

**'From Iconoclast to Traditionalist:
A Study of Anatolii Efros's Productions of
Chekhov, Gogol and Turgenev.'**

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Abstract

Between 1951 and 1987 the Russian director Anatolii Efros created seventy-four stage productions, thirteen television films, four feature films and four radio plays. His work made a significant contribution to the development of Russian theatre in the twentieth century, but has received no comprehensive study in Russian or English.

This thesis provides an overview of his career but concentrates on a central aspect: his response to the Russian classic canon. It analyses in depth seven productions created in Moscow over some fifteen years. These are discussed in the context of his reaction to their performance history and as a reflection both of changing political circumstances and of his own character and development. His response is shown to have evolved from radical, overtly contemporary, iconoclastic re-interpretation towards a greater indebtedness to tradition and in particular to the legacy of Stanislavsky.

His productions of Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1966) and *Three Sisters* (1967) were daring assertions of artistic independence. They were condemned and banned both as irreverent attacks on the sacrosanct style of the Moscow Art Theatre and for their overtly political implications. In 1975, Gogol's *Marriage* and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, though innovative, were less controversial; though they too reflected contemporary concerns, their messages were more muted. Turgenev's *A Month in the Country* in 1977 marked the beginnings of the change in his approach, and this became increasingly apparent in the 1980s. At the beginning of a period of irrevocable socio-political change, the Soviet theatre was in crisis, and Efros himself had serious problems, prompted in part by criticism of *Road* (an adaptation of Gogol's *Dead Souls*) in 1980. His second staging of *Three Sisters* in 1982 was characterised by a reassessment of his earlier ideas and an increasing concern for historical continuity.

Preliminary Notes

Sources

1) Sources in Russia for published materials (books, journals and newspaper reviews) include: the State Theatre Library, the Russian State Library (formerly The Lenin Library) and the State Historical Library. Sources outside Russia: New York Public Library, the British Library, the Hallward Library at the University of Nottingham, the Berkeley, Ussher and Lecky Libraries in Trinity College, Dublin University, and the Library of the National University of Ireland, Galway.

2) Archive sources are as follows:

The Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), Fond 2079, section 3, and Fond 2453, sections 4 and 5.

The United City Archives (MGOA), Fond 429, sections 1 and 2.

In the footnotes unpublished material taken from these archive resources is cited in the following way:

Title of document, (e.g. Transcript of a meeting of the Artistic Committee), MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 796.

In this F. = Фонд (Fond/Archive), op. = опись (list/collection), and del. = дело (file).

These archives house a wide variety of unpublished material such as: official documentation on the decisions made by the state in relation to theatre productions, including those of the censorship board; correspondence between Efros and the officials of the Ministry of Culture; letters and telegrams to and from Efros; transcripts of meetings at the Lenkom dating from the time of Efros's dismissal; Efros's director's scripts with illustrations for some of his

films; his final year dissertation work for GITIS; transcripts of speeches; photographs from productions.

3) Visual Material. The archives of the Bakhrushin Theatre Museum provided photographs of Efros's productions and unpublished material that originally formed part of an exhibition on his work displayed at the museum in 1993. In addition I have used a video produced in 1983 of Efros's production of Turgenev's *A Month in Country*, and on several occasions in the 1990s I saw revivals of his productions of *Marriage* and *Don Juan* at the Malaia Bronnaia and of *Napoleon I* at the Maiakovskii.

4) Taped interviews on their recollections of Efros's work were provided by the following: the actors Lev Durov, Nikolai Grachov, Viktor Lakirev and Nikolai Volkov; the director Anatolii Ivanov; the playwright Edvard Radzinskii; the critic Marianna Stroeveva.

5) Other unpublished source: Marianna Stroeveva, 'Anatolii Efros: molodost', (Unpublished chapter, Moscow, no date), pp. 270-387, cited here with permission of the author.

Transliteration and Variations

The transliteration system of the Library of Congress has been used throughout. There are however some names of persons, plays and theatres which may now be deemed to have been standardised in English according to a different system; in these instances (in the main text) the standardised form is used. These include: Chaliapin, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Maxim Gorky, Maly, Meyerhold,

Mussorgsky, Nevsky, Stanislavsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tallinn, Tchaikovsky, Tolstoy, Vanya, Yalta.

In footnoted references, however, spellings like Gogol', Meierkhol'd and Stanislavskii are used.

Russia's second city is named St. Petersburg, Leningrad and Petrograd in accordance with its appellation at the date in question, e.g. St. Petersburg in reference to Aleksandrinskii theatre, but Leningrad in reference to the Bolshoi Dramaticheskii.

On some occasions works are cited which have been translated into English by authors who have used a different system of transliteration. In these instances, for the sake of consistency, the Russian authors' names have been transliterated in the main text, but the names as published have been retained in the footnotes and/or select bibliography. Names that demonstrate these differences include: Anatoli, Anatoly and Anatolij (Efros), Èfros, Alexander Kugel, Alexei Altayev, Yury Lyubimov, Anatoly Smeliansky (and also Smelyansky), Smoktunovsky, Rudnitsky.

In some instances, when several works by a single author are cited, there are variations in his/her name as published. In keeping with MHRA guidelines these variations have been retained in the footnotes but are omitted in the bibliography, where only a single initial is used. The clearest example of this is the critic Shakh-Azizova who is cited variously as Tatiana Shakh-Azizova, Tat'iana Shakh-Azizova, T. Shakh-Azizova and T. K. Shakh-Azizova. Mikhail Shvydkoi is also cited as Shvidkoi.

Similarly, in direct quotations from previous writers any variations in the names of characters and theatres have been retained.

In accordance with academic practice, the names of critics, actors etc. are given in full only in the first instance, and surnames are used thereafter. The only exceptions to this occur in the rare instances in which two persons share the same surname, so that the omission of a first name might cause confusion. The chapters in which this occurs include the following: Chapter 3, *Three Sisters* (1967) — Vladimir Dmitriev (a designer at the MAT) and Iurii Dmitriev (a critic); Chapter 6, *A Month in the Country* (1977), in which the first name of the critic Nikolai Efros is repeated to avoid confusion with Efros himself; and Chapter 8, *Three Sisters* (1982), in which there are references to the critic Boris Liubimov and to Liubimov (Iurii), the Taganka director. Similarly in the footnotes the first name of the scholar Cynthia Marsh is used twice to avoid confusion with Rosalind Marsh.

The titles of the plays of Chekhov, Gogol and Turgenev central to this study are given in English only. All other titles of works originally published in Russian both in the main text and in the footnotes are given first in Russian, with an English translation; subsequent references to the same work are in English only. Appendix 2 lists the names of all Efros's productions in both Russian and English. The titles of journals and newspapers are transliterated but not translated. All Russian titles in the bibliography and footnotes are transliterated, but places of publication are provided in English. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the present writer's.

Footnotes

The details of all published materials cited in the text are listed in full in the bibliography. In the footnotes, a first reference is given in full, but subsequent references are shortened, either to the surname of the author alone or (in

instances where more than one work by the same author has been used) to the surname followed by the first word(s) of the title in question. In one instance where first references have previously been made to two authors who share the same surname (i.e. Cynthia Marsh and Rosalind Marsh), the first initial has been retained in a subsequent reference (to the latter).

Abbreviations

The following frequently cited abbreviations are used:

GITIS (*Gosudarstvennyi institut teatralnogo iskusstva*). The State Institute for the Theatrical Arts. This is now known as the Russian Academy of Dramatic Art.

Glavlit. This organisation when first established in 1922 was called *Glavnoe upravlenie po delam literatury i izdatel'stv* and later changed to *Glavnoe upravlenie po okhrane gosudarstvennykh tain v pechaty* but the standard abbreviation for both is Glavlit. This was the government body charged with preventing the publication of state secrets. It functioned on a wide basis as the major organisation concerned with the censorship of any material deemed politically sensitive. It had direct control over material published in the Soviet press and over all theatrical scripts. For further details see Appendix 1.

GUKiM (*Glavnoe Upravlenie Kul'tury ispolkoma Mossoveta*). The Main Administration of Culture of the Moscow City Council Executive Committee. This was the principal body of the Moscow City Council for the administration of cultural affairs. It had direct control of the general administration, budgets and repertoires of most theatres in Moscow (with the exception of the Bolshoi,

Maly and MAT which were under the immediate control of the Ministry of Culture).

LGITMiK (*Leningradskii Gosudartsvennyi Institut Teatra, Muzyki i Kinematografii*), cited in footnotes and in the bibliography as a publisher.

MAT

The name of the Moscow Art Theatre is often abbreviated in English texts, either in its Cyrillic form as MXAT or transliterated as MKhAT. The Cyrillic form can be rendered in full as *Moskovskii khudozhestvennyi akademicheskii teatr* and translated as Moscow Art Academic Theatre. The word *akademicheskii* (Academic) was added to the name in 1921 and later had a specific political connotation. Following critical attacks on this theatre in the immediate aftermath of the 1917 Revolution, *akademicheskii* implied that it had been given a protected status and was under the direct control of the USSR Ministry of Culture. In the 1930s the word also became associated with notions of excellence when the theatre was promoted as an ideal model (explained in more detail in Chapters 1 and 2). Since reference is made to the theatre both before and after it acquired this newer appellation, the abbreviation MAT (with the definite article) has been used throughout.

RSFSR (*Rossiiskaia Sovetskaia Federativnaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika*).
The Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic.

VTO (*Vserossiiskoe Teatral'noe Obshchestvo*) cited in footnotes and in the bibliography as a publisher.

Zastoi. The period of stagnation under Leonid Brezhnev's regime (1964-1982) is referred to throughout by this transliterated name.

The Russian form *imeni* (named in honour of), as in Teatr imeni Pushkina etc., is not used; the theatre is called the Pushkin. Similarly, Teatr na Maloi Bronnoi and Teatr na Taganke become the Malaia Bronnaia and the Taganka, and Teatr Leninskogo Komsomola becomes the Lenkom. The word 'Theatre' is deliberately omitted from these names. The Gor'kii bolshoi dramaticheskii theatre is shortened to BDT, and the Central Children's Theatre to CCT.

Drawing principally from Efros's own understanding, the word 'culture' is used in this thesis in the rather loose but widely-accepted sense denoted by the Russian word культура, meaning 'high culture', edifying and enlightening. Its use, however, does not presuppose particular value judgements on the part of the present writer or a lack of awareness of the ideological and sociological connotations that use implies.

Introduction

Anatolii Efros's career spanned thirty-six years, from 1951 to 1987. He worked principally in Moscow, in four main theatres, though also as a guest director in several others. He travelled to the United States to direct at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, and toured to the Edinburgh Festival, Japan and Finland and to festivals in the former Yugoslavia. He directed seventy-four stage productions, thirteen television films, four feature films and four radio plays.

Efros made a significant contribution to the history of Russian theatre in the twentieth century. He is widely acknowledged to have been one of the foremost directors of his generation, and to have had a seminal influence on the theatre of today. There is therefore in Russian a large body of material, both published and unpublished, on his life and work. A bibliographical listing published by the Theatre Library in Moscow, though it includes only those materials published in Russian by January 1992, provides 1162 separate entries of works by or about Efros.¹ Analyses of individual productions, as well as some material on his working methods, have also been published as articles in English and French. To date, however, there is no comprehensive study in any language. Since his creativity was prodigious, to have attempted such a study in the present thesis would have been to court an excessive degree of superficiality. It will provide an overview of his entire career, and all his productions for the stage, cinema, television and radio are listed in Appendix 2, but clearly not all of these could have been considered in detail. In particular discussion of his many productions of contemporary plays is limited to their impact on his development.

Instead this thesis will concentrate on a central and significant aspect: his response, as shown in seven stage productions, created between 1966 and 1982

¹*Anatolii Vasil'ievich Efros: bibliograficheskii ukazatel'*, ed. by F. Krymko and E. Tyn'ianova (Moscow: Soiuz teatral'nykh deiatelei Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 1992).

at three theatres in Moscow, to the works of three Russian playwrights — Chekhov, Gogol and Turgenev — seen universally as classics.

The assumptions that underlie the use of the word 'classic' in this study are founded on its widely-accepted connotations. These include the idea of timelessness and the notion that a classic is not only subject to but also in some senses demands multiple interpretations, concepts which Efros himself accepted. The timelessness of a classic refers to its capacity to transcend the specific historical circumstance in which it was written and to be relevant to the lives, aspirations and ideas of a later audience. But if a classic has this capacity, it will be subject to different interpretations, which are informed by and reflect its new context. In the case of a play, once a production is created — presented visually and physically in the presence of an audience, interpreted by actors, (often) by a director and by a designer, by critics and spectators — the written text becomes more than mere words. Instead in this process, and from subsequent productions, it garners a wide range of ideological, critical and cultural layers. In sum aspects of what might broadly be termed its performance history become encoded within the written text; subsequent generations of interpreters inherit not a single script but a series of inter-layered and interrelated texts.

The elaboration of a particular view, based on theoretical studies concerning the political, social and cultural factors which govern the inclusion of a work in the established canon of classics, is not however a feature of this study. Instead a central concern here is not with the formation of that canon but with the political, social and cultural factors which determined the interpretation on the Soviet stage of works regarded as canonical, and with Efros's response to them.

In the course of his varied and complex career he mounted productions of many such classic works. However, those drawn from the international repertoire must, for reasons of space, be excluded from this study, but may be briefly reviewed. In 1952, soon after completing his training, he directed Lope de Vega's *The Dog in the Manger* in a provincial theatre in Riazan'. This production will be mentioned, insofar as it relates to his later work. Similarly, in 1957 he directed Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, but this, like several early productions, was not wholly successful. That Efros himself was not satisfied by his approach is suggested by the fact that in 1986 he planned to stage it again at the Taganka, and might indeed have done so had he not died the following year.

He directed three works by Shakespeare: two at the Malaia Bronnaia, *Romeo and Juliet* in 1970 (a production adapted for television in 1983), and *Othello* in 1976, and *The Tempest* at the Pushkin Museum in 1983. The last of these productions, because particularly innovative, will be considered in Chapter 1. An analysis of all three might be the subject of a monograph, but would ideally form part of a fuller study of the performance history of Shakespeare on the Russian stage.

Finally, Efros was strongly drawn at different times in his career to the life and works of Molière. His productions of *Don Juan* in 1973, of *Tartuffe* in 1981 and of *The Misanthrope* in 1986, together with his approach on stage and in television to Mikhail Bulgakov's play *Мольер* (*Molière*) and to that author's fictional biography *Жизнь господина де Мольера* (*The Life of Monsieur de Molière*), have already been analysed in detail by the present writer.²

²Rosalyn Dixon, 'Efros and Molière', (unpublished M. Litt. thesis, University of Dublin, 1998).

He also mounted a number of productions of canonical Russian plays other than those which are the central subject of this thesis, but these in various ways are less germane to its purpose, and are largely beyond its scope. A production in 1957 of Pushkin's *Борис Годунов* (*Boris Godunov*) will be discussed in respect of its impact on his development and later career (whereas one of Lev Tolstoy's *Живой труп* (*Living Corpse*) at the MAT in 1982, because less significant in that sense, will be mentioned only briefly). He directed *Boris Godunov* again in 1971, for television, but analysis of his work in television, for cinema and on radio would require theoretical discussion of those media and is beyond the scope of the present study. Efros produced two stage adaptations of Russian classic novels. His first, in 1972, was *Брат Алены* (*Brother Alesha*), based by Viktor Rozov on Dostoevsky's *Братья Карамазовы* (*Brothers Karamazov*). That adaptation, however, although a critical and popular success, focuses almost entirely on the relationship between Alesha and the children, and fails in present writer's view to encompass the complexities and philosophical breadth of the novel. In essence it is an exploration of the themes of 'coming of age' and of youthful idealism in the face of a complex adult world that preoccupied the playwright in his own original works, stagings of which by Efros will be discussed. By contrast chapter 7 is devoted to his production in 1980 of *Road*, a play which attempts to translate to the stage in all its complexity the first part of Gogol's *Dead Souls*. This production marked a significant turning point in Efros's creative development, and can be closely related to his staging of *Marriage* in 1975. It therefore illuminates his approach to Gogol's work as a whole. On the other hand, this study will not be concerned with his staging at the Taganka in 1984 of Gorky's *На дне* (*Lower Depths*), principally because, although this work was written in 1902, Gorky's work is widely regarded to be part of the Soviet classic repertoire. A discussion of this production could therefore be incorporated into a wider study of Efros's attitude to Soviet drama as a whole.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. The first provides, as a context for those that follow, a chronological overview, in seven sections, of Efros's career. It outlines his early training and the development of his approach to theatre and his working methods. It discusses the conditions and his experience at several theatres, especially the Central Children's Theatre (1954-1964), the Lenkom (1964-1967), the Malaia Bronnaia (1967-1984), and the Taganka (1984-1987). In parallel, it describes the changing political, social and cultural situation in the Soviet Union as it impacted on Efros's life and work.

The remaining chapters discuss in detail, in chronological order, the following productions: *The Seagull* (1966), *Three Sisters* (1967), *Marriage* (1975), *The Cherry Orchard* (1975), Turgenev's *A Month in the Country* (1977), *Road*, an adaptation of Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1980), and a second staging of *Three Sisters* (1982).³ Created over a period of roughly three decades, they serve to illuminate different stages of his development, and in most cases demonstrate his exceptionally innovative stage-craft and exploration of acting techniques. Efros has frequently been credited, moreover, with a particular capacity for sensing the mood of his times, and indeed each production will be shown to have been informed by and to have reflected the socio-political situation in which it was created.

This study outlines his attraction to Russian classic repertoire and details how in the course of his career Efros's staging of such dramas changed from a radical, iconoclastic reinterpretation as a reaction against established approaches, towards a greater indebtedness to tradition, which would reflect a growing concern for historical continuity. Further, although the influences on his career

³Efros directed productions of the same works abroad, and reference is made to these, but for reasons of space a full study of them, together with such concerns as the issues of translation and intercultural performance, is beyond the scope of the present study.

were manifold, his training and early productions were indebted to the ideas of Konstantin Stanislavsky. The thesis also charts therefore his changing response to the legacy of those ideas and to the traditions of the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT).

The first important productions to be considered are those of Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1966) and *Three Sisters* (1967). At this period Efros's decision to stage plays familiar to audiences and critics alike can be seen on the one hand to have reflected a desire to make his mark as a director by reacting against (or indeed attempting to ignore) their performance history. On the other hand they expressed a need to see these works in the light of his own experience. After the 1917 Revolution, Chekhov's dramas had been rejected as irrelevant to immediate concerns. Later, however, they were subjected to ideologically-charged socio-political analyses. In the late 1920s and 1930s they were reinterpreted as critiques of a bourgeois past. Later still, from the mid 1930s, under the tenets of Socialist Realism, the performance history of the MAT was knowingly distorted to support the notion that it belonged to an exclusively realist theatrical tradition. Those of its productions deemed to conform to this idea were promoted as models to be copied, and the style of performing Chekhov established at that theatre came to be seen as 'correct'. In the 1960s, Efros was not concerned either to document or to critique the past, but instead consciously 'modernised' these works in order to make bold statements about contemporary realities. His *Seagull* and *Three Sisters* were characterised by a deliberate rejection of traditional interpretations and generated critical uproar, earning their director the appellation of 'anti-MAT'. Although he denied that his work was so deliberately targeted, these productions were undeniably radical and iconoclastic reinterpretations that challenged cherished myths and critical perceptions of the MAT in general and the work of Stanislavsky in particular. They were daring assertions of the director's independence and right to interpret

freely. Efros attempted to remove the layers of those works' performance history, react against the imposition of rigid, fixed interpretations, and indeed to break with his own past in order to create anew.

Although in the early part of his career Efros was most closely associated with the work of contemporary Soviet writers, in the 1970s, during Brezhnev's *zastoi* (stagnation), there was a relative dearth of high-quality modern plays, and he increasingly regarded the classics as the central focus of his work. In 1975 he directed his innovative productions of Gogol's *Marriage* and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. In these productions he was able to explore broader philosophical ideas, but without retreating from the modern world. On the contrary, by producing works whose classic status made them less subject to censorship than modern plays, but which were open to multiple interpretation, he succeeded in continuing to comment, though now indirectly, on contemporary concerns.

As noted above, however, in the course of his work Efros's approach to the classics reflected a growing concern for historical continuity. The first signs of this change can be seen in *The Cherry Orchard*, and especially in Turgenev's *A Month in the Country* (1977). This production was more clearly indebted than his earlier work to the ideas of Stanislavsky, and represented not a rejection of but rather an engagement with the play's performance history.

In 1980 Efros staged *Road*, an adaptation of Gogol's *Dead Souls*. He never stated reasons for his decision to direct an adaptation of this novel, but it too formed part of his response to the established traditions of the classic canon. Although he did not use Bulgakov's adaptation of Gogol, he was well-versed in the history of the production of that work at the MAT in the early 1930s. In his own production Efros continued his dialogue with Stanislavsky by reacting

against his predecessor's reworking of Bulgakov's play. *Road* was produced during a period of personal and professional crisis for Efros, which in turn reflected a growing sense of uncertainty at the beginnings of irrevocable socio-political change in the Soviet theatre, and indeed in society as a whole. His difficulties in the early 1980s were exacerbated by the harsh criticism of *Road*, and provoked in him a desire to return imaginatively to the past, and at the same time to reassess his previous work. Consequently, he attempted, in his second staging of *Three Sisters* (1982), to emulate and indeed to celebrate the traditional approach of the MAT, whose style once he had forcefully rejected.

Theatre in its essence is ephemeral. For the purposes of analysis it has been necessary therefore to 'reconstruct' Efros's productions from photographs in the archives of the Bakrushkin Theatre Museum in Moscow, by viewing a video of his 1983 production of Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*, and by documenting — as well as personally seeing — those productions which continued to be performed or were revived after his death in the repertoires of the Malaia Bronnaia, MAT and Maiakovskii Theatres. In addition, several theatre practitioners who worked with Efros provided taped interviews of their recollections. Extensive use has also been made of his own books on his life and work, which were published together in four volumes in 1993. Archives in Moscow provided a wealth of further unpublished material, and the analysis that follows relies too on reviews in newspapers and on critical commentaries in journals and books. Details on unpublished sources have been provided in the Preliminary Notes above, and the published material is listed in the bibliography.

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Life and Career of Anatolii Efros

1. Early Years, 1925-1954

In his early years, Efros, born in Khar'kov in 1925, had little direct acquaintance with the theatre. On leaving school he trained and worked as a fitter in an aeronautical factory, where his father was a designer and his mother a translator of technical manuals. He seems, however, at this relatively late stage to have discovered a passion for drama. In his memoirs he recalled having seen productions at the MAT, delighting in particular in the work of the legendary actor Ivan Moskvina, whom he saw in *Tsar Fedor*, and he cultivated an interest in the work of Stanislavsky, whose books he read avidly.⁴ In fact, he maintained that this early enthusiasm for Stanislavsky's ideas was what had made him want to train for the theatre.⁵ He began his career as an actor at the Mossovet Theatre in Moscow, studying under Iurii Zavadskii, a former student of Evgeny Vakhtangov, but from the very beginning he dreamt of running his own company, and in his first year joined a group of other students in establishing a studio at the theatre, without the blessing of its Artistic Director. An infuriated Zavadskii, on learning of its existence, and interpreting it as an unacceptable challenge to his authority, expelled some of the group, but treated Efros with greater indulgence. Recognising his student's potential not as an actor but as a director, he recommended him to Nikolai Petrov, who in 1947 accepted Efros into the second year of his course at the State Institute for Theatre Arts (GITIS).

⁴A. Efros, *Kniga chetvertaia* (Moscow: Panas, 1993), p. 369. This is the fourth and final volume of Efros's published writings. It first appeared in print in 1993, when all four volumes were published together by Panas in Moscow. The other three are entitled *Repetitsiia - liubov' moia*, *Professii: rezhisser* and *Prodolzhenie teatral'nogo romana*.

The word 'memoirs' is used throughout to refer to these four volumes. These writings include: Efros's notes on different plays; ideas with which he experimented in rehearsal; reflections on his personal, professional and political circumstances; his discussion of various artistic movements, other art forms and media relevant to his own work; analyses of the work of other theatre and film directors; anecdotes; stories; personal recollections etc. The word 'memoirs' is the most appropriate and convenient to encompass such a disparate collection of writings. It should be noted, however, that this descriptive term is one which, at least in relation to his first volume, Efros himself rejected. *Repetitsiia*, p. 315.

⁵Efros, *Kniga*, p. 369.

At this period the Soviet theatre was in crisis. During the War many theatres had been evacuated, and in the period of post-War recovery for those that remained open material resources were limited. As is well documented, moreover, from the mid 1930s the brutally repressive regime of Stalin had seen the silencing and annihilation of such leading figures of the theatrical avant-garde as Vsevolod Meyerhold, and from that period the theatre had suffered from the deleterious effects of the dictates of Socialist Realism. Innovation in theatrical form was repressed, departures from realism by the use of consciously theatrical techniques were condemned, and dramatic writing was stultified by such ideas as the notorious 'theory of no conflict'. The patriotism engendered by the war effort and the openly Russo-centric, chauvinist policies of Stalin, moreover, not only had led to a consolidation and canonisation of Russian history, culture and literature, but also had generated a pressing need for what was to become, in effect, a national theatre. As a result it had become necessary for all theatre art to conform to a particular model. In keeping with this idea, the supposed realism of the MAT had been recast as the primary example of the Socialist Realist ideal. Its style of performance had been actively promoted as a model to be copied in theatres throughout the Soviet Union;⁶ its artistic director had been elevated to the status of a demi god by a process that had something in common with the cults of personality of political leaders.

It is hardly surprising therefore that at the State Institute for Theatre Arts (GITIS), the official teaching programme was dominated by the ideas of Stanislavsky, and in particular by the active promotion of the so called 'method of physical actions'. This method, developed by Stanislavsky in his later years, represented, it has been suggested, the director's modification of his 'system' in

⁶In 1939 Solodnikov, the then Head of the Theatre Directorate, addressed the first national conference for theatre directors. He exhorted those present 'to learn from the Moscow Art Theatre, for the Moscow Art Theatre learns from life itself'. N. Velekhova, 'The Link of Time: Directing in the Soviet Union', *Theater*, 3 (Fall 1989), 28-38 (p. 32).

keeping with the ideology of Stalin.⁷ Efros's youthful enthusiasm for Stanislavsky's ideas bordered on the fanatical, and they were to have an enduring influence on him. At this time, although he never knew him personally, the MAT director, as an imagined figure, became something close to a mentor for Efros. He read and re-read Stanislavsky's ideas and he and other students, as he recalled, attempted to put them into practice in their own work.⁸ Influenced, perhaps unconsciously, by the prevailing political climate, Efros expressed a great interest in Stanislavsky's 'later discoveries'. His instructor Petrov, however, wary of the political imperatives behind the promotion of the 'system', refused (unlike other directors at GITIS) to teach the 'method of physical actions'. As a result, Efros took classes on another course run by Mariia Knebel' and Pavel Markov.

As we shall see, as Efros's art matured and evolved, Stanislavsky ceased to be his sole source of inspiration. In fact he became increasingly convinced that the only way to preserve 'the legacy of Stanislavsky' was to develop it.⁹ He never entirely abandoned Stanislavsky's theories, and in his approach to character consistently aimed at a psychological authenticity that recalled the concept of 'emotional memory'.¹⁰ But for him the way forward would be to develop an

⁷Stanislavsky's role in the changing political activities of the MAT in the late 1920s has become a debated subject in recent years. An investigation of new documentation has led to the suggestion that Stanislavsky's work towards the end of his life was complicit with the ideas and ideology of Stalin. A detailed discussion of this contentious topic is beyond the scope of this present study. The subject was explored in 1991 by Anatolii Smelianskii, 'Assimiliatsiia', *Moskovskii nabliudatel'*, 4 (1991), 1-6, and by Nick Worrall in *The Moscow Art Theatre* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 204-208.

⁸Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 138.

⁹Z. Vladimirova, *Kazhdyi po svoemu: Tri ocherka o rezhisserakh* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966), p. 111.

¹⁰'Emotional memory' was a concept fundamental to Stanislavsky's idea of the creative actor. In the process of training and rehearsals, it was necessary for performers, in responding to physical and aural stimuli, to evoke memories of their own in order to understand more fully the emotions and motivations of their characters. In his wider concept of actor training performers were to use conscious means to access their sub-conscious minds. He reasoned that by learning to increase their capacity to recapture their own emotional memories actors could stimulate new processes and, as it were, flesh out the feelings they first experienced when approaching a role. For a general overview and analysis of Stanislavsky's 'system', in English see David Magashack, 'Stanislavsky', in Eric Bentley, ed., *The Theory of the Modern Stage* (London: Penguin, 1968), pp. 219-278.

approach that combined his early study with a more overtly theatrical style of presentation. Although it would be some time before he put his ideas into practice, and his fanaticism for Stanislavsky notwithstanding, Efros was exposed at GITIS to a variety of different approaches that helped to determine his later development. He was influenced by his experiences with the maverick Petrov, and by his own extracurricular activities in attempting to establish a studio theatre with a fellow student, Lev Shcheglov.

The death of Stalin in 1953 would mark the beginning of a rejuvenation of the Soviet theatre, encouraged by the process of de-Stalinisation and the relatively liberal policies of Khrushchev's Thaw.¹¹ As early as 1948, however, calls for such reform, and new ideas on what was permissible in art, were beginning to be heard, although initially these were expressed in theoretical articles. In that year, for instance, the dramatist Aleksandr Kron launched an attack on the theory of 'no conflict', which though denounced as 'unpatriotic' was clearly expressing in print what other theatre practitioners felt in private.¹² As Shcheglov recalled, material deprivations notwithstanding, the atmosphere at GITIS in the immediate post-War period was infused with great creative energy, which gave expression to this still tentative aspiration for greater liberalisation and permitted the limited exploration of fresh ideas.¹³

¹¹The so-called Thaw was a period that lasted for approximately a decade from the early 1950s. It is beyond the scope of the present study to discuss in detail the policies of Khrushchev during this period. It is important to note, however, that the Thaw was not a revolutionary movement and should not be regarded as a return to the artistic freedoms that had characterised the immediate post-Revolutionary period. It was by no means rapid or consistent, and equally cannot be seen to have been governed by a coherent programme on the part of the Communist Party with the concerted aim of greater liberalisation. Instead policy was frequently determined by Khrushchev's strategy of appeasement of the conservative and liberal factions in the artistic and literary world, and also governed by pragmatic responses to events beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. It is perhaps useful to view the period less as a single Thaw than as one of a series of thaws and 're-freezes' which occurred often in rapid and confusing succession, or indeed almost simultaneously one with another. In general, however, despite the unpredictable nature of many of Khrushchev's decisions, and although the initial enthusiasm of the intelligentsia for the Thaw was tempered somewhat by 're-freezes', a spirit of optimism persisted until the early 1960s.

¹²Aleksandr Kron, 'Replika dramaturga', *Teatr*, 9 (1948), 48-50.

¹³Lev Shcheglov 'Gody ucheby', in *Teatr Anatoliia Efrosa: Vospominaniia, Stat'i*, ed. by M. Zaionts (Moscow: Artist. Rezhisser. Teatr, 2000), pp. 8-19 (p. 8).

In addition to his classes with Knebel' and Markov, Efros continued to study with Petrov, whose teaching was influenced by his training under both Stanislavsky and Meyerhold. In fact, Petrov's students, Efros included, experienced their first conflict with cultural orthodoxy when their teacher was called to account by the Institute's Educational Advisory Committee for introducing the ideas of Meyerhold, then an 'enemy of the people', into his teaching.¹⁴ Undeterred by this attack, Petrov continued to promote the use of non-realist techniques, whose influence could be felt in the set and performance style of his final-year production of *Twelfth Night*, in which Efros played Malvolio. Dispensing with a box-set, Petrov placed benches around an empty playing area that represented an open inn courtyard. He centred his production on the idea that the play was being performed by a band of strolling players, who entered initially from the auditorium and interacted directly with the audience. Though by no means new, these ideas were sufficiently out of keeping with the official teaching programme to cause uproar. The production was at first condemned by some for its 'formalist' tendencies; rumours ran rife in the student body that it would be closed and its participants refused degrees. But the performance was eventually permitted, and was later to be remembered by those who saw it as a as an event of signal importance in the lives of students at GITIS.¹⁵ Petrov's controversial approach had been vindicated, and his teaching undoubtedly influenced his young and inexperienced but wildly enthusiastic disciples in their own attempts to revitalise the moribund theatre of their day.

This was the explicit, ambitious aim of Shcheglov and Efros in a manifesto that announced the establishment of the Directors' Experimental Laboratory, a studio

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 15-18, and see Natal'ia Krymova, 'Zhdu vechera kogda my s toboi doma', *Obshchaia gazeta*, 15-24 April 1999, p. 16.

theatre separate from the official programme, in which they intended to explore their own ideas.¹⁶ In this manifesto, and in his later discussions with his co-founder, Efros's views on the actor at this early period are of little interest; his belief in the necessity for a 'citizen-actor' (актер-гражданин) was clearly circumscribed by the prevailing ideology.¹⁷ But his insistence on the need to regenerate the existing repertoire with new writing, his rejection of the traditional box-set, and more importantly the students' designs for a theatre building, were radical in those conservative times. According to Shcheglov, it was standard practice in established theatres for plays to run with three (or even four) intervals, during which sets were laboriously changed behind a curtain.¹⁸ In order to counteract this, he and Efros conceived of a theatre in which the action would be continuous, involving and surrounding the audience. In this theatre the walls dividing the auditorium, foyer and café could be rapidly removed, providing a large, flexible open space with three separate platform stages on which each succeeding act could be played. Any breaks in the drama could therefore either be eliminated entirely or incorporated into the whole as the action continued during the intervals. Efros channelled much energy into the project, and even went so far as to discuss the plans with the MAT designer Vladimir Dmitriev, who reportedly viewed the students' fantasies with indulgence.¹⁹ The activities of this experimental laboratory were limited to discussion and were not brought to fruition; Efros never built such a theatre. Nevertheless, these unrealised ambitions represented his first challenge to what were then established practices, and these as yet purely theoretical explorations sowed the seeds of his later practice.

¹⁶Shcheglov, p. 10.

¹⁷This term is difficult to translate. In the political context of the period it implies an actor who had developed a socialist socio-political consciousness and outlook.

¹⁸Shcheglov, p. 11.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

On graduation from GITIS in 1951, however, Efros's early interest and training in the ideas of Stanislavsky continued to exert the greatest influence on his work.²⁰ At this period Efros claimed that he knew Stanislavsky's work by heart. He had read and re-read Stanislavsky's books in such depth that he could identify where and when the director had mentioned a given idea.²¹ Indeed his first productions between 1953 and 1954 at the Dramatic Theatre in Riazan' were to be deliberately modelled on the MAT's. As he openly stated:

Точно так же, как и многие другие, пришедшие в искусство в определенные годы, я был полностью под влиянием спектаклей Художественного театра...Мне хотелось «Собаку на сене» поставить так, как поставлена «Женитьба Фигаро». А в своем спектакле «Горячее сердце» (я поставил его после института в Рязани) хотелось буквально повторить рисунок Художественного театра.²²

It was later to become Efros's standard practice to learn as much as possible about the performance history of any play he proposed to direct. This led him

²⁰Efros had wanted to continue at GITIS as a postgraduate but was reputedly not allowed to do so because he was a Jew. (Shcheglov p. 9.) Few accounts of his career prior to his death mention his Jewish origins, but there is considerable anecdotal evidence that he was the subject of anti-Semitic attacks. Vladimir Solov'ev has suggested that Efros's son, Dmitrii Krymov (a set designer and fine artist) took Natal'ia Krymova's (his mother's) surname rather than his father's to protect himself from anti-Semitism. (Vladimir Solov'ev, 'Istoriia odnoi skvernosti', *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 12 February 1998, p. 3.)

Similarly, Natasha Zhuravleva recalled that in the mid to late 1960s Efros received vicious anti-Semitic hate mail from some company members at the Lenkom as part of an orchestrated campaign that would lead to his dismissal in 1967. (Natasha Zhuravleva interviewed by Ol'ga Fuks, 'Leninu on khotel podarit' korzinu iablok', *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 5 June 2000, p. 3.) Efros also changed his patronymic from Isaevich to Vasil'evich, which may indicate that it was necessary for him to hide his origins. The former name appears on official documents such as the характеристика (reference/testimonial) about Efros (31 June 1966) in the Lenkom archives (MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 1054) and in his obituary in *Pravda* on 15 January 1987.

²¹Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 140.

²²*Ibid.*

In my research to date I can find no record of Efros's production of *A Passionate Heart*. It is not recorded in any official list of Efros's productions, and there is no mention of any reviews of this show in the bibliographical listing for works by or about Efros published by the State Theatre Library in 1992 (cited above, see F. Krymko and E. Tyn'ianova). I can only conclude that this may not have been a fully professional production and was possibly never shown to the public.

to read the transcripts of rehearsals and director's notes for some of Stanislavsky's most famous productions. He was often to find that Stanislavsky's interpretation differed from his own, and indeed he even permitted himself to criticise his idol's approach. But he maintained that the study of performance history was part of the education and development of a theatre director. This process, he suggested, was analogous to the practice of the Impressionist painters who studied the Old Masters in order to learn from them and to master their techniques, but who having absorbed these lessons broke with tradition and forged their own styles.²³ Some fifteen years in the future Efros was to direct *The Seagull* (1966) and *Three Sisters* (1967). Both of these productions would be very different in style from the accepted manner of staging Chekhov inherited from the MAT, and were to be severely criticised as unacceptable and irreverent attacks on the traditions of that theatre. In his defence Efros would reject the very idea of copying existing models as an impossible and foolhardy exercise, and indeed as detrimental to the whole essence of theatre as an interpretive and creative process.

Given the views expressed when he was older, it might be possible to dismiss Efros's early desire to copy Stanislavsky's work to the last detail as a mere excess of youthful enthusiasm. As we have noted, however, he was to develop a style that combined an authentic expression of emotions with an overtly theatrical style of presentation. In this light Efros's choice of Stanislavsky's productions of *The Marriage of Figaro* and *A Passionate Heart* as the models he wanted to replicate is interesting. Neither can be said to have conformed to the traditional performance style of the MAT. In fact they had been produced in the mid 1920s, when Stanislavsky's own art was changing as he explored new means of expression. As Konstantin Rudnitskii noted, although these productions had remained firmly grounded in Stanislavsky's ideas on the

²³Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 123.

necessity of authentic emotion, in their style and settings they demonstrated a marked influence of Meyerhold's exploration of the performance traditions of pantomime and fairground theatres.²⁴ Thus Rudnitskii could comment, in relation to *A Passionate Heart*, that it had been Stanislavsky's intention to present satire in the form of a *balagan* and as carnival-like mischievousness, while never foregoing the truth of the characters' psychology. As we have seen, Efros had a deep knowledge of Stanislavsky's approach, and his desire to use that director's stagings as templates reflected his devotion to the MAT. But his specific reference to these two productions suggests that an early impetus to synthesise emotional truth and theatricality, characteristic of Efros's later work, may also have come from Stanislavsky.

2. At the Central Children's Theatre (CCT), 1954-1964

In 1954 Knebel' offered Efros a position as a staff director at the Central Children's Theatre (CCT) in Moscow, and he was later to recall the decade he spent there under her guardianship as a 'golden period'.²⁵ His training at GITIS and his endeavours in Riazan' notwithstanding, it was here, he wrote, that he felt he truly understood how the principles of Stanislavsky could be put into practice.²⁶ In rehearsals he used Stanislavsky's techniques of improvisation, but also began to develop his own methods.²⁷ This period also

²⁴Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre: Tradition and the Avant-Garde* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), p 118.

²⁵Efros, *Kniga*, p. 397.

²⁶Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 139.

²⁷Birgit Beumers and Inna Solov'eva have both suggested that Efros was influenced by the ideas of Mikhail Chekhov. Birgit Beumers, *Yury Lyubimov at the Taganka 1964-1994* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997), p. 276; Inna Solov'eva, 'Prodolzhenie teatral'nogo rasskaza', in Zaionts, pp. 332-334 (p. 330).

Chekhov had emigrated in 1928 and his ideas, out of keeping with the ideology of realism, had been suppressed; his work was not published in the Soviet Union until 1986. Efros, therefore, had little opportunity to study these ideas at first hand, but Knebel' had worked under both Stanislavsky and Chekhov, and was to exert a considerable influence over Efros at this period; she had been instrumental in securing his appointment. Although, as noted above, at GITIS she had focused in the main on the official propagation of the ideas of Stanislavsky, it is entirely possible in the more liberal period of the Thaw that she may have introduced her young staff director to Chekhov's ideas. Chekhov too had been a student of Stanislavsky but had evolved an alternative system to that of his teacher. Influenced by the ideas of the

allowed him the freedom to produce a total of sixteen plays in a variety of genres, including his first productions of the Russian classics, and saw his earliest experimentation in the use of consciously theatrical techniques.

At first, however, he championed the work of the so-called New Realists, a group of playwrights whose work developed in the relatively liberal atmosphere of the Thaw. These dramatists were no longer required to extol the virtues of political leaders or to present a one-sided view of the glories of war, of revolution or indeed of increased production at a tractor factory. Increasingly, the focus of their plays would be the myriad of small events, personal pleasures and disappointments in the everyday existence of ordinary citizens, and their works were characterised too by criticism, albeit muted, of contemporary Soviet social realities.

The leading figure of this new generation of writers was Viktor Rozov, and in 1954 Efros's production of his *В добрый час!* (*Good Luck!*) generated widespread enthusiasm in Moscow theatre circles. It proved extremely popular not only with children but also with adult audiences.²⁸ Spectators and critics alike were drawn to a production characterised by a sense of spontaneity lacking in much of the theatre of the day. This sense of freedom was generated not only

Symbolists, his methods emphasised more imagistic, intuitively sensed spiritual resources of energy over the historical, emotional and psychological details of the actor's experience. His ideas centred on the 'psychological gesture', as a physical expression of inner thought and emotion, and his approach aimed to be highly spontaneous and plastic. The later influences on Efros's work were manifold, and he was to treat some aspects of Chekhov's methods with caution. (Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 312.) Nevertheless, as we shall see, the concept of the 'psychological gesture' had certain parallels with Efros's own ideas of 'truth is in the feet', a concept he would develop at the Malaia Bronnaia in the 1970s, and therefore the impact of Chekhov's ideas cannot be entirely discounted.

Mariia Knebel', *Vsia zhizn'* (Moscow: VTO, 1967). For Knebel's edition of material on Mikhail Chekhov, see *Mikhail Chekhov: literaturnoe nasledie*, 2 vols, ed. by Mariia Knebel' (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1986). Volume I is a collection of memoirs and letters. Volume II contains his *Ob iskusstve aktera*. The latter was also published in English when Chekhov emigrated as *To the actor: on the technique of acting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953).

²⁸As Efros was later to recall, the enthusiastic response from adults to *Good Luck!* was so unusual that it was illustrated in a satirical cartoon in a *стенная газета* (newspaper pasted to a wall) of the time. This showed a street scene with a child holding a ticket for the show and an adult lurking around a corner ready to steal it. Efros, *Kniga*, p. 373.

by the enthusiasm of a very young cast but also by Efros's rehearsal methods, which first established his reputation as what might be described as an 'actors' director'. Rather than adopting a dictatorial approach, he encouraged his performers to explore their roles for themselves. He also dismissed the idea of 'round-table' discussion as the first means of understanding a work as 'literary chit-chat' (литературная болтовня).²⁹ Instead, he frequently leapt on to the stage himself to demonstrate what he had in mind, and directed his actors to move almost immediately into action and to improvise the dialogue. These rehearsal techniques provided the basis for Efros's later approach. Spencer Golub characterised this as 'acting-on-the-run', a process by which the text was explored by director and actors alike, and emotions were expressed not only through words but also physically.³⁰

The production of *Good Luck!* commanded a significance that far outweighed the play's literary and dramatic qualities. Like much of Rozov's drama, it is firmly grounded in realism, and flawed in the naivety of its ideas, contrived plot and weak construction. Credit for its success is due in part to Efros, whose ideas did much to enliven and enrich Rozov's often insipid script. This production marked the beginning of a fruitful and mutually beneficial collaboration between the playwright and the director. Efros subsequently directed six further plays by Rozov.³¹ As Efros himself suggested later, Rozov's dramas do not stand the test of time,³² but the timing of their appearance in the history of Soviet dramaturgy undoubtedly contributed to their popularity. Since the 1930s audiences had been fed on a tedious diet of

²⁹Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 139.

³⁰This phrase is taken from the title of an article; Spencer Golub, 'Acting on the Run: Efros and the Contemporary Soviet Theatre', *Theatre Quarterly*, 26 (Summer 1977), 18-28.

³¹At the CCT Efros produced the following plays by Rozov: *Good Luck!* (1954), *В поисках радости* (*In Search of Joy*) (1957), *Неравный бой* (*Uneven Fight*) (1960), and *Перед ужином* (*Before Supper*) (1962). He also directed *В день свадьбы* (*On The Wedding Day*) in 1964 at the Lenkom and *Brother Alesha* in 1972 and *Ситуация* (*The Situation*) in 1973 at the Malaia Bronnaia.

³²Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 86. Efros discusses the various productions of his fruitful collaboration with Rozov in *Repetitsiia*, pp. 56-59, 86-90.

propaganda dramas: conflict had been eradicated and characters reduced to types, and the world had been depicted in terms of idealised Soviet utopias. The Thaw audience in the 1950s therefore craved dramas which would resonate more closely with their own experience.

Rozov's plays do not challenge the established order of Soviet society or the essential paternalism of the Party. Instead they are gentle, moralising critiques which suggest that reform is possible for a new generation of Soviet youth. Rozov's young male heroes, while not wholly good, are frequently seen to have a strong moral sense of right and wrong. His plots often centre on a significant turning point in the lives of boys who, faced with the social ills of petty corruption, bribery and deceit manifest in the lives of their elders, actively seek a more honourable path for their own futures. The significance of his dramas should not, however, be discounted. They are important documents of the psychological effect of the Thaw. They reflect the spirit of optimism in which criticism of the system seemed possible, and more importantly express the widespread belief among the artists and intellectuals of the so-called sixties generation that reform of the Soviet Union might be achieved from within. As we shall see, this was an idea cherished by Efros and his contemporaries. Later, under the more repressive regime of Brezhnev in the 1960s, the destruction of the idealism expressed in Rozov's work would inform Efros's *Seagull* and *Three Sisters*.

These productions would be controversial, not only because of their political content, but also because Efros would dispense with use of naturalistic details that had informed the settings of those two plays at the MAT in 1898 and 1901 in favour of more openly symbolic decor. As noted above, Efros had first rejected naturalistic styles of presentation in his theoretical explorations at GITIS, but in the 1950s he began to put these ideas into practice. In this he was

influenced by a second important development of the Thaw — New Theatricalism. The 1950s saw a relaxation of the censorship laws, which led to the publication of new translations of the works of previously-censored foreign writers. The Party's new, more open policy was manifest also, moreover, in 'posthumous rehabilitations' of native Russian writers and artists whose work had been suppressed under Stalin. This new policy significantly included the rehabilitation of Meyerhold, initiating a process of re-discovery and salvage that would eventually result in the publication of two volumes of his collected letters, speeches and theoretical writings.³³ Access to the ideas of Meyerhold, as well as to those of such innovators as Brecht, provided the impetus for young directors to develop their own new forms.

One of the earliest of Efros's productions in which these other influences could be detected was Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* at the CCT in 1957. It represented one of his earliest uses of more openly theatrical means of staging, although this was not a programmed approach on Efros's part but rather the result, very simply, of his poverty of means. As Efros himself admitted later, *Boris Godunov* was not entirely successful, in part because he lacked sufficient experience, but also because the language of Pushkin's poetry proved too difficult for a young audience.³⁴ The production, however, was important for quite a different reason. In his first attempt at a Russian classic, Efros established a principle that was to be fundamental to his later approach: a rejection of the trappings of previous stagings. Productions in the past had demanded large-scale sets and a luxurious production style, informed and made

³³Meyerhold was officially rehabilitated by the Military Board of the Soviet Supreme Court in 1955. The first study of his work appeared in 1960, and was followed by a series of reminiscences by his pupils and others who had worked with him. Aleksandr Fevral'skii, one of his former assistants, edited the collection of his writings published in 1968, and the following year Rudnitskii published in Russian *Meyerhold the Director* (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), the first major critical study of his work. The facts and circumstances of his arrest and execution in 1940 remained obscure until the early 1990s. For a more detailed account, see Edward Braun, 'Meyerhold: the Final Act', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 33 (February 1993), 3-15.

³⁴Efros, *Professiiia*, p. 145.

familiar by Mussorgsky's opera version. They had been typified by heavy sets, decorative kaftans for the boyars, a majestically slow pace and the grandiose style of high tragedy.³⁵ Efros did away with all of this. The lofty declamatory speeches were replaced by the direct and natural tones of ordinary voices. The actors wore neither wigs nor beards, and the costumes, while 'period' in terms of weight and cut, were made of velvet in single dark colours, and had little in the way of brocade or decorative trimmings. The set was simple. There were no front curtains and the space was occupied by a single set-piece that suggested walls and arches, with an aged bare-brick face. The locus of different scenes was indicated by a few stage properties, which allowed for rapid changes. By this means, although he retained Pushkin's text in full, Efros succeeded in eliminating the laborious pace of previous productions. The lights dimmed only briefly as the last lines of one scene were spoken and the first lines of the next came out of the darkness.

Simplicity of setting was also a feature of Efros's next production, Eduardo de Filippo's *De Pretore Vincenzo* (with the new Russian title *Hukmo* (*Nobody*)). This was staged in 1958 not at the CCT but at the Studio of the Young Actor, newly-founded by Oleg Efremov, and housed temporarily in the MAT's own studio. This company became the basis for the Sovremennik Theatre, which Efremov was to lead until 1970, and whose repertoire chiefly consisted of modern works, both Soviet and Western. Efremov, with whom Efros had first worked when he cast him as Aleksei in *Good Luck!*, was if anything even more enthralled than Efros himself by the ideas of Stanislavsky. Efros recalled how

³⁵The interpretation of *Boris Godunov* in the manner of high tragedy was a tradition inherited from productions like one at the Maly in 1937. M. Lenin as Boris delivered Pushkin's poetry in a declamatory style, and similarly V. Shchyko's historically accurate costumes and monumental setting appeared, it was suggested, to have been 'transported from the stage of the neighbouring Bolshoi Theatre'. The director K. Khokhlov was criticised for a lack of coherency in the production, which had allowed the sheer grandeur of the decor to obscure the play's political aspects, in particular the important role the people (народ) had played in Russia's history (an idea which other productions of the 1930s consistently emphasised.) See *Istoriia sovetskogo dramticheskogo teatra*, 6 vols (Moscow: Nauka, 1966-1971), IV (1968), pp. 182-183, and in particular, pp. 187-188.

the pair of them had argued constantly during rehearsals about that director's methodology and its application in contemporary theatre.³⁶ Efremov shared, however, Efros's increasing concern with the current state of the MAT, which in Efros's view had become a pale shadow of the theatre created by Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. The actors in the MAT troupe of his day expressed emotions outwardly, but lacked inner sincerity; in this they were betraying the very principles of what he described as the 'old' MAT. Efros at this period was enthused by the vibrancy and naturalness of the phenomenon of 'neo-realism' introduced to Russia by the latest Italian films. 'Neo-realism' provided an illustration of the disparity between the authenticity Stanislavsky had sought and the false realism Efros saw in the MAT at this time.

Для некоторых это, может быть, давно уже было открытым, но мне лишь начинало казаться, что между настоящим Художественным театром, которому мы поклонялись, и тем, каким он тогда становился, — огромная разница.

Иногда казалось, что в практике этого театра будто бы осталась только форма правды, а самой правды не хватало... С некоторой досадой я относился к тому, что вот выходит итальянский фильм, такой живой, такой натуральный, такой резкий в своей жизненности. И я думал: обидно, что наша школа иногда превращается в какую-то академическую, скучную творческую манеру!³⁷

Under Stalin's patronage, and confined to a narrow presentational style, the MAT had undoubtedly suffered from a lack of creativity, and there was therefore some justification for Efros's opinions. His direct experience of its

³⁶Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 100.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 141.

earlier productions, however, was limited. Stanislavsky had died when Efros was thirteen. His views were founded therefore on stories, memories of trips to the theatre in his childhood, and from his voracious reading of Stanislavsky's books.

Nevertheless he and Efremov, in their production of *Nobody*, openly advocated the complete rejuvenation and reform of the MAT, and with all the audacity of the young chose to put their plan into action on that theatre's very doorstep. Their actions were deliberately provocative. As Efros made clear, they were motivated by love of the old MAT and contempt for the new:

Мы все больше всего на свете любим МХАТ. И никто вероятно, больше чем мы, не критиковал тогдашнее состояние Художественного театра. Мы стали работать в искусстве, как нам казалось, из любви к МХАТ и в протесте против него, каким он был в годы возникновения «Современника».³⁸

The production was an illuminating experience, not least because de Filippo himself, while on an official visit to Moscow, made an unscheduled stop at the young company's rehearsals. Rehearsing several scenes with them and playing different roles, he impressed Efros with his ability to show through very simple yet precise gestures a particularly astute understanding of the characters' psychology.³⁹ Nevertheless, *Nobody* scandalised many at the MAT and created divisions in its company. Some lauded the young troupe's innovations, while others did all in their power to have the production closed. To make matters worse, although the actors' character-portrayals were founded on an exploration of psychology and the expression of authentic emotion, the studio

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 100.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 102.

had to operate on a very restricted budget, and the young director's solution was to produce a strikingly simple, schematic set. It consisted of a number of functional free-standing set-pieces placed against a backdrop painted with an abstract, representational design. This decor was in sharp contrast to the detailed, historically accurate designs more typically seen at the MAT. The model, when presented to the MAT's workshop, drew derisive comments from the stage carpenters. At first they refused to build it and later there were demands that the abstract backdrop be removed. According to Efros's account, moreover, the final public dress rehearsal was delayed and disrupted by the underhand tactics of a hostile faction in the theatre's administration, and although the production was supported by both the studio director and the administrative director of the MAT itself a full performance of *Nobody* was not permitted on its premises.⁴⁰

It is clear that more conservative members of the MAT felt threatened by the presence of the studio company in their midst, and indeed, quite understandably, were insulted by the criticism of young upstarts. Ironically, in 1970, Efremov himself was to be appointed as the MAT's Artistic Director, and would be heralded by many as its saviour. Efros, on the other hand, following what were to be regarded by many as his heretical attacks on the sacrosanct style of the MAT in his later productions of Chekhov, would earn the appellation of 'anti-MAT'. Thus for some in the theatre the production of *Nobody* would be recalled as his first misdemeanour. Efros himself, however, was later to look back on this production with pride and consider it a triumph in his early career.⁴¹ It marked a decisive break from a realist style of presentation and a new stage in his progress towards the development of a synthesis between psychological authenticity and overt theatricality.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 106.

In 1963 he attempted just such a synthesis when, turning once more to the classic repertoire, he staged the first of his three productions of Gogol's *Marriage*. As we shall see in Chapter 4, in this staging the synthesis remained incomplete. Indeed his whole approach was excessively tentative and his view of the play too narrow. In fact the production was something of an experiment. He explored in it some ideas that were to be more fully realised in his later interpretation at the Malaia Bronnaia in 1975, and in a third, with an American cast, at the Guthrie in Minneapolis in 1978.

Efros's repertoire at the CCT, a theatre which catered for the young, was naturally based on such material as dramatised fairy stories and popular works like those of Rozov, concerning the adventures of children and pioneers. From the point of view of the cultural authorities, the repertoire therefore gave little cause for concern over its ideological content and Efros enjoyed considerable freedom in his choice of plays, although his time at the theatre was not entirely trouble-free.⁴² He could decide to stage plays like *Boris Godunov* and *Marriage*, which while in line with the official policy that encouraged theatres to

⁴²In 1955 he and Knebel' directed N. Pogodin's *Мы втроем поехали на целину* (*We Three Went Together to the Virgin Land*), a play which concerned the activities of a group of young people on a farm as part of Khrushchev's Virgin Lands campaign to open up the dry steppe-lands of North Kazakhstan for agrarian use. When this play was later shown on television, viewers telephoned the theatre to complain that it presented that campaign in a negative light. The production was subsequently dropped from the repertoire, and an indignant Efros later recorded in his memoirs the furore it had caused. Efros, *Kniga*, pp. 421-422.

His political credentials were also called into question on other occasions; for instance in 1960 he was attacked in an article by A. Solodovnikov of the MAT. Efros had spoken at a meeting organised by the All-Russia Theatre Society, and Solodovnikov, interpreting Efros's ideas as an attack on the MAT, objected in detail to what he saw as a lack of ideological commitment and as evidence of pernicious Western influences. A. Solodovnikov, 'Poniatnoe i neponiatnoe v vystuplenii A. Efrosa', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 17 (1960), 11-12.

Later Efros's film *Вускокский год* (*Leap-year*) (released in 1962) was criticised for its lack of political content. In a report dated 11 December 1961 and held in the RGALI archives, Razumovskii, the then Chair of the Committee on Film Production, though recommending that the film be shown to the public, suggested that the absence of active, positive heroes considerably reduced the film's significance and meaning. The same file contains a handwritten note, dated 17 November 1961, from the film's script-writer, V. Panov, in which he stated that it was imperative that an episode which Efros had cut be restored because, he maintained, this episode linked the film directly with 'our Communist future, with the Programme, with our great task.' (RGALI, F. 2453, op. 4, del. 670.)

produce Russian classics as contributions to the education of the young, were clearly better suited to adult audiences. As we shall see, Efros was later to express dissatisfaction with contemporary plays and produce his more innovative work with dramas from the classic repertoire. His decision to stage *Marriage* might be seen therefore as symptomatic both of how his work was maturing and of the fact that he was outgrowing the CCT. It will be recalled, moreover, that from his days as a student Efros had always hoped to have his own theatre. This was an ambition shared by many Soviet directors, and one which by 1964 his contemporaries had already achieved: Georgii Tovstonogov was in charge of the Gor'kii bolshoi dramaticheskii (BDT) in Leningrad; in Moscow Efremov had been running the Sovremennik since 1959; Iurii Liubimov had just established the Taganka. The decade that Efros had spent at the CCT had provided him with an excellent training ground, but like these other directors he had now served his apprenticeship and it was time to move on. In 1964 he accepted the post of Artistic Director at the Lenkom.

3. At the Lenkom, 1964-1967

Lenkom is shorthand for the Theatre of Lenin's Komsomol, the youth wing of the Communist Party. This theatre had grown out of the TRAM movement, which had been devoted to the promotion of Communist ideals, using theatrical techniques as a means of propaganda.⁴³ The Lenkom had retained this didactic purpose. The standard fare at the theatre was either light-hearted comedies or ideologically-uplifting dramas that featured idealised, youthful and patriotic characters devoted to the greater glory of the Communist cause. It is clear,

⁴³The TRAM movement began as The Leningrad Theatre of Young Workers, under the direction of Mikhail Sokolovskii. This theatre evolved from the activities of a drama group at a factory social club, and its success encouraged the establishment of several others. At first they operated on a strictly amateur basis, presenting pieces devised by the factory workers on social and political topics of immediate concern to themselves and their audiences. The idea spread to other cities, including Moscow. State sponsorship and the encouragement of trained actors, directors and playwrights to become involved established the movement's professional standing. (For a fuller account, see Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet*, pp. 203-205.)

however, from Efros's successful production of new plays at the CCT that such dramas had fallen out of favour with Soviet theatre-goers. In fact, in the 1960s the Lenkom was experiencing very poor houses and consequently low morale amongst its staff. It badly needed a new repertoire and a firm controlling hand. S. Marinov, appointed as its Artistic Director in 1957, had been dismissed after three years, only to be replaced by M. Tolmozov, who had left two years later, frustrated by his inability to bring about change. Thus for the 1962/3 season, despite increasing demands by the Minister of Culture to re-organise, the theatre had had to survive without any artistic leadership whatsoever.⁴⁴ Efros's own tenure there was to be similarly short-lived. In 1967 he would be fired after just three seasons for failing to produce an ideologically appropriate repertoire.

His appointment in April 1964 came at a crucial turning-point in Russian cultural and political history. In October of that year, as he began his first full season, the Thaw came to its official end when Khrushchev was ousted from power and replaced by Leonid Brezhnev,⁴⁵ whose regime would bring changes in cultural policy that aimed to crush dissidence and to eliminate pernicious Western influences.

Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinisation had never been welcomed by all.⁴⁶ A backlash against the Thaw had been initiated from the very beginning by hard-line members of organisations like the Union of Soviet Writers, and after Khrushchev's fall the campaign against liberalisation in the arts began to gain increasing support. A resurgence in the propagation of the ideas of Andrei Zhdanov, the architect of Socialist Realism, became a cause for concern in more liberal circles, and by the end of 1965 it was becoming abundantly clear that the

⁴⁴Undated Report. MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 1054.

⁴⁵Brezhnev initially shared power with Aleksei Kosygin but rapidly overshadowed him.

⁴⁶In a major speech on VE Day in 1965 Brezhnev himself pointedly portrayed Stalin's entire war policy as beyond reproach. A few weeks later the widely-used *Handbook of Party History* was cleared for publication; in this, references to Stalin's mistakes before and after World War II, which had been included in a version published in 1963, were eliminated.

Party was now to take an ideologically orthodox stance in the control of cultural affairs.⁴⁷

At the time of his proposed appointment Efros's political credentials, and indeed his ability to fulfil the theatre's mission, were considered at the theatre's management meetings and called into question by some of the committee.⁴⁸ Efros was never a Party member, and although in an address to that committee he played down the difficulties facing the theatre, in an interview of the same time he spoke openly of his determination to bring about a major overhaul of its repertoire.⁴⁹ But these points apparently failed to sound a sufficiently loud note of warning, or at least when the question of his political credentials was raised it was outweighed by counter-arguments: that Efros, having established his reputation in youth theatre and as a champion of new playwrights, would rejuvenate the theatre.

He began by directing a new play by Rozov, *On The Wedding Day*, and in the space of six months changed the repertoire almost completely. He introduced the work of Edvard Radzinskii with *104 страницы про любовь* (*104 Pages About Love*), and gave the first Moscow performance of Aleksei Arbuzov's *Мой бедный Марат* (*My Poor Marat*).⁵⁰ All these won their director wide

⁴⁷One of the more celebrated examples of this was the instruction given by the new head of the Ideological Commission to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn that he was no longer to write on the Stalinist camps. He was also informed that the publication of *Первый круг* (*First Circle*) was unlikely at any near date in the future. Diana Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR: Novy mir and the Soviet Regime* (New York: Praeger, 1982), p. 216.

⁴⁸Transcript of a meeting of the Artistic Committee. MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 1799.

⁴⁹A. Nilin, 'Teatr obretaet kryl'ia', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 13 March 1965, p. 2.

⁵⁰Edvard Radzinskii (1938-), a prolific playwright and historian, graduated from the Moscow State Historical Archive Institute in 1960. Following the popular success of *104 Pages About Love*, Efros subsequently directed four more of Radzinskii's fourteen plays. More recently his history books *Николай II: жизнь и смерть* (*The Last Tsar*) (1992) and *Сталин* (*Stalin*) (1996) have become best-sellers in both Russian and English. See *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre*, ed. by Martin Banham, revised edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 901.

My Poor Marat was translated as *The Promise* in 1965. Aleksei Arbuzov (1908-1982), an actor and director, was one of most prolific and popular dramatists in the Soviet Union and abroad. An exponent of the so-called 'new lyricism' of the 1950s, he used a variety of consciously theatrical techniques in dramas that blended melodrama, sentiment and fantasy and recalled Chekhovian themes and eccentricities of character. After agit-prop skits for the

critical acclaim, and proved so popular that it became notoriously difficult to get tickets for the Lenkom, confirming for many that Efros had indeed been the ideal choice.⁵¹

Buoyed by his success, Efros spoke of the need to break with the past and expand the theatre's brief, suggesting that it should learn both from the practice of Soviet companies like the Sovremennik and from the West.⁵² But he soon came under pressure to conform and to produce the kind of overtly political dramas more typical of the Lenkom. Over the next two seasons he responded to this pressure by compromising and resisting by turns. His leadership, moreover, encountered some opposition within the theatre; the acting troupe and other professionals divided into factions. These divisions were in part politically motivated, but complaints about his repertoire, although couched in ideological rhetoric, were also a means of settling personal scores. For instance, he was called upon to defend Rozov's play against charges that it was lacking in political commitment from another director, O. Remez, who had been rejected in Efros's favour for the post of Artistic Director.⁵³

As a condition of his employment, Efros had put a series of demands to the theatre's management. He had requested that its chief designer and associate directors be dropped from the staff, and that it should take on two designers and several young actors from the CCT.⁵⁴ In his efforts to revitalise the theatre he

Moscow Proletkult, he wrote in 1930 his first full-length play *Класс* (*Class*), and in 1939 the hugely popular *Таня* (*Tania*) (re-written in 1946; opera version by G. Kreitner 1954). *My Poor Marat* and *Tania* were directed for television in 1971 and 1974 by Efros, who also produced four of Arbuzov's plays on stage. See *Cambridge Guide*, p. 31.

⁵¹Iurii Smelkov, 'Vremia i rezhisser', *Smena*, 22 (1964), 16-17.

⁵²A. Nilin, p. 2.

⁵³Efros's defence of Rozov, and Remez's comments, are recorded in the transcript of the Artistic Committee, 8 January 1964, MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 799. The discussion concerning the possible appointment of Remez is contained in an undated report. MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 796.

⁵⁴Transcript of a meeting of the Artistic Committee (undated), MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 796.

The designers were Valentin Lalevich and Nikolai Sosunov, and the actors Anatolii Adoskin, Antonina Dmitrieva, Lev Durov, Viktor Lakirev, Gennadii Saifulin and Bronislava Zakharova.

became increasingly reliant on this favoured group, but had also invited Lev Kruglyi to join the company from the Sovremennik, and was developing a close working relationship with the Lenkom actress Ol'ga Iakovleva. This group of performers would form part of a team with whom Efros was to work frequently and who would remain loyal to him for most of his life. At the Lenkom, however, they formed what was effectively a troupe within a troupe. As Anatolii Adoskin later recalled, Efros demonstrated a remarkable lack of diplomacy in his rejection of other actors with whom he would not (or could not) work.⁵⁵ This bluntness of approach, which, as we shall see, would later bring him trouble at the Malaia Bronnaia, caused resentment at the Lenkom too. Older actors, now largely unemployed, added to the chorus of complaints about his choice of plays because they provided a disproportionate number of parts to his favoured performers.⁵⁶

His first reaction both to these difficulties and to the calls to produce a different type of theatre was one of apparent appeasement. In meetings and in letters to the Ministry of Culture he mouthed appropriate sentiments, indicating that he valued the importance of the Party's role in guiding the theatre on its proper path.⁵⁷ These, however, were couched in formulaic rhetoric, and in the light of

⁵⁵Anatolii Adoskin, 'Iskusstvo, kotoroe ne prekratitsia nikogda', in Zaionts, pp. 19-31 (p. 22).

⁵⁶The actors at the Lenkom divided into two camps, one attacking, the other supporting, their Artistic Director. The split is evidenced, on the one hand by the following extract from an unpublished letter from some members of the troupe to the Party administration: 'We should not defend our colleagues, but instead censure them. We should not cry 'Hurrah-hurrah, Welcome!' at every play that Efros offers, but instead we should think very seriously about our repertoire. We must help Efros find a repertoire that is appropriate to the theatre that bears the name of Lenin's Komsomol.' (RGALI, F. 2079, op. 3, del. 431.) And on the other hand, by Lev Durov's statement that in 1966 he collected signatures in support of Efros throughout the Moscow theatre community (my interview with Durov, Moscow, 8 June 1997). Durov's assertion is also supported by Natasha Zhuravleva who maintained that when Efros's position was under threat a group of the actors wrote letters to A. Kashmalov, an official in the Komsomol. (Fuks, 'Leninu', p. 3.) According to Adoskin, Kashmalov attempted to placate Efros's attackers but was later reprimanded for conducting secret meetings with him. Adoskin, p. 23.

⁵⁷On 8 January 1964 the Artistic Committee of the Lenkom met to discuss proposals for a new repertoire. They outlined plans for *Народная сказка про Ленина* (A Folk Tale about Lenin), a work to be created collectively, and also discussed the possibility of staging Vishnevskii's *Мы — русский народ* (We are the Russian People) and Ivanov's *Блокада* (Blockade). Although Efros was an active participant in these discussions for a more

the uncensored views he later expressed in his final book (published posthumously in 1993) there is little reason to believe that his statements at the time were anything more than lip-service.⁵⁸

In fact he clearly saw the position of those in authority as an unjustifiable infringement of his artistic integrity, and soon began to register his protest in angry public outbursts. As S. Nikulin later suggested, Efros's fate was inevitable, given the tensions of the period, and was linked to political machinations beyond his control.⁵⁹ But Efros himself (heroically perhaps, but needlessly) contributed to his own downfall. His time at the Lenkom coincided with a 'battle' between the journals *Teatr* and *Teatral'naia zhizn'*. *Teatr*, edited by Iurii Rybakov, was noted for its support of more controversial directors like Efros, while *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, edited by Iurii Zubkov, regularly published negative reviews of his work, panning even those productions praised elsewhere. *Teatr* at this period was under fire for its liberal editorial policies,

politically apposite repertoire, there is no indication that he himself was to direct these plays. On 11 April 1964 he signed a letter addressed to the censorship board, in which he assured them that, following their recent attendance at rehearsals, their recommended changes to the script of Rozov's *On The Wedding Day* would be fully implemented, and furthermore that they were welcome to see any further performances. The tired and familiar phrasing of this letter, and of a later report in response to a directive from Zharkovskii, the director of the Theatre Department at the Ministry of Culture (7 August 1964), could well be interpreted as showing a lack of true commitment. In this report Efros expressed concern over the lack of heroic dramas in the repertoire, but assured Zharkovskii that 'not a single day passes' without a continuing search for suitable plays. He also noted that the theatre staff were involved in a host of other socio-political activities in keeping with the expectations of the Lenkom. These included: regular seminars on Marxist-Leninism; the organisation for the theatre's technical staff of round-table discussion groups on current political issues; the creation of a twelve-member *agitkollektiv* (team of propagandists) to work in all sectors of the theatre; and the involvement of the theatre in the local community with Komsomol organisations and youth groups. (MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 799.) For a more detailed discussion of the organisation of Soviet theatres and the systems of censorship, see Appendix 1 (pages 306-310).

