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## **The Mystery of the “Finest Hour” of Russian Theatre (Theatre Art as a Way of Constructing Russian Cultural Identity)**

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*The article presents the results of theatre art research in the context of constructing Russian cultural identity. Theatre art is considered in historical dynamics; the research analyses the main milestones in the development of the national style of the theatre. Special attention is paid to the phenomenon of mysterious success of Russian theatre at the end of the 19th – early 20th century, in the period of “European theatre depression”. The article reveals the origins of “Russian theatre” as such, its similarities and differences from the Western and Oriental theatres, and the scenarios of its further destiny.*

*The history of Russian theatre art leads the authors to the conclusion on the essence of transformation of the contemporary theatre in Russia and in the Krasnoyarsk Territory (Krai). The authors consider current discussions on the phenomenon of the “death” of drama text. The authors arrive at the conclusion that the text ceases to be the “heart” and the “lord” of the theatre, transforming into one layer, a material, an element of the total theatre production. The new theatre text distinguishes between the levels of the drama text as such, the play text based on non-verbal components and the performance level. The latter is the dominating one; an actor is not a performer of a certain role anymore, but a provoking performer, laying his being on the stage open to the audience.*

*Keywords: Russian theatre, drama, theatricality, people’s nature of play, agon, commedia dell’arte, dialogism of culture, director’s theatre, post-drama theatre.*

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Russian theatre and drama, Russian theatre traditions and innovations provide enormous historic materials the researchers continuously update with new volumes of works. For the last 5–10 years, it is worthwhile mentioning the researches by Costanzo S. (2008), Järvinen H. (2008), Lipovetsky M., Beumers B. (2008), Rahman K.S. (2008), Zazzali P. (2008), Senelick L. (2009, 2010, 2014), Goldstein R. J. (2010), Freedman J. (2010), Klebanov M. (2011), Thomas J.M. (2011), Aquilina S. (2012), Warden C. (2015), Koroleva L.A. (2016), Margaret Tejerizo (2016), Shevtsova M. (2016), Sobkin V.S., Lykova T.A., Kolomiets Y.O. (2016). The researchers are attracted, first of all, by the revolutionary changes that have occurred in the Russian drama of the first thirty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They analyse the innovations of drama by A.P. Chekhov, the theatre aesthetics revolution of Vsevolod Meyerhold, the theatre theory by Konstantin Stanislavsky.

But despite all that, there are still a lot of unsolved questions in the theatre studies. For example, a question of originality of Russian theatre, speaking of the mental features in the context of Russian culture that determined its fate. It also includes the mysterious success of Russian theatre in the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the period of the European “theatre depression”. When and how did these “wings of universal fame” appear, if the history of adopting European theatrical forms in the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century and the imitative character of early Russian dramaturgy are so widely known? Even later, in the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the influence made by the Western European theatre trend setters on the theatres of Moscow was significant. Suddenly, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the “golden age” of Russian theatre begins, launching a global breakthrough, followed by fireworks of theatre innovations that burst out in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, astonishing the European audience. How did happen, where did it come from?

One should not forget that the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the *crescendo* of the golden age of Russian literature. Russian theatre matured with the dramaturgy of Fonvizin, Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Sukhovo-Kobylin and Ostrovsky. In the theatron, or special performance ground, literary drama mostly dominated over free improvisation. But still, by the 1870-s and the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russian theatre had reached the condition we know as the “golden age”, the success of its brightest theatrical forms, new systems of theatre skills, the glory of Moscow Art Theatre, the creative search of the theatre troupes of Tairov, Vakhtangov, Meyerhold, the success of Diaghilev’s “Russian Seasons” in Paris! We may suppose that there is something inherent in the genetics of Russian theatre and its historical way of development that brought it to the “finest hour”.

Let us start with history. It goes back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when there were guisers wearing traditional masks to play in public performances on the city squares. Those "mashkars", as they were called, grew in the ground of Russian national traditions of *skomorokh* art existing in Russia since the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Moscow Kremlin for the skomorokhs the Mock Chamber was built, becoming especially famous during the reign of Ivan the Terrible. At that time, Russian culture was actively resisting all European traditions. But were there any adopted customs going back to the Medieval contacts with Oriental neighbours?

We believe that this question has a negative answer. However, in the East the genre of drama appeared earlier than in Ancient Greece. With the great diversity of epic and lyrical motives, it has never had the ultimate forms of tragic tension which developed in Ancient Greece, Europe, or in Russia. A different world outlook creates a different philosophic-aesthetic concept of theatricality. In traditional Oriental theatre, the dominating element is the language of everything that can be conveyed by anything but the speech. The characters of this theatre, mythological characters, live in the traditional makeup, gestures and scenery, performing traditional dialogues and vocal parts. Even the latest experiments of Chinese or Japanese drama are not free of this theatrical identity. One comes to the Oriental theatre to enjoy the art of incarnating the traditions. This is right for the Japanese performances Noh and Kabuki, for traditional Indian theatre or Chinese opera. But even the earliest syncretic forms of Russian theatre action hardly have anything in common with them.

