

THE THEME OF THE CIVIL WAR IN SOVIET DRAMA 1924--34

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds, Department of Russian  
Studies

February 1988

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a detailed examination of four key Soviet plays on the theme of the Civil War: Shtorm by V. Bill'-Belotserkovskii; Dni Turbin̄kh by M. Bulgakov; Lyubov' Yarovaya by K. Tren̄v and Optimisticheskaya tragediya by V. Vishnevskii.

The thesis is approximately 80,000 words in length and is divided into four main chapters each containing a separate treatment of each play.

The treatment consists of: a descriptive analysis of the original text; a tracing of the creation of the first production, including a study of the relationship between playwright and theatre company; a presentation of the political-historical context in which it was both written and produced; an examination of contemporary newspaper and journal reviews; an evaluation in terms of artistic merit and theatrical achievement and, finally, a consideration of its relationship to the other plays selected for this study and its wider dramatic significance.

The primary sources used for this work are hitherto largely neglected Soviet newspapers, journals and memoirs as well as the play texts.

The conclusion finds that in the decade 1924--34 these plays filled a vital role in serving both political and artistic causes and that today, despite their diminished topicality, their function is still to educate, explain and entertain and, by so doing, to underpin the very fabric of Soviet society.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction . . . . .	1
Chapter 1: <u>Shtorm</u> . . . . .	10
Chapter 2: <u>Dni Turbinykh</u> . . . . .	62
Chapter 3: <u>Lyubov' Yarovaya</u> . . . . .	121
Chapter 4: <u>Optimisticheskaya tragediya</u> . . . . .	197
Conclusion . . . . .	258
Bibliography . . . . .	261
Appendix: details of first productions . . . . .	293



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- (i) Shtorm, i. 1.
- (ii) Shtorm, ii. 111.
- (iii) Dni Turbin̄kh, i. 1.
- (iv) Dni Turbin̄kh, i. 1.
- (v) Dni Turbin̄kh, i. 2.
- (vi) Dni Turbin̄kh, ii. 1.
- (vii) Dni Turbin̄kh, ii. 2.
- (viii) Dni Turbin̄kh, iii. 1.
- (ix) Dni Turbin̄kh, iii. 1.
- (x) Lyubov' Yarovaya, model of revolving set.
- (xi) Lyubov' Yarovaya, iv.
- (xii) Lyubov' Yarovaya, iv.
- (xiii) Lyubov' Yarovaya, v.
- (xiv) Optimisticheskaya tragediya, i.
- (xv) Optimisticheskaya tragediya, i.
- (xvi) Optimisticheskaya tragediya, i.
- (xvii) Optimisticheskaya tragediya, i.
- (xviii) Optimisticheskaya tragediya, i.
- (xix) Optimisticheskaya tragediya, ii.
- (xx) Optimisticheskaya tragediya, ii.
- (xxi) Optimisticheskaya tragediya, iii.
- (xxii) Optimisticheskaya tragediya, iii.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks for practical assistance are due to: Colin Johnson, Donald Wikeley, Antony Foster, Michael Glenny and Edward Braun

## NOTE

The transliteration system used throughout the main text is B.S. 2979/58. This does not, however, apply to well-known names where there is an existing accepted English form

The general problem of analysing any drama lies in its ephemerality. Strictly speaking, in attempting to reconstruct and evaluate drama via the printed word, one is seeking to define the indefinable in fossilized, second-hand referential terms, given that theatre drama is a fusion of the skills of directors, designers and actors as well as writers. Indeed, from the writer's perspective, his work has always been at the mercy of the other parties and he has often been powerless to resist their attempts to usurp his role. In the context of the Soviet theatre, the role of the writer vis à vis the director naturally assumes a particular acuity. Broadly speaking, however, it could be said that the former three, collectively, simply interpret what is the original conception of the latter, namely the text. It is, therefore, to the text that attention should first be paid, and for this reason, in each of the following four chapters, there is a descriptive analysis of the plays selected for this study.

The second problem which specifically relates to attempts to analyse Soviet Civil War plays -- and, by extension, the contemporary reviews -- lies in the question of criteria. In other words, is it possible to make an objective evaluation of a play whose cultural context is completely removed from and alien to our own experience and whose merits and demerits have been judged according to totally different precepts from Western critical norms?

Whether there is a universal recipe for good drama is

debatable, although, clearly, those which have transcended boundaries of time and place have tended to deal with universal abstract themes such as love, loyalty, war and jealousy. Broad-based political themes also have a certain transferable value, but those which promote sectarian interests tend to be limited to home consumption. To a large extent, it must be said that the Soviet Civil War plays fall into the latter category, notwithstanding one or two honourable exceptions.