⁵⁸Efros's fourth collection of writings on his life and on the theatre was begun in Helsinki in 1983 but (as noted above) not published until 1993. In this, unfettered by censorship, Efros reveals his true feelings about the conditions under which he and other directors had to work before the advent of *perestroika*. He registers his angry protest on such matters as the ways in which self-interest could be used as means of attack when articulated as the Party line, challenges critics for basing their reviews on ideological imperatives rather than on aesthetic issues, and rails at the ludicrous banning of The Beatles, and at the arbitrary nature of decisions by the censors that prohibited the performance of some of his work while allowing that of others to be shown. *Kniga*, pp. 50, 223, 268-271.

⁵⁹S. Nikulin, 'Komnata na Kuznetskom', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 24 (1988), 8-9.

and an orchestrated campaign of vilification would ultimately lead to Rybakov's dismissal. Efros, however, had already become embroiled in the debate.

On 8 December 1965 the All Russian Theatre Society organised a meeting at which Rybakov and Zubkov were guest speakers. The transcript of this meeting was suppressed and not published until twenty-seven years later.⁶⁰ The discussions included the topic of the responsibility of theatre critics and the trust placed in them by the public. The critic Boris Poiurovskii suggested that the common practice whereby a critic championed one particular writer over another because it was politic so to do was both destructive and dishonest and a betrayal of the very ideals of the Party which those same critics purported to uphold. Poiurovskii cited numerous examples of such practice and assailed Zubkov, whose all-powerful position as editor of *Teatral'naia zhizn'* meant that any criticism of his opinion was automatically interpreted as disagreeing with the Party line. Zubkov got up to defend his position and in turn castigated Poiurovskii, and the meeting broke into pandemonium. The Lenkom and Efros's name had been mentioned several times in the meeting, and this had clearly angered him. In the midst of the ensuing mêlée, although he was not one of the invited speakers, Efros made his way through the crowds to the stage. Announcing that he supported every word Poiurovskii had said, he launched his own attack on Zubkov:

Еще будучи студентом, я привык к тому, что всех нас учит Зубков. Затем, став режиссером, я на собственной шкуре испытал ваши уроки. Так до каких же пор мы вынуждены будем все это терпеть? От кого вы защищаете советский театр? От меня, от Любимова, от Товстоногова, от Ефремова, от

⁶⁰Boris Poiurovskii, 'Protokol odnogo zasedaniia', *Sovremennaia dramaturgiia*, (January - March 1992), 239-244.

Львова-Анохина? Так ведь мы его и создаем, неужели вы до сих пор об этом не догадались!⁶¹

Predictably, Party officials disapproved of the proceedings: the event was described as ideologically subversive, and the organisers were accused of lacking political vigilance. Efros, moreover, had taken a very grave risk by insulting such a powerful figure as Zubkov. He continued, however, to make his feelings plain by channelling his anger and frustration into his work, turning the fictions of others into autobiography.

He began to select for production plays that were self-reflective and self-referential, and whose central concern was the freedom of the artist. In 1965 he directed a second play by Radzinskii, *Снимается кино* (*Making A Movie*), which featured the device of a play-within-a-play, and in which the protagonist Nechaev is a film director shooting a love story. Nechaev, encumbered by everything from bureaucratic red tape to the incompetence of his assistants and domestic crises, fails to make his projected film. Efros clearly saw this play as a portrait or projection of himself, and later recalled that when he first read the part of Nechaev it was as if he were looking at his own photograph for the first time.⁶² For Z. Vladimirova, however, this production not only expressed Efros's personality but also served as a manifesto of his belief in the need for artistic freedom.⁶³

Later that year, in the face of increasing demands for compliance, Efros beat a retreat by staging Sergei Aleshin's *Каждому свое* (*To Each His Own*), which concerns the fate of a young Soviet tank commander in World War II, caught by the Germans and forced to undertake a dangerous mission against the Russians.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁶²Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 43.

⁶³Vladimirova, *Kazhdyi*, p. 147.

It has a very clear moral purpose and a defined heroic theme, but lacks the complexity of ideas and characterisation favoured by Efros in his best works at the Lenkom. Nevertheless, *To Each His Own* was the closest he came to staging an heroic Soviet drama there. His decision to direct it might therefore be viewed as a compromise and indeed as an attempt to stem the growing tide of criticism that he was failing to produce politically appropriate plays.⁶⁴ But if some at the theatre took it as an indication that their wayward Artistic Director was finally being pulled into line, they were mistaken.

In 1966 *Making A Movie*, although it had proved no less popular than his previous Lenkom productions, was deemed by the authorities to be too sexually explicit, and its references to censorship were regarded as unacceptable. When consequently it was removed from the repertoire, he started work, by way of a response, on his second 'autobiographical' play, Chekhov's *The Seagull*. As we shall see in Chapter 2, he centred his production on the character of Treplev, who was turned into a spokesman not only for Efros's own anger and

⁶⁴ Although Efros may have seen directing this play (and later Iakov Volchek's *Судебная хроника* (*Chronicle of a Trial* —discussed below) as a means to save himself, it is unlikely that he had a free choice in the matter. As the director Petr Fomenko has remarked, at this period Efros was among many Soviet practitioners who were often 'persuaded' into producing what he described as 'идеологическое убожество' (wretched ideological [pieces]). Petr Fomenko, 'Derzhat' udar', in *Rezhisserskii teatr*, ed. by Anatolii Smelianskii and Ol'ga Egoshina (Moscow: Moskovskii khudozhestvennyi teatr, 1999), pp. 437-444 (p. 442).

This was not the only time that Efros had to direct 'ideologically appropriate, heroic' works. In 1975, for instance, he was to produce Mikhail Roshchin's World War II drama, *Эшелон* (*Troop Train*) at the MAT. Questioned about this production in an interview (published in English) with Spencer Golub, Efros implied that it was not wholly successful, but added: 'It is instructive from time to time to deal with and try to understand material with which you're not naturally in tune.' Anatolij Efros, 'Energy, Enveneration and the Mathematics of Intrigue', (in discussion with Spencer Golub) *Theatre Quarterly*, 26 (Summer 1977), 28-33 (p. 30). Given the uncensored opinions expressed in his fourth book of memoirs it seems unlikely that this statement reflected his real feelings. He details how at the Malaia Bronnaia he was criticised for directing 'too many classics', and therefore 'recommended' to produce so-called 'industrial' dramas (contemporary Soviet works set in the workplace). *Kniga*, p. 407. In addition to those already cited, in the 1960s and 1970s Efros produced the following works which might be legitimately described as those with which he was 'not in tune': Aleksandr Korneichuk *Платон Кречет* (*Platon Krechet*) (Malaia Bronnaia 1968), Ignatii Dvoretiskii *Человек со стороны* (*The Man from the Outside*) (Malaia Bronnaia 1971), and Iakov Volchek *Снятый и назначенный* (*The Dismissed and The Chosen*) (Malaia Bronnaia 1974). It would be facile to suggest that Efros should have taken a more honourable course of action by refusing to stage these works. Faced with the minefield of bureaucracy and the often arbitrary decisions of the Soviet censorship system, a strategy of appeasement in the hope of future advantage, while never to Efros's liking, was one adopted by many directors as a means to continue working.

frustration but also for that of the whole sixties generation. This Treplev was aggressive and energised, engaged in a battle with those around him in the defence of his work and besieged on all sides. This was clearly an idea close to the heart of a director in the process of establishing his own company and staging his first classic at the Lenkom. Efros drew a direct parallel between Treplev's circumstances and his own:

Они «стреляют» им направо и налево, как только видят перед собой фигуру неосновательную и невесомую, фигуру неустойчивую из-за непрерывных поисков. И когда какой-либо молодой театр производит свой новый не вполне удавшийся опыт, они тут как тут.⁶⁵

Efros's *Seagull* was a radical departure from traditional interpretations of Chekhov. It generated critical uproar, was interpreted as a deliberate attack on the aesthetics of the MAT, and was condemned as wilfully subjective. Treplev's call for 'new forms' met with incomprehension and led to his suicide; Efros's resulted in the banning of his production.

In 1966 his position at the Lenkom was increasingly precarious, and he attempted again to appease his opponents by producing Iakov Volchek's *Chronicle of a Trial*. The play concerns a gang of young hooligans brought to trial for their assault on an innocent passer-by. Set mainly in a courtroom, it suffers from a weak dramatic structure and poor psychological motivation, but its theme was in keeping with the theatre's avowed didactic purpose. As in his earlier CCT productions of Rozov, Efros's talents as a director did much to improve this inadequate work.⁶⁶ In this he was assisted by one of his most loyal supporters, the actor Lev Durov, who hoped, it may be supposed, that the production might save Efros. It failed to do so. *Chronicle of a Trial* opened on

⁶⁵A. Efros, 'Kak bystro idet vremia!', *Teatr*, 2 (1967), 66-70 (p. 67).

⁶⁶Solov'ev, 'Istoriia', p. 3.

27 May 1966, and the official announcement of the decision to replace him with Veniamin Monakhov was published on 11 March 1967.⁶⁷

Efros, however, had already begun work on his final production, the last in the 'trilogy' of plays in which he explored the self-reflective theme of the Artist and Society, Bulgakov's *Molière*. His decision to produce it has been interpreted by Rosette Lamont as an act of defiance which led directly, by creating deliberately overt political images, to his dismissal from the Lenkom:

Seeking to distance himself from Socialist Realism, he staged Bulgakov's parable of the artist's struggle against the power of the establishment, *Monsieur Molière*. In Efros's production, the seventeenth-century Jesuits were masks for the Politburo and the KGB. These obvious political parallels precipitated his dismissal in 1967.⁶⁸

This view of the production, however neat, is too narrow. Efros saw analogies between his own experience and that of both Bulgakov and Molière, and was equally aware of Bulgakov's intention to imply that there were political parallels between the court of Louis XIV and that of Stalin's Russia. But there was little in Efros's conception, set, or costuming that suggested such overt contemporary connotations. It did not open, moreover, until 1 December 1967, eight months after Efros was fired.⁶⁹

⁶⁷'Naznacheniiia i peremeshcheniia', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 11 March 1967, p. 4.

⁶⁸Rosette Lamont, 'The Taganka of Anatoly Efros', *Performing Arts Journal*, 3 (1978), 96-101 (pp. 97-98).

⁶⁹It seems indeed highly improbable that the production of *Molière* was a factor in the complex series of events that led to his dismissal. In the first place the public are unlikely to have seen it before he was officially fired. Although previews were normal, it is doubtful that one of *Molière* would have taken place eight months before the official première. True, representatives of the Ministry of Culture attended rehearsals in Soviet theatres, and therefore would have seen the production before a public showing. But had they been seriously concerned permission would not have been granted for performances to continue after Efros had left, and the production would not have been taken on tour to Tallinn and Tomsk; nor would Efros have been allowed to produce it twice more: for television (with Liubimov as Molière) in 1973, and at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis in 1979.

In truth, therefore, the reasons for Efros's expulsion were more complex and varied. As we have seen, he produced a popular repertoire but failed to find one that was ideologically appropriate,⁷⁰ and instead had caused a furore with his assault on traditional approaches to Chekhov. Furthermore, he had caused embarrassment with his over-heated outbursts, and had made an enemy of Zubkov. More importantly, it had become abundantly clear, towards the end of 1966, that the Lenkom would not be able to produce a new work as its showpiece for the celebrations in 1967 of the 50th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution. For the theatre that bore the name of Lenin's Communist Youth this was an intolerable situation.⁷¹

⁷⁰This was the official reason given for Efros's expulsion in a report in *Pravda* in May 1967. (N. Ivan'kovich and E. Solov'eva, 'Vazhnaia chast' obshchepartiinogo dela', *Pravda*, 12 May 1967, pp. 2-3.) Its authors also attacked Vladimirova for what they alleged was her excessively subjective account of the Soviet theatre in her book, *Kazhdyi po svoemu* (previously cited) in which she devotes a large section to an analysis of Efros's career (pp. 106-155.)

It was also alleged that by 1967 Efros's productions were becoming less popular, and that this was evident from what was reported as the catastrophic drop in audiences numbers for the Lenkom summer tour to Kislovodsk. (Larisa Isarova 'Primety sovremennosti i iskusheniia mody', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 15 March 1967, p. 8.) It remains unclear whether the tour truly was a failure. Tours in the past had been good, and another later in 1967 was reported to be successful. (Report of a tour to Sverdlovsk between 4-31 August. MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 799; telegram from Efros to Boris Rodionov reporting on success of a tour of *The Seagull*, *Molière* and *Making A Movie* to Estonia in February 1967. MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 1053.) Efros himself later asserted that it was as hard to get tickets in Kislovodsk as it had been in Moscow; on the other hand the actor Adoskin maintained that the financial and popular failure of the trip had provided the Ministry of Culture with the ammunition that it needed. This tour, he suggested, had coincided moreover with the appointment as the Senior Inspector of the Executive Committee of the Mossovet (GUKiM) of M. Meringov, whose 'one mission was to remove Efros'. (Efros, *Kniga*, pp. 408-409; Adoskin, p. 23.)

⁷¹The theatre had intended to produce a play entitled *Ленин нам сказал* (*Lenin Said to Us*) for the 50th anniversary celebrations, but it was not put into rehearsal because of its poor literary and dramatic quality. Blame for this was laid at the door of the Literary Department, which according to one report should have offered the play's inexperienced writers greater assistance. A scapegoat was found, the head of the Literary Section, E. M. Skergina, who was dismissed. She would later follow Efros to the Malaia Bronnaia, from which she was to be fired again, having 'failed to learn the lessons of the Lenkom'. Report dated (simply) February 1967. MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 1053.

One of his former students, who had attended rehearsals at the Lenkom in the 1960s, recalled 30 years later that Efros, at the time when the theatre was under fire for its failure to produce a suitable play for the celebrations, was summoned to a 'high-level meeting' of the Party. Here it was alleged that the Lenkom, unlike other theatres, had failed in its duty, and Efros was called upon to explain himself: 'Efros was asked straight out what "present" his theatre was going to give for the Jubilee year. Efros responded: "I'm not asking you what I should give my mother on her birthday, am I?" That was the end. He was subjected to a storm of threats that they would take away his beloved theatre. Someone suggested that he be sent to Siberia for being so obstinate.' Anatolii Ivanov, 'Ia vizhu ego vo sne', *Kul'tura*, 1 July 1995, p. 3.

4. At the Malaia Bronnaia, 1967-1975

Following his dismissal, Efros was given the inferior position of a staff director at the Malaia Bronnaia. But if this demotion was intended as a kind of punishment it brought its own rewards. The Artistic Director Aleksandr Dunaev shouldered much of the responsibility for the day-to-day management of the theatre, and his presence also provided Efros, whose first productions provoked renewed controversy, with a degree of political protection. Efros was not directly responsible, as he had been at the Lenkom, for the ideological content of the repertoire as a whole.⁷² Dunaev not only ensured that he, not Efros, staged the standard political works required for official Soviet celebrations, but also conducted most of the negotiations with the authorities.⁷³ In the period that Efros worked at the theatre, moreover, Dunaev became something of a figure-head, while Efros's productions in what was in effect a 'theatre within a theatre' became the centre of the Malaia Bronnaia's creative activity.⁷⁴

Efros's best productions were created on the basis of an organic relationship between the performers and their director, a process in which they 'infected' one another.⁷⁵ He frequently alluded to the necessity of establishing a common language with his actors, which should so unite them that each party could work intuitively but still follow the same creative path.⁷⁶ From his years at the CCT, he had begun to gather about him a group of actors some of whom, remaining faithful, would follow him from theatre to theatre for most of his peripatetic career. From then on the establishment of a troupe with whom he could work

⁷²Efros, *Kniga*, pp. 407-408.

⁷³Antonina Dmitrieva and Sergei Konaev, 'Rezhisser na vsiu zhizn', *Moskovskii nabliudatel'*, 4 (1998), 14-16 (p. 16).

⁷⁴According to the actress Vera Glagoleva, who later played in Efros's 1979 film *В четверг и больше никогда* (*On Thursday and Then Never Again*), in Moscow theatre circles audiences spoke not of going to the Malaia Bronnaia but 'to Efros' (пойдем к Эфросу). Vera Glagoleva, 'I bol'she nikogda', in Zaionts, pp. 124-128 (p. 124).

⁷⁵Golub, 'Acting', p. 20.

⁷⁶Efros discusses this idea in *Prodolzhenie*, p. 201, and in "'Vishnevyyi sad" v Khel'sinki', in *Russkoe-finskie teatral'nye sviazi* (Leningrad, LGITMiK, 1989), pp. 133-140 (p. 135).

continuously had become a consistent concern, and at the Malaia Bronnaia he came closest to realising this ideal. When he was fired from the Lenkom ten actors followed him there, and these were to be joined by a further ten when the Lenkom slid once more into decline. This group formed the basis of what he described as his 'theatrical family';⁷⁷ having gathered them together, he began to develop his approach to rehearsals and his own unique style of physical theatre. This style was centred on two ideas: his concept that 'truth is in the feet',⁷⁸ and the importance of the musical structure of performance.

The very title of his first book (published in 1975) *Репетиция — любовь моя* (*Rehearsals are My Love*) is indicative that he was always as interested in the process of theatrical creation as in its final outcome, the production in performance. Indeed his rehearsals were in effect performances. Though schooled in the ideas of Stanislavsky, he rejected now the idea that actors needed a 'circle of attention'; instead it became vitally important for their work to evolve from a dynamic interaction with an audience.⁷⁹ Unlike some other directors, he therefore refused to work in a closed environment and actively encouraged acting students, visiting directors and other interested parties to attend rehearsals from the very first days.

⁷⁷Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 6.

⁷⁸Golub, 'Acting', p. 20.

⁷⁹Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 178.

In Stanislavsky's 'system', actors created a 'circle of attention' around themselves, with a point of particular attention at its centre, as a means to focus (almost) exclusively on the world of the stage. Liking this to a pool of light, which could be reduced or expanded at will, he suggested that within its circumference it was possible to examine objects in detail, analyse one's inner thoughts and feelings, evoke and experience intimate desires, and establish close communication with others. He also described the actor within the circle to be in a state of 'public solitude'. A central aim of this concept was for the focus of the actor and audience to become one. Rather than interacting directly with the spectators, actors so focused their attention that they drew the audience, as it were, into this same circle. For accounts in English, see Magashack, 'Stanislavsky', pp. 239-241, and *Constantin Stanislavski: An Actor's Handbook*, ed. and trans. by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (London: Methuen Drama, 1990), pp. 24-25.

Though he spent many hours away from the theatre, analysing his approach to a given production, discussing his ideas with his designers and working on models of the set, in rehearsal he was often prepared to give his actors free rein. As we have seen, discussion of ideas was kept to minimum and he insisted that his actors should move freely in the performance space. He frequently joined them himself but, although he would demonstrate what he needed, it was vitally important that they should explore their roles for themselves, and he was rarely prescriptive in regard to their actions.

In his earliest productions he had been particularly interested in exploring psychological motivation. The audience, he maintained, should always be aware of what he called the 'zig-zag' of human emotions and their contradictions, which have to be revealed and expressed on stage.⁸⁰ His metaphor for this was a cardiogram, in which the jagged peaks conveyed the workings of a pulsating heart and only a straight line meant death. At the Malaia Bronnaia, however, he was now concerned to marry the actors' inner emotional states with their outward physical movement, creating a fluid stage picture. The moments of physical action had to be carefully tuned and modulated within the context of the production as a whole, in order to express as fully as possible the psychological and emotional circumstances that motivated them. He described the actor as a finely tuned instrument and also as an athlete, and conceived his productions almost as dance, keeping his performers in a state of almost perpetual motion. In an interview he explained:

It's important to me that the actors not only understand in an intellectual sense my approach to a particular scene or action, but that they physically enter into the action, the scene, and establish a physical system of associations. Then the approach becomes practical rather than theoretical. Often people will speak very articulately

⁸⁰Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 38.

about what they intend for a production, but when you see the production you don't feel it. Everything of which you speak must be expressed physically. It must all come out in the flesh.⁸¹

Dialogue, he suggested, was like a boxing match:

A person must either protect himself from the blows of another or else inflict some of his own. Being on stage is like being in a boxing ring. Only on very rare occasions do I allow the stage picture to be at rest, when circumstances make it absolutely necessary. Tranquillity is the exception not the rule.⁸²

In 1976 Efros was invited as a guest director to the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. In an effort to explain his approach to his American cast he produced a succinct analogy for his working method: 'Drama is a ballet with words'.⁸³ In ballet, music is the controlling factor in emotions and movement, and Efros was to use individual pieces of music as leitmotifs, to enhance mood and to create emotional associations, in many of his productions. He once likened the technique of a theatre director to that of an orchestral conductor, who is charged with controlling the component parts of instruments and voices in an ultimately unified performance.⁸⁴ But he also used music in a metaphorical sense to describe a kind of silent music inherent in the structure and action of a

⁸¹Efros, 'Energy', p. 31.

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁸³Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 23.

Efros had some direct experience of directing ballet. In 1976 he filmed an adaptation of Ivan Turgenev's 1872 novella *Бешные воды* (*Torrents of Spring*) under the title *Фантазия* (*Fantasia*), with ballet sequences in which the Bolshoi prima ballerina Maïia Plisetskaïa danced. He recalled discussing her ideas for a ballet version of *Three Sisters* and later attended rehearsals for her ballet of *The Seagull* staged at the Bolshoi in 1980. For his account of her ideas on *Three Sisters*, see *Professia*, pp. 307-309; for *The Seagull*, see *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 52-55. Plisetskaïa discusses *The Seagull* in her autobiography *Ja, Maïia Plisetskaïa* (Moscow: Paritet, 1994), pp. 396-401. For an account in English, see Emma Polotskaïa, 'Chekhov in the language of ballet: *The Seagull* at the Bolshoi Theatre', in *Chekhov Then and Now*, ed. by Douglas Clayton (New York: Peter Lang, 1977), pp. 239-258.

⁸⁴A. Efros and A. Kuzicheva, "'Bespreryvnoe izmenenie pri postoiianstve...'", in *Iskusstvozanie i psikhologiiia khudozhestvennogo tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), p. 234.

given work. He was particularly conscious that just such a hidden score underpinned the structure of Chekhov's plays,⁸⁵ and as we shall see in Chapter 3 constructed his *Three Sisters*, his first production at the Malaia Bronnaia, as if it were a symphony, controlling the flow of the action in crescendos and diminuendos, harmonies and dissonance.

In *Three Sisters* Efros again rejected established interpretations. His staging evoked neither the sad, elegiac mood of Stanislavsky's 1901 production nor the optimistic spirit of Nemirovich-Danchenko's in 1940. Instead his energetic, fast-paced production charted the changing moods of the sisters and provided moments of comic relief, but its overall tone was deeply pessimistic. It became a requiem not only for the unrealised aspirations and lost ideals of the Prozorov sisters but also for all who came into contact with them: the contemporary audience at the Malaia Bronnaia.⁸⁶ It therefore caused even more controversy than *The Seagull*. Some critics welcomed it as new departure in the interpretation of Chekhov, but others viewed it as an affront to a great Russian playwright and as a violation of a classic work. It was not only seen as politically subversive but also condemned as a further attack on the traditions of the MAT. It was banned in 1968.

Efros's next production, this time of a modern work, Radzinskii's satirical comedy about a latter-day Don Juan, *Обольститель Колобашкин* (*Kolobashkin The Seducer*), suffered a similar fate. His old adversary Zubkov condemned the work as a parody of contemporary life, and the censors, having first permitted its performance, later deemed its subject unsuitable for Soviet audiences (though its treatment of sexual morality was in fact mild) and ordered its removal from the repertoire.⁸⁷ In an effort to placate his critics Efros

⁸⁵Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 196-197.

⁸⁶T. Shakh-Azizova, '60-e: klassika i sovremennost', in *Mir iskusstv: stat'i, besedy, publikatsii* (Moscow: RITIS, 1991), pp. 156-172 (p. 171).

⁸⁷Iurii Zubkov, 'Zametki kritika', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 10 (1968), 10-11, (p. 10).

compromised again, and in November 1968 produced Aleksandr Korneichuk's *Платон Кречет* (*Platon Krechet*). A Socialist Realist drama first produced at the MAT in 1935, it concerns the plight of a doctor (an idealist, with appropriate party credentials and artistic leanings — he plays the violin) thwarted in his attempts to improve the treatment of his patients by a bureaucrat, Arkadin Pavlovich. The production was praised for its fine performances,⁸⁸ but can hardly be regarded as Efros's most innovative achievement. Not surprisingly V Razumnyi, writing in *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, welcomed the play's return to the Russian stage, and suggested that other theatres should follow the example of the Malaia Bronnaia in producing such 'great Soviet classics'.⁸⁹

Efros himself had other ideas, and in 1969 directed Aleksei Arbuzov's *Счастливые дни несчастливого человека* (*Happy Days of an Unhappy Man*). In this play the re-enactment in a series of flash-backs of the protagonist's reminiscences about happier times disrupt the conventions of a linear plot and also create a dream-like fantasy world. In a report on Efros's production the director of the Moscow City Council Executive Committee (GUKiM), Boris Rodionov, expressed serious concern about these 'difficulties' in Arbuzov's script, suggesting also that he had raised 'serious moral issues' but failed to provide answers.⁹⁰ The company was initially permitted to perform the work once a month, but in 1972, despite a written plea from its director, further performances were not allowed.⁹¹

The prohibition of the plays of Radzinskii and Arbuzov, rather than isolated incidents, were symptomatic of the restrictions then being placed on dramatic literature. Under Brezhnev's administration many of the more innovative

⁸⁸VI. Pimenov, 'Novyi "Platon Krechet"', *Teatr*, 3 (1969) 3-5 (p. 5).

⁸⁹V. Razumnyi, 'Pokhvaly v ushcherb pravde', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 14 (1969) 18-19 (p. 19).

⁹⁰Справка (Licence) circa January 1969. MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 1056a.

⁹¹Letter from Efros to Rodionov dated 1 October 1969. MGOA, F. 429, op. 1, del. 1152.

writers of the sixties and seventies were forced to emigrate, and the general malaise of the *zastoi* also took its toll on playwrights of the period. Traditional views on Socialist Realism continued to be propounded, and though this period did not see a return to the black-and-white propaganda of the thirties, it produced a relative dearth of innovative works. Writers were actively encouraged to produce plays with industrial or agrarian themes, or else retreated into the more politically neutral territory of domestic realism.

Not surprisingly, therefore, in the 1970s Efros began to express increasing dissatisfaction with the limited plots and excessively simple characterisation of most contemporary plays.⁹² He sensed that audiences were growing tired of this standard fare, and in him they induced 'director's block'.⁹³ Between 1972 and 1984 he produced only nine new works by contemporary Soviet writers, but twice that number of classics for the stage, on radio, and as television adaptations.⁹⁴ By comparison with modern plays, classic works, both foreign and Russian, provided complex characters, greater extremes of emotion and greater breadth of ideas. But another advantage was that the Russian classics, although censored in the past, had by now been fully accepted into the canon, and indeed the authorities recommended that they should be staged. Even more importantly, they were less ideologically suspect than new dramas and not

⁹²Efros, *Professia*, pp. 14-16, 18-19, 20-22.

⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁹⁴Efros himself suggested that classics formed the core of his repertoire, especially at the Malaia Bronnaia. (*Prodolzhenie*, p. 144.) This assertion, though in essence true, warrants qualification, because he did not focus exclusively on classics. Between 1972 and 1984 while working in several theatres he directed a total of nine works by contemporary Soviet writers (eight stage plays and one adaptation for television — Arbuzov's *Tania*, 1974), with the exception of the years 1975-1977 and 1981-1983 when he produced none. In addition three of these eight stage plays (at the Malaia Bronnaia) can be said to have had classic themes: Rozov's *Brother Alesha* (1972) was based on Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* and Veniamin Baliasnyi's *Road* (1980) on *Dead Souls*, while in 1978 Ignatii Dvoretiskii's *Веранда в лесу* (*A Verandah in the Woods*) (discussed below), borrowed motifs and themes from Chekhov. At this period Efros's other productions of contemporary Soviet writers consisted of adaptations for television of plays he had previously directed for the stage (Arbuzov's *My Poor Marat* (1972), staged at the Lenkom in 1965; Korneichuk's *Platon Krechet* (1972), staged at the Lenkom in 1968, and Dvoretiskii's *The Man from the Outside* (1974), staged at the Malaia Bronnaia in 1971). At the Taganka (1984-1987), he directed two contemporary plays. For a full list of all Efros productions, films and radio plays, see Appendix 2 (pages 311-317).

subject to the same scrutiny. Efros's productions in the mid 1970s were less overtly 'modern' than his earlier stagings of Chekhov. Nevertheless, in turning again to the classics he was not retreating into a safe haven or failing to comment on contemporary life. In producing such 'safe' works, he could both explore what might be termed eternal themes and make veiled allusions to concerns of the time. As we shall see, this was a particular feature of Efros's production of Gogol's *Marriage* in 1975.

This was his second staging of *Marriage* and he interpreted it in a manner quite new to the Russian stage. As we shall see in Chapter 4, under Efros's direction this rarely performed work, traditionally seen as a frivolous farce, became a complex drama, at once comic and deeply pessimistic. The production earned Efros almost unanimous critical and public approbation. It remained in the repertoire of the Malaia Bronnaia until 1984, was revived in 1987 and finally closed in October 1996 — a testimony to the coherence and inventiveness of his conception and to the fine ensemble performances of his troupe.⁹⁵

5. At the Malaia Bronnaia and elsewhere, 1975-1980

Although he felt most 'at home' in the Malaia Bronnaia, Efros also worked in other theatres. In November 1975, eight months after the success of *Marriage*, his *Cherry Orchard*, to be discussed in Chapter 5, opened at Liubimov's Taganka. As the first guest director at that theatre Efros had to work with a company whose methods and style of performance were very different from his own. The production was an experiment, in which he attempted to synthesise their approach with his own techniques of physical theatre. Although the attempt to unite the two dictated its style, Efros also drew on his own previous

⁹⁵Inevitably, over time, the production saw changes in the cast, but new performers were rehearsed according to Efros's directions by Durov, who himself continued to play the role of Zhevakin. The present writer saw the production on four occasions between 1993 and 1996.

experience of directing Chekhov, and further explored the themes and ideas expressed in his *Three Sisters*. But, whereas that production in 1968 had openly expressed the despair of the sixties generation at what they sensed was their own lack of purpose and isolation from their cultural roots, in 1975 his *Cherry Orchard* would be interpreted as a lament for the decline of a culture more refined than that of its day.

In the early 1980s Efros would become increasingly concerned by what he saw as a lack of refinement and cultural values in the society around him. At the Malaia Bronnaia in 1982 he staged a new production of *Three Sisters*, in which he not only clearly lamented the loss of the culture of Chekhov's era but also sought to return to the past, and to resurrect on his own stage the spirit of what had been lost. In 1967 Efros had written an article in which he criticised his own production of *The Seagull*. In this he had asserted that although his 'modern' approach to the play had succeeded in laying bare the play's essential emotions, it had also resulted in a loss of lyricism. He had suggested too that it was extremely difficult for modern actors, whose life experience was less refined, to enter Chekhov's world and to bring out the play's poetry.⁹⁶ This article was written after his first *Three Sisters* opened and in the midst of the heated critical debate over his approach to Chekhov. It may therefore have been intended to assuage the largely negative press. After all, as we shall see, such self-criticism would not prevent him from producing a radically new *Cherry Orchard*. Nevertheless, Efros's critique and in particular his assertion in 1967 that a 'freer, uninhibited' approach was 'only one side of the coin' undoubtedly pointed the way to his future change of approach to the treatment of classic

⁹⁶Efros 'Kak bystro', p. 69.

Anatolii Smelianskii's assertion that in this article the director 'criticized (*sic*) his work with Chekhov more fiercely than any of his critics', is an exaggeration. Although Efros criticised his own production, unlike many commentators of the time he was very far from condemning it outright. Anatoly Smeliansky, *The Russian Theatre after Stalin*, trans. by Patrick Miles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 65.

dramas.⁹⁷ There was a faint hint of this reversal in *The Cherry Orchard*, and its beginnings were also to be apparent in his staging at the Malaia Bronnaia in 1977 of Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*, to be discussed in Chapter 6.

In all his interpretations of classic writers Efros inevitably viewed their works in the light of his own experience, and *A Month in the Country* was no exception. But in contrast to his earlier productions, this 'contemporary' view would be counter-balanced by his concern to generate the atmosphere of Turgenev's era. More importantly this production, again by comparison with his previous ones, was less clearly a deliberate break with the established approach to the play. Although innovative, it also acknowledged a debt to the past. Rather than severing the work from its performance history, it constituted a development of that history.

His interpretation of Turgenev would be distinctively his own and in no sense a slavish reproduction of Stanislavsky's in 1909. But as we shall see his production had a lyrical quality, a sense of harmony and an old-world charm, and also included moments of peaceful tranquillity. In these features, which had been almost entirely absent from his earlier work, Efros was undoubtedly paying homage to a style of theatre that he had once rejected outright. Anatolii Smelianskii saw his *A Month in the Country* as both symptomatic of, and influential upon, a new tendency in the approach to the classics in the Soviet theatre. He described this new approach as 'quiet', by which he meant that those plays were produced in a more traditionally lyrical and gentle style.⁹⁸ Efros rejected Smelianskii's interpretation on all counts, and also expressed regret that although his 'dynamic and passionate' production would eventually

⁹⁷Efros 'Kak bystro', p. 69.

⁹⁸A. Smelianskii, *Nashi sobesedniki: Russkaia klassicheskaia dramaturgiia na stsene sovetskogo teatra 70-kh godov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1981), p. 147.

close, the words of this critic would remain.⁹⁹ But in studying his development after 1977, it difficult not to agree with Smelianskii, despite Efros's protestations to the contrary, that *A Month in the Country* was the first step by Efros towards a 'quiet' approach to the classics.

In fact he took another decisive move in that direction with his very next production, Ignatii Dvoretiskii's *A Verandah in the Woods*. Set on a nature reserve whose existence is threatened by plans to build dachas and sink mines, the action of this play revolves around an old family home. Efros was attracted to this new work precisely because it was written in the style of Chekhov and drew its material and characters from several of his plays.¹⁰⁰ He identified within it, moreover, what he described as a 'tender and tearful old-fashioned quality', and expressed a wish to treat it as though it were a classic.¹⁰¹ This production, however, bore even less resemblance than his *A Month in the Country* to his previous work. As Stroeveva has observed, Efros borrowed heavily from the early practices of Stanislavsky:

Режиссер творит спектакль в традиционной манере старого доброго МХАТа.

Словно не он когда-то ставил свои полемические чеховские спектакли.

Снова тонкий, психологический ансамбль, единое лирическое настроение, долгие паузы и замедленные ритмы. За словами угадывается скрытое, подводное течение, недосказанные чувства.¹⁰²

⁹⁹Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 264-265.

¹⁰⁰Dvoretiskii was known as an 'industrial' or 'production' playwright. His decision to write a play based on motifs from Chekhov was not in keeping with his earlier writing of socio-political dramas set in specifically Soviet environments, and is therefore interesting. It may indicate that at this period not only directors but also writers were nostalgic for the past and turned to older models for inspiration. The fact that Ludmilla Petrushevskaya, in 1983 was to write *Три девушки в голубом* (*Three Girls in Blue*), a play with clear echoes of *Three Sisters*, may also be indicative of such a trend.

¹⁰¹A. Efros, 'Interviu posle prem'ery', *Teatral'naia Moskva*, 2 (1978), 4-5 (p. 5).

¹⁰²M. Stroeveva, 'Vitok spirali', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 10 October 1978, p. 5.

More importantly, Efros's rejection of Smelianskii's comments was to be belied, as we shall see in Chapter 8, by his second staging of *Three Sisters* in 1982, and by what he himself said of it. This change of direction was neither immediate nor wholly consistent. Instead it should be seen as a general and developing tendency. It reflected, moreover, a more general trend in theatre at this time: critics identified a similar re-discovery of Stanislavsky in the work of Efremov's visually stunning *Seagull* at the MAT in 1980, and a nostalgia for the past in Galina Volchek's *Three Sisters* at the Sovremennik in 1982.

But the reversal in Efros's approach was not simply part of a general trend. It also reflected his response to difficult circumstances he encountered during his final years at the Malaia Bronnaia, which prompted, to some degree, his decision to leave the theatre for the Taganka in 1984. This period brought Efros into conflict with one of his best-loved actors, Durov, who from the early days at the CCT had played pivotal roles in his best productions and had on occasion worked as his assistant. In the early 1980s Durov was no longer content with this role and began to direct plays himself. Since the Malaia Bronnaia, in the view of audiences and critics alike, was Efros's in all but name, this was a direct challenge to his authority. Relations between the two men became increasingly acrimonious and led (when several other leading actors sided with Durov) to a split in the company. Although Efros felt undermined, he could perhaps have prevented the break-up of his troupe by demonstrating greater diplomacy and by accommodating Durov. However, their difficulties were compounded by the appointment of a new administrative director, Il'ia Kogan. According to Natal'ia Krymova, Kogan not only sided with Durov but also was instrumental in securing the dismissal of Dunaev, who had permitted Efros to work with relative freedom.¹⁰³ After Dunaev's dismissal, Efros met with

¹⁰³Krymova, 'Zhdu', p. 16. Krymova, a well-respected critic, is Efros's widow, and although the information she provides in this account is correct it is inevitably written, by her own admission, from a subjective view-point.

Kogan, who suggested that he would be made the new Artistic Director if he were prepared to join the Party, but after some deliberation he refused to join. The conflicts at the theatre, the break up of the 'theatrical family' with whom he had created his best work, and perhaps most particularly what he interpreted as Durov's treachery, affected Efros deeply. He was increasingly given to bouts of melancholia, and more importantly began to doubt his abilities as a director.

Although Efros's difficulties were 'home-grown', they appear to have been exacerbated by his trips to America in 1978 and 1979, when he was invited to stage first Gogol's *Marriage* and later Bulgakov's *Molière* at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. He encountered theatre practices, and perhaps more importantly audience responses, very different from his previous experience. As he detailed in his memoirs, he was particularly impressed by the industry, efficiency and willing cooperation of the technical staff at the Guthrie, remarking (in an invidious comparison with their Russian counterparts), that the words 'no' and 'it's not possible' did not appear to be in their vocabulary.¹⁰⁴ For Efros, these working practices were eye-opening. On the other hand, struck too by the material comfort of American life-styles, he was concerned by what he saw as a disparity between the social and historical experiences of Russian and American audiences, identifying what might be best described as a lack of emotional engagement in the latter. Indeed, having seen what he described as a beautifully dressed, but 'standardized' and insipid production of *Hamlet*, he questioned whether its well-attired audience, who in his view had been untroubled by war, famine or misfortune, actually needed theatre at all.¹⁰⁵

Similarly, he had certain misgivings about his cast, who by standard practice had been hired for a single season. They worked with diligence, enthusiasm

¹⁰⁴Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

and technical finesse, and the atmosphere in rehearsals was most convivial, but Efros left the US with the strong impression of having simply directed a production, rather than having created it collectively with a troupe.¹⁰⁶ It is important to note that his approach to his American *Marriage* was similar to the one he had adopted at the Malaia Bronnaia, and that the production was in essence a revival.¹⁰⁷ His impression of his American cast should be viewed in this light and was perhaps typical of a guest director in any theatre. However, the experience seems to have induced a sense of doubt in his own abilities, which was confirmed by his second trip to Minneapolis in 1979. His *Molière* was another revival; he had directed it first at the Lenkom in 1966. It was well-received, but with less enthusiasm than his *Marriage*. One reviewer suggested that Efros was using the same ideas in this production as he had in the previous season, and that they had lost their sparkle.¹⁰⁸

Efros, however, identified again the different life-experiences of American audiences as the root cause of the lukewarm reception. The Americans, he felt, unlike a Russian audience, whose social history had been very different, failed to see the links between the France of Louis XIV and the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁹

His experience of American theatre was relatively limited and his remarks may therefore not be entirely justified. It is important to note, moreover, that he recorded these ideas in a book written in the mid 1980s, when censorship was still enforced.¹¹⁰ However, he was clearly disappointed by his apparent

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁷The word 'revival' is used throughout to mean a re-staging of a given play closely modelled on Efros's original production.

¹⁰⁸M. Steele, *Minneapolis Tribune*, 17 August 1979, p. 7c.

¹⁰⁹The role of Lagrange, who delivers the final lines of the play, laying the blame for Molière's death on the King's unkindness and the evil Cabal, was played at the Guthrie by Jon Cranney. Efros noted that, whereas the end of his production at the Lenkom had evoked a sense of loss and tragedy Cranney threw these lines unthinkingly away. 'Произносит мимоходом, не вдумываясь в смысл. У французов был Людовик XIV, у нас была кабала, а тут не было ни того ни другого.' Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 136.

¹¹⁰Efros's third book *Prodolzhenie* was first published in 1985, but completed sometime before this date, since he is known to have begun his fourth in October 1983.

inability to communicate with a foreign audience, and on his return to the Malaia Bronnaia reportedly confessed to his actors that he had reached an 'artistic dead-end'. Having staged a show in three weeks in America, he felt that he had become a mere 'jobbing' director.¹¹¹

6. 1980-1984

While in the US Efros had expressed a desire to return to his 'own' company and audiences, but in truth he was to find little solace back at the Malaia Bronnaia. A further decline of his 'theatrical family' was exacerbated by his production in 1980 of *Road*, an adaptation of Gogol's *Dead Souls*, rehearsals for which had begun in 1978 but were interrupted by his visits to America. As we shall see in Chapter 7, it was by and large a major failure, and a destructive critique by Smelianskii was particularly wounding to Efros. The deep impact of both is reflected less in what Efros wrote about the experience than in the fact that he wrote very little. In his books he discussed at length his critically-successful productions of *Marriage* and *Month in the Country* as well as those of Chekhov, which although condemned and banned had given him great personal and artistic satisfaction, but in his third (which runs to 426 pages), only 11 are dedicated to his reflections on *Road*, and were clearly written after it closed.¹¹²

¹¹¹Maksim Andreev, 'Chuzhoi', *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 11 January 1992, p. 7.

Efros was invited to the theatre for a third time, to stage *Don Juan*, in October 1980. It was reported in the American press that he cancelled the trip without providing an explanation. It seems more likely, however, that he was not allowed to travel by the Soviet authorities. Krymova has suggested that officials in the Ministry of Culture, without consulting Efros himself, responded to invitations for work abroad by informing the host theatres that he could not travel because he was either indisposed or had other commitments. Her assertion is confirmed by one letter written to a Ministry official, P. Demichev, by Efros himself, in which expresses his surprise on learning from the Guthrie itself that he was apparently 'too busy' to accept their invitation. Anatolii Efros, 'Ustno i pis'menno', *Moskovskii nabliudatel'*, 3-4 (1996), 49-55 (p. 54).

¹¹²Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 67-74, 280-282.

The setting for *Road* could be seen to represent a convergence of different roads, and this image seems remarkably apposite as a representation of Efros's experience at this period. His response to its failure was to embark on a quest for a new approach which took him in several different directions. With characteristic energy, he worked in other media (radio, television and film), staged *The Cherry Orchard* in Japan, and became heavily involved in teaching at GITIS. Although these different ventures might be seen as a series of new experiments, his search was also fuelled by emotion. His writing at the period is somewhat ponderous, reflecting concerns over his age: although only in his mid-fifties, he was troubled by a heart complaint. He worked only sporadically at the Malaia Bronnaia, producing only two new works in the 1980-1981 season, *Summer and Smoke* by Tennessee Williams and *Воспоминание* (*Recollection*) by Arbuzov.¹¹³ These productions, though well received, lacked the daring and innovation of the past, and it was suggested that he had chosen these plays with strong female protagonists as vehicles for Iakovleva, the only member of the company who was to remain completely loyal to its director.¹¹⁴ Efros was clearly losing control over his troupe, and felt abandoned by those who had helped him to create his best productions. Without them his work lacked incisiveness, though this reflected, to some degree, a general tendency in theatre of the time.

From the early 1980s, as the disillusionment produced by Brezhnev's *zastoi* reached its lowest ebb, the theatre, so long at the forefront of creative activity, was felt to be in crisis and to have lost its sense of direction. Many expressed regret that audiences seemed indifferent; themes and ideas once regarded as fresh and thought-provoking now seemed uninteresting and insipid.¹¹⁵ This

¹¹³This play is also translated into English under the title *The Chance Visitor*.

¹¹⁴My interview with Marianna Stroeve, Moscow, 1 February 1997. See also I. Vasilinina, 'Teatr Arbuzova', *Teatr*, 6 (1983), 126-135 (pp. 129-130).

¹¹⁵A. Vislova, *Andrei Mironov: neokonchennyi razgovor* (Moscow: Isskusstvo, 1993), pp. 155-156.

sense of uncertainty can be seen to echo an increasing lack of stability in society itself. Russia's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 had prompted a new crackdown on dissidents, and by 1981 the political unrest in Poland culminated in the imposition of martial law there. On the surface therefore the Party's hard-line position was still strong. But Brezhnev himself, already terminally ill, died in 1982, and his replacement, Iurii Andropov, was also dead by 1984. The very extremity of the measures introduced by Brezhnev (and later by Andropov¹¹⁶) indicated that an ageing leadership was attempting to retain power but increasingly wielding less authority, not only over the countries of Eastern Europe but also within its own borders.¹¹⁷ In a confusing present, and with an increasing sense of uncertainty about the future, it is perhaps not surprising that the Soviet theatre in general lacked self-confidence, and that Efros was not alone in turning to the past for a sense of stability.

He consistently denied, however, that he was in crisis, and chose to lay the blame unfairly on others. He generated justifiably barbed responses in the theatre press by implying in an article that several critics had turned against him, suggesting among other things that they were often more concerned to display their own erudition than to review productions properly.¹¹⁸ Boris Liubimov objected to his accusation that the critics wished to attack him; Rudnitskii

¹¹⁶Iurii Andropov, the former head of the KGB, had a reputation as an intellectual, with a liking for jazz and Western novels, and it was rumoured that his appointment might lead to a more liberal cultural policy. But according to Rosalind Marsh such hopes were soon scotched. In fact as Chief Ideologue to Brezhnev's government he was responsible for a particularly reactionary resolution of the Central Committee drawn up in July 1982. This hard-line decree placed a renewed emphasis on traditional Socialist Realism. It demanded that writers fulfil the tasks of the Twenty-Sixth Congress, selecting subjects of contemporary relevance, such as industry, agriculture, the army and navy, concentrating on depicting 'positive heroes' and inculcating worthy moral values such as patriotism, hard work, internationalism and disapproval of 'political indifference' and 'a consumer mentality'. Rosalind Marsh, *Soviet Fiction Since Stalin: Science, Politics and Literature* (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 20.

¹¹⁷In a country in which government met in closed session and operated strict controls on the media, few could have predicted that Mikhail Gorbachev was waiting in the wings, but the beginnings of change were apparent. His rise to power in 1985 was not born in a vacuum; the move towards unprecedented social and political change effected by his policies, though not direct and far from predictable, was nevertheless inexorable and presaged.

¹¹⁸A. Efros, 'Labardan-s, ekzistans', *Sovremennaiia dramaturgiia*, 2 (1984), 259-263.

implied that he was in danger of alienating those who had supported him in the past.¹¹⁹

In his third book, *Prodolzhenie teatral'nogo romana (The Theatrical Novel Continued)*, Efros dedicates a whole chapter to the daily trials of working in theatre. Among other things, he questions the dedication and professionalism of actors and technical staff, and complains about the difficulty of working with a disunited troupe, who fail to love their director and recognise his authority. His remarks are couched in general terms and he mentions no names, but his tone is bitter and he is clearly reflecting his own experience.¹²⁰ In fact, the overall mood of the book is darker than that of the previous two. As Efros remarks in his preface, it outlines not only the joys but also the tribulations of a director, and its title is deliberately indebted to Bulgakov's *Theatrical Novel*, in which the writer had detailed with sorrow, humour and bitter irony his difficulties in working at the MAT in the 1930s.

It also reveals, however, that for Efros this troubled period was one of retrospection, during which he delved into history, as though looking to the past for guidance in the uncertain present. He recalls that during the difficult rehearsals for *Road* he had found joy and solace in reading the letters of Nemirovich-Danchenko, and devotes long passages to Stanislavsky and to the 'old' MAT, celebrating its work and values.¹²¹ By contrast with what he sees as the world of his day, the early years of the MAT were a period of culture and refinement, to which he would like somehow to return. His view is not that of a dispassionate theatre historian, but rather is imbued with a strong sense of nostalgia. Although he is not entirely uncritical, his tone is not one of censure

¹¹⁹B. Liubimov, 'Ne bud' ia kritik...', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 14 (1986), 20-22 (p. 20); K. Rudnitskii, 'Nasha professiia', *Teatr*, 12 (1985), 113-117 (pp. 113-114).

¹²⁰Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 107-122.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, p. 57, pp. 80-106.

but of admiration for the theatre's founders. He acknowledges that they had their differences, but remarks that theirs were the quarrels of 'Olympians'.¹²²

Similarly, in discussing Stanislavsky's methods in rehearsal, he implies not that the director was too exacting but rather that some of his actors could not meet his demands.¹²³ Elsewhere he speaks of Stanislavsky's greatness, kindness and wisdom, and expresses regret in respect of his treatment of Bulgakov that even a 'genius' such as Stanislavsky could not get everything right.¹²⁴ He says he is re-reading that director's *Моя жизнь в искусстве* (*My Life in Art*) and *Работа актера над собой* (*An Actor Works on Himself*),¹²⁵ and complains that though actors of his own day believe that they understand Stanislavsky's methods, they have in truth not read these works with due attention.¹²⁶ Stanislavsky's ideas, he says, have fallen so out of favour that actors and directors alike are ashamed to refer to them in rehearsal.¹²⁷ His celebration of the MAT in these passages is not always founded on reality, but rather is coloured by negative comparison with his present circumstances. Referring to an actor who wanted to leave the Malaia Bronnaia, he suggests that anyone who left the old MAT would have done so in the knowledge that they would become a 'nobody'.¹²⁸ This notion is pure fantasy; it fails to take account of Meyerhold, Alisa Koonen and other notable 'nobodies'.

Efros, as noted above, was never a Party member. Elena Davydova has remarked, moreover, that throughout his life he cherished a sense of 'inner freedom', as the source of his artistic integrity and self-worth.¹²⁹ Further, as

¹²²*Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹²³*Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹²⁵This is more usually, but incorrectly, translated as *An Actor Prepares*.

¹²⁶Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 100.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 81. This can be taken as a tacit reference either to Leonid Bronevoi or to Mikhail Kozakov, both of whom left the Malaia Bronnaia as a result of the difficulties in the rehearsals of *Road*.

¹²⁹Elena Davydova, 'Na grani ischeznoventiia', in Zaionts, pp. 385-402 (p. 398).

we shall see, his challenges to the enshrined orthodoxy of the MAT in his productions of Chekhov in the 1960s were acts of political defiance. In this light the language he uses in describing Stanislavsky is troubling because it is politically reactionary. His celebration of Stanislavsky, albeit as an imagined figure, echoes the cult of personality and virtual canonisation of the MAT director that had begun in the 1930s. In fact, throughout his third book Efros's ideas about the MAT have come full circle. His writing expresses the same sense of awe he had felt in his earliest youth, a desire not only to revel in history but to return to his own past — to regain a paradise lost. In 1981 he was given the opportunity to do this in practice when Efremov invited him to direct *Tartuffe* at the MAT.

At this time the MAT had two separate stages. In 1973, to celebrate its seventy-fifth anniversary, a new building with a huge, cavernous stage and auditorium had been constructed on Tverskoi Boulevard. But an older theatre, off Tverskaia, which had been part of the MAT since 1902, and an affiliated space (Filial MKhATa), were still in use. At first it had been planned that *Tartuffe* would be staged in the newer theatre. Efros was glad to have such a large playing area. Since (judging, as he admitted, from pictures) the Palais-Royal too had had a wide stage, the new MAT, he felt, was entirely appropriate for the performance of Molière. Early in rehearsals, however, the production was transferred to the affiliated theatre. This had formerly housed the Korsh Theatre, in which the audience could be seated on a level with, and in close proximity to, an apron stage. Efros's satisfaction with the new theatre was as nothing to his delight at the chance to direct in the older.¹³⁰ In such spaces, he maintained, Stanislavsky's spirit lived on.¹³¹

¹³⁰Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 286-287.

The existence of two buildings sowed the seeds for the split of the MAT into two separate theatres in 1987. In 1970 Oleg Efremov had been charged with rejuvenating the MAT, and in that same year invited Tat'iana Doronina, then at the Leningrad BDT, to join him. In 1987 he relinquished control of the newer building to her. In 1932 the MAT had been named in honour

Tartuffe was infused with a mischievous gaiety, generated in the first instance by the openly-expressed joy with which Efros greeted the opportunity of working at the MAT. Each time he walked into rehearsals, he wrote, was like entering a fairy story.¹³² His enthusiasm spilled over, infected each of his actors and spread in a chain reaction into the production as a whole. It was played at the lightning pace of much of his earlier work, fuelled in the main by the dynamism of the rotund and indefatigable Aleksandr Kaliagin as Orgon. Efros admitted to a childish excitement in working with Kaliagin, as well as with Sergei Liubshin (*Tartuffe*) and Anastasiia Vertinskaia (*Elmira*), in rehearsals that were founded on improvisation, clowning and impish good humour. In fact, he wished that the audience could see not just the finished production but these rehearsals too because they embodied for him the true spirit of Molière.¹³³ As Vertinskaia wrote, when Efros arrived at MAT he was seeking a refuge and found one.¹³⁴ In truth, the contrast between his experiences at the MAT and his situation at the Malaia Bronnaia could not have been greater. Tickets for *Tartuffe* were hard to obtain; by the time-honoured practice of Russian audiences, spectators lobbied actors and staff in order to gain admission. In the past this had been common for Efros's productions at both the Lenkom and the Malaia Bronnaia, but recently, by his own account, his work there had failed to produce such a clamour.¹³⁵ The intimate space at the MAT gave Efros the contact with audiences that he needed, but lacked at the Malaia Bronnaia. But the most marked contrast between the two theatres was the harmonious atmosphere of rehearsals, and the fact that at the MAT he was directing performers who actively wanted to work with him. Liubshin had

of Gorky and the newer theatre retained this name. Efremov named his theatre, housed in the older building, after Chekhov.

¹³¹Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 105.

¹³²*Ibid.*, p. 286.

¹³³*Ibid.*, p. 321.

¹³⁴Anastasiia Vertinskaia, 'Master', in Zaionts, pp. 133-142 (pp. 133-134).

¹³⁵Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 324.

asked Efros to cast him and it had long been Kaliagin's ambition to play in an Efros production.¹³⁶ This close relationship with his cast, and the loyalty they offered him, were like the relations he had once enjoyed with the Malaia Bronnaia troupe.

The latter, to his mind, had abandoned him. His willingness to work abroad, in other media and with other companies, was undoubtedly prompted by the hostility he felt at his own theatre. On the other hand, by all this activity he created a greater distance between himself and his company. If Efros felt betrayed by his actors, it is equally true that he neglected them, adding to their anger and distrust, and he did little to improve matters when he returned to the Malaia Bronnaia to direct a new production of *Three Sisters* in 1982.

As we shall see in Chapter 3, his first *Three Sisters* there in 1967, when he had begun establishing his own company, had then been attacked and banned. By 1982, however, it had been recognised as a landmark in the production of Chekhov in Russia and in the career of its director.¹³⁷ Its importance cannot have been lost on his troupe; they too had been key figures in his revolutionary new approach. But in staging his new production he not only rejected every aspect of his previous work, but also turned his back on all but one of the performers who had created it. Iakovleva, who had played Irina, was recast as Masha, but most of the other roles were assigned to young graduates and students of GITIS. Efros began rehearsing *Three Sisters* before his Molière opened at the MAT, and therefore divided his time between the two theatres. He did not conceal his enthusiasm at working with the MAT company and, as

¹³⁶Innokentii Smoktunovskii had originally been cast as Tartuffe, and in keeping with the practice common to Soviet repertory theatre of casting two actors in one role, Liubshin requested that both he and Smoktunovskii rehearse the part. (Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 321.) Later, however, Smoktunovskii had other commitments and Liubshin made the role his own. For Kaliagin's comments, see Aleksandr Kaliagin, 'Iasnost', in Zaionts, pp. 128-133 (pp. 129-130).

¹³⁷Shakh-Azizova, '60-e: klassika', p. 171.

noted above, made negative if veiled comparisons between the actors there and his own. His decision to recast *Three Sisters* infuriated his company, though it remains unclear whether this was simply poor diplomacy on his part or an act of deliberate provocation. According to his own account, when *Three Sisters* opened not one of the former company, contrary to their established practice, came back-stage to discuss the production.¹³⁸ In relating this, Efros presents himself as the injured party, but it is hard to believe that he had not foreseen that wiping the slate clean would wreak irreparable damage on his existing troupe.

Over the next two seasons the situation at the Malaia Bronnaia continued to deteriorate, not least because Efros continued to divide his time between his work there and in other theatres, both in Moscow and abroad. In 1982 he returned to the MAT to direct Tolstoy's *Living Corpse*, and after it opened in December travelled to Japan to stage *A Month in the Country*. August 1983 saw him back in Moscow, where his production at the Malaia Bronnaia of Ferdinand Bruckner's *Napoleon I* ended any hope of a reconciliation with Durov. Efros ignored the actor's request to play the title role and instead cast another outsider, Mikhail Ul'ianov. Krymova has suggested that the decision to cast outsiders was an attempt on Efros's part to revitalise the company.¹³⁹ It could equally be interpreted, however, as another piece of diplomatic bungling or indeed as a deliberate snub. The play is centrally concerned with the relationship between Bonaparte and Josephine, a role which for one commentator was an ideal vehicle for Iakovleva.¹⁴⁰ Ul'ianov and Iakovleva proved a most effective duo and the production was a critical success, but by November Efros had left the country once more to direct *The Cherry Orchard* in Finland.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 31.

¹³⁹Krymova, 'Zhdu', p. 16.

¹⁴⁰For an analysis of this production, see Iu. Arkhipov, 'Bruckner v pervye', *Teatr*, 4 (1984) 46-52.

¹⁴¹When working abroad with new casts, through an interpreter and with plays in translation, Efros inevitably made some changes in his foreign productions of Chekhov and Turgenev.

On his return he focused his attention on his young GITIS students, with whom he produced his most interesting work at this time, *The Tempest*, staged at the Pushkin Museum in December. This was unlike anything Efros had done before. The greater part of Shakespeare's script was spoken in unison by a chorus of students in modern dress, to the accompaniment of music by Henry Purcell, played by a full orchestra conducted by Sviatoslav Rikhter. At the outset the young actors blew up balloons and beat them with their hands to imitate the sounds of cracking masts and the cries of gulls, before releasing them into the air in the midst of the storm, which was created by music and by light bounced off the white gallery walls. Efros had considered several actors for the part of Prospero, and cast the MAT actress Vertinskaia as Ariel. When for various reasons none of his chosen actors was available, Vertinskaia played both roles simultaneously, turning an unfortunate circumstance into one of the production's greatest strengths. In a costume and make-up divided into black and white halves, and alternating between a tone of commanding authority and one of impish mischief, she created a startling new interpretation, turning the magician and his helpmate into two sides of a single self.

The Tempest was performed for only two nights, as part of the Museum's December Nights concert season. It was therefore in its essence ephemeral, but in this lay its true success. In its fusion of a concert style of performance, music and light, this production (according to those few who saw it) generated the magic of a fantasy conjured before their eyes, in complete accord with the essence of Shakespeare's play and the nature of theatre itself. The memory of

Thus although they were not carbon copies of his previous work the changes he made were relatively minor. These productions were not new stagings. In fact he used his previous successes as blue-prints, modifying the set designs to fit new spaces, and playing tapes of his Moscow performers to his new casts. He was impressed (as he had been in America) by the dedication and industry of his Japanese and Finnish actors and technical staff, and made further comparison with their Soviet counterparts. Efros describes his experiences in Toyko and Helsinki, and the difficulties at his own theatre in *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 340-429, and *Kniga*, pp. 6-44.

the atmosphere of joyous celebration that affected both cast and audience remained with Efros long after the event.¹⁴² Its success, though fleeting, rekindled his hope that he could start anew, and he declared his intention to open a studio with his young student performers.¹⁴³ This studio did not materialise, and such a declaration clearly signalled the true end of his time at the Malaia Bronnaia. Efros saw the supposed treachery of his old company there as a repeat of his experiences at the Lenkom.¹⁴⁴ In that theatre he had turned fiction into autobiography, and now he did so again by staging Dvoretiskii's *Дуекмор меампа* (*The Theatre Manager*), a drama which explores internecine strife in a theatre company, as his final production at the Malaia Bronnaia. It opened in February 1984, and in March it was announced that Efros had been appointed to the post of Artistic Director at the Taganka, in place of Liubimov, who was then living in exile.

7. At the Taganka, 1984-1987

Established in 1964, under Liubimov's leadership the Taganka had become an emblem of the Soviet avant-garde. A large part of its repertoire, at the height of its popularity, consisted of adaptations of prose works. Liubimov, who styled himself (as Meyerhold had done) the 'author' of the production, had become a master of so-called 'Aesopian language', criticising through hints and metaphor the abuses of the Soviet system. His controversial approach had brought him into frequent conflict with the cultural authorities and had led to the censorship and banning of several productions. In the summer of 1983 he had left for London, where he had been invited by Peter James to stage *Crime and Punishment* at the Lyric. On the day it opened an interview with Liubimov was

¹⁴²Efros, *Kniga*, p. 70.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 202.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

published in *The Times*.¹⁴⁵ In this he launched a vitriolic attack on the Soviet regime. He commented that in the past his applications to travel abroad had often been refused. He also gave vent to his anger at the banning of three of his productions, and implied that he would not return to the Taganka, or indeed to the Soviet Union itself, until these plays were re-instated. He questioned (as he had several times in the past) the competence and training of the representatives of the Ministry of Culture, and suggested that they should be replaced.

The timing of the publication of this article placed Liubimov in a very delicate position. It coincided with the resurgence of more repressive measures against expressions of dissent, fuelled in part by severe criticism in the West of the Soviet Union's response to the shooting down of a South Korean civil aircraft over the Sea of Japan with the loss of 269 lives. Liubimov chose not to return home, and instead applied for a one-month extension to his visa on the grounds of ill-health. Once this was granted, he extended his stay in the West by departing directly for Italy, having been invited to direct *Tristan and Isolde* in Bologna.

By March 1984 he had not returned and was consequently dismissed from his post at the Taganka; soon after, he would be stripped of his Soviet citizenship.¹⁴⁶ Efros was at first reluctant to replace him, and was advised by friends and colleagues to wait. In retrospect this would have been wiser. He must have anticipated that his move to the Taganka would be controversial. However, as we have seen, his position at the Malaia Bronnaia had become increasingly untenable and, moreover, it was rumoured that Liubimov did not

¹⁴⁵Brian Appleyard, 'The Crosses Yuri Lyubimov Bears', *The Times*, 5 September 1983, Arts, p. 13.

¹⁴⁶On 21 March Liubimov was expelled from the Communist Party, ostensibly for 'not paying his dues'. Then on 26 July 1984 he was deprived of his Soviet citizenship. Rimma Krechetova's suggestion that Efros was instrumental in bringing these events about is unfounded. R. Krechetova, 'Fantazii v manere Kallo, Taganka: Liubimov i Efros', *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 2 September 1992, p. 3.

intend to return. Indeed no other émigrés had done so in the past, and Liubimov's wife and young son had been permitted to travel with him, which led to speculation that the authorities were actively encouraging him to stay away.¹⁴⁷

On 22 March Efros accepted the post. His decision outraged Russian dissident groups abroad, and caused a furore in intellectual circles at home, where it was argued that Liubimov could only return if his place remained vacant.¹⁴⁸ The Moscow theatre community split into factions. Opposing sides defended and attacked Efros, and the debate would continue to rage after his death. Many of the articles concerning his tenure at the theatre are subjective and emotionally charged. Serious discussion is mixed with hearsay, half-truths and deliberate lies, so that it is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction.¹⁴⁹

Stories about the Taganka also circulated in the Western press. For instance much was made of the tale that the walls of Liubimov's office, which bore the signatures of celebrities from around the world, had been painted over on Efros's orders.¹⁵⁰ This story was completely untrue; the signatures remain intact to this day. It was widely rumoured too that Efros was responsible for the removal from the repertoire in 1984 of nine of Liubimov's productions. In

¹⁴⁷Liubimov himself later appeared to imply as much when he declared in an interview: 'The Soviets were fed up with me because I was always making remarks about their artistic restrictions. They sent me to England, like the King sent Hamlet to England, to be rid of me. The man who protected me, Andropov, died, and as soon as that happened, I was thrown out by Konstantin Chernenko [his successor], who hated Andropov.' Margaret Croyden, 'A Drama of Age and Exile', *New York Times*, 21 December 1986, Section 6, p. 34.

¹⁴⁸Krechetova, 'Fantazii', p. 3.

¹⁴⁹Rozov launched an offensive against the Taganka in an article in *Literaturnaia gazeta* (18 February 1987), in which he accused members of the company of conducting a hate campaign against Efros. The Artistic Committee of the Taganka wrote a letter of protest to the newspaper which it refused to publish. Rozov's accusations were later vigorously denied on the pages of *Teatr* and he was threatened with a lawsuit.

See V. Rozov, 'Moi trevogi', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 18 February 1987, p. 12; A. Smelianskii, 'Chem budem voskresat'?...', *Teatr*, 12 (1987), 42-62 (p. 54). The original of this letter is held in the theatre's archives. They also contain an anonymous satirical poem written to 'celebrate' Efros's 60th birthday, in which he is cast in the role of Salieri to Liubimov's Mozart.

¹⁵⁰Croyden, p. 34.

reality, many of the productions at the theatre were original adaptations or versions by Liubimov, and the Authors' Rights Agency insisted that they be removed in order to avoid having to pay him royalties.¹⁵¹ Other productions were forced to close when key performers left.¹⁵² In truth Efros did much to try to preserve rather than destroy the repertoire.

Such controversy formed the background to Efros's tenure at the theatre, and his difficulties were compounded by the fact that he came to the Taganka at a time when theatres in Moscow were on the brink of radical change. In the space of a few years they would cease to be state institutions and become autonomous, commercially viable ventures.¹⁵³ Moreover, Efros's experience as an Artistic Director had been limited, as he himself admitted, to three years at the Lenkom in the late 1960s. He confessed that he knew nothing of financial matters and little of administration.¹⁵⁴ Liubimov, although he had frequently clashed with the authorities, had also been particularly adept at cultivating the

¹⁵¹Beumers, p. 246.

¹⁵²In 1984 the following were dropped: *Павшие и живые* (*The Fallen and The Living*), *Послушайте!* (*Listen*), *Мать* (*Mother*), *Товарищ, верь* (*Comrade, Believe*), *Преступление и наказание* (*Crime and Punishment*), *Мастер и Маргарита* (*Master and Margarita*), *Час пик* (*Rush Hour*), *Работа есть работа* (*Work is Work*) and *Дом на набережной* (*The House on the Embankment*). *Rush Hour* and *Work is Work* were removed when the actors Dmitrii Mezhevich and Veniamin Smekhov left the theatre. The following remained in the repertoire for the 1984/85 season: *Добрый человек из Сезуана* (*The Good Person of Szechwan*), *Десять дней, которые потрясли мир* (*Ten Days that Shook the World*), *Тартюф* (*Tartuffe*), *Деревянные кони* (*The Wooden Horses*), *А зори здесь тихие* (*But the Dawns Here are so Calm*), *Обмен* (*The Exchange*) and *Три сестры* (*Three Sisters*). Beumers, p. 305.

¹⁵³Several Moscow theatres, including the Taganka, were invited to participate in an 'administrative experiment' which was introduced on 1 January 1987. It was designed to make the theatres increasingly independent and self-financing. Later in 1987, for those theatres which had participated in the experiment the subordination of theatres to the control of GUKiM was formally abolished. Initially theatres were still subsidised by GUKiM, but control was transferred to the newly-founded Union of Theatre Workers and later removed entirely. (Beumers, p. 247.) Though this 'administrative experiment' came into effect at the end of Efros's tenure he was to see the beginnings of such re-organisation and discusses these changes in his memoirs. (Efros, *Kniga*, p. 417.) Under the reforms, artistic and administrative staff at theatres were no longer employees of the state but hired on individual contracts. Theatres, like other state institutions in the Soviet Union, had seen excessive over-employment. The contract system and the need for theatres to be more commercially viable meant big reductions in staff numbers. Theatres also began increasingly to seek commercial sponsorship from the burgeoning business sector. For further details, see Alexei Altayev, 'The Economic Experiment: Soviet Theater of the Last Decade', *Theater*, 3 (Fall 1989), 18-20.

¹⁵⁴Efros, *Kniga*, p. 406.

support of powerful officials and other interested parties, and to some degree had been able to manipulate the system to his advantage. Efros, by contrast, although not a political innocent, had been protected during his time at the Malaia Bronnaia by Dunaev, and was less well versed in the workings (official and otherwise) of the various committees and boards of the Ministry of Culture. He was in his own words 'a bad diplomat', and this left him ill-prepared for the onslaught he was to face.¹⁵⁵

In the theatre itself Efros's appearance inevitably met with considerable resistance. On his arrival he met a group of about ninety of the Taganka's actors and outlined his plans, maintaining in good faith that he wanted to work with the company and develop the theatre. Opinion was divided over his intentions. Some actors expressed fury that he had taken over without Liubimov's permission; others were angered that he had not consulted them first. It was also suggested that he wait before joining the theatre until it had celebrated its twentieth birthday in April. Though some agreed to work with him, a large body of the actors and other members of staff left for good. At first, therefore, having alienated himself from his old theatre, the Malaia Bronnaia, he was largely isolated at the new one.¹⁵⁶

His response to the problems and political entanglements he faced was to bury himself in his work. This, he declared, was his only salvation.¹⁵⁷ He had always been indefatigable, but at the Taganka he worked at a ferocious pace and staged six productions in less than eighteen months.¹⁵⁸ As noted above, he had

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 333.

¹⁵⁶This sense of isolation was something he felt very deeply, and recurs as a frequent concern in the memoirs he wrote in the latter part of his life.

¹⁵⁷Efros, *Kniga*, p. 237.