However, some researchers still find a certain similarity with the Oriental tradition in this period, for example, in the structure of performance titles. Let us take a look at the comedy based on the Old Testament plot: "Queen Cuts the Head of King Holofernes". Let us compare it to the first Chinese translations of Shakespeare's plays: "Ha Deli Kills His Uncle to Revenge" ("Hamlet"), "Jealous Lian De Kills His Wife" ("Othello") etc.

These may sound similar, but interpreting events through actions was typical for the Middle Ages; however, the fact that plays based on Biblical stories have always been popular in Russia is really important. School drama is one of the most curious phenomena in European theatre, used to help students learn Latin poetry and speech. Perhaps, this Western tradition was adopted in Russia because it was associated with the experience of Medieval mystery, its Christmas and Easter cycles. At Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, for instance, since the moment of its establishment in 1631, all the plays had been created and produced both in Latin and Russian languages.

There is no surprise, that in the year 1643, during the reign of Mikhail Fedorovich Romanov, the first attempt to create a court theatre was made. However, only his son, Alexis Mikhailovich, succeeded in creating the first royal theatre. Upon his order, in one of the summer palaces near Moscow titled Preobrazhensky, the Comedy Chamber was made, and Pastor Gregory was delegated to "make comedy", and "in the comedy to enact the Book of Esther from the Bible". Since foreign actors refused to go to the faraway unknown Moscow, the troupe was gathered of the children of foreigners living in Moscow; it consisted of 64 people. October 17, 1672, the first performance in the history of Russian theatre was played. The play titled "Esther", or "The Comedy of Artaxerxes" was extremely successful. It consisted of seven acts with a prologue and an epilogue, and lasted for ten hours without an intermission. The tsar was very satisfied with the performance. But when the play was over, the spectators went directly to the steam house, as they believed that after watching the "comedy" the sin needed to be washed off.

That is understandable; though the plot of the plays was based on Biblical stories, in the final of each act there was an ungodly ballet divertissement. For this reason, at the court, ballet was nicknamed "interentry", from the word "entry" which had the meaning of "act". As a director, Gregory recruited dancers for the "interentry" in the Foreign Quarter. Of course, it was influenced by French ballet, which had finally found its shape as an independent kind of art during the reign of Louis XIV of France and was rapidly spread around the European courts. In 1661, the Royal Academy of Dance was opened in Paris. As soon as on February 8, 1673, at the court of Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich, the first ballet performance "Ballet of Orpheus and Eurydice" was produced, consisting of ceremonial postures, bows, slow dances and defiles, some prepared lines and vocal parts.

On the stage of the Comedy Chamber, nine "comedies" were produced. After the death of Alexis in 1676, the theatre performances were ceased in the royal chambers: the new Tsar, Feodor Alexeyevich, did not appreciate such entertainment. Only 25 years after, Tsar Peter the Great issued a resolution of assemblies, the revolutionary decree intended to introduce the Russian boyars and young noblemen to the Western traditions of cultural leisure; at state institutions, ballroom dancing was taught, and guest performances of Western theatre troupes became regular and compulsory during his reign.

In 1702, upon the Tsar's order, in front of Nikolsky Gates of the Kremlin, in the Red Square a special theatre hall for the public theatre was built. It was known as the

"Comedy Chamber". The new theatre with the capacity of 400 people was public, i.e. made not for the royal household but for ordinary people. The performance was given twice a week, with the ticket price ranging from 3 to 10 kopeks. However, the public did not go to the theatre much: as the actors were German, the plays were produced in German language. In 1706, the theatre was closed.

But in a short while there was a dramatic change, and Russian theatre gained enormous popularity. But it required lots of changes in Russian literature, culture, and history to make it happen. The one who stood at its origins was Alexander Petrovich Sumarokov. His plays were written in the 1750–1770s. He was highly appreciated by his contemporaries Novikov and Karamzin, who called him "Russian Rasin" and "Russian Moliere". 50 years after, in his poem "Arts and Sciences" A.F. Voyeykov named him "the father of Russian theatre". However, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that praise was the only one: Pushkin, and later, Belinsky saw the works of Sumarokov as unsuccessful adaptations of European plays (Belinsky, 1978: 185). The descendants turned out to be severe critics of the writer's heritage: forgetting that their time was separated from Russian classicism with the barrier of new literary language, they preferred to bury "the pionerdom of Sumarokov in the vineyards of Russian drama, the enlightenment achievements of his satire" in oblivion, though thanks to it, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century "evil had no chance to be named good".