Thus, these plays have been largely neglected in the West where they must surely be seen by directors as conservative and didactic and lacking the broad, inventive artistry of (say) a Mayakovsky play. In addition, as the subject-matter is esoteric as far as Western audiences are concerned, lying well outside their experience and comprehension, it is unlikely that the plays would be able to capture the imagination. Any potential interest is bound to be historical rather than artistic.

Although the better crafted of the Civil War plays are still performed today in the Soviet Union but rarely if ever in the West, it should be noted that in Britain there is a tendency to outgrow our own political plays fairly rapidly. Admittedly, they are sometimes launched successfully on a wave of nostalgia or topicality, but, as a general rule, nothing dates faster than a polemical play and nothing appeals less than a patriotic one. Given its vaunted richness, there is surprisingly little twentieth-



century depiction of British history on the stage, let alone in patriotic vein. Obviously, there are exceptions -- Noel Coward's Cavalcade, which was first performed in 1931, is one -- but such exceptions are rare.

Significantly, Walter Reynolds's Young England, whose staging in London in 1934 was contemporaneous with that of Vishnevskii's Optimisticheskaya tragediya, and whose intention was fervently patriotic, was assumed to be an hilarious burlesque causing it to become a succès de scandale. Patriotic and 'historical moment' themes tend to find a far more receptive audience when translated through the medium of cinema, whilst the transient appeal of topical political plays lends itself more readily to the media of television and radio. The situation in Northern Ireland invites an immediate and obvious comparison, presenting an example of a modern-day civil war close to home which has spawned numerous examples of television and radio drama, but relatively little for the stage. Generally speaking, such topical plays as do reach the British stage are likely to be presented in sharply critical or satirical mode as theatre in this country has a healthy tradition of subversion.

The Soviet Civil War plays followed the experimental and purely propaganda theatre which had been thrown up during the period of turmoil itself. Although the Proletcult was now in its decline, the didactic tradition was carried on by the Blue Blouse groups until about 1928.

Clearly, the virtues of loyalty to the Communist cause, unremitting collective effort, self-denial and comradeship were ~~being~~ proclaimed, whilst the nefarious influences of individualism, nihilism, religion and intellectualism were ~~being~~ implicitly or explicitly condemned. Throughout, there was a strongly moralistic undertone.

After the dust had settled, the Civil War plays, as well as providing a vehicle for inculcating the Party ethic, also lent themselves to the conventional representational form of drama which became the decreed norm under Stalin. What these plays largely failed to exploit, however, were the very themes thrown up by civil war which are the essence of drama. With its denial of private ~~passion~~ <sup>emotions</sup> Socialist Realism spelt death to this potentially rich dramatic vein of personal conflict, divided loyalties, hostility and recrimination. Moreover, the problems of redistribution and retention of wealth and power, seething resentment, bitterness, retribution (both official and unofficial) and coexistence were either given superficial treatment or were ignored altogether.

Given that there were virtually no convincing portraits of Whites (with the exception of those in Dni Turbin̄ykh which is a non-confrontational play) nor of people whose dilemma lay in having allegiance to neither side, the only style of drama which was available to Soviet playwrights was the heroic romantic epic. Thus, the Civil War plays were, on the whole, politically vapid. Their

disappointing content provided no forum for serious political debate; the issues involved were not examined, assuming they were ever raised in the first place and, more often, awkward questions were simply eschewed. Bulgakov's plays remain the notable exception, even in their tampered form, by virtue of addressing such questions.

The Civil War plays, nevertheless, say a great deal about the period in which they were written as well as the one which they depict. Any attempt to portray recent historic events is bound to be less than objective and, as time progresses, to become romanticized. Inevitably, therefore, they collectively express a certain philosophy of life and bear a distinct political message.

The examples of the plays selected for this present study were each considered to have made a significant contribution to the Civil War drama which flourished between the mid-twenties and the mid-thirties. Each was created with and for a major theatre company -- which in itself offers scope for investigation -- so each supplied a vehicle for four distinct theatrical styles. Moreover, as well as providing a point of reference, each play provides a point of contrast with the other three.