¹⁵⁸*The Lower Depths* (M. Gorky), *У войны — не женское лицо* (*War Does Not Have a Female Face*) (S. Alexeievich), *Прекрасное воскресенье для пикника* (*A Beautiful Sunday for a Picnic*) (T. Williams, more usually entitled *A Lovely Sunday for Crève-cœur*), a revival of *The Cherry Orchard* (A. Chekhov), *Полтора квадратных метра* (*One and a Half Square Metres*) (B. Mozhaev), in collaboration with Sergei Artsibashev, and Molière's *The Misanthrope*.

worked at that theatre before. In his production of *The Cherry Orchard* in 1975 he had attempted to unite his own style with that of the Taganka. This had then been an experiment, but it now became a daily exercise. The marriage produced mixed results, and it has been argued that given the troubled circumstances under which he and his actors laboured at the Taganka Efros was never able either to develop the older aesthetics of the theatre or to realise fully his own intentions.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in the three years he spent at the theatre he achieved some notable successes.

As we shall see in Chapter 5, the success of *The Cherry Orchard* there in 1975 had stemmed largely from the vivid portrayals by Alla Demidova and Vladimir Vysotskii of Ranevskaja and Lopakhin. In 1985 he revived this old production, but Vysotskii had died in 1980, and was replaced by B. D'iatchenko. Although Efros himself shared the view of critics that his performance lacked the dynamism and tragic force of Vysotskii's,¹⁶⁰ the production was warmly received on tour in Paris, and won a special jury prize at the prestigious Belgrade International Theatre Festival. Here Efros also received the award for Best Director for his production of Gorky's *Lower Depths*. Iakovleva had followed Efros from the Malaia Bronnaia, and in time he also gathered about him a group of those Taganka actors prepared to work with him. He developed a close working relationship with Demidova and with Valerii Zolotukhin. Relations with Zolotukhin were consolidated in 1986 during rehearsals for Molière's *Misanthrope*, a production that had much of the polish and cohesion of Efros's better work at the Malaia Bronnaia. By 1986 it appeared that under Efros's command the Taganka was gathering momentum again, although he was moving the theatre in a different direction from the one Liubimov would have envisaged. His productions lacked the direct political comment that had

¹⁵⁹Smelianskii, 'Chem budem', p. 54.

¹⁶⁰Efros interviewed by Monique Sueur in 'La Taganka de Moscou et Anatoli Efros au Théâtre de l'Europe', *Avant Scène Théâtre*, 808 (1987), 56-58 (p. 58).

characterised his predecessor's work. But in this he was not retreating from contemporary reality. Indeed it was suggested by more than one critic that his interpretations of Gorky and Molière expressed current concerns.¹⁶¹ More importantly, his productions reflected the changing needs of Soviet audiences, which were themselves one barometer of a changing Russia.

In the 1960s and 1970s, during the *zastoi*, theatres like the Taganka had given public voice to sentiments echoed by dissidents in private. Although the Taganka productions had often fallen foul of the censors, the theatre had also functioned as an example of the kind of permitted dissent that the regime found actually useful. As Kyle Wilson has suggested, it was allowed to exist partly because of its considerable propaganda value as a *vitrina* or window-dressing. It could be paraded before those Western critics who asserted that the Soviet Union lacked artistic freedom as a proof that their claims were ill-founded. The theatre only seated 414, and tickets were very hard to come by. It functioned therefore as a 'safety-valve', by allowing a few dissatisfied intellectuals to indulge themselves, but in circumstances that assured that their pernicious and subversive message reached only a small audience.¹⁶²

By the mid 1980s, however, it had become increasingly unnecessary for the Taganka, or indeed Soviet theatre as a whole, to fulfil this special function. On 10 March 1985, less than a year after Efros's appointment, Mikhail Gorbachev had been appointed General Secretary. His calls for *glasnost* (openness) meant that ideas once expressed from the stage could now begin to be articulated in the press and even to much larger television audiences. The theatre ceased to be a forum for debate; for Mikhail Shvydkoi it stopped being 'more than theatre',

¹⁶¹See Smelianskii, 'Chem budem', pp. 42-62; Iu. Smelkov, 'Novoe prochtenie', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 9 January 1985, p. 3, and E. Surkov, 'Spor o cheloveke', *Pravda*, 7 February 1985, p. 3.

¹⁶²Kyle Wilson, 'Splinters of a Shattered Mirror: Experimentation and Innovation in Contemporary Soviet Theatre', in *Transformations in Modern European Drama*, ed. by Ian Donaldson (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 99-118 (p. 107).

and as Demidova maintained there was as much satisfaction in reading a newspaper as there once had been in going to the Taganka.¹⁶³

Efros's fortunes appeared to improve. He began to develop plans for a new repertoire that included proposals for *Hedda Gabler*, *Hamlet* and a new production of *The Tempest*. Later the actor Innokentii Smoktunovskii suggested that in the years Efros spent at the Taganka his art, despite all his difficulties, truly appeared to be developing in a new direction, one not fully achieved but full of promise.¹⁶⁴ Efros was not destined to fulfil this potential. Although he could not have known it, *The Misanthrope* would be his final production.

It opened in October 1986. Gorbachev himself attended one of the first performances and met Efros backstage.¹⁶⁵ It has been suggested that Gorbachev's appearance was to play a decisive role in Efros's fate. The meeting apparently prompted the writing of a letter, signed by 137 actors and other staff at the Taganka, including Efros himself. In this they requested Gorbachev's assistance in bringing Liubimov back to the Soviet Union, and

¹⁶³Mikhail Shvydkoi, 'Nostalgia for the Soviet Theater — Is There Hope for the Future?', *Performing Arts Journal*, 43 (1993), 111-119 (pp. 114-115); A. Demidova, 'Teatr na Taganke: Utraty i nadezhdy', *Izvestiia*, 14 April 1987, p. 3.

¹⁶⁴Innokentii Smoktunovskii, in his introduction to Anatolii Efros, 'O blagorodstve', *Ogonek*, 34 (1987), 22-24 (p. 22).

¹⁶⁵The content of the conversation between Efros and Gorbachev became an issue of dispute. Aleksandr Gershtovich reported in an article that the Soviet Premier had expressed regret that some of Liubimov's productions (and in particular *The House on the Embankment*) were no longer in the repertoire at the Taganka. Gershtovich found Gorbachev's comments tactless, because they appeared to imply that Efros was to blame for the removal of Liubimov's productions. Aleksandr Gershtovich, 'Amerikanskaia Rossiia: Efros i Liubimov', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 10 (1999), 14-16, 26-27 (p. 14). In another article it was reported that the production in question was not *The House on the Embankment*, but Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, a production devised and staged by Liubimov in 1977. (R. Cullen and C. McGuigan, 'Director Without a Country', *Newsweek*, 19 January 1987, p. 50.)

Gershtovich was not privy to the conversation backstage at the Taganka. Vladimir Orenov, an editor at *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, added a list of corrections to the end of Gershtovich's article. In one he wrote that Gorbachev had told Efros that he had seen his production of *Napoleon I* at the Malaia Bronnaia, and had asked him why so few of his productions were now to be seen at that theatre. Efros allegedly replied that not every theatre preserved repertoires as Liubimov's had been at the Taganka. V. Orenov, 'Neobkhodimye poiasneniia', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 10 (1999), p. 27.

called for his re-instatement as Artistic Director.¹⁶⁶ News of this letter reached Liubimov when he was in Washington, directing at the Arena Stage. In an article in *The New York Times* (21 December 1986) he expressed an apparent willingness to return to Moscow, provided that his citizenship was returned to him, and that if allowed to return to the Taganka he would also be given permission to work abroad.¹⁶⁷ Efros's position at the theatre was now far from secure. The Russian émigré paper *Russkaia mysl'* (*Russian Thought*) responded to the speculation about Liubimov's return with an unverified announcement that Efros had agreed to step down from his post. He did not resign. He had previously been hospitalised twice for a heart condition, most recently early in 1985. His ill-health was almost certainly exacerbated by the intense difficulties he faced at the Taganka, and on January 13 1987 he was called into the offices of the Ministry of Culture for a meeting at which, reportedly, he was subjected to a ferocious interrogation.¹⁶⁸ He suffered another heart attack and later died at home. He was sixty-two.

¹⁶⁶Gershkovich, 'Amerikanskaia', p. 14.

¹⁶⁷Croyden, p. 34.

¹⁶⁸Gershkovich, 'Amerikanskaia', p. 26.

Chapter 2

Нужны новые формы

The Seagull
(1966)

Efros directed *The Seagull* in 1966 at the Lenkom, whose Artistic Director he had been since 1964. His interpretation of Chekhov's play was entirely new to the Russian stage, and generated a critical uproar in the theatre world of Moscow. The production was said to have failed to express the mood of optimism demanded in Soviet interpretations of Chekhov. It also deliberately challenged the expectations of critics and audiences familiar with the approach and style of presentation used by Stanislavsky at the MAT. This chapter discusses Efros's innovative approach in the context of the play's performance history in Russia, with particular reference to Stanislavsky's production of 1898, but shows too in what ways Efros's *Seagull* reflected the political situation of its time and clarifies further its role in his evolution as a director.¹⁶⁹

The true beginning of the MAT was a marathon, eighteen-hour meeting between its founders, Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, which began at the Slavianskii Bazaar on 22 June 1897. But both in theatre mythology and in authoritative histories the origin of the new art of the MAT is often seen to have been Stanislavsky's production of *The Seagull*. That production is said to have been remarkable for its stunning sharpness, unrelenting truth-to-life and innovative staging.¹⁷⁰ But the real success of the play in 1898, as Edward Braun has maintained, was for the theatre itself; it gave the new company a sense of identity, a corporate style which, though still tentative, held infinite promise.¹⁷¹ Indeed the theatre affirmed that identity by adopting as its emblem the seagull which to this day is emblazoned across its front curtains.

This was the second production of the play. The first had been staged two years previously at the Aleksandrinskii Theatre in St. Petersburg. Theatre

¹⁶⁹The greater part of this chapter has already been published as an article. See Ros Dixon, 'Slaughtering Sacred Seagulls: Anatolii Efros's Production of *The Seagull* at the Lenkom in 1966', *Irish Slavonic Studies*, 21 (2000), 49-73.

¹⁷⁰Elena Poliakova, 'Ereticheski — genial'naia p'esa', *Teatr*, 8 (1966), 37-43 (p. 38).

¹⁷¹Edward Braun, *The Director and the Stage* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 65.

histories and biographies of Chekhov have frequently dismissed that first production as an unmitigated disaster, and at the same time have lauded Stanislavsky's as a complete success. As Laurence Senelick has acknowledged, this excessively simple assessment owes much to theatre legend, and like most legends is an accretion of half-truths and exaggerations around a kernel of truth.¹⁷² Nevertheless, Stanislavsky's production was a significant turning point for Chekhov, who had been acclaimed as a writer of short stories and theatrical farces but had enjoyed only mixed success as a serious dramatist. Thereafter he was closely associated with the theatre, working as the equivalent of an in-house playwright. As a result, the approach evolved by Stanislavsky became the definitive performance style for Chekhov's work.

The Seagull was also a triumph for Stanislavsky in the evolution of a new theatrical aesthetic, and can be said to have laid the foundation of the future development of the MAT.¹⁷³ The theatre, first in its production of *Tsar Fedor* and then with *The Seagull*, explored the then new concept of designing a production from scratch.¹⁷⁴ In *The Seagull* Stanislavsky's aim was to create a setting which would present as great an illusion of reality as possible. At this period his company was housed in the Hermitage Theatre, and he used all that theatre's resources in an attempt to create a complete world for the play. Every

¹⁷²Laurence Senelick, *The Chekhov Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 28.

¹⁷³It should be noted that Stanislavsky did not work alone on *The Seagull* but with Nemirovich-Danchenko. However, in essence, Nemirovich-Danchenko supplied an interpretation of the written text which Stanislavsky then embodied in theatrical form; see Jean Benedetti, 'Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre', in *A History of the Russian Theatre*, ed. by Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 254-277 (p. 259).

¹⁷⁴It is generally acknowledged that Stanislavsky's development of an approach to staging on the basis of a total design concept was influenced by European companies such as the Meiningen Theatre. However he is sometimes credited, erroneously, with introducing the idea to the Russian stage. In fact his ideas and practice also had native antecedents. The playwright Aleksei Tolstoy, for instance, reacted in a similar fashion against the standard practices of much nineteenth-century theatre when in 1866 he elaborated a new approach to staging for his play *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*; see Cynthia Marsh, 'Realism in the Russian Theatre, 1850-1882', in Leach and Borovsky, pp. 146-165 (p. 155).

detail was incorporated into a complex visual and aural *mise-en-scène*, which was also intended to evoke atmosphere and to hint at a hidden sub-text. The indoor scenes were crowded with authentic stage properties and loaded with realistic detail: thus for instance a real fire burned in the grate, and a glass held by Treplev shattered when he dropped it. In Chekhov's stage directions the opening act is set outdoors on the estate. He specifies that there is a lake and an avenue of trees, obscured from view by a stage hastily constructed for the presentation of Treplev's play. Contrary to this instruction, the lake in Stanislavsky's production dominated the stage area, and the designer, Viktor Simov, attempted to recreate the beauties of a moonlit country estate by using a half-lit tracery of foliage. The technical resources of the Hermitage limited the realisation of some of Stanislavsky's plans, and his idea of creating a total illusion of reality appears to have been better as a concept than in its execution.¹⁷⁵ In fact at one point Simov resorted to using dimmed lighting in order to draw the audience's attention away from the obvious artificiality of the set and from its crudely painted scenery.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, for spectators accustomed to stock sets and painted drops this setting created a stunning effect. As Braun has remarked, one of the great merits for a contemporary audience of Stanislavsky's production lay in the fact that everyday life was portrayed with a degree of fidelity that was entirely unprecedented.¹⁷⁷

Stanislavsky also augmented Chekhov's directions by adding an orchestrated score of sound effects throughout the action. The purpose of this was two-fold. On the one hand, it generated a sense of a world beyond the set; on the other, it was used to create an appropriate mood for each scene. Mood was created through sound, but also through silence. Stanislavsky's production extended

¹⁷⁵In 1905 the production was revived in the company's new and fully-equipped theatre. This permitted Stanislavsky and Simov to construct the set in greater detail; Braun, *The Director*, p. 64.

¹⁷⁶Konstantin Rudnitskii, "'Chaika"— 1898', in *Chekhovskie chteniia v Ialte: Chekhov i teatr*, ed. by V. I. Kuleshov (Moscow: Kniga, 1976), p. 65.

¹⁷⁷Braun, *The Director*, p. 64.

the pauses and silences, timing them exactly to between five and fifteen seconds. The entire pace of the play was slowed, and for the most part it was played as a mournful and lyrical elegy in which theatrical time was replaced, as it were, by real time.

Stanislavsky's production was greeted with ovations on its opening night, but it subsequently enjoyed only moderate success, playing just thirty-two times in four seasons. It was revived in 1905, but after only eleven performances was dropped from the repertoire completely.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, having once found what he believed to be an appropriate style and mood for the works of Chekhov, Stanislavsky tended to repeat salient aspects of his first success in other productions. In fact, he developed something of a sub-genre in the Russian theatre of the time, a form which Meyerhold called the 'Theatre of Mood'.¹⁷⁹ In this manner the very features of *The Seagull* which had recently seemed so innovative became instead the norm, and were judged to be an inherent part of the style of the MAT.

In the prologue to his play *Мистерия-буфф* (*Misteria-buff*) Vladimir Maiakovskii famously mocked Chekhov's dramas:

Смотришь и видишь —

гнутся на диване

тети Мани

да дяди Вани.

А нас не интересуют

ни дяди, ни тети, —

тетя и дядя и дома найдете.

¹⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁷⁹See Meyerhold's critique of the techniques of the MAT in 'The Naturalistic Theatre and The Theatre of Mood', in *Meyerhold on Theatre*, ed. and trans. by Edward Braun (London: Eyre Methuen, 1969), pp. 23-34.

Мы тоже покажем настоящую жизнь,

но она

в зрелище необычайнейшее театром превращена.¹⁸⁰

Maiakovskii's sentiments echoed those of many leaders of the artistic avant-garde, who in the years following the October Revolution largely rejected Chekhov's work. This rejection was due in part to the playwright's inextricable association with the MAT, itself denounced as a bastion of bourgeois values, a theatre whose style was out of keeping with that of the placard theatre of the Revolution. Chekhov's interest in the psychology of the individual, his humanism and allusive imagery had no place in the agit-prop theatre, which demanded readily-identifiable character types and an absolute clarity of message. In the 1920s there were few productions of his plays. Even the Moscow Art Theatre, although it took *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* on its foreign tours, stopped playing Chekhov to Russian audiences.

His works, like those of all pre-revolutionary writers, were also subjected to the overtly ideological interpretations of Soviet critics. As complex dramas, they proved remarkably resilient, for the most part, to purely socio-political analyses. *The Cherry Orchard*, it must be briefly remarked, was a notable exception. In this play it was not difficult for critics to identify a Chekhov who advocated the destruction of an obsolete ruling class, to see in Lopakhin the rise of the bourgeoisie, and to view Trofimov as a visionary and as a harbinger of the coming Revolution.¹⁸¹ It seems hardly surprising therefore that at this time *The*

¹⁸⁰Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Misteriia-buff* (Version II) in *Sochineniia*, 1 vol (Moscow: OGIZ, 1941), pp. 408-451 (p. 409).

¹⁸¹In 1929, *Glavrepertkom*, the body which regulated the repertoires of Soviet theatres, assigned all Chekhov's major plays, with the exception of *The Cherry Orchard*, to the category of *Litera B*. This group included plays of the classic repertoire whose content was seen to be completely irrelevant from a Soviet socio-political view-point. *The Cherry Orchard*, by contrast, was categorised in *Litera A*. Plays in this group were characterised as 'those works which due to their high socio-political content have not lost their meaning for Soviet audiences'. *Repetuarnyi ukazatel'*, 29 (1929), p. 9. *Glavrepertkom* was established in 1923

Cherry Orchard was the most regularly and widely performed of all Chekhov's plays. However, it was frequently interpreted as a satirical farce that mocked the estate owners and their parasites. A. Lobanov took just such a view when he produced it at the Ruben Simov Studio in 1935. For Lobanov, the moral and material decay of the gentry was a rot that needed to be rooted out. But the replacement of this social class by one of industrial capitalists was no more desirable. Viewing the characters critically, with neither pity nor sympathy, the director exaggerated single negative traits in each character to comic effect. Thus, for instance, Ranevskia's distinguishing attribute was her lack of concern for others, while Lopakhin, beneath a mask of kindness and his 'broad, Russian nature', was a dangerous predator, and Trofimov was an absurd gabbler.¹⁸² Act II was set in a seedy restaurant; a tipsy Trofimov was thrown out in the middle of his harangue, which he later continued in a bath-house packed with students of both sexes.¹⁸³ These character traits, which in previous productions had been interpreted as purely human failings, were seen here to be socially determined, and the audience were expected to judge Chekhov's characters accordingly.¹⁸⁴ F. Litvinov, in a production staged in 1935 for the Krasnyi fakel' (Red Lantern) Theatre of Novosibirsk, invited the audience to participate in what Rudnitskii described as 'a satirical execution' of the characters.¹⁸⁵

Social satire catches the mood of a particular moment and rarely endures; such extreme interpretations of Chekhov's work did not stand the test of time. These productions, however, although short-lived and indeed rapidly forgotten, broke

and controlled the repertoires of Soviet theatres until 1953, when this function was taken over by the Ministry of Culture.

¹⁸²A. Lobanov, 'Stsenicheskoe voploshchenie Chekhova', *Sovetskoe Iskusstvo*, 14 April 1933, p. 3.

¹⁸³Laurence Senelick, 'Chekhov's Bubble Reputation', in *Chekhov Then and Now*, ed. by Douglas Clayton (New York: Peter Lang, 1977), 5-17 (p. 11).

¹⁸⁴E. A. Polotskaia, "'Vishnevyi sad": Zhizn' vo vremeni', in *Literaturnye proizvedeniia v dvizhenii epokh* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1983), pp. 229-287 (pp. 263-264).

¹⁸⁵Konstantin Rudnitskii, *Spektakli raznykh let* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), p. 89.

new ground in the approach to Chekhov in the Soviet theatre. They were characterised, on the one hand, by a greater objectivity in their interpretation of character, and on the other by a style of presentation which broke with the traditions of the MAT. As we shall see, these features were to be fundamental to what was seen as a 'new' approach to Chekhov in the mid 1960s, but they would have been forgotten for almost thirty years when Soviet theatre directors re-discovered them then.

The MAT, although rejected in the post-Revolutionary period, had not remained out of favour for long; in 1921 the Bolshevik Government had assigned to it a special protected status as an 'academic' theatre. As we have seen, later, in the 1930s, its style of performance was actively promoted as a model to be copied in theatres throughout the Soviet Union. The MAT was encouraged to present, often in the manner of a factory production line, monumental and ideological epics extolling Revolutionary and military victories, and these dramas began to overshadow its previous works. By this time Stanislavsky had effectively retreated from the theatre he had founded, and those of his productions which continued to run became increasingly fossilised museum pieces.¹⁸⁶ Others, like *The Seagull*, although no longer part of the repertoire, became theatre legends and entered into a kind of collective memory. Further, Stanislavsky's productions of Chekhov in particular came to be synonymous with what were seen as 'correct' interpretations, and were frequently used as the 'blue-print' for subsequent productions. In terms of Chekhov's scripts, this meant a failure to recognise the complexity of his writing, and therefore the possibility, indeed necessity, of multiple interpretations. Ironically, such rigidity of thought with regard to Stanislavsky's interpretations was directly contrary to his own credo

¹⁸⁶Following a heart attack in 1928, Stanislavsky spent increasingly long periods away from the theatre he had founded, rehearsing, developing his 'system', and working on opera.

and to the very essence of a theatre that had been founded on innovation and experimentation.¹⁸⁷

During World War II, innovation in the Soviet theatre gave way to the imperatives of propaganda. In addition, many theatres were evacuated and new productions were few. The only Moscow production of *The Seagull* at this period was staged in 1944 by Aleksandr Tairov in his bomb-damaged Kamernyi Theatre.¹⁸⁸ His set was minimalist and consisted of a platform surrounded by grey and black velvet curtains. Different locales were established by the use of a few stage properties and with delicate drapes, which were arranged differently for each scene and through which spotlights filtered, lending an airy and dream-like quality. The director's primary purpose was to reveal what he saw as a central theme of Chekhov's play: the need for new art forms to attain the highest truth. He reduced the drama to a discourse on the nature of art, and to this end

¹⁸⁷Poliakova, 'Ereticheski', p. 38.

¹⁸⁸Aleksandr Tairov (1885-1950) shared with Meyerhold an antipathy towards the developments in theatre after the Renaissance which had culminated in the 'dead-end' of late nineteenth century Naturalism. Like Meyerhold he sought to revive older forms: the theatre of Ancient Greece and Rome, folk dramas, the art of the *Commedia dell' Arte*, and pantomime. He envisaged and sought to establish a theatre in which an ideal or universal actor would be equally capable of playing tragedy, farce, opera and pantomime, as well as performing as a dancer and as an acrobat. Tairov drew on a huge range of sources. In his training of the actor, deriving his techniques from ballet and music, he valued equally the mastery of the body and voice, seeing them as a unified instrument of expression. His work was influenced too by Greek and Eastern myth, symbolist poetry and the artistic movements of the Cubo-futurists and Constructivists. In 1915 he opened the Kamernyi Theatre with his wife Ailsa Koonen as a forum for experimentation in theatre which aimed to synthesise all art forms. His theatre attracted leading Soviet artists as set and costume designers, and here he produced visually stunning and dynamic productions of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* in 1917, and in 1922 Charles Lecoq's *Giroflé-Girofla*, and (his acclaimed masterpiece) Racine's *Phaedra*; later productions included the works of writers as varied as Eugene O'Neill, Vladimir Maiakovskii and Maxim Gorky. Tairov remained largely unaffected by the Revolution; championed by the Commissar for Enlightenment Anatolii Lunacharskii, he continued to pursue an independent course in the face of intense criticism from others. In the 1930s, however, when experimentation was inimical to Soviet political tasks, his work was condemned as 'formalist'. At this period Tairov owed his survival to his ability to adapt to the new climate, producing Vsevolod Visnhevskii's *Оптимистическая трагедия* (*Optimistic Tragedy*) in 1933 as a model of socialist realist theatre. (Nick Worrall, in *International Directory of Theatre - 3: Actors, Directors and Designers*, ed. by David Pickering (Detroit: St. James Press, 1996), pp. 739-741.) The Kamernyi was closed in 1949 but Tairov's attempts to remain independent of the Soviet regime have been interpreted by some as a capitulation that to some extent overshadowed his important contribution to Russian theatre. For further material see Nick Worrall, *Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 15-75; and Aleksandr Tairov, *Zapiski rezhisser, stat'i, besedy, rechi, pisma* (Moscow: VTO, 1970). In English as *Notes of a director*, trans. by William Kuhlke (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, c. 1969).

cut the script by a third. He eliminated lines and stage directions that referred to characters he considered secondary, and removed details intended to produce a fuller picture of every-day life. Music was an important feature of all Tairov's work, and in this case he used the music of Tchaikovsky as an accompaniment to Treplev's play. The production was essentially a concert performance, and not a critical success. It soon closed, and indeed the theatre itself, condemned as an example of bourgeois decadence, was forced to do the same some five years later. However, the importance of Tairov's *Seagull* should not be underestimated. Until Efros's production twenty-two years later, this flawed version represented the only significant attempt to find a completely new interpretative key to Chekhov's play.

Other productions tended to preserve the legend of the MAT, and to copy the style of Stanislavsky.¹⁸⁹ 1960 saw the centenary of Chekhov's birth — an event every Soviet theatre was expected to honour. Viktor Stanitsyn and I. Raevskii revived *The Seagull* at the MAT, using many of Stanislavsky's ideas as their 'blue-print'. This production, which even reproduced exactly Stanislavsky's pauses, appears for the most part to have been a poor copy of the original. Elena Poliakova noted that it was a lifeless rendering of the script which audiences greeted with a polite, but indifferent response.¹⁹⁰ For Rudnitskii it failed entirely to present the complexity of emotions that he believed were central to Chekhov's characters.¹⁹¹ M. Turovskaja harshly criticised the production for its want of originality and its failure to interest a

¹⁸⁹Poliakova, 'Ereticheski', p. 38. *The Seagull* was not the most popular of Chekhov's major dramas. In the Soviet Union, between 1917 and Efros's production of 1966, there were forty-eight professional stagings of the play. In this same period there were fifty-five productions of *Three Sisters* and almost twice that number of *The Cherry Orchard*. The last named could be most clearly re-interpreted in accord with Soviet ideology and propaganda, and this accounted for its popularity. For a full list of professional theatre productions of Chekhov in the Soviet Union; see V. Berezkin, *Postanovki p'es A. P. Chekova v sovetskom teatre 1917-1986 gody* (Moscow - Prague, 1987).

¹⁹⁰Poliakova, 'Ereticheski', p. 38.

¹⁹¹Konstantin Rudnitskii, 'Vremia, Chekhov i rezhissery', *Voprosy teatra* (Moscow: VTO, 1965), pp. 135-159 (pp. 139-140).

modern audience.¹⁹² Nevertheless, whereas the directors had little new to offer, Nisson Shiffrin's decor marked the beginning of a new approach to the presentation of Chekhov. He blended exterior and interior scenes, so that the natural surroundings were always visible in the house. The interiors had no ceilings and only partial walls, and the set included a panorama, depicting trees and the horizon, which was visible in all four acts. Similarly, tall window drapes hung in both the indoor and outdoor settings, creating what Arnold Aronson has described as 'an ever-present sense of spatial memory and anticipation'.¹⁹³ As we shall see, the evocation of memory was to be a significant feature of Iurii Pimenov's setting for Knebel's staging of *The Cherry Orchard* at the Theatre of the Soviet Army in 1965, and of Valerii Levental's design for Efros's production of the same play at the Taganka in 1975. In that production, as well as in his *Three Sisters* in 1967, although the settings would be much starker than Shiffrin's, Efros was also to aim at a fusion between the interiors and outdoors.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹²M. Turovskaja, 'Ustarel li Chekhov?', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 26 July 1960, p. 3.

¹⁹³Arnold Aronson, 'The scenography of Chekhov', in *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*, ed. by Vera Gottlieb and Paul Allain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 134-148 (p. 140).

¹⁹⁴This fusion of exterior and interior settings was also seen in Josef Svoboda's set for Otomar Krejča's production of *The Seagull* at the Tyl Theatre in Prague in 1960. Svoboda encased the stage in black drapes and hung leafed branches over the stage throughout the action. There were no walls for the indoor scenes; instead these were suggested by pieces of furniture and free-standing set pieces. The atmosphere of each scene was created through the use of one of Svoboda's technological creations, 'light curtains', which created a scrim-like effect. The setting was fluid and changing but produced a unified stage-picture. Aronson, p. 139.

Josef Svoboda (1920-2002) trained as an architect in Prague before making his debut as a designer in 1947 at the Czech National Theatre where he was appointed head designer in 1951. During the course of a long career, working in many different countries, Svoboda completed over 600 productions of drama, opera and ballet. Arguably the most innovative designer of the post-war period, his work represented perhaps the nearest approach to the vision of the great pioneers of modern stage design Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig, who first conceived of stage design as an expressive art in its own right, rather than a mere illustration of locale. For Svoboda, scenography was a dramatic instrument capable of functioning dynamically in conjunction with the stage action, and to this end he introduced new and sophisticated means of lighting, developed the use of projected images (including laser), and invented various forms of kinetic scenery. See Jarka M. Burian, in Pickering, pp. 733-735.

For further material on Svoboda, see Josef Svoboda, *The secret of theatrical space: memoirs of Josef Svoboda*, ed. and trans. by J. M. Burian (New York: Applause, 1993); for his obituary, see 'Josef Svoboda', *The Times*, 16 April 2002, p. 29.

Otomar Krejča began his career as an actor under Emil František Burian and became chief director and head of drama at the Czech National Theatre in the late 1950s. In 1965 he established Divadlo za Bránou (Theatre Beyond the Gates), and at both theatres he collaborated

The 1960s also saw the first signs of a fresh attitude to the treatment of Chekhov's characters. This was first apparent in Boris Babochkin's *Ivanov* at the Maly Theatre in 1960. Babochkin himself played Ivanov with energy and passion, but stripped him of romantic colouring and demonstrated little sympathy for his character.¹⁹⁵ For Tat'iana Shakh-Azizova the central premise of this production, together with Georgii Tovstonogov's *Three Sisters*, staged at the BDT in 1965, and Efros's *The Seagull* the following season, was what she termed 'объективность сплошная' (thorough objectivity).¹⁹⁶ By this she meant that the sympathetic identification with Chekhov's characters that had provided the pathos of productions in the past was now replaced by what was intended to be dispassionate inquiry. Further, previous productions had scrutinised society in order to explain, or indeed excuse, the actions of Chekhov's characters. In these new productions the characters themselves were subjected to a critical analysis that revealed but did not excuse their frailties. The indecisiveness, failure to act and apparent indifference to the plight of

closely with Svoboda. In addition to his stagings of Chekhov, he directed memorable productions of Josef Topol's *End of Carnival* (1964) and his own conflation *Oedipus-Antigone* (1971). Owing to political pressures, between 1976-1989 he directed exclusively abroad, returning to Prague in 1990, following the Velvet Revolution, to revive his Theatre Beyond the Gates, which had been liquidated in 1972. For further information, see Jindich Cerný, *Otomar Krejča*, trans. by Marian Wilbraham (Prague: Orbis, 1968).

¹⁹⁵Tatiana Shakh-Azizova, 'Chekhov on the Russian Stage' in Gottlieb and Allain, pp. 162-175 (p. 167). For a more detailed discussion of Babochkin's production, see Rudnitskii, 'Vremia, Chekhov', pp. 151-156.

Georgii Tovstonogov (1915-1989) worked first as an actor and assistant director in his home town of Tbilisi before training at GITIS in Moscow. During the war he returned to Georgia to work at the Griboedov Russian Theatre and to teach at the Rustaveli Theatre Institute. Between 1939-1946 he was a director at the CCT in Moscow, but came to prominence when he moved to Leningrad, first at the Lenkom (1946-1949) and later as Artistic Director at the BDT. Heavily influenced by Stanislavsky, like Efros, Tovstonogov attempted to rescue his acknowledged master's teachings from the uniformity imposed by official doctrine. At the BDT he produced a mixed repertoire of Russian and international classics, as well as plays of modern dramatists. Notable productions included: Aleksandr Volodin's *Пять вечеров* (*Five Evenings*) (1959), Gorky's *Меуане* (*Philistines*) (1966), and *Henry IV* (1969). In 1979 he turned to opera, directing Verdi's *Don Carlos* at the International Opera Festival in Finland. See Jean Benedetti, in Pickering, pp. 764-766. See also, Georgii Tovstonogov, *O professii rezhissera* (Moscow: VTO, 1965). Translated into English as *The Profession of the Stage Director* (Moscow: Progress, 1972). For bibliography on Tovstonogov, see G. A. Tovstonogov: *zhizn i tvorchestvo: bibliograficheskii ukazatel'*, ed. by E. Fediakhina (St. Petersburg: Giperion, 1998).

¹⁹⁶Tat'iana Shakh-Azizova, 'Dolgaia zhizn' traditsii', in Kuleshov, pp. 22-35 (p. 25).

others demonstrated by Chekhov's intelligentsia came in for particularly harsh treatment. In these productions, frequently referred to as 'cruel', 'Chekhov the doctor' delivered a shrewd and sometimes mercilessly severe diagnosis of his characters' ills and weaknesses.¹⁹⁷

For both Tovstonogov and Efros, in order to achieve a ruthless objectivity in their approaches to character, it was necessary for the actors to distance themselves from their roles, and the key to this was to use techniques similar to Brechtian alienation. In Tovstonogov's *Three Sisters*, however, such objectivity was not fully conveyed in performance because it was overpowered in the course of the production, as Shakh-Azizova observed, by the sympathy the director felt for the characters in their tragic plight.¹⁹⁸ Efros, as we shall see, was to show the characters much less mercy. In addition, while rehearsing *Three Sisters*, Tovstonogov had expressed great admiration for Nemirovich-Danchenko's production of the play at the MAT in 1940, and had no quarrel with its method. Efros, by contrast, though familiar with the performance

¹⁹⁷*Ibid.*

The idea of a cruel and merciless Chekhov had been suggested by Maxim Gorky as early as 1898. In a letter to the playwright in that year Gorky (writing figuratively) suggested that Chekhov viewed his characters with a cold indifference much like that of a snow blizzard. Letter from Gorky to Chekhov, between 20 and 30 November 1898, in *Chekhov i teatr: pis'ma, fel'etony, sovremenniki o Chekhove — dramaturge*, ed. by E. Surkov (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961), pp. 359-360 (p. 360).

Gorky's concept underscored Krejča's interpretation of *Three Sisters* at the Theatre Beyond the Gates in Prague in 1965. Significantly, in this production Krejča emphasised the lack of harmony and discord between the sisters, expressed through their aggressive behaviour towards one another. Aggressive responses and actions as a reflection of embittered personal relationships were central to Efros's conceptions of *The Seagull* and *Three Sisters*. Like Efros, Krejča (in collaboration with Svoboda) vigorously rejected the traditional style of presentation for the works of Chekhov evolved at the MAT. This style, adulterated by the ideas of Socialist Realism, had been imposed on the theatres of Eastern Europe (as it had been in the Soviet Union itself), as a result of Soviet cultural hegemony. Evidence of the similarity in the approaches of Efros and Krejča (and indeed the possible influence of the Czech director on Efros's work) is to be found in their meeting at the Leningrad Hotel, following the Moscow première of Efros's *Seagull*, during which they discussed at length the staging of Chekhov. At an unspecified later date Efros saw Krejča's *Three Sisters*. See N. Krymova, 'Rezhisser v meniaiushchemsia mire', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 13 (1989), 7-9 (pp. 7-8).

For a discussion of Krejča's productions of Chekhov in Prague and abroad, see Senelick, *Chekhov Theatre*, pp. 241-248.

¹⁹⁸Shakh-Azizova, 'Dolgaia', p. 27.

history of *The Seagull*, deliberately rejected any established approaches. His intention, explicitly, was to look at Chekhov afresh:

Нужно сегодня прорвать ту трафаретную пленку, которая накладывает на всю пьесу налет скуки для современного человека:- 'А-а!...«Чайка»! Это мы читали, это мы знаем'.¹⁹⁹

Efros chose to work on the principle that the play had just been written by a new dramatist, and perhaps more importantly as if it had been commissioned by Efros himself.²⁰⁰ He urged his actors to imagine that they were reading and rehearsing it for the first time. The production opened on 17 March 1966, not in Moscow, but while the Lenkom company was on tour in Vilnius. In an interview before the première, Efros revealed the weight of responsibility he felt in adopting such a radical approach:

Чеховская «Чайка» первый классический спектакль для нынешнего состава труппы театра имени Ленинского комсомола. До сих пор мы ставили современные пьесы, и переход к Чехову чрезвычайно ответствен. Тем более, что его пьесы имеют большую и славную традицию. Но, приступая к работе, мы старались забыть об этом и попытались поставить «Чайку», как современную пьесу. Поставить так, как будто Чехов наш автор, который написал для наших актеров, для нашего театра.²⁰¹

Efros also directly linked his *Seagull* with his productions of contemporary dramas:

¹⁹⁹Efros, 'Kak bystro', p. 69.

²⁰⁰Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 145.

²⁰¹A. Efros, *Prem'era sostoitsia v Vil'niuse*, *Sovetskaia Litva*, 10 March 1966, p. 3.

Мы хотели, чтобы чеховский спектакль был для нас и новым словом и в то же время естественным продолжением тех чувств и мыслей, которые волновали наш творческий коллектив в последних работах.²⁰²

Indeed, as Smelianskii recognised, this was Chekhov interpreted in accord with Rozov and Radzinskii.²⁰³ Rozov provided the theme of uncompromising youth in confrontation with the adult world, and the biting, ironic tone came from Radzinskii. Efros's desire to reveal the contemporary relevance of the play was also in keeping with his assessment of the history of productions of Chekhov in Russia. He saw a fundamental difference of approach to classic plays in the West, and specifically in the attitude of English actors to Shakespeare. In an essay published in 1967, he maintained that in England the plays of Shakespeare are performed everywhere, with an endless variety of slants and conceptions and in every conceivable style. They were perceived as familiar and in keeping with contemporary experience. In fact in a barbed jibe he remarked:

Иногда кажется, что английскому артисту так же просто выйти в новой шекспировской роли, как нашему прекрасному артисту Плотникову из Вахтанговского театра сыграть еще одного председателя колхоза. Пьеса Шекспира рассматривается англичанами как знакомая и удобная современная пьеса, только, может быть, прекраснее, чем все остальные. Когда английские актеры или режиссеры берут Шекспира в свои руки, они знают, что с ним делать.²⁰⁴

²⁰²*Ibid.*

²⁰³Smeliansky, *Russian Theatre*, p. 64.

²⁰⁴Efros, 'Kak bystro', p. 68.

Efros appears to have had an idealised view of the English stage in the 1960s. His suggestion that the works of Shakespeare are more readily accessed by English actors is debatable. Dennis Kennedy's commentary in *Foreign Shakespeare* appears to suggest that the opposite is the case. Dennis Kennedy, 'Introduction: Shakespeare without his language', in *Foreign Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 1-17.

The Russian approach to Chekhov, he went on, was very different:

У нас же от «Чайки» до «Чайки» проходит хорошеньких двадцать лет, и когда, наконец молодой артист берет в руки роль Треплева, то держит он ее, как бриллиантовый глобус, который ему дали только поддержать, предупредив при этом, что, разбив его, он не расплатится всю свою жизнь. Можно себе представить, каким уверенным и смелым чувствует себя художник.²⁰⁵

Efros's refusal either to accept traditional interpretations of Chekhov or to conform to an existing performance style can be seen as a legitimate expression of artistic freedom, but also as an assault on the MAT as a political (or perhaps more accurately, a politicised) institution. Efros maintained however that his work was never intended as an attack on that theatre or indeed on its director. As we have seen, as a youth, in his training at GITIS, and in his early career, his work had been dominated by Stanislavsky's ideas. Efros made a distinction between what he saw as the 'old' and 'new' MAT. He idealised the 'old', the theatre of Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, which in his view had been characterised by spontaneity and innovation, but disparaged the 'new', the theatre of his own day, in whose work these features were sadly lacking.²⁰⁶ In this light his attack was less on Stanislavsky himself than on what he saw as the later debasement of his ideas. At the Lenkom, however, he was beginning to forge his own unique style and his production of *The Seagull* was a significant step in his evolution. Thus in 1966 he was throwing down a gauntlet to the Moscow theatre world and at the same time making a decisive break with his own past. Viewed in this light, for Efros *The Seagull* becomes a rite of passage. He found his own sentiments echoed in the words of Treplev: 'we

²⁰⁵Efros, 'Kak bystro', p. 68.

²⁰⁶Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 141.

need new forms'.²⁰⁷ For Efros, as for Treplev, if theatre was to progress it needed to break with the past and create anew.

Although he consistently maintained, as already mentioned, that his production of *The Seagull* was never intended to be wilfully anti-Stanislavskian, their approaches in 1898 and 1966 could not have been more different. Whereas Stanislavsky had expanded the written text by adding vast quantities of extra detail, Efros wanted to reduce the play to something more essential, to strip it of all pre-conceived ideas derived from literary criticism and past performances, and to pursue a single, very clear thematic line.

He forced his performers (and indeed his audience) to make the familiar - that is their preconceptions of the play - appear strange. He encouraged his actors to view their characters objectively, and to inject aggression into their performances. This sense of aggression was introduced from the very beginning, in the dialogue between Medvedenko and Masha. That scene, according to Efros, was traditionally played in a low-key, almost gentle manner. As they walk across the stage, waiting for Treplev's play to begin, the pair engage in an idle exchange of words. In Efros's understanding, Medvedenko, although he wants to talk to Masha of love, also has a more pressing purpose. Efros explained this as follows:

Медведенко ухаживает — это так. Но тем не менее он как бы предлагает некий принципиальный спор о том, может ли быть несчастлив человек по причинам духовным, моральным.

Он понимает, что несчастным можно быть от отсутствия денег, оттого что нужно покупать чай и сахар, но отчего можно ходить в трауре, имея

²⁰⁷A. Chekhov, *Chaika*, Act I, in *Sochineniia: P'esy 1895 - 1904, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 18 vols (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), XIII, p. 8.

достаток, он не понимает. Захотелось чуть ли не по-брехтовски оголеть смысловую сторону этого спора.²⁰⁸

Medvedenko was played by Durov and in his interpretation, as B. Evseev suggested, the character lost many of his traditional traits. Durov's Medvedenko was not the poor but respectable and well-meaning school-teacher, steadfastly prepared to bear his life's cross.²⁰⁹ Instead he was demonstrative and demanding, and therefore his opening question was pronounced with a certain element of annoyance, opening up a dispute and demanding an almost public response.

A similar sense of conflict and tension permeated the entire performance. Efros rejected the moderate 'room temperature' and slow pace traditionally associated with Chekhov. Instead he removed all the pauses and silences, and lost any sense of a cosy, conversational style. The actors were directed to shout, cry and moan their lines, were given to frequent outbursts of merriment or anger and to hysterical sobbing. The effect, according to Rudnitskii, was to reproduce the atmosphere of a contemporary communal flat.²¹⁰ These characters, brought together in a family reunion, have known each other for decades, and in Efros's interpretation this produced not a sense of mutual kindness, but an opportunity to express deep-seated irritation with each other. In fact, in their constant bickering and petty arguments they were often perceived as 'spoiling for a fight', perhaps as a means of relieving boredom and finding scapegoats for their own feelings of purposelessness.²¹¹ N. Ignatova, however, objected to this strident aspect of the production.²¹² She argued with some justification that by making the characters fight over petty things with as

²⁰⁸Efros, 'Kak bystro', p. 69.

²⁰⁹B. Evseev, 'Na puti k Chekhovu', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 10 June 1966, p. 3.

²¹⁰Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 147.

²¹¹Poliakova, 'Ereticheski', p. 39.

²¹²N. Ignatova, 'I Chekhov drugoi, i "Chaika" drugaia', *Ogonek*, 23 (1966), 26-27 (p. 26).

much ardour as over issues such as the role of the artist in society Efros had reduced the philosophical breadth of Chekhov's play. However, as Shakh-Azizova commented, Efros was more concerned with the characters' relationships with each other and their emotional responses to their circumstances than with their aesthetic principles.²¹³ The conflicts and continual arguments swamped the lyricism and sadness normally associated with Chekhov's world, and replaced it with a naked drama of disconnected people. The idea that the characters are unable to make contact and communicate with each other has often been seen as a key to the interpretation of Chekhov, but Efros's emphasis was on the fact that the characters did make contact continuously, but nevertheless failed to understand one another.²¹⁴ In other words, Efros brought what was formerly regarded as subtext to the surface of the drama, as the substance of the text.

His conceptions of Chekhov's characters were radically different from traditional interpretations, and so confounded the expectations of critics. Zubkov, for instance, complained that in their constant bickering the characters lost the gentility normally associated with notions of the intelligentsia.²¹⁵ He objected in particular to A. Pelevin's portrayal of Dorn. This critic expected to see an erudite doctor whose behaviour exhibited a sense of humanity touched by delicacy and a subtle irony, but this Dorn's loud voice and sweeping gestures revealed instead his anger and frustration. He reserved some sympathy and affection for Treplev, but his response to others was expressed in frequent angry outbursts. His relationship with his patient, Sorin, lacked all sense of a 'bed-side manner' and was particularly acrimonious. Thus, for instance, when in Act II he instructs Sorin to take some valerian tablets, the line was delivered

²¹³Shakh-Azizova, 'Dolgaia', p. 31.

²¹⁴A. Efros, 'Anatolii Efros repetiruet...i rasskazyvaet', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 23 January 1966, p. 3.

²¹⁵Iu. Zubkov, 'Razvedka chekhovskoi temy', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 13 (1966), 12-14 (p. 14).

aggressively, almost as a threat.²¹⁶ Despite Zubkov's objections, Pelevin's doctor was a credible interpretation of the role, and furthermore Dorn's rancorous relationship with his patient was perfectly in keeping with the performance of A. Vovsi as Sorin, who, feeling the weight of his twilight years, complained constantly, blaming others for his dissatisfaction with a joyless existence.²¹⁷

Sorin's disappointment with life was matched by Masha, whose passionate but unrequited love for Treplev left her both embittered and bereft. According to Poliakova, Antonina Dmitrieva appeared both tired and drained; moving slowly and lazily, she embodied Masha's lines from the beginning of Act II: 'А у меня такое чувство, как будто я родилась уже давно-давно; жизнь свою я тащу волоком, как бесконечный шлейф.'²¹⁸

E. Fadeeva as Arkadina was vain and self-absorbed, spitefully jealous of Nina and utterly indifferent to her son's plight. Indeed, as Evseev noted, in Act III her response: 'Нет у меня денег!' to Sorin's pleas to let Konstantin buy a new coat or travel abroad, was delivered not 'decisively' (решительно), as Chekhov directions suggest, but rather with the degree of ferocity one might expect were Arkadina's very life at stake.²¹⁹

According to Senelick, in Stanislavsky's production the depiction of the central trio of Nina, Trigorin and Treplev had been relatively simple: 'Nina was a pure creature, ruined by that 'scoundrelly Lovelace' Trigorin, and Treplev was a misunderstood Byronic genius'.²²⁰ Efros's characterisations were very different. Iakovleva's Nina, most surprisingly to the audiences of the day, lost

²¹⁶Poliakova, 'Ereticheski', p. 40.

²¹⁷Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 147.

²¹⁸*Chaika*, Act II, p. 21. Poliakova, 'Ereticheski', p. 40.

²¹⁹Evseev, 'Na puti', p. 3.

²²⁰Senelick, *Chekhov Theatre*, p. 40.

much of her meekness and naivety. Instead, in what Rudnitskii perceived as 'a correction' of her character, she was presented at first as a woman of considerable foresight and self-assurance.²²¹ In Smelianskii's account this Nina also displayed an insatiable appetite for fame.²²² In Act I, as she recited her monologue, she deliberately distanced herself through her tone and demeanour from the 'decadent' play and its excitable writer. She flirted with his text in the hope of impressing the celebrities from the capital, and when, mortified by the fiasco, Treplev fled, she lost all interest in the sensitive 'boy genius' and instead joined her public as a co-conspirator in his humiliation. Later in Act II, in what was to become the most memorable scene of the production, she turned her conversation with Trigorin into a game of seduction, imbuing it with powerful sexual feelings.²²³ As the dialogue drew to a close, Iakovleva slashed the air with a thin fishing rod with ferocity and glee, behaviour which, in Smelianskii's view, promised extraordinary carnal delights. In Iakovleva's action a predatory animal emerged in a figure traditionally seen as an innocent girl from the provinces.²²⁴ This Nina was a formidable threat to Arkadina, which accounted for the latter's jealousy and their open hostility to one another.

Stanislavsky had played Trigorin in an elegant white suit, and had based his performance on the line 'I have no will of my own'.²²⁵ Chekhov himself had a different conception, seeing him as a seedy character, who 'wears checked trousers and cracked shoes'.²²⁶ According to A. Svobodin, Trigorin had also been played as a vain fop who found country society intolerable.²²⁷ Thus, A. Shirvindt's portrayal differed from all previous interpretations. To the surprise

²²¹Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 149.

²²²Smeliansky, *Russian Theatre*, p. 65.

²²³Poliakova, 'Ereticheski', p. 41.

²²⁴Smeliansky, *Russian Theatre*, p. 65.

²²⁵*Chaika*, Act III, p. 42. Poliakova, 'Ereticheski', p. 42.

²²⁶Benedetti, 'Stanislavsky', p. 261.

²²⁷A. Svobodin, 'Chekhov bez pauz', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 21 May 1966, p. 3.

of Marianna Stroeveva, Trigorin became the most sympathetic character in the production.²²⁸ Played as a respectable, dignified and serious writer, he spoke with genuine feeling about his work and was honestly aware of his own failings; this Trigorin admitted frankly that he would never write as well as Turgenev.²²⁹ It is impossible to deny Trigorin's responsibility for Nina's fate, but in Efros's production he was seen to have been seduced and used by the aspiring actress, and therefore was not played as a devious villain. Although she was crushed by Trigorin's treatment, Efros refused to see Nina as a victim. Instead he wanted to show, in her rejection of Treplev and her general demeanour, that by seeking to satisfy her own ego she was at least partially responsible not only for her own downfall but also for Treplev's.

The play's conflict centred for Efros on the character of Treplev, and in a major departure from the accepted norm he turned it into something close to a monodrama. Arguing that Chekhov's own sympathies lay with Treplev, he dismissed the melancholy, morose traits so often associated with that character, and V. Smirnitskii, himself a recent acting school graduate, created a different Treplev, child-like, energised and ardently searching for 'new forms'. The central theme was the fate of the artist of a new generation who is doomed to be misunderstood and unappreciated. Efros saw Treplev as besieged on all sides, rejected by all the other characters with more or less equal vigour. From the outset Efros united them against Treplev and his new art, and ensured that any sympathy they extended to him was fleeting. Thus he made them all guilty of Treplev's death.

Efros also created a new finale. The pace, which for much of the production had been frenetic, was suddenly slowed, so that, in the opinion of G.

²²⁸Marianna Stroeveva, 'Anatolii Efros: molodost', (Unpublished chapter, Moscow, no date), pp. 270-387 (p. 369). Cited here with permission of the author.

²²⁹Svobodin, p. 3.

Kholodova, this new ending also functioned as a requiem for Treplev.²³⁰ In Chekhov's stage directions, Dorn's lines announcing Treplev's suicide are followed by the final curtain. In Efros's production, the auditorium lights were gradually brought up to full; Masha was directed to continue to call the numbers for the lotto game in a meaningless stream of figures, Arkadina sang an old romance, gradually increasing to full volume, and Dorn swung back and forth in a rocking chair. Efros was seeking to show that there was no real means of escaping from a senseless life. The only solutions were suicide, or continuing to engage in a pointless game or other monotonous routines. Rudnitskii's central criticism of this approach, and one that has some validity, was that by concentrating the conflict of the play on a single character Efros lost the 'polyphonic' multiplicity of Chekhov's writing, and that the other characters were inevitably weakened as a result. Every character reacted in a similar fashion to the troublesome Treplev. This emphasised his separateness and isolation, but also precluded development and emotional fluidity in the others.²³¹

The presentation of *The Seagull* almost as a monodrama was no less clearly to be seen in the set, created by the designers Valentin Lalevich and Nikolai Sosunov. This, like so many other aspects of the production, was both highly praised and severely criticised. Since Efros's production was meant to generate the bleak atmosphere of a world that was both harsh and unrelenting, on his stage there was no attempt to recreate the magic lake, leafy trees and glorious sunshine so familiar to Russian audiences. Whereas Stanislavsky had deliberately evoked a sense of life beyond the borders of the set, in Efros's production the stage was surrounded on all sides by a fence of old boards; but this, instead of obscuring natural beauties beyond, was constructed with gaps

²³⁰G. Kholodova, 'Tri chekhovskikh spektaklia', *Teatr*, 1 (1968), 15-18 (p. 17).

²³¹Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p 148.

that deliberately showed the audience that there was nothing but darkness beyond the enclosed world of the characters' lives. For Shakh-Azizova, writing in 1976, this set had the appearance of a prison and expressed the tragic circumstances of Chekhov's characters; they were locked into their lives and also fatally conjoined to one another.²³² In *Teatr* in 1980, this same critic saw the set precisely as an expression of the world as seen by Treplev, and more importantly perhaps as a realisation of the idea of an infinite and empty cosmic space, expressed in the words of Treplev's own play.²³³ Further, the sense of 'nothingness' beyond the world of the estate lent an even greater poignancy and foreboding to Nina's exit into the dark empty space beyond the set. Zubkov bemoaned, however, the loss of the lake and natural surroundings which had been so dear, he argued, to Chekhov. The failure to recreate such surroundings, he maintained, was a refusal on Efros's part to acknowledge Chekhov's intention to use the image of the richness of nature as a deliberate contrast to the inane and absurd life of the characters.²³⁴ Interestingly, Rudnitskii remarked that Efros succeeded in capturing just this contrast of opposites by the use of a single tree, which in its very vitality stood out against the capricious and unhealthy relationships that developed between the characters ('Дерево - простое, чистое, здоровое - отчетливое противостояло нездоровым, капризным, нервным и совсем непростым отношениям людей, являвшихся на этом фоне.')²³⁵ That commentator also saw a thematic link in the contrast between the old boards used for the surrounding fence and the fresh, new planks that littered the stage floor and were used in the construction of Treplev's stage. This was solidly built and he dashed about all over it, fussing and fixing things, balancing on the planks, lying down on his back, and leaping up again as he cried out for 'new forms'. For Rudnitskii,

²³²Shakh-Azizova, 'Dolgaia', p. 30.

²³³Tat'iana Shakh-Azizova, "'Chaika" segodnia i prezhde', *Teatr*, 7 (1980), 87-95 (p. 91).

²³⁴Zubkov, 'Razvedka', p. 14.

²³⁵Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 146.

throughout the play in general and in Treplev's performance in particular, there was a sense of foreboding. He remarked that the little stage itself looked like a scaffold and thus gave physical expression to the theme of the martyred artist.²³⁶

The set for the interior in Act III was in direct contrast to the stark opening scene. The designers created a room completely full of objects and pieces of furniture; a vast variety of different lamps shone from every corner, and every inch of the wooden walls was covered with pictures. However, in what was perhaps a complete reversal of the intention of the MAT production, this set evoked a sense not of comfort and stability, but of gloom and immobility. The characters were so hemmed in by their surroundings that they became absurd and awkward in their movements. Nina was the only one who seemed to be able to move in this atmosphere; in Rudnitskii's image, she flitted like a bat from one corner to the next. However, this capacity for movement had by Act III a very different meaning from her activity at the beginning of the production:

Но если в начале спектакля ее мобильность означала безоглядную
предпринимчивость, то к концу спектакля подвижность Заречной
воспринималась иначе – как агония.²³⁷

The mood for much of the production was aggressively anti-lyrical, but at moments Efros lightened the tension with pieces of pure comedy. At the beginning of Act II, following a short dialogue between Dorn and Arkadina, according to Chekhov's script Sorin enters walking with a stick, accompanied by Nina and Medvedenko, who is pushing Sorin's empty bath chair.²³⁸ In Efros's production Durov entered without the chair. Later Sorin and Shamraev

²³⁶*Ibid.*

²³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 152.

²³⁸*Chaika*, Act II, p. 22.

are arguing over Shamraev's refusal to provide the party with horses. An exasperated Sorin angrily demands: Сейчас же подать сюда всех лошадей!²³⁹ At this precise moment Durov pushed the bath chair violently on to the stage, producing laughter in the audience, who were delighted by the incongruity between the words and the action.

Efros's production raised a storm of controversy which split the Moscow theatre world. As Rudnitskii later noted, the critics of the time ranged between such extremes that on the one hand Efros's champions refused to see any failings or insufficiencies in his interpretation, and on the other his detractors were so blinded by their sense of righteous indignation that they refused to acknowledge the importance of Efros's discoveries.²⁴⁰

Zubkov, for instance, considered the scene with the bath chair and other comic moments as gratuitous, and further charged Efros with altering stage directions in order to 'modernise' Chekhov. Thus, for instance, he objected to the fact that Masha was directed to smoke rather than to take snuff because, he maintained, women of Chekhov's era did not smoke.²⁴¹ Similarly, N. Ignatova suggested that changes made to Chekhov's script in Efros's interpretation demonstrated the director's lack of faith in the play's capacity to excite the interest of a modern audience. Writing in *Ogonek*, she also provided some predictably ideologically-charged criticism, suggesting that *The Seagull* failed to send an appropriately optimistic message to the young spectators at the Lenkom:

Московский театр имени Ленинского комсомола знают и любят москвичи. В нем ежевечерне толпится молодежь, которую нужно учить добру и правде.

²³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁴⁰Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 145.

²⁴¹Zubkov, 'Razvedka', p. 14.

Молодежи – как никому – надо знать и верить, что есть солнце, а не только пятна о нем! С этого спектакля уходишь с тяжелым сердцем. Нет, Чехов другой, и «Чайка» другая.²⁴²

Efros's production failed to find approval even from some who had championed his work in the past; thus it was many years before his former mentors, Knebel' and Markov, could forgive their protégé.²⁴³ The front curtains used for Efros's production had been decorated with the image of a seagull, painted as if by the hand of a child. For all Efros's protestations to the contrary, it is difficult not to see in this, and in other features of the production, an ironic commentary on the style of the MAT, and Efros was admonished for his audacity by members of that theatre.²⁴⁴ However, as Stroeve reasoned, criticism from this particular quarter was hard to justify:

Разумеется, мхатовцы были возмущены подобным своеволием по отношению к их 'законному достоянию' — «Чайке». Но собственная недавняя постановка «Чайки» на сцене МХАТ, бесславно провалившаяся, подрывала 'законность' их возмущения.²⁴⁵

It is important to note that few, if any, of Efros's critics could have seen Stanislavsky's legendary production of 1898. But Efros was seen to be attacking and indeed destroying a cherished myth. Further, as we have seen, *The Seagull*, both actually and symbolically, lay at the heart of the history and development of the MAT. Efros's assault was therefore also on that theatre's

²⁴²Ignatova, p. 27.

²⁴³Stroeve, 'Anatolii Efros', p. 370.

²⁴⁴As noted in Chapter 1, in 1968 Efros staged Radzinskii's *The Seducer Kolobashkin* at the Malaia Bronnaia. It was proposed for this production that the front curtains should also mimic those of the MAT, but that the figure of a seagull be replaced by that of a huge moth. This was clearly intended to suggest that the ideas of the MAT had become exhausted and irrelevant with age. The idea was, however, later dropped. Edvard Radzinskii, 'Repetitsiia', in Zaionts, pp. 70-76 (p. 73).

²⁴⁵Stroeve, 'Anatolii Efros', pp. 270-387 (p. 370). Stroeve is referring to the MAT production of 1960 discussed above.

essence. His challenge upset the sensibilities of those many critics for whom *The Seagull* represented a sacrosanct part of the history and symbolism of the MAT.

Interestingly, while *The Seagull* was on tour in the Baltic States and Ukraine reviews of the production were generally positive, but when it opened in Moscow there was only limited support.²⁴⁶ A. Svobodin admired Efros's courage for breaking with tradition, and Poliakova praised the Lenkom for having produced an innovative but carefully respectful production of a classic, that nevertheless explicitly explored Chekhov's ideas in a contemporary context.²⁴⁷ Mark Poliakov, although he found much to admire in Efros's original interpretation, sharply criticised its excessively strident tone, which in his view reduced the subtle complexity of Chekhov's writing:

Но вот зазвучали голоса, и чем резче, чем грубее они звучат, чем более вздорно поведение их, тем менее остается у нас от ощущения чеховской атмосферы....Исчезает симфоничность чеховской драматургии, исчезает тонкость, многосторонность и многоплановость трагических судеб чеховских героев.²⁴⁸

Poliakov's comments were justified. Indeed years later Efros himself, in his first book *Rehearsals Are My Love*, criticised his production and suggested that his 'Brechtian' approach had been misguided and excessively harsh. It had allowed the actors to view the characters objectively but without affection, had reduced the actors' capacity to portray depth and had resulted in a loss of

²⁴⁶See I. Kashnitskii, "'Chaika" prodolzhaet polet', *Sovetskaia Litva*, 22 March 1966, p. 3. Later there were also positive reviews in the following newspapers outside Moscow: M. Brusilovskaia, 'Chekhovskim kliuchom', *Komsomol'skoe znamia*, (Kiev), 12 July 1966, p. 3, and S. Lerman, 'Vchera i segodnia: "Chaika" A. P. Chekhova v teatre imeni Leninskogo Komsomola', *Sovetskaia Estoniia*, 11 December 1966, p. 3.

²⁴⁷Svobodin, p. 3. Poliakova, 'Ereticheski', p. 43.

²⁴⁸Mark Poliakov, 'Zapiski bez daty', *Nash sovremennik*, 4 (1967), 101-106 (p. 106).

lyricism.²⁴⁹ In general, adverse criticism of *The Seagull* outweighed positive commentary, and it significantly failed to find support amongst the more politically powerful critics. As we have seen, in the mid to late 1960s the Soviet regime was increasingly demanding ideological conformity. As Rosalind Marsh has noted, by September 1965 the increasing influence of the neo-Stalinist Politburo member Shelepin and his ally, the KGB chief Semichastnyi, had led to the imposition of a repressive policy against literary dissidence. This policy saw the confiscation of copies of Solzhenitsyn's *Первый круг* (*First Circle*), and in February 1966 the infamous trial of Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel.²⁵⁰ Efros's *Seagull* opened in March, a month which also saw concerted (though only partially successful) efforts by neo-Stalinists to ensure the complete rehabilitation of Stalin at the Twenty-Third Congress. During this Congress productions were removed from the repertoires of several theatres including (as noted above) *Making a Movie* from the Lenkom, and Aleksandr Tvardovskii's *Теркин на том свете* (*Terkin in the Other World*) from the Satire, while at the Taganka Liubimov's *Павшие и живые* (*The Living and The Fallen*) was permitted only after numerous revisions and viewings by the censors.²⁵¹ Not surprisingly, in this context Efros's iconoclastic production, a protest against such increased repression of artistic freedom, was seen as too radically individual, and was banned within a year. Shortly afterwards, having produced a repertoire that failed to conform to political imperatives, Efros was removed from his post at the Lenkom and moved to the Malaia Bronnaia. But there, deterred neither by his dismissal nor by the furore caused by *The Seagull*, he chose for his very first production another Chekhov play, *Three Sisters*.

²⁴⁹Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 163. This book was first published in 1975.

²⁵⁰R. Marsh, pp. 14-15. Sianiavskii and Daniel, who wrote under the pseudonyms Abram Terts and Nikolai Arzhak, were arrested and accused of having published their work abroad. They were condemned to seven and five years labour respectively at a trial which caused widespread controversy in Russia and abroad.

²⁵¹Beumers, p. 49. The production at the Satire was based on Tvardovskii's poem of the same name. Tvardovskii himself was forced to resign as editor of *Novyi mir* in 1970.

Chapter 3

Не гони меня!

Three Sisters
(1967)

In his *Three Sisters* at the Malaia Bronnaia Efros further developed, in his treatment of character and use of visual symbolism, key features of his *Seagull* at the Lenkom. Rejecting once more the evocation of a traditional 'Chekhovian' mood, he created an energetic, fast-paced and openly theatrical production. Through parody and the tragicomedy of the grotesque, he expressed the inherent absurdity and ultimate meaninglessness he saw in the lives of Chekhov's characters. The production caused even more controversy than *The Seagull*. Some critics welcomed it as another departure in the interpretation of Chekhov, but others condemned it as an affront to a great Russian playwright, a violation of a classic work and a further attack on the traditions of the MAT.

As we have seen, the MAT *Seagull* of 1898, though rightly regarded later as one of the most significant productions in that theatre's history, had in fact enjoyed a relatively short run, so that Efros's radical re-staging at the Lenkom, rather than attempting to supplant a specific production, had challenged and destroyed a cherished myth. By contrast *Three Sisters*, first produced at the MAT by Stanislavsky in 1901, had been staged there again by Nemirovich-Danchenko in 1940, and this production was still playing, albeit with a change of cast, in 1967.²⁵² It constituted therefore a living example, with which critics of Efros's interpretation made comparisons.

Written at the turn of the twentieth century, Chekhov's drama reflects a turbulent period in Russian history, which saw the beginnings of the collapse of

²⁵²These productions have been discussed by (among others): David Allen, *Performing Chekhov*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 26-28 (1901), pp. 87-88 (1940); Braun, *The Director*, pp. 67-71 (1901); Konstantin Rudnitskii, *Russkoe rezhisserskoe iskusstvo 1898-1907* (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), pp. 116-131 (1901); Senelick, *Chekhov Theatre*, pp. 188-195 (1940); M. Stroeve, 'Rabota Vl. I. Nemirovicha-Danchenko nad spektaklem "Tri sestry"', *Teatr*, 7 (1954), 53-67 (1940); M. Stroeve, *Rezhisserskie iskaniia Stanislavskogo 1898-1917* (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), pp. 73-79 (1901); Nick Worrall, 'Stanislavsky's Production of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*', in *Russian Theatre in the Age of Modernism*, ed. by Robert Russell and Andrew Barratt (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 1-31. Reference will be made here, therefore, only to features of them which Efros either radically rejected or echoed with significant modifications.

an old social order in the face of the new era of revolutions. Stanislavsky's production, though opening on a note of buoyant gaiety, had created overall a pervading sense of heart-rending tragedy. As a lament for the destruction of a way of life under threat, it had clearly reflected not only the personal concerns of a director who was himself a member of an educated elite but also those of his audience. Similarly Nemirovich-Danchenko's staging in 1940 had been a product of its time. His interpretation had rested on two central principles: firstly the longing for a better life, seen not simply as a passive desire but rather as a goal towards which the characters would actively struggle, and secondly a deeply rooted faith in the future. This concept was clearly in full accord with the prevailing ideologies of the Stalinist years, and linked to what was required of all theatre art of the period: that it should depict life not as it is but as it ought be.

This was reflected most clearly in the setting. In 1901 Stanislavsky had been concerned to emphasise the isolation felt by the sisters in the dull, stifling atmosphere of a provincial town, which Chekhov had imagined to be some eight hundred miles east of Moscow. He had therefore instructed his designer, Simov, to produce a home fit not for a general's daughters, but for a captain's. Simov had introduced down-at-heel and common-place objects: a damask tablecloth, faded wall-paper, yellowed painted floors, a threadbare Turkeman carpet. In 1940, by contrast, Nemirovich-Danchenko's designer, Vladimir Dmitriev, created an elegant home with huge graceful windows, surrounded by a landscape of shimmering birch trees, a setting more appropriate to a house in suburban Moscow. The sisters in this production were removed from a provincial backwater to a world more closely associated with their poetic aspirations. Everything in the set and costumes was designed to express beauty and refinement. In the final act, Dmitriev created a wide avenue of birch trees that shed shimmering leaves on to the stage area. This avenue led back to a

vision of a river rising from the mist in the distance. The colour of the tree trunks matched grey-white folds of material, which were decorated with patterns similar to those of the theatre curtains and extended the borders of the set into the auditorium. This unified stage picture created a sense of air, light and spaciousness. In the final scene, as Ol'ga delivered with passionate conviction her lines about the happiness that awaited future generations, the three sisters gathered on the forestage in an harmonious group. According to Stroeveva, this lasting image of total harmony evoked in the audience not a feeling of hopelessness at the tragedy of the sisters' plight, but rather an affirmation of hope and life in the future.²⁵³ At the end, according to Chekhov's script, Chebutykin is seated reading a newspaper, sardonically undercutting Ol'ga's speech by repeating the words: 'Все равно! Все равно!'. To strengthen the mood of optimism, Nemirovich-Danchenko removed Chebutykin from this final scene, so that Ol'ga's triumphant hymn to the future was not interrupted by his idiotic ditty 'Тара...ра...бумбия...сизу на тумбе я...' Writing in 1954, Stroeveva maintained that this production was a triumph for the principles of Socialist Realism in the interpretation of Chekhov.²⁵⁴ As we shall see (although Stroeveva herself was to be castigated for her later support of Efros), in the late 1960s such ideologically-charged criticism was still much in evidence amongst those conservative critics who had come to regard Nemirovich-Danchenko's production as the 'correct' Soviet interpretation.

Efros remarked that that production had been copied and recreated in many different theatres, but that these had failed to create the enduring impression of the original.²⁵⁵ The reason, he maintained, was that as times changed it was impossible to revive the ideas of an older director, no matter how wonderful those ideas might once have been, and in fact his own ideas were very different.

²⁵³Stroeveva, 'Rabota', p. 66.

²⁵⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵⁵Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 257.

