baken says: "May be you want to shoot yourself, it's usual for students to shoot themselves when they are unsuccessful." These words bring an immediate change in Melusov and he is determined to defeat his tormentors.

Velikatov, is the rich man who runs away with Negina. He is a quiet man with controlled emotions. He knows his own dignity is evident in his display of fine clothing and a look of independence. In the scenes he always gives the impression that he thinks deeply before he acts. He has a soft, pleasant voice and his movements are smooth. He seems amiable and ready to help others. His sharp penetrating look analyzes a man and without a mistake he defines the man's habits and principles. Velikatov moves slowly and surely towards his goal. This character is reminiscent of Turgenev's Nezhdanov, a man who was superfluous, yet aware of his destiny.

In 1933, the Moscow Art Theater staged Talents and Suitors. Negina's role was played by Sila Tarasova. This was one of her best parts as she succeeded in disclosing Negina's tragic situation. Despite its loose construction and its temporary theme, the play still enjoys huge audiences throughout the provincial theaters it portrayed so well.
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Moscow. Moskovskiĭ khudozhestvennyĭ akademicheskiĭ teatr.

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Ostrovsky's greatest creation was his powerful tragedy, The Thunderstorm. It was written in 1859, in the time of the social uprisings before the peasant reforms of the 1860's. In this play Ostrovsky raises one of the most important questions of his time: the emancipation of the Russian woman from domestic slavery. The play tells the story of a young merchant's wife, Katerina, who is unable to love her weak husband. She is driven by her malevolent and tyrannical mother-in-law to destroy herself. She has an affair with a young man, Boris, who is too weak to save her. This affair is both a futile attempt to rescue herself from the oppressive family atmosphere, and an impulse toward her own inevitable destruction. In the end, her evil mother-in-law drives her to suicide. The latter figure dominates the play, and is probably Ostrovsky's most forceful character.

Ostrovsky creates a picture of all that was arbitrary in the typical Russian society of his time. Katerina protests this society. She is joined by Kudrash, Varvara, and Kuligin.

In the character of Kuligin, Ostrovsky portrayed the spiritual wealth and talents of the Russian people. Kuligin is full of various good ideas and he could be creative if it were not for the crushing power of the petty tyrants, the samodurs.

The title, The Thunderstorm, is significant. One feels the build up of oppressive atmosphere before the storm, the actual breaking in suicide, and the subsiding. All these form an integral part of the scene structure. Soviet critics claim that Ostrovsky portrayed a
coming social thunderstorm in discussing the changes in the life of Katerina. Nevertheless, this thunderstorm must defeat the samodurs and release those who suffer under their tyranny.

The action of the play occurs in merchant surroundings that preserve the old domestic ways of life. The town is Kalinov, on the banks of the Volga. Ostrovsky was an admirer of Russian natural landscapes and introduced it into his plays. This admiration sets the stage for the portrayal of his characters.

The main figures in the play representing the samodurs are Dikoy and Kabanikha. Dikoy is a typical samodur. He is used to immediate obedience from everyone. He makes the lives of those who surround him very miserable. The members of the family spend all day hiding in cellars and attics. He realizes that his nephew, Boris, is dependent on him and thus, he tortures him. Dikoy is not ashamed to ridicule and hurt others. He is greedy and will cheat anyone for money. He is a coward and a bully. He is afraid of those people who are stronger than himself. His speech is full of rude and insulting expressions. In short, Dikoy is a despot, a typical representative of the kingdom of darkness.

Kabanikha is another representative of the dark kingdom but more cruel. Kabanikha adheres to all the old patriarchal customs of ancient Russia. She is Dikoy's sister and obeys all the laws her brother follows. She is opposed to change and tries to force everyone to live in the old manner, with all its tyranny. Kabanikha is superstitious, rude, greedy, and uncultured. She never misses a church
holiday or service. She is a canting hypocrite. On holidays she humbly
gives alms to the town's beggars. Her despotism is even worse than
Dikoy's. She tortures her victims from day to day on a systematic
basis. She causes her daughter-in-law, Katerina to commit suicide.
Her son, Tikhon ("the quiet one") loses his ability to think for himself.
She knows that the old way of life is coming to a close and hard times
are beginning for her kind.

Katerina is the central figure in this great play. She is
sharply distinguished against her surroundings by her character and
interests. It is unbearable for her to live in oppression. She suffers
an intense life drama. She is the dreamer and lover of personal freedom.
Recalling her carefree days of maidenhood, she tells Varvara, how her
world of feelings and moods was formed. In childhood she was happy
with her gentle mother. Caring for beautiful flowers, embroidering
velvet, attending church and walking in quiet gardens formed her
earliest impressions. With this internal peace she comes to the home
of Kabanikha. The conflict naturally revolves around the tyrannical
environment nurtured by Kabinikha, and the world of light and spiritual
freedom worshipped by Katerina. The conflict is inevitable but
Katerina's tragedy is complicated.

Katerina is married to a man she does not love. She tries to
be a faithful and loving wife. She searches desperately to find love
and warm feelings in Tikhon's heart. She fails in her quest and
suddenly meets a man who is completely different from the others.
She falls in love with Boris. Her love for Boris became a means of escape and the only reason for existing. She loves him in a different way and is ready to sacrifice anything for Boris. She is honest, and not afraid of other people's judgment. This lack of fear aids in her catastrophe. She cannot hide her love for Boris. The conflict between the strong feelings of love and her sense of duty ends when she confesses to her husband that she is in love with another man. She commits suicide by drowning herself in the Volga - a final protest against the dark kingdom.

The play has other interesting characters and events. Kuligin reflects Ostrovsky's opinions on the dark kingdom. He is an observer, and a searcher of enlightenment. He represents the struggle of light over darkness. The play begins in light and ends in darkness but the hope for the future definitely lies in Katerina and Kuligin.

**Bread by Labour**

This play is devoted to the out-of-the-way place, to the land inhabited by Russia's poor. The main characters are all poor but they are honest, hard-working people who make their living by the sweat of their brows. Ostrovsky portrays the poor as unhappy with their fate but never becoming dejected or prone to complaining. His play like others is realistic and a profound social comedy. The positive heroes love life and the hearts of the audience by their faith in progress and spiritual cleanliness.
The play is divided into four acts. In the first act the audience can already feel the message the playwright has in mind. The scenery reveals a poor apartment with worn out furniture. The master of the apartment is Iosaff Naumich Karpelev. He is bull-headed, old before his age, bent over from hard labour, but maintains a pleasant air and a friendly smile. His tone, movements and manners are always pedantic. By profession, he is a teacher who exists on the money he obtains by giving cheap private lessons. He is not married in spite of his youth. He has wondered all his life from village to village in search of something. He drinks heavily. He drinks because he feels better when he is drunk. He is poor and often cannot afford to give the landlord, the month's rent. He is not ashamed of his poverty, on the contrary, he is proud of it. He is insulted when Potrokhov offers him three rubles. He returns the money and tells the donor that he is poor, but not a beggar. He has a good education and this places him above everyone else, including the conceited Potrokhov. He prefers to work hard rather than accept charity. He raises and supports two orphan girls and is happy that he can do something useful in his poverty struck life.

One of the girls is Natasha, his niece on his mother's side. She is twenty-five years old, beautiful, and orphaned while a baby. She works very hard at keeping the apartment in order. Her mother left her a small sum of money which she has looked after all her life. She guards the money in fulfilling her mother's wish that she give it to her future husband. She needs the money very badly but she does not touch it. She is a simple girl with a narrow mind due to a lack of
education. She is kind but very gullible. She meets a man who cheats her, takes her money, and is gone forever. This episode causes her to suffer immensely.

Zhenya is the other orphan girl in the play. She is a distant relative of Natasha. She is like Natasha in that both girls have little education and possess kind hearts. She suffers for Natasha's loss and tries to help her in her own little ways. She is devoted to Natasha and sincerely confesses that she loves Natasha more than anything in the world. Zhenya loves a young man named Grunsev. For a long time she does not reveal her feelings toward him. At the end of the play she announces her intention to marry him.

Pavel Sergeyevich Grunsev is a young man who has recently graduated from the university and is looking for a position. He is handsome and dresses neatly and decently. Presently he can hardly "make ends meet." He teaches for a living and is so poor he cannot even buy a pound of candy for his beloved Zhenya. At the end of the play he obtains a position, proposes to Zhenya and they leave for the distant town.

The second act of the play reveals the chinovnik and businessman. Potrokhov is a rich chinovnik, tall and very stout with a round face. He values people according to their wealth. Accidentally he meets his old friend Karpelev. In a drunken stupor, he invites Karpelev to his home but afterwards, he bitterly regrets doing so. He did not want to invite a poor man into his home. When Karpelev comes to visit
him he drives him off by offering him three rubles to go away. He treats his old friend as a beggar. Potrokhov is always boring and does not know what to do with his free time. He has a wife who is narrow-minded and jealous of her husband's attention to the maid.

Koprov, is a young, handsome fellow with very refined manners. The one purpose in his life is money. For the sake of it he cheats the kind and innocent Natasha. Because of this money and the deed, he shoots himself after failing to cheat another girl.

Chepurin, is a storekeeper and the landlord of Karpelev's apartment. He is always modest and concerned with the life around him. He loves Natasha not as a woman, but for her money.

The play was staged by the Moscow Art Theater in the 1939-40 season. The play is of note because it was staged by the third generation of actors who had been raised under the creat of the Sea Gull, the Theater's emblem.

The Three Sisters

No treatment of the trends in repertoire of the Moscow Art Theater would be possible without an article on Chekhov and his creations.

Chekhov gave the Moscow Art Theaterists most valuable gifts before the Revolution of 1917. Everything that is significant in the pre-revolutionary history of the Theater is connected with his name. Chekhov was the third founder of the Theater and his greatness was preserved when the Theater was called "The House of Chekhov."
Chekhov's plays are the most valuable and original part of the entire repertoire presented by the Theater before the Revolution. His The Seagull, The Three Sisters, Uncle Vanya, and The Cherry Orchard formed the creative method of the Theater. These plays forced Stanislavsky to work out the problems of life on the stage and to seek a new and marvellous inner technique of acting experience. The Theater transferred Chekhov's methods to other playwrights, both classical and contemporary.

Nowhere does Chekhov reveal the hidden beauty of Man's inner world than through his poetry of the commonplace in The Three Sisters. Perhaps the pressures created by his own confinement to the country gave him an insight into the boredom and frustration of small town life. The desire to go to Moscow, coupled with a faith in the future, forms the plot of the play.

The three sisters have an intense desire to break away from their petty provincial lives and take part in the gaiety and social activities of the capital, Moscow. The eldest sister, Olga Prozorov, is an old maid school-teacher who hates her work. Her life outside the school is completely barren. Masha, is married to a commonplace husband, Fyodor Kulygin, an ineffective high school teacher. She has a brief affair with the Battery Commander, Vershinin.

Irina, is the youngest of the three sisters. She works in a telegraph office and is engaged to Baron Tuzenbach who is killed in a duel. With the loss of her fiance she lapses into complete drudgery. The girls have a brother, Andrey. The sisters have high hopes for their
brother. He, however, secretly mortgages their property and marries a country girl Natasha. Natasha comes coyly into the Prozorov family and eventually reveals herself as a vixen and harridan, driving the sisters off. Finally she is in violent control of their lives. The sisters have lost any hope of escape from their stifling existence. They begin to find purpose only in work until some time in the future, the deeper purpose of life will be revealed to them.

The three sisters move against a background of characters who make it possible for their roles to be highlighted.

Andrey Prozorov, is the son of a high-ranking Russian army officer. He is the hope of his sisters, but he mortgages their property. He studies to be a professor but after his marriage fails he turns to gambling in order to forget his boorish wife, who has taken a local official Protopopov, as a lover. He is ineffective and accomplished nothing.

Ivan Tchebutykin is a medical doctor and a long time friend of the sisters. He makes comments that reveal the state of affairs in the Russian provinces. He is incompetent as a medical practitioner and as such he is confined to the province.

Baron Tuzenbach is in love with Irina. As an army lieutenant he adheres to the old code of honour and military ethics. He is killed in a duel by Captain Soleny, a rival for Irina's affections. Irina's only hope for escape from the garrison town is thus crushed.

Alexander Vershinin is an artillery commander. He does not worship
the system of military order and ethics. He firmly believes that the world and its people will eventually get better. He is in love with Masha, but he cannot must enough strength to leave his family for her.

The three sisters' movement through the play is thus brought into a clearer focus through the actions and failures of these weak-willed and ineffective people. The absence of a positive hero does not hinder the movement of the sisters from scene to scene.

The Three Sisters opened January 31, 1901. Olga Knipper played the role of Masha. Chekhov was so taken by her performance that he later proposed to her and she became Mrs. Chekhov in May, 1901. The play was an instant success and has been the most frequently performed of all Chekhov's plays. The Moscow Art Theater's presentation was world famous. In 1923 the troupe was given a standing ovation for their performance in New York, of The Three Sisters. The greatness of the play was fully illuminated by the Theater's production. When the play was performed again in Russia during 1940, it was not a success. The play itself is like a huge sluggish river which by itself is not exciting to watch. But when such a play is impelled by exciting acting it becomes a fearsome, potent force compelling the audience to remain in awe.