Bill'-Belotserkovskii's Shtorm, written in 1924, can lay legitimate claim to being the first Soviet Civil War play. It was conceived in the agit-prop tradition, although it went further in terms of characterization,



character interaction and narrative, Although it was first performed in 1925 by the workers' theatre of Moskovskii gubernskii sovet professional'nykh soyuzov, under the direction of Lyubimov-Lanskoï, its impact was mainly felt in the Blue Blouse theatre of the provinces and thus it arguably reached the widest audiences of the four. Written in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, when events were still fresh and relatively undigested, the play presents a cogent account of the Reds' struggle to subdue the White backlash whilst coping with the overwhelming domestic problems which were the side-effects of the years of war, revolution and civil war. Thus, much of the play focuses on the minutiae of local Party activity which formed the bedrock for the sweeping political changes. This concentration on the specific rather than the general gives not only a fascinating insight into the period in socio-historical terms, but also brings home the huge scale of the difficulties encountered by the Communists in this painful period of transition. Seeing the way in which the physical existence of individuals was affected, or seeing it as their own experiences mirrored, enabled audiences to grasp more readily the significance of the events, whilst simultaneously holding their interest.

Bulgakov's Dni Turbin̄ykh which appeared the following year, 1926, remains significant today for being a rare if not unique example of a play which is predominantly concerned with the fate and fortunes of Whites during the Civil War in which they are presented in a sober, objective

fashion but also sympathetically. (As a proponent of enlightened humanism rather than materialist determinism,)

It is understandable that Bulgakov, should create a play which deviated considerably from the standard of mainstream Civil War drama. The controversy which surrounded the play and its author serves to heighten the awareness of the problems of the artist in society and his relationship with power; a theme more deeply explored in Molière. It also raised questions about the degree of influence exercised by a major theatrical institution such as MKhAT over the authors it employed, its relationship with official power as well as its own autonomy and public accountability. Ultimately, in the case of Bulgakov, MKhAT, in the person of Stanislavsky, was responsible for the adulteration of the text and production of Dni Turbin̄kh, as extensive research by Bulgakov scholars has shown, although, to what degree, must remain conjecture until the entire content of Bulgakov's archive is released.

Tren̄ev's Lyubov' Yarovaya, which appeared almost concurrently with Dni Turbin̄kh in the season 1926--27 provided -- as far as the critics were concerned -- an odious comparison. Although not the first to use episodic form, it was, nevertheless, deemed to be innovative and was seen as an attempt to create a symphonic fusion of events and lives in the Civil War period. Its appearance on the stage of the Maly was the result as much of extensive interference by the director, Prozorovskii, and the Maly actors as composition by Tren̄ev. This play also marked the

emergence of the fully-fledged New Soviet Woman in the person of the eponymous central figure.

Vishnevskii's Optimisticheskaya tragediya, written seven years later, drew elements from all the foregoing plays. It was romantic-epic in scale and form, but owed its success largely to Tairov and the Kamerny Theatre company with whose fate it was inextricably bound. Its retrospective view of events contained none of the gritty detail of Shtorm; instead, it was a view coloured by rose-tinted spectacles and the peculiar political pressures of the thirties.

This study examines, initially, the text and form of each of the four above examples individually, and then, given their topical nature, briefly outlines the historical context. The creation of the play by its author is traced as far as possible, followed by its moulding according to the requirements, pressures and whims of both theatre directors and government officials which were as significant in the eventual shaping of the play as the original author's text. Conversely, the play and its author were often instrumental in determining the theatre's artistic course, if not its fate, and the play is therefore considered in the context of this symbiotic relationship.

The first production of each play is examined in some detail because, to a large extent, it served as a model for all subsequent productions. Soviet Civil War plays tend to

be revived rather than re-worked, judging by later examples.

The notices which the first production received from the contemporary press reviewers, whilst possibly of dubious critical value, nevertheless give an (albeit) impressionistic view of how each play actually appeared to Soviet audiences. Clearly, it is impossible to make a definitive statement about the quality of any live performance for the reasons outlined earlier. Ultimately, therefore, the evaluation of the play in terms of artistic merit and enduring significance stands on the figures of audience attendance then, as now, as well as on its longevity in the Soviet repertoire. Whether these plays have become classics or dodos is given individual rather than collective consideration, at the end of each chapter.

Notwithstanding the existence of other significant Civil War plays such as Bronepoezd 14-69 and Razlom, the purpose of this study is not to present a general survey of Civil War drama of the decade 1924--34, but rather to trace in detail, from Soviet sources, the creation of four key works. From the close study of these plays may be said to emerge the main line of development of Soviet Civil War drama from the period immediately following the historical event through the consolidation of power to the establishment of the new orthodoxy.