In rehearsing *Three Sisters*, he and his actors questioned, for the audience of their own day, the relevance of the concept of 'the longing for a better life' :

Люди в «Трех сестрах» тоскуют? — спрашивали мы себя. Да нет, пожалуй, точнее было бы сказать, что они решительно и энергично ищут для себя какой-то истины. Они вслушиваются и всматриваются в происходящее и думают, думают, думают... Они ищут для себя какое-то новое призвание, они пытаются вдуматься в то, что будет через двести — триста лет, и в то, почему идет снег. Не от тоски заводят они свои бесконечные разговоры, а от желания проникнуть в тайны своего собственного существования: «Если бы знать!» — так звучит самая последняя фраза в пьесе.²⁵⁶

This notion of a search for the meaning of existence was to be a principal theme of a production which would emphasise neither the past nor the future but the present, and would therefore reflect, like its predecessors, the spirit of its own time. In *The Seagull* Efros had protested against the limitations placed on his own artistic freedom at the Lenkom. Since, however, it was staged as noted in Chapter 2, at a time of more widespread cultural repression, it may be seen to have expressed in addition the frustrations felt by many others of the post-Thaw generation. In *Three Sisters* he no longer protested, but instead reflected the sense of bitter disillusionment that repression had produced. In this respect his production presaged the mood of despondency generated in the 1970s during the period of *zastoi*. For those artists, writers and intellectuals who under Khrushchev's relatively liberal government had been encouraged to express themselves more freely, and to believe that the reform of the future Soviet Union was possible from within, the more repressive regime of Brezhnev came as a bitter disappointment. Disillusioned with current circumstances, they now felt a sense of isolation from their cultural roots, and a depressing

²⁵⁶*Ibid.*

awareness of the disparity between their aspirations and reality. In the light of unfulfilled past promises, moreover, lofty sentiments about a better future sounded like so much empty rhetoric. In its perception of character, setting, treatment of language and action Efros's darkly pessimistic production reflected these concerns, capturing the mood of his time and marking a decisive break from the idealism of the 1950s.²⁵⁷

Efros's treatment of Chekhov's characters reversed established expectations. In 1898 Stanislavsky had sympathised with the sisters' plight. In 1940 Nemirovich-Danchenko had been keen to emphasise what he saw as their spiritual suffering as dreamers in the midst of lack-lustre reality.²⁵⁸ In their capacity for endurance they had also obtained, however, an heroic status.²⁵⁹ In 1967 Efros took a harsher view of the characters and their lives. In his *Seagull* the previous year he had felt a close affinity with Treplev and had seen the action from his point of view; now, according to Rudnitskii, he directed *Three Sisters* as Treplev might have done.²⁶⁰ In that critic's opinion, the play as a whole was viewed from a perspective of youthful idealism, and therefore with hostility, disappointment and bitterness. Efros refused to romanticise the characters. Instead he directed his actors, as he had in his *Seagull*, to approach their roles with sympathy but objectively, with a degree of ironic detachment and aggression. The army officers were not the 'best-mannered, noblest and best-educated men in the town', as Masha describes them; Vershinin and Tuzenbakh were seen as rather foolish and naive chatter-boxes, and all the characters were caught up in their own concerns to the point of indifference to one another. They neither heard nor listened to what others were saying, but

²⁵⁷Shakh-Azizova, '60-e: klassika', p. 171.

²⁵⁸For further details on Nemirovich-Danchenko's conception of *Three Sisters*, see Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, *Rozhdenie teatra: vospominaniia, stat'i, zametki, pis'ma* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), pp. 381-384, 423-429.

²⁵⁹According to Rudnitskii they evoked much sympathy for the pain of their unrealised dreams, in their subtle expression of feeling, in the purity of their enthusiasm and in their defencelessness in the face of a vulgar world. Rudnitskii, 'Vremia, Chekhov', p. 140.

²⁶⁰Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 152.

instead argued with each other and were given to frequent outbursts of anger and near-hysterical emotion. For instance, in Act II Masha gave vent to her vexation at Vershinin's rapid departure, on hearing that his wife had once again attempted to poison herself, by shouting loudly and rudely at the innocent messenger, Anfisa, before storming upstage and throwing things at someone in the wings.²⁶¹

Stanislavsky had been admonished for lowering the sisters' rank by providing them, as mentioned above, with a home fit not for a general's daughters but for a captain's. Efros adopted a similar approach, which tended to place all the characters on the same social level. Indeed, Stroeve has suggested that the key to the interpretation of the play's intellectual characters — the sisters, the military officers and Chebutykin — came from the doctor's own lines to Tuzenbakh in Act I:

Вы только что сказали, барон, нашу жизнь назовут высокой; но люди все же низенькие... (Встает.) Смотрите, какой я низенький. Это для моего утешения надо говорить, что жизнь моя высокая, понятная вещь.²⁶²

This perception of the characters was heavily censured. Iurii Dmitriev bemoaned a loss of the lyricism and gentility normally associated with the intelligentsia.²⁶³ Zubkov, noting that on two occasions Irina sat in Chebutykin's lap, was similarly critical of the sisters' lack of restraint, and was shocked too by overt expressions of sexual desire.²⁶⁴ At one point Tuzenbakh carried Masha off-stage in his arms, and at the beginning of Act II Natasha attempted to seduce her husband. She gambolled about, catching Andrei in a

²⁶¹*Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

²⁶²A. Chekhov, *Tri Sestry*, Act I, *Sochineniia: P'esy 1895-1904, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 18 vols (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), XIII, p. 129.

²⁶³Iurii Dmitriev, 'P'esia A. P. Chekhova. Rezhissura A. V. Efrosa.', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 18 January 1968, p. 3.

²⁶⁴Iurii Zubkov, 'Raznye tsveta vremeni', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 5 (1968) 8-10 (pp. 8-9).

close embrace, as they rolled around on an ottoman set at the edge of the stage. He attempted to escape her clutches by retiring to a rocking-chair, but she pursued him with caresses and kisses before he finally and decisively rejected her advances. For Rudnitskii, Andrei's rejection provided Natasha with the motivation and 'moral right' to conduct an affair with Protopopov.²⁶⁵ Later in Act III, Natasha lifted her skirts to her knees to examine her legs in a mirror while musing to herself: 'Говорят, я пополнила ...и не правда.'²⁶⁶ For Shakh-Azizova, L. Bogdanova played a self-assured and coldly calculating Natasha, determined to bring order to the household.²⁶⁷ In Act IV Natasha expresses her intention to destroy the old garden with its avenue of firs and plant scented flowers instead.²⁶⁸ In Shakh-Azizova's description the actress pronounced the words 'будет запах' in such a 'cold, bloodthirsty' tone that one could imagine that such a person as she could take an axe to a cherry orchard.

Though Natasha was seen, in keeping with traditional expectations, as a largely unsympathetic figure, Efros, unlike his predecessors, did not idealise the sisters, who in some respects were to be no more refined than she. This was evident from Natasha's first entry at the end of Act I. According to Chekhov's text, she first appears in a pink dress tied with a green belt.²⁶⁹ In Efros's production, in keeping with her own words, this belt was not green but violet. Firstly, Ol'ga's remark that the belt and dress do not match was therefore clearly untrue. Secondly, A. Dmitrieva delivered her lines at full volume, tactlessly, and in a manner deliberately calculated to bring maximum embarrassment to Natasha, whose dress sense the sisters had already ridiculed. Thus Ol'ga's

²⁶⁵Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 153.

²⁶⁶*Tri Sestry*, Act III, p. 158.

²⁶⁷Tat'iana Shakh-Azizova, 'Chekhovskaia trilogiia', in Zaionts, pp. 372-385 (p. 374).

²⁶⁸*Tri Sestry*, Act IV, p. 186.

²⁶⁹*Ibid.*, Act I, p. 135.

behaviour revealed lack of breeding on her part rather than poor taste on Natasha's.²⁷⁰

Stanislavsky had seen as the play's fundamental conflict the struggle between the sisters' quest for happiness and the threat of petit-bourgeois philistinism posed by their brother's wife.²⁷¹ Similarly, Nemirovich-Danchenko had divided the characters schematically, separating the philistines Natasha and Solenyi from the refined Prozorovs and the other military officers. As Efros himself noted, in 1940 Boris Livanov had played Solenyi as a boorish bully, establishing a pattern for the role for generations.²⁷² Efros rejected this neat opposition; in a complete reversal of conventional expectations, Solenyi became the most positive character in the production. E. Kalmanovskii commented that Sergei Sokolovskii's Solenyi was not himself malicious but rather suffered the malice of others. Though proud, and occasionally given to uncontrolled emotional outbursts, he was essentially vulnerable.²⁷³ His strange jokes were delivered in a tone of moody sadness, with an enigmatic, bitter smile. According to Rudnitskii, in the midst of the frenzied action and emotional extremes of the others he remained measured and restrained. Elegantly and unhurriedly smoking his cigar, he appeared gracious and sincere.²⁷⁴

Vadim Gaevskii has argued convincingly that by placing Natasha on the same level as the sisters, and by his unorthodox treatment of Solenyi, Efros modified one of the central conflicts of the play.²⁷⁵ The other officers, Chebutykin and the sisters are all closely associated with 'high-culture' and education. They, like Andrei (played by V. Smirnitskii as a 'superfluous man'), have skills and

²⁷⁰Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 153.

²⁷¹Braun, *The Director*, p. 68.

²⁷²Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 35.

²⁷³E. Kalmanovskii, 'Chem zhiv rezhisser', *Zvezda*, 8 (1975), 147-156 (p. 149).

²⁷⁴Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 159.

²⁷⁵Vadim Gaevskii, 'Priglasenie k tantzu', in V. Gaevskii *Fleita Gamleta* (Moscow: Soiuzteatr, 1990), pp. 53-66 (pp. 59-60).

talents, but are incapable of turning their dreams into reality and become detached from their cultural roots. Irina is employed in a post-office and Tuzenbakh is to work in a brick factory. By contrast the refined Solenyi recites Lermontov, and Natasha, who is learning French, has aspirations to education. The central conflict, for Gaevskii, was not therefore a battle for selfhood or for the house, but rather for the ownership of culture itself. He argued, moreover, that the members of the intelligentsia all lived in constant fear of rejection and cultural dispossession. For that critic, the repeated cry of the old nanny Anfisa in Act III as she begs Ol'ga not to evict her ('Не гони меня!') became a motif for many of the characters.²⁷⁶

In Efros's own words, the intelligentsia in Chekhov's drama had been 'cast out' of life (выброшенные из жизни),²⁷⁷ and he expressed this idea most clearly in his setting. The single, unchanging set designed by Viktor Durgin was for many a shocking departure from traditional expectations. Stanislavsky had stressed the sisters' isolation in their provincial town, but in his concern for realistic detail had set their home in a readily identifiable locale. Efros and Durgin borrowed this idea but carried it much further. The set had some pieces of furniture, but little sense of domestic comfort. In fact it was not a house but a room, with minimalist decoration in the style of the Russian Moderne. In contrast to Dmitriev's creation in 1940 of a beautiful countryside with shimmering birch trees, it was surrounded on three sides by stylised naked trees, whose distorted limbs bent under the weight of outsize crows' nests. These appeared to encroach on and overhang the space, overpowering the characters. For Shakh-Azizova they created a sense of the fragility of the space, which thus offered little protection to the defenceless characters. In this remote and barren landscape, moreover, they were cut off from the world, so that their

²⁷⁶Anfisa's lines to Ol'ga run as follows: 'Олюшка, милая, не гони ты меня! Не гони!'. *Tri sestry*, Act III, p. 158.

²⁷⁷Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 193.

cries of 'To Moscow' sounded like 'To the end of the earth'.²⁷⁸ In the sisters' home all links with place and time were severed. In the centre of the stage stood a single rubber-tree plant, covered in gilt leaves, which seemed ridiculously out of place, and was intended perhaps to create a sense of fake opulence, an absurd reminder of past grandeur. The rest of the set was devoid of all period detail.

There are references to time and memory throughout *Three Sisters*, even from the very first line: 'Отец умер ровно год назад, как раз в этот день, пятого мая в твои именины, Ирина.'²⁷⁹ Accordingly, in the opening act of Stanislavsky's production, a clock had solemnly struck twelve, reminding the sisters of the hour of their father's death. This had been followed by the calls of a cuckoo clock in an alcove on stage, and as Ol'ga continued her speech about time passing the rapid chimes of a smaller clock had been heard off-stage. In Tovstonogov's production at the BDT in Leningrad in 1965 the action had similarly begun with the sound of a striking clock, and its incessant ticking had taken on a fateful meaning in the course of the action. For Tovstonogov, changes over time had destroyed dreams and suppressed hopes.²⁸⁰ At Efros's Malaia Bronnaia, by contrast, time appeared to stand still. C. J. G. Turner has argued that '*Three Sisters* is unique in Chekhov's dramaturgy in that its action covers at least over three and probably over four years and in that an appreciable period of time passes between each of its acts'.²⁸¹ For Rudnitskii, however, although the performance was interrupted by three intervals instead of the usual one, the pace of Efros's production generated a sense that the events took place in a single day. The passage of time did not appear to affect the characters, who remained unchanged throughout the action.²⁸² Efros placed a large clock

²⁷⁸Shakh-Azizova, 'Dolgaia', p. 32.

²⁷⁹*Tri Sestry*, Act I, p. 119.

²⁸⁰Senelick, *Chekhov Theatre*, p. 207.

²⁸¹C. J. G. Turner, *Time and Temporal Structure in Chekhov*, *Birmingham Slavonic Monographs*, 22 (Birmingham: Department of Russian Language and Literature, 1994), pp. 51-52.

²⁸²Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 152.

down-stage, but it stood motionless throughout the action and its face had no hands. Time - the past, the present and dark presentments about the future - were compressed into a single context; thus the sisters were locked into a never-changing world of unrealised dreams. But although time appeared frozen, the atmosphere and action of the production were carefully modulated. It swung from moments of gaiety to an ironic, indeed humorous perception of the characters' world, which often bordered on satire and even threatened to spill over into energetic excesses and hysteria, but the performance ended on a note of despair. As Rudnitskii maintained, Efros succeeded in the course of the play in switching its mood between two extremes: 'Спектакль начинался одной крайностью, кончался другой. Начинался нотами скепсиса и сарказма, кончался потоками слез.'²⁸³

Efros was supremely conscious of the musical tempi that underlie the structure of Chekhov's plays.²⁸⁴ For him the melody of the dialogue and the action, together with the internal construction of a scene or act, functioned like music, generating mood, pace and atmosphere in arias, pauses, crescendos and diminuendos, harmonies and dissonance. Iurii Smelkov suggested that Efros built his entire production as a symphony, orchestrated in accordance with just such a hidden score.²⁸⁵ In the opening scene, wanting (like Stanislavsky) to generate an expectant, buoyant tone, he used a piece of waltz music, played on an old-fashioned horned gramophone set down-stage left. Iurii Dmitriev commented derisively that the melody was of the type typically played in the apartments of the bourgeoisie at the turn of the nineteenth century.²⁸⁶ In fact the music was taken from a recent popular Czech film, *The Shop on the Square*. Efros used this familiar modern music as a deliberate anachronism, which

²⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 160.

²⁸⁴Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 196-197.

²⁸⁵Iurii Smelkov, "'Tri sestry" 1967 goda', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 24 December 1967, p. 3.

²⁸⁶Dmitriev, 'P'esa', p. 3.

contributed to the sense of timelessness in his production. As the music began, Tuzenbakh (Lev Kruglyi) gestured to Irina (Iakovleva), inviting her to dance. The waltz and this gesture were repeated at different moments in the first act and Chebutykin, the officers and other sisters swirled around the stage in a joyous dance. The same waltz was heard intermittently throughout the later action. It functioned as a *leit-motif*, a bitter reminder of the joyful hope expressed at the opening, which jarred increasingly with a growing sense of despair. At other times the whirring sound of Irina's spinning top cut into the dialogue, creating a sense of alarm which for Shakh-Azizova recalled the effect of the distant breaking string in *The Cherry Orchard*.²⁸⁷

For Smelianskii, the shift of mood from gaiety to pessimism was charted too by the changing colours of A. Chernova's costumes.²⁸⁸ Ignoring Chekhov's stage directions, Efros had all the sisters similarly clothed. They appeared first in brilliant, spring-like green, then in smoky-grey, and finally in satin dresses with black and white stripes. The costumes became more luxurious with each appearance, and according to Rudnitskii the sisters did not merely wear their dresses, but paraded them, as it were, around the stage.²⁸⁹ In their extravagance, like the gilt-leaved tree, these costumes seemed incongruous in this remote place and provided a stark, almost ludicrous, contrast with the wretched reality of the characters' lives. Moreover, the sleeves of the green dresses were padded and resembled butterfly wings, suggesting almost cruelly that these women, though their dreams would remain unfulfilled, were capable of flight. In Act I Chebutykin calls Irina 'my white bird', and when she announces in Act IV that she is marrying Tuzenbakh and leaving, he refers to himself as an old bird who, unlike the others, is now unable to fly away, but urges them to do so. ('Остался я позади, точно перелетная птица, которая

²⁸⁷Shakh-Azizova, 'Chekhovskaia', p. 373.

²⁸⁸Smeliansky, *Russian Theatre*, p. 70.

²⁸⁹Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 154.

состарилась, не может лететь. Летите, мои милые, летите с богом!')²⁹⁰
 According to Shakh-Azizova, however, Durov delivered these lines in a way that suggested he had no faith in them, indeed as if he knew what fate had in store.²⁹¹

This was by no means the only instance in which the words spoken by characters were out of keeping with the reality of the world around them. As Gaevskii noted, Efros's treatment of language was again at odds with traditional expectations. Monologues and speeches made famous in MAT performances became low-key and were delivered by the actors with their backs to the audience, whereas lines formerly seen as insignificant were given new and greater weight.²⁹² Efros was not simply concerned, however, to inject new sense into well-worn phrases. Instead language itself became a central theme of his production. Words in Chekhov's drama express ideals and hopeful dreams which are not fulfilled in the real world. In a play in which, as Masha remarks angrily in Act IV, everyone talks incessantly, it was Efros's intention to show that words cannot be trusted. They deceive; they mask true feelings and can be manipulated to create false dreams. At the opening of Act II Stanislavsky had littered the stage floor with toys (presumably belonging to Bobik, and intended perhaps to imply Natasha's incipient domination of the household). They had included a little, squeaky barrel-organ and a harlequin with a pair of clapping cymbals. Later in the act, as Irina had begun to talk dreamily of Moscow, Vershinin had been directed to play with the harlequin, undercutting her words with the tinkling sound of its tin cymbals. Then as Vershinin himself had begun to philosophise on life in two or three hundred years, his musings had been interrupted by the squeaks of the barrel organ turned by Tuzenbakh. Thus Bobik's toys had provided an ironic commentary on the characters' lofty

²⁹⁰*Tri Sestry*, Act I, p. 123; Act IV, p. 175.

²⁹¹Shakh-Azizova, 'Chekhovskaia', p. 376.

²⁹²Gaevskii, p. 58.

sentiments. Efros used a similar device in this act by directing Durov as Chebutykin to thump the piano derisively during Tuzenbakh's speeches. But an idea that Stanislavsky had used for a single scene was extended by Efros to become a central premise of the production as a whole. Even the joyous mood engendered by the waltz at the beginning of Act I was undercut by moments of tension and insecurity. As Smelkov noted, Iakovleva spoke Irina's line: 'Я не знаю, отчего у меня на душе так светло!'²⁹³ not as an exclamation but as a question, as though she were attempting to fathom whether it was true, revealing a disparity between the words and her inner conviction.²⁹⁴ Similarly in the final act Tuzenbakh's exclamation that life too should be beautiful amid such beautiful trees seemed both comic and deeply ironic on a set overhung by gnarled bare branches.²⁹⁵

Efros did not, however, change Chekhov's script, which can itself be shown to justify his interpretation of *Three Sisters* as a play of contrasts between the characters' ideals and aspirations and the reality of their unchanging circumstances. In Act I for instance, through the ingenious use of simultaneous staging, the sisters' dreams of going to Moscow are undercut by caustic though apparently unconnected remarks from the officers in the adjoining ball-room. Similarly, later in Act II the idealised image of the city is counterpointed by Ferapont's fantastical anecdotes. Vershinin, in the sisters' view, has a close, almost magical, association with Moscow, and they are in awe of him when he first appears, exclaiming and questioning repeatedly: 'You come from Moscow'.²⁹⁶ He too, however, soon paints a different picture of their beloved city by recalling the loneliness and sadness he used to feel when crossing a

²⁹³*Tri Sestry*, Act I, p. 120.

²⁹⁴Smelkov, "'Tri sestry'", p. 3.

²⁹⁵M. Stroeve, 'Esli by znat'...', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 18 January 1968, p. 3.

²⁹⁶In this opening exchange between Vershinin, the sisters and Tuzenbakh, the phrases 'Из Москвы' and 'Вы из Москвы' are used six times as questions and as statements, while Vershinin himself also uses 'в Москве' three times. *Tri Sestry*, Act I, pp. 126-127.

gloomy bridge to his barracks, and suggesting that their own river is by comparison a much more wonderful sight.²⁹⁷

Smelkov recalled the glittering impression that had been created by Stanislavsky's entrance as Vershinin in the first MAT production. Tall, handsome, clothed in full dress uniform, with glimmering epaulets and sword-knots on his hat, this Vershinin had truly appeared to be a vision from another world.²⁹⁸ Efros by contrast appears to have taken his cue from Masha's confession in Act III that before she loved Vershinin she thought him at first rather strange and later pitiable. He had Nikolai Volkov play Vershinin not as a dashing hero but as an ordinary though somewhat eccentric individual. As Henry Popkin noted, the pattern of his eccentricity was set by his first scene:

He is a man haunted by the past. On meeting two of the sisters, he stares at them without a word, clapping his hand to his cheek. They exchange glances, wondering if he is all right. At last he explains that he is recalling his previous acquaintance with them.²⁹⁹

Similarly, during the monologue in Act III in which he describes his daughters' plight during the fire, Volkov flapped his arms about comically and did not seem to listen to his own words. As Gaevskii has noted, such an eccentric interpretation was fully in keeping with the role as written: Chekhov's directions indicate that during this speech the character laughs three times and at its end begins to sing.³⁰⁰ Clearly Volkov's Vershinin belonged more to the Moscow of Ferapont, or possibly to the gloomy and lonely city described in his own words, which, as Smelkov noted, were lent a new emphasis, as though they

²⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁹⁸Smelkov, "Tri sestry", p. 3.

²⁹⁹H. Popkin, 'What the Russians Ask of Chekhov', *The Times*, 17 July 1968 (Arts), p. 6.

³⁰⁰Gaevskii, pp. 65-66.

had never been spoken before.³⁰¹ This was not the city of the sisters' dreams, their lost spiritual homeland. The disparity between the sisters' expectations and the real figure of Volkov's Vershinin highlighted the absurdity of their hopes.

Stroeveva maintained that Nemirovich-Danchenko had treated seriously the discussions on the meaning of life between Vershinin and Tuzenbakh in order to avoid their becoming 'superficial intellectual chit-chat' (интеллигентская болтовня).³⁰² In Efros's production, by contrast, these debates became precisely the kind of empty chatter that Nemirovich-Danchenko had wanted to avoid. Thus, according to Rudnitskii, Volkov's Vershinin, though apparently enthralled with Masha, used high-flown language and expressed seemingly lofty sentiments not because he actually thought in this way, but rather because he had heard somewhere that this was what was expected if one was in love.³⁰³ However, he rapidly became tongue-tied and confused, was too embarrassed to 'philosophise' seriously, tended to mutter or race through his speeches, and was given to joking and play-acting.

In a similar manner, Tuzenbakh's speeches were given an ironic treatment in Kruglyi's interpretation of the role. In fact Kruglyi's overall tone was one of humour, self-mockery and parody. In Act I he was directed to sing and dance, and in Act III appeared to be in an almost dream-like state. In Act II he was drunk, which (as Popkin maintained) conveniently explained his sudden warmth towards Solenyi, who was also played as tipsy.³⁰⁴ Thus the Baron's speech about the swallows, who simply fly with no knowledge of why they do so, was produced as if Tuzenbakh himself had no real idea what he was saying

³⁰¹Smelkov, "'Tri sestry'", p. 3.

³⁰²Stroeveva, 'Rabota', p. 63.

³⁰³Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 155.

³⁰⁴*Ibid.*

and even less belief in its content. This Tuzenbakh was radically different from Viktor Khmelev's interpretation at the MAT in 1940. Khmelev's Baron, though not himself an active revolutionary, had fervently believed in and welcomed enthusiastically the coming storm which would sweep before it all laziness, boredom and unwillingness to work.³⁰⁵ Kruglyi, by contrast, delivered his speech on the necessity of work in a tone that was both comic and ironic, and it was received with indifference by his on-stage audience.

Rudnitskii saw the hollowness of the army officers' speeches as significant in the emotional downfall of the three sisters. The women themselves shed all sense of delusion when they realised that these high-flown words, and indeed by extension the speakers, so closely associated with their dreams of Moscow and a new life, were increasingly unbelievable.³⁰⁶ This ironic aspect of the interpretation was not, however, completely overpowering. Instead Efros maintained a balance between a mocking sense of humour and a deep sense of sorrow. The steadfast and self-assured Solenyi was used as a counter-weight to the meaningless discussions between Vershinin and Tuzenbakh. He was sincere, moreover, in his affection for Irina, and her preference for Tuzenbakh was therefore given an added twist. As Iurii Dmitriev maintained, his decision to fight the Baron was not simply therefore an act of bravado but motivated instead by the pain of unrequited love.³⁰⁷

The Baron too had moments of absolute sincerity. For instance, in Act II his lines to the effect that he is Russian, in spite of his triple-barrelled German surname and Greek Orthodox baptism, expressed a deep insecurity by being delivered as though he himself was searching for reassurance about his

³⁰⁵Stroeve, 'Rabota', pp. 60-61.

³⁰⁶Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, p. 157.

³⁰⁷Dmitriev, 'P'esa', p. 3.

roots.³⁰⁸ In Act IV, as he leaves for the duel he expresses a deep longing for love from Irina, who feels only affection for him. He repeatedly pleads with her ('Скажи мне что-нибудь.'³⁰⁹), but in this production he elicited from Iakovleva's Irina only a harsh and calculating response: 'Что. Что сказать? Что?'. Tuzenbakh appeared for this scene not in uniform but in mufti, as though, as Stroeve noted, he was stripped of all defences, and as he exited for the duel his mask of self-mockery was finally removed.³¹⁰ The waltz music was heard again, and Kruglyi repeated for the final time his gesture of invitation. He then danced slowly off, shouting: 'No, No'. In Chekhov's text the word 'no' is said twice, but Efros directed Kruglyi to repeat the line again and again; with each repetition he used a softer tone and spoke with increasing conviction. According to Gaevskii, this suggested resignation in the face of what Tuzenbakh knew to be a suicidal act.³¹¹ In Kruglyi's sudden changes of tone the audience were made aware that Tuzenbakh's self-mockery belied a deep despair. He turned Tuzenbakh into a tragic clown, both enormously sympathetic and somewhat foolish and awkward, which in Popkin's opinion was entirely in keeping with Chekhov's own conception.³¹²

Stanislavsky had suggested that the sisters' desire for life and joy was the central theme of the play. To this end he had attempted, largely unsuccessfully, to inject laughter and gaiety into his actors' performances. As Meyerhold, who had played Tuzenbakh, recorded in his notebook, one of the basic motifs of Stanislavsky's concept had been 'a tragic quality against a laughable (background) comedy'.³¹³ Efros carried this kind of contrast much further. Zubkov, in describing Kruglyi's tragi-comic dancing exit, used the word

³⁰⁸Smelkov, "Tri sestry", p. 3.

³⁰⁹*Tri Sestry*, Act IV, p. 180.

³¹⁰Stroeve, 'Esli', p. 3.

³¹¹Gaevskii, p. 58.

³¹²Popkin, p. 6.

³¹³Quoted in *Rezhisserskie ekzempliary K. S. Stanislavskogo*, 6 vols, ed. by I. Solov'eva (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1983) III, 1901-1904, p. 23.

'*balagan*' as a term of derision.³¹⁴ It is clear however that Efros had recognised, and was deliberately using, the expressive power of the theatre of masks, the grotesque and the ironic, that are so frequently associated with such theatre. In this he was clearly influenced not only by the ideas of Stanislavsky, but also by those of Meyerhold and (as Gaevskii noted) of Vakhtangov.³¹⁵ Like Vakhtangov, Efros rejected naturalism or what he termed 'domestic truth' in the theatre: 'Мне эта бытовая достоверность всегда была скучна и неинтересна. Неинтересно, когда люди на сцене сидят, носят свои пиджаки...' ³¹⁶ In an interview recorded in about 1979 Efros discussed his approach to Chekhov, and insisted that the contemporary theatre should not be based on what he termed 'literary psychology':

Станиславский ввел в нашу профессию такие слова как «действие», «внутреннее действие», — и тем самым совершил переворот. Мы... воспитаны на этом, это основы нашего профессионального мировоззрения... Лично мне со временем стало ясно, что внутреннее действие надо доводить до предела, почти до абсурда.³¹⁷

He drew an analogy with painting, suggesting that it was possible to stay within the frame of realism or go beyond it:

Можно и воспринимать и изображать ту же жизнь гиперболически, гротеского, преувеличенно. Вот вопрос: как находить преувеличенные задачи, преувеличенное действие, преувеличенную активность, не нарушая

³¹⁴Zubkov, 'Raznye', p. 8

³¹⁵Gaevskii, p. 59.

³¹⁶A. Efros, 'O Chekhove i o nashei professii', *Moskovskii nabliudatel'*, 11-12 (1993) 4-8 (p. 7). The exact date of this interview is not known. Krymova has estimated that she taped it in about 1979, but its text was not published until 1993.

³¹⁷Efros, 'O Chekhove', p. 7.

жизненной правды, но подчиняя ее какой-то крупной, если можно так сказать, острой цели.³¹⁸

As we have seen, for much of his time at the Malaia Bronnaia Efros was to develop his concept of 'acting on the run', in which he sought to combine a sense of 'inner truth' with a very physical performance style. This idea was central to his first production there. In productions of Chekhov at the MAT, the passions and sufferings of the characters had been buried in a sub-text, and revealed only through implication and silent pauses. By contrast, as Demidova noted, referring specifically to the final scene between Masha and Tuzenbakh, in Efros's *Three Sisters* this sub-text was not buried but physicalised in a manner that was to become typical of much of his later work.³¹⁹ In a production in which words could not be trusted, Efros filled the MAT's silent pauses with action, which quite literally spoke louder. In addition, some pieces of business, though often created as buffoonery, had also a sad, even cruel aspect, revealing (often quite explosively) the characters' inner emotions. For instance, in Act I Chebutykin presents a samovar to Irina, who is embarrassed by such an expensive present. Usually this samovar is rapidly removed from the stage, but Efros directed Tuzenbakh to snatch it up and toss it to Solenyi, creating laughter all round. Solenyi then set it down on the stage, and a furious and humiliated Chebutykin kicked it viciously, so that it fell over and its lid rolled about noisily, frightening the sisters. Similarly, when Kulygin returned exhausted from the fire in Act III and sat with his wife on the ottoman, Masha suddenly and decisively tipped him off on to the floor.

The role of Chebutykin had been created for the MAT actor A. Artem, and (as Gaevskii observed) was usually interpreted as the slow slide into indifference of

³¹⁸*Ibid.* See also Allen, p. 93.

³¹⁹Alla Demidova, *Vtoraia real'nost'* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980), pp. 55-56.

a lonely old man.³²⁰ Chebutykin is reduced to reading useless newspaper excerpts about a distant world from which he is precluded. But in his monologue after the fire, in Durov's interpretation, he suddenly became (for Gaevskii) not only energised but ageless, and revealed like Tuzenbakh that all his quirky behaviour was only a mask for inner despair. Durov's execution of Chebutykin's speech was an electrifying *tour de force*: he created a wild dance, parodying his waltzing in Act I. In Rudnitskii's description of this scene, the diminutive Durov flew on to the stage with a cry between laughter and tears, and with such nervous energy that he seemed to be seeking an exit or some way to discharge his intense emotions. Suddenly he caught sight of the gramophone, which stood to one side of the stage; turning the handle, he whirled into a rollicking dance. As he danced he examined himself in an imaginary mirror, inspecting his own limbs as if they were objects, disconnected as it were from his own body. 'Может быть, я и не человек, а только вот делаю вид, что у меня руки и ноги ...и голова.'³²¹ He then uttered the line: 'О, если бы не существовать!' as one of complete despair. At this precise moment the music stopped and Chebutykin halted, drooping, limp and utterly perplexed. Then he suddenly leapt back across the stage to his 'saviour' the gramophone, and galloped into a frenzied dance once more.³²² This portrayal of Chebutykin as a dancing marionette pulled by unseen strings, railing against his very existence and demanding a justification, revealed a pathetic, despairing and inherently futile attempt at rebellion against a life of meaningless inertia and passivity.

Following this explosive crescendo in Efros's Chekhovian symphony, the pace of the final act was slowed and the farewells prolonged. In the closing moments of the 1901 production Stanislavsky had created the now famous final

³²⁰Gaevskii, p. 62.

³²¹*Tri Sestry*, Act III, p. 160.

³²²Rudnitskii, *Spektakli*, pp. 157-158.

image of the forlorn sisters huddled together around a bench stage-left in a withered garden. Nemirovich-Danchenko's *Three Sisters* had created a lasting impression of unfailing optimism: with Chebutykin banished from the finale, the sisters had stood united in their belief in the future. In Tovstonogov's 1965 production, which also celebrated an ultimate faith in human endurance, the closing moments of the play were the only time at which the sisters drew physically close to one another. Efros, by contrast, deliberately rejected this traditional image and the indeed the spirit it evoked. He 'quoted' Stanislavsky by providing a bench down left, but left it conspicuously bare and instead separated the sisters to different parts of the stage. Ol'ga addressed her final lines, in a tone of mocking despair, not to her sisters but directly to the audience.

Although he borrowed something of the tragic atmosphere of Stanislavsky's production, Efros's *Three Sisters* created a view of the world that was ultimately far more bleak and pessimistic than that conveyed by any previous performance of the play in Russia. In his vision of Chekhov's intellectuals as fearful of false promises of the future, culturally dispossessed and ineffectual, Efros reflected the experience of the intelligentsia of his day. Indeed, as Shakh-Azizova has correctly observed, his melancholy scepticism concerning contemporary Soviet experience caused greater alarm amongst critics than even his production of *The Seagull*.³²³ In fact it caused a furore. Different commentators alternately championed and condemned Efros's work, and his detractors also criticised those who praised the production, often implying that their political credentials should be subject to scrutiny.³²⁴ For many in both

³²³Shakh-Azizova, '60-e: klassika', p. 171.

³²⁴N. Albakin suggested that those critics who saw Efros's production as a new departure in theatrical art were misguided. N. Albakin, 'Mera otvetstvennosti khudozhnika', *Znamia*, 12 (1968), 202-212 (pp. 206-207). This same critic challenged the views of both Smelkov and Stroeve. Stroeve's ideas and her support of Efros were similarly criticised by both N. Fed' and B. Slovakov. See N. Albakin, 'Klassika ostaetsia klassikoi', in *Teatral'naia khronika* (Moscow: VTO, 1975), pp. 69-71 (pp. 73-74); N. Fed', 'Obshchestvennaia zhizn' i iskusstvo',

camps Nemirovich-Danchenko's interpretation became the yard-stick against which Efros's was measured. Smelkov, on the one hand, praising his wonderful new staging, declared that audiences should not be surprised that this production was different from the MAT's; on the contrary, after twenty-seven years, it would be surprising if it were not.³²⁵ On the other hand, as Leonid Bronevoi recalled, MAT actors present at previews declared it to be a 'violation' of a classic.³²⁶ Similarly Albakin, on seeing the Malaia Bronnaia production, expressed a desire to go to the MAT in order to see 'genuine art' and 'to commune with the poetry of theatre, which stood so proudly above the poor prose of the opposition.'³²⁷

Efros's *Three Sisters* was later appreciated as one of his greatest triumphs, and even some negative critics at the time found it difficult to attack from a purely aesthetic stand-point. Zubkov confessed, in what was otherwise a damning critique, that he could fault neither the coherency of the overall conception nor the quality of the performances.³²⁸ Predictably his remarks, and those of other hostile critics, were ideologically-charged and frequently in accord with the peculiar logic of Socialist Realism, which this staging was seen to contradict. Gleb Grakov, writing of the so-called 'objective' laws of art, and quoting selectively from Chekhov himself, suggested that the correct interpretation of his work was to present life not as it is, but as it ought to be.³²⁹ N. Fed'

Sovetskaia Rossiia, 10 September 1968, p. 3, and B. Slovakov, 'I moe mnenie', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 20 February 1968, p. 5.

³²⁵Smelkov, "'Tri sestry'", p. 3.

³²⁶Leonid Bronevoi, "...no kak ne zhalet'?", *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 1 (1992), 16-18 (p. 17).

³²⁷Abalkin, 'Klassika', p. 72.

³²⁸Zubkov, 'Raznye', p. 8.

³²⁹Gleb Grakov, 'S pozitsii Chebutykina?', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 31 January 1968, p. 3.

Grakov is referring here to one of the central tenets of Socialist Realism. Given the need to stress the idea that the Soviet Union was continually, and rapidly, moving towards a harmonious period of economic strength and a glorious future prosperity for all its peoples, the dominant tone of all artistic expression was to be one of prevailing optimism. In the skewed logic of this theory it was necessary and indeed 'more realistic', to lay stress on the positive aspects of the current situation and to ignore any negative ones. The former were to prevail in the future and were thus more typical even today than the latter, which were doomed to extinction. Dramatic literature, in particular, was thus to depict the Soviet world not through the microcosms of sordid and petty realities but in terms of idealised utopias.

objected to the suggestion that the sisters were of the same social standing as Natasha, and also referred to the depiction on the production's poster of not three but four identical stylised female figures, which confirmed for him that this staging was a celebration of the values of the bourgeoisie.³³⁰ In a second critique he echoed the sentiments of G. Kucherenko, who objected to the removal of historical referents in the costumes and setting on the grounds that 'truth' could not be 'abstract'; it could be revealed only through the use of concrete details of locale and period.³³¹ Their views were shared by M. Levin; comparing Durgin's set unfavourably with that of Nemirovich-Danchenko, he also maintained that Efros, by his failure to recreate the beauties of nature, had violated the idea that Chekhov's play was a celebration, in spite of everything, of all that is beautiful and wonderful in life.³³² He interpreted the gilded rubber-tree plant as an effrontery to nature ('как бы в насмешку от природы'), and remarked that the encroaching trees immediately plunged the audience into an atmosphere of hopelessness and doom, which was strengthened by Tuzenbakh's final exit. In a negative comparison with the 1940 production he wrote:

В тысячу раз большее становилось зрителю от того, что Тузенбах уходил из жизни вдоль прекрасной аллеи, развернувшейся во всей красе, а не под аккомпанемент вороньего грая в долине смерти. ³³³

The comic treatment of Vershinin's and Tuzenbakh's discourses on the future and on the necessity of work sent shock waves through many critics. Albakin, who also described Efros's work as 'an experiment born of a poverty of ideas'

³³⁰N. Fed', 'Chelovek dlia liudei', in N. Fed', *Formula sozidaniia: liudi truda v sovremennoi literature* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1977), pp. 223-44 (pp. 241-242).

³³¹N. Fed', 'Dostoinstvo iskusstva', *Izvestiia*, 12 June 1968, p. 4; G. Kucherenko, 'Istorizm kak printsip sotsialisticheskogo realizma', *Oktiabr'*, 3 (1972), 195-196. (pp. 196-197).

³³²M. Levin, 'Obraz spektaklia', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 24 (1968), 13-16 (p. 13).

³³³*Ibid.*

and as a 'parody of Chekhov',³³⁴ stated simply that without hope and a belief in the possibility of building a better life there is no *Three Sisters*.³³⁵ He implied, moreover, that the use of mocking irony was indicative of Efros's own lack of political commitment.³³⁶ Similarly for Iurii Dmitriev the delivery of these speeches displayed a lack of faith in what he maintained was Chekhov's own belief in the future; he condemned the production as 'decadent', neither in accordance with Chekhov's intentions nor appropriate to modern Soviet theatre.³³⁷ For Smelianskii, however, Kruglyi's derisive tone and the deadly sarcasm with which he announced that a time would come, in twenty-five or thirty years, when everyone would work, had quite a different effect. At this particular moment, Smelianskii recognised a cruel contrast between such aspirations in Chekhov's period and the forced-labour camps of more recent Soviet history.³³⁸ Efros had created a short-circuit between two eras, and thus administered to the audience a brutal electric shock. Efros himself later denied that he had intended to mock the institution of work *per se*, suggesting instead that Tuzenbakh's self-mockery was an inherent aspect of his character.³³⁹ This comment was written, however, under conditions of censorship, and may therefore have been somewhat disingenuous.

For some commentators Efros's production not only reflected recent Soviet history and more immediate social conditions but also appeared to provide a broader commentary on eternal truths of the human condition. In presenting characters locked in a timeless world of unrealised dreams and separated from the touchstones and referents of past, present or future, this interpretation of Chekhov's drama drew it close to the existentialist ideas more frequently

³³⁴Abalkin, 'Mera', p. 206.

³³⁵Abalkin, 'Klassika', p. 70.

³³⁶Abalkin, 'Mera', p. 206.

³³⁷Dmitriev, 'P'esa', p. 3.

³³⁸Smeliansky, *Russian Theatre*, p. 70.

³³⁹Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 33.

expressed in the work of playwrights of the Absurd. In describing Durgin's set, Aronson later maintained that 'the influence of Beckett as the spiritual descendent of Chekhov was clearly making itself felt'.³⁴⁰ David Allen similarly has described the world on Efros's stage as 'a Beckettian limbo'.³⁴¹ As is well known, the work not only of European Absurdist dramatists but also that of Soviet writers working under their influence was heavily censored at this period: Vampilov's *Утиная охота* (*Duck Hunting*) was banned in the same year that Efros's *Three Sisters* was staged. As a member of the intelligentsia, Efros may have enjoyed privileged access to censored material, and it seems unlikely that he would have been completely unaware of the Absurdist tradition. He certainly read Vampilov later, after the ban was lifted.³⁴² However, whether he intentionally interpreted Chekhov's 'waiting for Moscow' as an anticipation of the Absurdist is debatable.³⁴³ But intentional or not, the possibility of such an inherently decadent, and indeed pernicious, conception of the play was not lost on his critics. Dmitriev maintained that nowhere in the Russian classic repertoire is there a character who is convinced of the incomprehensibility of life.³⁴⁴ This, he suggested, was the prerogative of 'bourgeois' Western writers like Beckett and Ionesco. In Russia it was the duty of the director to ensure that his contemporary approach to the classics conformed to the Socialist Realist model. Thus the 'modernity' of Efros's production could not in fact be seen as in any way modern or progressive, but like that of all 'Absurdist' theatre represented a step backwards in cultural history. As Shakh-Azizova has noted, the suggestion that Efros's production was influenced by the ideas of existentialism and the theatre of the Absurd was

³⁴⁰Aronson, p. 141.

³⁴¹Allen, p. 89.

³⁴²Efros discusses Vampilov's *Duck Hunting* in *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 149-155.

³⁴³The phrase 'waiting for Moscow' is used by Nick Worall in his introduction to his discussion of Stanislavsky's production. 'The predicament of Chekhov's heroines could no longer be sustained within those existentialist terms which can now be seen, in retrospect, to have anticipated specific forms of European "absurdist" drama where waiting for "Godot" can be construed as a simple imaginative extension of waiting for "Moscow"'. Worrall, 'Stanislavsky's', p. 1.

³⁴⁴Iurii Dmitriev, 'O klassike i ee meste v sovremennom teatre', *Teatr*, 9 (1968), 3-7 (p. 4).

made by critics whose own knowledge of them was limited; furthermore these terms tended to be used to condemn any theatrical forms that appeared to deviate from the well-trodden paths of realist interpretation.³⁴⁵ Thus although the influence of Absurdist theatre was undeniably to be felt in *Three Sisters*, for Soviet critics its attack on traditional interpretations and its articulation of the immediate concerns of the contemporary intelligentsia were a greater cause for alarm. It was these that were seen to contain a subversive message directed beyond the walls of the theatre. Efros's production garnered as much support as condemnation, but was staged at a time when Brezhnev was directing an ever wider and increasingly intense campaign against dissent in artistic circles. Official policy changed in the late 1960s, and within months was to see a wholesale crackdown, brought about in the main by the crisis in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The voices of those who supported Efros were swamped. The production was banned, and for over a decade in critical works was frequently cited only as a prime example of the violation of a classic work. According to Shakh-Azizova, it was not until the 1980s, when censorship laws were somewhat relaxed, that the significance of Efros's work as a landmark in a new approach to Chekhov on the Soviet stage could be articulated again.³⁴⁶

The response to Efros's innovative staging of Chekhov can be seen not only in critical commentaries but also in the work of his contemporaries. In fact his productions contributed to what might be described as an artistic debate between directors in the late 1960s and 1970s, as they translated their arguments into theatrical form. Boris Livanov launched the first sally at the MAT in 1968, when he produced what Shakh-Azizova described as a 'romantic and elevated version' of *The Seagull* that was emphatically detached from 'the boredom of everyday life', and was staged as deliberate reaction against Efros 'rough'

³⁴⁵Shakh-Azizova, '60-e: klassika', p. 171.

³⁴⁶*Ibid.*

interpretation of 1966.³⁴⁷ This production, in contrast to Efros's, included a beautiful evocation of the play's natural surroundings.³⁴⁸ V. Asmus suggested moreover that, in contrast to other recent stagings (a tacit reference perhaps to the 'failure' of Efros's single-minded interpretation), the triumph of Livanov's production lay in the director's understanding of the multiple layering inherent in Chekhov's work.³⁴⁹ For Smelianskii, by contrast, Livanov's staging contained no new ideas.³⁵⁰ Efremov's production at the Sovremennik Theatre in 1970 demonstrated the influence of Efros, and was itself intended perhaps, as Smelianskii suggested, as a riposte to Livanov.³⁵¹ Efremov's central idea that the characters' inability to communicate stemmed from their essential selfishness and lack of concern for others was also borrowed from Efros. Like Efros, Efremov changed the final scene; all the characters were so wrapped up in their own activities that they were entirely oblivious to the plight of their loved ones. Sorin appeared to be not asleep but dead, and when Treplev (contrary to Chekhov's directions) shot himself on stage, for Shakh-Azizova his suicide was a deliberate reproach for their indifference.³⁵² The Sovremennik *Seagull*, like Efros's *Three Sisters*, reflected the social and political circumstances of the end of the Thaw. As Smelianskii suggested, the 'death of the "common ideal" set the tone for the production'.³⁵³ In the characters' harsh recriminations and hostile attitudes to one another, Efremov similarly 'imported to *The Seagull* the ideological confusion and despair that typified the late sixties'.³⁵⁴ The sense of entrapment in Efros's settings for *The Seagull* and *Three Sisters* was echoed in Leonid Kheifets's *Uncle Vanya* at the Theatre of the Soviet Army in 1969, and

³⁴⁷Shakh-Azizova, 'Chekhov', p. 171.

³⁴⁸V. Shklovskii, 'Vernost' "Chaike", *Pravda*, 22 February 1969, p. 6.

³⁴⁹V. Asmus, 'Voskreshenie "Chaiki"', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 12 February 1969, p. 8.

³⁵⁰Anatoly Smeliansky, 'Chekhov at the Moscow Art Theatre', in Gottlieb and Allain, pp. 29-49 (p. 33).

³⁵¹Smeliansky, 'Chekhov', p. 33.

³⁵²T. Shakh-Azizova, 'Sovremennoe prochtenie chekhovskikh p'es', in *V tvorcheskoi laboratorii Chekhova*, ed. by L. D. Opul'skaia et al (Moscow: Nauka, 1974), pp. 336-353 (p. 346).

³⁵³Smeliansky, 'Chekhov', p. 33.

³⁵⁴*Ibid.*

later in Adolf Shapiro's *Three Sisters* at the Molodezhnyi teatr (Youth Theatre) in Tallinn in 1971. Kheifets's cage-like set overpowered and enclosed the characters, creating the impression that they could neither move nor breathe.³⁵⁵ In Tallinn the Prozorovs lived in a solid house of high walls, with no doors or windows that could permit daylight to enter the murky gloom of its interior. The garden of the final act was replaced by an empty space, in which Andrei played with a child's ball. He attempted to bounce it off the walls, but it fell against them with sharp smacks.³⁵⁶

Efros's first iconoclastic productions of Chekhov prompted a partial revolution in the staging of his plays and were clearly influential on others. On the other hand, traditional productions, like that of Livanov, which remained in the repertoire of the MAT for decades, continued to run parallel to more radical interpretations. Efros himself, as we shall see, adopted later a different approach to Chekhov, the beginnings of which can be detected in his *Cherry Orchard* which opened at the Taganka in November 1975.

First, however, we must consider his production at the Malaia Bronnaia in March of that same year of Gogol's *Marriage*. In this he was again able to adopt a radical approach. Although he did not deliberately modernise Gogol, he succeeded in totally altering established conceptions, and, by exploiting a classic's potential for multiple interpretation, in commenting, though now indirectly, on the contemporary world. One reason for his attraction to such works in the 1970s, it will be recalled, was that because they were canonical and lacking, apparently, in reference to the modern world they were regarded by the authorities as 'safe'. *Marriage* in 1975 was to be regarded by critics (and indeed by Efros himself) as his greatest triumph.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵Shakh-Azizova, 'Sovremennoe', p. 345.

³⁵⁶*Ibid.*

³⁵⁷Efros, *Kniga*, p. 399.

Chapter 4

Ну взгляни в зеркало, что ты там видишь?

Marriage
(1975)

Efros staged Gogol's *Marriage* three times: first in 1963 at the CCT, second in 1975 at the Malaia Bronnaia, and finally in 1978 at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis (a new English-language version of the play with an American cast). All his productions will be referred to in this chapter, with special mention of the first, which though in some respects an experiment influenced his later approach. But it will focus in the main on the second, which was much more successful, toured widely in the Soviet Union and Europe, and was presented at the Edinburgh Theatre Festival in 1978.

Marriage concerns the attempts of two matchmakers, one professional, Fekla Ivanovna, and one amateur, Kochkarev, to marry off the dilatory bachelor Podkolesin to a merchant's daughter, Agaf'ia Tikhonovna. In the course of the action Kochkarev cunningly fends off competition from four other suitors and cajoles and badgers Podkolesin to the point where the match is almost complete. However, a terrified Podkolesin, when finally faced with the imminent prospect of matrimonial bliss, suddenly leaps out of an open window and escapes in a horse-drawn carriage. At first glance, with its simple plot, the play seems more like a comic interlude than a full dramatic work. Indeed in its earliest performances it was treated as such. Throughout the nineteenth century it occupied a relatively lowly position in the repertoires of the Imperial theatres, and from its first production at the Aleksandrinskii in St. Petersburg on 9 December 1842 was presented as a vaudeville, one of the most popular forms of theatrical entertainment of the period.³⁵⁸

Although it was given some different interpretations in the twentieth century, the play never fully recovered from its association with the vaudeville, and continued to be seen as a light-weight comedy. In all his productions, Efros,

³⁵⁸This is evidenced by the fact that the number of vaudeville pieces presented annually at the Aleksandrinskii increased from 41 in the season 1832-1833 to 149 by the end of 1853; see Nick Worrall, *Nikolai Gogol and Ivan Turgenev* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Modern Dramatists, 1982), p. 35.

however, refused to accept that it was nothing more than (in his own words) 'a jolly concert number' (веселый концертный номер).³⁵⁹ On the contrary he maintained that it had depths not yet fully explored on the Russian stage. He saw it as an intriguing mixture of comedy and drama, with elements of fantasy.³⁶⁰ Thus he created on stage a phantasmagorical world, in which the fantasies, dreams and fears of the unconscious mind were represented physically.

In this he was rejecting official Soviet interpretations dating from the mid 1930s, which suggested that the play was a realistic depiction of society in Tsarist Russia. Efros was influenced instead by earlier productions of Gogol in the 1920s. His approach was undoubtedly (and perhaps inevitably) indebted to Meyerhold's seminal staging of *The Government Inspector* in 1926. This production, now regarded in Russia and elsewhere as one of the most significant theatrical events of the twentieth century, has generated a huge volume of critical literature and has been extensively documented in both Russian and English. It is therefore neither necessary nor within the scope of the present study to provide a full analysis of that production here, but it must be taken into account.

Meyerhold's *Government Inspector* represented to some degree a summation of his previous practice, which had developed alongside and also influenced that of other directors of the post-Revolutionary avant-garde. The impact of his ideas had been felt in a production of *Marriage* mounted in 1922 as the first performance by The Factory of the Eccentric Actor (FEKS).³⁶¹ Some of his

³⁵⁹Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 268

³⁶⁰Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 10.

³⁶¹This was the first production by the company founded by Sergei Eisenstein, Grigorii Kozentsev and Leonid Trauberg. Staged as a 'montage of attractions', the production exploited to an extreme degree the farcical traditions of Russian folk dramas and the *vertep* puppet theatre of Gogol's native Ukraine, to which his works are said to be indebted. The chaotic action consisted of a series of stunts, drawing on the techniques of circus, musical hall, acrobatics and gymnastics, performed to a cacophony of musical effects and under rapidly-changing lighting.

techniques had also been used by Iurii Zavadskii in another staging of the play at the MAT's Third Studio in 1924.

Zavadskii had studied with Vakhtangov, and his production clearly demonstrated the influence of his mentor's concept of 'Fantastic Realism'. *Marriage* bears the subtitle: 'A Completely Incredible Event in Two Acts', and this provided the director with the key to a surreal and musical interpretation which transformed the play into a living nightmare. Zavadskii's central theme was the opposition between two worlds. The first was represented by what he saw as the idealised love of Podkolesin and Agaf'ia Tikhonovna. The second was inhabited by mysterious, demonic forces which threatened to tear this ideal world asunder. The stage was populated by terrifying, caricatured figures, who appeared, disappeared and magically reappeared from the gloom. The actors' voices were carefully modulated throughout; at times they spoke in whispers, but then suddenly raised their voices to sharp, barking shouts. Mournful, wailing choruses gave way to a cacophony of sounds that faded away unexpectedly as crashing musical chords were heard. Similarly, life-like gestures were abruptly transformed into the awkward, angular movements of marionettes. Moments of frenetic action were introduced into what was otherwise a deliberately unhurried pace. The action was frozen at times into tableaux; for instance in the scene in which the suitors try to peer through the key-hole at the bride-to-be the actors clustered around the door, forming a pyramid of human statuary.³⁶²

As the advertising poster proclaimed this was *Marriage* 'not according to Gogol', and indeed although the performers at times uttered isolated lines from the play these had no logical connection to the action and Gogol's written text was almost entirely lost. FEKS only remained in existence for two years, staging their second (and last) production, *Foreign Trade on the Eiffel Tower*, on 4 June 1923. However their productions were influential and spawned a host of imitations including some of *Marriage*. This tendency to turn Gogol's play into mad-cap extravaganzas was delightfully satirised by the humorists Il'ia Il'f and Evgenii Petrov in the chapter 'At the Columbus Theatre' in their novel *Двенадцать стульев* (*Twelve Chairs*). See Il'ia Il'f and Evgenii Petrov, *Dvenadtsat' stul'ev* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1956), pp. 236-246. For further details on FEKS, see Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet*, p. 94.

³⁶²E. Kukhta, "'Zhenit'ba" N. V. Gogolia na sovetskoi stsene 1920-kh gg.', in *P'esa i spektakl'* (Leningrad: LGITMiK, 1978), 40-49 (p. 47).

As we shall see, the idea of two contrasting worlds and the use of frozen tableaux were important aspects of Efros's work. He was well-versed in Vakhtangov's ideas, and he had also begun his training, it will be recalled, with Zavadskii. Although he made no specific mention of this production, he may therefore perhaps have been influenced by it to some degree.

By the mid 1930s, the elements of mysticism and the surreal, characteristic of the work of Zavadskii (and of Meyerhold), were out of keeping with the official interpretations of Gogol's work. Soviet criticism at this time gave renewed emphasis to the turn-of-the-century notion that Gogol had influenced Aleksandr Ostrovskii, the playwright regarded as the father of Russian realism. The hyperbole and eccentricity exhibited in productions of Gogol's works in the 1920s were now regarded therefore as features grafted on to them by misguided formalist directors, and not in any sense an inherent part of his style. Instead, in official interpretations Gogol's clearly fantastic representation of his world was seen as a realistic depiction of Tsarist Russian society. Significantly, a new edition of *Marriage*, published in 1937, was accompanied by a commentary which insisted perversely that the author's own subtitle, 'an extraordinary event', had no relevance to the content of the work itself. In 1949 these sentiments were echoed by B. Medvedev in his review of the play's first production in Moscow after the war, directed at the Lenkom by S. Stein. He praised the director for recognising that *Marriage* was not 'an extraordinary event' but an accurate picture of the behaviour and morality of the merchant class and civil servants of its era.³⁶³

Moscow audiences had to wait until 1963 for another production, when Efros directed the play at the CCT. In contrast to Stein, Efros at this period had begun

³⁶³B. Medvedev, "'Zhenit'ba'", *Trud*, 17 September 1949, p. 5.

to explore non-realist, consciously theatrical means of expression. His first 1963 *Marriage* also demonstrated two other concerns central to much of his work at this time: his interest in 'the tragedy of the common man' and his investigation of the psychology of character. He was beginning to seek ways in which to synthesise the actors' expression of their authentic inner emotions with a consciously theatrical style of presentation. In this first *Marriage*, however, the synthesis remained incomplete. In fact his production was something of an experiment. He explored in it some ideas that were to be more fully realised in his later interpretation, but his whole approach to *Marriage* was as yet excessively tentative and his view of the play too narrow. The 1975 production would be more complex and guided by a much surer hand.

In 1963, anxious to avoid the trappings of 'realist' interpretations, and constrained by a limited budget, Efros's designers Valentin Lalevich and Nikolai Sosunov avoided heavy period furniture and historically accurate decor in their setting. They attempted instead to give a sense of the era with the simplest means. They surrounded the stage area with a series of velvet-covered screens, on which were inscribed, in naive style, motifs evocative of the period: a top hat, a candelabrum, the profile of a bonneted woman and so forth. Light scrim curtains were hung at the sides, and a few sparse properties suggested the location of each scene. Efros also augmented the action with pieces of comic buffoonery. For instance, he added a new opening sequence in which G. Petrov, as Podkolesin, was directed to wander through the audience introducing himself to the spectators, until he was overcome by a fit of shyness and hid himself from view. Later Durov, as Stepan, and B. Zakharova, as Duniasha, made much play of clearing the furniture and props, working together as 'proscenium servants'.³⁶⁴ Similarly, at the end of Act I, scene XVII, the

³⁶⁴This term is a deliberate allusion to the costumed stage hands used by Meyerhold, first in his production of *The Adoration of the Cross* in 1910 and later in other productions, including (perhaps most memorably) *Don Juan* in November of that same year. As noted above, the influence of Meyerhold's work was to be seen even more clearly in Efros's 1975 production.

suitors crowded around a door with a man-sized key-hole in order to 'peep' at Agaf'ia Tikhonovna. In 1975 such pieces of stage business would be used to create the sense of a fantastic, unreal world, and to call attention to the artifice of performance, but they were also to be fully integrated into Efros's overall concept. In the earlier production this buffoonery, though in keeping with the spirit of Gogol's work, at times seemed out of place in an interpretation more firmly grounded in other respects in the dramatic.

Nevertheless in this production Efros seems to have been less concerned with outward appearance and more with inner content. The production's true focus was his rejection of the traditional view of Gogol's characters as typical comic masks. Instead he saw them as rounded, as unique, albeit eccentric, and often deeply unhappy, individuals. For instance, according to Evseev, Podkolesin, who was often stereotyped as an irremediable idler similar to Oblomov, was played sympathetically as a gentle, kind character, an impossibly shy dreamer.³⁶⁵ The interpretation of Agaf'ia Tikhonovna was also refreshingly new. Traditionally seen as frivolous and feather-brained, for B. Aseev, in Dmitrieva's convincing performance she became both charming and touching. This soft-spoken Agaf'ia Tikhonovna, rejecting the mercenary advice of the matchmaker, seemed completely sincere in her desire to marry for love. Appearing in white at the end and radiantly happy, she broke into bitter tears of genuine grief on learning of the disappearance of her husband-to-be.³⁶⁶

In the role of Zhevakin Efros cast the veteran actor Mikhail Zholodov, who at seventy had played at the CCT for over twenty years. Zhevakin has more lines than the other suitors and his role has therefore greater scope. In Act I, scene XVI he has a series of speeches in which he provides a rambling description of

³⁶⁵B. Evseev, 'Vozvrashchenie "Zhenit'by"', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 24 October 1963, p. 3.

³⁶⁶B. Aseev, "'Sushchestvovateli" ili "malen'kie luidi"?", *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 14 January 1964, p. 5.

his past life and travels. He has served as a naval officer on a destroyer, with a crew who had extraordinary surnames, including one called Hole. He describes too his sojourn in Italy, though he confuses Sicily with Venice and says that Italians speak French. His stories are comic and have the quaint charm of an older world, a different era. But though these travels seem exotic to the other suitors, there is another side to his life. He now lives entirely alone in a small single room; his one possession is a pipe. In his own words, being alone is death itself, and when at the end of Act I, scene XX, the suitors depart, he accompanies Anuchkin home, even though this takes him well out of his way.³⁶⁷ It can be assumed that he does this to put off the horror of returning to an empty house. In Zholodov's performance, as a commentary in *Teatral'naia Moskva* made clear, Zhevakin's stories, though comic, also revealed a deep longing to break free from a life of isolation, loneliness and fleeting, insubstantial relationships.³⁶⁸ Zhevakin is an absurd figure, now too old to marry; he has been rejected sixteen times before and his optimism at the prospect of success on this occasion is ludicrous, but also touching. An innocent, he is readily taken in by Kochkarev's offer to help him; it is a ruse, but he is convinced. Zholodov expressed his character's wild delight at the prospect of his future happiness, and literally rolled about the floor in laughter at the idea of defeating the other hapless contenders. But in his final moments, rejected for the seventeenth time, Zholodov appeared to express real pain, and as he departed, carrying a single small flower, he bore a close resemblance to a tragic clown.

Efros's recognition of the importance of the idea of 'laughter through tears' was vital to his understanding of Gogol, and it was this aspect of the 1963

³⁶⁷N. Gogol', *Zhenit'ba*, Act I, scene XIX and Act I, scene XX, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 7 vols *Dramaticheskie proizvedeniia*, IV (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1967), pp. 137, 139.

³⁶⁸'Gogolevskii obraz', *Teatral'naia Moskva*, 41 (1963), 4-5.

production which most clearly influenced his approach in 1975.³⁶⁹ But an emphasis on the tragi-comic nature of the play was only one aspect of the later production. What distinguished it both from that of 1963 and from all previous stagings of *Marriage* in Russia was the breadth and complexity of Efros's approach.

In his productions of Chekhov, as we have seen, Efros had been criticised with some justification for taking an excessively reductive, indeed subjective approach by interpreting the works along narrow thematic lines. In *Marriage* he did the opposite. He revealed in the play a complexity and psychological depth not manifest in previous productions. He incorporated concrete images which expressed Gogol's concepts of the double, of distorting mirror images, and of *poshlost'* and the metaphorical meanings of marriage itself. Under his direction Gogol's deceptively simple play became a profound treatise on the inherent absurdity of the human condition.

To characterise his broad approach to the play he coined a new verb: 'He надо «оводевиливать» «Женитьбу», надо ее «ошинелить»'.³⁷⁰ His remark implied that rather than regarding the play as a minor work he intended to interpret it within the context of, and in relation to, Gogol's other works, including his short story of 1842, *The Overcoat*.³⁷¹ In order to understand his remark we must therefore consider the similarities between the symbolic function of the overcoat in the prose work and the concept of marriage expressed in the comedy.

³⁶⁹Iurii Smelkov has suggested that prior to Efros's production in 1975 the concept of 'laughter through tears' had never been used as an approach to Gogol's characters. Clearly this critic was not only not *au-fait* with a production of Gaideburov's Travelling Popular Theatre in 1916 but also unaware of Efros's own earlier staging of *Marriage* in 1963. Iurii Smelkov, 'Bednye liudi', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 14 May 1975, p. 5.

³⁷⁰Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 269.

³⁷¹As noted above, Efros directed *Marriage* at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis in 1978. Although he explained the importance of his new verb to his cast, the significance of 'to overcoat' was probably lost on his audience, when in the programme Efros's words were mistranslated as: 'One must not vaudevillize (*sic*) *Marriage*, one must wrap it up in a coat.'

In this short story the purchase of a new overcoat transforms the dismal and mundane existence of Akakii Akakievich Bashmachkin, and the involved process of buying it rapidly becomes an all-absorbing passion. Actually and symbolically the overcoat becomes the object of all his desires and dreams and represents not only the purpose of his current existence but also the promise of a new life. Interestingly, its acquisition is directly equated with the idea of marital happiness. In order to pay for it, Akakii Akakievich subjects himself to a regime of near-starvation, but he suffers this privation gladly because his nourishment is spiritual; from the moment he decides to buy it he thinks only, like one in love, of the fact that one day the overcoat will be his.

С этих пор как будто самое существование его сделалось как-то полнее, как будто бы он женился, как будто какой-то другой человек присутствовал с ним, как будто он был не один, а какая-то приятная подруга жизни согласилась с ним проходить вместе жизненную дорогу, — и подруга эта была не кто другая, как та же шинель на толстой вате, на крепкой подкладке без износу.³⁷²

Once purchased, the overcoat brings great joy and propels the protagonist into another world. Newly attired, he ventures into a different part of the city in order to go to a party, and in so doing to participate in a social circle from which previously he has been excluded. But his new-found happiness is short-lived. Leaving the party, and lost in the unfamiliar streets, he is robbed of his overcoat; abandoned in the bitter cold, he falls ill and dies soon after. Buying the overcoat has horrific consequences. Indeed its very existence ultimately brings about his death. In this manner Gogol subverts its symbolism, turning it into the negation of all it once represented.

³⁷²Gogol, *Shinel'*, in *Sochineniia*, 2 vols *Povesti* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennii literatura, 1973), I, pp. 536-565 (p. 548).

It is interesting to note the marked similarity between Efros's comment and the famous remark attributed to Dostoevsky: 'We have all emerged from under Gogol's *Overcoat*.' This observation, as F. Driessen has noted, 'may serve very well as a succinct formulation of a view which had become classical during the 19th century. This sees Gogol's short story as the starting point of the literature which is dominated by social pity and which demands attention for the humiliated and insulted.'³⁷³

There is no direct evidence that Efros intended to paraphrase this much-quoted aphorism, but he may well have known it and was possibly alluding to it, because he clearly saw Podkolesin, Agaf'ia Tikhonovna and Zhevakin in particular as very much part of that literary tradition. As we have seen in the description of his CCT production, he did not see Gogol's characters as simple comic masks. He viewed them instead as complex individuals; as such they were not separate from, but very much part of, Gogol's whole approach to characterisation. In every character Efros saw a ridiculously funny and deeply unhappy 'cousin' of Akakii Akakievich, a character often perceived as the quintessential 'tragic little man'.

But Efros also wished to see the work in the context of Gogol's whole *oeuvre*. This idea had something in common with Meyerhold's approach to *The Government Inspector*. He too had wanted to produce 'all of Gogol'. Efros, however, unlike his predecessor, did not make radical alterations to Gogol's written text or incorporate into his production extracts from Gogol's other writings. Moreover, Meyerhold's intention had been overtly political; he had wanted to paint a satirical picture of the whole of Gogol's Russia. By contrast,

³⁷³F. Driessen, *Gogol as a Short-Story Writer: A Study of his Technique of Composition*, (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1965), p. 183. Although this famous remark is attributed to Dostoevsky, Driessen casts some doubt on whether he actually uttered it. (Note 4, p. 185).

Efros's desire to 'overcoat' the play was motivated, as well as by his approach to character, by his desire to express the philosophical ideas in Gogol's work. Like the overcoat, the concept of marriage in his play simultaneously affirms and negates all that it represents.

The idea of marriage as it is depicted in Gogol has very little to do with the ideas normally suggested by the word. His perception of matrimony was undoubtedly coloured by his own sexual complexes and by what appears to have been, at least as it is expressed in his works, an inordinate fear of women. But his concept of marriage also has broad, complex, metaphorical meanings, the separate strands of which the present writer feels obliged to seek to delineate, before analysing how these were expressed in Efros's production.

In the opening scene of *Marriage*, Podkolesin is lying on a divan, ruminating on the meaning of life:

Вот как начнешь эдак один на досуге подумывать, так видишь, что наконец точно нужно жениться. Что, в самом деле? Живешь, живешь, да такая наконец скверность становится.³⁷⁴

Podkolesin, as his name implies, is a man 'under the wheel', trampled down by a life which by his own admission is dull and meaningless. A victim of the essential sameness of his bachelor existence, his solution is to get married. This then is the first meaning ascribed to marriage in the play: it is a means of escape. It offers, if not exactly the possibility of happiness, then at least the hope of relief from boredom. But marriage in Gogol's perception rapidly loses its positive attributes. As Podkolesin's reluctance to commit to the match throughout the action makes clear, marriage is also something to be feared,

³⁷⁴*Zhenit'ba*, Act I, scene I, p. 109.

principally because it represents an alarming invasion of privacy. A bachelor existence, though perhaps tedious, is after all also deeply private and comfortingly familiar. Getting married inevitably means that one's single life will cease, and marks the end of everything one is used to. In fact marriage casts one into a completely unknown, and indeed unknowable, world.

The idea of a second, unknown world, or indeed a series of such worlds, beyond the one immediately visible is extremely important to an understanding of Gogol's work. Unknown worlds in Gogol are invariably linked with the imaginings of the unconscious mind or with the realms of the supernatural, as in the shadowy vision of St. Petersburg at the end of *The Overcoat*.

At times these worlds appear to run parallel to the real world. To use a metaphor from theatre, they are the life of the wings, while 'real life' is played out on stage. However, they rarely remain so; instead, in Gogol's work, the real and the fantastic converge and intertwine, and indeed can become so enmeshed that one can no longer distinguish them. Fact becomes fiction and vice versa. The effect is invariably terrifying: reality becomes nightmare and nightmare reality. Moreover, in a world of such blurred distinctions, the premises on which one judges oneself and others are inevitably faulty. Nothing is as it seems, perceptions are distorted and appearances deceptive.

Significantly, many of the characters in *Marriage* are obsessed with outward appearances and with how society may judge them by their dress or behaviour. For instance one suitor, Anuchkin, is excessively concerned with the notion that his future wife should speak French. He does not know it himself, but sees it as a status symbol. He hopes to acquire a spouse who will speak it for him, by a kind of proxy. Similarly Zhevakin, when he first appears in Act I, scene XVI, asks Duniasha to brush him down, and take care to remove all the specks

of dust from his coat. As she does so he delivers a long speech on its history, emphasising to others that it is of high quality and made of English cloth. He then tidies his hair, while admiring himself in a mirror.