The first story produced as a Russian ballet was also written by Sumarokov: he created libretti for "The Refuge of Virtue" and "New Laurels". Being a pioneer is always hard. But it is fruitful, at the same time. The contemporary and competitor of Sumarokov in the Classicist domain, poet V. Trediakovsky, criticized the playwright for being "not quite European" in his 9 tragedies and 12 comedies despite of the Europeanization age. Besides Descartes rationalism, the dramas were rich in love affairs, national and lyrical elements, typical for the "first literary attempts" of Sentimentalism. The famous lyrical songs by Sumarokov were so popular that they gave rise to a great number of copycats (Dubrovina, 2010: 112).

In plays by Sumarokov the national traits of the comic characters were very prominent: typically Russian characters of the crafty servants, and no matter how unthinkable it sounds, motives of Old Russian history. What is his "Dmitry the Impostor" if not an anticipation of forthcoming Romanticism? The resolutions of Sumarokov's tragedies, with the comedy elements strictly forbidden by the Classicism aesthetics, were more typical of the new genre of drama which was about to emerge in Europe. This is not the aesthetic tractate of Classicism by Boileau; this is almost

Diderot with his justification of realism and the "middle genre" in drama. And how should we treat Trediakovsky's calling the heritage of Sumarokov "skomorokhship of skomorokhship", which is actually the tradition of Italian national *commedia dell'arte*?

This is what makes it interesting! In those times, theatre gradually began to win its grounds, as it did during the reign of Alexis Mikhailovich when new performances were produced in houses of the boyars Matveev, Miloslavsky, princes Odoevsky and Golitsyn. During the age of Elizabeth in Petersburg, the theatres in the houses of Count Yaguzhinsky and Count Peter Sheremetev still existed. This tradition remained for a very long time, spreading to the province. Foreign troupes and actors were in great demand. Empress Anna Ioannovna was especially fond of Italians. The German comedians invited from Leipzig and the Italian troupes who introduced *commedia dell'arte* to the Russian audience in 1733 were very popular.

The permanent masks of the characters embodying the faults of the masters (the arrogant pedant, the boastful military man, the stingy old man) as well as crafty servants and lovers in *commedia dell'arte* quite matched the need for didacticism and improvement of morals in the society of the Enlightenment Age. Strictly speaking, there is little information of this improvisation comedy in books, but its theatrical principles were used in the theatres and dramaturgy of different eras.

Yes, the tight plot of a couple of lovers getting over the obstacles of social stereotypes with the help of crafty servants, can be found four hundred years back in the Spanish Renaissance comedy by Lope de Vega, another author who has an anniversary this year. "The Dog in the Manger" has a rich atmosphere of a folk carnival, together with the universal irony and democratic robustness typical for *commedia dell'arte*. Half a century later, Jean Batiste Moliere in his early French Enlightenment comedy, continuing the traditions of his predecessors, also turned to the castigation of greed, ignorance, subservience to fashion. "The Bourgeois Gentleman" written by him was played on many national stags, and the great Mask of Hypocrisy, Tartuff, became a milestone in the history of world literature.

After half a year more, in Italy the acting mask theatricality will dominate in the famous stage fairy-tales by Carlo Goldoni and Carlo Gozzi. Proceeding from their national comedy, the great Italians reviewed the antithesis of masks and real human character. But the value of love as a key to the truth, intellectual games, verbal riddles similar to the improvised agons of ancient comedians still dominated.

Quarrels and fights were also common for Russian performances, for example, for masquerade characters: thus, on the coronation ceremony of Catherine the Great



in 1763, there were the masks of ignorance, idleness, slander, venality, extravagance, opposed by the massive singing unit similar to that known as choir in the Antique theatre.

Naturally, verbal controversies were a distinctive feature of dramas by Sumarokov, Knyazhnin, Fonvizin. But, just like in Russian professional theatre, in the literary drama of those times the traditions of *commedia dell'arte* were not visible until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Folk theatre was a different thing: back in the 1770-s, the characters of mask comedy found their way to the public theatre stage, appearing in the buffoon harlequinade played at the Maslenitsa shows. They were prohibited in 1894.

Back in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Italian comedy motives returned to the professional stage in the famous theatre experiments by Evreinov, Vakhtangov.