After the Revolution of 1917, Stanislavsky was under pressure to portray The Three Sisters as a herald of the bloody events that had just occurred. The Bolsheviks were looking for any justification of the Revolution. Stanislavsky did not wish to comply with their request and
maintained that the characters could not be shown as heralds of coming
social upheavels. In the play, however, Irina's fiance, the Baron, who
has never worked a day in his life exclaims:

"The time is at hand, an avalanche is moving down upon us, a
mighty clearing storm which is coming, is already near and
will soon blow the laziness, the indifference, the distaste
for work, the rotten boredom, out of our society. I shall
work, and in another twenty or thirty years every one will
have to work. Every one!"

The events in the play move quietly with wonderful rich comic
moments steeped in a Chekhovian pathos. Tragedy seems to lapse into a
sense of futile drift, and hope digs in its spurs into the cloud-flanks
of despair. The Three Sisters causes the eyes of the audience to film
up with tears and at the same, brightening them with a vision. Through
the three sisters it is possible to back into Russian history and share
the frustrations and the enduring courage of people who really left
the kingdom of darkness only to find themselves thrown into a world
of conflict and the forces of change.

The Death of Pazukhin

Mikhail Evgrafovich Saltykov-Shchedrin wrote numerous works in
the field of satire. His play, The Death of Pazukhin, was written in
1857 for inclusion in the newly established journal, Provincial Sketches.

The play is one of the most artistic and profound of all his
satiric writings and was forbidden until 1893, when the Alexandrinsky
Theater staged it.

Shchedrin portrays a terrible picture of the family relationship
in Russian society. He depicts a cruel struggle for the estate of the wealthy merchant, Pazukhin, who has died and named no heirs. The playwright focuses his attention on the revealing of the characters and the discovery of their miserable world, rather than events in the play. The characters live in a world of "beasts of prey," who constantly crowd each other out of existence. Ostrovsky had focused his attention on the merchants and their dark kingdom. Shchedrin found it impossible to let these people escape his satiric pen.

Ivan Prokofiyeich Pazukhin is a seventy-five-year-old successful merchant. His entire life has centered around trading and contracting. He appears on stage only in the third act in a wheelchair. He is rich but paralyzed in his old age. His life was spent in amassing a huge fortune through honest and dishonest means. He is just barely living out his last days and cannot understand why he must come to an end. He possesses a pathetic hope to live for another five years. His own children and relatives cannot wait for the moment when he dies. The old man counts his money twice a day and hides it under the bed in an enormous trunk. The old man lives illegally with Zhivoyedova, a woman who openly confesses that she has lived in sin with him from the age of fifteen. She does not need the old man. Nobody needs him alive. He realizes that everyone wants his fortune. His final trick on the vultures is to leave his wealth without any will or any heirs. He even denies his own son, who at the final scene of the play becomes the heir to his fortune despite the machinations of the dishonest and evil Furnachov, Lobastov, and Zhivoyedova.
The above people plan to rob the old man and to cheat each other. Their attempts end in defeat and shame. Old Bayev, discloses these deeds to the helpless son of the old Pazukhin, Prokofy Ivanovich Pazukhin.

Prokofy is the old man's son but he is also a greedy beast of prey. Prokofy cannot wait until his father dies. He is afraid of his own son, Gavrilla, who also wants to obtain his grandfather's money. Prokofy is 55 years old, constantly drunk, poorly dressed, and thinks only of his father's money. The only thing that makes him happy are his dreams about his father's gold. Prokofy is married to a girl who married him with the hope that they might share his father's money.

The old Pazukhin had refused to let his son marry the young girl, Mavra Grigoryevna. The son married without the father's permission and this is a reason for disinheriting him despite the fact he was in his fifties when he married. Prokofy is so desperate for the money that he enters into a conspiracy with the swindler, Lobastov. He promises that he will force Gavrilla to marry Lobastov's old maid daughter, Yelena Lobastov. Lobastov wants to become a member of the family in order to be eligible for part of the money. Prokofy Pazukhin does not trust Lobastov and conspires with Simyon Furnachov, his brother-in-law. He offers him 150,000 rubles if they are successful in obtaining the money. Furnachov, publicly discloses the plot in the presence of his father, the old Pazukhin.
Prokofy Pazukhin is a poor merchant with a poor shop. He is incapable of running his own business, complains a great deal, and gets involved in foul plots. His son, Gavrilla, cannot stand his father or the life he leads. He threatens his father with his fist and says: "What do you think? If you are my father, do you think I should even endure your evil?" Prokofy's only reaction is to complain about his unhappy lot in life.

Toward the end of the final act, Prokofy's position suddenly improves. Old Bayev, outfoxes the swindlers who work so hard to obtain money that does not belong to them. He helps Prokofy inherit his father's money. Once Prokofy has the money, he forgives everyone, except his brother-in-law, Furnachov. Prokofy cannot forgive him for ridiculing him before his dying father. In revenge Pazukhin, legally ridicules Furnachov after he catches him robbing his dead father. Prokofy promises to award everybody. He immediately rises above his surroundings and feelings of affection appear in his soul for his wife, Mavra.

The two most fierce beasts of prey are Furnachov and Lobastov. On first appearances these men seem completely different. In reality they are similar. They are both greedy, dishonest and incorrigible liars. Throughout the play, Furnachov acts a cultured, educated man who occupies himself by reading newspapers and telling others the news. He likes to show off his knowledge of politics and astronomy. He considers himself better than anyone around him. He tries to show
concern for the old Pazukhin by worrying about the old man's health. Everything about him is artificial and below the surface he is a dangerous and dirty individual. He persuades the old man's mistress, Zhivoyedova, to help him in his plot to take the old man's money. He promises to share the fortune with her but intends to cheat the stupid woman. He teaches her how to measure the keyhole of the old man's trunk for a new key. He forges a key and robs the old man as soon as he dies. He has great plans with the stolen money. He dreams of a cultured life without his friends. His plans are thwarted and the thief is ridiculed before the other beasts of prey.

Lobastov is the other prominent beast of prey. Lobastov tells the old Pazukhin of Furnachov's plans to rob him. When Furnachov takes the money he is surrounded by the other relatives who seize the money and take it with them. Lobastov is rude and vicious. He threatens Prokofy and does not hide the fact he is after Pazukhin's money. His main desire is to marry his daughter Elena to Gavrilla. He does not care about her happiness, he only wants money.

All these characters serve to illustrate the rottenness of the old order. The Soviet critics and censors demanded that the play be presented as a social comment rather than a comedy satire. Stanislavsky presented the play before the Revolution of 1917 and continued to regard this play as one of his favourites. The Moscow Art Theater has continued to place this play as a favourite stand by in their repertoire because of Turchanov's famous presentation.
The Enemies

Maxim Gorky was probably one of Russia's greatest writers of revolutionary themes. One of his first revolutionary plays was The Enemies. This drama was forbidden by the Tsarist censorship and was not staged until 1933, when the Moscow Art Theater decided to present it.

The plot of The Enemies revolves around a strike, complicated by the murder of a factory director. According to the rules of the old regime, workers were forbidden to strike. Strikers were conscripted into the Imperial army while their homes were searched for propaganda literature and confiscated. The murder incident further complicates the plight of the strikers. They cannot be tried by a local judge and receive a fair trial. The army held the rebellious strikers in check while the police tried to round up the murderer. The army captain, Boboyedov, and the prosecuting attorney, Nikolai Skrobotov, bring out the play's action through their opposition to the strikers.

The action takes place in the early years of the 20th century when socialism was a dangerous and forbidden thing. The word was pronounced secretly on the lips of students and workers. One of the workers, Levshin, has more in common with Lev Tolstoi, than the theories of Marx. The ruling middle class industrialists hated the strikes and had them put down with terrible cruelty or they would unwillingly make compromises, on the grounds of humanism. They could not see the workers demands to be socially and economically equal.
The extreme conservative and liberal points of view are shown against the background of hardships for a decadent intelligentsia.

One of the characters in the play is Mikhail Skrobotov, the director of the factory. He holds the workers in the palms of his hands and treats them cruelly. His partner, Zakhar Bardin, is a liberal and cool toward the working man. He denies the conservative ideas of Skrobotov although he particularly does not like the working class. Mikhail Skrobotov gives many examples of his hatred and spite of the working people. In the beginning of the play he says:

"And down at the factory they're threatening to quit work after lunch! You can be sure that no good will ever come of Russia, and that's a fact. It's a land of anarchy! People have an organic disgust for any kind of work and a complete inability to maintain order. There's not the slightest respect for law!"

He is concerned only with business, not justice. The workers are striking because they want to have Dichkov, the foreman, removed. He goes about beating the workers with his fists and chasing the women.

Mikhail Skrobotov had to carry a revolver at all times. He is finally killed by this same revolver. When he tries to cheat the workers he is killed by a red-headed man. This is symbolic. Mikhail is an excellent example of the love for power in action. Tatyana, the wife of Yakov Bardin, gives his character in the following words:

"He reminds me of a policeman who often used to be on duty in our theater in Kstorna: tall and thin with bulging eyes.... This policeman too, was always in a hurry. He never walked; he ran. He never smoked; he gobbled up cigarettes. He had no time to live at all. All his time was taken up by rushing somewhere, but not even he knew where."
In other words, the man's energy was misdirected. He was quite prepared
to send for troops long before any strike even started. He says: "It
is wonderful to feel that you get what you want." He was a true
representative of the rich, callous, industrial middle class.

Zakhar Bardin is his partner and owner of the factory. He sums
himself up in these words:

"You know I am more a pomeshchik (land owner) than an
industrialist. Everything is new and complicated for me.
I want to be righteous. The peasants are more soft and
kind than the workers, and I can get along well with them.
Among the workers there are many curious figures, but in
the mass, I agree they are very uncontrollable."

Zakhar wanted to fire Ditchkov but Mikhail Skrobotov needed a cruel
man to control the workers. Zakhar does not want revenge on the
murderer. He wants only a fair trial for him. He does not want the
soldiers to come and cause a tragedy. He wants to do something good
and quiet. He thought that the decent life was possible but the
workers were suspicious of a rich man sympathetic with their cause.
He is a typical representative of the old liberal land owner who
philosophized his problems away.

Tatyana is the wife of Zakhar's brother, Yakov Ivanovich
Bardin. She is a good actress and a good wife. Throughout the play
she uses theatrical metaphors which openly hint at the forthcoming
revolution. She is a sensitive woman in whom are combined physical
attractiveness and mental capability. Nikolai Skrobotov says to her:

"Everyone complains that the play is boring. She replies:
"We ourselves make it so, and the extras and the stage hands are beginning to see it. Some day they'll drive us off the boards."

This is how she describes the aristocratic life and the impending storm. She gives many remarks on the superfluous, useless life of the intelligentsia of her times. She says of herself: "I want a different kind of life...I don't want to be superfluous."

Nikolai Skrobotov is the brother of Mikhail Skrobotov. Nikolai is a cold, hard prosecuting attorney. He says: "I am a man of principle, not a man of responsibility." He says that every man must stick to a definite set of principles in order to retain his culture. He is afraid of socialism and reports all suspicious people to the police. He watches everybody around him like a hawk. He is a true representative of the Pobedonostev period. He inherits the factory after his brother's death. He has no feelings toward his loss of a brother. He is just as cold as he was. Nikolai Skrobotov says:

"What can these people contribute? Nothing but destruction. And note that the destruction will be more fearful here, among us, than anywhere else."

At last he says that all decent people seem to be socialists.

Mikhail Skrobotov's wife Cleopatra is also cold and heartless. Her name is symbolic of her many secret affairs and sins. She symbolizes the sins of the old regime.

One of the most important heroes in the play is Sintsov. He is one of Zakhar Bardin's clerks. He organizes the workers. Sintsov is a decent man, intelligent, effective, and a positive hero. He likes
Tatyana and feels that there is a future for her, for she understands the poor working class. Sintsov closely resembles Gorky and his philosophy.

There are many revolutionaries in the play. One of them is old Levshin. He has observed the industrial growth of a small village. The old man loves people and possesses Lev Tolstoi's philosophy. He can see no reason to burn the factory that the hands of his predecessors had made. He is a materialist and hopes that the workers' life will improve. He has his own peculiar theories:

"Everything human carries the taint of copper, miss. That's why your young heart is heavy. All people are chained to a copper kopek—all but you, and so you don't fit in. To every man on this earth the kopek jingles its message: 'Love me as you love yourself.' But that doesn't mean you. A bird neither sows nor reaps."

The average worker is represented by Grekov, a young man who saved some rich ladies from possible assault by drunken workers. He is proud and refuses to accept money from the General for his services. This insults the old General. Grekov is proud of his poor origins and says that the rich will never understand the poor. This young man symbolizes the future realist movement.

Captain Boboyedov is a representative of the military class. Gorky is quick to satirize the harsh cavalry captain. He says:

"Everything is found, we shall find, don't you worry...It is the duty of every soldier to entertain society...Only children and revolutionaries don't understand the law."

He crashes through life making mistake after mistake. He resembles
General Pechenegov, the uncle of Zakhar Bardin. The General also belongs to the same military stamp and insists on commanding the people around him and making jokes to ridicule them. Both military men are superfluous but are capable of making people suffer and die.