CHAPTER 1

Shtorm and Lyubov' Yarovaya contain the common elements of personal tragedy and the influence of historical forces upon the lives of individuals. The former does not revolve around a single person, story or event, but around general events on a much wider front. All the different lines in Shtorm are linked by a time element; the drawing together of the strands being brought about by the 'momentnaya situatsiya'.<sup>1</sup> The orthodox view is that the Chairman is not intended to represent a hero-figure,<sup>2</sup> even though he inevitably becomes one in both Classical and Romantic senses by virtue of his noble self-denial, his compassion for his fellow men and his martyr's death. Indeed, Bill'-Belotserkovskiĭ, in his initial draft of the play, deliberately gave much less individuality in the list of dramatis personae than in the final version with a view to depersonalizing the play's moral message.<sup>3</sup> It is, nevertheless, difficult to sustain this interpretation in the light of the author's retrospective assertion that the Chairman, Bratishka and Raevich were heroes.<sup>4</sup> Despite these inherent contradictions, it may safely be said that the play ultimately concerns the fate of the collective rather than the individual.

In form, Shtorm was more innovatory than in content and its technical features aroused as much interest as the performance itself, applauded by some and deplored

by others. It could be said to be the dramatic and stylistic successor of Mayakovsky's Mystery-Bouffe chronologically, if not qualitatively, and the precursor of Lyubov' Yarovaya, although Trenëv's inclusion of indispensable elements of traditional drama, notwithstanding his more refined exploitation of the episodic form, pointed to the reassertion of conservatism in Soviet drama.

In its first version, Shtorm had seventy different characters, allegedly based on people encountered by Bill'-Belotserkovskiï during the period 1919--20<sup>5</sup> when he was Chairman of the War Commission in Simbirsk, followed by posts as Secretary and Chairman of Gorkom RKP (b). In its final version, Shtorm's cast was reduced to fifty.<sup>6</sup> The scenes are presented as different aspects of the Civil War, all linked by the common struggle, turbulence and the fate of the Revolution -- 'logika borby' -- according to the contemporary view.<sup>7</sup> In this, Shtorm differed from its predecessors and created a precedent. The play was considered to be a true example of the theatre of dialectical materialism; its very strength lay in its presentation of a panorama of different social backgrounds, although, unlike Trenëv in Lyubov' Yarovaya, Bill'-Belotserkovskiï did not seek to establish a range of psychologically-distinct characters as well as the collective. In this respect, Trenëv's approach was far more detailed, more sophisticated and more carefully crafted.

Thus Shtorm marked the theatrical transition from the agit-prop plays of the twenties and immediate post-Revolution period and the more substantial, but increasingly conservative drama of the late twenties. It could not be classified, properly speaking, as agitation because it was not simply a presentation of (crude) slogans addressed directly to the audience, nor did it present poster-style scenes employing elements of satire, caricature, heavy symbolism, variety, circus and music. It had, however, developed from the largely propaganda performances which were the stock-in-trade of the numerous workers' amateur theatre clubs which flourished during the post-Revolution decade, while the author's declared and understood intention was undoubtedly to generate enthusiasm for and participation in mass conversion to Communism. Moreover, Shtorm was presented in the form of a pageant and was heavily moralistic in tone.

With the consolidation of the educational role of the theatre under Lunacharsky, Shtorm was a sign of the new theatrical order of the day, that is, one of innate conservatism. It demonstrated a departure from the extreme theatrical experiments of Meyerhold et alii -- a welcome departure as formalism came to be discredited -- whilst looking backwards at the well-established traditions of bourgeois realism as exemplified by MKhAT; in other words, its 'condensed Naturalism'<sup>8</sup> heralded the arrival of Socialist Realism. The pundits staunchly

held, however, that Shtorm was innovatory in character and style. This was true to the extent that it was virtually plotless, (allegedly) had no central hero, thereby promoting the notion of the masses-as-hero, used an episodic rather than kartina form, had a large cast which called for disciplined ensemble playing, used few props and had quick-change scenery.<sup>9</sup>

It would seem, despite the innovations, that Shtorm was not deemed to be a significant theatrical event when it first appeared as records show only two first-night reviews;<sup>10</sup> a very small acknowledgement compared with the reception accorded to Lyubov! Yarovaya a year later, although the Maly's more prestigious standing might well have been a contributory factor.