On the eve of the New Year 1907, Meyerhold presented the first night of "The Puppet Booth", and in 1912 F. Komissarzhevsky produced "Turandot" by Gozzi in Moscow; in 1919 in America Sergei Prokofiev completed his work on the opera "The Love for Three Oranges" based on the fairy tale by Gozzi, and in 1924, the opera "Turandot" by G. Puccini was produced in Milano, directed by A. Toscanini. However, the truly emblematic of these is "Princess Turandot" by Vakhtangov.

All Russian culture of the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century was great cultural and historical crossroads. In his article "Silver Age of Russian Poetry", Otsup emphasized that this aesthetic phenomenon hardly has an analogue in the West, that in Russia whole centuries of Western art happened to be squeezed into three decades. Berdyaev agreed with him, speaking of the rise in creativity, of the "spiritual trends" that occupied Russian souls at that time. The epoch brought a whole constellation of wonderful poets, writers, artists, musicians, and sculptors.

Among arts, almost the most important place was occupied by theatre, which, was, according to most of its ideologists and builders of the time, the "centre" of the new outlook. The theatre professionals were attracted by its creative opportunities. It is no coincidence that this period was fruitful in some new names. It is all connected to a new unique phenomenon in the sphere of musical theatre, the first private theatrical concern belonging to Savva Mamontov, one of the philanthropists of that time. A large industrialist with two academic degrees, in love with arts, he was engaged in sculpturing and libretto writing, working as an actor and a theatre director. But this was not his major gift. Everyone spoke of the amazing atmosphere he created around himself to attract new talents. Today it is hard to overestimate the role Mamontov played in the development of Russian musical and theatre art as a whole. Having gathered all the

greatest artists and musicians around himself, he provided the private opera stage for the implementation of the most daring artistic ideas of the Silver Age. Everything began in Abramtsevo, at Mamontov's estate. Many literary soirees, amateur concerts and home performances were organized there. The scenery was made by Vasily Polenov with his young assistant Konstantin Korovin, Ilya Repin, Valentin Serov, Mikhail Vrubel, Viktor Vasnetsov. These home performances in Abramtsevo helped him accumulate the experience which was finally formulated into the innovative principles of opera production by Mamontov, opened with "Rusalka" by Dargomyzhsky on January 9, 1885.

From the very first performances, everyone was impressed with the prominent power of art combined with music: the scenery was so bright that it acted as a painted interpretation of music. That was not a coincidence. Vasnetsov confessed that he could never paint without music. For Vrubel, music was dearer than any other art including painting. He said that his mother-of-pearl paints were adopted from the colours of the orchestra playing music by Rimsky-Korsakov. The "Mozart of painting" born for making scenery was Konstantin Korovin. According to him, in his paintings he had always attempted to "sing with paints". Obviously, that was the incarnation of one of the main ideas of the Silver Age: the idea of integrity, synthesis of all arts.

It looks as though one art is trying on some traits of another: poetry tries on music, music tries on painting, painting tries on music etc. To describe it, M. Antakolsky wrote that music was desired to be visible, and painting and sculpture were desired to be audible.

At the private opera of Mamontov, Russian operas were produced, Russian painters worked and Russian composers conducted the orchestra. This is where the gem of Feodor Chaliapin, the future genius of Russian opera stage, was cut. It is impossible to imagine the Silver Age without him! In a certain sense, Chaliapin was the face of Russian theatre, the new type of character who came out to the stage: a singing actor. Stanislavsky once confessed, that his system was primarily based on Chaliapin's manner.

By that time, besides authors, new talented philanthropists with equal literateness and delicateness of artistic taste were needed. For this reason, after Mamontov, another outstanding figure appeared on the horizon of Russian art, making the fame of Russian art resonate all around the world. That was Sergei Diaghilev, one of the founders of the "World of Art" association and organizer of the Russian Seasons in Paris. In his youth, Diaghilev dreamt of being a singer, but he became a Russian opera propagandist: first



as a publicist and critic, then as an impresario, a guest performance organizer. As he believed, introducing Russian music and opera to European audience was his mission. He kept telling his friends that he was convinced of being a descendant of Peter the Great. Similarly to Peter who "opened the window to Europe", he, Diaghilev, was meant to open the real beautiful and glorious face of Russia to Europe. And did he succeed! In the year 1907, the "Russian Historical Concerts" were held in Paris. Five programmes of opera music by Glinka, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakov, symphonies by Balakirev, Glazunov, Tchaikovsky, Lyadov, Taneev, Rachmaninov, Skryabin stunned the French audience. One year after, in 1908, "Boris Godunov" with Chaliapin starring was an enormous success. This victory determined the entire destiny of Diaghilev. Starting from the next year, regular "Russian Seasons" began; even though that was for ballet only, it was a great success. For 20 years his private theatre concern saw the most outstanding ballet-masters of the time: Mikhail Fokin, Vaslav Nijinsky, Léonide Massine, Bronislava Nijinska, George Balanchine, Serge Lifar.