Podkolesin, according to Gogol's directions, twice looks in a mirror to check his appearance, and at the beginning of Act I he interrogates his servant, Stepan, as to what progress has been made on his wedding outfit. He presses Stepan for assurances that his dress-coat is the finest of those hanging in the tailor's shop. Stepan asserts that this is so, but then Podkolesin needs to be reassured that the coat will be suited to his official rank and guarantee him the respect he is due.³⁷⁵

Then there is the question of a man's boots. Podkolesin is equally convinced that a man is judged by their make and shine. The polish for them cannot come from just any shop; he insists that it be bought in the one on Voznesenskii Street. His obsession with appearances and appropriate etiquette reaches its most ridiculous extreme at the finale when, as he sees it, a major obstacle to his escape from impending wedlock is the fact that he has no hat and will therefore be forced to run bareheaded through the streets. Indeed, Kochkarev is so convinced that his friend would not suffer the indignity of being hatless in public that he has deliberately hidden Podkolesin's hat in order to prevent him from fleeing.

However, as Gogol makes plain, the way a man views himself in society may in truth be very different from the way society views him. Zhevakin is completely self-deluded. The coat he wears is thirty years old, thick with dust and even home to the odd spider. It is frayed at the seams and has been turned inside out. His description of it recalls that of Akakii Akakievich's old

³⁷⁵*Zhenit'ba*, Act I, scene III, pp. 110-111.

overcoat, which is so far beyond repair that he must reluctantly give it up for a new one. Zhevakin nevertheless insists that what is clearly an ancient and decrepit garment is still 'almost like new'.³⁷⁶

Similarly, Podkolesin is shocked when the match-maker tells him he has grey hair, which for all his concern for his appearances he has apparently failed to notice. He immediately inspects himself in a hand-mirror. Kochkarev creeps up behind and startles him, so that he drops the mirror and it breaks. Kochkarev volunteers to buy him another, but he rejects the offer because the replacement would not be from the 'English shop' and would therefore distort his reflection. 'Да, сыщешь. Знаю я эти другие зеркала. Целым десятком кажет старее, и рожа выходит косяком.'³⁷⁷

These lines clearly echo the proverb that Gogol used as an epigraph to the final version of *The Government Inspector* in 1842: 'Don't blame the mirror if your mug is crooked!'. In that play, just as in *Marriage*, the characters look in mirrors to see not their real selves but only what they want to see. The idea of 'seeing what one wants to see' suggests a double perspective, as if characters like Podkolesin have not one but two selves, the self others see and the self they perceive themselves. These selves are also to some extent reflections of one another in a distorting mirror. Moreover, the idea of a character with two selves is closely linked to another Gogolian idea: the double.

The process of matchmaking, indeed marriage itself, involves the bringing together of two sides. It destroys 'singleness' or singularity by introducing 'doubleness' or duality. However, marriage also implies the act of sexual procreation and therefore a further 'doubling' of the married couple. The effect

³⁷⁶*Ibid.*, scene XVI, p. 129.

³⁷⁷*Ibid.*, scene X, p. 117.

of doubling something twinned, is, of course, to quadruple it. Marriage in Gogol's distorted world therefore involves not only a doubling of oneself (or one's selves) but also the creation of multiple reproductions of the self.

In *Marriage* this process is once again closely linked to the concept of mirror images. In Act I, scene XI, Kochkarev tempts his friend with the idea that marriage will bring children:

Ну взгляни в зеркало, что ты там видишь? глупое лицо — больше ничего. А тут, вообрази, около тебя будут ребятишки, ведь не то что двое или трое, а, может быть, целых шестеро, и все на тебя как две капли воды. Ты вот теперь один, надворный советник, экспедитор или там начальник какой, бог тебя ведает, а тогда, вообрази, около тебя экспедиторчонки, маленькие эдакие канальчонки...³⁷⁸

In Gogol's distorted perception, and in Kochkarev's fantasy, Podkolesin's offspring will not be individuals. Indeed he will have at least six little dispatch clerks, all of whom will be spitting images of their father. The idea of identical pint-sized Podkolesins also recalls the broken hand-mirror of the previous scene; the children are simply reflections captured in the little scattered shards littering the floor. Interestingly, however, Kochkarev first exhorts Podkolesin to 'look in the mirror' of the present, and then to picture in his mind's eye what are in effect self-replicating mirror images of the future. In this way the production of children becomes part of life's unending sameness; it can be imaginatively supposed that each of these 'children' will produce identical offspring, and that those will do likewise and so on *ad infinitum*.

³⁷⁸*Ibid.*, scene XI, pp. 119-120.

This leads us to the central paradox in Gogol's perception of marriage. As we saw, at the beginning of the play marriage ostensibly provides a means of escape from a tedious existence, from an unending sameness, but in truth it is part of that sameness. Moreover, as we also saw, Podkolesin's life before he contemplates marriage lacks any purpose, and getting married provides one. Like the acquisition of Akakii Akakievich's overcoat, it becomes the sole aim of existence but also therefore the ultimate end of all human aspiration. It is both a beginning and a termination, at once everything and nothing. The pursuit of marriage is the pursuit of a dream which is the end of all dreams, and is therefore an utterly futile activity. But if marriage is the purpose of life, it follows that life itself is an endless and fruitless quest for nothing.

This perception of human endeavour as an empty activity has much in common with Gogol's notion of *poshlost'*. This word is possibly the most famous of all untranslatable words in Russian. It can be rendered as 'banality', 'triviality', 'the mundane', but also as 'ostentatious bad taste' or 'pretentious vulgarity'. In *Marriage* there are many examples of *poshlost'*: several characters' excessive concern with appearances and decorum; the social climbing demonstrated by Agaf'ia Tikhonovna and her Aunt in their desire that she marry not a merchant but a nobleman; the reduction of marriage to a mere financial arrangement in the words and actions of Iaichnitsa, who though a nobleman is prepared to marry beneath him for financial gain; Anuchkin's inflated notions about a French-speaking wife; the characters' petty rivalries in their attempts to outdo each other, and so on.

In Gogol's perception *poshlost'* denotes all that is petty, self-important and commonplace in human aspirations and feelings, and becomes the very sum of existence. It is by definition all that is consistently mundane and middle-ground; it is a denial of all depths and heights, of the sublime. Indeed for

Gogol *poshlost'* has a quasi-mystical aspect: the denial of the sublime is a denial of the spiritual and so a denial of God.³⁷⁹ His characters therefore inhabit worlds which are spiritually empty. The need to escape from these worlds becomes a central theme of his work. The flight is often made in a carriage: Khlestakov towards the end of *The Government Inspector*, Chichikov in *Dead Souls*, Poprishchin in *Diary of a Madman* and Podkolesin in *Marriage*. But Gogol provides neither his audience nor his readers with any real indication of the final destination of his fleeing characters.³⁸⁰ Leaving others behind, they simply gallop off along apparently open roads into indeterminate spaces; where they stop, whether they stop, remains unclear, and if their destinations are unknown or unseen, their journeys by implication are endless. In this sense all hope of escape is in fact an illusion, for the roads lead nowhere, into nothing, into the emptiness from which the characters are ostensibly running away. Thus the characters left behind are entrapped in a spiritually barren existence, and those that flee run towards one. In this fashion, *poshlost'* comes to express not only the nature of experience but also the eternal human condition. This idea of life as an empty cycle, as inescapable *poshlost'*, was fundamental, as we shall see, to Efros's understanding of *Marriage*.

Efros 1975 production was staged at the Malaia Bronnaia in the same year as his *Cherry Orchard* at the Taganka. In these productions Efros worked with the designer Valerii Levental', who on both occasions produced a single set which incorporated as visual metaphors the central ideas of the play. As Efros made

³⁷⁹For a discussion of the metaphysical and spiritual aspects of Gogol's notion of *poshlost'* (in relation both to *The Government Inspector* and to *Dead Souls*), see Dmitry Merezhkovsky, 'Gogol and the Devil', in *Gogol from the Twentieth Century, Eleven Essays*, ed. and trans. by Robert. A. Maguire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 57-102 (pp. 57-60).

³⁸⁰As Podkolesin leaps from the window, he demands that the driver take him to Kanavka Street, near the Semonovskii Bridge. However, Gogol provides no indication of what this means. It could be assumed that Podkolesin is going home, but the audience do not see him reach a final destination. Like Khlestakov in effect he simply disappears (or perhaps enters some other unknown realm).

clear later in an interview, his collaborative work with his designer was fundamental to his conception of the work:

Левенталь великий выдумщик и фантазер, и потому беседы с ним дают очень много. Нашей первой совместной постановкой была «Женитьба». Обычно ее воспринимают как вещь пустую, как шутку. Мы же постарались поставить ее как часть гоголевского наследства, как совершенно невероятное происшествие, в меру болезненное, с чертовщинкой и вообще трагическое. Левенталь придумал для «Женитьбы» такую декорацию, которая как бы втягивает в себя персонажи и извергает их вновь. И предложил ввести типичную для Гоголя тему двойников. В общем, помог мне увидеть Гоголя фантасмагорического...³⁸¹

As the play opened, two large gilt frames were gradually illuminated. Slowly emerging from the dark, the entire cast, carrying posies of white flowers, moved in a procession headed by Volkov as Podkolesin, leading on his arm Agaf'ia Tikhonovna (Iakovleva), dressed in traditional white and wearing a veil. This wedding party walked towards the front of the stage and froze in a tableau to pose for an imaginary photographer. Sonorous Orthodox Church music and choral singing were heard off-stage. Similar musical motifs were used later at specific points throughout the action.

At the sound of a gong the party suddenly disappeared. The portrait frames that remained enclosed yawning empty spaces instead of pictures of family life, suggesting perhaps that the marriage was an illusion from the very beginning. These vacant frames remained on stage throughout and produced an eerie

³⁸¹Efros, in conversation with E. Egor'eva in "Teatral'nyi khudozhnik Valerii Levental", *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo*, 12 (1978), 16-19 (p. 19).

impression; for V. Kommissarhevskii they created from the outset an horrific vision of the emptiness of the characters' lives.³⁸²

As we have seen, marriage is a frightening prospect. Podkolesin's fear is apparent from the very beginning; it is expressed in his nervous questioning of Stepan, who has made several journeys into the town to make arrangements for his master's wedding outfit. He pesters his valet about the progress being made, and is concerned to know whether his orders for a dress suit and new boots have made either the tailor or boot-maker curious about his intention to marry. His worries about inquisitive shopkeepers are unfounded; no one has asked Stepan such questions. This exchange establishes a sense of the opposition between two realms: the public, unknown and unseen one of the town into which Stepan ventures and where these invisible rumour-mongers reside, and the private one, Podkolesin's home. Efros established in his blocking this notion of private and public worlds, and the fear that the former may be invaded by the latter.

Fond of bridging the division between stage and audience, in such scenes between two characters he frequently imposed conditions which made it impossible for them to simply sit and talk. Instead he placed one actor in the audience and the other on stage, forcing their conversation to span the length of the auditorium. His purpose, he explained, was so to involve the spectators that the actor, when he moved to the stage, would take them back with him through the proscenium arch. This technique, he maintained, allowed the audience to become co-creators of the theatrical event without sacrificing their spectator status.³⁸³ He used this method, which he referred to as 'putting each in a different city', for the opening exchange between Podkolesin and his valet,

³⁸²V. Komissarzhevskii, "'Zhenit'ba'", in *Teatr kotoryi liubliu* (Moscow: VTO, 1981), pp. 99-104 (p. 100).

³⁸³Golub, 'Acting', p. 22.

Stepan. Volkov as Podkolesin remained on stage, and Aleksei Ushakov answered his questions while walking through the auditorium. This world, into which only Stepan ventured, and where pertinent questions might be asked about marriage, was quite literally the public one. On the other hand, the stage on which Podkolesin waited for answers represented the safe confines of his own room.

At the back of the acting area, on the left, a little stage mounted on a truck represented Podkolesin's private domain. A black carriage on its upstage end symbolised the open road and the promise of escape. This carriage was used by the suitors in Act II; according to Maria Szewcow they conveyed their mutual rivalry by adroitly changing seats.³⁸⁴ A similar stage, on the right, was Agaf'ia Tikhonovna's domain: an overcrowded parlour, surrounded by lace curtains, on which stood an armchair and a small round table covered by a cloth. Enclosed in its own frame, her home, rather like the portraits at the beginning, was frequently presented as if it were a cinematic 'still'; within it the bride-to-be became as much a prisoner as the multi-coloured, stuffed parrots in three cages that hung over her head. As Shakh-Azizova observed, Efros's staging owed much to the techniques of television and film.³⁸⁵ At specific points he drew individual characters out of the background and focused the audience's attention upon them, as if using a camera in 'close-up' before pulling back again to provide a 'panorama'. In order to achieve this effect the mini-stages rolled backwards and forwards on metal tracks, towards and away from the audience, as the action demanded. This was a method of staging clearly borrowed from Meyerhold, who had similarly been inspired by the language of cinema. In *The Government Inspector* in 1926 the stage had been surrounded by a semi-circular screen of thirteen double doors in polished imitation mahogany. The central

³⁸⁴Maria Szewcow, 'Anatolij Efros Directs Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* and Gogol's *The Marriage*,' *Theatre Quarterly*, 26 (Summer 1977), 34-46 (p. 41).

³⁸⁵T. Shakh-Azizova, 'Kontrasty sovremennoi stseny', *Voprosy teatra* (1977), 88-119 (p. 104).

doors could be slid sideways to allow a series of little stages on trucks to roll on one at a time on metal runners which ran to the front of the playing area. Once each truck was on stage the doors behind it closed silently. Before it emerged each was prepared back-stage, so that when it rolled into view the cast and setting for a given scene had been fully assembled. In Braun's description, 'each scene on the truck-stage glided forward from the gloom like the reincarnation of a long-buried past, an exquisitely composed engraving projected out of its mahogany frame; a long pause was held for the image to register, then the tableau came to life.'³⁸⁶ As noted above, Levental' created a similar dynamic in his set by drawing the characters inwards and then casting them outwards again.³⁸⁷

Irving Wardle, in his review of *Marriage* at Edinburgh in 1978, criticised Efros's use of these stages, remarking: 'If they are intended to represent the hero's dreams, it does not say much for his dreams.'³⁸⁸ Although meant as a sharp rebuff, this criticism was a succinct summation of Efros's perception of a character enmeshed in the *poshlost'* of the everyday. Wardle also suggested that the stages did nothing to establish location, and were too small to act on. He apparently failed to realise that the director was deliberately incorporating into his staging a symbolic juxtaposition between these restricted spaces and free movement in the auditorium. This was clearly seen at the end of Act I: when Kochkarev has finally brought Podkolesin round to the idea of marrying and leaving the safe world of his room, Mikhail Kozakov as Kochkarev chased Volkov down into and through the 'unknown world' of the audience.

As we have seen, in Gogol the unknown is a world with its own peculiar and unfathomable logic, in which reality and fantasy become inextricably linked.

³⁸⁶Edward Braun, *The Theatre of Meyerhold*, (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 218.

³⁸⁷Egor'eva, p. 19.

³⁸⁸Irving Wardle, 'The Marriage', *The Times*, 22 August 1978, Arts, p. 6.

Thus, in keeping with the phantasmagoria that was the playwright's vision of St. Petersburg, Efros created a bizarre environment in which the characters' inner emotions, desires and fears were represented physically. Like both Zavadskii and Meyerhold, he wanted to evoke a sense of another world parallel to the 'real' one, and employed a device analogous to their use of extras. In 1924 Kochkarev had been accompanied throughout by a pair of mysterious *dopplegänger* who had created the illusion that the elusive Kochkarev was everywhere at once; as soon as one figure exited from one place the other would suddenly emerge elsewhere.³⁸⁹ Similarly in 1926 Khlestakov had had a mysterious and taciturn double, an Officer in Transit, and Meyerhold had introduced another additional character, who if anything was even more enigmatic. Named the Blue Hussar and dressed in a blue military uniform, he appeared in three scenes but spoke no lines and did not participate in the action. For Mikhail Chekhov his presence symbolised the idea of the emptiness of man's existence at the heart of Meyerhold's production.³⁹⁰

In 1975 Efros's 'extras' were by turns ghostly and comic, and took the form of the actual embodiment of figures mentioned only in passing in Gogol's dialogue. For instance in Act I, scene XII, before the suitors have made their first entrances, the match-maker Fekla describes each one to Agaf'ia Tikhonovna and her aunt. In this production each suitor materialised as he was described, as though summoned in the imagination of the bride-to-be. The men then lined up like soldiers on an inspection parade. Last on Fekla's list is a stammering clerk and titular councillor, Akinf Stepanovich Panteleev. According to Gogol he never appears because he is immediately rejected on account of his lack of sobriety. He too was conjured, however, and joined the ranks of the assembled wooers. In this same scene the aunt recalls how

³⁸⁹Pavel Markov, 'Istoriia moego teatral'nogo sovremennika', *Teatr*, 10 (1969), p. 100.

³⁹⁰Mikhail Chekhov. Quoted in: Rudnitskii, *Rezhisser Meierkhol'd* (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), p. 356.

Agaf'ia's merchant father had bouts of bad temper in which he used to beat her mother. This fearful memory prompts Agaf'ia to confess that she herself is wary of marrying a merchant. At this moment, the figure of her father suddenly appeared, holding over his head, in readiness to strike, a hand encased in a huge glove several times normal size.

Efros also used supernumeraries to express the idea of marriage as an endless repetition. Thus when in Act I Kochkarev points out to Podkolesin, as an inducement to marriage, that he will be able to beget children, half a dozen little boys piled on to the stage, all identically dressed in period costumes as petty civil servants. Each child was a version in miniature of his father, so that all those in the group were doubles, indeed multiples of each other. In a later scene, this image was itself deliberately mirrored: Agaf'ia Tikhonovna's dreams of future children were realised in a gaggle of little girls, all decked out in identical flounced dresses and wearing bonnets covered in lace and ribbons. As Kozhukova noted, by presenting these tots on stage Efros deliberately blurred the distinction between reality and dreams, because although apparently a trick of the imagination they were also in some sense real.³⁹¹ This merging of two apparently separate worlds, true to Gogol, was underlined when Kochkarev led the children away up-stage to prevent them from disturbing a conversation between Podkolesin and Agaf'ia Tikhonovna. In a similar way the match-maker reacted in shock at the appearance of the ghost of Agaf'ia Tikhonovna's father, who one might otherwise have been assumed to have been invisible to those on stage.

In an interview Efros explained his understanding of the play as follows:

³⁹¹G. Kozhukhova, 'Predstav'te sebe', *Pravda*, 10 November 1975, p. 3.

Gogol's idea in *The Marriage* is to show that people search for some kind of activity, any kind, even to the point of seeming absurd, but they can't find anything to do.

There's no reason to live, so they begin to view marriage as a possible means of escape. They are locked into an absurd pattern of meaningless pursuit, not knowing who or what they want. They run around and around and around. No sooner do they stop than they die.³⁹²

This idea of a life as perpetual cycle of useless activity was manifest in three different ways in Efros's production. Firstly, it was seen in the manner in which the director propelled his actors into almost constant action. Secondly, the idea was incorporated directly into the set design. Finally, it was expressed through the new finale he added to the play which served as a frame to the action.

Judging by Gogol's directions alone, the play contains little physical action. In fact the suitors spend most of their time waiting. However, as Golub has observed, it was characteristic of Efros's brand of staging at the Malaia Bronnaia that he propelled his performers into a state of constant movement by filling this waiting time with a variety of inventive comic business.³⁹³ For instance, when in Act I scene XV two characters, Iaichnitsa and Anuchkin, meet for the first time, Efros turned their attempts at a simple hand-shake into a comic play of request and denial, with repeated gestures that reflected escalating emotions, from polite courteousness through anger to the expression of injured pride. At a later point in the action, all five suitors dutifully trailed after Agaf'ia Tikhonovna, dragging between them an outsized divan from one side of the stage to the other and back again. Later, the rivalry between them provoked by Kochkarev was expressed not only through Gogol's lines but also physically, in a humorous game of one-upmanship. In the opening scene of Act II, Agaf'ia

³⁹²Efros, 'Energy', p. 33.

³⁹³Golub, 'Acting', p. 26.

Tikhonovna was seated in her parlour attending to her toilette; meanwhile Kochkarev staked out a space on the floor from which to observe her, comporting himself, as Golub has suggested, as would befit a connoisseur viewing an exhibit at a museum.³⁹⁴ The other gallants then appeared from behind her chair, jockeying for position to get a closer look. Like a many-headed hydra with waving arms, they stretched out to catch whichever part of her dress and body was closest to each.

As Braun has noted, in *The Government Inspector* Meyerhold had employed comic business not for its own sake but to bring out the significance of the action and to underscore the performers' awareness of it.³⁹⁵ This idea clearly influenced Efros's approach. In Gogol's script, the object of the suitors' desires, Agafia Tikhonovna, is a relatively minor character, in respect both of dialogue and of the stage action he prescribes. In Efros's staging however, as Szewcow has noted, her role was in no way minor.³⁹⁶ On the contrary, its importance was evoked by her silent presence. Indeed in a scene in Act II, in which Gogol expected her to be off stage, and in which the suitors discuss her merits and faults, she was at the centre of a tug-of-war between them. Conducted as a pantomime, this tug-of-war revealed the contradiction between what each man secretly desired and what he actually said to beat off his rivals. This mock-heroic battle expressed too each man's erotic fantasy, which was rendered concrete by the kisses they lavished on the body. Since the real Agafia Tikhonovna had slipped from their grasp, this was now that of a rag doll. On several occasions Podkolesin was knocked out of the contest and staggered to one side of the stage. At fleeting moments, the doll appeared to come alive once more: by clever manipulation, it was made to turn and face him and stretch out its arms in an embrace before being pulled back into the fray.

³⁹⁴*Ibid.*

³⁹⁵Braun, *Theatre of Meyerhold*, pp. 210-211.

³⁹⁶Szewcow, p. 44.

The principal engineer of action was Kochkarev, who was played by Kozakov with frantic and prodigious energy. The script contains several suggestions of the presence of demonic forces. In fact Kochkarev's first line to the match-maker, if taken literally, suggests that he himself is married to the devil. ('Hy, послушай, на кой черт ты меня женила?').³⁹⁷ Such references as this and indeed the sheer intensity of Kozakov's portrayal led several commentators to suggest that he appeared to be driven by dark forces beyond his control. In the words of Anna Obraztsova he was a latter-day Mephistopheles transplanted into a nineteenth-century Russian comedy.³⁹⁸ As if possessed and propelled by an extraordinary inner dynamic, Kozakov was breathlessly excited as he rushed to organise the great event, delighting in his description of the preparations for the feast, the purchasing of champagne and the arrangements for the ceremony. According to Obraztsova's account, his euphoria at duping the other suitors and at the prospect of the match produced in him a sense of amazement at his own new-found powers, as if like a fiendish magician and before our very eyes he was about to pull off a master stroke.³⁹⁹

Although this association between Kochkarev and the devil can be substantiated in Gogol's script, Efros's own conception of the character had a less other-worldly basis.⁴⁰⁰ Indeed Kozakov's performance was very much in line with the director's overall conception of life as a constant search for action. As Efros himself noted, Kochkarev is unhappily married and therefore his actions in trying to find a match for his friend are not motivated by kindness. In truth he is little concerned with Podkolesin's feelings on the matter. Instead, Kozakov's Kochkarev had a mania for activity, which implied that he himself would cease

³⁹⁷*Zhenit'ba*, Act I, scene IX, p. 115.

³⁹⁸Anna Obraztsova, 'Odin den' i vsia zhizn' Podkolesina', *Teatr*, 12 (1975), 17-25 (pp. 23-24).

³⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴⁰⁰Efros, *Repetitsiia*, pp. 262-263.

to exist unless involved in something. In order to master his own life, to give it purpose, he needed to persuade himself, and others, that he was a man of energy and decision. For Podkolesin the prospect of marriage becomes the purpose of life, but for Kochkarev too the impending match becomes his own reason for living. Like Podkolesin he hopes that the match will bring change, the possibility of something new, a chance to rise above the *poshlost'* of the everyday. But his energies are misdirected and his plans ruined when the wedding does not take place. Like Obraztsova, Stanislav Rassadin identified a demonic aspect in Kochkarev, but suggested that he was working for the wrong master. He was in the pay of a devil whose name was neither Beelzebub nor Voland; he was serving instead a creature called Vacuum. In Rassadin's analysis, this production captured Gogol's sense of horror in the face of life's spiritual emptiness, and turned the play into a re-telling of the legend of Faust and Mephistopheles. In this instance however the story had a new twist; Podkolesin's Faust did not know what he wanted, and Kochkarev's Mephistopheles did not know what he needed.⁴⁰¹

In truth this Kochkarev, for all his feverish activity, recognised early on the ultimate futility of his actions. At the end of Act I, when Kochkarev has disposed of the rivals and apparently persuaded Podkolesin to marry, the friends shake hands to seal the bargain. At this moment Kozakov danced a jig of victorious delight as he delivered his line: 'Ну этого только мне и нужно.' (That is all that I need). According to Gogol's script Kochkarev speaks this line once, but Kozakov stopped dancing and repeated it several times, finally addressing it to himself as a question: Is that all that I need?...Is that all that I need? In this single moment, his energetic movements arrested, the character became earth-bound, revealing his own insecurities and recognising with increasing clarity the emptiness of his existence. Kozakov's treatment of this

⁴⁰¹Stanislav Rassadin, "'Ne dal'she chem v sobstvennoe serdtse'", *Iunost'*, 7 (1976), 67-72 (p. 68).

line was calculated to reveal Kochkarev's inner emotions and to evoke sympathy for his plight. As such it was symptomatic of Efros's whole approach to characterisation, and in full accord with his conception of the play as a tragedy disguised as comedy.

A sense of the tragi-comic coloured all the actors' performances, but was particularly apparent in the portrayal of Zhevakin by Durov. Having played Stepan in the production at the CCT, he appears in his conception of Zhevakin to have been influenced by Zholodov's performance there, but rather than simply reproducing that interpretation he brought to the role a great deal of his own invention. Indeed, the diminutive Durov is an actor of considerable range and indefatigable energy, and has an arresting stage presence. In his many roles with Efros he always excelled in those which allowed him to give rein to his considerable comic talents, but which also permitted him to reveal the essential humanity of his characters. As Igor' Zolotusskii's account of his Zhevakin made clear, these qualities were evident from his very first appearance.⁴⁰²

In Act I, scene XVI, Zhevakin introduces himself for the first time to the unfortunately named Ivan Pavlovich Iaichnitsa (Fried Eggs/Omlette). Mishearing, he thinks that Iaichnitsa is talking about food. This exchange is often regarded as little more than a silly joke, but as played by Durov and Bronevoi it became a small scene in itself. For Bronevoi's Iaichnitsa, as the actor's pained expression made clear, his surname was no joke but rather the cause of genuine embarrassment. Durov's Zhevakin, ashamed of his mistake, revealed his sympathy by directing his reminiscences about acquaintances with curious names to Iaichnitsa personally, in a manner which, in Zolotusskin's opinion, was calculated to compensate for the hurt he had caused.

⁴⁰²Igor' Zolotusskii, "'Zhenit'ba'", *Komsomolskaia pravda*, 15 May 1975, p. 5.

Durov delivered his monologue about his travels with great verve, gesticulating wildly and speaking ever more rapidly as his excitement grew. For Zolotusskin, Durov's account of life abroad became an enchanting fairy tale, but in this Durov revealed, as indeed Zholodov had done, the character's yearning to break free from his loneliness; in so doing he also exposed the longings of the other suitors, his on-stage audience. This was a view shared by Obraztsova, who saw his whirling gestures and the increasing speed of his speech as signs of his growing sense of helplessness.⁴⁰³

Durov was at his most touching, as M. Liubomudrov noted, at the end of scene X of Act II, when Agafia Tikhonovna repulses Zhevakin and leaves him alone on stage to deliver a monologue.⁴⁰⁴ According to the script he directs the first lines to her departing figure and goes on to beg her to tell him why he has been rejected once more. But Durov, shaking and with tears in his eyes, appealed directly to the audience for help in solving his enigma:

Да...Вот эта уж будет, никак, семнадцатая невеста. И чего ей, однако ж, хочется? Чего бы ей, например, эдак...с какой стати...(Подумав.) Темно, чрезвычайно темно! Добро бы был нехорош чем. (Отсматривается.) Кажется, нельзя сказать этого — все славу богу, натура не обидела. Непонятно.⁴⁰⁵

The word 'непонятно' occurs a second time in the speech as Zhevakin says: 'Ей богу непонятно!'. As Rimma Krechetova recalled, Durov turned his head upwards on this line and directed it angrily to the heavens. In his words and in this action, according to the critic, he succeeded in expressing a central theme of Efros's production: the tragedy of little people who are thwarted in their

⁴⁰³Obraztsova, 'Odin den', p. 20.

⁴⁰⁴M. Liubomudrov, 'Uroki klassiki', *Zvezda*, 1 (1978), 200-212 (p. 207).

⁴⁰⁵*Zhenit'ba*, Act II, scene X, p. 154.

desperate efforts to change the circumstances of their existence because they live in a world they cannot comprehend.

И возникает единый образ огромного, сложного мира, в котором этот человек бьется, не умея обнаружить причин своих бедствий, готовый обвинить мироздание за отсутствие видимой логики, за то, что причины его несчастья скрыты, не явны ему, и неизвестно, как можно их устранить.⁴⁰⁶

The role of Podkolesin was performed by Volkov. Volkov was a leading actor in Efros's troupe and had previously played, among other parts, Don Juan in 1973; later in the 1975 season he was to be seen in the role of Othello. In 1987 Iurii Fridshtein wrote a retrospective account of Volkov's career in which he identified certain traits common to all these portrayals. Each character had been interpreted by Volkov as a man of great intelligence who was racked by doubts. As Othello, totally trusting, he had shown a lack of judgment that rendered him blind to Iago's intrigues. His Podkolesin, lost in a world he did not understand, displayed a similar uncertainty, which lent the character a child-like innocence. In fact, Fridshtein has suggested that in all these roles Volkov revealed a sense of the child within; one felt compelled as it were to take him by the hand and lead him safely through the labyrinth of lies and perfidy in which he found himself.⁴⁰⁷

Smelianskii, on the other hand, voicing an opinion shared by other commentators, suggested that Volkov's vacillating and indecisive Podkolesin was a parody of the 'superfluous man' of Russian nineteenth-century literature — a Russian Hamlet.⁴⁰⁸ This was hardly a new interpretation. In 1859

⁴⁰⁶R. Krechetova, 'Za gran'iu gran', *Teatr*, 6 (1980), 97-103 (p. 103).

⁴⁰⁷Iu. Fridshtein, 'Strannye geroi Nikolaia Volkova', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 10 September 1987, p. 5.

⁴⁰⁸A. Smelianskii, "'Chelovecheskoe slyshitsia vezde'", *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2 (1979), 85-91 (p. 88).

Apollon Grigoriev had argued that the character was a 'travestied and trivialised Hamlet, one Gogolian exhibit among many serving to attack the inflated self-image of the contemporary Russian — as if to say "You are not a Hamlet, you are a Podkolesin"'.⁴⁰⁹ But if Volkov's performance was in line with a familiar conception, Iakovleva (like Dmitrieva before her) brought a new perspective, by contrast, to the part of Agaf'ia Tikhonovna.

This character, as Krechetova has noted, was frequently interpreted as similar to the silly, pretentious and coquettish women found in the works of Ostrovskii.⁴¹⁰ Iakovleva's comic portrayal did not entirely exclude these traits, but for M. Panich her performance also revealed a tenderness and depth of feeling that was most affecting.⁴¹¹ This view was echoed by many, including Dmitriev, who remarked that beneath her comic affectation the actress displayed at times a touching naivety and defencelessness.⁴¹² In Zavadskii's 1924 production the love between Agaf'ia Tikhonovna and Podkolesin had been idealised, but Efros believed it should be portrayed as real. Accordingly, Dmitriev suggested too that the heroine's desire for love was endearing and apparently authentic, and that the humour, lyricism and drama blended in Iakovleva's portrayal were traits entirely appropriate to the interpretation of Gogol, but which hitherto had remained unseen. At the finale Agaf'ia Tikhonovna was left alone on stage to mourn the sudden loss of her husband-to-be. Like Kozakov and Durov, Iakovleva expressed her inner anguish in a physical way. V. Maksimova described her final exit as follows:

⁴⁰⁹Donald Fanger, *The Creation of Nikolai Gogol* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Belkap Press, 1979), p. 196, see note 7.

⁴¹⁰Krechetova, 'Za gran'iu', p. 103.

⁴¹¹M. Panich, *Puť k sebe*, (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1991), p. 279.

⁴¹²Iurii Dmitriev, 'Akter i "aktivnaia" rezhissura', *Teatr*, 2 (1976), 117-123 (p. 119).

И взглянет в зал глазами, полными слез, и улыбнется, готовая заплакать,
тоненькая, невесомая ...невеста Агафья Тихоновна (О. Яковлева),
прислонится к кулисе в истоме последней усталости.⁴¹³

As noted above, the sense of life as a endless, meaningless cycle was incorporated directly into the stage design. At the back of the stage, at the top of the set, Levental' created a semi-circular border containing a series of separate panels. These operated on a spindle, and could be rapidly turned over to reveal differently painted sides. In the opening sequence they showed views of street life in St. Petersburg, with crowds of ladies and gentlemen, elegantly attired, walking on Nevsky Prospect. As the wedding party exited, the panels swivelled to reveal a series of pictures of a hatless running figure, whose progress could be followed around the semi-circle of the screen. The effect was again cinematic, in the manner of a child's cartoon book whose pages, when flipped with a thumb, create the illusion of figures in motion. Used at the beginning and end of the action, this device suggested that the lives of Gogol's characters, and by extension that of all human beings, amounted to nothing more than a unbroken and never-ending cycle of futile activity.

In the closing moments of *The Government Inspector*, Khlestakov gallops off in a coach, soon after the townspeople, having realised that he was an impostor, are dumb-struck with horror as the gendarme announces that a government inspector has come. His arrival is intended as a final resolution, almost in the manner of a *deus ex machina*. But Gogol subverts this theatrical convention and his audience's expectations; the government inspector does not appear, and the characters remain mute and motionless like statues. The play therefore has no dénouement, or rather its very lack of ending is its finale. An audience is left

⁴¹³V. Maksimova, 'Eta strannaia, eta grustnaia "Zenit'ba"...', *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 26 November 1975, p. 3.

with the unmistakable sense that another drama (or perhaps, in a manner familiar in Absurdist Theatre, the same drama) is about to begin.

The final scenes of *Marriage* have even less sense of resolution than those of *The Government Inspector*. Podkolesin leaps from the window and disappears, leaving the other characters in a state of scurrying consternation. This lack of completion caused great confusion in the audience at the first performance of the play in 1842. The majority of its spectators, familiar with the happy outcomes of well-made romantic comedies, saw the play as unfinished, and fully expected Podkolesin to return and marry Agaf'ia Tikhonovna.⁴¹⁴

In Efros's production, he did return to the stage in a newly created finale, which suggested, like the dénouement of *The Government Inspector*, that it was at once an ending and a beginning. It created a visual statement of Gogol's idea of eternal *poshlost'*, but linked this closely to the Absurdist sense of life as an endless, empty pursuit. Moreover, this resolution of the play was almost identical to the opening. Thus with stunning simplicity Efros incorporated Gogol's ideas of the double and of mirror images into the very structure of his production.

Podkolesin made good his escape by leaping from the stage into the 'unknown' world of the auditorium. The top hat he had worn lay abandoned in a pool of light. Somewhere in the distance, as though in the mind of his intended, was heard the sound of horses' hoof-beats galloping to freedom. The panels above the stage turned over to reveal the running figure once more. But for this Podkolesin escape was an illusion: his carriage remained motionless on its stage. Instead, Volkov climbed wearily back on to the stage to the join the whole of the rest of the cast, including the dozen miniature Agaf'ia Tikhonovnas

⁴¹⁴S. Danilov, *"Zhenit'ba" N. V. Gogolia* (Moscow: GATD, 1934), pp. 47-48.

and Podkolesins. The wedding portrait of the opening was repeated, and moved slowly down towards the audience. All the characters were expressionless save Agafia Tikhonovna, who was quietly crying. Her dream of happiness had been turned into a nightmare to which there was no end.

In Podkolesin's weary return to the world of the stage, and in the other visual metaphors of the continually running figure and the immobile carriage, Efros appeared to imply that Podkolesin is doomed to run in incessant circles or to remain 'under the wheel', mired, so to speak, in the mud (or *poshlost*) of his own existence. Indeed on Efros's stage all Gogol's characters were in almost perpetual motion and yet remained rooted on the same spot, engaged in the endless ritual of a wedding celebration. In this production Gogol's characters, like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, filled their time with activity while they waited for the appearance of something they hoped would end the waiting. This hope was an illusion. Godot never comes. The marriage never takes place. Efros's new ending was meant to create this sense of a perpetual waiting game, and it was to this end that he had the groom return to the stage. This was a vital point entirely missed by Wardle, in his review of the production in Edinburgh in 1978, when he described Podkolesin's getaway as 'outstandingly clumsy' precisely because Volkov leapt into the audience and then clambered back on to the stage.⁴¹⁵

Wardle heavily criticised *Marriage*. It is clear from his comments as a whole that he steadfastly believed the play to be a mere theatrical romp, and therefore understood little of Efros's serious intentions. With patronising excess and considerable savagery, he remarked:

⁴¹⁵Wardle, p. 6.

To Moscow audiences Anatoli Efros's version for the Malaya Bronnaya Street company may convey messages hidden from the Western spectator, but my impression is that the farce has been systematically sabotaged by leaden perversities.⁴¹⁶

Wardle's damning opinions were not however shared by Ossia Trilling in a review in *Plays and Players*:

Gogol's comedy is subtitled 'An absolutely incredible event' and Efros proceeds to make it look perfectly credible by turning it into a rip-roaring spectacle in which stage effects and incidental music vie with the actors' finely spun performances to make his comic, socio-critical point.⁴¹⁷

In Russia in 1975, and indeed throughout its long run, Efros's *Marriage* spawned a great many reviews. There was some minor criticism of his treatment of the play not as a comedy but as a drama, which in the opinion of Inna Vishnevskaja negated its humour.⁴¹⁸ This was refuted however by others, most notably Liubomudrov and Rassadin, who noted on the contrary that his interpretation provoked much spontaneous laughter in its audiences.⁴¹⁹

In fact the Russian reviews of the 1975 production were overwhelmingly positive, and found little fault either in its style or in the ideas it expressed. There was only one notable exception, from a predictable quarter, an article by G. Danilova in *Teatral'naia zhizn'*.⁴²⁰ She opined that Efros had altered the entire tone and purpose of Gogol's work, producing an atmosphere of

⁴¹⁶*Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷Ossia Trilling, 'The Russians at Edinburgh', *Plays and Players*, 1 (October 1978), 36-37 (p. 36).

⁴¹⁸I. Vishnevskaja, 'Klassika: granitsy i bezgranichost', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 24 March 1976, p. 8.

⁴¹⁹Liubomudrov, p. 207, and St. Rassadin, 'Ne khodite v teatr s papoi', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 9 June 1976, p. 8.

⁴²⁰G. Danilova, 'Spros osobyi', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 21 (1975), 20-23.

hopelessness and gloom which precluded what she maintained was Gogol's belief in the healthy, purifying effects of laughter. She also rejected Efros's treatment as misguided because it had turned Gogol's biting social critique into a drama of suffering and into a timeless morality tale on the theme of unrealised dreams.⁴²¹ Indeed for her Efros's production was profoundly misconceived. Other critics, by contrast, saw his perception of the play as a treatise on spiritual loss and his exploration of the theme of the ultimate futility of human endeavour as a profound, insightful interpretation of a work often regarded as frivolous.

Panich remarked that the humour of the piece was coloured by a tone of sadness which expressed a longing for harmony and unattainable ideals:

Спектакль углубляется тем, что к комичному примешана грусть неустroенности человеческой жизни. И это уже не только о Подколесине и его неудачной женитьбе.⁴²²

Smelkov similarly praised Efros's broad approach, suggesting that the idea of spiritual poverty was one often explored in such works as *Dead Souls* but not previously seen as a key to the interpretation of *Marriage*.⁴²³ His sentiments were echoed by M. Pozharskaia, who praised Efros for his originality:

В этом спектакле впервые вся пьеса, все характеры были освещены светом всего гоголевского творчества, его грустными размышлениями о скуке жизни и страстях человеческих.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹*Ibid.*, p. 23

⁴²²Panich, p. 279.

⁴²³Smelkov, 'Bednye', p. 5.

⁴²⁴M. Pozharskaia, *Sovetskie khudozhniki teatra i kino* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1977), p. 161.

Likewise, Rassadin suggested that the production expressed Gogol's sense of horror in the face of what he had seen as a spiritual vacuum in Russian society. Interestingly, he also implied that Efros had interpreted Gogol as a precursor of Chekhov, in whose apparently action-less drama, nothing happens; people simply eat, oblivious to the fact that their lives are being destroyed.⁴²⁵

In his staging of *Three Sisters* in 1967, as noted above, Efros had been heavily criticised for what was seen as his Absurdist vision, for presenting a world in which dreams of a new life were illusory. That production had been banned principally because such a view was out of keeping with the prevailing ideology of optimism. In 1975 in *Marriage* he viewed human endeavour as a cycle of futile activity, a fruitless search for happiness and fulfilment. But this production was not condemned as his *Three Sisters* had been. On the contrary it won him high praise, toured in the Soviet Union, was produced abroad and would be performed at the Malaia Bronnaia for the next two decades.⁴²⁶ It is interesting to speculate why, less than ten years later, critics once so ready to castigate Efros not only were untroubled by the pessimism of *Marriage* but also frequently cited the production as his greatest theatrical achievement.

One answer may be found in the fact that the world presented on stage was manifestly unreal and indeed extremely funny, which allowed the critics to ignore any possible parallels with contemporary life. Another answer may lie in the tone of the commentaries and the language in which reviewers expressed their remarks. Several, at least in print, created a sense of distance between the production and its potential as a critique of modern society by echoing Danilova's remarks that this was an abstract and timeless morality tale. G. Lobkovskaia provided a different sense of distance, by implying that the

⁴²⁵Rassadin, "'Ne dal'she', p. 69. Rassadin is referring to a famous remark by Chekhov. See note 730 below.

⁴²⁶ The Malaia Bronnaia production closed in 1996, but (as noted in Chapter 1) did not play continuously from March 1975 to that year. See page 56 above.

production was less concerned with the spiritual poverty of everyday existence than with the absence of a love closely associated with a higher realm:

[Театр на Малой Бронной] толкует «Женитьбу» как высокий акт, заключаемый на небесах, начертанный свыше, акт любви (оттого и хор часто звучит за сценой), а если ее нет, любви, то и жизнь человеческая, ею не освещенная, никчемна и пуста.⁴²⁷

In contrast to this somewhat fanciful and romantic perception, A. Solodovnikov saw in Efros's production a salutary lesson directed in particular at the young. It called upon them to think of their role in the world, and to avoid squandering their time on life's trifles and nonsense: 'Тоголевский «смех сквозь слезы» зовет молодых зрителей, посмеявшись вольно, подумать: а как жить, ради чего?'⁴²⁸

It need hardly be said that Solodovnikov was not calling on the Soviet youth to question openly and freely the circumstances of their lives. His commentary was a reiteration of the firmly-held belief in the didactic power of theatre to inculcate Soviet ideals, and was couched in a familiar rhetoric. Implicit in his remarks was the idea that any 'free-thinking' on the purpose of human existence was to be expressed in the confines of prevailing ideologies, and not as a radical rejection of them. In the context of the period Solodovnikov's comments may have provided for many an acceptable explication of Efros's purpose.

The present writer remains unconvinced, however, that at least some of Efros's spectators and critics, who knew of the banning of *Three Sisters*, could have failed to comprehend in *Marriage* the wider implications of what was after all a

⁴²⁷G. Lobkovskaia, 'Uroki nastavnika', *Detskaia literatura*, 9 (1975), 38-43 (p. 40).

⁴²⁸A. Solodovnikov, 'Sovetskii teatr rastit cheloveka', *Kul'tura i zhizn'*, 10 (1976), 34-35 (p. 34).

deeply pessimistic view of the human condition. It is important to note that the work of all theatre critics was scrutinised for ideological purity and subject to censorship. It is possible to suggest therefore that Efros's *Marriage* may have articulated ideas fully understood by his audience but not aired publicly in reviews.

In this sense the production serves to illustrate not only an aspect of Soviet theatre in the seventies but also the paradoxical status of classic works, and indeed the nature of theatre itself. As noted in Chapter 1, the Soviet theatre was granted a greater degree of freedom than the official press and other media, most notably television. The classics, moreover, were subject to less scrutiny than modern plays, and indeed productions of them were actively encouraged. But though they were acceptable to the authorities, the fact that they were not rooted in the familiar, contemporary world, and were also multi-layered, allowed both directors and audience to interpret them more broadly and to see them as having meaning on more than one level. As well as exploring eternal themes and philosophical concepts, productions could suggest, by allusion and implication, ideas which would otherwise be suspect. It is one of the characteristics of theatre that it permits such ideas to be indirectly conveyed, especially through visual and gestural irony, even under systems of control and censorship.

In the specific context of the Soviet theatre before *perestroika*, Shvydkoi has argued that whereas in the late 1980s, when censorship had been removed, productions of classics had less impact, for 'masters of the sixties generation' such productions had been 'the only way seriously to toss a glove in the face of Soviet power, to comprehend its monstrous nature from the position of eternity'.⁴²⁹ As he also wrote in an article of 1989:

⁴²⁹Shvydkoi, 'Nostalgia', p. 115. This article is in translation, and without recourse to the original Russian it only possible to suggest that the phrase 'to toss a glove' might be rendered as 'to challenge' or idiomatically as 'to throw down a gauntlet'.

Today it is understood that theater was a type of island of freedom on which even if things could not be said, they could be stated with such expressive silence that this had a great effect on the public.⁴³⁰

That use of 'expressive silence' can be best seen perhaps in the staging of classics.

Gogol's *Marriage*, though overshadowed (like all his other dramatic works) by *The Government Inspector*, was regarded as a classic, by reason of its author's status. As has been shown, prior to Efros's production in 1975, it had enjoyed few successful stagings and been dismissed as a light-weight comedy. Though fully exploiting its comic potential, Efros created a fantastical world, radically altered traditional preconceptions, and lent the work a depth hitherto unseen. But in addition, although his production did not comment directly on contemporary life, one may suggest that he was using the potential of a classic, and of theatre itself, to send messages which, though muted, were there to be read. After *Marriage*, which opened on 14 March 1975, Efros would state further things 'with such expressive silence' in his *Cherry Orchard* at the Taganka in November that same year.

⁴³⁰M. Shvidkoi, 'The Effect of Glasnost: Soviet Theater from 1985 to 1989', *Theater*, 3 (Fall 1989), 7-12 (p. 7).

Chapter 5

Забыли. Никто не помнит.

The Cherry Orchard
(1975)

Efros was invited by Liubimov to direct at the Taganka in 1975. As that theatre's first guest director, he would be working with a company whose methods and style of performance were very different from his own. The first production there, in 1964, had been *The Good Person of Szechwan*, and the company had since developed a style which in essence owed less to Stanislavsky's principles than to Brecht's. Liubimov, who had himself been invited to work at La Scala, left the choice of play to Efros, whose decision to direct *The Cherry Orchard* was a surprising one. The theatre had no tradition of performing Chekhov, and its demonstrative techniques of performance represented the very antithesis of the lyrical style in which the playwright's works had traditionally been presented. Efros, however, saw working at the Taganka as an interesting challenge, although he expressed some apprehension at directing Chekhov's play there, and was not surprised by the critical debate that his production provoked.

Конечно, «Вишневый сад», поставленный на Таганке, — спектакль спорный. Спорность его хотя бы в том, что Чехов ставится в коллективе абсолютно «не чеховском». Тут люди прозаичны до дерзости. Их главное оружие — насмешка. А если они играют драму, то делают это, скорее, жанрово. А Чехов в пьесах своих утончен, изящен. Ставить Чехова на Таганке — значит как бы заведомо идти на провал. Однако в последнее время Чехов не удавался именно там, где, казалось, изящество и лиричность были в самой природе театра. Потому что в этом лиризме и в этой поэтике образовалась доля привычности. Она не давала возможности снова почувствовать существо. Вот почему не простой прихотью было желание поставить Чехова на Таганке.⁴³¹

⁴³¹Efros, *Professia*, p. 279.

In his previous stagings of Chekhov, Efros had rejected the detailed settings, the slow, pausing pace, and the evocation of lyrical mood characteristic of traditional performances, and in *The Cherry Orchard* he was to adopt a similar approach. He clearly saw in the methods of the Taganka something in common with his own ideas. Indeed Senelick, in his discussion of the production, has gone so far as to assert that Efros 'adopted the style of his host [Liubimov]: frank and clear-cut, perhaps more aggressive than was called for in Chekhov'.⁴³² This statement, however, is not substantiated by other commentaries and is erroneous for several reasons. Firstly, although in his *Seagull* Efros had encouraged his actors to put aggression into their performances, in 1975, as Stroeveva has observed, he demonstrated greater sensitivity and subtlety.⁴³³ Indeed, as Vladislav Ivanov noted, his treatment of the characters marked a development away from the more openly brutal approach that had been typical of 'cruel' productions of Chekhov in the 1960s.⁴³⁴ Secondly, the assertion appears to be belied by the fact that Liubimov himself was said to have disliked the production.⁴³⁵ Indeed, in V. Solov'ev's opinion *The Cherry Orchard* marked the beginning of the troubled relations between the two directors.⁴³⁶ Thirdly, and most importantly, Efros was by now a mature and experienced director, who had honed his skills over many years, and therefore contributed much of his own invention. In fact, as we shall see, his production perhaps owed a greater debt to his previous approach than to the techniques of the Taganka.

As detailed in Chapter 1, he had been working since 1967 as a staff director at the Malaia Bronnaia, where he had developed his own style of physical theatre.

⁴³²Senelick, *Chekhov Theatre*, p. 69.

⁴³³M. Stroeveva, 'I snova Chekhov', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 10 December 1975, p. 8.

⁴³⁴Vladislav Ivanov, 'Sovremennost' klassiki: tendentsii, problemy', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1 (1978), 88-94 (p. 89).

⁴³⁵Aleksandr Gershtovich, 'Vishnevyyi sad v epokhu perestroiki', in Aleksandr Gershtovich, *Izbrannoe* (Moscow: ULISS, 1994), pp. 26-38 (p. 27).

⁴³⁶Solov'ev, 'Istoriia', p. 3.

He saw *The Cherry Orchard* as an experiment, in which he could attempt to marry his own style with that of the Taganka and allow the production to operate on two planes at once. On the one hand, the actors in general, and Demidova (Ranevskaiia) and Vysotskii (Lopakhin) in particular, expressed their feelings at certain moments through physical action. On the other hand, the Taganka actors, using techniques akin to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, at times distanced themselves from their roles and so provoked the spectators to reflect more objectively on the characters' emotions and ideas. As we shall see, critical opinion was divided over the success of this experiment, but Efros himself saw working in a theatre whose techniques were different from his own as an opportunity for mutual benefit and development. He remarked that it was necessary for any troupe (by which he meant both the Taganka actors and his own Malaia Bronnaia company) to work not in isolation but 'comparatively', so that 'every few years they could re-arm themselves'.⁴³⁷ He suggested that his work at the Taganka was like looking in a two-way mirror: it allowed director, actors, audience, and critics to observe simultaneously the effect of one approach on the other.

At first, however, he found it very difficult to work with a company that was not his own, in the alien environment of the Taganka. There was a faction within the theatre, company members not involved in the production, who did not welcome the presence of an outsider.⁴³⁸ Liubimov himself attempted to intervene in the rehearsal process, taking actors aside and advising them to play their parts in a manner different from Efros's conceptions.⁴³⁹ Vysotskii, perhaps the most celebrated Taganka actor, compared the two directors' rehearsal techniques, and identified a fundamental difference of approach. Liubimov tended to rule rehearsals with an iron hand, to be intrusive and to

⁴³⁷Efros, *Professiiia*, p. 95.

⁴³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 280.

⁴³⁹Alla Demidova, 'Vysotskii igraet Lopakhina', *Teatr*, 6 (1988), 44-51 (p. 45).

demand that the actor must reproduce the role as he, the director, saw it. In Vysotskii's view, moreover, Liubimov consistently focused less on the progress of the work than on its end product. ('Любимов все доводит до конца. Он не позволяет тебе, чтобы на его глазах был еще полуфабрикат. Он может с ума сойти от этого!'.⁴⁴⁰ Efros, by contrast, was more concerned with the process, and placed more trust in his performers. Instead of dictating their actions, he permitted them to explore more freely and to let their roles develop in the course of rehearsals. Not surprisingly, he found it hard initially to communicate his ideas to a troupe who were accustomed to a more direct approach. His tendency to allow his actors to explore their psychological motives and then translate them into physical action (which was both emotionally expressive and consciously theatrical) met at first with misunderstanding:

На Таганке другие привычки, другой характер репетиционной работы, совсем иная сцена. Манера игры другая. Их частенько обвиняют в голой форме; но по сути — они гораздо больше реалисты, чем многие из нас.... Они совершеннейшие реалисты, даже иной раз достаточно элементарные. Это парадокс, но именно я им казался формалистом. Моя условность иногда казалась им «неуловимой», они привыкли к более весомой, открытой условности. Но эта их условность жанровая, что ли. А тут, по их мнению, — какой-то «абстрактный психологизм».⁴⁴¹

In the course of rehearsals, however, he achieved what he claimed was a 'common language' with the Taganka troupe, and both Demidova and Vysotskii welcomed the opportunity of working with him because it enriched their own experience.⁴⁴² Demidova was to remain at the theatre under Efros when he was

⁴⁴⁰V. Vysotskii, "'Vyrazit' sebia'...", *Avrora*, 1 (1990), 132-147 (p. 138).

⁴⁴¹Efros, *Professia*, pp. 282-283.

⁴⁴²Demidova, 'Vysotskii', p. 47; Vysotskii, p. 138.

appointed to the post of Artistic Director there in 1984. She later found her own analogy for the differences between his approach and that of Liubimov: 'It's like this. You have an actor and a chair which he has to treat as a horse. With Liubimov, I see it's a chair, but I shall treat it as a horse. With Efros, I see it's a chair, I shall treat it as a chair, but deep inside I feel that I am riding.'⁴⁴³ The attempt to unite these two approaches dictated the style of Efros's *Cherry Orchard*, but on the other hand, as noted above, he also drew on his previous experience of staging Chekhov's work (though treating the dramatist's characters less aggressively), and *The Cherry Orchard* represented a further exploration of the themes and ideas he had expressed in *Three Sisters*. Whereas that production, in 1968, had openly expressed the despair felt by the post-Thaw generation at what they sensed was their own lack of purpose and their sense of isolation from their cultural roots, in 1975, although these ideas were still important to Efros, the message of *The Cherry Orchard* (like that of his *Marriage* the same year) was more closely guarded, revealed more by implication than by open statement.

As is well documented, a primary source of conflict between Chekhov and Stanislavsky over the first staging of *The Cherry Orchard* at the MAT in 1904 had concerned the genre of the play. Chekhov had insisted that he had written a comedy, at times almost a farce, but Stanislavsky had remained rooted in the idea that the plight of the dispossessed gentry was in essence a tragedy. The fundamental difference of opinion between director and author, however, was one of perspective. Chekhov, as Stroeve has argued, viewed historical change (as symbolised by the axing of the orchard) with a degree of objectivity, as a natural occurrence, an unalterable law, no more heartless than the change of

⁴⁴³Dan Sullivan, 'Détente in New Haven', *Los Angeles Times*, 7 March 1987, Section 6, p. 8.

seasons.⁴⁴⁴ Thus his characters's inability to recognise this process, indeed their indifference to it, was laughable, almost absurd. By contrast, Stanislavsky, whose social background was similar to that of the characters, saw the events of the play, in a Russia on the verge of major and irreversible change, from a more personal perspective. As Rudnitskii has observed, his production was weighted emotionally in favour of the theme of 'Farewell to the Old Life' over that of 'Welcome to the New'.⁴⁴⁵ If previous MAT productions of Chekhov had emphasised 'тоска по лучшей жизни', now Stanislavsky stressed its opposite, 'тоска по жизни прошлой'. He expressed a great nostalgia for the old order; in the destruction of the fragile and beautiful orchard, he saw a tragic loss of ideals and of a cultured, genteel and harmonious way of life. Thus, although in his production he had by no means ignored opportunities for pieces of buffoonery, it is widely accepted that he staged Chekhov's play as a mournful elegy for a past life.⁴⁴⁶ Efros's interpretation in 1975 owed a very clear debt to this idea but his production was, if anything, more openly tragic than that of his predecessor. In keeping with his established practice, this sense of deep sorrow was not buried in a sub-text but shown nakedly and frequently revealed in startling emotional outbursts. He was well

⁴⁴⁴Stroeve, *Rezhisserskie* (1973), p. 129.

⁴⁴⁵Rudnitskii, *Russkoe*, p. 245.

⁴⁴⁶References will be made only to those aspects of the MAT staging in 1904 that illuminate study of Efros's production. For more detailed discussions of Stanislavsky's interpretation, see Braun, *The Director*, pp. 71-74; Sharon Marie Carnicke, 'Stanislavsky's production of *The Cherry Orchard* in the US', in *Chekhov Then and Now*, ed. by Douglas Clayton (New York: Peter Lang, 1977), pp. 19-30; Rudnitskii, *Russkoe*, pp. 226-247; Senelick, *Chekhov Theatre*, pp. 67-82; Stroeve, *Rezhisserskie* (1973), pp. 120-136, and E. Taranova, "'Nachalos' s nedorazumenii ...'", in *Chekhov i teatral'noe iskusstvo* (Leningrad: LGITMiK, 1988), pp. 151-173 (pp. 154-164).

In most accounts of Stanislavsky's production there are references to moments that the director treated in a comic, at times almost farcical, manner. It is generally acknowledged, however, that in his setting and in his creation of mood (particularly in the final act) the overall tone of the production was melancholic. In a recent study, however, David Allen has suggested that Stanislavsky's perception of the play as a tragedy is a myth, a commonly-accepted idea that is essentially erroneous and warrants qualification. (Allen, pp. 29-46). In his detailed analysis of Stanislavsky's production notes, Allen cites numerous instances that indicate that the director actually weighted his interpretation towards tragi-comedy and farce. He argues further that Stanislavsky viewed the gentry with irony and gentle, mocking humour and based his production on this. He also refers to contemporary accounts, most notably those of Aleksandr Kugel', who suggested that the play emerged (contrary to Kugel's own perception) as 'light, funny and cheerful' (Allen, p. 35), and therefore appears to contradict the opinions of other commentators.

aware of the legendary conflict, but suggested that Chekhov might have insisted that he had written a comedy because he had been dissatisfied with Stanislavsky's production. In his own, moreover, he deliberately strengthened what he saw as the tragic aspects of the play. In an article in 1976 he wrote:

Да, я знал, что Чехов писал о том, что пьеса эта — комедия. Возможно, Чехов это сказал оттого, что спектакль во МХАТе был излишне лиричен, может быть, даже сентиментален....Теперь же, читая «Вишневый сад», я могу доказать, что это трагедия хотя и сильно запрятанная в форму чуть ли не фарса. Но я специально сделал много акцентов на открытом трагизме.⁴⁴⁷

Efros included far fewer comic moments than Stanislavsky. In fact, even in his response to characters who might be seen, at the very least, as tragi-comic, he chose to stress their more melancholy traits. As Stroeveva has suggested, this was particularly true of his treatment of the eccentric figure of Sharlotta.⁴⁴⁸ In Act II, dressed in a two-piece costume (somewhat reminiscent of a fairground Petrushka), M. Politseimako amused the guests at the ball by juggling large metal balls.⁴⁴⁹ Her humour overall, however, was less that of a farcical character than that of a sad clown, and in Act IV she became pathetic. In this act, according to the stage directions, she picks up a bundle that looks like a baby in swaddling clothes. Efros, however, directed her to model a doll from earth. For G. Kholodova, at this moment Sharlotta's longing gaze at her baby stressed her sense of isolation and lack of belonging (articulated in Act II); she was doomed not only because she had no homeland but also because, unlike her clay child, she had both literally and symbolically no link to the earth on which

⁴⁴⁷A. Efros, 'A chto skazal by avtor?', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 28 July 1976, p. 8.

⁴⁴⁸Stroeveva, 'I snova', p. 8.

⁴⁴⁹Szewcow, p. 37.

she lived. ('Ведь она обречена не только на безродность, но и на бесплодие.')⁴⁵⁰

Efros maintained that Chekhov's play was supremely well-crafted because although there is a forward movement in its events everything apparently occurs by happenstance.⁴⁵¹ For instance the penurious Pishchik, who continually borrows money from others, comes into a fortune only by selling his land to prospectors after the orchard is sold and thus too late to save Ranevskiaia, a circumstance which Efros described as at once comic and tragic.⁴⁵² The characters, moreover, are either unwilling or unable to communicate with each other. Even at times when it is absolutely necessary for them to talk about what is really at stake, their attention is diverted to petty and inconsequential matters: Lopakhin fails to propose to Varia, and although the family express concern over the ailing Firs they ultimately abandon him. In his *Seagull* and *Three Sisters*, such a failure to communicate had reflected the characters' essential selfishness and indifference to the plight of others as they engaged in bitter arguments and squabbles. In *The Cherry Orchard*, however, Efros took a more sympathetic view. He saw this failing as a mainspring of the characters' suffering, which resulted in their social, and by extension cultural, isolation. The dominant theme of the production was unrequited love. This was seen both as a source of personal pain for Trofimov, and more importantly for Ranevskiaia and Lopakhin, but was also linked to the more general idea of the sense of spiritual loss experienced by disconnected people who, sensing a lack of purpose, look for something to fill the emotional void.

⁴⁵⁰G. Kholodova, "'Vishnevyyi sad": mezhdru proshlym i budushchim', *Teatr*, 1 (1985), 148-169 (p. 161).

⁴⁵¹Efros, *Repetitsiia*, pp. 99-100.

⁴⁵²Efros, *Kniga*, p. 21.

As Efros himself noted, at the beginning of many his productions the performers appeared together, as if to announce collectively the source of their troubles.⁴⁵³ As the play opened, the entire cast grouped on stage to sing in mournful unison the words of Epikhodov's ballad (from Act II):

Что мне до шумного света,
 Что мне друзья и враги,
 Было бы сердце согрето,
 Жаром взаимной любви.⁴⁵⁴

Later in Act II Epikhodov introduced a note of grim humour when he sang the song with a revolver cocked into his mouth as if it were a microphone. The note of melancholy expressed in the ballad set the tone for the whole production, and this haunting refrain was heard at different points throughout the action, to underscore the idea that no one was immune from a sense of longing. At the end, as a frame for the action, the chorus of actors gathered to sing it once again.

Trofimov, who in this production did not return Ania's love, was seen to be motivated by love in his efforts to help Ranevskaiia. This was made most apparent, as A. Iakubovskii observed, in the ball scene of Act III, when the pair danced together:

И я почувствовал, как между ними возникло эмоциональное поле любовных отношений. Демидова сыграла его осознание, учла присутствие своей дочери Ани и резко прервала на наших глазах отношения. Актриса сыграла это замечательно, точно и предельно поэтично.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³Efros, *Professiiia*, p. 234.

⁴⁵⁴A. Chekhov, *Vishnevyyi sad*, Act II, in *Sochineniia: P'esy 1895-1904, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 18 vols (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), XIII, pp. 215-216.

⁴⁵⁵A. Iakubovskii 'Bogatye tozhe plachut', *Teatr*, 8 (1992), p. 151.

Trofimov's love for Ranevskaja cannot, however, come to fruition. He is intended for Ania, and Ranevskaja has a lover in Paris. This lover has rejected her, but when she receives his telegram in Act III she is nevertheless prepared to return to him. Later in this same act she admonishes Trofimov for his claim that he and Ania are above love, telling him that at his age it is ridiculous that he has no sweetheart. As a kind of distancing device, Demidova repeated the line: 'В ВАШИ ГОДЫ НЕ ИМЕТЬ ЛЮБОВНИЦЫ!' ⁴⁵⁶ not once, as the script indicates, but six times. At the final repetition she brought her hand to her breast, indicating that the line referred to herself, implying that her love, too, was doomed to frustration. In her production for the Theatre of the Soviet Army in 1965 Knebel' had hinted at a secret love between Lopakhin and Ranevskaja. Efros extended this idea by making Lopakhin's unrequited love for her the motivating force of his actions.

In a letter to his wife Ol'ga Knipper in 1903 Chekhov had expressed concern that Lopakhin, whom he saw as the central character, should not be played simply as a loudmouthed boor.⁴⁵⁷ The playwright had emphasised instead a delicacy of spirit hidden beneath the businessman's coarse exterior, and from the very beginning had envisaged the role being played by Stanislavsky, a real millionaire from a family of merchants, themselves sprung from peasant stock. Stanislavsky had readily agreed with Chekhov's analysis of the character, but showed great reluctance to play him. Initially he had rehearsed two parts, Lopakhin and Gaev, but he had written twice to Chekhov, on 3 and 4 November, complaining that he could not find the right 'tone' for the peasant-turned-merchant.⁴⁵⁸ In the end he had played Gaev, portraying him, Aleksandr Kugel' maintained, as a well-groomed man of refined taste and bonhomie but

⁴⁵⁶*Vishnevyyi sad*, Act III, p. 235.

⁴⁵⁷Letter from Chekhov to Knipper, 30 October 1903, in Surkov, *Chekhov*, p. 156.

⁴⁵⁸Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski* (London: Methuen, 1988), p. 128.

with a sense of self-irony and showing a gentle mockery towards those around him.⁴⁵⁹ Chekhov had been concerned when Lopakhin had been offered to Leonid Leonidov, anxious that this less talented actor would turn the character into a 'kulachok' (little kulak).⁴⁶⁰ It appears that Leonidov did indeed fall into the traps of overstatement and coarseness, as the playwright had feared; for Nikolai Efros his performance lacked the necessary sense of internal conflict.⁴⁶¹ Stanislavsky and Chekhov had disagreed also over the role of Ranevskia. Chekhov had been adamant that Knipper should play not her but either Varia or Sharlotta. Stanislavsky, ignoring his wishes again, had insisted on casting Knipper as Ranevskia, a role with which she was to be closely identified for the rest of her career. Her performance became legendary, and was consistently cited as a measure against which later interpretations could be judged. Sharon Carnicke has argued that the casting of Stanislavsky and Knipper, two of the company's strongest performers, in the roles of brother and sister, had immediately and inevitably focused attention upon them, strengthening Stanislavsky's overriding concern with the sufferings of the dispossessed gentry and shifting the centre of gravity of the play.⁴⁶² In 1975 Efros altered this balance. Gaev for him was a less significant figure, and his production centred on the plight of Ranevskia, although Lopakhin, as Chekhov himself had hoped, was also of pivotal importance.

⁴⁵⁹Quoted in: Rudnitskii, *Russkoe*, p. 244.

⁴⁶⁰Letter from Chekhov to Stanislavsky, 30 October 1903, in Surkov, *Chekhov*, pp. 156-157 (p. 156).

⁴⁶¹Nikolai Efros, *"Vishnevyyi sad" P'esa A. P. Chekhova v postanovke MXTa* (Petrograd: 1919), pp. 87-88.

There is some indication that the interpretation of Lopakhin was given greater depth in Viktor Stanitsyn's new staging of the play at the MAT in the late 1950s. This production toured to the UK in 1958, and as Cynthia Marsh has observed on this occasion the MAT demonstrated that Lopakhin 'is a character of maturity, who is unwillingly, and perhaps tragically, caught between his own generosity and self assertion'. Cynthia Marsh, 'Chekhov re-viewed: the Moscow Art Theatre's visits to Britain in 1958, 1964, and 1970', in *Chekhov on the British Stage*, ed. by Patrick Miles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 113-125 (pp. 120-121). Such a conception of the character had something in common with Stanislavsky's early conception and was perhaps intended as a 'correction' to Leonidov's performance.

⁴⁶²Carnicke, p. 23. Carnicke discusses the touring production of *The Cherry Orchard* in the USA (1923-1924).

Vysotskii, with his slight frame and shoulder-length hair, was perhaps an unusual choice for Lopakhin, but one which, as Golub noted, proved particularly effective.⁴⁶³ The actor possessed a particular magnetism, which together with the famously compelling timbre of his deep, somewhat cracked, bass voice, had long made him a favourite on the Taganka stage. In reviews of the production, and in tributes written after his untimely death in 1980, his dynamic performance was universally praised; for G. Kholodova his work demonstrated to the best advantage the fusion of the styles of Liubimov and Efros.⁴⁶⁴ His Lopakhin lost the traits first manifested in Leonidov's performance at the MAT, and thereafter traditionally associated with the role. As Szewcow wrote:

The stereotypes into which Lopaxin can (understandably) fall are avoided: there is not the slightest trace of vulgarity, of that impudence of a peasant turned merchant with which the character could tempt the actor; nor is this Lopaxin a mixture of inferiority and condescension, good-will and haplessness, ingredients which often go into his making. He is not a variant of Piscik (*sic*), that frequentor (*sic*) of the family, who is essentially parasitic and ultimately indispensable, as parasites are to frail psyches.⁴⁶⁵

He was played instead as a refined, intelligent, and deeply sensitive man, who for Stroevea possessed a rare combination of outer coarseness and inner poetry.⁴⁶⁶ Stanislavsky had recognised in Lopakhin what Rudnitskii has described as a tormented duality: a man whose industry forces him to destroy the orchard, but who in so doing destroys his own humanity.⁴⁶⁷ This conception was fundamental to Vysotskii's understanding of the role. Demidova observed that he created Lopakhin in keeping with the image of such

⁴⁶³Golub, 'Acting', p. 25.

⁴⁶⁴G. Kholodova, 'Lopakhin', in *Vysotskii na Taganke* (Moscow: Souzteatr, 1988), p. 69.

⁴⁶⁵Szewcow, p. 38.

⁴⁶⁶Stroevea, 'I snova', p. 8.

⁴⁶⁷Rudnitskii, *Russkoe*, p. 233.

men as Savva Mamontov and Savva Morozov. These men were rich industrialists who had supported the Revolutionary movement in its earliest stages, and whose combination of refined artistic taste and huge wealth had enabled them to establish art galleries and theatres,⁴⁶⁸ and Morozov had committed suicide following his depression over the failure and bloody consequences of the 1905 Revolution. As we shall see, the destruction of the orchard and the life it represents was if anything a greater tragedy for Vysotskii's Lopakhin than for Ranevskaiia. Thus for Demidova, an ultimately tragic echo of Morozov, a merchant-cum-artist-cum-suicide, underlay the actor's performance. She wrote:

⁴⁶⁸Demidova, 'Vysotskii', p. 47.