Shortly after its première, the play was taken on tour by MGSPS and was, thereafter, adopted and adapted enthusiastically by the workers' amateur theatre groups. It was important that Shtorm lent itself to the less than ideal circumstances of touring and amateur theatre because it enabled workers' theatre groups both to see and produce drama of (relatively) high quality, despite the difficulty of a large cast, which was overcome by actors' doubling up on roles, thereby ensuring wider and more effective dissemination of the political message.<sup>11</sup>

Although there were eighty performances of Shtorm in its first season,<sup>12</sup> it was not very popular with the



general public as the half-empty auditorium at the premiere testified,<sup>13</sup> with the full half probably accounted for by the block factory bookings mentioned below (p.17). According to later Soviet sources,<sup>14</sup> there was little interest aroused by the play from its inception and it was rejected by several theatres before being accepted by Lyubimov-Lanskoï, who also had a difficult task in convincing the MGSPS actors of its merits. This was alluded to in a reminiscence which appeared in Teatral'naya zhizn' in 1967:

Евсей Осипович долго убеждал всех и наконец сказал "Даже против желания труппы, я буду ставить эту пьесу."<sup>15</sup>

and again, in an article on Shtorm in Spektakli i gody:

Когда пьесу В. Билль-Белоцерковского "Тиф"<sup>16</sup> впервые прочли в театре имени МГСПС, поклонников у неё нашлось не много. ... "не ошибусь, если скажу, что из всего коллектива вряд ли больше двух-трёх человек принял пьесу", писал ... Любимов-Ланской в 1934 году в книге <sup>17</sup> "Театр московского пролетариата".

Even the 1950 revival by Zavadskiï for Mossovet,<sup>18</sup> was not an unqualified success,<sup>19</sup> -- possibly because of more exciting literary and theatrical developments during the 'Thaw' -- and the kindest assessment of it might be summed up as 'naive but worthy'.<sup>20</sup> Given this lukewarm reception, Shtorm's long sojourn in the Soviet repertoire remains something of a mystery. It has been adopted and adapted with varying degrees of success by provincial and touring companies, the most notable productions being by the Krasnÿï teatr in 1927 and the Filial gosdramÿ in 1933, both in Leningrad. There have been three major revivals by Mossovet, most recently in

1967, when the fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution doubtless imbued it with nostalgic and dramatic appeal, causing it to be elevated to the status of Soviet classic.<sup>21</sup>

It must be said, however, that even this indifferent material could be given emotional and dramatic impetus by skilled acting and direction. Both individual and ensemble playing, involving doubling and trebling roles, were praised by the pundits, particularly in the performances by the more experienced troupes. Ultimately, therefore, it was up to the theatre company to 'lift' the material. For, although the text of Shtorm was doomed to fail miserably when performed with merely adequate skill, the original MGSPS production and subsequent notable productions undoubtedly captured the romance of the period, a fact which has been alluded to by Soviet reviewers and theatre historians alike. It remains difficult, none the less, to gauge broad public reaction at an emotional level, given only isolated testimonials.<sup>22</sup>

MGSPS was the self-styled theatre of the proletariat with the declared aim of bringing culture to the workers by performing not only in the theatre but also -- and mainly -- in theatre clubs where it found its true audience. In the first season, out of 353 performances, 264 were put on in the provinces at factory workers' clubs.<sup>23</sup> MGSPS was also committed to helping theatre clubs to establish themselves;<sup>24</sup> the company understood

the problems of these clubs having itself suffered and adapted to an absence of repertory base, transport and technical staff.<sup>25</sup>

Shtorm was MGSPS's last-ditch attempt to haul itself out of artistic and financial straits, a fact which might account for the public's initial lack of interest since the company's prestige had by 1925 fallen considerably. Thus, the fate of the play was closely linked to that of MGSPS which had recently undergone a number of increasing difficulties. Committed to bringing Socialist drama to the theatre club stages, MGSPS's problems consisted not only in the material constraints mentioned above, but also and principally in an impoverished repertoire.<sup>26</sup> Having first, in 1923, turned to a play on an anti-religious theme, Savva by L. Andreev, which, despite its subject-matter was deemed reactionary because it advocated anarchy and which, apparently, met with little success, the company then tried, faute de mieux, Kazn' Sal'vĭ by S.U. Prokov'ev. It then staged an adaptation of Zola's Le Ventre de Paris followed by one of Voïnich's The Gadfly and Galsworthy's Strife. Additionally, at this time, productions of the classics were mounted such as Beaumarchais's The Barber of Seville and Ibsen's The Doll's House. In attempting to adapt novels and stage classics which seemed to offer themes appropriate to the Communist cause, the theatre often succeeded only in weakening and debasing the original work. MGSPS did try, even at this early stage, to include in its repertoire



a modern Soviet play and produced Sivolapinskaya komediya by D. Chizhevskii, about 'Nepmen', but it was deemed too frivolous a treatment of a serious and reprehensible subject and too full of vulgar language.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the 'mistakes', in terms of repertoire, made by the company during this period, it was apparently popular with the worker-spectators -- who, in all likelihood, constituted an uncritical audience -- and during its first year it was visited by an audience of 318,000 of whom 191,000 had come to the special performances exclusively reserved for factory workers.<sup>28</sup> This last-mentioned fact rather begs the question of whether MGSPS would have attracted such large numbers of spectators coming independently of their factory educational departments.