Many of them were brought up by Diaghilev himself. Just like Mamontov, he had a "nose" for talents. "Surprise me!" he would tell the producers starting a new project. That is how he brought the best artists of the epoch to his ballet. The performances were decorated by Bakst and Benois, Roerich and Golovin, Goncharova and Larionov, Matisse and Picasso etc. The stars of Diaghilev's group were the elite of Russian ballet: Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, Olga Spesivtseva, the Nijinskis... Among composers, he invited the famous French masters C. Debussy, M. Ravel, E. Satie. Among the Russian composers Diaghilev revealed to Europe, the most outstanding one is Igor Stravinsky. June 25 1910, the first night of "The Firebird" on the stage of Grande Opera in Paris, is the date when the world glory of the young composer began. The next year, on the Champs Elysees, there was the first night of "Petrushka" produced by Mikhail Fokin based on libretto by Alexander Benois. And, of course, we cannot but mention the iconic ballet "The Rite of Spring" to the music by Stravinsky.

In the one-act ballets by Mikhail Fokin, dramaturgically complete and balanced, the canonic dance compositions were replaced by new choreography: dynamic pantomime, the dance full of mimic expression. At that time, Russia was the only country where ballet existed as an independent and creatively developing kind of art, and the achievements of Russian masters made a very powerful impact on the further development of world choreography.

However, fairly admiring the best examples of Russian ballet of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it would be important to understand how and when its transformation from

a secondary art adopted from Europe into this bright, original, spectacular scenic reality took place. A number of Russian researchers, particularly Yu. Lotman and N. Khrenov, suppose that something had to happen both in Russia itself and something had to influence the personality and culture as a whole, which used to be monologic and monolith in its nature.

Let us begin with the fact that Russian clergy protested against introduction of a dramatic element into the church service. Theatrical church performances in Russia (for example, "The Play of Daniel", first mentioned in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century) appeared under the influence of the Western liturgical dramas. The synthesis of Christian culture with popular pagan roots was not encouraged, causing, to a great extent, the phenomenon of Russian schism. As a rule, monologism in culture leads to a natural result: complete physical elimination of dissidence. But as soon as in the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries the cultural dialogue in Russia became universally important: social ground for the theatre had developed in Russian culture. This is why agon, i.e. competitiveness in the conflict of ideas, opinions and positions, became an essential and common need of the society.

At that moment, as researcher A. Panchenko claims, the "boom of popular acting power" occurred (Panchenko, 1984: 162), while the sense of drama in Russian culture was the downside of its mentality. G. Florovsky writes: "There is something artistic in the Russian soul; there is too much acting" (Florovsky, 1991: 501). In the book by W. Schubert we read: "The acting talent of Russians is above any comparison. The one who has never seen Russian theatre has no idea what kind of sacral impact may be radiated from the stage. Russians do not play their roles; they live them with the plain naturalness which stuns the spectator. In comparison to Russian scenic art, the European seems artificial, amateurish even at the peak of its achievement". The author explains this effect with the mentality of Russians, the underlying mindset concerning the attitude to the world. "A Russian plays with the world", he has no idea of the Western earthly seriousness" (Europe and the Soul of Russia, 1997: 105, 81).

And this unrestrained acting, intrinsic to Russian people more than to any other nation, happens to be forbidden in the official Russian culture. What can the foreign drama and theatre discipleship turn into for the "acting nation"?

Learning is always good, respecting a foreign culture is useful. But remaining an eternal disciple, being a true master... It creates a protest which was concisely formulated by Evreinov in his history of Russian theatre: "The fact that this theatre was imposed on the people from outside as a fruit of a foreign culture, and the fact that

during its further development it remained, in the most important aspects, "adopted" from the West and clearly following its example, is proven by the whole history of theatre in Russia. That is a strange destiny for a nation which had already mastered perfectly developed forms of its own calendar, agricultural and ceremonial actions and the performances which could, without any assumption, be described with the term of a "ritual theatre"! How sad it is for any Russian theatre lover to realize, that his Russian theatre as the history knows it, is not an original, an initially Russian institution of a purely Russian nature!" (Evreinov, 1923). Evreinov was not the first to remark this underlying fact. Even Bestuzhev in "The Polar Star" in 1825 wrote of "being bred by foreigners", of the "absence of connection to the people and surprise for the strange..." Starting from Russian Romanticists, literature and theatre had been in search for their path.