Savva Mamontov (1841-1918) was a railway tycoon who studied art abroad in the 1870s. In Paris and Rome he met the artists Vasilyi Polenov and Il'ia Repin, the sculptor Mark Antokol'skii and the art historian Adrian Prakhov. This group formed the foundation of an artistic circle at Mamontov's estate of Abramtsevo, which he purchased in 1870. Numerous artists were invited to come and live on the estate and were to be inspired by its creative atmosphere and picturesque surroundings; among other famous works painted there were Valentin Serov's *Girl with Peaches* (1887) and Mikhail Nesterov's *Vision of the Boy Bartholomew* (1889-1890). In 1885 Mamontov opened the first museum of Russian folk art on the estate and oversaw the building of the Abramtsevo Church (1881-1882), designed by Viktor Vasnetsov. Vasnetsov, Repin and others contributed to the decoration of the church and to the creation of its iconostasis. Mamontov's interest in the collection of folk art, together with the efforts of the artistic circle in the revival of the techniques of icon-painting, were important influences on the development of modern Russian and Soviet art at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1885 Mamontov also established the Moscow Private Russian Opera Company and in this venture was concerned to promote his opera as a synthesis of arts. The company was conducted by a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov, the composer Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov, and later by Rakhmaninov. It was here too that Fedor Chaliapin, later a world-famous bass, gained valuable early experience. The opera, however, also attracted artists such as Aleksandr Golovin, Konstantin Korovin and Mikhail Vrubel', who created sets for its productions. See Oxana Cleminson in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. by Jane Turner, 30 vols (New York: Grove, 1996), XX, p. 232.

Savva Morozov was a wealthy industrialist who subsidised Lenin's newspaper *Iskra* and was a major investor in the MAT, contributing a large proportion of the 28,000 roubles needed for its launch. Later in 1902, when the lease ran out on its first home the Hermitage Theatre, it was with heavy backing from Morozov that the company acquired the Aumont Theatre. That same year saw a major restructuring of the company as a collective whose members were entitled to buy shares (an idea first mooted by Nemirovich-Danchenko in 1897). Morozov lent money to those who could not afford to buy them, on the proviso that no shareholder could have more than he. As a result, much to Nemirovich-Danchenko's chagrin, he wielded considerable influence at the theatre. For instance he championed the work of Maxim Gorky, and was instrumental in having his plays performed. See Benedetti, 'Stanislavsky', pp. 256, 264-266, 269.

Stanislavsky himself was very much of this milieu (in its early years he frequently attended rehearsals at Mamontov's opera company), and was himself heir to a fortune. It is interesting to speculate therefore if Chekhov had figures like Morozov and Mamontov in mind when he wrote the part of Lopakhin for Stanislavsky, and indeed whether the part, as executed by Vysotskii, contained elements closer to the playwright's conception than he had seen in Leonidov's interpretation.

Высоцкий очень точно передал эту трагическую ноту образа. Несмотря на то, что Лопахины [Морозовы, Мамонтовы] приходят на смену обитателям «Вишневого сада», они, Лопахины, тоже обречены. Конечно, Чехов имел в виду не только смену социальных укладов. Для него в гибели «Вишневого сада» звучала тема гибели поэтического, духовного начала в русской жизни.⁴⁶⁹

In Act IV Trofimov remarks to Lopakhin: 'У тебя тонкие, нежные пальцы, как у артиста, у тебя тонкая, нежная душа.'⁴⁷⁰ Komissarzhevskii suggested that this line was the basis of Vysotskii's interpretation, which centred on the actor's understanding of a tragic paradox: it is these same hands which, though motivated by kindness, so cruelly lift the axe to fell the trees.⁴⁷¹ Throughout his performance Vysotskii used the simplest of gestures with extraordinary expressiveness and clarity. As Demidova recalled, at Ranevskaiia's arrival the characters gathered about her and each in turn kissed her hand in a gesture of welcome and respect. At his turn Vysotskii moved to take her hand, but was suddenly overcome with shyness. Unable to touch her, he drew back, leaving his hand to hover over hers.⁴⁷² In this single action he succeeded in expressing the secret love he had felt for her all his life, and which, as noted above, was to motivate all his behaviour. From this first moment Lopakhin responded to Ranevskaiia with what Smelkov described as unexpected tenderness and warmth.⁴⁷³ He showed great restraint and patience, and acted exclusively in her interest, in order to save her from penury. When urging her to build dachas, he explained the virtues of his plan, gently refuting her objections, in the manner, as Solov'ev observed, of a caring and intelligent

⁴⁶⁹Demidova, 'Vysotskii', p. 47.

⁴⁷⁰*Vishnevyyi sad*, Act IV, p. 244.

⁴⁷¹V. Komissarzhevskii, 'Teatral'naia panorama', in *Teatral'nye stranitsy* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), 32-49 (p. 46).

⁴⁷²Demidova, 'Vysotskii', p. 50.

⁴⁷³Iu. Smelkov, "'Zhar vzaimnoi liubvi...'", *Komsomolskaia pravda*, 26 March 1976, p. 3.

physician.⁴⁷⁴ This image of a gentle doctor was fully in keeping, as we shall see, with the ideas of incurable disease and imminent death that underscored Demidova's understanding of Ranevskia's plight.

Efros once suggested that Chekhov had included many 'extras' in order to show how life on Russian estates was changing.⁴⁷⁵ He referred to the clerk Epikhodov playing billiards (off-stage in Act III) as symptomatic of the way in which the social status of the gentry was being usurped, but he also included Sharlotta, Iasha, Pishchik and Duniasha in his list of supernumeraries, and indeed effectively treated them as such. With the exception of Lopakhin, and to a lesser extent Trofimov, the other characters formed a background chorus to the action's main thread — the plight of Ranevskia — on which he built the whole of his production. His primary aim was to express what he described as Ranevskia's 'howl (воплъ) of farewell to her childhood, life and past'.⁴⁷⁶ As we have seen, Efros paid close attention to what he sensed were the musical qualities inherent in Chekhov's works. He likened *The Cherry Orchard* to an orchestral piece whose conductor should ensure that, while the other musicians played their parts, the central motif of Ranevskia was consistently heard.⁴⁷⁷

A crucial key to this complex character is on the one hand her response to the new life she has established in Paris, and on the other her feelings about the old one to which she has now returned. In the MAT production of 1904, Stanislavsky's notes suggested that Knipper's behaviour should show the influence of her life in France. As she entered in Act II, he specified that she should wear a fashionable French summer dress, and remarked that, troubled by tiredness and the heat (and by biting mosquitoes!), it should be apparent that

⁴⁷⁴Solov'ev, 'Istoriia', p. 3.

⁴⁷⁵Efros, *Kniga*, pp. 21-22.

⁴⁷⁶Efros, *Professia*, p. 202.

⁴⁷⁷*Ibid.*

she would be happy walking on the Italian boulevard in Paris but not in Russian villages.⁴⁷⁸ He also added certain mannerisms, such as her 'Parisian habit of frequently taking out a powder compact and mirror' in order to do her make-up in Act III.⁴⁷⁹ In this same act, when she says to Trofimov 'А я вот, должно быть, ниже любви.'⁴⁸⁰ — during which it may be suggested that she is thinking of her lover in Paris — he noted:

Не то кокетничая, не то нервно распускаясь, она как-то наклонилась головой до стола, приняла какую-то кокотистую позу. Чувствуется француженка. (Все-таки Ольге Леонардовне надо идти в тоне от француженки.) Невольно угадываешь, как она там в Париже проводила вечера в ресторане, за полночь, около беспорядочного обеденного стола. В ней есть какая-то богема парижской бульварной жизни.⁴⁸¹

Allen has suggested that thanks to Stanislavsky's emphasis on her links to Paris Knipper's Ranevskaiia created the impression that she did not belong to her old world and 'would not stay long'.⁴⁸² There may be some truth in this, but according to B. I. Rostotskii's account this idea did not translate into Knipper's performance. That critic argued, on the contrary, that the actress engaged the audience's sympathy by playing up her love of her homeland and playing down her attraction to her lover in Paris.⁴⁸³ This was in marked contrast to N. Urgant's portrayal in R. Goriaev's staging at the Pushkin Theatre in 1972. Smelianskii has observed that this Ranevskaiia, who smoked a cigarette in a long holder, and wore a bright red wig and fashionable clothes, belonged utterly to Paris and her 'Parisian tormentor'.⁴⁸⁴ He has suggested that her anxiety

⁴⁷⁸Stanislavskii, *Rezhisserskie ekzempliary*, III, Act II, note 20, p. 345.

⁴⁷⁹*Ibid.*, Act III, note 150, p. 413.

⁴⁸⁰*Vishnevyyi sad*, Act III, p. 233.

⁴⁸¹Stanislavskii, *Rezhisserskie ekzempliary*, III, Act III, note 73, p. 397.

⁴⁸²Allen, p. 30.

⁴⁸³B. I. Rostotskii, 'O. L. Knipper-Chekhova', in *Mastera MXATa* (Moscow/Leningrad: 1939), pp. 250-251.

⁴⁸⁴Smelianskii, *Nashi*, p. 294.

throughout Act III was inspired by her fear that Gaev might buy the orchard and so delay their return to France. For this Ranevskaja, therefore, news of its sale to Lopakhin was not traumatic but came instead as a relief.

Chekhov had originally seen Ranevskaja as a mature woman, but had later re-written the part for a younger actress.⁴⁸⁵ Knipper played her, according to many accounts, with extraordinary grace and refinement, and as a woman who lived in a state of near-constant anxiety, moving easily from laughter to tears, from anger to a carefree lack of concern and back again.⁴⁸⁶ Knipper continued to play the part for most of her career, and inevitably aged with her role. In subsequent performances she was often seen, as Demidova noted, as older than the part as finally written.⁴⁸⁷ For instance in Knebel's production in 1965 she was played by an older actress, L. Dobrzhanskaia, who in her concern for her ward Varia, her comforting of Ania, and her grief for her drowned son, emphasised Ranevskaja's maternal traits.⁴⁸⁸

In Efros's production, as Golub maintained, Demidova abandoned traditional interpretations of Ranevskaja as 'a grand (*sic*) dame exuding old-world charm', and became instead 'a contemporary woman of fashion' in low cut-gowns, who stalked about the stage 'with the grace and beauty of a thoroughbred'.⁴⁸⁹ Before accepting her role she stated that although she knew of Knipper's legendary performance she had never seen *The Cherry Orchard* either on stage or on film; her only recourse, therefore, was to return again and again to

⁴⁸⁵Chekhov had originally envisaged Ranevskaja as an old woman, and had requested that the theatre invite Ol'ga Sadovskaia of the Maly Theatre to play her. Much to Chekhov's annoyance, however, she was not available, and in any case Stanislavsky appears to have had little interest in employing an outsider. Chekhov therefore re-wrote the part for a younger woman. Chekhov described Ranevskaja as 'an old woman for whom all was in the past' in a letter to Vera Komissarzhevskaja dated 6 January 1904. See Surkov, *Chekhov*, p. 161.

⁴⁸⁶Taranova, p. 158.

⁴⁸⁷Demidova, *Vtoraia*, p. 138.

⁴⁸⁸E. Polotskaia, 'Neugomonnaia' dusha', *Teatr*, 3 (1993), 87-97 (p. 90).

⁴⁸⁹Golub, 'Acting', p. 25.

Chekhov's script.⁴⁹⁰ For her, Ranevskia's relative youth — she estimated her age as no older than thirty-seven — was important precisely because she had not entirely abandoned her new, wilder (and therefore more youthful) life in Paris but equally was not totally at peace with her old one.⁴⁹¹ Maria Shevtsova has described how Demidova came running on in Act I like an elegant dancer, 'incarnating a refined Parisian (*sic*) who has lost all traces of her Russian origins and education'.⁴⁹² Shevtsova suggested further that 'Efros de-Russianises her to point out that she returns as a stranger to a foreign land'. For all her fashionable appearance, however, this Ranevskia belonged to neither world. On the one hand, her existence abroad was sordid and belittling; on the other, her return to the old evoked painful memories. At the Pushkin Theatre in 1972 there had been something almost romantic and enticing in Ranevskia's Paris, but in 1975 Demidova emphasised the loneliness and wretchedness of life there, where her lover had left her and she had attempted suicide.⁴⁹³ The actress alluded to Ania's speech in Act I, in which she provides a heart-rending insight into her mother's life:

Мама живет на пятом этаже, прихожу к ней, у нее какие-то французы, дамы, старый патер с книжкой, и накурено, неуютно. Мне вдруг стало жаль мамы, так жаль, я обняла ее голову, сжала руками и не могу выпустить.⁴⁹⁴

Smelianskii has suggested that Demidova 'hid her Paris deep within herself', only allowing her feelings about it to be revealed in occasional, sudden outbursts of emotion, which left those around her at a loss as to their cause.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁰Demidova, *Vtoraia*, p. 138.

⁴⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁴⁹²Maria Shevtsova, 'Chekhov in France 1976-9: Productions by Strehler, Miquel and Pintellé', in *Transformations in Modern Drama*, ed by Ian Donaldson (London: Macmillan, 1983), 80-98 (p. 90).

⁴⁹³Alla Demidova, 'Bol'shaia Medveditsa i zvezdnoe nebo', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 25 August 1976, p. 8.

⁴⁹⁴*Vishnevyyi sad*, Act I, p. 201.

⁴⁹⁵Smelianskii, *Nashi*, p. 295.

In Act I, when Varia handed her the two telegrams from Paris, Demidova ignored Chekhov's directions to tear them up without reading them; instead she hid them swiftly and suddenly in her pocket. For N. Lordkipanidze this gesture indicated her secret guilt that she still loved and was incapable of renouncing her unscrupulous lover.⁴⁹⁶ It indicated also Demidova's sense that, although Ranevskia's new life is a torment, she cannot rid herself of it; in the actress's words it was like 'an itch' from which she could get no relief.⁴⁹⁷ She suggested that Ranevskia has returned home, penniless, in order to sell her estate, in the hope that the sale will bring some stability to her dissolute and unhappy existence.⁴⁹⁸ But she also observed that the act of returning was a deeply painful and emotionally turbulent process, and thus no less troubling than the Paris that haunted her. On the one hand, the orchard represented a return to her childhood, the place to which people in times of distress imaginatively regress. On the other hand, the home from which she had escaped was full of painful memories of the deaths of her husband and son. As Demidova explained:

Да, дым отечества сладок, но здесь, в этом доме, умер муж, здесь утонул семилетний сын, отсюда «бежала, себя не помня», Раневская, здесь каждое воспоминание — и радость и боль. На чем остановить беспокойный взгляд, за что ухватиться, чтобы вернуть хоть видимость душевного спокойствия?⁴⁹⁹

From the outset Ranevskia appeared highly-strung. Like Knipper, as is clear from V. Frolov's description, she moved rapidly from one emotional state to the next:

⁴⁹⁶N. Lordkipanidze, 'Postizhenie', *Nedelia*, 17-13 July 1975, p. 10.

⁴⁹⁷Demidova, 'Bol'shaia', p. 8.

⁴⁹⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁹Demidova, *Vtoraia*, p. 139.

Алла Демидова играет Раневскую на сцеплении невероятных контрастов.

Ее героиня живет в вихре страстей. Она может веселиться и может застыть в горе. Она мятежна, озорна, кокетлива и во всем умна и чувствительна. Она может вскружить голову Лопахину, но не уступит ему.

Протестуя против зла, Раневская беспомощна перед бедой.⁵⁰⁰

Rudnitskii identified the source of these vacillating emotions as the inner turmoil felt by a Ranevskia torn between the life in Paris she has left behind and the old one to which she has now returned.⁵⁰¹

Efros's production was played at his characteristically rapid pace, and in her dynamic expression of emotions his leading actress clearly demonstrated his central principle that 'truth is in the feet'. This is to be seen in Szewcow's description:

Demidova and Efros (the close collaboration between actor and director is evident in the consistency of the interpretation) hear the suffering of Chekhov's heroine. They find its expression not in Ljubov' Andreevna's traditional sighs and tears but in her perpetual motion. Motion to Demidova is not just a matter of physical position or displacement, it is also a matter of emotional fluctuation.⁵⁰²

For E. Taranova, Demidova's Ranevskia appeared fragile and broken; her angular movements recalled those of a bird who had been shot down in flight but was still attempting to fly.⁵⁰³ Similarly, Stroeve suggested that it was as if her wings were broken and she were falling in a spiral.⁵⁰⁴ For this critic, she

⁵⁰⁰V. Frolov, *Sud'by zhanrov dramaturgii* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1979), p. 229.

⁵⁰¹K. Rudnitskii, 'Vremia i mesto', in *Klassika i sovremennost'* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), pp. 190-223 (p. 205).

⁵⁰²Szewcow, p. 36.

⁵⁰³Taranova, p. 166.

⁵⁰⁴Stroeve, 'I snova', p. 8

was also like a person on the threshold of death, who demonstrated, at moments, that her spirit was still very much alive, as she joked, laughed and suppressed her feelings in expressions of cheerful bravado.

The idea that the play is pervaded by the imminent approach of death was articulated by several commentators in Chekhov's own day. Kugel', for instance, saw the central idea of *The Cherry Orchard* as a 'a meeting with death'.⁵⁰⁵ Andrei Belyi expressed a similar notion, which was consonant too with Meyerhold's conception of the 'The Dance of the Living Dead' for the ball scene of Act III.⁵⁰⁶ In the midst of the supposed joviality, Meyerhold sensed the suggestion of an underlying threat. He saw affinities between Chekhov's work and that of the Symbolist writer Maurice Maeterlinck. Deeply critical of the MAT interpretation, he felt that the key to the play lay in its hidden musical qualities. After the première he wrote to Chekhov:

Ваша пьеса абстрактна, как симфония Чайковского. И режиссер должен уловить ее слухом прежде всего. В третьем акте на фоне глупого «топотанья» — вот это «топотанье» нужно услышать — незаметно для людей входит Ужас: «Вишневый сад продан». Танцуют. «Продан». Танцуют. И так до конца. Когда читаешь пьесу, третий акт производит такое впечатление, как тот звон в ушах больного в Вашем рассказе «Тиф». Зуд какой-то. Веселье, в котором слышны звуки смерти. В этом акте что-то метерлиниковское, страшное.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁵A. Kugel', 'O Chekhove', *Teatr i iskusstvo*, 28 (1904), p. 518.

⁵⁰⁶M. H. Stroeve, *Rezhisserskie iskaniia Stanislavskogo 1917-1938* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), p. 129.

⁵⁰⁷Letter to Chekhov. V. E. Meierkhol'd, *Stat'i, pisma, rechi, besedy: 1891-1917* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1968), p. 85.

Contrary to a more widely accepted view, Allen has argued that the 1904 MAT production was not essentially naturalistic in its conception, but rather that Stanislavsky understood and exploited its symbolic elements. In his view the director staged the ball in Act III in a 'comic, absurd, even grotesque' manner and in a way that suggested that elements of Meyerhold's phantasmagorical description were already present in the MAT production. (Allen, pp. 38-41). On 5 November 1903 Stanislavsky suggested to Chekhov that the final act be set not in 'a room in the house', as the author had stipulated, but in the nursery of Act I, a change which

Shakh-Azizova has observed that both in Gorjaev's Leningrad production in 1972 and in Adolf Shapiro's *Cherry Orchard* for the Youth Theatre in Tallinn the previous season, the ball scene had been staged almost 'à la Meyerhold', expressing the 'suppressed, hidden rhythms of Time and Fate', as the dancing characters created a mood of 'joy before death'.⁵⁰⁸

Although Efros's production, unlike those of his contemporaries, did not evoke the phantasmagorical aspects of Meyerhold's conception, he did, as we shall see, incorporate images of death in his set. Demidova's understanding of the play, moreover, had much in common with the ideas of these earlier commentators. She recalled that Chekhov, when writing *The Cherry Orchard*, was himself seriously ill; the ghastly vision of someone dying of tuberculosis was fundamental to her conception of his play:

Для меня в понимании пьесы немаловажно то, что Чехов писал «Вишневый сад», будучи сам смертельно больным. Туберкулез медики называют страшно: «веселой болезнью». Умирают в полном сознании. И в основном на рассвете. Весной.⁵⁰⁹

In Demidova's view it was not for nothing that Chekhov's play opens at dawn in spring-time, and that later in the action the characters attempt to stave off their

Chekhov retained in the published version of the play. (Letter from Stanislavsky to Chekhov, 5 November 1903, K. S. Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 8 vols (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1960), VII, p. 271.) For Act IV the nursery was stripped bare; the curtains had been taken down and the shutters closed. Crates, bundles and cases cluttered the stage. Oval and rectangular marks on the walls indicated where the pictures, now stacked in piles, had once hung. Allen has argued that the staging of this scene was a further indication of how Stanislavsky's production could be read realistically *and* symbolically. (His emphasis) The stripping of the room had a basis in realism, indicating the characters' imminent departure, but also symbolically suggested desolation and emptiness (Allen, p. 41). There is some justification for this argument, but it is equally true that the theatre by its nature communicates through signs, and that therefore many features in a given production, even when conceived in a naturalistic style, and irrespective of a director's intent, may be interpreted symbolically.

⁵⁰⁸Shakh-Azizova, 'Sovremennoe', p. 350.

⁵⁰⁹Demidova, 'Bol'shaia', p. 8.

inevitable destruction by joking and drinking champagne. In her perception the destruction of the orchard is life-threatening for Ranevskaja. At first however she refuses to acknowledge her illness openly; only in Act II, and then unwillingly, does she look for a 'cure' from 'the doctor', Lopakhin. Demidova described Act III as follows:

Третий акт — ожидание результата, как ожидание исхода тяжелой операции.

Тут несоответствие ситуации и поведения достигает вершины: стремятся прикрыть смертельный страх музыкой, танцами, фокусами. И вот монолог

Лопухина — операция кончилась смертью.⁵¹⁰

It is clear from this description that Demidova's Ranevskaja knew her fate. She was neither feckless nor happy-go-lucky, as she is sometimes portrayed: her moments of apparent cheerfulness, like those of the other characters, were pretence. Emma Polotskaia maintained that Demidova, unlike Knipper, never showed frivolous unconcern; instead she portrayed a woman of considerable intellect, who in truth understood her circumstances all too clearly.⁵¹¹ For this critic, in her expressions of great anguish this Ranevskaja was more tragic than in previous performances: her self-knowledge was the very source of her true tragedy, and she had gained her wisdom and worldly insight through suffering. Although Demidova revealed her emotional anguish physically, she was also a Taganka performer. The impression she gave that Ranevskaja knew her fate was indebted too, therefore, to the approach she had developed under Liubimov. As Stroeve noted, her interpretation was coloured at times by a sense of self-irony, and through a subtle stylisation of the role the actress created a distance between herself and her character.⁵¹² This opinion was echoed by Alevtina Kuzicheva, who remarked that in her somewhat affected

⁵¹⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹¹Polotskaia, "Neugomonnaia", p. 91.

⁵¹²Stroeve, 'I snova', p. 8

gait, and in her playful intonation, Demidova occasionally created a sense of viewing Ranevskaiia from the outside.⁵¹³

This idea that Ranevskaiia is fully aware of her fate, in the way that someone terminally ill may also hide what they know to be true, was in Efros's view apparent from the scene of her arrival, in which he suggested that those who gathered about her also understood the truth:

Все понимают одно: она приехала прощаться. С этой жизнью покончено. Хотя еще будут какие-то страсти кипеть, будут скандалы и споры, надежды, но где-то, уже понятно, все решено. И вот все стоят, и мы наблюдаем, как она держится. Так выходит больной от врача, узнав ужасный диагноз, а вы идете с ним и болтаете о погоде, городе и витринах. Она говорит о комнате, где когда-то спала, о том, как ехала в поезде, что любит кофе, но все понимают, что дело совсем в другом. И Аня с Варей уходят, не выдержав напряжения.⁵¹⁴

For Efros the underlying tensions of this scene were indicative of what he called the 'emotional mathematics' inherent in the structure of Chekhov's plays.⁵¹⁵ He further suggested that it was neither desirable nor necessary to express these through details of 'domestic realism' (быт); he maintained on the contrary that they needed a form which was at once symbolic and emotionally charged. He drew an analogy between theatre design and painting, remarking that while it was possible to paint a bull in all its life-like detail, one could also draw it as Pablo Picasso had done with 'a single, daring brush-stroke', creating in effect a symbol, almost a 'sign', which nevertheless completely captured its pose and

⁵¹³Alevtina Kuzicheva, 'Vishnevyi... Vishnevyi... Vishnevyi sad', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 11 June 1976, p. 14.

⁵¹⁴Efros, *Professia*, p. 97. (His emphasis).

⁵¹⁵*Ibid.*

movement.⁵¹⁶ His rejection of realist detail was in keeping with his previous interpretations of Chekhov, but his desire to express the essence and ideas of *The Cherry Orchard* symbolically was shared by other directors, and therefore not entirely new.

In 1904, Stanislavsky, in characteristic fashion and exploiting every technical means available, had expanded, much to Chekhov's dismay, on the playwright's directions for the setting. In collaboration with Simov, he had provided a wealth of naturalistic detail for each act, and (as in *The Seagull*) had written what was in effect a complete score of off-stage sound effects. The production had been criticised for such excess of detail by contemporary commentators, including Meyerhold, who by contrast had maintained that the orchard and the old life it represents were expressed in Chekhov's play in an openly symbolic form.⁵¹⁷ This idea had been central to Knebel's production in 1965: in the Theatre of the Soviet Army there had been no attempt to create a physical realisation of the orchard. This, as Shakh-Azizova noted, had been a bold move indeed for a director who had trained at the MAT under Stanislavsky.⁵¹⁸ Working with her designer Iurii Pimenov, Knebel' had created a semi-opaque shroud of light, floating drapes around the stage area, and so had evoked the spiritual essence and memory of the orchard rather than its actual presence. Pimenov had also made inventive use of slide projections. These appeared in separate scenes to indicate the locus of the action, and between the acts to create a montage of associations and memories, in the manner of still-life paintings. Taking his cue, perhaps, from Pimenov, M.

⁵¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

⁵¹⁷For details of Meyerhold's conception, see his letter to Chekhov already cited, (Meierkhol'd, pp. 84-86.), and also 'The Naturalistic Theatre and The Theatre of Mood' in *Meyerhold on Theatre*, ed. and trans. by Edward Braun (London: Eyre Methuen, 1969), pp. 23-34 (pp. 28-33). Later, in the 1930s, Nemirovich-Danchenko appears to have shared to some degree the ideas of Meyerhold. He suggested that the theatre had handled the play too roughly, and remarked significantly that the playwright had refined his realism to the point where it became symbolic. Stroeve, *Rezhisserskie* (1973), p. 126.

⁵¹⁸Shakh-Azizova, 'Dolgaia', p. 30.

Kataev too had departed from the traditions of the MAT in his design for Shapiro's 1971 production. He also had not created a garden of trees in blossom, but instead had painted the faint outlines of leaves and flowers on the walls of a dilapidated house, whose furniture had been covered in dirty dust sheets.⁵¹⁹ I. Ivanov's setting at the Pushkin Theatre in Leningrad in 1972 had created an atmosphere of destruction and neglect. Black, rough branches sprouted through white ceilings, walls and colonnades, and punched holes in the cases of clocks, each of whose faces showed a different time.⁵²⁰ Both Pimenov's idea of a 'still-life', conveying the sense that the orchard had long passed into memory, and Ivanov's suggestion of timelessness, also featured in Efros's setting. It was designed by Levental', who had collaborated with Efros before, on *Marriage*, but worked mainly at the Bolshoi, producing lavish and visually stunning designs for operas. In this case, however, he succeeded in creating Efros's 'single daring brush stroke'. His set remained unchanged throughout the action, but generated multiple meanings, and expressed through visual metaphors the ideas that were central to the director's interpretation.

Chekhov provides extensive directions for the outdoor scene of Act II. These specify an open field and a road leading to the estate, together with an abandoned chapel with a well, large stones, long-neglected gravestones and an old bench. In this act, in 1904, Stanislavsky and Simov had hoped to create a vision of Central Russia in the style of the landscapes of Levitan. Stanislavsky had replaced the old bench with a mown field and a pile of hay, and had made a host of other additions. These, as he outlined in a letter to Chekhov, were to include a little chapel, a small gully and a neglected cemetery.⁵²¹ Chekhov responded by stating categorically that there should be no churchyard; there *was* one, he stressed, a very long time ago, but its existence should now be indicated

⁵¹⁹Taranova, p. 164.

⁵²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁵²¹Letter from Stanislavsky to Chekhov, 19 November 1903 in Stanislavskii, *Sobranie*, pp. 274-275.

only by two or three slabs lying scattered about.⁵²² In keeping with the ideas of Stanislavsky and contrary to those of Chekhov, an old cemetery was the central focus of Levental's set.

At the centre-back of the stage, filling about a third of the area, the designer created a white mound, roughly circular in shape. On this there was a white garden bench of exquisite iron-work, several garden chairs, furniture from a child's nursery, and whitish gravestones, arranged in such a way as to give the ensemble depth. A single cherry tree in blossom was placed in the midst of the gravestones, and at the back two more were silhouetted against a white lace-like cross. At both sides of the stage, in groups of three and scalloped at the top into rosette-like drapes, almost transparent white curtains were blown by a constant air-flow at varying strengths. Georges Banu interpreted this as a metaphor for the wind of history that would bear away all in its path.⁵²³ At the back white material fell to form a frame reminiscent of theatre curtains, against which sepia portraits of former family members hung in oval frames. The huge branch of a cherry tree dangled obtrusively across the front of the stage. At the opening paper blossoms, manufactured in the MAT's props department, fell from the flies like snow.⁵²⁴ This evocative set was devoid of all local details; the only touch of colour was the reddish hue of Gaev's beloved book-case, curiously out of place in the all-pervasive white.⁵²⁵ The characters too were dressed in white, its dominance relieved only by the textures of the fabrics, which gave the impression of different tones of white; nothing stood out in contrast but their coloured shiny shoes and boots, and the black trimming on Ranevskia's costume in Act IV.⁵²⁶ The only other exceptions were Lopakhin, who for the

⁵²²Letter from Chekhov to Stanislavsky, 23 November 1903, in Surkov, *Chekhov*, p. 161

⁵²³Georges Banu, 'Les Cerisaies' Étrangères', in *Chekhoviana: Chekhov i Frantsiia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), pp. 233-240 (p. 238).

⁵²⁴Efros's set is described in several accounts. See in particular the following sources: V. Berezkin, *Khudozhnik v teatre Chekhova* (Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1987), pp. 97-98, and Szewcow, p. 34.

⁵²⁵Berezkin, *Khudozhnik*, p. 98.

⁵²⁶Szewcow, p. 37.

final act changed from a white suit into a plum-coloured one, and Firs, who throughout wore a black coat and tails; this gave him, in the opinion of A. Kurzhiiamskaia, the appearance of a master of ceremonies at a sad spectacle.⁵²⁷ The contrast between this setting and Simov's poetic vision of the Russian countryside at the MAT in 1904 could not have been more stark. Golub recalled that when he saw the production in 1976 a theatre student, having pondered on the set, leaned over to him and whispered: 'The Moscow Art Theatre lies buried there'.⁵²⁸ Golub added, however, that although everything about the production seemed to be aimed at a sacred cow, Efros was too much of an artist to serve as a 'hit man' even for the sake of innovation.⁵²⁹ In truth the setting drew its inspiration from several different sources. As noted above, a realistic depiction of the orchard had already been rejected in several productions on the Soviet stage. For Szewcow, moreover, the composite image of 'white on white' recalled the work of Kazimir Malevich, and Rudnitskii and Shevtsova both cited the influence of the all-white production by the Italian director Giorgio Strehler at the Piccolo Teatro di Milano the previous year.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁷A. Kurzhiiamskaia, 'Chto utverzhdaet spektakl', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 30 July 1976, p. 3.

⁵²⁸Golub, 'Acting', p. 24.

⁵²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵³⁰Szewcow, p. 34; Rudnitskii, 'Vremia i mesto', p. 205; Shevtsova, 'Chekhov', p. 89.

Levental's set had some clear similarities with that of Luciano Damiani's for the opening act of Strehler's production. Strehler had first produced *The Cherry Orchard* in 1955, but was dissatisfied with that production, and had staged it again at the Piccolo Teatro in 1974. Strehler referred directly to a letter from Chekhov to Stanislavsky on 5 February 1903, in which the playwright maintained that the play was already fully formed in his mind, and alluded to the white orchard in full bloom and to ladies in white dresses. (Surkov, *Chekhov*, p. 141.) Strehler was convinced that for Chekhov the work had taken shape as 'a shooting white light'. (Giorgio Strehler, *Un théâtre pour la vie. Réflexions, entretiens, notes de travail*, ed. by S. Kessler, trans. by E. Genevois (Paris: Fayard, 1980), p. 326.) This idea was central to Damiani's conception. In Act I he created an open space, with no walls, and with a few pieces of simple white furniture (including a diminutive set of tables and chairs for the nursery). The stage floor was covered in a white-grey cloth and an enormous, white, transparent gauze hung over the stage throughout the acts. This could be manipulated by stage hands to float over the orchestra and audience and was covered in shimmering leaves which fell to the floor in the final act. The characters were all dressed in white, its dominance relieved only by Firs's black suit, the actors' dark shoes, and by a black poodle for Sharlotta. For further details of this production, see Banu, pp. 235-237; Senelick, *Chekhov Theatre*, pp. 267-272; Shevtsova, 'Chekhov', pp. 80-98.

In the course of his career the leading Italian director Giorgio Strehler (1921-1997) directed some 200 works in a variety of genres, and his work does not divide easily into distinct periods. Educated at the University of Milan, the Geneva Conservatory and the Accademia dei Filodrammatici in Milan, he co-founded the Piccolo Teatro with Paolo Grassi in 1947.

The set functioned on several levels. In the first instance it synthesised all Chekhov's spatial and temporal directions. As Szewcow noted, it was at once the orchard, the bower of Act II, the spring of Ranevskiaia's return to Russia from Paris, with a temperature of minus-three degrees just left behind her, and the October of her departure, when the house is closed for winter and for ever. But that critic also saw in the almost completely white set a visual translation of a major theme:

Ljubov' Andreevna and her brother, who are the characters most threatened by the material world, turn reality into abstraction. If they cannot seize their present and make it concrete through action, they can, only too well, take hold of their past.⁵³¹

In Knebel's production the light drapes around the stage had been interpreted as a hazy memory through which the remains of Ranevskiaia's life on the estate appeared as in a mirage.⁵³² But in Efros's interpretation all emotional responses were brutally revealed, and therefore memories of the past were dazzlingly precise and clear. The actors moved about the mound, sat on it and on the furniture, and leant against the gravestones, watched over by their dead relatives. Thus for V. Berezkin in this 'still-life' memories of the past and the detritus of the present were jumbled together in a heap. In fact in Act IV the

Subsidised by government funds, the theatre had an acknowledged public service function in its attempt to reach a socially more heterogeneous audience than that of the traditional urban theatre. The European tour of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble in 1956 was a seminal influence on Strehler's work and led him to stage *The Threepenny Opera* (1956), *The Good Person of Szechwan* (1958), *The Good Soldier Schweik* (1961), and *The Life of Galileo* (1963). His work in the Italian repertoire included notable productions of Goldoni, including several stagings from 1947 of *Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters*, in which he explored for a modern audience the techniques of the mask and pantomime. The events of May 1968 led him to develop a more politically engaged theatre and saw the establishment of the Gruppo Teatro e Azione, but he returned to the Piccolo in 1972. In the 1980s he was involved in the work of the Théâtre de l'Europe, and his interest in opera saw productions of Mozart, lighter comic pieces by Piccinni and Cimarosa, and Beethoven's *Fidelio* at La Scala in 1990. See Richard Trousdell, in Pickering, pp. 727-731; for further material see David L. Hirst, *Giorgio Strehler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁵³¹Szewcow, p. 34.

⁵³²Berezkin, *Khudozhnik*, p. 78.

hummock itself became a rubbish dump, when the triumphant Lopakhin, in a gesture of mocking irony, carelessly tossed empty champagne bottles on to it.

According to Chekhov's text, in Act I the orchard is still flourishing, and in Act II and until the end of Act III Ranevskiaia clings to the hope that, though threatened, it will be saved. It is not until the end of Act IV, when the sounds of chopping are heard off-stage, that it is actually destroyed. Efros's production, however, began as it were at the end. His white set, although it evoked the blossoming of the orchard in Spring, indicated at the same time, with its suggestions of shrouds and mourning, that the trees and the life they represented were already dead. This was in keeping with the idea that he shared with Demidova that Ranevskiaia's fate has been decided from the outset. The cherry orchard was not seen simply as almost certainly doomed: its destruction was presented as an established fact. In this way (as in *Three Sisters* in 1967), the passage of time in the play — and with it the historical changes in Russia since 1904 — were entirely eclipsed. The audience were invited to contemplate the effects on their own lives of the losses, both spiritual and cultural, symbolised by the destruction of the orchard. In Stanislavsky's production Ranevskiaia's house, although crumbling and dilapidated, had been still a comforting home. Here, by contrast, and from the very beginning, just as the sisters at the Malaia Bronnaia had had no home, not only was there effectively no orchard, there was no house. In Efros's stark conception this (and indeed, as Berezkin noted, even what might have been a family vault) had already collapsed before the action began.⁵³³ Thus the characters, driven from their home and dressed in shrouds, were left to move about a graveyard, to dwell as it were amongst the dead. For Rudnitskii the image of the characters fighting off their imminent demise haunted Efros's production: 'На кладбище не

⁵³³*Ibid.*, p. 98.

живут. Чеховские люди у Эфроса бились в предсмертных конвульсиях, в последних спазмах исыхающих чувств...'⁵³⁴

This description of the external expression of feverish emotions was entirely in keeping with Efros's style of physical theatre, in which, as we have seen, passions were to be outwardly and openly portrayed. Efros recalled how, after a break in rehearsals and on re-reading the script, he was struck even more forcibly by the idea that the basis of Chekhov's drama was the fact that the characters were living in a constant state of anxiety.⁵³⁵ As noted above, this was particularly apparent in Demidova's dynamic performance, but it was also a feature of the work of other actors, most notably Vysotskii. In the opening scene, as Lopakhin, Duniasha and Epikhodov are awaiting the delayed arrival of Ranevskaiia and her entourage, Vysotskii, uncomfortable in his white suit, which he was clearly unaccustomed to wearing, made insistent perambulations about the stage, infecting the others with his nervous tension. Thus for instance Epikhodov, who according to Chekhov's directions crushes a bouquet of flowers, became so agitated that he also knocked over a table and flattened one of the gravestones. This nervous energy at the opening permeated the entire action; rising and falling in peaks and lows, it gradually built momentum as the production's driving force.

In other scenes Efros was equally concerned, as ever, that Chekhov's 'emotional mathematics' should not be buried in the subtext but openly displayed. In *The Cherry Orchard* (as in *Three Sisters*) he demonstrated therefore how, without changing a word but by a careful re-reading of the script, lines which were often seen as insignificant could be given a new emphasis. In Act I Lopakhin announces his plan to cut down the orchard to

⁵³⁴Rudnitskii, 'Vremia i mesto', p. 204.

⁵³⁵Efros, *Professia*, p. 278.

make room for dachas. Firs then recalls how in the past the cherries were dried or preserved as jam, but remarks, when asked by Ranevskia where the recipe for the jam is now, that it has been forgotten. As Efros noted, this exchange was usually treated as inconsequential chatter. The role of Firs had been written for the MAT actor A. Artem, who played it with great tenderness and warmth and as a tired, old man.⁵³⁶ In Efros's production, according to G. Kholodova, Gotlieb Roninson's Firs had little to do on a set where there was no house, so that he loitered rather than fussing over the new arrivals.⁵³⁷ In this exchange, however, he suddenly became animated and demonstrated that for Efros Firs, though deaf, fully understood the import (indeed almost symbolic significance) of the loss of this recipe.⁵³⁸ Firs's recollections were not the mumbled ramblings of an old man but his ardent protest against the dachas, and his line: 'Забыли. Никто не помнит.'⁵³⁹ was to be directed at Lopakhin in a tone of reproach. Similarly Efros suggested that Gaev attempts to silence Firs not because he is embarrassed by the old lackey's chatter but because Firs touches a raw nerve, awakening Gaev's own memories of the past.⁵⁴⁰

In Act II, after Trofimov's speech about the differences between the lives of the intelligentsia and the workers, the conversation runs as follows:

ЛОПАХИН: ...Иной раз, когда не спится, я думаю: 'господи, ты дал нам громадные леса, необятные поля, глубочайшие горизонты, и, живя тут, мы сами должны бы по-настоящему быть великанами...'

ЛЮБОВЬ АНДРЕЕВНА: Вам понадобились великаны...Они только в сказках хороши, а так они пугают.

(В глубине сцены проходит Елиходов и играет на гитаре.)

⁵³⁶Taranova, p. 159.

⁵³⁷Kholodova, "'Vishnevyy'", p. 160.

⁵³⁸Efros, *Professia*, pp. 275-276.

⁵³⁹*Vishnevyy sad*, Act I, p. 206.

⁵⁴⁰Efros, *Professia*, p. 275.

(Задумчиво). Епиходов идет...

АНЯ: (задумчиво). Епиходов идет...

ГАЕВ: Солнце село, господа

ТРОФИМОВ: Да.⁵⁴¹

This exchange could be seen as an idle conversation, as Efros conceded in his notes; but he added that he loved moments such as these, which on the surface appeared to have been written to create a particular mood or to simply allude to the characters' surroundings, but could actually be seen as an indication of internal conflict.⁵⁴² Thus, as Demidova recalled, Vysotskii produced a sudden deathly hush in the audience, because he had been directed to deliver his lines directly to them.⁵⁴³ It was as though he was asking them why the inhabitants of their Russia were not giants. Efros then saw in Ranevskaiia's almost immediate reference to the appearance of Epikhodov (a man of 'twenty-two misfortunes' and therefore a most unlikely giant) her 'instinctive understanding' that Lopakhin's fantasy was completely out of keeping with reality.⁵⁴⁴ Similarly, he remarked, Trofimov's 'yes' was not simply an inconsequential confirmation of Gaev's statement but an assertion of something much more significant — 'the end of the world' (конец света; literally, the end of light).⁵⁴⁵

Later in this same act, Trofimov and Ania are left alone on stage and he speaks to her of the necessity to rid themselves of the existing social order and entrenched attitudes in order to march forward to the future. Rudnitskii, in his account of the original MAT production, maintained that Stanislavsky had shown little faith in Trofimov's words, and that he had therefore interpreted the

⁵⁴¹ *Vishnevyyi sad*, Act II, p. 224.

⁵⁴² Efros, *Professiiia*, p. 276.

⁵⁴³ Demidova, 'Vysotskii', p. 50.

⁵⁴⁴ Efros, *Professiiia*, p. 276.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

exchange between the student and Ania as simply a love duet.⁵⁴⁶ By so doing the director had suggested that Trofimov's apparent optimism was fleeting and unconvincing because it was primarily motivated by his excitement in the expression of his passion for Ania. As a result Stanislavsky's view of the youthful and ardent Trofimov was touched with a sense of knowing irony. As noted in Chapter 2, in some subsequent Soviet interpretations critics had identified a Chekhov who had advocated the destruction of an obsolete ruling class, had seen in Lopakhin the rise of the bourgeoisie, and had viewed Trofimov as a visionary and as a harbinger of the coming Revolution. The interpretation of Trofimov as a wholly serious character is undercut, however, by Chekhov's comic devices (after storming out in Act III he falls down stairs, and in Act IV he mislays his galoshes), and in general his inability to put his words into action renders him somewhat laughable. Efros, like Stanislavsky, took an ironical view of Trofimov and insisted that the character had to be interpreted in the light of contemporary circumstances. He remarked, moreover, that he felt Chekhov's attitude to his character was at the very least ambivalent:

И что такое Петя Трофимов, если его рассматривать с сегодняшней точки зрения? ... Что такое его слова: «Вперед, не отставай, друзья!» — которые он говорит девушке вечером при луне? Есть ли здесь доля насмешливости Чехова? Или Чехов тут абсолютно серьезен?⁵⁴⁷

In Act II Trofimov himself remarks that he is afraid of serious talk, and (like Kruglyi's Tuzenbakh in Efros's *Three Sisters*) Zolotukhin therefore delivered his lofty speeches on the future in a tone of self-mockery, turning statements into questions and highlighting the rift between ideas and action. Later in Act

⁵⁴⁶Rudnitskii, *Russkoe*, pp. 233-234.

⁵⁴⁷Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 263-264.

IV, in the exchange between Trofimov and Lopakhin, the disparity between fine words and the characters' inability to alter events was given a further ironic twist. Trofimov and Lopakhin are soon to part company, and at this juncture the student states grandly: 'Человечество идет к высшей правде, к высшему счастью, какое только возможно на земле, и я в первых рядах!'⁵⁴⁸ Lopakhin then asks him: 'Дойдешь?' to which Trofimov responds: 'Дойду.' But as he delivered his next line ('Дойду или укажу другим путь, как дойти.') Zolotukhin turned upstage, walked back to the mound, settled himself against a gravestone, and promptly fell asleep.

In *Three Sisters* the central, climatic moment had come in Act III with Durov's virtuoso performance of Chebutykin's dance, and had been followed by a slowing of the pace throughout the final act. *The Cherry Orchard* followed a similar pattern, and in Act III Vysotskii, as Lopakhin, also finished his monologue by cavorting and gesticulating wildly as he performed what E. Taranova has described as 'The Dance of the New Master.'⁵⁴⁹ On his return from the auction Chekhov gives him the following line: 'Торги кончились к четырем часам...Мы к поезду опоздали, пришлось ждать до половины десятого.'⁵⁵⁰ Smelianskii described how Vysotskii, as he uttered these words, tapped the side of his neck with the back of his hand, a typical gesture to indicate how much they had drunk in the meantime.⁵⁵¹ Tipsy and flushed with excitement, he then announced that he had bought the estate. The effect on Ranevskaiia was extraordinary: she suddenly collapsed, clasping the front of her dress as if shot in the stomach, and released a terrible, soul-chilling, almost inhuman cry of pain.⁵⁵² At first, apparently oblivious to her, Vysotskii launched into the speech in which he describes the thrill of the sale, his triumph

⁵⁴⁸*Vishnevyyi sad*, Act IV, p. 244.

⁵⁴⁹Taranova, p. 166.

⁵⁵⁰*Vishnevyyi sad*, Act III, p. 239.

⁵⁵¹Smeliansky, *Russian Theatre*, p. 122.

⁵⁵²Kholodova, "Visnevyyi", p. 154.

in outbidding Deriganov and his growing awareness that (none other than) he, the poor barefoot peasant boy, is now the owner of the estate on which his father and grandfather had been serfs. In this speech Vysotskii succeeded in combining drunken laughter, sober tears, anger, self-reproach, and self irony all in one. Vysotskii, however, was not only an actor but also a poet and songwriter. In the words of his famous ballads, through allusion and hidden metaphors, he spoke with a critical, dissenting voice of the abuses of the Soviet system. In the view of Kholodova, in the rhythm and intonation of his delivery he turned Chekhov's prose into verse, almost as if reciting the lyrics of one of his own works.⁵⁵³ At this point, for Krymova, the actor and character fused into a single persona. Through Chekhov's lines, in the words of 'the poet' Lopakhin, the ballad-singer Vysotskii was expressing a thought deeply familiar to him: 'Чем на Руси глушат тоcky.'⁵⁵⁴ Stanislavsky had once suggested that it was as if Lopakhin had bought the orchard by accident and then his confusion over his actions had prompted him to get drunk.⁵⁵⁵ In a similar way, Vysotskii appeared at first to be carried away with excitement; but then in the middle of his speech he suddenly felt the full and horrific import of his deed. At this moment he broke into hysterical, reckless dancing. In this he expressed violently the tumult of his confused emotions: his triumph and pride, his anger and frustration at the blind stupidity of those who had forced him to act, and at the same time his bitter anguish and self-loathing at the thought that he, like a reluctant murderer, had been forced to kill the very thing he held most dear. His stamping feet beat out a pain that ate at his very soul, crushed his spirit and shattered the illusions of his hopeless love. In Rudnitskii's view Vysotskii's distress spelled out with absolute clarity that the loss of the orchard was if

⁵⁵³Kholodova, 'Lopakhin', pp. 63-64.

⁵⁵⁴N. Krymova, 'Poet, rozhdennyi teatrom', in *Vspominnaiia Vladimira Vysotskogo* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1989), p. 154.

⁵⁵⁵Letter from Stanislavsky to Chekhov, 31 October 1903, Stanislavskii, *Sobranie*, pp. 266-267 (p. 267).

anything a greater tragedy for Lopakhin than for Ranevskiaia, because by its destruction she was lost to him forever.⁵⁵⁶

After this emotional climax late in Act III, the pace slowed for the final act. In the closing moments the actors circled the central mound in procession, walking in silence at a funereal pace to the steady beat of an amplified metronome that recalled the sound of a chopping axe.⁵⁵⁷ But Ranevskiaia unexpectedly broke from their ranks, rushed to the front of the stage, and in a final tormented cry addressed the audience with her line: 'О, мой милый, мой нежный, прекрасный сад! ... Моя жизнь, моя молодость, счастье мое, прощай! ...Прощай! ...'⁵⁵⁸ She then stretched out to clutch the branch of cherry blossoms hanging tantalisingly out of reach over the forestage and cried out in bitter despair as she failed to grasp it. The others moved forwards, placed a black cloak about her shoulders, and led her gently back from the edge of the stage, as a group of mourners might pull someone back from the brink of a grave.⁵⁵⁹ The characters exited slowly, leaving Firs alone. According to Chekhov's directions the old servant lies motionless, but Roninson began to hunt desperately among the gravestones, as though looking for a way out, before finally collapsing at the base of the mound.⁵⁶⁰ The other characters then gathered where he lay and sang their mournful refrain for the final time.

By the mid-1970s, as Efros himself noted, there had been several productions of classic works, including those of Chekhov, whose style of performance was not in keeping with established interpretations, and consequently those which deviated from tradition had met with a greater acceptance from the critics.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁶Rudnitskii, 'Vremia i mesto', p. 206.

⁵⁵⁷Stroeve, 'I snova', p. 8.

⁵⁵⁸*Vishnevyyi sad*, Act IV, p. 253.

⁵⁵⁹Stroeve, 'I snova', p. 8.

⁵⁶⁰Taranova, p. 167.

⁵⁶¹Efros, 'A chto', p. 8.

This view is substantiated by several critical commentaries. Shakh-Azizova, outlining developments in the staging of Chekhov from the earliest productions to 1998, suggested that from the beginning of the 1960s, as directors searched for new forms, his theatre underwent 'truly revolutionary changes', which by the 1970s had resulted in the continuing 'democratisation' of the playwright's work and had seen the breaking of the MAT's 'monopoly', because 'Chekhov offered equality of rights and opportunities to all theatres regardless of rank or artistic style'.⁵⁶² The MAT's own productions, she added, (under the direction of Efremov) echoed to some degree changes in traditional perspectives. This perception was shared by Polotskaia, who noted that the rejection of the MAT's 'canonical' style, apparent both in Efros's staging of *The Cherry Orchard* in 1975 and in Kheifets's television film in 1976, was also reflected in Efremov's production of *Ivanov* at that theatre in 1978.⁵⁶³ In this context critics of Efros's *Cherry Orchard* focused not on ideological issues (as they had in their reactions to his *Seagull* and *Three Sisters*) but on aesthetic ones. Their responses were mixed. They remained divided above all as to the ultimate success of Efros's experiment in bringing together two disparate styles at the Taganka.

Efros had found two metaphors which for him expressed the sense of historical change as an implacable force, in the face of which Chekhov's characters, and by extension all humans, are powerless.

В чем, так сказать, основная проблема «Вишневого сада»? В том что жизнь — как вихрь. А люди не успевают за этим вихрем. Вихрь всегда над нами. Мы — следы этого вихря, которому название: время. Время безжалостно, стремительно, беспощадно. Оно меняется и меняет нас, так же как вулкан

⁵⁶²Shakh-Azizova, 'Chekhov', pp. 169-170. Shakh-Azizova has observed elsewhere that the rejection of traditional approaches to Chekhov had been already demonstrated previously in the critically-acclaimed productions of *The Cherry Orchard* by Shapiro at the Tallinn Youth Theatre in 1971 and by Goriaev at the Pushkin in Leningrad in 1972. Shakh-Azizova, 'Sovremennoe', pp. 349-350. (These productions were discussed briefly above, see page 204.)

⁵⁶³Polotskaia, "'Vishnevyyi sad'", p. 284.

меняет рельеф земли. И люди всегда перед вулканом, в общем, бессильны.

Вулкан перестраивает рельеф земли. Чехов почувствовал в те годы, что рельеф земли изменяется. И написал об этом пьесу.⁵⁶⁴

This would appear to suggest that Efros shared what can be imaginatively construed as Chekhov's sense of historical objectivity in regard to the inexorable march of time, represented by the inevitable destruction of the orchard. This, as noted above, had allowed the playwright (unlike Stanislavsky) to see ironically the diminutive stature of his characters in the face of the passage of time, and to laugh at the absurdity of their inability to recognise the hopelessness of their situation. In his previous productions of Chekhov, Efros had maintained a sense of objectivity, but in *The Cherry Orchard*, taking his cue from Stanislavsky, he deliberately exaggerated certain aspects of the drama in keeping with his idea of the loss of the orchard as a tragedy, and viewed the characters with sympathy. Although the inevitable destruction of the orchard was apparent in the set, there seems nevertheless to have been a certain disparity between Efros's conception of the play and its performance. The Taganka actors, schooled in Brecht's techniques of multiple perspectives, were capable of portraying a sense of objectivity. It will have been clear, however, from the account above, that the most effective moments in the production were those in which the actors expressed physically deeply-felt inner emotions. The production therefore demonstrated the techniques of Efros's physical theatre, but did not exploit fully the capabilities of the Taganka troupe. The direct addresses to the audience and sense of a separation between actor and character were to some degree added details rather than inherent aspects of the performers' work. There is some truth, therefore, in Smelianskii's assertion that the synthesis of the two approaches remained incomplete.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶⁴A. Efros, 'O Chekhove', p. 4. (His emphasis).

⁵⁶⁵Smelianskii, *Nashi*, p. 299.

As noted above, Efros had difficulties in communicating his ideas to Liubimov's troupe, and it is apparent from their own accounts that Demidova and Vysotskii grasped more clearly than others the differences in Efros's approach. This practical issue, together with his concern to foreground the relationship between Ranevskaiia and Lopakhin, led Efros to focus attention on them. As M. Turovskaiia observed, however, this meant that many of the other characters remained on the periphery of the action.⁵⁶⁶ The Taganka production, therefore, lacked the sense of ensemble so important in Stanislavsky's productions, and indeed characteristic of Efros's own troupe at the Malaia Bronnaia. Through Efros's neglect, several of the roles remained underdeveloped, and (as Smelianskii maintained) the director might have produced a more satisfying production at the Malaia Bronnaia, where his own troupe could have filled the character portrayals with a greater psychological depth.⁵⁶⁷ This lack of depth, however, was not a feature of all the performances. Demidova's Ranevskaiia was almost universally praised, and there seems little justification for Vladimir Blok's opinion that her rapid changes of emotion lacked psychological motivation.⁵⁶⁸ G. Kholodova also suggested that Demidova's extreme reaction to the news of the orchard's sale lacked internal justification because it was out of keeping with the sense of self-knowledge that this Ranevskaiia had demonstrated throughout.⁵⁶⁹ In the view of the present writer such criticism is not valid, because there is a great difference between knowing, but scarcely admitting, a truth, and suddenly being faced with it.

Zolotukhin's interpretation of Trofimov was predictably attacked for what was seen as insufficient political commitment. T. Surina criticised the ironical and

⁵⁶⁶M. Turovskaiia, 'Kino — Chekhov-77 — teatr: Na granitse iskusstv', *Iskusstvo kino*, 1 (1978), 87-105 (p. 92).

⁵⁶⁷Smelianskii, *Nashi*, p. 299.

⁵⁶⁸Vl. Blok, 'Kopiiia? Variatsiia? Eksperiment?', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 2 June 1976, p. 8.

⁵⁶⁹Kholodova, "'Vishnevyl'", p. 154.

sceptical tone of his delivery, which failed to convey what this critic maintained was Chekhov's positive vision of a new life and unfailing belief in the future.⁵⁷⁰ Smelianskii remarked that he played the role in 'elementary colours', implying that his interpretation was lacking in depth.⁵⁷¹

There was condemnation also of the unchanging, all-white set. S. Mezhtinskii criticised it for establishing the central ideas of Chekhov's drama from the outset; this, he maintained, impeded an independent analysis by the audience of the play's social issues.⁵⁷² Similarly, in a vigorous attack in *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, Oksana Korneva and Gennadii Biriukov rebuked Efros for his failure to include realistic detail and for the style of his performance, which had much in common, they suggested, with his production of *Three Sisters* in 1967.⁵⁷³ This production too had produced a mood of despondency, and had demonstrated the failure of communication and interpersonal relationships. Such ideas, they maintained, properly belonged to Absurdist drama, and were therefore inappropriate in an interpretation of Chekhov. Maiia Turovskaiia, on the other hand, praised both the set and the acting style for revealing the skeleton of the play's emotions and ideas. She interpreted the cemetery as an epitaph for the end of an era, and saw too, in the actors' delivery of their monologues from the very edge of the stage, a physical realisation of their spiritual isolation.⁵⁷⁴

Several commentators heard in Efros's stark and openly tragic production a lament for the death of spirituality in modern Russia. Stroeveva suggested that it was a nostalgic requiem for the passing of a culture more refined and poetic than that of its day, and an appeal to the audience to guard against a loss of values

⁵⁷⁰T. Surina, 'Istoricheskaiia preemstvennost', *Teatr*, 1, 1981, p. 73.

⁵⁷¹Smelianskii, *Nashi*, p. 298.

⁵⁷²S. Mezhtinskii, 'Uvenchannoe pravdoi', *Sovetskii klub*, 4 March 1977, p. 5.

⁵⁷³Oksana Korneva and Gennadii Biriukov, 'Nasledstvo, dostoinoe vremeni', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 2 (1976), 12-14 (p. 12).

⁵⁷⁴Turovskaiia, 'Kino', p. 90.

within themselves.⁵⁷⁵ E. Taranova went still further in her assessment of Efros's central message, suggesting that pragmatism was levelling spiritual values in present-day society. Thus the sound of the breaking string was as much a warning for those in the auditorium as for the characters on stage.⁵⁷⁶

Efros later denied (as he had in respect of *Three Sisters*) that his production was intended as a commentary on the loss of idealism and culture in contemporary society, although it should be noted once more that he was writing under censorship.⁵⁷⁷ In the ironic treatment of Trofimov's speeches, in Lopakhin's direct address to the audience, and in the presentation of a cherry orchard already dead, such a message was undoubtedly there to be read. Despite his protestations to the contrary, there is therefore clear justification for such critical interpretations.

Efros's denial seems all the more implausible, moreover, in the light of his next Chekhov production, a new staging of *Three Sisters* at the Malaia Bronnaia in 1982, in which he would clearly lament the loss of the culture of Chekhov's era and seek to resurrect the past. As stated in Chapter 1, such nostalgia for the past would also be manifest in other Chekhov productions in the 1980s, and would lead directors to return to the techniques and style of the MAT. This retreat into history would reflect a more general sense of uncertainty in the face of what were as yet barely-felt changes in political and social spheres. But in Efros's case the need to re-discover history and tradition was also part of his personal and artistic crisis. This would prompt him to begin to reject his own previous productions, and to take a less aggressive approach to classic dramas. This change of direction in his work was not wholly consistent, and would not be fully apparent until his second production of *Three Sisters*. As we shall see,

⁵⁷⁵Stroeve, 'I snova', p. 8.

⁵⁷⁶Taranova, p. 167.

⁵⁷⁷Efros, *Professia*, p. 297.

in both the form and content of that production Efros would suggest that it was possible to preserve the past. This was at odds with his assertion, cited above, that human attempts to resist the 'whirlwinds' and 'volcanoes' of time are doomed to fail. This idea was not conveyed by his production of *The Cherry Orchard*, in which rather than stressing the inevitability of change he showed the characters' loss of their past as tragic. It could therefore be said to have signalled the start of his change of direction. That change would be more clearly apparent in his staging, at the Malaia Bronnaia in 1977, of Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*.

Chapter 6

**Авангарду, вы знаете, очень легко следоваться
ариергардом...Все дело в перемене
дирекции.**

A Month in the Country
(1977)

As already noted, this production, though innovative, was less at variance with established approaches than those of the plays discussed so far. Efros was especially familiar with Stanislavsky's staging at the MAT in 1909. He read his predecessor's remarks on the work in *My Life in Art*, and also an analysis of the MAT production published in 1976, by the theatre historian Inna Solov'eva.⁵⁷⁸ That production will therefore be referred to in some detail in what follows, in order to show that Efros's was indebted to it in some respects, though in others fundamentally different.

Although ostensibly a love story, *A Month in the Country* was written against the backdrop of the later years of the reign of the aggressively reactionary Nicholas I (1825-1855), and (as Soviet critics in particular have emphasised) reflects contemporary developments in Russia. Produced at a time of upheaval, which saw the often violent suppression of revolutionary activity, it depicts the gentry, represented by Natal'ia Petrovna, Rakitin and Islaev, as an increasingly isolated social group whose existence is threatened by fundamental change. This threat is symbolically represented by an outsider of lower class, the poor student Beliaev. However, although Natal'ia Petrovna falls for the tutor, she does not leave with him; instead she loses both her new love and the persistent Rakitin and remains with Islaev. The threat that Beliaev poses to her, and to the world she represents, is thus averted.

By contrast, in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, first performed in 1904 (some fifty-five years after Turgenev's work was written and shortly before the 1905 Revolution), the actual destruction of the gentry class is symbolised in the axing of the orchard by Lopakhin, another outsider and the son of a peasant. Chekhov always vigorously denied that any of his work was influenced by

⁵⁷⁸Inna Solov'eva, "'Mesiats v derevne'", *Teatr*, 6 (1976), 101-111.

Turgenev, but in this was disingenuous.⁵⁷⁹ The demise of the gentry depicted in his work had undoubtedly been presaged in *A Month in the Country*. Indeed, it may be imagined that the world of Islaev's estate is in essence that of the impecunious Ranevskiaia, but is shown at a time when the auction has been forestalled and its owners given a temporary stay of execution. This perception of Turgenev's play as a prologue to *The Cherry Orchard* was perhaps first most clearly established by Stanislavsky.

As noted in Chapter 5, a root cause of disagreement about the latter play between Stanislavsky and Chekhov had been one of perspective. Chekhov had seen the events in his play with a sense of historical distance and a certain comic irony. Stanislavsky, by contrast, had mourned the loss of the cultured way of life symbolised by the destruction of the orchard, and in 1909 when turning to *A Month in the Country*, five years after his work with Chekhov, a desire to preserve that way of life was something he felt, if anything, even more personally and strongly. Indeed, as Stroeva has observed, the principal motivating concept of his production was the destruction of what he described as the 'epic quiet and subtle aestheticism of life on [Russian] estates' when it came in contact with 'a breath of fresh air' and 'drew close to Nature itself'.⁵⁸⁰

For him the central conflict in the play was therefore between what we might term nature and nurture. In Act I we learn that Islaev is repairing a weir, in order, it may be assumed, to hold back waters that threaten to flood his land.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁹A. D. P. Briggs, 'Writers and Repertoires, 1800-1850', in Leach and Borovsky, pp. 86-103 (pp. 102-103). It possible to suggest that Chekhov denied the influence of Turgenev because he intended to parody his predecessor's work.

⁵⁸⁰Stroeva, *Rezhisserskie* (1973), p. 246. Stroeva is quoting Stanislavsky.

⁵⁸¹Interestingly, in an earlier version of the work Turgenev appears have drawn an analogy between an unpredictable flow of water and a woman in love. In Act V, in a final exchange with Beliaev, Rakitin remarked: 'A woman's love is like a brook in spring: one day it rushes, excited and turbid, rising to the gully's edges, the next day it scarcely moves, a thin, fresh little trickle along the dried-up bed of the stream.' These lines were expunged by the censor for the published version of 1855. See 'Appendix' to Ivan Turgenev, *A Month in the Country*, trans. Isaiah Berlin (London: Penguin, 1981), pp. 124-127 (p. 127).

This operation typifies man's desire to control the anarchic excesses of Nature, whose potent forces are capable of destroying the world he has made. It symbolises a central theme of the drama, which was given a particular emphasis in Stanislavsky's production: the absolute necessity for Natal'ia Petrovna to stem the tide of natural and spontaneous sexual impulses induced within her by Beliaev, in order to prevent the destruction of the cultured world she represents.

The director found his own metaphor to describe this opposition between wild natural impulses and an ordered, civilised society. In *My Life in Art* he suggested that Natal'ia Petrovna was to be seen as a woman who had spent her life enclosed in a luxurious sitting-room, separated from nature and constrained by a 'corset' of society's conventions. He likened her situation, and those of Islaev and Rakitin, to that of hot-house flowers protected from the natural world by the glass of a conservatory.⁵⁸² The challenge to the existence of this cloister (set, ironically, in an idyllic rural landscape) was Beliaev; as Natal'ia Petrovna's much-desired 'gulp of fresh water on a hot day', he represented a force of Nature itself.⁵⁸³ On seeing him with Verochka, Natal'ia Petrovna was involuntarily drawn to simple and natural feelings, to Nature: 'Оранжевая роза захотела стать полевым цветком, начала мечтать о лугах и лесах.'⁵⁸⁴

In Stanislavsky's perception the action was circular: once the threat of destruction was averted, it returned to its starting point and Natal'ia Petrovna was to be immured once more in her glass-house. He viewed this as a

⁵⁸²Konstantin Stanislavskii, "'Mesiats v derevne'", in *Moia zhizn' v iskusstve* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1972), pp. 368-374 (p. 368).

⁵⁸³The idea that Beliaev's spontaneous behaviour draws him into close contact with nature can be seen to be in direct opposition to Rakitin's response. In Act II Natal'ia Petrovna highlights the artificiality of this aesthete's relationship with nature; she suggests that Nature cannot understand his language because he courts it as a perfumed marquis on little red-heeled shoes might court a peasant girl. See I. Turgenev, *Mesiats v derevne*, Act II, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 28 vols *Stseny i komedii 1849-1852*, III, (Moscow-Leningrad: Akademii Nauk, 1962), pp. 75-76.

⁵⁸⁴Stanislavskii, *Moia zhizn'*, p. 368.

restoration of social order, a triumph of duty over desire, which in turn would ensure the continuation of a refined and cultured life-style, with its moral values intact. In Chekhov's drama, set at a later date, the fate of the characters can be seen to be historically determined, the result of forces beyond their immediate control. In *A Month in the Country* by contrast the gentry were still empowered, because the values that their upbringing had fostered (and that Stanislavsky so prized) were the very means of their self-preservation.

Turgenev's heroine is twenty-nine, but in his notes, as Solov'eva has observed, Stanislavsky frequently referred to Natal'ia Petrovna as younger, suggesting instead that she was eighteen or nineteen.⁵⁸⁵ Her youth, inexperience and naivety, manifest in her inability to comprehend or control her new-found emotions, for him were part of her charm. But these very traits also threatened to cause her downfall, and he also therefore viewed her negatively as a 'weak woman', in need of schooling by Rakitin. Accordingly, she was not to be ruled by passion or to follow the dictates of her misguided heart. Instead, although she erred, she was ultimately to be governed by her sense of honour and duty — the codes of behaviour in which she had been educated. To borrow his own metaphor, the 'corset' she wore was therefore not a restrictive garment but her coat of armour.

For Stanislavsky, however, the real saviour of standards, and therefore the representative of his whole 'ruling idea', was Rakitin.⁵⁸⁶ His own performance in that role won him unanimous acclaim and came to be seen as one of his greatest triumphs. Poised and handsome, elegantly attired in a blue period coat,

⁵⁸⁵Solov'eva, note, p. 106.

⁵⁸⁶In the process of rehearsal, Stanislavsky broke the elements of the actors' performances and the production into more readily manageable parts, but suggested that these separate elements should ultimately be melded together and follow a specific pathway. In this manner the performance should move in the direction of a 'ruling idea', the concept that underlay the actors' interpretations, and the production as a whole. For further details, see Magashack, 'Stanislavsky', pp. 266-269.

his every gesture controlled and delicate, he epitomised the very essence of grace and refinement.

Rejected by Natal'ia Petrovna, to whom he cannot express his love, and fully aware of the feelings aroused in her by Beliaev, Rakitin undoubtedly suffers a private torment. In Turgenev's script he gives vent to the trauma, humiliation and indignity of his position in monologues unheard by the other characters. In Stanislavsky's portrayal this repression of emotion was also apparent, as Nikolai Efros recalled, in his economy of gesture and use of the very slightest vocal modulations. Such a style of performance, that critic maintained, was right for Rakitin, an aesthete elegant in all things, in both word and feeling, beautifully world-weary and condescendingly scornful of life.⁵⁸⁷ Clearly this suggestion of scarcely perceptible, suppressed emotions was fundamental to Stanislavsky's conception. He saw Rakitin as a man motivated by a sense of duty and bound by codes of honour so deeply ingrained, according to Solov'eva, that they were part of his very being; so deeply indeed that he interpreted the role, without the slightest hint of irony, in the spirit of a chivalrous knight of old.⁵⁸⁸ His performance won him high praise for the subtlety and apparent authenticity with which he conveyed inner emotions. However, as Stroeveva suggested, he also turned Rakitin into a symbolic figure, in whom the spiritual values of the past were celebrated and preserved.⁵⁸⁹

This sense of celebration and preservation was emphasised too in the production's set, designed by a member of the World of Art group, M. Dobuzhinskii, whose strikingly beautiful and graceful settings frequently produced spontaneous and rapturous applause and high critical praise. Moreover, they captured the spirit of the era in a manner never to be repeated on

⁵⁸⁷N. Efros, 'Turgenev v Khudozhestvennom teatre', *Rech'*, 12 December 1909, in *Vinogradskaja*, p. 215.

⁵⁸⁸Solov'eva, pp. 103, 109.