Yakov Ivanovich Bardin is one of the most complete characters that Gorky ever portrayed. He is always drunk. He is a representative of a dying decadent intelligentsia. Despite his perpetual drunkenness he clearly predicts the results of the Revolution of 1917. He loves his actress wife, Tatyana, but the drunkeness separates them. He has a friendly wit that captures the workers. They are fond of him. He gives some wonderful comments on his contemporary society:

"...People are divided into three categories: the first consists of those who work all their lives, the second of those who save money, the third of those who refuse to earn their bread because there's no sense in it, and can't save money because it's foolish and beneath them. That's me - the third category. To this category belong all the lazy loafers, the tramps, monks, beggars and other parasites of this world."

He can match anybody's wit. He is definitely a superior mind. He comments to his wife Tatyana, the actress:

"Talented drunkards, handsome loafers and other members of the jolly professions have ceased to attract attention. As long as we offered a contrast to the boredom of everyday life, people took an interest in us. But now everyday life is becoming more and more dramatic. And people are shouting at us: 'Hey, you clowns and comedians! Off the stage!' But the stage is your field, Tanya."

Finally the audience is introduced to a warm, happy, and aimable character in the person of Nadya. She is Zakhar Bardin's
niece. The world situation does not bother her. She has a fine heart and loves the poor people. She is bored by the old order and feels that the rich will never understand or tolerate the poor. She symbolizes the end of the rich classes. The curtain is closing on their act. The revolutionaries are quiet. They are victorious. They believe in their future and the curtain falls.

The Moscow Art Theater gave the life of pre-Revolutionary Russia in the worst possible light in The Enemies. In 1935, it was staged and directed by Nemirovich-Danchenko. He felt that the message should be the pathos of the class struggle and the conflict between two irreconcilable forces - the masters and the workers. He had M.N. Prudkin play the part of Mikhail Skrobotov. The character was to be shown with a "maximum of hatred for the working class." Sinstsov, Levshin, and Nadya are the members of a revolutionary underground. They are the shining heroes who reflect the image of Stalin himself. Nemirovich-Danchenko was instrumental in bringing the communist "social command" to the Moscow Art Theater. He was opposed to one of Stanislavsky's basic principles - one ought to seek good even in the worst characters.
CHAPTER III

Adapted Russian Classics on the Stage of the Moscow Art Theater

Between 1927 and 1939 the Moscow Art Theater staged thirty-two premieres. Of these, fifteen were classical plays. The most outstanding of these plays were Dostoevsky's *Uncle's Dream*, *Village of Stepanchikovo*, *Brother's Karamazov*, Tolstoi's *Resurrection*, *Anna Karenina*, and Gorki's *My Apprenticeship*.

*Uncle's Dream*

In 1929, Nemirovich-Danchenko staged Dostoevsky's famous short novel, *Uncle's Dream*. The play is an involved tale of intrigue, in which a provincial lady, Marya Alexandrovna tries to marry off her proud daughter to a decrepit old man, Prince K. The Prince was only in the town of Mordasov three days. During this time Marya Alexandrovna is involved in constant scheming which ends in a terrible scandal. Her daughter, Zinaida Afanasyevna, is forced to give up the man she really loves. In reprisal for this frustration, she rebels against her mother and assumes a tyrannical power over the entire household. Her nature is proud, resentful and sensitive. Zinaida is also capable at times of a strong warmth and generosity. With this dualistic nature she is thus, the first example of the double heroine in Dostoevsky's literary works. The most striking quality of the comedy lies in the wonderful humor of unexpected incident which Dostoevsky was richly endowed with in his earlier creations.
In the novel, Prince K. has a terrible dream in which the inhabitants of Mordasov appear as grotesque, narrow-minded people. The adaptation of the novel, as presented by the Moscow Art Theater, showed a ruthless satire on the lives of those who lived in pre-Revolutionary Russia. The prince was presented as a foppish idiot whose mechanical motions made him appear as a puppet. He represented the spiritual and physical senility of the old Russian aristocracy. Indeed, the entire play smells of a strong mental and physical decay. The grotesque beggars who constantly surround him, waiting for him to toss them a ruble, appear as superfluous and parasitical. The play was nothing more than a satirical exhibit of tsarist Russia. The message was simple: these repulsive monsters had once ruled the destiny of Russia and their extinction was absolutely necessary for the growth of a new society.

The Village of Stepanchikovo

The Moscow Art Theater had chosen Dostoevsky's short novels as excellent subjects for adapted plays before the Revolution of 1917. From 1916 to 1918 the Theater had presented the finest of Dostoevsky's earliest works, The Village of Stepanchikovo.

This adaptation of an excellent novel, describes in almost excruciating detail the suffering endured by a sensitive, meek-spirited landowner, Colonel Rostanev. His tyrannical mother is responsible for his unnecessary suffering. She considers it her son's duty to support her in all her luxuries: toadies, pug-dogs, Pomeranians, Chinese cats,
and so on. Apart from these luxuries, "Madame la Generale", so-named because she had married a general, kept a male companion, Foma Fomich Opiskin. She is abetted in her tyranny by this companion who is a hypocrite and despot. Opiskin is a richly conceived character. He is worthy of ranking with the great hypocrites and parasties of world literature. Opiskin has for many years, sustained a lack of recognition from others. He was forced by a tyrannical old general to play the part of a buffoon. He assumes this role to perfection but on the death of the general, he seeks vindictive revenge and becomes a sadistic tyrant himself. In the end of the play, he goes too far. His insinuations concerning the chastity of a pure young girl bring the landowner to drive him from the house in which he has lived as a tyrannical parasite. Finally, before the curtain falls, he is forgiven for his sins. He is now thoroughly chastened and becomes a mere shadow of his former tyrannical self. The rise and fall of this character is the main driving force behind a plot of many incidents and characters.

This adapted play is most significant in the history of Russian theater. In 1891, seven years before the founding of the Moscow Art Theater, Stanislavsky had staged this play and played the role of the uncle. For the first time in his acting career, he experienced the boundless joy of blending himself with his role. In other words, he brought the role to life and made its life, his own. This feeling of accomplishment and participation, made him wonder if the thrill he
had experienced could be created for every role with the aid of certain devices of internal technique. Could the genuine experience of a character's role become a permanent feeling for the actor. This role was the source of Stanislavsky's unending searches which partially culminated in his book, *An Actor Prepares*.

In the seasons before the Civil War that followed the Revolution of 1917, Stanislavsky had the opportunity of experimenting with the inner technique of an actor which gave the Moscow Art Theater the ability to blend the actor with the role, and to stabilize the role. The world owes the results of Stanislavsky's awakening to the richly conceived characters of Dostoevsky's novels.

**Resurrection**

In 1930, Nemirovich-Danchenko staged an adaption of Count Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. The presentation was praised by Soviet critics and condemned by western critics who saw it as a perversion of Tolstoy's creative genius. The presentation of Resurrection thus occupies a controversial position in the world of theatrical criticism. In order to understand the source of the controversy, a short explanation of the novel's original plot and action is required.

The most developed of the principal characters are Prince Dmitri Ivanovich Nekhludov, and Katerina Mikhailovna Maslova whose name is abbreviated to Katusha. Nekhludov is a gentleman. At a trial in which he is serving as a juror, he is astonished to find that the
the defendant is the falsely accused Katusha, whom he had seduced in the past. The judge sentences Katusha to hard labour in Siberia. Nekhludov realizes that he has driven her into this horrible existence. His pity for her leads him into a period of self-examination. He emerges from this mental exercise realizing that his life is empty and degenerate. He feels an intense need to cleanse his soul. He decides to follow Katusha to Siberia and marry her. He feels himself purged when her sentence is lightened to exile. She, however, decides to live with the man who loves her, Valdemar Simonson.

Katusha is an illegitimate girl. She was seduced at the age of sixteen by Prince Nekhludov. As a result, she becomes a prostitute and later is falsely accused of complicity in a murder. At the trial she is recognized by Nekhludov. Her appearance is the device that triggers his remorse. The Prince tries to have her sentence commuted to exile and succeeds. The twist of fate comes when she decides to marry Valdemar Simonson, rather than jeopardize her benefactor's happiness by his marriage to a woman like herself.

There are many other interesting characters who support Nekhludov and Katusha's role. Probably the most interesting of these is Selenin, a public prosecutor and an old friend of the Prince. Fundamentally, Selenin is an intelligent, honest man, but he has come to the place in his life where he makes society's standards his own.

The Moscow Art Theater's adaptation and presentation was removed from the plot of the novel. The novel presents a cascade of religious
themes along with the revelation of Tolstoy's own spiritual and moral purification. These primary subjects were missing from the production. Instead, the Communist point of view and interpretation of Tolstoy was applied. Tolstoy's novel was presented as a book that mercilessly lashed the ruling classes. The decadence and falseness of tsarist society was revealed.

Nemirovich-Danchenko had changed the venerable philosopher into a vulgar Party sociologist. Nekhludov is stripped of his positive traits and Katusha's inner reconciliation is completely absent. In place of character revelation, the ruthlessness of tsarist courts appears as the main interest. Each member of the jury represents a satirical presentation of the banal, cynical, and despondent life under the tsars. Nekhludov occupies himself with "self criticism" in the approved Party manner.

The staging devices were used to portray the enormous contrast between rich and poor. The poor and desolate Russian countryside is compared with the decadent luxury of Countess Charskaya's sinful salon. The play was narrated by Kachalov who caused the play to be a success. His role was to consolidate the various scenes and lead the audience through a terrible hell that had been swept away by the force of the Revolution. There was no narrator in the original novel and Tolstoy did not intend to portray the squalor and decadence of the Russian peasants.

The play was not presented as a profound tragedy of the human
spirit. It became a propaganda play exposing "tsarist justice" and the terrible lack of morals in tsarist Russia. The great director, Nemirovich-Danchenko, has succeeded in establishing a policy of falsification of the great classics. The system of "physical actions" and "inner portrayal" that Stanislavsky had worked so hard for, was subjugated and betrayed to Party commands.

Anna Karenina

In 1937, Nemirovich-Danchenko presented an adaptation of Tolstoy's great novel, Anna Karenina. This profound story became a melodramatic social tragedy. In order to justify this accusation it is necessary to compare the original novel with the Theater's presentation in 1937. The Novel contains many interesting and well-developed characters. The principal characters are Anna Karenina, Count Alexey Vronsky, and Alexei Karenin.

Anna Karenina is Alexei Karenin's wife. As a wife she is beautiful but wayward. She meets the handsome officer, Count Vronsky and falls completely in love with him. She fully realizes the consequences of her act of infidelity. In spite of her love for her child, Sergey, she cannot give up Vronsky. She becomes estranged from her husband. This unhappy woman, who was once so generous and respected, has an illegitimate child and runs off with Vronsky. When his love wanes she commits suicide by throwing herself into the path of an oncoming railway train.
Count Alexey Vronsky is a wealthy army officer who eagerly returns Anna's love. He is not a bad man. In fact, he is a thoughtful and generous man in many ways. He proves this by giving part of his inheritance to his brother. He thinks nothing, however, of taking Anna away from her husband and son. Actually, this behaviour is part of his code of ethics which includes the patronization of his inferiors. When Anna dies he becomes a gloomy seeker of painless death.

Alexei Karenin is a public servant. He is a cold-blooded and ambitious man whose main desire is to rise to the heights of the government service. He seems to be incapable of jealousy or love. He loves himself, however, and permits Anna to see Vronsky away from home. He is afraid only that his reputation will be blemished by his wife's infidelity. In spite of this obvious cold temperament, he is a good official who knows how to circumnavigate the red tape and bureaucratic inefficiency.

In the Moscow Art Theater's presentation of Tolstoy's great novel, Anna's tremendous passion is contrasted with the hypocritical morality of a decadent tsarist society. Her passion becomes a natural freedom resisting the slavery of her society. The Theater presented the play in thirty-three scenes. The revelation of Anna's character was originally leisurely and profound. This depth is lost in the abbreviated scenes. Tolstoy's basic belief that "vengeance is the Lord's" is replaced by a picture of a repulsive aristocracy in the control of the evil monster, Karenin. Karenin is the personification of a ruthless and rotten bureaucracy and Anna is the victim of this
terrible machine. Khmelev played the part of Karenin so sympathetically that he won the hearts of Soviet spectators and increased their admiration of Tolstoy's characters. The final blow to Tolstoy's genius comes when Anna is portrayed as the incarnation of a sincere and simple girl with a pure and honest nature. She has tasted the sweetness of social truth and can no longer reconcile herself to the despicable hypocrisy and evil that permeated all of Russian society.

My Apprenticeship

One of the difficulties of writing a thesis in English when the discussion revolves around Russian writings, is that translation of titles is not always accurate. My Apprenticeship, or Among People as it is called in Russian, is part of a trilogy written by Gorky. The trilogy consists of Childhood, My Apprenticeship or Among People, and My Universities. These three volumes are a somewhat romantic and poetic autobiography. Since Gorky was seen as a prophet and embodiment of communism it is natural that his writings should become part of the repertoire of the Moscow Art Theater. Gorky had been a friend of the Theater long before the Revolution. When Chekhov was making his appearance on the stage of the Theater, Gorky was in the wings. Chekhov's plays had given the Theater the title of "House of Chekhov." More than a decade after the Revolution, the Moscow Art Theater became the "House of Gorky." The great artist of the proletariat, and leader in Soviet literature, was the symbol of the Theater's acceptance of
the Communist message and its political presentation.