To find it, Russian theatre had to make its way of one hundred and fifty years and return to itself, to its best national acting traditions. The nationally-Russian nature was actively intruding into the cultural process in Russia after the war of 1812, due to the boom of national self-consciousness and the appearance of new trends of literary and musical Romanticism.

Russian opera art, popular since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and beginning with the national choir genres and melodic characteristics of the characters, went through its development in the musical performances by V. Pashkevich, lyrical operas by D. Bortnyansky, in vaudevilles and comic performances of A. Alyabyev and A. Verstovsky to become the Russian opera classic by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the works by Mikhail Glinka, and, first of all, in his historical opera "Life for the Tsar" and magic epic opera "Ruslan and Lyudmila".

By the middle of the century, Russian music was represented by a great constellation of "The Mighty Group" composers, Balakirev's circle. Ballet in Russia, which had reached maturity by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, finally found its shape as a Russian school of classic dance in the middle of the century in the works of the ballet-master Marius Petipa, who produced around 60 ballets in Petersburg, and in the psychological ballet music by Pyotr Tchaikovsky.

The literary drama of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a "late child of Romanticism", but it developed its realistic character quite early. Even Russian Classicism manifested the traits of its late birth in the 1740-s. In his tragedies, Sumarokov was closer not to Ruasin, but to Voltaire, with whom he used to hold direct correspondence. A. Knyazhnin, whose writings included the libretto of Pashkevich's first opera, was even closer to

Beaumarchais, than to Moliere, who are almost 90 years apart. Yakov Borisovich Knyazhnin was almost a century ahead of the time, supporting the nobility opposition: his antimonarchic tragedy "Vadim the Bold" was forbidden for 120 years.

Russian Enlightenment, including, first of all, Knyazhnin, Radishchev, Fonvizin, belonged to the strata of nobility; unlike France, bourgeois were not idealized in Russia. By the way, comparison of the real destinies of Beaumarchais and Knyazhnin would be educating for the understanding of historical processes in Europe and Russia. A fashionable watchmaker, Pierre Augustin Caron bought his position at the court together with the name "de Beaumarchais" and got in a long-term litigation with the millionaire's heirs. And he won a seemingly hopeless trial! The victory was achieved due to the "Memoires", the scrupulously accurate and ironic prose where he revealed the characters and deeds of the people involved in the litigation. The public supported him. In Russia, in the year 1773, Knyazhnin, who by that time had produced the tragedies "Olga", "Vladimir and Yaropolk", a member of Commission on the New Law Code Composition, was suspected of defalcation and despite the fact that he had contributed the money the verdict was shocking: "prosecute by hanging". To hang a nobleman for a deed so common in those times? Though he was not hanged in the end, despite all rules of those times and disproportionally to the deed, he was put in irons, deprived of the title and reduced to the ranks... Here are two destinies of playwrights, two faces of Enlightenment in Europe...

In "Woe from Wit", the milestone comedy in the history of Russian drama, we can hear not only the motives of the brilliant "School for Scandal" by Sheridan, translated into Russian in the 1790-s and exposed to a number of Russian adoptions, but also some heritage of Knyazhnin. Generally, the Romantic traits of dramas by Pushkin, Griboyedov, Lermontov were equally born by the tendencies of European Romanticism and purely Russian Enlightenment of the nobility. The romantic comedy "The Government Inspector" by Gogol, the only positive character of which, according to the author, was laughter, was surprisingly original in that sense. This laughter was also important for Griboyedov, who called his "Woe from Wit" a comedy, though for many years it was produced at Soviet theatres as a drama. The historicism of Pushkin's tragedies was also dictated by nothing but Romanticism. And only in the descriptions of folk life and bright national characters from the plays by Sukhovo-Kobylin and Alexander Ostrovsky, the traits of realistic dramaturgy could be seen.

Summarizing everything said above, the genetic origins of Russian theatre were, first of all, the developed dialogism within Russian society, which was prepared, inter

alia, by the centuries of Russian culture's "discipleship" of the European one. Secondly, there was the powerful intrusion of the folk acting art into the official culture. Thirdly, it was the success of Russian music, ballet, literary drama separately and altogether. What else was necessary for the "finest hour" of the theatre?

There was only one thing left, and it happened in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A truly historical role was played by the person so valuable in Russia: the real Director came on the stage of Russian theatre. The "Director's theatre" appeared at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its birth and establishment took place in the situation of great activity of artistic and style-developing processes the Silver Age was so rich in. This was the time when the theatre ceased being secondary in respect to literature, intended to incarnate the literary image in the "natural" way. From then, it worked to be a performance, a special form of cultural communication.