⁵⁸⁹Stroeveva, *Rezhisserskie* (1973), p. 252.

the stage of the MAT. The production was therefore a celebratory hymn to a bygone era of sophistication and refined feeling, and also its swan-song:

Последний раз в своей истории Художественный театр с такой лирической силой воскрешал на сцене поэзию прошлого. Словно прощаясь с ней и не желая расстаться, он как будто говорил своим зрителям: нет, посмотрите, все-таки есть в этом уходящем и гибнущем нечто такое, что неподвластно времени, что навсегда сохранит в себе черты душевного благородства истинной русской культуры.⁵⁹⁰

Paradoxically, however, although these settings represented, symbolically and in reality, the end of an era, Stanislavsky's actual approach to them was a new departure. Previously he had been concerned to create an architecturally accurate picture of the period and to produce an illusion of reality. To achieve this, particularly in his productions of Chekhov, he had loaded his sets with a large number of authentic props and decorative features. His approach to *A Month in the Country*, by contrast, was governed by three different concepts. Firstly, his overriding concern was to explore the psychological nuances of character. Secondly, he wished to express what he saw as the essence of the play by evoking an atmosphere of stability and quiet, which in his opinion was typical of its time. Finally, although the settings incorporated realistic features, they were somewhat stylised, and intended to express his central ideas through the use of visual symbols.

The subdued colours in the outdoor scenes, in Acts II and IV, were meant to create an autumnal mood, and thus to symbolise the gentry's slow decline.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 251.

⁵⁹¹Dobuzhinskii took some artistic licence here. Russian autumns tend to be very short and there is little in the script to suggest that the play is set in autumn. On the contrary it appears to be late summer. This is indicated in the following: in Act I we learn that Beliaev has taken a vacation post, and it can therefore be assumed that he intends to return to Moscow for the

Similarly, Stanislavsky's sense of order restored was to be incorporated into the stage picture. As the designer would later recall:

[Станиславский] ждал от меня, чтобы в конечном итоге декорация отвечала духу пьесы и смыслу ее — в данном случае — картине уютной и тихой помещичьей жизни, где в доме все места «насижены», все устойчиво и куда врывается «буря», но, когда она утихает, все остается на своем месте и жизнь опять течет по прежнему руслу.⁵⁹²

The sets for the first and final acts, which in keeping with Turgenev's directions were identical, were conceived in the so-called Empire style of the 1840s, a period characterised by symmetry and balance, qualities which were emphasised throughout. They depicted an elegant semi-circular drawing-room; its walls were painted in a delicate dove-grey, with a dark blue flower-patterned cornice, topped by a white stucco ceiling, in the centre of which hung a gilded chandelier. The stage was covered by highly-polished parquet flooring with a rose pattern in its centre. An arched window in the back wall revealed a view of the estate, but this, rather than depicting an unruly countryside, was in the style of the planned symmetry of the parks of St. Petersburg.⁵⁹³ Objects, furniture and pictures to the left of this window were a mirror image of those on its right, and the V-shaped sitting-room for Act III had a similar sense of balance.

Such symmetrical features were meant to symbolise the equilibrium and harmony of an idealised vision of the past. But as Solov'eva observed this symmetry, together with the use of semi-circular walls, which reduced the depth

autumn semester; in Act II Katia is picking raspberries (a summer fruit); and in this act she, Natal'ia Petrovna and Rakitin all mention that it is a very hot day.

⁵⁹²M. Dobuzhinskii, 'O Khodozhestvennom teatre', *Novyi zhurnal*, 1943, 30-40 (pp. 37-38) in Vinogradskaia, p. 177. Dobuzhinskii was clearly referring here to the gathering storm mentioned by Rakitin in Act I.

⁵⁹³Leonid Grossman, *Teatr Turgeneva* (St. Petersburg: Brokgaus-Efron, 1924), p. 153.

of the stage, evoked in addition a feeling of containment.⁵⁹⁴ The effect was the opposite of that created in many of Stanislavsky's previous productions, in which the diagonal lines of the walls had extended off-stage to suggest that life continued beyond the sight-lines. Instead the audience were presented with a clearly-defined playing area, as though the characters' lives were confined to this space alone.

This feeling of confinement, however, was not only a feature of the setting. As Dobuzhinskii noted, it was also in accord with the actors' style of performance:

Эта симметрия и «уравновешенность», которая так типична для интерьера русского ампира, отвечала и намерениям Станиславского в этой постановке создать атмосферу спокойствия и дать внешнюю неподвижность актерам при всей внутренней напряженности чувства и как бы «пригвоздить» их к местам.⁵⁹⁵

Stanislavsky's *A Month in the Country* came at a time when he was exploring new ideas of acting that would give rise to his famous 'system'. His focus was shifting away from an emphasis on the externals of a production towards greater concern for an inner, psychological authenticity. The play was eminently suited to his purpose, he maintained, because Turgenev had woven the lace-work of the psychology of love (тонкие любовные кружева) with such delicacy and mastery that it demanded a particularly subtle approach.⁵⁹⁶ He believed, furthermore, that revealing the spiritual and emotional essence of the characters' inner worlds could not be achieved by the established conventions of gesture and movement, and therefore proposed an almost static *mise-en-scène*. The actors were to stay seated, almost motionless, for long periods, using what he

⁵⁹⁴Solov'eva, p. 104.

⁵⁹⁵Dobuzhinskii, in Vinogradskaiia, p. 186.

⁵⁹⁶Stanislavskii, *Moia zhizn'*, p. 368.

described as 'unseen rays of creative will and emotion', 'psychological pauses', eye movements and barely perceptible changes of intonation to convey the characters' feelings.⁵⁹⁷

A long and arduous rehearsal process began in August 1909. His new ideas met with considerable and understandable resistance from actors who in the main were experienced performers.⁵⁹⁸ Knipper, whom he also rehearsed as Natal'ia Petrovna in private, perhaps had the hardest time. A talented and seasoned performer, she later described working with Stanislavsky as both a joy and a torment, but more of the second than the first.⁵⁹⁹

When the production opened on 9 December she was singled out for particular censure. N. Iatsev, for instance, remarked that she lacked refinement and humour, and Nikolai Efros stated that her portrayal left him cold and unmoved.⁶⁰⁰ These opinions were not shared by all, but her performance drew a mixed response, which undoubtedly reflected her difficulties in rehearsals. By contrast, there was almost unanimous critical acclaim for the other actors and the production as whole. Beliaev was played by the handsome R. Boleslavskii. Dressed in a student's uniform, wearing a cap and with Romantic flowing hair, his portrayal was said to have been characterised by a sense of spontaneity,

⁵⁹⁷*Ibid.*

Stanislavsky distinguished between a logical pause that shaped the written text and so made it intelligible, and a 'psychological pause', which added life to thoughts, as an eloquent silence capable of transmitting the performer's emotions to an audience. Reynolds Hapgood, p. 106.

Stanislavsky described these unseen rays of communication in terms of 'ray-emission' and 'ray-absorption'. He argued that whereas under normal circumstances these rays were invisible, in moments of heightened emotion or stress they became more clearly defined and perceptible, both to those emitting them and to those absorbing them. This enabled actors therefore to communicate with each other, as well as conveying their inner thoughts to their audiences. Magashack, 'Stanislavsky', pp. 257-259.

⁵⁹⁸For further details on the rehearsal process, see Worrall, *Moscow Art*, pp. 182-198.

⁵⁹⁹Worrall, *Moscow Art*, p. 186. In early November, pushed to the point of emotional exhaustion, she suffered something like a nervous breakdown, so that rehearsals had to be suspended until she recovered. Knipper's difficulties in rehearsal resulted in a famous exchange of letters between her and Stanislavsky; see Letter to Ol'ga Knipper, in Stanislavskii, *Sobranie* VII, pp. 453-454; and for Knipper's response, see Vinogradskaia, p. 211.

⁶⁰⁰Quoted in Grossman, p. 158.

natural purity and youthfulness.⁶⁰¹ The highest approbation was reserved, however, for Stanislavsky's refined and delicate playing of Rakitin. In *My Life in Art*, he interpreted this as a ringing endorsement of his new approach:

Спектакль и, в частности, я сам в роли Ракитина имели очень большой успех. Впервые были замечены и оценены результаты моей долгой лабораторной работы, которая помогла мне принести на сцену новый, необычный тон и манеру игры, отличавшие меня от других артистов. Я был счастлив и удовлетворен не столько личным актерским успехом, сколько признанием моего нового метода.⁶⁰²

Although the first acclaimed and successful production of the play had been staged at the Aleksandrinskii in January 1879, Stanislavsky's interpretation did much to establish Turgenev as a dramatist of real standing, and marked a significant development in the history of the MAT. Moreover, his perception that Rakitin was its true protagonist, as Lordkipanidze has observed, came to be seen as entirely appropriate, not to say the 'correct' interpretation for several decades. Indeed by the mid-1970s, although the work was rarely performed, the role of Natal'ia Petrovna was viewed in serious critical studies as a secondary one.⁶⁰³ Efros, characteristically, was to break with this established idea: in 1977 he created what Smelianskii described as a 'concerto for violin and orchestra', by making her the centre of attention.⁶⁰⁴ For the present writer that decision restored the more obvious dramatic focus of Turgenev's play.

He not only saw Natal'ia Petrovna as the protagonist but also viewed her very differently from Stanislavsky. For Efros it was of central importance that she

⁶⁰¹Grossman, p. 162.

⁶⁰²Stanislavskii, *Moia zhizn'*, p. 370.

⁶⁰³N. Lordkipanidze, "'Mesiats v derevne'", *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 10 October 1977, p. 3.

⁶⁰⁴Smelianskii, *Nashi*, p. 142. This is also the title of an article on the production by the same critic. See A. Smelianskii, 'Koncert dlia skriпки s orkestrom', *Teatr*, 11 (1978) 42-48.

was a mature woman who felt that her time had passed. At the end of Act II, after Vera, Beliaev and Kolia, accompanied by Natal'ia Petrovna, have left for the kite-flying expedition, Dr. Shpigel'skii, Lizaveta Bogdanovna and Rakitin are left to bring up the rear, and the Doctor's exit line to Rakitin is: 'Авангарду, вы знаете, очень легко следаться ариергардом...Все дело в перемене дирекции.'⁶⁰⁵ Efros identified in this jest the central theme of his production: time marches on, and an older generation must give way to a younger. But in this scene and throughout the drama, in his view, Natal'ia Petrovna resisted becoming part of the rearguard. For him she had squandered her youth by marrying a man she did not love, and on the threshold of her thirties was afraid of growing old; she therefore attempted to recapture a life never lived, and experience passions, joys and torments never felt.⁶⁰⁶

The catalyst for these newly-felt emotions is Beliaev, in whom she sees the hope of renewal. He, however, initially seems oblivious to his effect on his employer, treating her with the deference due to her age and station, not as someone for whom he dares to feel affection, and focuses his attention on Verochka, his equal in years and status. Efros in fact suggested that Natal'ia Petrovna's feelings for him were kindled first less by his interest in her ward than by his *lack* of interest in herself, which confirmed her worst fears about growing old:

У Натальи Петровны любовь началась, мне кажется, с ревности, даже с зависти. Внезапно, совершенно неожиданно для нее, оказалось задетым ее самолюбие. Приехал новый учитель. Он молод, независим и до чрезвычайности к ней равнодушен. Для этого человека...она часть дома, как

⁶⁰⁵*Mesiats v derevne*, Act II, p. 90.

⁶⁰⁶Efros, *Professiiia*, p. 51.

Efros also expressed his central ideas elsewhere in simpler terms. Noting that by all the characters other than Islaev she is always addressed formally, using her name and patronymic, he suggested that this was a Natal'ia Petrovna who wanted to be a Natasha. Accordingly, when he directed the play in Japan it was entitled simply *Natasha*. Efros, *Professiiia*, p. 242.

вот эта витая колонна или этот деревянный стол на веранде. Так ей, во всяком случае, кажется. И это не только обидно, это повергает в самые грустные размышления о себе, о своей жизни, о своем возрасте.⁶⁰⁷

She is tormented by believing not only that her youth has gone but also that it was never lived. Indeed, in Act I she confides in Beliaev that her life as a child was controlled by a strict, frightening father, in whose presence she never felt free. Later, as he became old and blind, she cared for him but was still terrified, and believes that traces of her early fears and long captivity have stayed with her.⁶⁰⁸ Efros noted also that she feels under constant watch, imprisoned by the keen eyes of the ever-present Rakitin.⁶⁰⁹ Taking this as his cue, and when working with his actors, he rejected the notion that she falls in love with Beliaev simply because he is younger than she. Instead he saw her desire to relive her life as a revolt against her sense of imprisonment, a bid for liberation from both her past and her present.⁶¹⁰ For him the principal conflict therefore was not, as for Stanislavsky, between nature and nurture, but centred on feelings of entrapment and freedom.

Freedom, at least in Natal'ia Petrovna's eyes, was personified in Beliaev, but also represented symbolically by his kite, a huge paper creation with a ten-foot-long tail. According to Turgenev's script it is flown once off stage, at the end of Act II, but in Efros's production it became a recurring motif. He also found his own metaphor for this association between freedom and flight, a particularly apposite one because it expressed at the same time the flurry of Natal'ia Petrovna's agitated emotions and the real tragedy of her plight:

⁶⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁶⁰⁸*Mesiats v derevne*, Act I, p. 62.

⁶⁰⁹Efros, *Professii*, p. 51.

⁶¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 336.

Я где-то читал, что есть бабочки, которые живут один день. Утром они появляются на свет из куколки, а вечером умирают, породив личинок... Я подумал, что у этой бабочки не существует сознания собственного несчастья, как не существует его в нас только оттого, что мы живем меньше, чем орлы, например... Но вот представьте себе бабочку, в которой не просто проснулось сознание... но проснулось то *сравнительное* сознание мизерности отпущенного ей для жизни времени... А вот эту бабочку стало мучить. Она узнала, что другие бабочки живут два или три дня, а некоторые даже — целое лето, и что есть орлы и есть горы и многое другое. И ей захотелось прожить жизнь другой бабочки или даже орла. Чем это кончилось — легко себе представить. Она не прожила и дня.⁶¹¹

This butterfly is drawn to a life it has never known, that seems almost unimaginably freer, more fulfilling and more wonderful than its own. This idea in Efros's view was analogous to Natal'ia Petrovna's perception of Beliaev's world: he fascinated her because he came from an unknown faraway place and had experienced a life completely different from hers. But just as the butterfly, though capable of flight, cannot ultimately free itself from the bondage of its existence, so the hopes she pinned on Beliaev would prove vain. The perception of the student as a representative of freedom was Natal'ia Petrovna's alone. It accorded neither with his view of himself nor the image of Beliaev that Efros presented to the spectators. He was in fact a very unlikely candidate for such an exalted status:

То, что для Натальи Петровны звучит как раскрепощение, для Беляева есть реальная жизнь, и у этой реальной жизни — свои пределы, свои оковы, своя несвобода. Он беден, плохо одет, он перевел как-то французский роман, за 50 рублей, не зная французского языка, только оттого, что нужда заела; его

⁶¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 199. (His emphasis).

мучает и смущает отсутствие воспитания, у него свои сложности — бедного человека, который с дамами и говорить-то не умеет, и т. д. и т. п. Одним словом, это вовсе не идеальный, а обыкновенный молодой человек...⁶¹²

Oleg Dal' played Beliaev as childish and free-spirited, but was not dazzlingly handsome and was very simply dressed, in black trousers and a white shirt. His portrayal was very much in keeping with Rakitin's view that he is 'a student like any other', but was a radical departure from Boleslavskii's romantic and heroic one of 1909. It was at odds too with the notion expressed by some Soviet critics that Beliaev is a representative of the *raznochintsy* (nineteenth-century intellectuals of non-aristocratic birth), with a strong resemblance to the revolutionary thinker Belinskii. This view clearly influenced A Kuzicheva; while remarking that Dal's performance was characterised by a sense of gaiety, she criticised what she saw as a lack of intellectual vigour.⁶¹³ Such a naughty, fun-loving Beliaev, she maintained, was a match for Verochka, but could not possibly attract an intelligent woman like Natal'ia Petrovna. Beliaev, who says that his education was neglected as a child, is undoubtedly an autodidact. He also clearly has a lively mind, many practical skills and indeed creative talents. However, his true intellectual prowess, as Efros's own comments made clear, is open to question. In stressing the apparent lack of intellectualism in his portrayal by Dal', Kuzicheva completely misunderstood the director's central point: Natal'ia Petrovna was drawn to Beliaev, not because of his beauty, his mind or any other qualities he might possess, but rather very simply because, in her imagination, he was free.

Kozakov's Rakitin was also very different from more traditional interpretations. He had little of Stanislavsky's knightly nobility. According to V. Potemkin,

⁶¹²*Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁶¹³A. Kuzicheva, "Kak khoroshi, kak svezhi byli rozy...", *Moskovskaia pravda*, 24 December 1977, p. 3.

with his greying temples he looked older than his thirty years and was played as a man who had seen much, whose sense of duty hung heavily upon him, and who seemed, though he lacked the cynicism of Dr. Shpigel'skii, to be almost tired of life.⁶¹⁴ This interpretation was in keeping with Efros's view that Rakitin, like Natal'ia Petrovna, felt that he too might soon have to give ground to the young:

Тут — тема попадания «в арьергард», тема устаревания. Они оба как бы находятся в момент изменения взгляда на мир и пытаются отдать себе отчет в этом. Его монологи не просто монологи ревнующего или обиженного человека. Это попытки разгадать, что *сдвинулось* в мире. Это пьеса о том, что в мире что-то сдвинулось. Как если бы в первый раз люди почувствовали толчок землетрясения, еще не зная из истории, что это такое.⁶¹⁵

The first shocks of an earthquake are at first barely felt, but it gradually increases in strength and intensity until it rips through the earth like a shattering explosion. Efros used precisely this image to describe the slow building of emotional tension that he hoped would underlie the tempo of his production. In his notes he divided the play into three. He meant Acts I and II to be played in a gently flowing rhythm, but the third and fourth acts explosively, until the point at which Islaev discovers Natal'ia Petrovna in what he sees as a compromising position with Rakitin. Here the intensity was to be reduced, but only as a temporary lull, for the rhythm would be forcefully interrupted again by the fervour of her passion in Act V as she protests against Beliaev's imminent departure. The exit of the other characters was then to be followed by the kind of deadly calm that follows a destructive quake. Then her final expression of

⁶¹⁴V. Potemkin, 'Mesiats v dome, gde razbivaiutsia serdtsa', *Vechernii Leningrad*, 17 December 1977, p. 3.

⁶¹⁵Efros, *Professia*, pp. 336-337.

anguish was to be like an after-shock. In contradiction to Turgenev's directions, she would be alone on stage. At the end there was to be absolute stillness, providing a deliberate contrast to the earlier passionate outbursts in order to emphasise her total isolation and tragic desolation.⁶¹⁶

As Efros himself argued, this perception of the play as one of passionate emotions, turmoil and ultimate despair was completely at odds with Stanislavsky's description of it as 'a delicate canvas of love which Turgenev wove with such mastery'.⁶¹⁷ In fact, Efros later admitted that he had reacted angrily against what had been the traditional approach: 'Мне казалось, что Тургенев вовсе не такой элегичный, спокойный, как многие его воспринимают. Мне нужно было извлечь из Тургенева всю его драматичность.'⁶¹⁸

He rejected too the idea of containment that had characterised the MAT production:

Да и так ли уж сдержан Тургенев? У нас странное представление о классиках, о Чехове, например, или Тургеневе. Мы заковываем их в жесткий корсет. Между тем они полны огня, ... часто — *открытого огня*.

Пьесу «Месяц в деревне» запрещала цензура, а теперь мы часто выдаем ее за дистиллированную воду.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 337-378.

⁶¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁶¹⁸Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 99. (His emphasis).

⁶¹⁹Efros, *Professia*, pp. 55-56. (His emphasis).

Turgenev wrote the play in Paris between 1848 and 1850. First called *The Student* and then *Two Women*, it was intended for publication in *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*), but ran into trouble with the censors who demanded changes on both moral and political grounds. The love of a married woman for a man other than her spouse was deemed an unsuitable subject for the Russian stage. Accordingly, Natal'ia Petrovna was to be turned into a widow and her husband Islaev eliminated. Similarly, several sections from Dr. Shpigel'skii's monologues in which he referred to the poverty of his childhood and his hatred of his benefactor, together with passages that expressed his contemptuous and hypocritical attitude towards the gentry, were also to be expunged. Renamed *A Month in the Country*, the play first appeared in print, with the cuts demanded and some other minor changes, in *Sovremennik* in 1855, and was later

Nevertheless, although he reacted so strongly in print against traditional interpretations, to judge from critical comments and video evidence not all the ideas he articulated in theory were translated into performance. In truth his production, though highly charged emotionally, had a subtle, poetic quality not seen in his previous work. In fact in this, and in several other respects, his *A Month in the Country* can be seen as to some degree a repudiation of his earlier approaches to the classics. Furthermore, although he made no attempt to resurrect Stanislavsky's 1909 production, his interpretation seemed indebted in some ways to the practices of the MAT. It was almost as if Efros, who had once conducted ardent polemics with the past, was engaged instead now in a dialogue with his predecessor. This was to be seen in the way his production of the play evoked the atmosphere of its era, his concern for the inner emotional lives of the characters, and in what was for the most part a gracious and fluent style of performance.

Smelianskii has described the production as something of an 'artistic compensation' (внутренняя художественная компенсация) on Efros's part for his 'mercilessly objective' *Seagull* at the Lenkom.⁶²⁰ It would be quite wrong to suggest that his staging of Turgenev constituted an apology for his treatment of Chekhov, but there is some truth in Smelianskii's observation, as the following comparative analysis shows.

Whereas he had divorced *The Seagull* from its historical context, in *A Month in the Country* he sought to evoke the atmosphere of its time, principally by the use of music (albeit music of an even earlier date). The action was accompanied

included in an edition of Turgenev's collected works published in 1869. This edition retained all but one of the censor's cuts. A complete, authoritative edition of the play, with the passages restored, was not published until 1962.

⁶²⁰Smelianskii, *Nashi*, p. 139.

throughout by excerpts from Mozart's 40th Symphony.⁶²¹ As Liudmilla Bakshi has noted, that symphony has plaintive passages, which for her reflected the sorrowful atmosphere that surrounded Natal'ia Petrovna, while its rising crescendos and dying diminuendos expressed the theme of 'unspent feelings' and her desire to reach unattainable goals.⁶²² Mozart's work is also characterised, however, by delicate tremolos and repeated whirling motifs that create a enchanting lightness. Moreover, excerpts were played with such frequency that the whole production seemed to have been scored. This created an overall sense of harmony, and at magical moments evoked a subtle tranquillity, so that although, as we shall see, there was little in Efros's setting to suggest the period of the play, the mood that prevailed throughout had something in common with Stanislavsky's 'epic quiet of the Russian estates'.

Whereas at the Lenkom Efros had analysed Chekhov's characters with a degree of detachment that allowed him to reveal but not excuse their defects, his attitude to Turgenev's was far less judgmental. He likened Natal'ia Petrovna's love for Beliaev to a mental illness which (in the course of the action) gradually took total command of her.⁶²³ Accordingly, as E. Tikhvinskaia observed, he did not censure her reprehensible treatment of her ward, because this was something over which she had effectively no control.⁶²⁴ Similarly, although his Rakitin lacked the romantic qualities of Stanislavsky's knight in shining armour, Efros shared the view that the character was entirely honourable. Thus, according to Potemkin, Rakitin's willingness to assist Shpigel'skii's scheme to marry off Verochka in order to obtain a *troika* of horses from Bol'shintsov, behaviour ill-

⁶²¹Given that Mozart wrote this symphony in August 1788, some sixty-seven years before Turgenev's play was first published, it is not my intention to imply that the music *per se* created a sense of period, but rather that certain of its qualities evoked a similar mood to that manifest in Stanislavsky's production.

⁶²²Liudmilla Bakshi, "'Tam, gde konchaiutsia slova...'", *Don*, 3 (1981), 185-189 (p. 187).

⁶²³Efros, *Professia*, p. 76.

⁶²⁴E. Tikhvinskaia, 'Drama pozdnei liubvi', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 22 July 1980, p. 5.

fitting a man of honour, was also not condemned.⁶²⁵ In fact, as Ia. Bilinkis noted, any judgment of the characters was left entirely to the audience.⁶²⁶

Finally, whereas from the beginning of Chekhov's play Efros had urged his actors to inject aggression into their performances and had sought throughout to reveal raw emotions, forcing to the surface what might have been seen as sub-text and making it the substance of the work, in 1977 his overall tone was gentler: especially in the first two acts (although this was consistent with his wish to suggest the gradual build-up of an earthquake) emotions were kept in check. The submergence of an emotional sub-text was also usually seen as more characteristic of Stanislavsky's earliest productions than of his.

Efros described the opening acts as the 'revelation' of the secret that Natal'ia Petrovna believes is known to her alone.⁶²⁷ At the opening Turgenev sites the action in two places: Anna Semenovna, Lizaveta Bogdanovna and Shaaf are seated stage-left playing *préférence*, while stage-right Rakitin is reading to Natal'ia Petrovna in French. The conversations interconnect, separate and then intersect once more. In addition, Natal'ia Petrovna interrupts the reading three times with questions and observations, forcing Rakitin each time to begin at the same line. For Efros the alternating rhythms inherent in Turgenev's lines reflected what he described as the 'zig-zag' of the heroine's emotions.⁶²⁸ Ol'ga

⁶²⁵Potemkin, p. 3.

The perception, shared by Stanislavsky and Efros, that Rakitin is consistently honourable and a man whose behaviour is beyond reproach, is problematic. There are at least two points in Turgenev's script (other than that indicated by Potemkin) that belie this conception. In Act III, for instance, when Natal'ia Petrovna despairs at the prospect of being alone if he and Beliaev leave together, Rakitin suggests that he can delay his own departure by a few days. Natal'ia Petrovna is immediately suspicious, believing that, with Beliaev gone, Rakitin is hoping to stay and continue their relationship as before. Although Rakitin is insulted by her inference, it is possible to suggest that he does indeed harbour an ulterior motive. *Mesiats v derevne*, Act III, pp. 107-108. Similarly, in Act V, Rakitin's words to Beliaev undermine his reiterated claims to be an honourable man; having just confessed his love for Natal'ia Petrovna to Islaev, he lies to the young tutor, saying that his friend has no grounds to suspect him. *Mesiats v derevne*, Act V, pp. 144-145.

⁶²⁶Ia. Bilinkis, "Mesiats v derevne", *Smena*, 17 December 1977, p. 3.

⁶²⁷Efros, *Professia*, p. 50.

⁶²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 58-61.

Skorochkina had high praise for Iakovleva's ability to express a wide range of moods, a sentiment which was echoed by Fridshtein.⁶²⁹ Completely in tune with her role, she moved from gaiety to seductiveness, from intellectual debate to the pensiveness of her monologues, frequently performed under a single spot. Moreover, whereas Knipper's performance was said to have lacked humour, Iakovleva displayed a mischievous playfulness. For instance, at the first appearance of Bronevoi's Dr. Shpigel'skii she offered him a chair, but as he made to sit adroitly pulled it from under him. However, in the first two acts in particular, she expressed herself through languid, controlled gestures, which only occasionally revealed her inner tension. The grace and lightness of her bearing was considerably enhanced by the floating layers of a light-weight costume and strips of silk thread that hung from her shoulders to her feet. Even in her more passionate scenes in later acts, she again produced moments of calm and returned to her initial graciousness. Not until her final moments did she truly give vent to the torments of her heart. Iakovleva was the driving force of the production, controlling much of its momentum, so that the other actors' performances were similarly modulated and conveyed a quiet intensity.

In contrast to Stanislavsky's restricted spaces, Efros provided his actors with an open playing area, only one long seat and a single garden chair, and at times the action moved at an electric pace. Tikhvinskaia suggested that it was as if the events took place not over a month but in a few hours.⁶³⁰ Efros's company did not play at the even tempo of the MAT, and were not constrained as Stanislavsky's had been in their physical means of expression. For instance in Act I, when Islaev and Beliaev were discussing the building project, Natal'ia Petrovna climbed up onto a balustrade and listened to their conversation seated

⁶²⁹Ol'ga Skorochkina, 'Ol'ga Iakovleva', *Teatr*, 1 (1982) 55-63 (p. 62). Iu. Fridshtein, 'Taina aktrisy', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 7 March 1987, p. 3.

⁶³⁰Tikhvinskaia, p. 5. This comment is useful as a description of the alacrity of pace at some points in the action, but contains an inaccuracy. The events in the play do not take place over a month. We learn from Verochka in the middle of Act I that Beliaev has been living on the estate for twenty-eight days, but the five acts cover only four days.

on a rail. However, the pace was often slowed, and therefore this production lacked the sense of near-constant urgency to which Efros in the past had often goaded his actors. The actors' movements, furthermore, were supported by the music, which according to Komissarzhevskii had the effect of moving the characters onward, as though calling them to its melody.⁶³¹ Thus for the most part their actions were delicate and flowing as if they had been carefully choreographed, and provided a deliberate contrast to the moments of more frenetic activity. This was seen especially in the recurrent flying of the kite, which was performed as a gracious ballet.

In the middle of Act I, after Bronevoi had delivered, at lightning speed, his comic tale about the antics of his acquaintance's daughter, Dal' entered as Beliaev, bearing his kite aloft. He was followed by a laughing Verochka, who skipped about, attempting to seize it from his grasp. She caught the end of its long tail and they encircled the playing area, moving around the assembled cast, and leaping and dancing very much in the style of a *pas de deux*. This action was repeated at the end of Act II and witnessed by the others, who were seated in a row like an on-stage audience. Verochka was played by E. Korneva. Although a little old for the part, she portrayed the childish joy of her character with particular charm. Later in Act IV she provided a poignant counter-point to Dr. Shpigel'skii's mocking song by appearing alone and circling as she had done twice before with Beliaev. But this time her once joyous dancing was replaced by angular motions that expressed her anguish at her guardian's betrayal, and created the impression of a young bird attempting to fly with broken wings.

The performers' physical expression was assisted in no small degree by the kinetic set designed by Efros's son, Dmitrii Krymov. Efros had seen a Polish

⁶³¹Komissarzhevskii, "Zhenit'ba", p. 104.

production of *Month in the Country*, directed by Adam Hanuskiewicz at the People's Theatre in Warsaw, and played in the round. The stage floor had been covered by a small field of real grass, on which flowers and a cherry tree had been rooted. It also featured a running brook, from which, at the opening, a pair of hounds drank real water.⁶³² Although he remarked on the prettiness of this setting, in his own production he rejected any attempt at realism. In contrast to Stanislavsky's idea of a glass-house protected from the world, Efros's production was played entirely outdoors, as though the characters lived not apart from nature but within it. This effect was enhanced by the costumes, most of which were in similar styles and hues and blended with the background.

As Rakitin, Kozakov was dressed in grey trousers with a faint stripe, a yellow waistcoat, a blue cravat and a velvet coat of burgundy brown. Dr. Shpigel'skii wore grey, wide-striped trousers, and a green coat with a darker decorative trim. Islaev was similarly costumed, in a shorter brown coat with black trimmings and a cream waistcoat, while Verochka darted on to the stage in a pale green summer dress with short puffed sleeves. She later changed into one of cream and chocolate, tied with a long brown ribbon under her bosom. Natal'ia Petrovna had four costumes: for Act II she changed from her flowing dress into a rich, dark-green silk one with a full flounce and trimmings, and cooled herself with a feather-covered fan. In Act III, reflecting her elation after the kite-flying expedition the previous day, she tripped on in a more frivolous dress of deep pink, with three-quarter length sleeves and a decorative bodice, carrying a parasol. In the final act, in which Beliaev appeared in a blue jacket, she wore a costume with long flowing sleeves and a dark yellow bodice, decorated with a pattern in burgundy which matched the colour of her hooped skirt.

⁶³²Efros, *Professii*, pp. 50-51.

Krymov created a backdrop of brown and amber yellow whose colours had bled into each other (as though washed in water). This created the effect of golden sunlight filtering through the foliage of branches in a wood, a setting which, by contrast with Dobuzhinskii's autumnal colours, generated the atmosphere of the torpid heat of summer.⁶³³ The stage floor, washed in blue light, was bare, and could be entered from several points. For Potemkin, setting the work in the open, at a point where all the characters converged, created the sense that the action took place at a crossroads.⁶³⁴ This was in keeping with the director's idea that the characters have reached a point of irrevocable change in their lives.

At the MAT Dobuzhinskii had used four separate sets, but Efros ignored Turgenev's directions for changes and performed the play on a single set. This allowed the action to flow freely from one act to the next, and (in keeping with his approach in previous productions) succeeded in translating many of the work's central themes into a single scenic metaphor. A two-tiered, circular structure was placed centre-stage. Its top layer, supported on ornate pillars, and surrounded on all sides by a balustrade, was reached by steps at the back of the stage. This staircase projected outwards and downwards to a landing, and then turned at right angles so that its lower part ran parallel to the back wall. The upper level allowed the actors to make interesting use of vertical dynamics, and several dialogues were spoken with one actor on the stage and the other above.

The structure looked like a gazebo or bandstand, and was made of metal shaped into a filigree-like fretwork, incorporating flowers and interlacing curves. Its

⁶³³Mikhail Kozakov, 'I teatr — eto vsego lish' samopoznanie', in Smelianskii and Egoshina, pp. 207-224 (p. 221).

⁶³⁴Potemkin, p. 3.

delicately woven metal was intended perhaps as a reference to Natal'ia Petrovna's lines in Act I:

А вы видали, как кружево плетут? В душных комнатах, не двигаясь с места... Кружево — прекрасная вещь, но глоток свежей воды в жаркий день гораздо лучше.⁶³⁵

In these lines the heroine is clearly rejecting a man-made object of beauty in favour of a natural phenomenon. Similarly, although Krymov's set was elegant and beautifully constructed, it was artificial and thus out of place in its natural setting. Being made of iron, moreover, it also had a cruel, harsh appearance, as Komissarzhevskii noted. He suggested that all living things — people, birds and flowers — would die here.⁶³⁶ When Natal'ia Petrovna paced within it, moreover, the metal columns and curves resembled prison bars, making it a visual metaphor of her feelings of entrapment.

A long, curved, high-backed bench, in the shape of a half moon, was soldered on to the lower half to form the greater part of the circular side. This was set on a thin metal track that ran all around the edge, so that the seat itself, when pushed by the actors, could revolve through 360°, while the inner floor remained still. This revolving seat turned the entire structure into a fairground carousel, gently whirling around the actors standing within. This contributed to the moments of merriment, and added a further, magical dimension to the gliding and soaring music that accompanied its movements.

A pair of small, wheeled coaches, each about four feet in height, were set either side of the stage. Their shafts held no horses, but their high-backed, roofed

⁶³⁵*Mesiats v derevne*, Act I, p. 46.

⁶³⁶Komissarzhevskii, "Zhenit'ba", p. 104.

seats were large enough for the actors to sit in, and the coaches were periodically pulled back and forth into the action. In the coach stage-left sat a model coachman, dressed in a dark coat, white scarf and little top hat. He carried a whip, which Natal'ia Petrovna at one point took from his hand and idly and playfully whirled. In keeping with the fairground theme, the coachman's face had the bulbous red nose and exaggerated cheeks of a traditional Petrushka puppet. A sense of carnival fun was also a feature of Bronevoi's performance as Dr. Shpigel'skii.

His opening speech, about a woman who loves two men at once, may have something in common with the patter of fairground performers outside a *balagan*, who to attract an audience provide a synopsis of the drama to be performed within. Shpigel'skii's role has elements of the grotesque of the *Commedia dell' Arte*: like a *dottore* of that tradition, he engineers a match between a pretty young girl and an old, dull-witted *pantalone*, Bol'shintsov.⁶³⁷ A cynic and a clown, he has an exaggeratedly theatrical manner and is a renowned raconteur. As Smelkov remarked, Bronevoi clearly enjoyed the part, playing it like a number in a variety show (концертно).⁶³⁸ He exhibited, however, a gleeful cruelty in his treatment of the benighted Bol'shintsov, played by K. Glazunov. The latter's diminutive stature and gangly appearance made for a farcical contrast with a portly Bronevoi, who succeeded therefore, in Potemkin's view, in being at once comic and frightening.⁶³⁹ In fact, in the midst of Efros's playful and elegant carnival something darker, tragic, and destructive could be felt to be brewing.

Indeed, if Stanislavsky's final setting can be seen to have symbolised resolution, the restoration of calm after a raging storm, the earthquake that

⁶³⁷Worrall, *Nikolai Gogol*, p. 178.

⁶³⁸Iu. Smelkov, 'I zhizn', i slezy, i liubov", *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 14 October 1977, p. 3.

⁶³⁹Potemkin, p. 3.

gathered in intensity under Efros's carousel-cum-summer-house was to produce at his conclusion a very different effect. Following Beliaev's exit, the departing actors addressed their final lines to each other but also to the audience, as if as both performers and characters they were bidding farewell both to the real spectators and to the tragi-comic spectacle in which they had just played. As noted earlier, Efros rejected the idea of the closed 'circle of attention', arguing instead that active interaction with the audience, a result of breaking the boundaries between the stage and auditorium, produced a much more interesting dynamic.⁶⁴⁰ The actors' exits, therefore, signalled the end of all illusion: both Natal'ia Petrovna's and *L'illusion comique*.

Left alone on stage as the music played gently, Iakovleva sat in the coach stage-left and tapped the puppet-driver on the shoulder, as if asking him to move off after the others. But the coach stayed motionless. As she climbed down the music built into a roaring crescendo, and the actress, clapping her hands over her ears to block out its sound, span and cavorted as though in agony. In a frenzy of near-madness, half-falling, half-running, she returned to the coach. She picked up Beliaev's abandoned kite from its roof. Pressing it to her sobbing face, she moved downstage front. Stage-hands appeared with tools and hammers and began to dismantle the set, like workers when a fair is leaving town. As the twisted metal shapes piled up, in Smelianskii's account, the blows of the hammers sounded like axes in a cherry orchard, as the bewitching circle of Turgenev's estate was broken and scattered by the wind of history. The crowbars and mallets brought Efros's production back to the twentieth century with a crashing jolt, to a cacophony of sounds and music like trains in a head-on collision.⁶⁴¹ At the front of the stage Iakovleva was approached by one of the stage-hands, who took her kite. She clutched at its tail, which was

⁶⁴⁰Efros, *Professiiia*, p. 179.

⁶⁴¹Smelianskii, *Nashi*, pp. 146-147.

then pulled through her fingers for its entire length, until she saw, looking down, that her hands held only air.

In the closing moments, trapped in her tragic present and bereft of all hope, Natal'ia Petrovna stood on the same threshold as at the beginning, as though reflecting on her own words in Act III: 'Мы часто своего прошедшего не понимаем ...где же нам отвечать за будущее!'⁶⁴²

Natal'ia Petrovna's future is unknown, but for Efros, with historical hindsight, there was little doubt that it too would end in grief. He, like Stanislavsky, saw *A Month in the Country* as a prelude to *The Cherry Orchard*, and when viewing those works in 1977 understood better than his heroine what fate had in store:

...Она потянулась к той жизни, какая будет когда-нибудь, после того как «дворянских гнезд» уже не будет или почти не будет. Та жизнь ей кажется заманчивой. Она не знает, не может знать, что, по-видимому, так же будет думать в свое время и того же захочет Раневская из «Вишневого сада». Но если бы Наталья Петровна знала, если бы могла знать, чем Раневская кончит!

«...Мама живет на пятом этаже, прихожу к ней, у нее какие-то французы, дамы, старый патер с книжкой, и накурено, неудобно. Мне вдруг стало жаль мамы, так жаль, я обняла ее голову, сжала руками и не могу выпустить. Мама потом все ласкалась, плакала». (Аня. «Вишневый сад».)⁶⁴³

In 1982 Efros produced *A Month in the Country* (*Natasha*) in Japan, but was also requested by his host theatre to re-stage *The Cherry Orchard*, which he had directed there the previous season, so that the company might take both plays on

⁶⁴²*Mesiats v derevne*, Act III, p. 94.

⁶⁴³Efros, *Professiiia*, p. 197.

tour. For several days, therefore, he rehearsed them back-to-back on the same stage: *Natasha* in the mornings and Chekhov's play in the evenings. He found the process intriguing, and noted:

Когда смотришь эти две пьесы одну за другой, приходишь в восторг и одновременно в ужас. В восторг — от их художественного совершенства, их величия. В ужас — от ощущения катастрофически бегущего времени.⁶⁴⁴

In 1975, by setting *The Cherry Orchard* in a graveyard, Efros had seen the destruction of the orchard not as inevitable, but rather, from the outset, as an established fact. This controversial production, like his *Three Sisters* before it, had been interpreted by many as a reflection of the loss of spirituality and culture in Soviet Russia. In 1977, Natal'ia Petrovna's world was completely destroyed, and her hopes for a new future, effectively Efros's present, were shown to have been an illusion. It might therefore be assumed that reactions to *A Month in the Country* would be similar to those produced by Efros's stagings of Chekhov. Interestingly, however, it neither provoked critical uproar nor was viewed as a damning indictment of the society of its time. We must consider why.

For Smelianskii the answer lay in the fact that this production lacked much of the sense of immediacy that had characterised Efros's overtly modern readings of classics in the past, and had therefore created a sense of distance between its audiences and the action.⁶⁴⁵ This estrangement, in Smelianskii's view, was the result, on the one hand, of what he described as its melancholy tone, and on the other of what he saw as the director's fascination with the 'epic quiet' and refinement of the old culture, which was as captivating for Efros as it had been

⁶⁴⁴Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 423.

⁶⁴⁵Smelianskii, *Nashi*, p. 138.

once for Stanislavsky. Efros had presented the past in delicate, pastoral tones, and (as noted in the introduction) this led Smelianskii to identify *A Month in the Country* as part of a new tendency in the theatre of the period to produce Russian classics in a more traditionally lyrical and gentle style.⁶⁴⁶

Efros rejected Smelianskii's interpretation,⁶⁴⁷ asserting that he had intended from the beginning to set the action in the past, but in a way that would make it accessible and comprehensible to a modern audience.⁶⁴⁸ There seems therefore little doubt that he was engaged in a kind of balancing act between the past and the present. Such a view can be substantiated in the responses of other critics. Their opinions divided more or less equally between those who remarked on its sense of old-world charm and others who stressed its feeling of modernity. Bilinkis, for instance, maintained that the director allowed the spectators to delight in and admire the refined behaviour and gracious conversations of the gentry.⁶⁴⁹ Potemkin, by contrast, described it as a fresh and original production, which presented characters with whom the audience could identify closely.⁶⁵⁰

In the theatre, like much of Efros's work, it would be influential long after his death. The central focus of Sergei Zhenovach's production of the play, staged at the Fomenko Studio in 1996, was Galina Tyunina's performance as Natal'ia Petrovna. Zhenovach worked at the Malaia Bronnaia after Efros's departure, and his productions owe a debt to the work of his predecessor. The present writer saw Zhenovach's *A Month in Country* in 1996. Like Efros, Zhenovach succeeded in blending elements of a light, sparkling comedy with the underlying tensions of conflict and tragedy. Vladimir Maksimov's setting, together with

⁶⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁶⁴⁷Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 264-265.

⁶⁴⁸Efros, "'Mesiats v derevne'", *Krasnoiarskii rabochii*, 28 July 1979, p. 3.

⁶⁴⁹Bilinkis, p. 3.

⁶⁵⁰Potemkin, p. 3.

Aleksei Nenashev's lighting and the sporadic use of motifs from Beethoven, evoked a light and delicate atmosphere, complemented by the rotations of two pieces of an incomplete gazebo set centre stage.

The present writer's commentary on Efros's production has been founded throughout on written critiques and also on a close analysis of a video. This, although first shown on Russian television in 1983, was directed by Efros himself, and as he himself declared was not substantially different from the stage performances of 1977.⁶⁵¹ His production, as we have seen, retained some of the features characteristic of his previous work, but also undeniably was indebted to the past, and pointed the way, despite his protestations, towards his 'quieter' approach. As stated in Chapter 1, this change of approach would be most clearly seen in his *Three Sisters* in 1982, and was generated by the personal and professional crises that characterised his later years at the Malaia Bronnaia. These in turn were exacerbated in part by the failure there in 1980 of his production of *Road*.

⁶⁵¹M. Lebedeva, 'Kazhdyi sposoben poniat', *Televidenie i radioveshchanie*, 6 (1983), 46-47 (p. 46). It is well recognised that an analysis of video evidence is fraught with difficulties. The viewer is at the mercy, so to speak, of the camera operator, who controls his/her line of vision. This is an experience very different from that of theatre spectators, who are free to focus where they will. Moreover, the camera has the effect of bringing the viewer inside the action, as it were, and this too alters the relationship between performer and spectator. Furthermore, the very act of filming a production 'fixes' it for all time; it does not therefore allow for those changes in tempo, mood and meaning which naturally occur in a live performance over the course of its run. I do not therefore intend to imply that the television version was identical to the theatre production, but only that it was the same in essence.

Chapter 7

Куда ж несешься ты?

Road
(1980)

Road, an adaptation of Gogol's *Dead Souls* by Veniamin Baliasnyi, was staged by Efros at the Malaia Bronnaia after his return from the USA. In interviews and articles on his career the production was remembered by some as flawed but regarded by most as a complete failure. When it opened on 24 January 1980 it received qualified and cautious responses from some reviewers and was championed by only one, Demidova, who challenged directly the views of 'one of her fellow critics'.⁶⁵² This was a clear reference to Smelianskii, whose article 'Four Circles', to be discussed in more detail later, was published in the highly-respected journal *Teatr*, and influenced to no small degree the view that the production was an unmitigated disaster.⁶⁵³

Staged in an overtly theatrical style, *Road* was indebted to both Meyerhold and Vakhtangov, and challenged Stanislavsky's approach to Bulgakov's adaptation of the novel at the MAT in 1932. But following the publication of Smelianskii's wounding critique, Efros began, as argued in Chapter 1, to reject his earlier work, and to re-discover, indeed to celebrate, the techniques of the MAT. *Road* therefore marked a decisive turning point in the reversal of Efros's ideas.

Stanislavsky's 1932 production had proved a huge popular success, and was to remain in the theatre's repertoire for decades. It had drawn on the talents of seasoned and well-loved actors such as Moskvín (Chichikov), Leonid Leonidov (Pliushkin) and Mikhail Tarkhanov (Manilov), and their performances had become legendary. Although over time these actors had been replaced, their roles were taken by other luminaries of the MAT, who succeeded in recreating vivid and comic portrayals of Gogol's characters that became definitive for generations of audiences and critics alike. For E. Kotok the enduring

⁶⁵²A. Demidova, 'Osobyi mir', *Nedel'ia*, 24-30 March 1980, p. 9. Alla Demidova is an actress who also writes critically about theatre.

⁶⁵³A. Smelianskii, 'Chetyre kruga', *Teatr*, 10 (1980), 26-37. This article is reproduced in Zaionts, pp. 290-312. It also forms the basis of Smelianskii's final chapter 'Vmesto zakliucheniia', in *Nashi*, pp. 347-367.

impression left by what that critic described as inspired performances by stars of the MAT complicated Efros's task of recreating the characters anew.⁶⁵⁴

Since the performance history of *Dead Souls* at the MAT has been thoroughly researched and documented, a full account is unnecessary here.⁶⁵⁵ It is important to note, however, that Stanislavsky's production was a radical reinterpretation of the adaptation of the novel first envisaged by Bulgakov. *Dead Souls*, as has been frequently noted, is a remarkably complex work; it blends realist depiction and descriptive passages with comic hyperbole and the grotesque, and biting satire with mysticism and flights of fancy. The links that allow these apparently disparate elements to cohere are provided throughout in the commentaries and quintessentially Gogolian 'lyrical digressions' by a self-conscious author. The translation of so intricate and nuanced a work to the medium of the theatre is by any estimation an extraordinarily difficult task. Bulgakov for his part stated that for anyone familiar with the novel such an undertaking was 'axiomatically impossible', although this admission did not deter him from accepting the challenge with gusto.⁶⁵⁶ Like Meyerhold in *The Government Inspector* in 1926, he aimed to produce 'the whole of Gogol', to reflect Gogol's fantasy in all its complexity; to this end he researched not only the various versions of the novel but also Gogol's correspondence and the reminiscences of his contemporaries.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁴E. Kotok, 'Fantaziia na goglevskie temy' *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 27 February 1980, p. 3.

⁶⁵⁵For more detailed analyses of this history, see Lesley M. Milne, 'M. A. Bulgakov and *Dead Souls*: The Problems of Adaptation', *Slavonic and East European Review*, LII, 128 (1974), 420-440; K. Rudnitskii, "'Mertvye dushi" MkhAT - 1932', in *Teatral'nye stranitsy* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), pp. 145-85; A. Smeliansky, *Is Comrade Bulgakov Dead?: Mikhail Bulgakov at the Moscow Art Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 175-208, and M. Stroeve, "'Mertvye dushi", in *Rezhisserskie* (1973), pp. 296-317.

⁶⁵⁶Milne, p. 420.

⁶⁵⁷As Milne has noted Bulgakov and Sakhnovskii based their work on the version in volume VII of the tenth edition of Gogol's *Collected Works* edited by N. Tikhonravov and V. Shrenok, published between 1889-1896, which contains all extant variants, drafts and redactions of *Dead Souls*; see Milne, pp. 421-422.

The conception and structure of Bulgakov's version rested on two concepts: firstly, the fact that Gogol had written *Dead Souls* in Rome, and secondly the inclusion of a character representing the writer himself, designated as the Reader (Чтец) or First Person (Первый в пьесе). For Bulgakov Rome evoked a colourful world of guitars, sunshine and macaroni, and moreover had provided Gogol with a remote and delightful vantage-point from which to view what was by contrast a dark and dull provincial Russia.⁶⁵⁸ Bulgakov intended the action to flow between Italy and Russia, an idea incorporated into the early design of the production as conceived by Dmitriev. The Reader had his own part of the stage, which represented a corner of Gogol's study in Italy, and the action as a whole was framed by a Roman portal, through which at different moments views of a verandah, an arbor, Plushkin's orchard and so forth could be seen. The Reader was a complex character. Dressed in the fashion of a Russian traveller of the 1830s, he functioned as a link between the two worlds. In some scenes he was an active participant, in others an aloof observer. He addressed the audience directly, introducing the characters, articulating their thoughts and registering astonishment at their actions. His lines included Gogol's lyrical digressions, and also functioned as a satirical commentary on the grotesque and absurd drama played out before him.

Bulgakov began work on his version in the summer of 1930. At this period Stanislavsky, partly due to illness and partly as result of the changed political circumstances of the time, had largely been absent from the theatre. The task of directing the production had been assigned to Vasilii Sakhnovskii, working under the supervision of Nemirovich-Danchenko and assisted by Bulgakov himself. But in February 1931, one month before the scheduled première, Stanislavsky took over the production. At first he tried to come to an accommodation with the considerable work that Sakhnovskii and Bulgakov had

⁶⁵⁸Smeliansky, *Is Comrade*, p. 195.

put into the project, but their ambitious plans had little in common with his own ideas. Focusing on the humour of the work, he was largely unconcerned either by its lyrical aspects or by Gogol's social critique. From the beginning he was unhappy with the self-conscious author figure and with his lyrical digressions, which interrupted the flow of the action. The role of the Reader was ultimately erased completely; so too was the notion of two contrasting worlds. Moreover, at this period Stanislavsky was working on the development of his techniques of actor training, and almost exclusively on the inner workings of psychology. In a further exploration of the ideas that had governed his much earlier approach to Turgenev, he proposed that gesture be kept to a minimum and limited his performers' mobility. Wanting nothing to detract the audience's attention from the actors, he rejected Dmitriev's exaggerated and stylised settings in favour of the restraint and minimalism of his favoured designer, Simov. Dmitriev had worked with Meyerhold on the early design of *The Government Inspector* in 1926, and his approach to *Dead Souls* demonstrated clearly the influence of this experience.⁶⁵⁹ Thus in dispensing with his work Stanislavsky was also deliberately rejecting Meyerhold's approach, eradicating from his own work its phantasmagorical elements, which in his view owed more to Hoffmann than to Gogol.⁶⁶⁰

His rehearsals at this period were in effect a laboratory for experimentation in acting techniques. Increasingly he concentrated less on the result (blocking a work for the stage, or devising a complete *mise-en-scène*) than on the rehearsal process itself. (Or perhaps more accurately, as Rudnitskii has indicated, his focus narrowed still further to the use of exercises in rehearsals).⁶⁶¹ Working not at the MAT but in the relatively confined space of his private theatre at

⁶⁵⁹Meyerhold later rejected Dmitriev's designs in favour of his own conception.

⁶⁶⁰Smeliansky, *Is Comrade*, p. 196. Bulgakov is said to have disliked Meyerhold's *Government Inspector* but as Milne and Smelianskii have argued convincingly this production of 1926 exerted a considerable influence on Bulgakov's and Sakhnovskii's work; see Milne, pp. 424-429, and Smeliansky, *Is Comrade*, pp. 194-197.

⁶⁶¹Rudnitskii, "Mertvye dushi", p. 174.

home, he therefore tended to rehearse with the actors in pairs, producing finely-honed and vivid comic duos, in which the characters' quirky traits were meticulously detailed. Although the final production was to include some ensemble work, this working method, together with the removal of the Reader as a link between scenes, meant that the play was reduced in effect to a series of duets like variety show performances, that roughly corresponded to the chronology of the novel. By the time the production opened the director had so altered and simplified Bulgakov's original work as to eliminate it almost entirely.⁶⁶² Thus, as Lesley Milne has remarked, Bulgakov's adaptation of the novel, as produced and (later) published, became a 'conscientious' reading of the plot — more *The Adventures of Chichikov* than *Dead Souls*.⁶⁶³

This was not the only occasion on which Stanislavsky showed a high-handed and blatant disregard for Bulgakov's artistic integrity. The conflicts between

⁶⁶²Stanislavsky's rejection of Bulgakov's more complex version appears to have been in keeping with the ideas of previous adapters who took similarly reductive approaches. The first stage adaptation of the novel opened on 9 September 1842 at the Aleksandrinskii in St. Petersburg as a benefit for N. I. Kulikov. Written by Kulikov himself, this simplified version was staged as a vaudeville as part of an evening variety programme of comic pieces and melodramas. It proved popular but was removed from the repertoire after eight performances after the intervention by acquaintances of Gogol to whom the writer appealed in a letter written from Rome in which he stated that he had not given permission for an adaptation of his then new novel. Several more adaptations of the novel were later produced including three more at the Aleksandrinskii; one in 1893 by P. I. Grigor'ev and two in 1889 and 1893 by A. A. Potemkin and V. A. Krylov. These, like that of Stanislavsky, were composed of individual vignettes and scenes that corresponded to the novel's chronology. In 1916 at the Korsh V. K. Tatischev wrote and directed a version in which he chose to ignore the work's satirical content, an aspect which by contrast A. Schvatz emphasised in his musical-hall version staged in Leningrad following the Revolution. Directed by P. Veizbrem, this version, like that of Bulgakov, included Gogol's lyrical digressions. For a more detailed discussion of these productions, see S. Danilov, *Gogol i teatr* (Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1956), pp. 157-62, 221-94.

In 1935 the Uzbek director V. Vitt produced *The Government Inspector*, which in common with Meyerhold's production in 1926, included excerpts from other works by Gogol, including *Dead Souls*. This experimental, fast-paced and farcical production was condemned as 'mistaken' and was said to demonstrate 'dangerous' formalist tendencies. See *Istoriia sovetskogo*, IV (1968), pp. 372-373.

There is some evidence to suggest that Stanislavsky's version of *Dead Souls* was used as part of the official promotion of the MAT as a model for other theatres in the Soviet Union. Selected scenes from the MAT version, together with other pieces from celebrated productions were presented in Latvia when the company toured there in 1940. Later V. Toporkov, who had worked closely with Stanislavsky in his latter years at the MAT staged a revival of *Dead Souls* at the Lettish Theatre in Latvia in 1952. For the actor E. Sil'gis, performing in this production allowed him to become properly acquainted with Stanislavsky's 'system'. See *Istoriia sovetskogo*, V (1969), p. 486.

⁶⁶³Milne, p. 430.

them over the staging of *Molière* in February 1936 are legendary, and as noted above the writer caustically satirized his experiences at the MAT in his lampoon, *The Theatrical Novel*.

Efros, although well-versed in the history of that fraught relationship, always held Stanislavsky in high esteem, and could not therefore bring himself to condemn his behaviour completely. However, there is little doubt that in the debates between the director and author over *Molière* he sided with Bulgakov, with whom he felt a personal affinity. In his staging of *Molière* in 1967 (and later in his film for television) Efros had seen in the experiences of both *Molière* and Bulgakov a reflection of his own difficulties as Artistic Director of the Lenkom, but he had also approached the work in a way he believed was closer to Bulgakov's perception, and thus redressed an imbalance in the original MAT production. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Efros wrote little about *Road*, so that his response to *Dead Souls* at the MAT and his own intentions in adapting the work are largely undocumented. However, Baliasnyi's *Road* incorporated the idea of the dual worlds of Italy and Russia, and included a character called the Author. It might therefore be inferred that Efros's production was intended as a corrective to Stanislavsky's interpretation, and as something of a tribute to Bulgakov, albeit an apparently misguided one.

Stanislavsky's solution to the difficulty of staging so complex a work as *Dead Souls* had been to simplify the task, but the success of the MAT production indicates perhaps that in this he was not altogether mistaken. If his approach was reductive, that of Efros and Baliasnyi was expansive, and it would appear that the root of their problems in staging *Road* lay in its sheer complexity. In fact E. Kotok, noting that Baliasnyi had previously worked with Efros on an adaptation for radio of Jack London's *Martin Eden*, suggested that the perplexing Gogolian fantasy they created was better suited to that medium or to

television than to the stage.⁶⁶⁴ Indeed critics were divided over the stage-worthiness of Baliasnyi's adaptation. Smelianskii remarked that Efros's production was at odds with a 'well-constructed work', and laid the blame for its failure almost entirely on the shoulders of its director.⁶⁶⁵ This was a burden that Efros seemed prepared to bear: he absolved the playwright of responsibility, stating that the script, though complex, was an interesting work.⁶⁶⁶ By contrast, the actor Kozakov identified a flawed script as the chief cause of the production's lack of success.⁶⁶⁷ This view was endorsed to some extent by A. Latynina. Rejecting some of Smelianskii's comments as too harsh, she suggested that he should have paid more attention to Baliasnyi's interpretation of the novel.⁶⁶⁸ Unfortunately the present writer is unable to pass judgment on the script because it remained unpublished and the original manuscript has been lost.⁶⁶⁹ Judging, however, from the descriptions in reviews and articles, Baliasnyi's play was indeed extremely complex.

Based on the first volume of *Dead Souls*, like Bulgakov's version it also incorporated material from Gogol's letters. The action, divided by an interval into two acts, was in four parts, entitled 'Road', 'Auction', 'Ball' and 'Court'. This was a free version of the novel, which blended reality and fantasy, conveying Gogol's world through images, and which, taking for granted that the audience were familiar with the narrative, disrupted (as Stanislavsky had not) the plot structure of the original. For instance, although in the novel

⁶⁶⁴Kotok, p. 3.

⁶⁶⁵Smelianskii, 'Chetyre', p. 32.

⁶⁶⁶Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 282.

⁶⁶⁷Kozakov, 'I teatr', p. 223.

⁶⁶⁸A. Latynina, 'Kanon i "eres' izobretatel'stva"', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 8 (1981) 92-96 (p. 93).

⁶⁶⁹The loss of this manuscript complicates the task of discussing the production in full. This discussion is based on the inevitably subjective commentary of others whose views cannot be countered or confirmed by reference to a written text. The manuscript was held in the archives of the Malaia Bronnaia theatre before being stored in RGALI. However extensive searches in libraries and in both these institutions proved fruitless with each claiming the other had retained it. Efforts to locate the script through scholars and acquaintances in Moscow were equally unsuccessful.

Chichikov conducts his transactions with each landowner in private, in the second part of Act I these were turned into a ensemble piece, staged as a public sale. This was devised in the manner of a simultaneous chess display in which the Grandmaster, Chichikov, played a game with each of his opponents. Some games (or transactions) ended quickly as the antagonist was rapidly defeated, but others continued with mounting tension.

Similar changes to the chronology included the ending of Act I with Chichikov's flight in the famous bird-like *troika*, which takes place in the novel at the end of the first volume. This reversal of events made those of Act II curiously retrospective. The act opened with the ball scene, and culminated in Nozdrev's startling revelations about Chichikov's activities (whereas in the novel it is Nozdrev's rumour-mongering that prompts Chichikov's escape). The final part, invented by Baliasnyi, saw all the characters in turn, and then collectively, argue with and pass judgment on the creator, the Author. As Smelianskii noted, the drama presented the novel in fragments: the action was divided between scenes of grim reality and moments of pure whimsy, lending the play the quality of a dream.⁶⁷⁰ Pul'khritudova similarly described the action as capricious: it not only moved backwards and forwards in time, but also alternated between scenes in which one or two characters appeared and others involving them all.⁶⁷¹

Baliasnyi's intricate adaptation was matched by Efros's no less ambitious *mise-en-scène*. It was played on a single composite set designed by Levental', which in Meyerhold's manner had stylised and exaggerated features and which incorporated, like Dmitriev's, the idea of two worlds. The Author appeared first in a little theatre set centre-stage; its own fanciful backdrop depicted a river

⁶⁷⁰Smelianskii, 'Chetyre', p. 27.

⁶⁷¹E. Pul'khritudova, 'Etot strannyi "Kozel otpushcheniia"', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 7 (1980) 84-89 (p. 89).

bank bathed in sunlight, on which a boat and exotic foliage could be seen. Lighting effects were used to transport the audience between Rome and images of Gogol's Russia: a motionless carriage in front of the mini-theatre, three horses positioned left, right and centre as though they were pulling a *troika*, and a huge tilted wheel hanging over the actors' heads. Demidova was charmed by this setting, which reminded her of the theatre of her childhood.⁶⁷² V. Berezkin suggested, however, that the set pieces remained either purely functional or entirely symbolic, and therefore failed to create a sense of unity.⁶⁷³ Smelianskii too was unimpressed by the set's naive, child-like and all-too-obvious symbolism.⁶⁷⁴

In *A Month in the Country* movement had been choreographed to the music of Mozart. Now Efros used a similar technique for *Road*. However, whereas music had been used for Turgenev's work to generate a sense of unity and harmony, here it was meant to do the opposite. The production was accompanied throughout by excerpts from Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony, a work underscored by tension and characterised by dissonance and discord. For Efros, who characteristically drove the action forwards, creating a sense of urgency and alarm, the music was intended to invoke an atmosphere of phantasmagoria and the macabre. When Shostakovich had written that symphony in 1943, it had caused immediate hostility from members of the musical establishment. They resented the air of foreboding that permeates the work, maintaining that an element of triumphalism might have seemed more appropriate in view of the Red Army's recent victories. It had been withdrawn from performance for some fifteen years, and was only restored to the repertoire after Stalin's death. It is generally accepted to have been intended as a requiem for the victims of Stalinism, but overtly and officially was a memorial to the

⁶⁷²Demidova, 'Osobyi', p. 9.

⁶⁷³V. Berezkin, 'Stsenografiia vtoroi poloviny 70-kh godov', *Voprosy teatra* 81, 174-175.

⁶⁷⁴A. Smelianskii, 'Chetyre kruga', *Teatr*, 10 (1980), 26-37 (p. 27).

casualties of war and in particular of Stalingrad. Thus although for Efros it generated a particular atmosphere his choice of it, in view of its association with anti-war sentiments, was a curious one. Interestingly, the music was almost the only aspect of the production which Smelianskii enjoyed: that very association, he suggested, added another layer of meaning to Gogol's work. However, there is little in *Dead Souls* itself to suggest images of war, and for M. Sabinina the use of Shostakovitch was ambiguous and disconcerting.⁶⁷⁵

In 1975, when approaching *Marriage*, Efros had refused to see Gogol's characters simply as comic masks or types, regarding them instead as eccentric but sympathetic individuals. Similarly in *Road* he rejected (erroneously, in the present writer's view) the notion that *Dead Souls* was a satire. He suggested that Gogol, viewing Russia from afar, had been expressing a longing for his homeland, and therefore had looked on his characters with kindness. He aimed to reveal what he saw as the characters' 'poetic' aspects as well as their human qualities.⁶⁷⁶

He based his conception of Chichikov on Gogol's idea that there is a Chichikov in every one of us. He therefore altered traditional interpretations of the character, stressing not, as might be expected, Chichikov's chameleon-like changes of mood or his fantastical traits, but instead his very ordinariness. Pul'khritudova was surprised by this Chichikov's business-like attitude, by his lack of a cranberry-coloured tailcoat, and by the replacement of the famous inlaid mahogany box by a commonplace black travelling-bag.⁶⁷⁷ She suggested, however, that this unusual interpretation had its own advantages: Chichikov's very ordinary appearance made him somehow more dangerous, not

⁶⁷⁵M. Sabinina, 'Novye puti sinteza', *Sovetskaia muzyka*, 5 (1983), 62-72, (p. 68).

⁶⁷⁶Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 281.

⁶⁷⁷Pul'khritudova, 'Etot', p. 89.

least in the final act when he argued aggressively and belligerently with the Author over what he saw as his moral right to a life of comfort.

This Chichikov was not only a departure from tradition, but also stood out amongst Gogol's motley group of landowners. Efros's conception of this group of characters, in Demidova's view, showed the influence of Vakhtangov, because he had aimed to find a balance between grotesque exaggeration and psychological truth.⁶⁷⁸ Efros himself remarked that the key to their interpretation was to find for each a single characteristic trait.⁶⁷⁹ He encouraged his actors to use stylised gestures, and dressed them (in a departure from his previous practice) in fantastical costumes with exaggerated make-up, almost as if they were wearing masks. However, by identifying particular characteristics and by effectively making them play in masks Efros presented his performers with a considerable challenge: to maintain a balance between their overtly theatrical and outlandish appearances and the expression of a more subtle inner lyricism and humanity.

In several reviews Iakovleva (Korobochka) and Durov (Nozdrev) were singled out for particular praise, but other performers were judged to have lacked the skills required for such demanding roles, and therefore to have portrayed not vital and credible individuals but caricatures. Pul'khritudova remarked that Viktor Lakirev as Manilov and Volkov as Sobakevich were completely one-dimensional. Their performances, moreover, were so out of keeping with those of the rest of the cast that they appeared to be in an entirely different production.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁸Demidova, 'Osobyi', p. 9.

⁶⁷⁹Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 69

⁶⁸⁰E. Pul'khritudova, 'Roman v zerkale stseny', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 11 March 1980, p. 5

Smelianskii similarly condemned a lack of consistency in the actors' portrayals. He suggested that an excess of theatrical gesture and costuming had turned the cast, with the notable exceptions of Durov and Iakovleva, into marionettes.⁶⁸¹ He remarked, moreover, that in stark contrast to Efros's highly-successful *Marriage*, the actors failed to engage the audience's sympathy. In the earlier production the director had turned monsters into humans, but in *Road* had achieved the reverse.⁶⁸² Efros himself appears to have endorsed that critic's harsh assessment by admitting later that as the production ran its course he had allowed the actors to overplay and so to lose sight of a sense of inner truth and empathy.⁶⁸³

For Efros, as for Stanislavsky, the most difficult aspect of the production was the role of the Author. Stanislavsky had opted for the simple solution of removing it, but for Efros the Author and his relationship with his creation were centrally important. He presented *Dead Souls* not as a chronological narrative but in fragments, as a kaleidoscope of images, characters and events. The action switched rapidly from vignettes to group portraits, from the earth-bound to the fantastical, and from Italy to Russia and back. For Pul'khritudova the hurried pace and chaotic structure reflected the free-flowing thoughts of a writer's mind.⁶⁸⁴ Similarly, Smelianskii described *Road* as an attempt to access and present in concrete terms the creative processes that had generated *Dead Souls*.⁶⁸⁵ Efros based his work on the premise that Gogol's novel had not yet been written, and was therefore quite literally to be created before the spectators' eyes, channelled as it were through The Author. Like his *Marriage* in 1975, *Road* opened with a parade of the characters, who responded to the Author's first lines as though summoned in his imagination: 'Мертвые текут живо и

⁶⁸¹Smelianskii, 'Chetyre', p. 27.

⁶⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶⁸³Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 73

⁶⁸⁴Pul'khritudova, 'Etot', p. 89.

⁶⁸⁵Smelianskii, 'Chetyre', p. 28.

мне совершенно кажется, как будто я в России: передо мною все наши.'⁶⁸⁶ Like Bulgakov's Reader, the Author was alternately involved in, and separated from, his creation.

He was played by Kozakov, who had previously earned critical acclaim in leading roles in *Don Juan*, *Marriage* and *A Month in the Country*. On this occasion however, critics, were divided over Kozakov's performance in general, and in particular over his ability to maintain the necessary balance between involvement and estrangement. Demidova remarked that this was his finest achievement to date, and this judgment was echoed by Kotok, who said that Kozakov's skill in drawing the audience into the creative process was one of the production's greatest achievements.⁶⁸⁷ Pul'khritudova, by contrast, while acknowledging his gifts, also recognised his difficulties in playing this dual role, suggesting that he seemed to be engaged in single combat with his part.⁶⁸⁸ In another review she indicated that at times the Author failed to show sufficient empathy with the characters he had created.⁶⁸⁹ For Smelianskii, too, this was a central problem of Kozakov's interpretation. Though in the opening scene, he noted, the actor was emotionally engaged with the others on stage, as the action progressed he became increasingly cold and aloof and withdrew into his little theatre, distancing himself physically and severing a vital link with the audience.⁶⁹⁰

Kozakov quite literally distanced himself from the production by leaving the theatre for good soon after the opening night, on which, as he recalled, many of the audience had departed at the interval.⁶⁹¹ He later admitted openly that he

⁶⁸⁶Quoted in Smelianskii, 'Chetyre', p. 27.

⁶⁸⁷Demidova, 'Osobyi', p. 9; Kotok, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁸Pul'khritudova, 'Etot', p. 89.

⁶⁸⁹Pul'khritudova, 'Roman', p. 5

⁶⁹⁰Smelianskii, 'Chetyre', p. 31.