All of Gorky's characters characterize pre-Revolutionary Russia. Gorky was an ideal writer to be immortalized in propaganda plays. Social messages seem truthful when given in Gorky's pithy language, craftsmanship and strong characteristic traits. All of this is fine, with the exception that Gorky did not intend his trilogy as propaganda plays welcoming the arrival of militant communism.

In 1933, The Moscow Art Theater, produced My Apprenticeship under the direction of M.N. Kedrov. The adaptation was excellent in that all the events lent themselves easily to scene constructions. Gorky's writings on unity were added to the Moscow Art Theater's principles of acting.

The second part of Gorky's autobiography is My Apprenticeship. The play is a picture gallery of loosely assembled events with no central grandmother as in Childhood. After leaving his grandfather's home, Gorky held a series of jobs. He was an errand boy in a shoe store inhabited by simple, dirty people. Later he becomes a dishwasher aboard a steamer on the Volga. He leaves the ship and becomes a general helper in a draftsman's establishment where he is initiated into all the cruel and hideous facets of family life. He leaves the shop and becomes a kitchen boy on another ship and then an assistant in an icon maker's shop. Here he has an opportunity to show the hypocrisy of the society he serves. Much later, Gorky becomes a supervisor on construction projects at the great annual fair in Nizhni-Novgorod.
All of these events take place before the autumn of 1884 when at the age of sixteen, he leaves his apprenticeship behind him and goes to Kazan hoping to enter the university there.

These records of his trials and tribulations are all borne along by his intense curiosity to learn more about his world. In each phase of his apprenticeship some character comes out who is interesting and yields some knowledge for him. In many of the scenes or episodes, Gorky meets people who arouse his interest in books. He learns about Russia's Pushkin from Queen Margot, an unforgettable character, and becomes familiar with Balzac. The senseless struggle between those who know and want to suppress knowledge and those who do not know and want to belittle learning plus his varied bits and pieces of philosophy, compel him to take his journey to Kazan.

The main reason for the presentation of My Apprenticeship by the Moscow Art Theater was to give the Communist treatment of pre-Revolutionary Russia. The Party partiality in depicting ancient Russia is quite obvious. Semenov, the baker of Kazan is portrayed as a fine example of the abuses of private property owners who were masters over their slaves - the proleatariat. It is true that Gorky was merciless with these evil men of Old Russia, but he did not interpret them as "class enemies."

The very fact that Gorky was critical of the old system of "slaves and masters" provided excellent soil for propaganda. It also revived the Theater's discarded method of presentation - "external
truth-to-life." The Communist regime decided to support fully the "House of Gorky" and to canonize the Stanislavsky system. Some of Gorky's principles of acting had actually been incorporated by the Moscow Art Theater. The Moscow Art Theater with its excellent actors had the ability to influence the entire population. The external naturalism of the great Theater was, by 1933, a device for creating a powerful illusion that made the promises and tenets of Communism more and more palatable. When Gorky's plays were revived in 1933, the Party entered the stage, occupied it, and since then, has not left.
CHAPTER IV

West European Classics on the Stage of the Moscow Art Theater

In 1918 the Moscow Art Theater chose to produce Lord Byron's mystery play, *Cain*. Some critics believe that *Cain*, with its story of fratricide was used to protest the fratricidal war that the Revolution of 1917 had unleashed. The play was severely criticized by the Soviet critics and was soon taken off the repertoire. Despite the fact that a western play had been taken off the boards, a trend toward the presentation of western classical plays was established. Some of these notable presentations were Goldoni's *Mistress of the Inn*, Beaumarchais's *Marriage of Figaro*, an adaptation of Dickens's characters in *The Pickwick Club*, Moliere's *Tartuffe*, and finally, Sheridan's *School for Scandal*.

*Cain*

It is natural that one of England's greatest rebel poets should create a drama of Cain, one of the earliest rebels. Byron called his drama a "mystery." He shows the son of Adam wondering why he must work because of another's fault. He questions himself and then Lucifer. Cain must know what are God's purposes and arrangements of the world. Cain, in a spirit of complete revulsion, kills his brother, Abel, because of his unthinking piety. Cain regrets his deed and goes into exile with his sister Adah and their little son, Enos.

One scene depicts the gateway to the Garden of Eden, another
depicts a great flight through space toward Hell as Lucifer disputes with the Angel of the Lord. This boldness and conception of a great drama with its religious challenge has been the main reason why the play was never permitted to be produced in England.

Cain as a play is nothing without the powerful tremor of Byron's verse and the conception of a rebel hero. Lucifer describes several restrictions placed upon the world before the creation of man. He says that there were beings on Earth long before Adam. These beings were more intelligent than man and the Lord destroyed them all, except Lucifer whom he could not destroy. Lucifer is a rebel himself, constantly defying the greater power. Cain is above Lucifer because he is pictured as the first thinking man and progenitor of all sadness from thinking. He precedes Job by thousands of years. Cain is the questioner, brooding over the basic elemental evils of the world. Until Cain's questions are answered the play will always have meaning to any generation and transmit its tremendous message.

Cain contained some of the new aims the Moscow Art Theater was to give to Russian theater. Here, as in Anathema, Stanislavsky experimented with unreal forms. He posed questions on the sculptural method as applied to the architectural elements on stage. He felt that the entire action of the drama must dissolve and re-appear in a constant rhythm. The scene depicting Hell, shows great statues of former beings scattered around in a dim haze. Every figure was separately illuminated in an eerie light. The main lesson to be learned from this presentation
was that sculpture and architecture are a great aid to the actor's attitude. The sculptural method opened an entirely new era in acting. Stanislavsky began to examine the speech, motion, and rhythmic life of the actors on the stage of the Moscow Art Theater.

The Mistress of the Inn

Goldoni wrote well over 200 plays in Italian and in French. Goldoni possessed a good, gay, sunny disposition which is reflected in his plays with their shade and shine of common life. These qualities together with the pleasures and profits of innkeeping are delightfully presented in The Mistress of the Inn. The play tells the story of the pretty, merry, and independent young Mirandolina, who is wooed mainly for her wealth (she inherited her father's inn). She is wooed by the niggardly old Marquis de Forlipopoli and the eccentric Count de Albaforita. Mirandola decides to tease the woman-hating Cavalier, the Black Knight of Ripafratta. She wins the Count over slowly by enticing him with good food and flattery. When he falls for her, she immediately dispenses with him and decides to marry Fabrizio, whom her dying father commanded her to marry in the first place. Mirandolina knows that the only way she can have freedom is to marry and look after a home.

The comedy is highlighted by the actions of two actresses, Ortensia and Djaneira who arrive at the inn. They put on airs as ladies of high bearing and quality. At the slightest provocation
they are women of the evening, vulgar and crude. Mirandolina sees through their veneers and provides the opportunity for them to appear in all their hearty, lusty, vulgarity. While all the fun and satire progresses throughout the play, Mirandolina stuffs her guests with food and fills her money box with profits.

Goldoni saw his characters as dynamic and living. Men could fashion their personalities through their own will power. This idea lends a powerful vigor to his figures and a vitality that the Moscow Art Theater could work with. There are plenty of situations where the characters can be fully developed.

Stanislavsky first produced the play December 2, 1898, after the founding of the Moscow Art Theater. He presented it in New York in 1923. When he produced the play in 1933, the critics declared his presentation as false and unwarranted because it did not portray the struggle of the Italian middle class against the aristocrats, and the nobility with all their evils.

Goldoni was the father of the friendly comedy of manners for the Italian theater of the 1750's. His play is original in mood but its manner is based on the work of Moliere.

**The Marriage of Figaro**

In 1927, the great event in the Moscow Art Theater was Stanislavsky's staging of Beaumarchais's, *The Marriage of Figaro*.

The famous Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*, becomes the center of intrigue in this play, *The Marriage of Figaro*. Count Almaviva has married Rosine but covets Figaro's fiancee, Susanne. The count tries to push
Figaro into the arms of his aging housekeeper, Marceline. A rendezvous is planned for the Count and Susanne, but Rosine intends to be there. Misunderstandings and surprises ensue. Marceline turns out to be Figaro's mother and the play ends happily.

Figaro is used by Beaumarchais to satirize the abuses of the times, in the spirit of the impending French Revolution. As a servant, he is superior to his master, the Count, except in social status. Figaro's courage and comic sense are the foils to an order that was ripe for overthrow.

Stanislavsky considered the play as a comedy. He transferred the action to France on the eve of 1789. He used his famous crowd scenes to heighten the suspense. All the scenery, furniture, etc., were realistic depictions of the time. The play was originally a five act comedy but it was now divided into twelve scenes situated on a revolving stage.

Stanislavsky replaced the stereotyped characters with warm, true to life characters. In this play he introduced for the first time, new devices for the inner technique of acting. Exterior actions required an inner justification. These experiments would soon culminate in his method of "physical actions."

The critics felt that Figaro should have been portrayed as a Communist, waging a war against the class enemies. They forgot that the play exhibited a national character filled with a democratic spirit. The play had a revolutionary quality, but it did not serve the needs of the Party.
The Pickwick Club

In 1934, the Moscow Art Theater produced an adaptation from Dickens' Pickwick Papers. The adaptation was named The Pickwick Club. It revealed the warmth of human hearts and did not show any social messages or contain any revolutionary content. The Theater was severely criticized for not revealing the moral chaos of the Industrial Revolution. This adapted play is right in the stream of West-European presentations since The Mistress of the Inn had been shown only a year previous.

One of the main characters in the play is Mr. Samuel Pickwick. He is a stout, amiable founder and perpetual president of the Pickwick Club. He is an observer of human nature, a lover of good food and drink, and an excellent travelling companion. He travels about the countryside with his friends, accepting invitations from local dignitaries. He pursues Mr. Alfred Jingle, and tries to thwart him in his devilish schemes. The height of Mr. Pickwick's development comes when he arrives at the Fleet Street Prison, where he observes human suffering and learns to forgive his enemies.

Mr. Nathaniel Winkle is a sportsman, inept and human. He finds himself involved in hunting misfortunes, romances, and duels. Finally, he marries Arabella Allen, his true love.

Mr. Augustus Snodgrass, is the poetic member of the Pickwick Club. He keeps extensive notes but never writes any verses. Eventually he wins his sweetheart Emily Wardle after many visits to Manor Farm.

There are many other characters. No description however would be complete without including Mrs. Martha Bardell, Mr. Pickwick's landlady.
He consults with her as to the advisability of taking a servant. She mistakes this for a marriage proposal and accepts him, much to his dismay. This misunderstanding leads to the famous breach of promise suit of Bardell vs. Pickwick. Mr. Pickwick refuses to pay damages and is sent to Fleet Street Prison. Mrs. Bardell's attorneys, unable to collect their fees, have her arrested and sent to Fleet Street Prison. Her desperate plight arouses Mr. Pickwick's pity and he pays for the damages in order to have her released and to free himself and Mr. Winkle, who had eloped with his love, Arabella Allen.

The production of Dickens' *Pickwick Club*, is remarkable for its excellent staging, designed by P.V. Williams, an excellent artist. He revived the painted flats that the theater had used in the first years of its existence. Each scene was built against a background of draperies, panels and frescoes which in turn, were supplemented by furniture and architectural details. These panels emphasized the grotesque and satirical aspects of this drama. The stage action was supplemented through painting. The background showed rows of toy soldiers, tents, and buglers set in the clouds in the manoeuvre's episode. The foreground revealed people watching the movement on canvas which in itself was a continuation of the actors on the stage. The director was Stanitsin, and the production bore none of the experiments of Stanislavsky or Nemirovich-Danchenko.

**Tartuffe**

Moliere's *Tartuffe* is the Moscow Art Theater's most vivid presentation of a hypocrite, who preys upon the weaknesses of ordinary people. Despite the play's comic scenes, there is a sadness that closely approaches a tragic gravity.
Tartuffe is a religious hypocrite and imposter who comes into the home of a substantial citizen, Orgon. Orgon befriends him and holds him in high regard. Tartuffe tries to drive Orgon's son away, marry the daughter, corrupt the wife, ruin and imprison Orgon. He almost succeeds, not by his clever plots, but by his coarse audacity of his cunning disposition. Orgon's wife pretends to yield to Tartuffe in order to let her husband overhear the hypocrite. Tartuffe brazens out this situation by presenting Orgon with the deed to the house which he had given in friendship to Tartuffe. Tartuffe claims the house as his own and serves Orgon and his family with an eviction notice. When a police officer arrives to carry out the eviction, the tables are turned. Tartuffe is arrested by King Louis XIV's orders. Tartuffe is branded as a notorious rogue and imprisoned.

In 1938, The Moscow Art Theater produced Tartuffe. It was Stanislavsky's final work as a director. He did not finish the production for he died before it could be presented.

Surprisingly enough, this play does not contain any communist class conflicts or social messages. Stanislavsky felt that his play was a springboard for his experiments in finding new ways to improve the internal technique of acting. He decided that experienced actors should return to their studies in order to capture the eternal youth of acting techniques. This new technique was never meant to be written down or included in a manual. It exists only on the stage. Stanislavsky's
aim in Tartuffe was to give once and for all to his favourite actors, the culmination of his life's work as a living heritage. The basis of the new study was his profound faith in the method of physical actions which determined the sincerity of the role. A profound belief in the inner justification of physical actions was a tremendous artistic process that completely mobilized the entire psychology and soul of an actor. After so many years, Stanislavsky hoped to make the dream of an art theater come true.