In recognition of its valuable work in bringing enlightenment to the workers, the People's Commissar for Enlightenment, A. Lunacharsky, gave MGSPS permission to give two performances per week at the Nezlobin theatre, and in 1924 allocated to them as their base, the Hermitage theatre. Despite the new base, 1924 was a disastrous year for the theatre company which, used to performing for theatre club audiences, now had to reorganize itself to cater for a more sophisticated city audience. The company now included some 170 actors, including some of the foremost of the day such as Stepan Kuznetsov, in addition to talented directors and designers, but there was no one

responsible for overall artistic policy. Thus, MGSPS erred through an eclectic maze of low-brow offerings and classics via some infelicitous dramatizations of foreign and Russian literary works. Directors, too, having no clear aim, experimented intermittently with various 'formalist' techniques and took eclecticism to its ultimate absurdity by attempting to juxtapose naturalism with symbolism and satire. Not surprisingly, this was not a very successful recipe and culminated in a particularly disastrous production of Lunacharsky's Thomas Campanella.<sup>29</sup> Thereafter, in a search for an appropriate repertoire, MGSPS turned, in 1925, to plays whose subject was the history of the revolutionary movement.

Although the Party, press and public commended the attempts by MGSPS to find laudable themes for its plays, they were compelled to acknowledge the defects of the material which was used. After the move to the Hermitage theatre in 1924, audience numbers began to fall, particularly among the workers, so that MGSPS was no longer fulfilling its mandate. Falling receipts and the withdrawal of State subsidy eventually led the company to the brink of closure. It was rescued at the eleventh hour, thanks largely to an initiative by Lyubimov-Lanskoj who, together with other dedicated members of the company, decided to carry on its work. From April 1925, MGSPS became a workers' collective, and at the Conference of Trade-Union Cultural Sections, it was decided to give full support to the company's initiative. MGSPS reorganized itself by creating

an artistic-political council which included workers from all the leading Moscow enterprises together with representatives from trade-unions, the press and the Party. Finance and planning were to be dealt with by the trade-union conferences and plenums and workers' committees, and, in order to help the theatre out of its financial difficulties, trade-unions made block reservations of seventy per cent. of the seats for the first season. The most pressing task which remained was to pull the theatre out of the artistic mire by solving the problem of finding its (Soviet) artistic idiom. Soon the theatre had its State title restored and came under the auspices of the Moskovskii otdel narodnogo obrazovaniya which appointed Lyubimov-Lanskoï its director. Under this new leadership, the theatre embarked upon its policy of creating new Soviet plays for the Soviet spectator, based on the assumption that this was what he wanted, needed and would therefore come to see.

To this end, MGSPS successfully attracted 'young, talented writers who had experience of life'<sup>30</sup> to work in close co-operation with it, and among these was Bill'-Belotserkovskii who had already achieved some recognition with his plays: Bifshteks s krov'yu, Ėkho and Levo rulya. He offered his new play, Shtorm, which had already been turned down by other companies, and the play eventually had its première on 8 December 1925, assuming an historically wider significance than its quality deserved. It was not an unqualified success; the fact that its first

night went largely unobserved speaks volumes for its contemporary significance. Indeed, it is only in retrospect that Shtorm has been credited with any enduring qualities and, although the public do not appear to have endorsed it wholeheartedly, it is acknowledged in Soviet theatre history as being owed a debt of gratitude by MGSPS, subsequently revamped as the Mossovet Theatre.

Shtorm is set in a small, provincial town whose exact location is not specified, thereby creating the impression of being a universal 'Everytown'. Likewise, the origin and biographical detail of the characters are left deliberately vague, thus also avoiding any clouding of the play's main issues. The avoidance of personal drama was deemed to be a positive virtue. One critic wrote:

в ней нет ни . . . "единства интриги" -- драматического сюжета, руководимого индивидуальным героем, ни вообще личностных характеров и страстей, а поэтому нет и конфликтов обычного размаха от Петра до Ивана.

31

This same point was taken up forty years on by A. Obraztsova, ostensibly conducting a vigorous defence of the play and its first interpreters, although failing to provide the sources of the 'quoted' remarks contained in the following extract:

У героев "Шторма" не было ничего -- ни кола, ни двора. Волны революции неведомо откуда забросили их в уездный городок, то ли на Урале, то ли на Волге. . . . Были ли пьеса и спектакль натуралистичный? Действительно ли автор не сумел отличить главное от второстепенного, увлекся деталями, попал во власть эпизодов и из-за деревьев не увидел леса?