⁶⁹¹Kozakov, 'I teatr', p. 223.

had hated the part and (as noted above) laid the blame for the production's failure almost entirely on the script, in which Chichikov on occasion repeated lines spoken by the Author. This device was perhaps intended to suggest that they represented in some senses two sides of a single character, but in Kozakov's opinion this turned Chichikov, quite erroneously, into the Author's intellectual equal.⁶⁹² He described the two-year rehearsal period as a torment; he had frequently argued with Iakovleva, who despite her considerable talents could be, as Efros himself once admitted, extraordinarily difficult.⁶⁹³ He had also had protracted and heated arguments with Efros. According to Kozakov, their most serious disagreements concerned the tone in which he was to deliver his final speech at the end of Act I, when the 'bird-troika' was heard to thunder into the distance. Its departure at the end of Part One of *Dead Souls*, when it comes to symbolise Rus' herself, is accompanied by philosophical musings of the self-conscious narrator. These include the penultimate line of the first part and possibly the novel's most memorable words: 'Русь, куда ж несешься ты? дай ответ. Не дает ответа.'⁶⁹⁴ For Kozakov this speech was crucial to his entire interpretation: it underscored the essence of the Author's relationship to the world he depicted. He wanted to deliver the line as a question, expressing a sense of curiosity and wonderment, and in support of this view referred to the sentence that immediately follows, which suggests that all other nations make way as Rus' flies past like a thundering wind. This final line expressed for

⁶⁹²Mikhail Kozakov, "'V svoem kvadrate'", in Zaionts, pp. 112-124 (p. 123).

⁶⁹³Kozakov, 'I teatr', p. 223.

⁶⁹⁴N. Gogol', *Mertvye dushi* in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 7 vols, (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1967), V, Part I, pp. 7-286 (p. 286). The etymology and multiple meanings of the word Русь (*Rus'*) are the subject of debate. Historically it denotes a geographical area between the river Dnieper and its two Western tributaries, the Irpen and the Ros, with the settlement of Kiev at its centre, and also refers to the people whose occupation of this area is documented in early chronicles dating from at least the 11th century. It refers in addition, however, to their language and orthodox Christian faith, and because it is associated with Russia's historical roots and her people's distant origins, also has romantic, mystical and spiritual connotations. In using this archaic term to describe Russia, symbolised by the 'bird-like troika', Gogol was evoking (ironically, perhaps, though arguably with a sense of awe) the historical might of this land and people, but also alluding to those other connotations. For further details of the debate over the origins and meaning of this word, see for instance Henryk Paszkiewicz, *The Origin of Russia* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1954), pp. 1-25.

Kozakov what he believed was Gogol's ultimate faith in Rus'.⁶⁹⁵ Efros, however, insisted that he should deliver it as though in the depths of despair.

Efros's previous successes had been created with actors who trusted him, in an environment in which disagreements centred on the creative process and were therefore largely healthy and productive. The conflicts surrounding *Road*, which led to the departure not only of Kozakov but also of Bronevoi (Chichikov), were personal and acrimonious and generated low morale. They undoubtedly contributed to the failure of a complex work, staged by a director who on this occasion frankly lacked a sure hand and a coherent vision. After Efros's death, Kozakov published two articles on his experiences at the Malaia Bronnaia, in which (with the exception of the rehearsals for *Road*) he wrote positively about Efros's productions and their working relationship. He had left the theatre before Smelianskii's fateful critique was published, but suggested that though harsh it was just.⁶⁹⁶ He also believed, however, that *Road* was the failure of a gifted man, not of a jobbing director (провал жужоЖника, а не ремесленника).⁶⁹⁷

Smelianskii himself was rather less temperate. He savagely criticised the lack of unity in the actors' approaches in a production which as a whole 'loomed cheerlessly and indistinctly'.⁶⁹⁸ In justice to Smelianskii it should be remarked that he was aware of the internal problems at the theatre, and of a discussion in the press before the opening night which suggested that the production was in difficulties. In fact this awareness created a dilemma for the critic when he committed his comments to print.⁶⁹⁹ Nevertheless his article was deliberately targeted and hard-hitting, not least because he alluded to Efros's previous

⁶⁹⁵Kozakov, 'V svoem', pp. 123-124.

⁶⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁶⁹⁷Kozakov, 'I teatr', p. 223.

⁶⁹⁸Smelianskii, 'Chetyre, p. 32.

⁶⁹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

successes, suggesting that the celebrated *Marriage* of 1975 was 'a lost paradise'.⁷⁰⁰ He also used the director's own metaphor of a cardiogram to condemn the production's failure to engage the audience's sympathy. As noted in Chapter 1, Efros used this image to express his overall approach to the shape of a production, in which the changing emotions, like the pulse of a heart-beat, should always be felt with absolute clarity.⁷⁰¹ On the screen of a cardiogram a lack of vitality is signalled by a straight line, and Smelianskii used this analogy to suggest that a lack of emotional engagement was one of the serious faults in *Road*.⁷⁰² He suggested too that the image of a road was an appropriate metaphor for the production as a whole. He recognised that Efros, by experimenting with overtly theatrical techniques, was in some respects taking a new road. But this approach had led to a conflict of different styles that saw his cast wandering aimlessly rather than taking a determined new course. Without himself quoting Gogol, Smelianskii was effectively asking Efros: 'Куда же несешься ты?'. He believed, moreover, that the failure of the production was symptomatic of more fundamental problems for Efros and his theatre. At best, it should offer the director a salutary lesson, a means by which to correct his path in the future. In conclusion he hoped that setting the theatre on some new road would not be in vain, and that Efros would not miss this opportunity for a fresh start. (Будем надеяться, что новая дорога не напрасна. Будем надеяться, что не зря она дарована творцу.)⁷⁰³

Following the publication of Smelianskii's article, *Road* played infrequently for only two seasons before being dropped from the repertoire. The critic's views did not actually close the production, but perhaps sounded its death-knell. Its failure prompted in no small measure Efros's artistic crisis, which resulted in

⁷⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁷⁰¹Efros, *Repetitsiia*, p. 38.

⁷⁰²Smelianskii, 'Chetyre', p. 32.

⁷⁰³*Ibid.*, p. 37.

his need to seek solace in the past, his re-evaluation of the techniques of the early MAT, and his reservations about his own previous productions. These concerns were to find their clearest expression in his *Three Sisters* at the Malaia Bronnaia in 1982.

Chapter 8

**Нужны новые формы, а если их нет, то
лучше ничего не нужно.**

***Three Sisters*
(1982)**

Efros's reassessment in the early 1980s of Stanislavsky and his legacy (noted in Chapter 1), was in line with a general trend in theatre at this time, as the following brief excursus will show.

Efremov had first staged *The Seagull* as his final production at the Sovremmenik in 1970. In that production Efremov, like Efros in his first *Three Sisters* two years before, had explored the theme of the demise of common ideals in contemporary society. As a result Chekhov's characters neither listened to nor heard one another. Instead they struck attitudes, squabbled and made scenes. As Smelianskii noted, Efremov had turned the play into a pamphlet, reflecting the concerns and 'ideological confusions' that followed the Prague Spring.⁷⁰⁴ But in 1980 he brought Chekhov back to his original stage in a new production of that play. This staging (like Efremov's earlier production of *Ivanov* in 1978), as Shakh-Azizova remarked, was intended to reflect the spirit of new times, combined with a 'grain of tradition'.⁷⁰⁵ He focused now on ideas of reconciliation and understanding, and on the concept that transcendent nature diminishes the scale of human conflict. The setting designed by Levental' was a detailed and sumptuous recreation of natural beauty amid which Chekhov's characters became part of the landscape.⁷⁰⁶ Charged since his appointment as Artistic Director in 1970 with regenerating the MAT, Efremov had assembled a new company, and emphasised, as Stanislavsky had, the importance of playing as an ensemble. Long pauses, a seamless flow of action, and gentle rhythms, were techniques borrowed from his predecessor, and the production also opened with an orchestrated score of recorded cries of gulls and pealing bells, one of Stanislavsky's own most favoured devices.

The design for Volchek's *Three Sisters* at the Sovremmenik in 1982 was by contrast devoid of detail and much starker than Levental's. This production

⁷⁰⁴Smeliansky, 'Chekhov', p. 35.

⁷⁰⁵Shakh-Azizova, 'Chekhov', p. 170.

⁷⁰⁶M. Litvarina, 'Kliuch ot roialia', *Moskva*, 7 (1983), 172-82 (pp. 173-174).

too, however, assimilated the past: it reflected the spirit of optimism of previous interpretations, most notably that of Nemirovich-Danchenko at the MAT in 1940. At the end, the sisters appeared on a rainbow-shaped bridge that spanned the width of the theatre. Picked out in the light of projectors, and high above the creation in light and sound of Tuzenbakh's advancing storm, they were lifted above the world, and from their vantage-point gazed out into a brighter future. As M. Litvarina maintained, this ending was no requiem but the start of a new drama.⁷⁰⁷ Volchek's production emphasised, through frequent physical contact, the loving relationships between the sisters, in an interpretation of the play that emphasised their personal tragedy. Stroevea, when considering the approaches to Chekhov adopted at this period by Efremov, Volchek and Efros, acknowledged the differences between their three productions, but identified a tendency common to them all: a desire for historical continuity rather than direct reference to the contemporary world.⁷⁰⁸

One production, however, stood out in stark contrast to this general tendency, Liubimov's *Three Sisters*, which opened at the Taganka on 16 May 1981. This aggressively anti-lyrical and overtly contemporary interpretation was seen by one critic as an anachronism, which was not only indebted to the 1960s concept of a 'cruel' Chekhov, but also took that idea to its utmost extremes.⁷⁰⁹ In a production devoid of almost all period reference, Liubimov's controlling idea was the militarisation of Russia — from World War II, through the aggressive campaigns in Eastern Europe to the recent invasion of Afghanistan — and the subsequent and all-pervasive regimentation of contemporary Soviet life that stifled individual action.⁷¹⁰ Iurii Kononenko's set was stripped of any semblance of domestic comfort; for Stroevea, it had the appearance of a disused

⁷⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁷⁰⁸M. Stroevea, 'Voennaia muzyka', *Teatr*, 10 (1982), 118-25 (p. 125).

⁷⁰⁹Nikolai Putintsev, 'V poiskakh Chekhova', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 2 July 1982, p. 14.

⁷¹⁰T. Kniazevskaia, 'Providcheskoe u Chekhova', *Teatral'naiia zhizn'*, 4 (1994), 9-12 (p. 11). For more detailed analyses of this production, see also Allen, pp. 98-102; Beumers, pp. 179-185; Litvarina, 176-178, and Stroevea, 'Voennaia', 118-125.

church converted into a barracks.⁷¹¹ In this prison-like environment the presence of Chekhov's military officers was consistently emphasised. The play was punctuated by military music, which not only often dictated a rapid pace and mechanical actions by the actors but also created the sense that almost everyone on stage was part of this militarised world. Most of the men were dressed in army greatcoats, and although Irina and Masha were dressed at first in white and black (as Chekhov prescribes) Ol'ga's blue dress was replaced by a khaki uniform, and at Vershinin's arrival a military coat was draped around Masha's shoulders too. The behaviour of the soldiers was not that of the men she describes as the 'best-mannered, noble and best-educated' in the town, but instead openly brutal. Time was telescoped, and Liubimov constantly reminded the audience, by using a wall of mirrors set to one side of a dimly-lit auditorium, that they, not the protagonists, were the subject of the drama. His central message, however, was delivered by an ingenious device which framed the production. At the opening, and at the finale, the mirrors slid back to reveal an opening in the side wall, exposing the audience to the air, electric lights and hubbub of the night on the Sadovoe kol'tso, in the very heart of the city. With striking force and absolute simplicity the production was declaring to its audience that Moscow, rather than a distant future or a place of dreams, was all around them. Liubimov's startlingly novel staging deprived the characters, and more importantly the audience, of all hope, stating boldly that there is no future, only the bleak present.⁷¹²

Liubimov's *Three Sisters* was criticised for a lack of psychological depth, and for a purely formal approach that failed to reveal the work's sub-text.⁷¹³ Efros concurred. Indeed, he declared that his own *Three Sisters* at the Malaia Bronnaia in 1982 was staged in direct opposition to the work of the

⁷¹¹Stroeve, 'Voennaia', p. 120.

⁷¹²Beumers, p. 184.

⁷¹³G. Zamkovets, 'Variatsii pod orkestr', *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 23 (1981), 28-29.

Taganka.⁷¹⁴ He attacked Liubimov's production for its overtly contemporary interpretation. Recognising the debt it owed to the 1960s concept of a 'cruel' Chekhov, he remarked that the director was pursuing a path, that he, Efros, had already travelled but now intended to abandon.⁷¹⁵ In his view Liubimov's methods had once been seen as revolutionary and novel, but were now outmoded and exhausted. His comments are hard to justify, because there was much that was innovative in Liubimov's production, but he qualified them by stating that they were not intended as a personal attack but rather as a reflection of artistic difference. Like the other 'nostalgic' productions of the time, Efros's production by contrast was deeply indebted to the past and heavily influenced by the techniques of the early MAT. This was a style of theatre that Efros had once vigorously rejected but now chose to celebrate. In truth, therefore, his criticism of Liubimov was less an assault on a specific production than an apologia for a reversal of his previous approach. His argument was not with the Taganka director but with himself.

As we have seen, in his *Seagull* of 1967 and *Three Sisters* of 1968 he had wanted his actors to put aggression into their performances, and had used 'Brechtian' techniques in an effort to open up the drama as a public debate. Furthermore, in some scenes of his *Cherry Orchard* of 1975 at the Taganka the established methods of that theatre had produced a demonstrative style of performance. But now he asked himself the following question:

Ставить классику «агрессивно» или «спокойно»? ...Агрессивно — это значит не музейно, не хрестоматийно. Агрессивно — это так, чтобы выплескивать и свои собственные сегодняшние чувства. Спокойно — это не значит никак.

В данном случае я имею в виду то спокойствие, какое было в первом

⁷¹⁴Efros, 'O blagorodstve', p. 23.

⁷¹⁵*Ibid.* An edited version of Efros's article 'O blagorodstve' appeared in English in the following: Innokenti Smoktunovsky and Anatoli Efros, 'Beautiful Are Those with a Breadth of Vision: Excerpts from a Workshop', *Soviet Literature*, 4 (1988), 168-177.

спектакле МХАТа. ...Раньше я придерживался первой точки зрения на постановку классики, а теперь склоняюсь к второй.⁷¹⁶

As a student and in productions in the 1950s and 1960s Efros had wanted to rejuvenate contemporary Soviet theatre, and in 1967 had identified with Treplev in calling for 'new forms'. At that time his way of achieving this aim had been to turn his back on Naturalism and to explore more overtly theatrical techniques. In 1982, by contrast, although with that same aim, he rejected this idea. In approaching his new *Three Sisters*, he took his cue once more from Treplev, and now suggested like him that these 'new forms' had become routine and overused. He claimed that they had led directors to become excessively concerned with styles of presentation rather than inner truth, and questioned why everyone always recalled the character's demand for 'new forms' but never remembered his words: "Дело не в старых или новых формах. Дело в том, что то, что пишешь, должно свободно литься из души ..." и т. д. Свободно!".⁷¹⁷

If in the past Efros had built his theatre on the basis of his desire to marry inner truth with its outer physical expression, he now asserted that the former was his only true concern:

Мне казалось, что дело только во *внутренней правде*, что только в ней все дело. Мне казалось, что надо поставить новые «Три сестры» и новую «Чайку». В том смысле, чтобы найти новых действующих лиц, новую

⁷¹⁶Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 35-36.

⁷¹⁷Efros, *Kniga*, pp. 375-376. (His emphasis). Although it was clearly his intention to do so, Efros did not stage a second production of *The Seagull*.

Efros is paraphrasing Chekhov. In Act IV the playwright gives Treplev the following lines: 'Я так много говорил о новых формах, а теперь чувствую, что сам мало-помалу сползаю к рутине.' Later in the same speech Treplev states: 'Да, я все больше и больше прихожу к убеждению, что дело не в старых и не в новых формах, а в том, что человек пишет, не думая о каких формах, пишет, потому что это свободно льется из его души.' *Chaika*, Act IV, pp. 55, 56.

среду, новые идеи, но воплотить их с такою же силой внутренней правды,
как это когда-то было в старых мхатовских спектаклях.⁷¹⁸

At such a distance in time it is difficult to assess whether the *earliest* productions at the MAT were in fact characterised by a powerful sense of inner truth as Efros suggested. Given that at that period Stanislavsky's ideas on the 'creative' actor were in their infancy and that, judging from his notes for *The Seagull* and *Three Sisters*, in which he details every gesture, he was extremely prescriptive, there is an argument to suggest that this was not the case. In the context of the period, and as a reaction against the histrionic style of nineteenth century theatre, the first MAT actors undoubtedly created a greater sense of fidelity to life. But this was far from being the kind of absolute naturalness that adherents of his later 'system' would seek. It is therefore possible to suggest that Efros, who with his *Seagull* in 1966 had destroyed a cherished myth about the MAT, was seeking by contrast in 1982 to recreate another.

He was aspiring now, however, not only to emulate the MAT by returning to its past but also to recover his own: not the past of his startlingly innovative productions of Chekhov, but rather his 'golden period' at the CCT. He hoped that his new *Three Sisters* would generate the sense of spontaneity and vitality that had once excited the audiences for Rozov's *Good Luck!*.⁷¹⁹ He was sadly mistaken. As we shall see, his production did not live up to his expectations and failed to impress the public.

As has been argued throughout, Efros viewed the Russian classics through the prism of his own experience. In his earlier productions, as we have seen, he had been accused of taking an excessively subjective approach, deliberately distorting Chekhov in order to reflect contemporary concerns. He had staged

⁷¹⁸Efros, *Kniga*, p. 377. (His emphasis).

⁷¹⁹*Ibid.*

The Seagull and *Three Sisters* as though they had never been produced before, stripping them of past interpretations and telescoping time in order to turn them, as it were, into new dramas. Moreover, in his first, deeply pessimistic *Three Sisters*, he had presented the effect on society of the irretrievable loss of prized cultural values as a stark fact, reflecting the disillusionment of his audience, the contemporary intelligentsia. But in his new production, though it conveyed a similar sense of loss, the idea of modernity was given a new emphasis. In his writings of this period, he made frequent comparisons between modern practices and his idealised view of theatre in Stanislavsky's day. He criticised modern actors for a lack of professionalism, and for wasting their energies by working in film and television. Audiences too were less well-read than their predecessors and had less understanding of high cultural ideas. In fact he saw the theatre of the time as a microcosm of society at large, which was equally deficient.⁷²⁰ His new *Three Sisters* therefore was not 'modern', but indebted to history, creating a sense of distance between itself and the modern world. 'Modernity' was intended to be a negative example against which a positive evocation of the past could be measured. He seems to have hoped that in staging *Three Sisters* again he could somehow recreate an idealised past and restore this cultural loss. He therefore consciously disassociated himself from the 'avant-garde', which he now saw as a destructive force, and advocated instead not the rejection of, but a sense of continuity with, traditional interpretations.⁷²¹ For a director once condemned for his assault on the enshrined orthodoxy of the MAT, this was a radical change of tack, although paradoxically a conservative and politically reactionary one. His rallying cry for the restoration of tradition was the 'Return of Chekhov to Chekhov', and ironically he found himself in full agreement with those critics who had

⁷²⁰Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 42-43.

⁷²¹Efros, 'O blagorodstve', p. 24.

condemned his earlier work for its 'anti-Chekhovian' failure to conform.⁷²² The influence of the early MAT was felt in the setting, mood, atmosphere and pace of his new production, and can also be seen in his frequent allusions to the work of Stanislavsky, and to a lesser extent to that of Nemirovich-Danchenko.

Before creating his new setting he studied the designs of Simov and Dmitriev for the MAT productions of 1901 and 1940. Making a comparative analysis between the two, he concluded that the MAT's so called 'realism', for all Stanislavsky's attention to detail, had retained what he described as an element of 'lyrical idealism'. His own design, created in collaboration with Levental', while it was in no sense a carbon copy of either predecessor, reflected that concern to recreate this lyricism.⁷²³ Whereas in many previous productions he had used single, unchanging sets, charged with visual symbolism but abstract and devoid of realist detail, his new *Three Sisters* evoked an atmosphere of intimate domesticity and comfort. It included many features of every-day life, from the table laid for Irina's name-day celebrations to vases of flowers, period furniture and multi-coloured fan-lights over each door. As Nikolai Putintsev noted, a sense of historical distance between the characters and their audience was created by the use of a semi-opaque gauze hung over part of the stage; actions performed behind this were partly obscured, as though played out in a mist of time.⁷²⁴ Significantly, the design also included a direct visual quotation from the 1901 production. A huge panel across the back wall depicted the sisters huddled together in a way that for Putintsev was very reminiscent of the famous grouping created in the finale by Stanislavsky.⁷²⁵ In his *Three Sisters* in 1967 Efros had consciously avoided bringing the sisters together. In 1982 by contrast, in the final scene he repeated the quotation by grouping them,

⁷²²*Ibid.*

⁷²³Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 33-34.

⁷²⁴Putintsev, p. 14.

⁷²⁵*Ibid.*

down-stage left, in the same pose that his predecessor had given them. This, it will be recalled, was not the first time Efros had 'quoted' the MAT. But, whereas in 1967 MAT actors in the audience for *The Seagull* had been angered by the naive depiction of a seagull on the front curtains of the Lenkom in apparent mockery of their theatre, on this occasion the allusion was not intended to ridicule, but rather to show a kind of reverence and to imply a sense of continuity with tradition.

Chekhov, when writing *Three Sisters*, explored the metaphorical implications of photography as a method of preventing the march of time and providing proof of people's existence.⁷²⁶ At the end of Act I, Fedotik takes a group photograph, and this moment is lent a greater significance in Act III when he declares that all his belongings (including presumably that photographic record) have been lost in the fire. This symbolic destruction of photographic proof appears to imply that time cannot be halted, and that people in the past, for all their efforts, will not be remembered, which is underscored in Masha's assertion when speaking of her mother: 'Представьте, я уж начинаю забывать ее лицо. Так и о нас не будут помнить. Забудут.'⁷²⁷ By contrast Efros, in his use of this same motif, appeared to assert not only that the past could be recreated but also, at least symbolically, that it could be retained in the imagination. He achieved this not only by the repetition of the image of the three sisters (itself indelibly printed on audience's minds from a photograph reprinted in history books) but also by framing the entire action as a photographic still. The production opened and closed with a familiar device: the gathering of the entire cast on the forestage, presenting themselves to the audience. He moved to the beginning of the action Fedotik's snapping of the group as they gathered to admire his present. For Smelkov the capturing on

⁷²⁶Worrall, 'Stanislavsky's', p. 14.

⁷²⁷*Tri sestry*, Act I, p. 128.

film of the characters watching a spinning top expressed Efros's entire purpose in a production that hoped to show that the whirling passions and ideas of these people were both frozen in time and also, like history itself, very much alive.⁷²⁸ Moreover, by a repetition of this sequence at the end concrete evidence of this vibrant past was preserved and, as Smelkov put it, handed to the audience as a 'keepsake'.

In 1967 the sacrificial victim Treplev, the artist, had been 'hung' on the scaffold of his own theatre. In 1975 the cherry orchard had not been merely threatened with destruction but already buried in a graveyard. And in Efros's first *Three Sisters* a single plant with gilt leaves had stood centre-stage as an absurd reminder of a luxurious past in a world overhung by the gnarled branches of dead trees. Through the use of such concrete visual metaphors, the works' central ideas and the overall mood of the productions had not been seen in a process of development or as subject to change, but rather had been established from the outset. In this way the sub-text of the works had not simply been faintly discernible, revealed only in what remained unsaid, but forced to the surface as the very substance of the dramas. In his new *Three Sisters* Efros categorically rejected this approach. Referring to the gilt-leafed plant, he now declared:

Нельзя три часа рассматривать умерший цветок. Надо увидеть, что сначала цветка не было, потом этот цветок вырос, потом он стал красивый, потом стал увядать. Обязательно должен быть процесс.⁷²⁹

Thus, his focus in 1982 was on developing changing moods, on creating a 'flow of life', and on the subtle revelation of the sub-text. In all this, Efros was

⁷²⁸Iurii Smelkov, "'Tri sestry" 1982', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 27 July 1982, p. 3.

⁷²⁹Efros, 'O blagorodstve', p. 24.

borrowing directly from the ideas of Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavsky, and was also influenced by listening to recordings from the 1940 MAT production.

While working on *The Wood Demon*, in 1889, Chekhov had remarked, apparently exasperated by how frequently his own characters were seen eating: 'Люди обедают, только обедают, а в это время слагается их счастье и разбиваются жизни.'⁷³⁰ Chekhov used *The Wood Demon* as a basis for *Uncle Vanya*, and Efros, in his notes for an unrealised production of the later play in the 1970s, incorrectly attributed this comment to Nemirovich-Danchenko:

И я не уверен (о ужас!), что прав Немирович-Данченко, говоривший, что судьбы героев у Чехова решаются, когда люди обедают, например, или просто мирно сидят за столом.⁷³¹

Clearly interpreting what he believed were Nemirovich-Danchenko's words to mean that the play was reliant on a hidden sub-text and should therefore generate a gentle and calm mood, Efros had categorically rejected this notion, stating on the contrary that in *Uncle Vanya* the characters' emotions should be displayed sharply and openly as 'naked' tragedy.⁷³² In his new *Three Sisters*, however, he hoped to produce just such a sense of the flow of life, and was paraphrasing this idea when he suggested:

Недаром же еще тогда, давно, во МХАТе придумали такие слова, как «второй план» и «подтекст». А то у нас теперь второго плана часто и не

⁷³⁰A. Gurliand, 'Iz vospominanii ob A. Chekhove', in Surkov, *Chekhov*, pp. 206-207 (p. 206).

⁷³¹Efros, *Professiiia*, p. 340.

⁷³²*Ibid.* The notes for *Uncle Vanya* were written sometime in 1975 and in his conception of this unrealised production the open expression of emotions and passions was if anything more extreme than in the works of Chekhov he actually staged. See *Professiiia*, pp. 339-349.

бывает, мы его выводим в первый. И получается плоско...А надо, чтобы жизнь текла, будто ничего страшного и нет, будто все в порядке, а что там, в глубине, люди очень беспокоятся, то это ведь — в глубине.⁷³³

Thus, although in the earlier production of *Three Sisters*, while charting the sisters' changing moods, Efros had created an overriding sense of tragedy, in this second version, by contrast, he hoped to begin on a more buoyant, happy note. In this he borrowed directly from Stanislavsky. He re-read the well-known account of how in rehearsals for *Three Sisters* (recorded in *My Life in Art*) the tone of the production had seemed all wrong, and how someone scratching a bench, making a sound like a mouse, had fired the director's imagination.⁷³⁴ Stanislavsky had suddenly realised his error and understood that the sisters were not revelling in their melancholy but longing for joy, laughter, happiness and wanting to live. Efros admitted that in the past he had known but deliberately ignored Stanislavsky's 'ruling idea'. He now concluded that this was not simply a possible but indeed an essential interpretation of the work.⁷³⁵

In the 1980 production at the Taganka Liubimov, in order to remind the audience of how Chekhov had been played in the past, and as a deliberate allusion perhaps to styles of performance he was seeking to reject, had used recordings of the voices of actors from previous productions. For instance Tuzenbakh's deliberations on the future in Act I had been overlaid by the voice of Vasilii Kachalov, who had played Tuzenbakh in Stanislavsky's production of 1901. Efros criticised what he saw as the apparent mockery in this use of Kachalov's voice as 'empty irony' and condemned it as a piece of gratuitous 'trickery'. For him the recording served only to demonstrate the beauty of the

⁷³³Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 30.

⁷³⁴Stanislavskii, *Moia zhizn'*, p. 242.

⁷³⁵Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 49.

old actor's voice by contrast with the unappealing flatter ones of the Taganka performers.⁷³⁶

For Efros, the key to achieving the appropriate mood for the opening of *Three Sisters* depended, logically enough, on the delivery of Ol'ga's first lines. ('Отец умер ровно год назад, как раз в этот день, пятого мая в твои именины, Ирина....Помню, когда отца несли, то играла музыка, на кладбище стреляли. Он был генерал, командовал бригадой, между тем народу шло мало.')⁷³⁷ Although he did not incorporate recordings as had Liubimov, in order to find the appropriate tone for Ol'ga he listened to a tape of the MAT actress Elanskaia, and marvelled at the apparent carefree tone of her delivery, which barely hinted at the emotions hidden beneath the words.⁷³⁸ It was precisely this sense of subtle shading, which he described as a 'rare combination of simplicity and wisdom' that he hoped to produce in his own actors. While the play was in rehearsal, he was also conducting a series of workshops with young directors, in which he frequently referred to his work in progress. In one session he carefully re-examined the opening passage, admitting that he had once interpreted the lines as a melancholy reflection on the past, and had emphasised Olga's sorrow at the lack of mourners at the general's dismal funeral. But it was possible, he now maintained, to deliver the lines differently, not as tragic but as a quiet acceptance that all things in life must pass.⁷³⁹

Although the production created moments of pathos and sadness, such a sense of acceptance was maintained throughout, and Efros hoped to end on a note of optimism, expressing what he stated was his admiration for the sisters' youthful

⁷³⁶Efros, 'O blagorodstve', p. 23.

⁷³⁷*Tri Sestry*, Act I, p. 119.

⁷³⁸Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 44.

⁷³⁹Efros, 'O blagorodstve', p. 23.

purity and endurance.⁷⁴⁰ This more positive ending was in complete contrast to the sense of despondency and pessimism expressed in his earlier interpretation. Like Volchek's, his production also had much in common, moreover, with Nemirovich-Danchenko's staging in 1940, which had reflected the accepted Soviet interpretation that Chekhov himself had looked to a better future.

In the 1980s such ideologically-charged interpretation was still prevalent. When at the Taganka in 1980 Irina had delivered her speech in Act I on the need to work from a platform stage in the manner of a school-girl reciting lines learnt from a text book, and had drawn ironic applause from her on-stage audience, G. Zamkovets had objected in his review to the 'evident sneer' in the speeches about work and the future, arguing that it negated 'the essence of Chekhov's world view' — his love of humanity and hopes for a better life.⁷⁴¹ Very similar criticism had once been directed at Efros's ironic treatment of Tuzenbakh's and Irina's speeches in his 1968 production. At that time Smelianskii had also suggested that this was a searing indictment of the Soviet labour camps.⁷⁴² Efros later denied, somewhat disingenuously, but perhaps to avoid accusations of political subversion, that he had ever intended to mock the idea of work.⁷⁴³ He now admitted, however, that in his previous production he had been unable to take seriously these idle people's talk of the need to work, and had treated it as romantic nonsense.⁷⁴⁴ He made it clear that his attitude to the theme of work had completely changed, and in an extraordinary about-turn stated that Chekhov's message, and therefore his own, was that 'work is the only thing that ennobles man'.⁷⁴⁵ He saw this both as a reflection of his personal belief and as a commentary on contemporary society. He declared:

⁷⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷⁴¹Zamkovets, p. 29.

⁷⁴²Smeliansky, *Russian Theatre*, p. 70.

⁷⁴³Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 32.

⁷⁴⁴Smoktunovsky and Efros, p. 173.

⁷⁴⁵*Ibid.*

I work from morning till night myself, and a day off is torture. I believe that people who don't work are miserable. The main thing is to ensure that this remark [Irina's] about work does not leave the audience indifferent or sceptical. I have come to understand one simple truth. We are haunted by the same problem as Chekhov in his day: people don't know how to work and they don't want to work. That is the main source of our troubles. Life would be completely different if everyone were dedicated to their work and did it well.⁷⁴⁶

It was Efros's intention in this more buoyant, optimistic production that his audience should feel a sense of identity with the sisters and share their heart-felt dreams: 'Мы не должны думать, что они несчастны. Мы должны думать, что они хорошие. Мы их должны полюбить, болеть за них и вместе с ними мечтать, чтобы все было хорошо.'⁷⁴⁷ Statements like these indicated a change of attitude towards the characters themselves. Whereas in his earlier production Efros had viewed them (as it has been suggested the playwright himself had) with a degree of objectivity, seeing the philosophising officers for the most part as absurdly ineffectual, he now regarded them with greater indulgence, suggesting that although they were eccentric, and perhaps even a little naive, they were also essentially good-hearted.⁷⁴⁸ In the earlier production Solenyi had been seen, unusually, as the most honourable and upright, and Efros's view of him remained sympathetic. According to Putintsev, A. Kotove created a memorable moment when, on his knees before Irina, after issuing his threat to kill his rival in a malicious half-whisper, he was as it were unmasked and revealed the genuine suffering of a man truly in love.⁷⁴⁹ Similarly, whereas in 1968 the sisters' behaviour had been criticised as contrary to that of

⁷⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁷Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 30.

⁷⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷⁴⁹Putintsev, p. 14.

cultured and educated women, to the extent that there was little discernible difference between them and the vulgar Natasha, in 1982 Efros encouraged his performers to play with greater delicacy and finesse and to move graciously, qualities Smelkov admired in O. Sirina as Irina.⁷⁵⁰

This emphasis on the sisters' graciousness, together with his wish to imitate the flow of life, led Efros to reject the energetic and accelerated rhythms that had been so characteristic of his earlier work. He now associated speed with the hectic pace of modern life, and in order to create a sense of a more genteel, leisured existence in the past he slowed the whole production down, much in the style of Stanislavsky, using pauses and moments of quiet reflection.⁷⁵¹ Now critical of his own former approach, he quite unjustifiably reproached members of his company at the Malaia Bronnaia for the dynamic style he himself had encouraged by his ideas of 'acting on the run':

Я некоторых своих актеров загнал в такой «мотор», что они до сих пор из него никак не могут выйти. Я им говорю: «Тут — душа, тут надо о душе подумать», — а они мне: «Какая душа? Давайте скорее определим действие...» И я с грустью наблюдаю собственных замоторенных учеников. Глаза у них бегают, руки-ноги дергаются, а мне им хочется сказать: остановитесь, бога ради. Это уже только суета, мотор, механика.⁷⁵²

Although Efros writes here of 'some of my actors' it can be inferred that in truth he is referring directly to Durov, the most energetic performer at the Malaia Bronnaia and the motive force that powered some of his best productions. Efros's comments were unjustified, particularly in the light of the performance

⁷⁵⁰Smelkov, "Tri sestry" 1982', p. 3.

⁷⁵¹Efros, 'O blagorodstve', p. 24.

⁷⁵²*Ibid.*

Durov had given as Chebutykin in 1968. He had created the most memorable moment of the production in his wild dancing, which far from being purely mechanical had expressed his intense inner frustration and despair at the absurdity of existence. In the second production G. Korotkov was directed to repeat Durov's action, but as Irina Vergasova remarked this dance appeared perfunctory, and Putintsev suggested that it had simply been imported into the action, as a 'piece of business' (выглядит аттракционом) no longer linked to the character's inner torment.⁷⁵³

Efros's remarks may also be seen as an excuse for having looked outside the Malaia Bronnaia for the cast of the 1982 production. Much to the understandable chagrin of his existing company, he selected Iakovleva for the role of Masha but used very young actors, recent graduates and students in almost all the other roles. Moreover, he clearly saw *Three Sisters* as an opportunity to rebuild and gather around him a loyal company to replace actors with whom in some cases he had worked all his life. He declared openly that the future of theatre depended on the young. However, his relationship with this new troupe was not founded on collaborative creation but instead was closer to that of a master with his pupils. He consistently reiterated to them the importance of his ideas on a continuity with tradition, which as we have seen was central to his re-staging of Chekhov.

However, in mounting this production with all its allusions to the past he also had another purpose. He was attempting to resurrect a mission central to Stanislavsky's art: the creation of a theatre based on the values of so-called high culture, whose aim was to elevate and edify its audiences. As we have seen, in his writing at this period Efros made frequent comparisons between his own world and his idealised and romanticised view of Stanislavsky's. He described

⁷⁵³Inna Vergasova, 'Khozhdenie po krugu: "Tri sestry" A. P. Chekhova v teatrakh na Maloi Bronnoi i "Sovremennik"', *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, 4 April 1982, p. 3; Putintsev, p. 14.

Stanislavsky as an 'aristocrat', by which he meant not a member of a manicured nobility but an artist who was aristocratic in spirit, with a sense of refinement and a fundamental understanding and appreciation of high cultural values.⁷⁵⁴ He further suggested that Chekhov had been elevated from lowly beginnings to this same exalted status, and that the world in which these men lived (and by extension their productions at the MAT) had been infused with this 'artistic, aristocratic spirit'. Contemporary directors, he reasoned, were not 'aristocrats' but members of the 'nouveau-riche', and their art was by contrast rough and crude.⁷⁵⁵ Moreover, modern society was less refined, and modern audiences less cultured and relatively ill-read by comparison with those of the past. Efros saw the lofty ideals and aims of the MAT as its true legacy. He described its purpose as, at its simplest, the creation of beauty, a purpose which not only should be preserved but also pointed the way forward for all theatres.

Я думаю, что новые театры должны идти ...по пути красоты, потому что отсутствие настоящего воспитания, отсутствие потомственности и преемственности уже слишком сильно сказывается.⁷⁵⁶

As already noted, his *Three Sisters* was perhaps the most extreme example of a general trend in the treatment of Chekhov in the theatre of the period. The approaches of Efremov and Volchek, had in varying degrees shown a similar conservatism in productions that had also borrowed from, and expressed (in the face of social uncertainty in the present) a certain nostalgia for, the past.

This tendency was viewed by some commentators as a welcome return to what had long been regarded as the appropriate model for the production of Chekhov. K. Shcherbakov praised Efros's depiction of the sisters' resilience, and

⁷⁵⁴Smoktunovsky and Efros, p. 175.

⁷⁵⁵Efros, 'O blagorodstve', p. 24.

⁷⁵⁶*Ibid.*

welcomed his rejection of the pessimistic despair of his earlier, 'subjective' interpretation in favour of revealing the multiple layers of Chekhov's script.⁷⁵⁷ For him this staging demonstrated how the Russian classics could provide 'solace and salvation' for their audiences. Such lofty praise was not however endorsed by the majority of critics.

Kuzicheva identified the inexperience of the young actors as a central weakness — a sentiment echoed in several commentaries.⁷⁵⁸ Boris Liubimov remarked that D. Shaboltas's Andrei was a man content with his lot, and was thankful that someone who demonstrated so little erudition never became a professor.⁷⁵⁹ Similarly, Putintsev remarked that the portrayals of Vershinin, Kulygin and Tuzenbakh were lacking in depth and largely one-dimensional.⁷⁶⁰ He praised, however, the refinement and feminine charm of Iakovleva's Masha, remarking that she created a memorable moment when in Act II, tossing a little ball and laughing, she asked: 'Все-таки смысл?'.⁷⁶¹ Similarly, that critic sensed throughout her performance a subtle understanding of the sub-text of Masha's hidden affection for Vershinin, until it was forcefully revealed in her admission of love.⁷⁶² These lines were pronounced in a tone of defiance, which turned the words into an irrefutable fact, and reflected Masha's deep desire to free herself from the imprisonment of her situation. For Boris Liubimov, however, Iakovleva herself appeared to be a 'quotation' from Efros's previous production, and the strength of her performance served only to underscore the weakness of the others.⁷⁶³ He justifiably maintained that Efros's work had always been founded on the considerable talents of his former troupe, and that

⁷⁵⁷K. Shcherbakov, 'Svet fonaria v tumane', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1 (1985), 83-88 (p. 84).

⁷⁵⁸A. Kuzicheva, 'V shkole russkoi klassiki', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 25 June 1982, p. 3.

⁷⁵⁹Boris Liubimov, 'V puti', *Sovremennaia dramaturgiia*, 4 (1982), 225-235 (p. 229).

⁷⁶⁰Putintsev, p. 14.

⁷⁶¹*Tri sestry*, Act II, p. 147.

⁷⁶²Putintsev, p. 14.

⁷⁶³Liubimov, 'V puti', p. 229.

by comparison this new staging had all the hallmarks of a 'graduation show' (дипломный спектакль).

Efros had criticised Efremov's 'gloomy' *Seagull* at the MAT, suggesting that he had staged it as 'a slow death' in which the conflict between Trigorin and Treplev was lost in a 'general Chekhovian mood'.⁷⁶⁴ His own *Three Sisters*, however, lacked passion and dynamism, and his reliance on old techniques, his desire to recreate the past in spirit, if not in every detail, together with the inclusion of the mechanical rendering of Chebutykin's famous dance, demonstrated a poverty of ideas. This new production seemed flat and insipid, and certainly for most critics compared unfavourably with their memories of the innovation and vitality of the old.

According to Shakh-Azizova, in 1978 Aleksandr Vilkin staged *The Seagull* at the Maiakovskii as a bitter and acid commentary on the 'repentance of yesterday's Treplevs — the former rebels of the artistic avant-garde who gave up their protest to favour the establishment and the mainstream — and became sterile'.⁷⁶⁵ Vilkin might as well have been addressing Efros directly. Or perhaps Efros would have done well to recall also Treplev's other line to Nina in Act I: 'Надо изображать жизнь не такою, как она есть, и не такою, как должна быть, а такою, как она представляется в мечтах.'⁷⁶⁶ If Efros attempted the production of his dreams he can hardly be said to have achieved it. His 'new' *Three Sisters* reflected a hitherto unprecedented aesthetic and political conservatism. He may have found a new cast, but clearly failed to realise his stated aim of new means and new ideas. Nor, moreover, judging by the reviews above, did his young actors succeed in generating the 'same powerful

⁷⁶⁴Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, pp. 51-52.

⁷⁶⁵Shakh-Azizova, 'Chekhov', p. 172.

⁷⁶⁶*Chaika*, Act I, p. 11.

sense of inner truth' that he believed had once been characteristic of the old productions of the MAT.

Efros later admitted that his *Three Sisters* was 'too quiet', but attempted to lay the blame for this on the stage design:

В поисках нового поворота очень опасно ошибиться в оформлении. Наши новые «Три сестры» на Малой Бронной выглядели излишне «спокойными», может быть, именно из-за оформления. Само по себе оно было красиво, но укладывало все наши внутренние поиски в некий пенал известной формы. Надо было все-таки сделать так, как я когда-то предполагал: комнаты дома где-то под Пермью, маленькие окна, домотканые половики.... Но, наверное, неубедительно объяснил, не увлек Левенталья. А потом, из уважения к его работе, не настоял на переделке. Вот и родилась неточность, какое-то несовпадение.⁷⁶⁷

In this, his only criticism of the production, Efros failed to acknowledge fully his own responsibility for its failure. It is hard to disagree with Vergasova's assessment of this *Three Sisters* as a tedious and 'bloodless' production that had assimilated its own central image of a top spinning pointlessly on its own axis.⁷⁶⁸ In the light of such sharp criticism, Efros's own assertion that his new staging was well-received by audiences is also hard to accept.⁷⁶⁹ It is belied, moreover, by Smelianskii's statement that at one performance many spectators left at the interval.⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁷Efros, *Kniga*, p. 24.

⁷⁶⁸Vergasova, p. 3.

⁷⁶⁹Efros, *Prodolzhenie*, p. 125.

⁷⁷⁰Smeliansky, *Russian Theatre*, p. 125.

By rejecting almost every aspect of his previous approach, turning to the past for inspiration, and creating a new company, Efros hoped that his second *Three Sisters* would provide a new beginning. In truth it signalled the end of an era.

Conclusion

In a study of this scope the writer has been obliged to concentrate on a single aspect of Efros's output: his staging of the work of the Russian classic playwrights Chekhov, Gogol and Turgenev at the Lenkom, Malaia Bronnaia and Taganka. This thesis has analysed in depth his productions of *The Seagull* (1966), *Three Sisters* (1967), *Marriage* (1975), *The Cherry Orchard* (1975), *A Month in the Country* (1977), *Road* (1980) and *Three Sisters* (1982) in the context of his response to their performance history, and as a reflection both of the changing socio-political circumstances of his day and of his own character and development. It has shown how his approach to these works evolved, changing from radical, iconoclastic, overtly contemporary re-interpretation in the 1960s towards, in the 1980s, as he reflected on his career and expressed an increasing concern for cultural and historical continuity, a more lyrical style and one more clearly indebted to tradition.

In his *Seagull* in 1966 Efros challenged the validity of fixed preconceptions and committed what was perceived as heresy against the enshrined orthodoxy of the MAT, whose style of performance had been long regarded as the only acceptable one for the performance of Chekhov. This production can be seen as a 'rite of passage', in which its director, asserting his independence and breaking with his own past, deliberately reacted against the play's performance history and consciously 'modernised' it in order to comment on his own times. In 1967 he adopted a similarly iconoclastic approach to *Three Sisters*, in which he developed further his techniques of 'acting on the run', and openly expressed the loss of idealism felt by many of his post-Thaw generation.

In his radically new interpretation of *Marriage* in 1975, this rarely performed work was seen, by turns, as both tragic and comic and became a treatise, in the tradition of Absurdist Theatre, on the ultimate futility of human endeavour. This production demonstrated the influence in particular of the ideas of

Meyerhold in its creation of a surreal and fantastical world. By presenting such a world, seemingly divorced from immediate social concerns, Efros exploited a classic's potential for multiple interpretation in order to convey muted messages to his audience at the Malaia Bronnaia. A similar exploitation of this potential was evident in 1975 in his *Cherry Orchard* at the Taganka, although as a guest director, Efros was only partially successful in uniting the acting style of that theatre with his own. This production was a further exploration of the theme of cultural and historical loss expressed in his first *Three Sisters*, but by laying particular emphasis on the tragic aspects of the play, Efros provided the first hint of the beginnings of a change of approach.

Although this change would not be fully apparent until his second *Three Sisters* in 1982, it was foreshadowed in his *A Month in the Country* in 1977. In the creation of the atmosphere of the past, and in its lyrical performance style, this production owed a greater debt than Efros's previous work to the traditions of the MAT. In his work on Turgenev he was engaged no longer in a debate with the past but rather in a dialogue with Stanislavsky, who from Efros's earliest years had exerted the greatest influence on his approach.

In 1980 he directed *Road*, an adaptation of *Dead Souls*. This production illuminated his approach to Gogol as a whole, and saw him involved once again in a dialogue with Stanislavsky. This ill-fated staging, though in some respects experimental, marked a turning-point in his career. The sharp, though justifiable criticism of *Road* exacerbated the difficulties that he experienced in his later years at the Malaia Bronnaia. He began to question his abilities as a director and to reassess his previous approach, but also turned his back on the Malaia Bronnaia troupe, with whom over seventeen years he had created some of his finest work. The period of social instability in the early 1980s, together with his own sense of personal and professional crisis, led Efros to seek solace

in history, to attempt to return imaginatively to the past. In 1982 he took a much more traditional, 'quieter' approach to his second *Three Sisters*. In this he attempted to create the sense of a flow of life and the lyrical atmosphere that he believed to have been characteristic of early MAT productions. He wanted too to rediscover an era that he saw as more refined and cultured than his own, and to emulate, indeed to celebrate, a traditional style of performance that he had forcefully rejected before. He hoped that working on *Three Sisters* with a newly-formed young company would herald a new beginning, but instead it signalled the end of his time at the Malaia Bronnaia, and his continuing problems there were responsible in part for his decision to move to the Taganka in 1984.

That decision provoked controversy, creating antagonism and anger. Efros found himself isolated and estranged from many of the Moscow theatre community. At that theatre, however, as well as in his successful productions of *Tartuffe* (1981) at the MAT and of *The Tempest* (1983) at the Pushkin Museum, there were some indications that he was steering his work in a promising new direction, which his untimely death in 1987 prevented him from pursuing.

In the years that followed, there were expressions of regret and support, but the artistic community remained divided, and attacks on his character and his work continued. In recent years castigation has given way to a more balanced assessment. It has been possible to see his actions in the final years of his life in the context of the turbulent days of radical social change in the former Soviet Union.

The controversy that surrounded Efros in the 1980s can no longer be allowed to overshadow his influence on the development of theatre, not only in Russia but

also further afield. This thesis, confined to a single, though significant area of his work, should be seen as only part of on-going research that must encompass his whole career. Over thirty-six years he directed seventy-four stage productions, created thirteen television films, four feature films and four radio dramas. His work in these other media has been ignored. His productions at the CCT at the beginning of his career, and his important pedagogical labours at its end, have similarly received scant mention. Likewise, his stagings of contemporary playwrights like Arbuzov and Radzinskii have been noted only in passing. Moreover, although the present writer has explored elsewhere his response to the plays of Molière, his productions of Shakespeare and other foreign classics also demand attention.

As yet there has been no full study of Efros's work, in Russian or any other language. The present conclusion should therefore be seen not as an end but as a new beginning, and this thesis as a contribution to the continuing interest of scholars and theatre practitioners alike in his enduring legacy .

In Russia the importance of Efros's work has long been recognised by audiences, critics and theatre directors. In Moscow loyal spectators can still witness his *Don Juan* at the Malaia Bronnaia, as well as reconstructed productions of his *Napoleon I* and *Tartuffe* at the Maiakovskii and MAT (Chekhova). Over the past decade his work has also been recalled and celebrated by those who knew him. In 1993 a retrospective exhibition of photographs, set models and other archive material relating to his productions was mounted at the Bakrushkin Theatre Museum. In January 1996, on the tenth anniversary of his death the present writer was invited to (and recorded on tape) a marathon six-hour celebration of his work at the Maiakovskii in Moscow. This drew together over a thousand people as spectators and participants in a programme of performances of scenes from his productions,

musical interludes and personal recollections. Some of those same participants (actors, directors and critics) contributed articles to a collection of memoirs edited by M. Zaionts (already cited) and published in 2000. A new biography by Efros's widow Natal'ia Krymova, extracts from which have already appeared in print, is on the way.

The importance of Efros's contribution to the performance history of Chekhov is acknowledged in critical commentaries and the impact of his ideas is also to be felt in the practice of a new generation of Russian directors. Sergei Artsibashev's *Marriage* has been in the repertoire of Teatr na Pokrovke since 1996 and owes a debt to Efros's long-running production. It is played as a fast-paced comedy, but the character portrayals are full of endearing human warmth, which produces a pervasive sense of sorrow at the shattering of their dreams of happiness. In addition, Agaf'ia Tikhonovna is visited, as in Efros's staging, by shadowy and eerie apparitions.⁷⁷¹ Similarly, as has been shown, a recent production of *A Month in the Country* by Zhenovach clearly reflects Efros's interpretation of Turgenev. According to John Freedman, moreover, Efros's approach is also echoed in the work of directors as divergent in style as Iurii Pogrebnychko and Vladimir Mirzoev.⁷⁷²

⁷⁷¹Sergei Artsibashev joined the Taganka as a staff director in 1981, worked under Liubimov and was Efros's co-director for *One and a Half Square Metres* in 1984. In 1991 he established Teatr na Pokrovke (The Theatre on Pokrovka Street), where in 1997 the present writer saw his productions of *Three Sisters* and *Marriage* (when the latter transferred to the Vakhtangov). For further details see John Freedman, *Moscow Performances The New Russian Theater 1991-1996* (The Netherlands: Harwood, 1997), pp. 195-196, 256-258.

⁷⁷²John Freedman, 'The *Marriage* (final performance), Malaya Bronnaya Theatre', in John Freedman, *Moscow Performances II. The 1996-1997 Season* (The Netherlands: Harwood, 1998), pp. 15-16 (p. 16).

Iurii Pogrebnychko trained under Liubimov at the Taganka and is currently the Artistic Director of The Theatre Near Stanislavsky's House, where the present writer has seen his remarkably innovative interpretations of Chekhov, Gogol and Shakespeare. Vladimir Mirzoev trained first as a circus director, lived in Canada for a number of years, where he established his own theatre Horizontal Eight in Toronto in 1989. In Moscow theatre circles this young director is renowned as an *enfant terrible* and is noted in particular for his radical reworkings of Gogol's *Marriage* and *The Government Inspector* at The Stanislavsky Theatre. For a more detailed account, see Freedman, *Moscow Performances II*, pp. 101-105.

Efros worked not only in Russia but also in Japan, Finland and the United States. Although it has not been possible here to discuss in detail his foreign productions, the influence in America of a director who 'reinvestigated classical texts in a fresh and imaginative manner' has been acknowledged in a recent interview by Robert Brustein, the founding director of the Yale Repertory and the American Repertory Theatres.⁷⁷³ Vera Gottlieb is one of a small group of Western critics who have already recognised Efros's contribution. Most recently, in paper given in March 2002 at the National Theatre in London, in which she discussed the reinterpretation of Chekhov on the British stage, she suggested that one of the earliest impetuses for the rejection of traditionally gloomy and 'deadly' theatre productions of his work had been Efros's *Cherry Orchard* in 1975.⁷⁷⁴

Efros's approach to rehearsals and to individual productions, his discussion of the work of contemporaries, and his reflections on Soviet theatre and society, are documented in his four books. James Thomas of Wayne State University (Detroit, Michigan) is soon to publish these in translation, and so will provide the English-speaking world with fuller insights on Efros.

Finally, it is possible to speculate that audiences and scholars may be able to witness at first-hand the impact of Efros's work. Michael Boyd directed recently a cycle of four of Shakespeare's history plays for the Royal Shakespeare Company. In an interview (published on the internet in December 2000), Boyd revealed that his experiences of Russia under Brezhnev, 'at a time when Sir Francis Walsingham [and espionage] were a reality', had given him a

⁷⁷³Brustein indicated in an interview with Gideon Lester on 12 May 2000 and published on the internet that the work of directors like Efros and Efremov in the United States had had a significant influence on American directors as diverse as Lee Breuer and Julie Taynor. See Gideon Lester, 'Brustein's American Theater. A Theatrical Giant Maps his View', 1-2 (p. 2).

www.theatermania.com/news/feature/index.cfm?story=668&cid=1 Viewed 4 August 2002.

⁷⁷⁴Vera Gottlieb, 'Rough Chekhov', *Platform Papers*, 7 March 2001, 1-11 (p. 6).

www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/platforms/veragottlieb_chekov.html Viewed 21 July 2002. Gottlieb is referring here to the concept of 'Deadly Theatre', evolved by Peter Brook. For further details, see Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 1968), pp. 11-46.

greater understanding of the world in which Shakespeare had operated.⁷⁷⁵ More importantly, he expressed his astonishment at the 'aesthetic and intellectual rigour' that he had encountered during his year of study, between 1978 and 1979, at the Malaia Bronnaia, while 'sitting at the feet of the great man', the theatre director Anatolii Efros.

On 24 July 2002 the board of the RSC appointed Boyd to follow Adrian Noble as Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company. He is to take up his appointment in March 2003. Sixteen years after Efros's death, his enduring legacy may very well be assured, not only in Russia but also much closer to home.

⁷⁷⁵See 'Letter from London's RSC', *CyberTheatre Monthly*, December 2000, 4-5 www.zoetrope-stories.com Viewed 4 August 2002.

Appendix 1

Systems of Censorship and the Organisation of Soviet Theatres

1. *General Principles of Censorship*

2. *Organisation of Soviet Theatres*

3. *Systems of Censorship*

4. *General Principles of Censorship*

5. *Organisation of Soviet Theatres*

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7. *General Principles of Censorship*

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31. *General Principles of Censorship*

32. *Organisation of Soviet Theatres*

33. *Systems of Censorship*

34. *General Principles of Censorship*

35. *Organisation of Soviet Theatres*

In the years following the October Revolution, the theatre, as an important tool in the dissemination of political ideas, was under the control of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narodnyi kommissariat prosveshcheniia, NKP or *Narkompros*), created in 1917. Anatolii Lunarcharskii was in charge of this body, although he also served as the first Minister of Culture, and as a playwright had a particular interest in theatre. During his tenure, responsibility for theatres was delegated to the Theatre Department of *Narkompros* (Teatral'nyi otdel Narkomprosa, TEO) and theatre repertoires were controlled by *Glavrepertkom*, a censorship committee established in 1923, and discussed in more detail below. In the late 1920s, following the sacking of Lunarcharskii in 1929, and during Stalin's regime the theatre was increasingly subject to more rigorous scrutiny to ensure ideological purity. By 1953 direct control of the theatre repertoires had been transferred from *Glavrepertkom* back to the Ministry of Culture itself.

The Ministry of Culture received directives from the Council of Ministers and the Secretary for Ideology of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, but in turn delegated direct responsibility for most theatres in Moscow to the *Glavnoe upravlenie kul'tury ispolkoma Mossoveta* (The Main Administration of Culture of the Moscow City Council Executive Committee, GUKiM).⁷⁷⁶

Through various sub-sections this organisation controlled the budgets both for the general administration of theatres and for individual productions. It was also responsible for sending unpublished scripts to *Glavlit*, a body established in 1922 under the name *Glavnoe upravlenie po delam literatury i izdatel'stv* (The Chief Administration in Matters of Literature and Publishing), which was later changed to *Glavnoe upravlenie po okhrane voennykh i gosudarstvennykh tain v*

⁷⁷⁶Most but not all theatres were under the control of GUKiM. The Bolshoi, Maly and MAT were the direct responsibility of the USSR Ministry of Culture, and the Vakhtangov in Moscow and the Kirov in Leningrad were subordinate to the RSFSR Ministry of Culture.

pechaty (The Chief Administration for the Preservation of State Secrets in the Press). In theory its officials were responsible for the removal from printed works of any material which endangered military or state security. In reality however *Glavlit* had wide-ranging powers of control over all printed matter. It was responsible for the exportation and importation of literature both native and foreign, and could 'recommend' the elimination from a work of any material deemed ideologically suspect.⁷⁷⁷

Glavrepertkom was a sub-section of *Glavlit* and (as noted above) was established in 1923. According to a statute of 1934 it was responsible for the censorship of theatre, music, variety, the representational arts, gramophone recordings and artistic radio broadcasts.⁷⁷⁸ *Glavrepertkom* was also responsible for drawing up lists of permitted and banned productions. Once a script had been scrutinised and passed by *Glavlit*, it was returned to GUKiM, whose representatives gave the initial consent to a theatre for the play to be produced. GUKiM officials then monitored the rehearsal process, and also viewed the production at the final dress rehearsals before it opened. GUKiM could make mandatory requests for omissions and additions before issuing a licence permitting public performances. Once the production had been cleared for public viewing, the theatre was required to reserve two seats no further back than the fourth row for censors, who (theoretically at least) could view any subsequent performance to ensure that lines were not changed.

The Party could also exert control over the theatres through its local district committees, and the larger theatres had internal systems of control. Indeed most

⁷⁷⁷*Glavlit* was split at a local level into separate organs (*krailit*, *obllit*, *railit*, *gorlit*), each of which was responsible for the publications produced in their geographical area, and censors at any publishing house had to be approved by the plenipotentiaries of *Glavlit*.

For a complete list of the subject matter which was officially subject to the scrutiny of *Glavlit*, see R. Conquest, *The Politics of Ideas in the USSR* (London: The Bodley Head, 1967), pp. 43-44. A list of information of what in 1956 officially constituted a state secret is provided in Appendix 1 in this same book, pp. 61-63.

⁷⁷⁸*RSFSR Laws*, 1934, 10:66.

had their own party organisations. These cells were responsible for education programmes among the staff, such as lectures in Marxist-Leninist ideology, and in accordance with the remit of a given theatre (the Lenkom, for instance) were instrumental in organising performances for specific groups. Theatres were therefore an integral part of a wider political network.

The representatives of various official bodies liaised closely with each theatre's Administrative Director, who was appointed directly by the Ministry of Culture, and held responsible for any infringement of procedures. The Administrative Director could command considerable influence. It will be recalled for instance that Kogan was instrumental in 1983 in securing the dismissal of Dunaev, the official Artistic Director at the Malaia Bronnaia, who had permitted Efros to work with relative freedom.

All theatres also had their own artistic councils (*khudsovery*) which were introduced in 1956, in the relatively liberal period prior to the Hungarian revolt. These councils, chaired by the Administrative Directors, were made up of actors, staff directors, theatre critics, intellectuals and other theatre practitioners, and functioned as advisory bodies to the Artistic Directors in the matter of the selection and production of plays. In some cases they had considerable power; Liubimov for instance was particularly adept at ensuring the election to the artistic council of the Taganka of influential intellectuals and critics prepared to vouch for the theatre's integrity when it was under attack. In other cases, however, the councils came to function as a potent political force. This was particularly true after 1963, when it was suggested at a joint meeting of the Ministry of Culture and the Union of Writers that these councils should be expanded to include writers and representatives of 'public and creative

organisations'. The implication would appear to be that orthodox views should where necessary be injected.⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷⁹Conquest, p. 49.

Appendix 2

Efros's Productions on Stage, Television, Screen and Radio.

Efros's productions are listed in chronological order. The names of those works not written in Russian are given in English only. However, if these were performed under a different Russian title this is indicated.

The information in the brackets reads as follows: Author's Name, Assistant or co-director (as appropriate), Theatre or Film Studio (as appropriate).

The following abbreviations are used: MODT (Московский областной драматический театр, The Dramatic Theatre of the Province of Moscow), RODTim.O (Рязанский областной драматический театр им. А. Н. Островского, The Ostrovskii Dramatic Theatre of the Province of Riazan'), CCT (Central Children's Theatre, Moscow), T-s K (Театр-студия Киноактера, The Film Actor's Theatre Studio, Moscow), LK (Lenkom Theatre, Moscow), and MB (Malaia Bronnaia Theatre, Moscow).

1951

Прага остается моей (Prague Remains Mine) (K. Buriakovskii; Touring production.)

Приезжайте в Звонковое (Come to Zvonkovoie) (A. Korneichuk; MODT.)

1952

The Dog in the Manger (Lope de Vega; RODTim.O.)

Любовь яровая (Liubov' Iarovaia) (K. Trenev; RODTim.O.)

1953

Девуцы — красавицы (Beautiful Girls) (A. Simukov; RODTim.O.)

Любовь на рассвете (The Dawning of Love) (Ia. Galan; RODTim.O.)

Когда ломаются конья (When They Break a Horse) (N. Pogodin; RODTim.O.)

Камни в печени (Gall Stones) (A. Makaenok; RODTim.O.)

1954

Чужая роль (Someone Else's Role) (S. Mikhalkov; CCT.)

В добрый час! (Good Luck!) (V. Rozov; CCT.)

1955

Мы втроем поехали на целину (We Three Together Went to the the Virgin Land) (N. Pogodin; Co-director: M. Knebel'; CCT.)

1956

Сказка о сказках (*A Story About Stories*) (A. Zak and I. Kuznetsov; CCT.)

1957

Hedda Gabler (H. Ibsen; T-s K.)

Борис Годунов (*Boris Godunov*) (A. Pushkin; CCT.)

В поисках радости (*In Search of Joy*) (V. Rozov; CCT.)

1958

De Pretore Vincenzo (Under the title: *Никто* (*Nobody*); E. de Filippo. Studio of the Young Actor (Sovremmenik).)

1959

Вольные мастера (*Their Own Masters*) (Z. Danovskaia; CCT.)

The Visions of Simone Machard (B. Brecht; Ermolova Theatre.)

Друг мой Колька! (*My Friend Kol'ka!*) (A. Khmelik; CCT.)

1960

Неравный бой (*Uneven Fight*) (V. Rozov; CCT.)

В гостях и дома (*Home and Away*) (A. Volodin; Ermolova Theatre.)

Бывшие мальчики (*Boys No More*) (I. Ivanter; CCT.)

1961

Шумный день (*The Eventful Day*) (Film version of *Good Luck!*; V. Rozov; Co-director: G. Natanson; MosFilm.)

1962

Цветик-Семицветник (*The Magic Rainbow Flower*) (V. Kataev; CCT.)

Перед ужином (*Before Supper*) (V. Rozov; CCT.)

Высокосный год (*Leap Year*) (Film; V. Panov; MosFilm.)

1963

Двое в степи (*Two Men on the Steppe*) (Film; E. Kazakevich; MosFilm.)

Женитьба (*Marriage*) (N. Gogol; CCT.)

1964

Они и мы (*Us and Them*) (N. Dolinina; CCT.)

В день свадьбы (*On The Wedding Day*) (V. Rozov; LK.)

104 страницы про любовь (*104 Pages About Love*) (E. Radzinskii; LK.)

1965

Мой бедный Марат (*My Poor Marat*) (Also translated as *The Promise*) (A. Arbuzov; LK.)

Снимается кино (*Making a Movie*) (E. Radzinskii; LK.)

Каждому свое (*To Each His Own*) (S. Aleshin; Assistant director: L. Durov; LK.)

1966

Чайка (*The Seagull*) (A. Chekhov; LK.)

Судебная хроника (*Chronicle of a Trial*) (Ia. Volchek; Assistant Director: A. Adoskin; LK.)

Мольер (*Molière*) (Also translated as *The Cabal of Hypocrites*) (M. Bulgakov; LK.)

1967

Три сестры (*Three Sisters*) (A. Chekhov; MB.)

1968

Обольститель Колобашкин (*The Seducer Kolobashkin*) (E. Radzinskii; MB.)

Платон Кречет (*Platon Krechet*) (A. Korneichuk; MB.)

1969

Счастливые дни несчастливго человека (*The Happy Days of an Unhappy Man*) (A. Arbuzov; MB.)

Women Live Too Long (Under the Russian title *Дальше — тишина* (*The Rest is Silence*); V. Delmar; Mossoveta Theatre.)

1970

Romeo and Juliet (W. Shakespeare; MB.)

Сказки старого Арбата (*Tales of the Old Arbat*) (A. Arbuzov; MB.)

1971

Борис Годунов (*Boris Godunov*) (An adaptation for television; A. Pushkin.)

Человек со стороны (*The Man from the Outside*) (I. Dvoretzkii; MB.)

1972

Марат, Лука и Леонидик (*Marat, Lika and Leonidik*) (An adaptation for television of *My Poor Marat*; A. Arbuzov.)

Брат Алезиа (*Brother Alesha*) (V. Rozov; MB.)

Платон Кречет (*Platon Krechet*) (An adaptation for television; A. Korneichuk.)

1973

Ситуация (*The Situation*) (V. Rozov; MB.)

Don Juan (J. B. de Molière; MB.)

Всего несколько слов в честь господина де Мольера (*Just a Few Words in Honour of Monsieur de Molière*). (Television drama based on Bulgakov's *Molière* and Molière's *Don Juan*.)

1974

Турбаза (*The Holiday Resort*) (E. Radzinskii; Mossoveta Theatre.)

Человек со стороны (*The Man from the Outside*) (An adaptation for television; I. Dvoretiskii.)

Таня (*Tania*) (An adaptation for television; A. Arbuzov.)

Страницы журнала Печорина (*Pages from Pechorin's Diary*) (An adaptation for television of *Герой нашего времени* (*A Hero of Our Time*); M. Lermontov.)

1975

Женитьба (*Marriage*) (N. Gogol; MB.)

Эшелон (*Troop Train*) (M. Roshchin; MAT.)

Вишневый сад (*The Cherry Orchard*) (A. Chekhov; Taganka.)

Снятый и назначенный (*The Chosen and the Dismissed*) (Ia. Volchek; Assistant director L. Durov; MB.)

1976

Othello (W. Shakespeare; MB.)

Фантазия (*Fantasia*) (An adaptation for television of *Весенние воды* (*Torrents of Spring*); I. Turgenev.)

Dear Liar (An adaptation for television of a production of this play by J. Kilty originally staged at the MAT by I. Gaevskii.)

Martin Eden (An adaption for radio by V. Baliasnyi of Jack London's novel.)

1977

Месяц в деревне (*A Month in the Country*) (I. Turgenev; MB)

1978

Незнакомка (*The Unknown Woman*) (Efros's own adaptation for radio of Aleksandr Blok's play.)

Веранда в лесу (*A Verandah in the Woods*) (I. Dvoretzkii; MB)

Женитьба (*Marriage*) (N. Gogol; Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis.)

Islands in the Stream (A television adaptation by V. Baliasnyi of E. Hemmingway's novel.)

1979

Продолжение Дон Жуана (*Don Juan Continued*) (E. Radzinskii; MB.)

Мольер (*Molière*) (M. Bulgakov; Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis.)

В четверг и больше никогда (*On Thursday and Then Never Again*) (A film based on A. Bitov's short-story *Заповедник* (*The Nature Reserve*); MosFilm.)

1980

Дорога (*Road*) (A stage adaptation of Gogol's *Мертвые души* (*Dead Souls*) by V. Baliasnyi; MB.)

Summer and Smoke (T. Williams; MB.)

Women Live Too Long (Under the Russian title *Дальше — тишина* (*The Rest is Silence*)) (V. Delmar; an adaptation for television of Efros's 1967 stage production.)

1981

Вишневый сад (*The Cherry Orchard*) (A. Chekhov; Tokyo, Japan.)

Воспоминание (*Recollection*) (A. Arbuzov; MB.)

Tartuffe (J. B. de Molière; MAT.)

1982

Три сестры (*Three Sisters*) (A. Chekhov; MB.)

Каменный гость (*The Stone Guest*) (A. Pushkin; on radio.)

Живой труп (*Living Corpse*) (L. Tolstoy; MAT.)

Месяц в деревне (*A Month in the Country*) (I. Turgenev under the title *Наташа* (*Natasha*); Tokyo, Japan.)

1983

Romeo and Juliet (An adaptation for television of Efros's 1970 stage production; W. Shakespeare.)

Моцарт и Сальери (*Mozart and Salieri*) (A. Pushkin; on radio.)

Napoleon I (F. Bruckner; MB.)

Месяц в деревне (*A Month in the Country*) (An adaptation for television of Efros's 1977 stage production; I. Turgenev.)

Вишневый сад (*The Cherry Orchard*) (A. Chekhov; Finnish National Theatre, Helsinki.)

The Tempest (W. Shakespeare; Pushkin Museum.)

1984

Директор театра (*The Theatre Manager*) (I. Dvoretzkii; MB.)

На дне (*Lower Depths*) (M. Gorky; Taganka.)

1985

У войны - не женское лицо (*War Does Not Have a Female Face*) (S. Aleksievich; Taganka.)

A Lovely Sunday Crève-coeur (T. Williams; under the title ***Прекрасное воскресенье для пикника*** (*A Lovely Sunday for a Picnic*); Taganka.)

Вишневый сад (*The Cherry Orchard*) (A. Chekhov; Taganka.)

1986

Полтора квадратных метра (*One and A Half Square Metres*) (B. Mozhaev; Co-director S. Artsibashev; Taganka.)

The Misanthrope (J. B. de Molière; Taganka.)

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This bibliography is divided into four separate parts.

1. This first part lists all the published sources in Russian and is divided as follows:

- 1 (i). Literary Texts
- 1 (ii). Secondary Material in Books
- 1 (iii). Articles and Chapters in Books
- 1 (iv). Articles and Reviews in Newspapers
- 1 (v). Articles and Reviews in Journals

2. This second part lists all the sources in English and is divided as follows:

- 2 (i). Books
- 2 (ii). Chapters in Books
- 2 (iii). Articles in Journals and Articles
- 2 (iv). Reviews in Newspapers

3. This third part lists sources in French

4. This fourth part lists Internet Sources

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