In order to feel the significance of the times in which Moliere lived, Stanislavsky had the actors live in Orgon's house. They ate, worked, and slept in the atmosphere of the times. At the same time Stanislavsky led the actors away from the standard presentation of Moliere's comedy as he had done with Carlo Goldoni's Mirandolina. The actors had to place themselves in the position of the characters and action on stage. For the actor, such things as comedy and tragedy do not exist, only the actor revealing the inner truth of supposed circumstances.

Tartuffe was Stanislavsky's second attempt to apply his entire system to the actor's work. His first attempt came about with his presentation of Goldoni's play. His "method of physical actions," was the first attempt to score a role in such a way as to allow the supreme creative act in theater.

The School for Scandal

In 1940, N.M. Gorchakov presented Sheridan's School for Scandal
to Moscow audiences who were preparing themselves for the holocaust that was to come in the German invasion. The satirical comedy stands out alone among the "preparation for war" themes that were emphasized in the repertoires of other theaters.

The play contains an array of important and vividly contrasting characters. Charles Surface, is a heedless, happy go lucky, but honest fellow. His brother Joseph is a scheming hypocrite. Maria, the ward of Sir Peter Teazle, is in love with Charles. Joseph decides to woo Maria for her fortune while courting the young Lady Teazle at the same time. Joseph tempts Lady Teazle to his room where the untimely arrival of Sir Peter forces her to hide behind a screen while the men converse. Finally, the screen is thrown down and Lady Teazle is revealed. While this action progresses, Oliver Surface, a wealthy uncle of Charles and Joseph returns unexpectedly from India. While he is still unrecognized by the nephews, he decides to test their character. Joseph's hypocrisy is revealed to everyone and Sir Peter decides to give Maria in marriage to the honest and cheerful Charles. He forgives Lady Teazle's indiscretion and the curtain falls on one of England's greatest satires.

The Moscow Art Theater produced this play without any "sociologizing." The characters are presented in good fun, and the smiling hypocrisy that we prefer to see in our neighbours and the vanity in ourselves that makes us its victims was well presented. The superb gallery of comic and recognizable figures is still a favourite with Soviet audiences.
CHAPTER V

Mikhail Bulgakov on the Stage of the Moscow Art Theater

While analyzing the trends in the repertoire of the Moscow Art Theater one is struck by the prominent position held by the Soviet playwright, Mikhail Bulgakov. Three of his famous plays were presented on the stage of the Theater: The Days of the Turbins, Moliere, and an adaptation of Gogol's Dead Souls.

The Moscow Art Theater first became acquainted with Bulgakov in 1925. The Theater was impressed with his novel, The White Guard. The directors wanted to adapt his novel in the form of a play. Bulgakov accepted the idea and began to adapt his novel to the stage.

Bulgakov was readily accepted by the young actors who had been trained since the days of the Revolution. The Theater had been in anticipation for a play about contemporary events in which the young actors could excel. The memory of the Civil War was fresh in everyone's minds.

The Days of the Turbins

In 1926, Stanislavsky and Ilya Sudyakov presented Bulgakov's play, The Days of the Turbins. The play was a profound depiction of the motives and morality behind both Reds and Whites. In the beginning of the play, the Turbins and their friends are Whites. By the end of the play, except for Studzinsky, everyone has joined the Reds. The play dramatized the change in allegiance and the reasons for it.
After its premiere, the play was attacked for being too sympathetic for the Whites and "not revolutionary enough" for the times. The play was taken off the stage under the pressure of official criticism. A study of the plot reveals why it was temporarily removed.

Bulgakov depicted the terrible collapse that occurred during the first few years of the Revolution. The action takes place in the Ukraine which had been invaded by the Germans. The Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky was a German puppet on the throne at Kiev. The play depicts the fate of the Turbin family and their friends who are caught up in the confusion of struggle. Many Russian officers joined the Hetman to try and save Russia from the approaching anarchy and civil war. When the Germans returned to Germany in 1918 to quell their own revolution, they left Skoropadsky without any strong military support. He runs off with the retreating German troops and leaves his supporters to defend the Ukraine. The Ukrainian peasants oppose the Hetman, under the leadership of the nationalist, Symon Petliura. The Turbins, along with their officer friends and cadets are left to fight off Petliura's fierce nationalists. The Turbins have no chance of winning the conflict. This resistance and futile struggle is used to show the good and bad aspects of those who by fate fought under the banner of the "White" movement.

One of the main characters is Colonel Alexei Turbin. He is a member of the old regime and the White Guard. His loyalty to the old regime is unquestionable and he is determined to fight despite the
knowledge that he will be beaten. When the forces of the Reds are closing in on him he suddenly realizes that he has backed the wrong side.

Captain Myshlayevsky is a talkative dullard. Before the play ends he also realizes that he has served the wrong cause. He announces:

"In front are the Red Guardsman, like a wall; to our rear are the speculators and every kind of human garbage with the Hetman; and in between I am. Your humble servant. I am fed up with being used like dung to fill holes in the ice. Let them (the Communists) mobilize me! At least I shall know that I am serving in the Russian Army."

Lieutenant Shirvinsky is the symbol of the fashionable "perfumed cadet." He is initially portrayed as a pleasant young officer with little ability to fight. As the battle grows intense, he proves to be a brilliant soldier.

Nikolka Turbin has just finished his training as a cadet. His first action comes in defending Kiev against Petliura. He passionately seeks the glory of battle. In his romantic attitude toward fighting he does not comprehend for what he is fighting.

The black sheep of the retinue turns out to be Captain Talberg who is Elena Turbina's husband. He is a man who puts in appearances and is incapable of action. He is a coward and a misfit. When the battle is going against the White Guard, he decides to leave his wife and native land to flee with the German occupational army.

This, briefly, is the plot. Petliura's nationalists are seen in darker colours than the Whites. This very fact made Bulgakov the
target of critics who called him a "dangerous counter revolutionary."

The audience's approval of the production saved Bulgakov from possible extinction. The war weary people hoped that this play was a sign that the Soviet authorities had declared a peace with the Whites. It appeared that the new regime had forgiven its enemies and had become reconciled.

When the censorship saw a closed preview they were shocked and banned the play. When they learned that the Theater had invested an enormous sum on the production they preferred to remove the ban. Stanislavsky, himself requested from Stalin that the ban be removed. Stalin felt that the play should be shown because it showed an "intelligent and powerful enemy."

For this play, Bulgakov had been slandered as an "anti-Soviet dramatist." When Stalin showed his approval, the Soviet press dismissed its charges but kept a wary eye on Bulgakov.

The Moscow Art Theater now felt that Stalin and the Party was on its side. Stanislavsky was confident that he had won a victory. To show his faith in the system, Stanislavsky decided to produce Ivanov's *Armoured Train 14-69* in 1927. This time, however, the Whites were shown as cruel and decadent murderers who had sold their country and the lives of their countrymen to a vicious, hostile world of interventionists.

Molière

Bulgakov was alarmed at the controversy he had caused. He decided
to turn his attention to more acceptable subjects and plays. In 1931 he finished writing his tragedy, Moliere. In 1936, the play was produced by Stanislavsky.

*Moliere* stands alone as a lonely island in a sea of Soviet plays. The play was condemned by Party critics and the Theater was condemned for its presentation. What brought on such an unfavourable review? An analysis of the plot provides the answer.

The title, *Moliere*, would immediately bring to mind a portrait of the personal life of the great French dramatist. Anyone familiar with French drama would probably assume that the plot would be about the love intrigue in Moliere's life. His life was ruined completely by sinister and purely family circumstances, a common occurrence in his day. Bulgakov relied upon the theory that Moliere had, without realizing it, married his own daughter.

The prologue of Bulgakov's play reveals the wings of the stage during the premiere performance of a play in which Moliere has a prominent role. In the fashion of the time, the play is being given a first audience in King Louis XIV's court. Moliere informs his mistress, the actress Madeline Bejart, that he is in love with her sister, Armande. He has full intentions of marrying the girl. Madeline is quick to tell Lagrange, her lover's friend, that she has never been able to muster enough courage to tell Moliere that Armande is not her sister, but is in fact, her own daughter. Madeline's secret leaks
out and rumors begin to circulate that Moliere has, in fact, married his own daughter. Louis XIV's reaction is complete disgust. He withdraws his royal protection and Moliere is drummed out of the court despite his violent protestations of innocence. Gradually, he grows old and sick under the continual rain of insults. His very person is shunned and former friends refuse to see him. His wife cannot stand the blot on her life and she leaves him in his sorrow. His favourite pupil despises his master and turns informer. The King finally publicly disgraces Moliere and his play *Tartuffe* is forbidden.

Finally, Bulgakov shows Moliere dying from a broken heart at a performance of *Le Malade Imaginaire* which is in itself, symbolic.

Why did such a straightforward plot merit such violent criticism? The reason is simple. Bulgakov did not intend this play to be the story of Moliere's life. The theme of the play was an expose of the "cabal of hypocrites." Moliere had produced a play, *Tartuffe* in which the clergy and aristocracy are insulted and humiliated. The comedy was directed against them and the "cabal of hypocrites" who are a secret society of feudal lords under the patronage of the reactionary Archbishop of Paris. This party of people believed that they alone, possessed the absolute truth. They tried every evil trick available to try and silence the freedom-loving Moliere who posed a threat to their very existence. Bulgakov exposed the ruthless suppression of free speech and creative endeavour. What the critics saw was not an event in French history, but an analogy to the present with Bulgakov as Moliere and the Party as the "cabal of hypocrites."
Louis XIV was interpreted as a prototype of the dictator, Joseph Stalin. The Party soon became aware of his intentions. The play was allowed a few performances and then removed. The critics felt that Bulgakov's presentation did not "truthfully show the life and works of one of the outstanding classical playwrights on the stage."

Was Bulgakov correct in his analogy? Of the thirty-six plays he wrote, only five were permitted to be performed. In 1938, he reportedly died of a broken heart.

The presentation of Bulgakov's *Moliere* is significant also from a historical and staging point of view. For several years before the presentation of *Moliere*, Soviet critics had felt that it was time for a tremendous upsurge in Soviet theater. Instead of a rise, there was a marked decline. During this decline, Stanislavsky tried to raise the Moscow Art Theater to its previous position of importance in the world of theater arts. He decided to present Bulgakov's *Moliere* and *Moliere*’s own play, *Tartuffe*, early in 1939.

Stanislavsky entered into the production of *Moliere* against the trend toward naturalistic presentations. The properties for his production gave off a gloomy symbolism. The theatrical costumes in Moliere's dressing room were in piles on the floor and thrown loosely on available furniture. The scene harkened back to the grotesque masks of the commedia dell'arte. The wooden portals were decorated with monstrous clowns in hideous masks. In the scenes which portray the "cabal of hypocrites" all is masked in a silent gloom. The
reactionary group had tortured the actors into betraying Moliere. The stage was at all times immersed in a mysterious and gloomy light. The gloomiest scene of all is in Moliere's bedroom where he lies dying, tortured by his conscience and completely despondent. This was the last experiment in staging that the Party allowed.

**Dead Souls**

In 1932, Stanislavsky decided to present Bulgakov's adaptation of Gogol's *Dead Souls*. The presentation was simple, restrained and a complete failure. Let us examine Gogol's original plot.

In *Dead Souls* Gogol gave a portrait gallery of some of the most grotesque characters in Russian literature. The "hero" of the unfinished play is Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov. Chichikov is an adventurer and opportunist who makes his appearance at the turn of the nineteenth century. His main occupation consists in buying "dead souls." These "dead souls" are the names of serfs who have died since the last census but who still continue to cost their owners taxes until they can be written off in the next census. Chichikov uses their names in order to get from his uncle's estate the money refused him in the old man's will. Chichikov decides to mortgage his own "estate" with its dead souls to the Trustee Committee. To find dead souls, he rides from village to village visiting landowners and exerting his charm to obtain the names of their dead serfs. The villagers soon become aware of his activities and begin to talk amongst
themselves. They cannot guess what he is up to so they accuse him of all sorts of crimes. He has a brief encounter with the law and is arrested. He is finally released by an unscrupulous lawyer who brings to light all the local scandals. The villagers are afraid to prosecute Chichikov and are glad to see him get out of the town.

Bulgakov was only one of many who had adapted *Dead Souls* to the stage. As a young man, Bulgakov was fascinated with Gogol's characters. He wrote a short novel, *A Continuation of Chichikov's Journeys*. Previous adaptations had shown only Chichikov's purchases of the dead souls. Nobody had attempted to continue his exploits. Bulgakov succeeded in culminating the "hero's" actions. His adaptation of Gogol's *Dead Souls* contains the same dramatic structure as Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Chichikov plans to make money by selling the dead souls he has bought up. His plans develop rapidly, reach a peak of success and suddenly everything ends in a complete fiasco.