This peculiarity of the new theatre was also visible to the contemporaries. Stanislavsky spoke of theatre as of the most powerful pulpit for addressing huge crowds of people at the same time. Meyerhold saw it as something larger than art. The term of artistic reality was reviewed in theatre art; some attempts were made to produce a new model of the world outlook, a new understanding of conventionality of the scenic creation.

The tandem of a dramaturg and an actor was replaced with the domination of one and new will in art, the one and only artist, the Director. The emergence of this super-profession changed the requirements to the art of acting, the drama techniques; it gave a start to the professions of theatre artists, composers, lighting technicians in the volume and power they had never existed before. The stunning and innovating ideas of Stanislavsky and the results of activity at Moscow Art Theatre created by him and Nemirovich-Danchenko in 1898 would be enough to consider Russia to be the capital of world theatre achievements of the turn of centuries.

The core of the troupe was formed by the students of Drama Department of the Music and Drama School of Moscow Philharmonic Society: Olga Knipper, Ivan Moskvina, Vsevolod Meyerhold, where acting was taught by V.I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, and the actors of amateur performances of the "Society of Art and Literature" led by K.S. Stanislavsky. Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko claimed that the theatre had to incarnate the spiritual life of the person, to be the school of morals, the institution for educating people. And even though the Art Theatre was opened with the performance "Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich" by A.K. Tolstoy, it was the dramaturgy of Anton Pavlovich Chekhov that became the true banner of the theatre, mysterious, still not understood

until today. There is no coincidence that on the theatre curtain there is a seagull, referring to the title of one of the best plays by Chekhov which is the symbol of the theatre. In the MAT repertoire, the leading positions are occupied by plays by Chekhov, and, particularly, "Uncle Vanya". This play reveals the main nerve of the man living in the Modernism Age: loneliness, alienation, duality and loss of integrity, the sense of falseness of existence as early as in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For the first time, routine, as the main accused in this court, acted as an impassable barrier on the way to beauty and virtue.

Shakespeare, Griboyedov, Turgenev, Chekhov, Maeterlinck... the repertoire of the Art Theatre required new talented actors. And that was when Stanislavsky developed his own actor training system. The formula of scenic life by Stanislavsky, "I in the given circumstances", is still highly demanded in the universal theatre art. Another great achievement of Stanislavsky is training of talented students who kept developing the theatre system further, in the least expected and the most paradoxical ways. Among them, there were Vsevolod Meyerhold, Eugeny Vakhtangov, Mikhail Chekhov... On Moscow stage, Meyerhold established the principles of a "conventional theatre", in its essence opposite to the "theatre of experience". In 1906-1907, on the stage of the Komissarzhevskaya Theatre, and later, at the Alexandrovsky Theatre, Meyerhold proclaimed the return to the domination of "pure theatricality" and "naked acting skill", free of dramaturgic influence. The legendary "Masquerade" by Lermontov in the scenery by Alexander Golovin and music by Glazunov produced in 1917, became the quintessence of the search of those times, and, simultaneously, the final accord of the dying epoch.

Meyerhold's passion for creating new reality on the stage with a prominent cult of theatricality was shared by Alexander Tairov and Nikolai Evreinov, decisively rejecting the theatre's inclination to be true-to-life, and proclaiming the "instinct of theatricality" in a purely Russian way. "No matter what sweet songs of your theatre you sing to me, writes Evreinov, – no matter how witty, scientific or amusing are your reasons proving that this is an essentially important institution, a temple where the soul can find its expiatory purification, that theatre is the teacher of morals, chair of virtue, mirror of the truth etc., I will remain absolutely indifferent to the theatre if I do not see that this is my theatre, the theatre for me, for my joy and satisfaction of my spirit craving for transformation in this imperfect world!" (Evreinov, 1922).

The picture of multifaceted theatre search is supplemented by variety shows that appeared in the 1910-s and with unbelievable speed spread all around Russia. In the



year 1912 in Moscow and Petersburg alone there were 125 cabarets and variety shows opening their curtains.

So, as we can see, in the dialogue of arts Russian theatre succeeded to find the concept of its own originality established by the creative function of the Director. But, having hardly ascended, the theatre got overwhelmed by the ideological wave of the revolution. We can only guess what could happen in the theatre history, had it not been interrupted. But still, as soon as the thaw revealed the first sprouts of the new cultural dialogue, they came to a powerful ear in the dramaturgy of the Sixtiers, in the theatre of Lyubimov, Efros, Zakharov... These theatre pages have entered the treasury of the world theatre. Perhaps, the realistic and psychologic variety still exists on the Russian stages, but the "tomorrow" of Russian theatre is still not clear and its prospects are vague.