32

The first scene of Act i takes place in the Communist



Party Chairman's office, the sparse furnishings of which verge on the monastic. The Chairman is on stage as the play opens (no curtain is used). The author's note specifies him as:

(из рабочих), коренастый парень с бледным, усталым лицом, в синей рабочей блузе, чёрных кожаных брюках-калифе, в валенках. 33

He is given no name in the list of dramatis personae, and is addressed only by his official title throughout the play until Scene 8 when his semi-conscious body and, later, in Scene 10, his corpse is addressed by the anguished Bratishka as 'Vas'ka'; a brief posthumous acknowledgement of the contribution of the individual to the collective struggle. A typical example of the man of iron portrayed in the Soviet literature of this period, he is imbued with 'partiĭnost''. In this play, the Chairman is swiftly established as a decisive, hard-working man of action, given to forceful expression of his own impeccably orthodox views as well as criticism of the shortcomings in those of others. The opening dialogue between him and the Requisitioner establishes him as the champion of the uneducated but right-thinking Party man against the potentially undesirable intellectual who has hitherto enjoyed the privilege of education, represented here by the Commissar for Education. His sharp retort to be conveyed to the Commissar who has been criticizing his underlings for their illiteracy sets the tone for this theme which recurs throughout the play:

Скажи ему от моего имени, что ты в гимназии, как он, не учился. Пускай поделится своей грамотой. 34



Although this scene essentially deals with the Chairman's practical solutions to the myriad problems thrown up by the Civil War, the moralistic tone is further underlined in his dealing with the series of callers to his office. He employs a didactic style of address towards the other characters, ever-conscious of being the voice of the Party whose duty is to inculcate the correct new attitudes. Thus, he champions the cause of women's rights in speaking on behalf of the pregnant peasant woman:

А ежели ты зарежешь жену или эксплуатировать её будешь, 35  
тогда как? Это тоже личное дело?

He upbraids the obsequious bath-house attendant for failing in his paternal duty as well as for bringing disgrace upon the Party, which he has recently joined out of self-interest; an indication that the Party is ever-vigilant in keeping its own house in order. He underlines the crucial concept of Party duty whilst, incidentally, throwing out disparaging remarks about the Church:

Да брось креститься! Тут не церковь, а комитет партии. 36

Finally, he hands out rough but fair justice, finding for the inarticulate and oppressed as represented by the peasant woman.

In Shtorm, the female characters play secondary roles in what is shown to be essentially a man's world; they are all recognizable female types from Soviet literature. This peasant woman, in seeking redress for the wrong done her by her worthless husband, is clamouring for her rights

-- as yet unconsolidated -- amidst more pressingly urgent issues. Here, the general upheaval of society is mirrored in the challenge to traditional male dominance in marriage, and this woman symbolizes Soviet woman's determination to establish her right to equal status for good. For the time being, though, she still requires a male champion (here, in the person of the Party Chairman) to uphold these rights on her behalf. Only he can apply the sanctions which are sufficiently powerful to influence her husband.

The Chairman also demonstr<sup>†</sup>ates the incorruptibility of the Party, standing by its declared egalitarian principles and refusing to be influenced by rank, real or imagined. At one point, the Chairman tells his secretary to put a self-important representative from Headquarters in his place:

Поставить товарища в очередь . . . Нам нужны такие единицы, которые счёта революции не предъявляют. 37

In this case, the recipient of the sharp reprimand is, again, an intellectual. Whilst naturally avoiding the latter category, the Chairman is clearly no fool, and throughout the play is never duped.

Славный у тебя партбилет. Сам сделал? 38

he says to the Ukrainian malingerer in a scene which also exhibits an underlying racial prejudice which is apparent elsewhere in the play.

In this first scene, the close rapport between the

Chairman and Bratishka is established. The latter, a one-legged ex-sailor is (improbably) secretary and 'minder' to the Chairman as well as being his friend and confidant. Bratishka is, in every way, the forerunner of Shvandy in Lyubov' Yarovaya, a comic but noble character, a true comrade whose function is to engage the sympathy of the audience either by virtue of his quick repartee, or by unconscious humour. He provides the comic relief which would be inappropriate to the Chairman, as well as acting as his interlocutor so that the former's motives may be clearly communicated to the audience.

Although advocating egalitarian principles, the Chairman is necessarily dictatorial, but is, apparently, unaware of the paradox. This, and other contradictions in him, the author can only resolve by finally killing him off, whilst showing at the same time that the political struggle continues beyond his death.