Stanislavsky concentrated on bringing to life, the portrait gallery of Gogolian characters that Bulgakov had worked so hard to adapt to the stage. The actors were required to reveal the complex natures of these characters and the emphasis was on revealing the inner truth of the characters. Bulgakov was concerned with revealing the centre of the character's nature about which his life revolves. Stanislavsky's method suited Bulgakov's interpretation of the famous types found in the original *Dead Souls* by Gogol.

Bulgakov's presentation of Chichikov buying the "dead souls"
was magnificent. Why then, was the play a failure? Despite his research and understanding of the lives of Gogol's characters, Bulgakov was attacked by the critics. Bulgakov had neglected to criticize the old order. There was no "social command" or "social message." Party critics called the play a "step backwards." The Moscow Art Theater was accused of "rejecting the past." The Theater did not present the political, social, and psychological ills of Old Russia. The Theater did not portray a nation waiting for its release from the bonds of serfdom. Despite the efforts to please the Party, the crime had been committed - no propaganda content.
CHAPTER VI

Modern Soviet Drama on the Stage of the Moscow Art Theater

In 1927 the Bolsheviks celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The enthusiasm of the Party toward this event was felt in every field of endeavour. In the same year the Moscow Art Theater decided to give their first presentation of a purely Soviet topic. They adapted to the stage a novel by Vsevolod Ivanov called Armoured Train 14-69. This play is significant because it marks Stanislavsky's acceptance of the regime, and it marks a turning point in the Theater's history and repertoire.

Armoured Train 14-69

The play is an outstanding drama dealing with the struggles of the Civil War. The action of the play takes place in a fortified Russian town on the Pacific Ocean. The town is occupied and controlled by White Guardsmen. The Red Army is slowly pushing the remnants of the White Guardsmen into the ocean. Captain Nezelasov is the commander of an armoured train that protects the retreating White Army. The train is bound for the fortified city, but it must also break through a line of partisans who have surrounded Japanese and American interventionist forces.

One of the Communist heroes, Peklevanov, makes his appearance. He has just escaped from the prison in the town. He succeeds in
convincing, Vershinin, a popular man with the rural peasants. He becomes a deadly enemy of the old order when he learns that the Japanese have burned his village and killed his two beloved children.

The armoured train has halted at a railway station. Nezelasov is portrayed as a confused and disinterested commander. He is incapable of making decisions and is afraid of an enemy that exists only in his mind. He finally decides to push on into the corridor occupied by Vershinin and his partisans.

Vershinin has an army of peasants. He undertakes to capture the armoured train and use it to attack the fortified city.

In scene V, the partisans are seen along the railroad embankment awaiting the train. Their problem is to stop the train without damaging it or the rails. A student, Mitia, decides that one of them must lie on the rails and pretend to be dead. According to the regulations of the old regime, the engineer must halt his engine and remove the corpse before travelling any farther. Everyone is afraid to volunteer. A peasant, Okorok, throws himself on the rails but loses heart when the train approaches. Finally, a Chinese, Sing Wu, places his body on the tracks because "The Chinese want to show their importance to Russia." The engineer stops and is killed. After a protracted battle, the White Guardsmen give up from sheer exhaustion. The student, Mitia, takes command of the throttle and the train advances on the fortified town.
Peklevanov tires of waiting for Vershinin and the captured train. He gives orders for the revolt to begin on the sixteenth of September, 1919. Just before the revolt he is shot by a Japanese spy. As soon as the revolt is underway, the armoured train arrives on time. The partisans force their way into the town. The red flag they were going to use for a banner is used to cover Peklevanov's corpse instead. The play ends with Masha, Peklevanov's wife, softly crying over his dead body.

The main characters in the play are Nezelasov, Vershinin, and Peklevanov. Each character is skillfully portrayed as an individual rather than an idea.

Nezelasov, a captain in the White Army, sums up the desperate situation in which he finds himself.

"...Russia has kicked us out. We all thought we were indispensable and suddenly we are given notice to quit. Not even a notice, we're just flung out, neck and crop. And we sit here waiting for the first decent excuse to run to America. We run, like pus out of a wound."

Nezelasov does not want to engage the enemy. He is a coward and wants to run away to America with his sweetheart, Nadia. His mind is a vast plain of confusion, jealousy, and self-pity. In scene III he describes himself:

"All my life, I've believed in myself; it seems I was mistaken. Perhaps it's good to realize one's mistakes before death. I'm only thirty years old. You can't mend steel, you have to refund it. You see him... (pointing to a Chinese) if only he had some cocaine...."
When the partisans attack the train, Nezelasov is delirious and ruled by jealousy. He pictures his sweetheart, Nadia, in the arms of an indolent White General in the town. He orders his soldiers to fire on imaginary targets. He is finally killed as he steps out of the train to view the enemy. The partisan, Vershinin, curses him and spares the life of the sleeping white soldiers for "they are our own people and they'll understand when we speak to them."

Vershinin is a strong and popular peasant leader. When he learns of the Japanese atrocities in his village and the death of his children he agrees to hide the members of the Revolutionary Committee. He cannot stand the thought of foreign soldiers destroying his land and people. During a meeting of the revolutionaries, a priest enters and threatens Vershinin with the wrath of God. He answers him in deject bitterness:

"A just God! They burnt down the village, but the Church was left standing. And for years, I worshipped such a God."

A peasant arrives, dragging behind him, an interventionist, French-Canadian soldier. Everybody wants to shoot him. Vershinin in a true proletarian manner says:

"Hold on comrades, there's been enough shooting. There's a better way comrades. Here's a young man, perhaps a peasant like ourselves, who lives in a far country and ploughs the land like the rest of us. We should be comrades but he doesn't know that. He doesn't understand our language. They tell him lies as they told us lies and send him to burn up our land."

Here is the theme of the international Communist revolution. A peasant
makes the soldier say Lenin's name and he is soon singing a revolutionary song. Vershinin is an able leader and a true patriot son. His mind is clear and his purpose in life is to rid his land of its enemies. He respects Peklevanov and carries on the struggle after he is dead.

Peklevanov, is the organizer of rebellion. He is a small man who wears glasses and appears as an intellectual throughout the play. He stands for the broom that is sweeping the trash of centuries into the sea. As a wise and just member of the Party, he is the source of inspiration for the Russian peasants - the salt of the earth. In scene VII, Peklevanov shows his contempt toward his country's enemies by blowing his nose on a captured Japanese flag. Peklevanov is so interested in his country's freedom that he does not take precaution to protect himself. He is shot and killed by a Japanese spy. Before his death, however, he has laid down the plans of rebellion. When his body is brought before the revolutionaries, in the town, they pause in reverence and cover his body with their banner, the red flag. They renew their attack on the city with increased determination. His death is the only sad moment in the entire play.

The Moscow Art Theater made the author change several passages depicting the main characters of the play before the presentation could take place. Ivanov did not resent the advice of the Theater. He was glad to have his characters humanized and separated from the stereotyped members of the Party. The play is notable because it was the first time in theater history that Lenin's name was mentioned on
the stage. The scene in which Okorok, the partisan, converts the captured soldier to communism was hailed as superb. It was an unrealistic scene made real only by the enthusiasm of those who celebrated the Revolution's success. The critics praised the presentation because it showed a man who was both a leader and an ordinary fellow. He personifies the desires of the nation to mould a new society. Peklevanov resembled Lenin in his modesty, character, and wisdom.

The premiere of the Armoured Train 14-69 took place on November 8, 1927. Stanislavsky had successfully included a number of "inner innovations." He wanted to portray the Russian people who fought for the Revolution, and not the Party members. This was Stanislavsky's first presentation in which he welcomed the Bolshevik way of life. The actors tried hard to understand every phrase of Ivanov's play. They believed that the characters were true-to-life. Stanislavsky revealed each individual in the crowd scene, with his own peculiar mastery of the ensemble.

The Moscow Art Theater gave Ivanov's play one of the most important innovations in Soviet theater. The characters are not just "positive" and "negative." There are many levels of action for each character. The mass of people who struggled in the Revolution are revealed as individuals with their own idiosyncracies. There was no presentation of the stereotyped masses or the beastly Whites. The frailties of Peklevanov were clearly shown. He was a slow-moving intellectual with a narrow field of experience. He was absent-minded and his ideas were
not always clear. Kachalov played the role of Vershinin. He portrayed
the profound folk wisdom and spiritual sincerity of the Russian peasant.
He revolted against the cheap picture of the "revolutionary peasant."

Stanislavsky gave strict instructions to Victor Simov, the set
designer. Once more, the naturalistic detail of the Moscow Art Theater
was used to highlight each detail of the peasant's environment.
Stanislavsky had accepted the realities of the Soviet regime and had
revolted against the "black and white" presentations of the Soviets.

Squaring the Circle

In 1928, The Moscow Art Theater performed Valentin Katayev's
Squaring the Circle. The drama is significant because it is an amusing
self-criticism of the society the Soviets were building. It was probably
the liveliest farce, that the Theater produced in the 1920's.

The play opens with two members of the Communist Youth, Vasya
and Abram, sharing one room. The young men decide to get married and
both bring their brides, Ludmila and Tonya to this crowded little
room. At first, they draw a chalk line to separate the two families
and offer some privacy. Ludmila wants to pretty up the spartan-like
surroundings. She stretches a curtain across the room. This curtain
suggests a deeper division between the couples. Vasya is an earnest
Communist, but his wife Ludmila, wants to wait on him like an ordinary
middle-class wife. Abram is an earthy fellow concerned with himself
and his wife, Tonya, would rather buy Soviet books than eat anything.
The ill-assorted couples develop tempers that go from bad to worse. Finally, a Communist Party official, Flavious, like a benevolent god from the Party machinery, gives his assent to the interchange of partners in the marriages.

The play has a dual quality of satire and searching. It is first of all, a lively knock-about farce making simple-hearted fun of the more obvious paradoxes of Soviet life. Secondly, it is a play which manages very well in reconciling the boisterous satire with a subtly effective profession of a fervent faith in the Communist enterprise. Thirdly, the play provides an elusively ironic conclusion which leaves the audience wondering just how deeply the satire is supposed to cut. This conclusion left the Soviet censorship wondering whether or not the author had succeeded in putting something over on them. Katayev's play is a two-edged sword that hacks away at the shortcomings of the new society but does not strike hard enough to draw any blood.

The characters of the play are familiar to those who know the Soviet Union. The search for a new code of love, romance, and morality as well as an end to the crowded housing conditions still continues. The youthful followers of Marx and Lenin are completely human and vulnerable to the upheavals of love that confront the youth of other social systems. Katayev has succeeded in giving us four unforgettable characters: Vasya, Abram, Ludmila and Tonya.

Vasya is a member of the Communist Youth. He is a serious-minded young worker, simple and abrupt in his manners, sincere and possessing
no frills. He is the opposite of Abram. Despite his honest nature he picks up a guitar and begins courting Abram's wife, Tonya. Vasya cannot stand the bourgeois ideas and practices of his own wife, Ludmila. He says that he is "beginning to rot in this bourgeois atmosphere." He wants to marry Tonya. He gives his ideas on the ideal married life:

"We'll all be happy. We'll read together, work together, love together, have a good time together."

Tonya counters his words with the following Communist morality:

"Today I register with one man. Tomorrow I divorce him; the next day I register with another man! What kind of an example are we setting to our other party comrades, and to the most active elements among the non-partisan youth and the poorer peasantry?"

The two kiss just as the Party official, Falvious enters. This kiss represents their reality. The Communist youth come and tear down the partition as something false and below the proleatariat. Vasya and Tonya leave the room in embarrassment as a poet, Emilian comes in and reveals the truth about the couples' marriages. Finally Vasya confronts Abram with his love for Tonya and the two stand shouting at each other. Flavious arrives in time to calm the two combattants down.

Abram is also a member of the Communist Youth. He is Vasya's roommate and friend. He possesses frivolous mundane appetites that contrast with Vasya's genuine serious nature. Abram discusses the basis of his marriage: "mutual understanding, equitable division of labour, and worker's solidarity." Abram becomes infatuated with Ludmila. His own wife Tonya, is too interested in reading to even feed him.
Ludmila can cook and sew and this appeals to Abram. Ludmila asks him to thank her for the sewing job she did on his torn trousers. She wants him to kiss her hands. He runs into his room to consult his book on Communist ethics but someone has stolen it. He always poses the question to himself: "is it ethical?" Infidelity is not regarded as a good thing by the Party. The chance of friends breaking up and the resultant poor image is a weapon to keep the youth in line. Everything revolves on being a respectable member of the Party. Abram sums up his dilemma: "Why does everything come out so unethical when everything really feels so ethical? I must take a long walk and figure it out." Abram is ashamed of his deeds but his shame soon vanishes when Flavius says "If you love each other, what's to stop you? Rush down to the marriage Registry. You can't hurt the Revolution that way and there's no sense in running away to a village." At his declaration the poet, Emillian recites an on the spot poem:

"The city has gnawed me to pieces
I will not see my native moon,
I will tear my collar wide open
That I may hang myself soon."

Ludmila is a real materialistic woman. She does not belong to the Komsomol (Communist Youth) and is chiefly interested in her own pretty face, domestic comforts, and her boy friends. Ludmila is the one who suggests a chalk line and curtain to divide their room. For all her frivolity, Ludmila keeps a clean and homey apartment while Tonya's is bleak and dirty. Ludmila's fondling enrages Vasya. Her
fondling nature completely captures Abram. She can sew and cook but
knows very little of Party politics. She entices Abram to her apartment
with delicious food. She knows that the way to a man’s heart is
through his stomach. Ludmila plays hard to get and this increases
Abram’s love for her. She decides to leave the apartment with all
her belongings when she learns her husband is unfaithful to her.
Finally she returns when she has no place to go. The two rival girls
finally embrace each other after the truth is out that the couples are
poorly matched.