Today, Russian theatre cannot be regarded outside the universal theatre context. Postmodernism has created a new, and, perhaps, the dominating type of the performance theatre. This is the theatre of cruelty, anatomy of feelings, discourse theatre.

The theory of post-dramatic theatre by Hans-Thies Lehmann is well-known in the West; it was derived from the practice of the greatest theatre masters of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Tadeusz Kantor, Robert Wilson, Klaus Michael Grüber, Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook, Anatoly Vasilyev and others. However, Lemman believes that the progenitors of such theatre were Meyerhold and Brecht, who established, first of all, the theatre discourse.

This statement is associated with the highly disputable thesis of the "death of drama". However, it does not mean elimination of the drama text as such. The text is not the heart of the theatre, its lord anymore; it is now nothing but one layer, a material, an element of the production. The new theatre text distinguished between the level of the drama text, the level of performance text consisting mainly of non-verbal means of expression, and the level of performance. The latter is the dominating one; an actor is not a performer of a certain role any more, he is a provoking performer, laying his being on the stage open to the audience. It reminds of a language of a youth subculture, so habitual to us. It has contributed a lot to Lemman's theatre theory. For example, the aesthetics of risk. Or "electronic image as a denial of living body plastics" or the use of electronic technologies as a whole. Or the vague border between the stage and the auditorium for the transmission of "directly common experience of the performer and the audience". Or the need to make the spectator follow the ideas and thoughts of director, confusedly and feverishly. All these are common for the youth perception, though the "classics of post-dramatic theatre" Tadeusz Kantor and Robert

Wilson have obviously addressed the wide audience. However, literature critics and culture researchers are convinced that the protest sentiments common for the youth and teenage audience are very powerful in large cosmopolitan cities. The total youth protest is close to the social escapism of megalopolis residents, preferring escaping into virtual reality from the true one.

By the way, this is the reason why the literary genre of fantasy, created, first of all, for teenagers, became a multiage genre. The mosaic teenage culture does not like stories in their classic form, preferring their conditions or their images. Looking into their precious selves almost beyond the social context is its distinctive feature. This is why, I believe, we have to deal with another important question: is the post-dramatic theatre a specifically theatre phenomenon or is it a consequence of the growing leadership of the teenage and youth subculture?

For this reason, let us turn to the letters of Leonid Andreev: in that time, describing Chekhov's drama, he called it the drama of intellect, the tragedy of thought incarnated in word. He supposed that in the future the cinematograph will reign over the action and condition, while the Word, the delicate dialogue and psyche complying with Chekhov's traditions, will remain the sphere of the theatre, just like soul and thought. So, can we say that Andreev was mistaken, and everything the theatre and cinematograph can resort to are the elements, separate parts, not an integrated whole?

Are there any elements of the post-dramatic theatre in the living practice of the contemporary Russian theatre? That is truly not an idle question. The critics insist on the necessity to understand whether those elements present a threat for the traditions of the Russian stage which is characterized with the national acting style, democratism of common sense and spiritual search. The opinions on this issue may differ.

However, one should not be afraid of new trends in the theatre. The greatest threats for the theatre have always been subservience to fashion, mediocrity and non-professionalism inside, and political ideologization outside. The theatre exists as a close shot of being, which shows us stories of ourselves in the framework of the coulisse.

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## **Загадка «звездного часа» русского театра (театральное искусство как форма конструирования русской культурной идентичности)**

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В статье представлены результаты исследования театрального искусства в контексте конструирования русской культурной идентичности. Театральное искусство рассматривается в исторической динамике, анализируются наиболее значимые эпохи в становлении его национального стиля. Особое внимание в исследовании уделено феномену загадочного взлета русского театра в конце XIX– начале XX века, в период европейской «театральной депрессии». В статье вскрываются истоки формирования собственно «русского» театра, его близость и отличия от западного и восточного типов, сценарии его дальнейшей судьбы.

История русского театрального искусства приводит авторов к выводу о сути трансформаций современного театра в России и в Красноярском крае. Рассматриваются актуальные дискуссии, связанные с феноменом «смерти» драматического текста. Авторы делают выводы о том, что текст перестает быть «сердцем» театра, его «властелином», а переходит в разряд слоя, материала, элемента постановки. Новый театральный текст различает уровень собственно текста драмы, уровень текста спектакля, главной составляющей которого являются невербальные средства, и уро-

*вень перформанса. Последний доминирует, и актер предстает не как исполнитель роли, а скорее как перформер-провокатор, представляющий на обозрение публики свое бытие на сцене.*

*Ключевые слова: русский театр, драма, театральность, народная игровая стихия, агон, комедия дель арте, диалогизм культуры, режиссерский театр, постдраматический театр.*

*Научная специальность: 24.00.00 – культурология.*

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