Tonya is a serious-minded member of the Komsomol. She has no
love for feminine frivolities and she is determined to be as tough
and useful in the world as any man. She is pretty but completely
unaware of her good looks. When she learns that the two couples must
share the same apartment she simply replies: "Trifles. There’s room
for all of us here. Nothing terrible." Tonya is so interested in
reading that she does not feed or love her husband. She does not
know the graces of family living. She is as cold to her husband as
the print on the pages she reads. She is akin to Vasya in her serious-
ness and love of the Communist way of life. She is a simple girl and
when asked by Vasya if she loves Abram she replies: "I don’t understand
why you place the questions so ideologically. Do I love, or don’t I
love. I don’t understand. It’s not correctly formulated." Tonya
is well steeped in Communist morality and is ashamed when the poet,
Emilian reveals her love for another woman’s husband. She finally says:
"We shall have to surrender our personal well-being in the interest of general social well-being." Vasya simply replies: "How unpleasant." She protests about the use of alcohol at her wedding party and only agrees when Flavious says it is acceptable. She finally reconciles herself to her shortcomings. The play ends in the confusion of squeals and snatches of programs heard on Vasya's radio. The curtain does not fall, however, until Flavious has spoken: "Never mind kids. Don't be bashful. Go to it. Love one another and don't play the fool. It can't hurt the Revolution."

Fear

Fear, written by Alexander Afinogenov in 1930, deals with the relation between the intellectuals and the Soviet proletarian regime. The play deals specifically with intellectuals pursuing abstract scientific projects, but the message deals with the intelligentsia also.

The Communists believe that science cannot be apolitical. Science is a weapon of the class struggle. The conversion of Professor Ivan Ilich Borodin, prototype of Academician Ivan Pavlov, to the Soviet view point is the subject of the play. Borodin, an honest, old-fashioned and individualistic scientist, and Director of the Institute of Physiological Stimuli, comes to the conclusion that the vast majority of persons in the Soviet Union live in a constant state of fear. He concludes that eighty percent of human actions are stimulated
by fear. The other twenty percent are stimulated by opportunism. He is charged with treason for his views and imprisoned. He soon discovers that he has taken into account only the noisily dissatisfied people who work around him. He decides that the great bulk of the Soviet people, far from being victims of their fears, are swayed by a great and genuine enthusiasm. Having reached this conclusion, he is accepted as a true "friend of the people."

 Fear was banned in 1931 as counter-revolutionary. Later, it opened at the State Dramatical Theater in Leningrad and at the Moscow Art Theater. It was the most popular play in the U.S.S.R. for two years after its initial performances. In 1938, a shift in the party line saw all of Afinogenov's plays taken off the Soviet stages. The conversion of Borodin prophesied the 1948 shift of all U.S.S.R. scientists to the party line, particularly to the shift of biologists to the support of the imposter, the Academician Trofim Lysenko, and the abandonment of the universally accepted principles of genetics.

Afinogenov is unsparing in his picture of individuals trying to adjust themselves to the Soviet order. A professor, Zakharov, is dismissed because he has no background in Marxism. Former aristocrats beg in the streets, among them an admiral's daughter, whose son denies his parentage in the hope of being accepted by the Communists but is nevertheless thrown out of the party to rejoin his mother in begging.

It would be wrong to feel that the citizens accepted in the play as loyal Soviet subjects escape the dramatist's satire. Afinogenov
said of the fearful eighty percent: "The dairymaid fears confiscation of her cows; the peasant, forcible collectivization; the Soviet worker, perpetual purging by the Party; the political worker, the accusation of lukewarmness; the scientific worker, the accusation of idealism; the technical worker, the accusation of sabotage." Of the opportunistic twenty percent he wrote: "They are the owners of the country. They enter institutions of science with arrogant faces, stamping their boots, laughing and chattering loudly. But for them there is brain fear; the brain of the worker fears the overtaxing of his ability that develops a persecution mania." Despite the fact that the last was re-written by the censors, no one could be more critical of the shortcomings of Marxism as applied by Stalin and his followers, than Afinogenov.

Borodin, is a scientist of the pre-Revolutionary stamp. He is an intellectual possessing all the Russian intensity and excitable nature. His theories are stated in the first scene of the play:

"Since the very first dawn of the earliest human specimens on earth to the last sunset of the human race, always - love, hunger, rage, fear." Borodin is upset to find that a girl from the working class, Elena Makarova, has come from a worker's school to a responsible scientific position. Borodin is indignant over the late evening visit of Kimbayev, a Kazak workman, who has come to work at the Institute. The Kazak's impertinence, roughness, and suggestions to Borodin to criticize himself, eats away at his good nature.
Borodin is dismayed at his old friend, Professor Bobrov, who changes to the side of the Communists early in the play. He feels that everyone has lost their principles. Borodin's discontent is heightened by the constant comments of Kastalsky, a graduate student. He needles Borodin with the idea that the uncultured masses are rising to the top with their unprincipled tactics. In Act III, Borodin decides to oppose the Communist regime. Kastalsky says: "The world is awaiting for the final accusing words of science." Borodin is still loyal to the system. He tells Kastalsky: "But our Institute first began to live with the Revolution." Borodin is hesitant about publishing an anti-Soviet paper abroad. Borodin is getting old and sentimental. When he delivers his speech he is unaware that his theories will be rejected and a strong rebuttal thrown in his face. Borodin faces the Secret Police as a broken man. A secret conspiracy turns against him and accuses him of crimes he did not commit. Kastalsky turns against him in a double dealing move. Borodin's predictions about the unprincipled people were correct. These people, however, are remnants of the old order fighting to survive in the Soviet system. Borodin dismisses the hangers on in his house, making a clean sweep of the old order. He is truly sorry for his mistakes. After criticizing himself in the Communist fashion, the old, sincere professor is welcomed into the ranks of the progressive Communist scientists.

Kastalsky is Borodin's favourite pupil. Kastalsky is a graduate of the Institute and comes from the aristocratic class. He is
frightened to see so many of the proletariat come into science and push him out. When he learns that there is a competition open for the assistantship with Borodin he says:

"The son of a member of the Academy and a senator cannot become an assistant. But a metal worker's daughter, Elena Makarova, will become your assistant - and she will be sent abroad too."

Kastalsky wants to go abroad to watch the antics of night club dancers. He does not want to study. Kastalsky personifies all the double-dealing and idleness of the old order. The conflict arises when he opposes Elena, Makarova and her progressive ideas. He even lies about his association with Professor Borodin, thus putting the old man in a poor light. He denounces his own professor.

Elena Makarova is guilty of misplaced enthusiasm. She is unaware that she is annoying the professor with her constant political remarks:

"Look out for me! Before long I will replace Bobrov and be in charge of Bobrov's department. Then you will be my (to her husband) graduate student."

She says about politics:

"Our politics are to transform people. Feelings that were considered innate are now dying out. Envy, jealousy, anger, fear, are disappearing. Collectivity, enthusiasm, the joy of life are growing. And we will help these new stimuli to grow."

These comments better than any long digression reveal the conflict between the new and old order.

During the play, Bobrov, a former old regime professor becomes a Communist, Tsekhovoi, Elena's husband becomes infatuated with power
and becomes a friend of the old order characters. Borodin's daughter Valentina is a sculptress who finally gets her inspiration from the struggling worker and is won to the cause. Klara, is the old Bolshevik, who gives the party reasons for this play:

"The old order was foul and decaying. The new order is making a clean sweep of the rubbish of the past."

Platon Krechet

By 1935, the trend toward the production of Soviet plays was well-established. Stanislavsky was aware that the quality of the Soviet plays was slowly diminishing. Under pressure he chose one of the finest propaganda plays available and produced Platon Krechet by Alexander Korneichuk, in 1934.

The Moscow Art Theater's production was a success. Platon Krechet posed serious questions about the new life under communism. Platon Krechet is a surgeon who has grown up during the period of N.E.P. (New Economic Policy). He is a talented young man and a brave innovator in the science of surgery. His entire life in surgery is orientated toward better service for his people. He wants to conquer and eliminate the causes of immature deaths. Platon Krechet has an unbelievable spiritual cleanliness and honest attitude toward his work. In the play his plans are opposed by Arkady Pavlovich, the manager of the hospital. Arkady is a self-admiring careerist who is constantly occupied with hair-brained schemes and vulgar ideas. An example of his ideas is the scene in which he proclaims a system of
stupid dialectical methods for curing tuberculosis. He calls meetings
for political indoctrination and has no understanding of medicine. At
every opportunity he belittles Platon. He is in the way of the great
innovator's important work. The party officials see the predicament
and attempt to remove Arkady and his misplaced enthusiasm. Toward the
end of the play, Arkady, who is jealous over Platon's love for Lyda,
his former girlfriend, decides to write up a petition against him. He
cooks up charges of many accidental deaths caused by Platon's experi­
menting. The plot is complicated by an operation that Platon performs
on Lyda's father, who dies. When Lyda learns the truth that her father
was too far gone to be saved and that Arkady was evil toward Platon,
she decides to be tolerant toward him. Arkady's evil designs are
revealed after Platon saves the life of a Party Commissar who was
injured in an auto accident. The Party chastises Arkady for his deeds
and gives Platon and Lyda tickets for a long deserved rest in Moscow.

The play has excellent comical scenes. The new and advanced
ideas of communism gradually conquer the forces of reaction, but some
of the characters in this play are portrayed in true satiric tones.
These characters are those communists who through their incompetence
and misplaced zeal were sabotaging the efforts of the scientists.

The play opens with a birthday feast laid open for Platon Krechet.
He is busy in surgery and does not arrive. Styopa, an oculist, says
of Platon and his work:
"I see Platon as the engine-driver of our medical train. Ever since he has been at the throttle our train has been hurtling forward at a furious speed. You, a passenger on that train (to Terenty Bublik, an old practitioner) have been scared by Platon's speed, as you are now, by the way. Our spurt into the future still frightens you. Wake up, Terenty Osipovich, the ticket inspectors have boarded the train...."

The characters in the play speak of the "stratonauts" and "stratosphere" just as our age speaks of the "cosmonauts" and "cosmos." When Platon arrives home he is met by Berest, a party official who needs surgery on his arm. Platon sets to work immediately to help him in his own home. Platon finishes his work and plays his violin for Lyda, but she does not understand the importance of his work or his creativity. Platon has seriously criticized her proposed plans for a sanatorium. She, like Arkady, are unaware of the real issues of medicine. He says of her project:

"In designing your project, you ought to have made sure that every line, every angle of the sanatorium should afford a maximum of sunlight, for sunlight means joy and good cheer to those who will live in it. And what a site to choose - a gully! Think how damp it will be."

In Act II, the human side of Platon is revealed in his conversation with Lyda. Despite the fact he has criticized her work, he does not criticize her person. He says to her:

"Lyda....Lyda....you wouldn't listen to me...How could you know of those interminable sleepless nights...when despair/seizes you...and your heart aches with weariness."

Once more he picks up his violin to play for her. As he does, the rain falls in the patio outside. The rain is symbolic that Lyda's father has died in the hospital. The rain is used again as a symbol
of trouble when The People's Commissar is hurt in an auto accident.

Platon goes to the hospital despite his fatigue. When the operation
is completed Platon collapses in a heap at the bottom of the stairs.
This unfailing devotion was not the only cause of his collapse. He
was driven to late hours by Arkady. Arkady is chastised and loses his
position in the hospital. Platon is rewarded with the trip to Moscow
with Lyda.

Arkady is portrayed throughout the play as the antagonist to
Platon. He is tired of his existence in the small provincial town
and says:

"...And one day we'll wake up in the capital. It's stifling
here. How can one do anything worthwhile in a sleepy hollow
like this? It's so hard to work among all these narrow-minded
craftsmen. We got to get to a big city...."

Arkady is in love with Lyda. He supported her plans for the sanatorium.
Therefore, he is upset and incensed when Platon criticizes her plans.
Arkady is not alone in his stupid plans to handle medicine through
dialectics. He has an assistant, Bochkaryova, who was an assistant
in a candy factory before becoming the Chief of the Health Department.
She tries to run the hospital as a factory and has doctors inspecting
latrines. Her comments are: "It turns out you have to know something
about medicine to run a health department. Well, live and learn."

This woman is a further embarrassment to Arkady and his position
as hospital manager. Berest, the communist official has plans to get
rid of both individuals. Arkady has busied himself with social activities
for the hospital staff. He becomes terribly jealous of Platon and
seeks the aid of Terenty Bublik, an old practitioner, in writing some­
thing against Platon. The old man defends Platon and changes the
wording of the petition to read like a mild report. When Arkady meets
this failure he demands an audience with Berest, to disclose the
supposed increase in mortality caused by Platon's experiments. When
this fails, he tells Lyda that Platon operated on her father without
her permission and let him die. Lyda immediately turns against Platon
but does not go to seek comfort in Arkady. After the operation on
the party commissar, Arkady meets his enemies, at the hands of the
Party.

Lyda is one of the many females in the play. She is a symbol
of the hastily trained soviet technicians. She is an architect who
cannot understand such basic principles as making the function of a
building a consideration in design. Despite her mistakes, she is
sincere. She does not appreciate Platon's surgical ability and cannot
see any creativity in it. She dislikes Platon for his operation on
her father and his criticism. Despite the incidents, she is finally
won over to respect and then love for Platon.

Terenty Bublik, the old practitioner, says of himself:

"I have taken ninety thousand pulses, listened to ninety
thousand hearts, I, the mechanical citizen, Terenty
Osipovich Bublik."

Bublik symbolizes the hard work and devotion of the older doctors who
are training the new ones. He is the old specialist who had been
educated in Tsarist Russia. He is portrayed with great sympathy. He tells one of Platon's assistants: "No, I am only building the airfield, you are the one who will fly." Bublik reveals the rotten plans of Arkady to the communist party officials, and is a friend of Berest.

Berest, is one of the communist officials in the play who has something to say and do. The role of the party is slight in this play but the message is everything. Nothing must impede the progress of science. Berest understands the problems of the over zealous and incompetent party members and takes steps to remove them. The author has carefully satirized the abuses of these members and uses Berest as a symbol of the wise, and all powerful party, that corrects such situations in its wisdom.

There are other characters who form an important part of the background. These characters give their impressions of events and report the position of contemporary Soviet society. The play is quite realistic and demands no exaggeration of the truth.

In 1934, Platon Krechet was produced by the director, Sudakov. The Moscow Art Theater produced, The Pickwick Club and The Thunderstorm in the same year. These plays reveal three aspects of the Theater's repertoire: the Soviet play (Platon Krechet), the Russian classics (The Thunderstorm) and the West European classics (The Pickwick Club). None of the above mentioned plays were produced by Stanislavsky, in that season. The play was produced to show that Stalin's policies were the best. Stanislavsky was opposed to the use of the Art Theater as a
sounding board for propaganda. He did not produce any plays until 1938, when he presented Tartuffe.

**The Orchards of Polovchansk**

This play written in 1938 by Leonid Leonov, is the last in the series of plays to be discussed in this thesis. It is probably the best example of the many plays depicting the healthy progress of the Soviet Union before the years of the German invasion. The Moscow Art Theater produced the play in 1938. It recaptured much of the charm of Chekhov's plays, because here was an orchard and a family gathering in it. Leonov's play has a striking contrast with Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. The frustration and futility of *The Cherry Orchard* are replaced by a profound joy in communal achievement. The orchard that Chekhov made famous was sold and cut down. Leonov's orchard belongs to the state and yields more abundant and magnificent fruit each year. This play dramatizes the struggle of the Soviet Union for collectivization of the land and establishment of industry. Both are the necessary precursors of a strong national defence. The action of this play proceeds against a background of sinister figures lurking in the background. These are Russia's enemies who give, even in the cheerful moments, a sense of the ever present menace of invasion.

The play opens in an orchard in the Ukraine. The orchard is suffering from drought. Adrian Maccaveyev, the Sovkhoz director, is waiting for news of his children. There is a war going on somewhere and he wants his children home. His wife, Aleksandra Ivanovna, reveals that
she has had an affair many years ago with her husband's former friend, Matvey Pylyayev. The result of this affair is a young crippled lad, Issayka, about 18 years old. Everyone is tense, awaiting the arrival of Maccaveyev's sons. The sound of soldiers practicing war games is heard throughout the play. Pylyayev arrives and is immediately made welcome despite his sordid affair with Aleksandra years ago. Maccaveyev feels he has arrived to see his bastard son, Issayka, but the reason for his arrival is a mystery.

In Act II, Maccaveyev is seen explaining the merits of a new strain of apple he calls "Fatherland." Pylyayev tries to influence Aleksandra again. She still retains some interest in him despite his eighteen years absence. Pylyayev wants some money. She agrees to give him her son's money that was being saved for an operation on his crippled legs. Yuri, a son who has become a doctor is suspicious of Pylyayev and his motives at the orchard. The brothers arrive and sit themselves around the table. Two places, however, are vacant. The sons pledge allegiance to the fatherland and old Maccaveyev makes patriotic speeches. He indicates his country's enemies: "The Japs and the Germans are climbing...crawling...crawling nearer all the time." Pylyayev does not drink a toast to Russia and throws doubt on his allegiance. Maccaveyev's only daughter Masha, has news that Vasili, one of the missing sons is on a secret mission. A visitor arrives and is set upon by the boxer son, Anatoly. The stranger beats him. The visitor is Otshelnikov, a Red Commander and good friend of Vasily. The young man is courting Masha also.
In Act III, the orchard serves as a hiding place for various lovers and their antics. Pylyayev receives Issayka's money and pretends to be waiting for another strange guest. The guests of Maccaveyev are making merry with cider when in comes Maccaveyev, dejected and carrying a newspaper. Everyone runs into the woods at his arrival. This flight scene was shown well on the Moscow Art Theater's revolving stage. The stage turned to reveal apple trees filing by endlessly. Masha quizzes Otshelnikov about the fate of her brother who has been lost in war. The empty places at the table were symbolic of sons who would never return. Toward the end of Act III soldiers appear at the house while guns boom in the distance.

In Act IV, the action takes place in the orchard's old mansion. The brothers are packing their bags to leave. The boys disapprove of Pylyayev who has insulted their father and been a bad influence on the house. Maccaveyev sums up his life to his boys:

"They say in that other world there is no trouble and grief. But I always loved my troubles...I adore conquering them and breaking them. (He looks at his hands). Look at them. They are dear, my hands, and all in veins."

This scene is very symbolic. It is a continuation of Dostoevsky's image of the peasant Marei in "Diary of a Writer" and his love for the soil. Out of this soil comes the strength for Russia to fight and defend the fatherland. Pylyayev eats his last supper in the home and prepares to leave. He turns to go out but is seized by some men who have entered the home. Otshelnikov reveals that Pylyayev was a traitor and a spy
who had returned to get information on the Russian manoeuvres. Maccaveyev goes to the door and invites the wind to enter. This wind is a symbol of a cleaning power that sweeps the last traces of evil out of his home. The boys leave and Masha confirms her love for Otshelnikov. Otshelnikov receives news that he is needed immediately in case the Russians must engage the enemy. The curtain falls on the last act covered in sinister suspense of a coming conflict.

The plot has been discussed in detail because it means almost as much in the play as the action of the characters. The constant sound of guns, the sinister figures in the orchard, the missing sons, all contribute to a feeling of suspense that is difficult to describe.

Maccaveyev is the director of the state owned orchard. He is an old man who has given his life to making the soil produce good things. He has also contributed six fine sons and a daughter to the future of Russia. He is the symbol of all that is good in the Russian peasant. When he is confronted with Pylyayev he welcomes him rather than throwing him off the premises. Maccaveyev's soul is as big as the orchard he planted. He awaits his talented sons because he feels he will not survive the coming war. He is getting old and he wants to impart his wisdom to his boys in the time honoured patriarchal custom. Despite his bad heart he goes out into the night to repair the fencing around his orchards. He is afraid that the soldiers will destroy the orchard. Maccaveyev knows life very well and predicts that his young daughter, Masha will run away. He calls her "sparrow," in the traditional manner of naming
the youngest daughter after a bird. He has only forgiveness for his errant wife. He loves her bastard son, Issayka as he loves his own. He married Aleksandra, after his first wife died. Maccaveyev is firmly convinced that the socialist system is the right way of life. Throughout the play he expounds all the good things that will come in the future. His part in the new world is the production of bigger and better apples. His supreme contribution is in giving his sons to the field of bloody harvest, - the war. At the news of his son's death he is silent. He knows that some must die so that others must live. As his sons leave the home he says: "Let them break their heads against your chests."

Just then a thunderous noise breaks out in the background and the rain pours signalling the end of the drought and the preparation for war.

Just as Maccaveyev symbolizes all that is good about the Russian peasant and collective labour, so Matvey Pylyayev symbolizes the evil that threatens Russia. He returns to his birthplace to shame Maccaveyev's wife, Aleksandra. He did not come to see his bastard son, Issayka, but to spy on his own people. He asks for his son's operation money and steals from Maccaveyev. The evil that emanates from his being permeates through to the brothers who are uneasy in his presence.

Aleksandra Ivanovna, is Maccaveyev's young wife. She married him long after his first wife died. While Maccaveyev was away on the front during the First World War, she had an affair with Pylyayev. She describes herself:
"Look how my face has broadened out and how dull my eyes have become (Maccaveyev caresses her hand). It was very simple Adrian, much simpler than these words. I married you when I was a little girl. I had grown up together with your children. And my sister Nastenka, when she was dying, made me promise never to leave the children. Then you left for the front. And then Matvey came here. It began in the morning, and I thought it would be over by evening. I was walking on the road and he met me by accident. He stopped his horse and kept following me with his eyes."

Aleksandra's daughter comes to her and tells her in a fuzzy way about her dream in which "everything fell and broke to bits." Masha is like her mother in that she has hidden the fact she had a lover outside of the orchard. Aleksandra maintains a guilt complex throughout the play. It is dispelled when she learns that Pylyayev has turned traitor. She loves her crippled son Issayka. Maccaveyev had forgiven her many years ago. The love and wisdom of her husband have kept her in order for years.

Otshelnikov is a symbol of the young Soviet youth bravely defending the fatherland. He is honest, decent, brave, and determined to rid the world of evil and war. His love for Masha is as pure as the rain that falls finally on the orchard. Before he leaves he comments to Issayka in words that describe himself:

"Everybody loves you here, everybody has faith in you."

The theme of faith and love versus the forces of evil ends as a beautiful close to one of the finest Soviet plays every produced by the Moscow Art Theater.
CHAPTER VII

IN CONCLUSION

The Moscow Art Theater grew out of the hopes and aspirations of two great men, K.S. Stanislavsky, and V.I. Nemirovich-Danchenko. From its inception in June 1897, to its opening performance in 1898, the basis for one of the world's greatest theaters was laid. On the eve of the 1905 Revolution, the Theater had already proven to its audiences that it was a center of intellectual fervor and experiment. One of Russia's greatest lyric writers, Anton Pavlovich Chekov realized the potential of the new enterprise and wrote The Cherry Orchard for the theater that was to make him famous.

Against this background of experimentation, fervour and development of theatrical arts, the Moscow Art Theater grew into a company that commanded the attention of the world. In 1924, the troupe went to New York for its presentation of Gogol's The Inspector General. The actors were given standing ovations at every performance. In 1965, the Theater appeared again in New York with another of Gogol's works, Dead Souls adapted by M. Bulgakov. This time the audience was cool and held many reservations about the Theater for the new performances were only shadows of great ones in the past.

What happened to this magnificent giant? The purpose of this thesis was to analyze the trends in the repertoire of the Moscow Art Theater. The subject could have been treated in many ways which would
have revealed basically the same trends. It is difficult to appreciate these trends without some understanding of the history of Soviet Theater. Indeed, the trends which have been revealed by a sampling of the better plays are dependent upon forces which gradually assumed control over the creative endeavour of the Theater. The Moscow Art Theater which had been conceived as a theater that would present plays from the point of view of art, completely divorced from financial, religious and political considerations met tremendous opposition. Gradually the Theater presented its repertoire free of any religious or financial considerations but within five years of the Revolution of 1917 it began to feel the pressure of political forces. These forces with their "social commands" and "social messages" made themselves felt in every area where art was present. The tremendous heritage that was possessed by the Moscow Art Theater was turned slowly but surely into an efficient organ for the propagation of Party slogans and philosophy.

The trends that have been studied reveal that the Theater gradually engulfed these plays of propaganda into its repertoire. At the same time the theater tried desperately to temper its productions with the works of the classical Russian playwrights and European dramatists. By the advent of World War II, the Theater was completely devoted to the presentation of plays which glorified the Soviet effort in the war. This feat was commendable but it sealed the fate of the Theater that had once aspired to the slogan of "art for arts sake."
Since the end of World War II the Moscow Art Theater has preserved the classical repertoire it established before the advent of war. Presently presentations are mostly from the works of the great dramatists and the actual staging follows the methods of the great directors. There is very little experimentation or innovation.

Despite the fact that the Party turned the free theaters into organs that glorified the Communist way of life, there is one credit which is indisputably due to the members of the regime. The theater was made accessible to the broad masses of all nationalities in the land ruled by the Soviet government. This service was immense and extremely costly. It was done to spread the Communist 'gospel' and thus, the price was justified. The subsidized theaters had to pay an even higher price - the loss of their freedom of creative endeavour. The feelings aroused by the plays included in Chapter VI continued to be felt in the audiences who attended the Theater's presentations after World War II.

Today, in 1965, the words "formalism" and "estheticism" are used to cow the flickering flames of creativity into submission. Any deviation from socialist realism is considered a crime. The Moscow Art Theater has a long way to go before it can recapture the freedom and variety in repertoire that it possessed before the Revolution of 1917, and up to 1927. There is one comforting thought, however. The Communist regime does believe in progress and that this same progress is irreversible. Possibly the abuses and restraints so liberally employed
in the past will be gradually removed to permit a renaissance of a truly glorious past.
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