Scene 2 revolves around a committee meeting whose agenda is unbelievably long, ranging from a typhus epidemic, lawlessness and sabotage to transport and fire-wood shortages and . . . church weddings. In addition to these ongoing issues of policy, the committee addresses itself to more immediate problems such as devising a method for incinerating diseased animals and providing homes for railway workers who are currently forced to live in railway carriages. The Head of the Health Department is reprimanded by the Chairman for slackness and time-wasting

and accused of misuse of materials by Bratishka, but he is incorporated into the fight against typhus together with two worthy Party members, an example of a calculated risk taken by the Chairman, faute de mieux.

The problem of the railway workers' accommodation is settled by the decision to requisition the monastery, as suggested by Bratishka. This potentially boring scene is enlivened by the interplay of the characters. The main interest derives from the interaction and contrast between the bluff, hot-headed unorthodox but honest Bratishka and firstly, the dishonest Head of the Health Department, Zagoretskiĭ, whose bureaucratic procrastination is lampooned and secondly, the lecturer who, as an intellectual, is negatively portrayed as fastidious and faint-hearted. Throughout this scene, the Chairman remains in full control, settling internal disputes, swiftly resolving disagreements by rough but fair methods and exhibiting an authority which is little short of autocratic, as he calmly deals with the havoc on all sides.

Act i ends on a note of controlled urgency as the Chairman sets out to resolve yet another urgent problem -- this time that of a rabble-rousing komsomolets -- whilst keeping tabs on the committee meeting. Thus, two points of interest are held in suspense to sustain audience attention and involvement through to the second act.



Act ii, Scene 2 commences with a meeting called by the regional soviet to organize a campaign against the typhus epidemic. A range of characters is given voice in this scene, although their portrayal is partisan. The members of the praesidium are seated on a platform before the members of the soviet. Their bleak situation is painted in all its horror by the doctor whose words are underlined by the Committee Chairman who pleads that unless the members of the soviet take action to alleviate matters, he can no longer be held responsible for the state of the town. The Voenkomb, himself a victim of the typhus epidemic, summons up enough strength to describe the desperate conditions in the barracks where the epidemic has caused corpses to accumulate which cannot be disposed of for lack of the wherewithal to do so. It transpires that the Voenkomb has been given the post of Acting Head of the Health Department in addition to his existing function as chief of the garrison following the arrest for drunkenness and negligence of Zagoretskiĭ. Knowing that death is imminent, the Voenkomb pleads for deputies to be appointed to assume his duties. The lecturer is next to speak, urging the proletariat, who are about to inherit the fruits of the Revolution, to sacrifice present comfort for the sake of the sick; in other words, he suggests that it is their duty to forego the monastery accommodation so that it can be turned into a hospital. Naturally, as the suggestion is made by an intellectual, it is not welcomed, and its proponent is made to look like a pompous ass. The final, compelling

speech on this topic is left to the next speaker, Popov, the representative of the workers, who emerges as the spirit of sense and practicality amid suspect 'experts' and intellectuals:

А я товарищи, не лекарь и не лектор, а знаю, что, вагоны -- это новый очаг заразы и что больному не станет легче, если здоровый заболевает. . . . Революции такой дурацкий долг не нужен, от него только вред один. (Аплодисменты)<sup>39</sup>

The Requisitioner is then invited to make his contribution, which is the suggestion that everyone's head be shaved to prevent the infection spreading. The Doctor and others point out to him that this action is of little value without soap. At this reference, the representative of the Cheka feels it incumbent upon himself to stress that he is doing his utmost to trace the whereabouts of the supplies of soap and washing powder which have been stolen. Clearly, counter-revolutionaries are sabotaging the war effort, a fact which emerges explicitly in the next scene.

Kurilova, a non-Party member who represents the fellow-traveller sorority, is given the opportunity to make her contribution next. This offers a pretext for the peasants' voice to be heard, with a passing acknowledgement of their problems and hardship, together with that of the New Soviet Woman as Kurilova -- somewhat incongruously -- digresses into the area of female emancipation:

А мужики: "Ну ты, баба, помалкивай, тоже за коммунию, в политику, а даже учить вас, дураков, станем, потому Ленин

сказал, что и каждая кухарка должна уметь государством<sup>40</sup> управлять!"

Again, the raising of this issue seems out of place in the context of emergency action. Indeed, after Kurilova's robust rallying call on this theme, she is recalled to her main point by the chairman. Her suggestion is both simple and practical: to use clay as a substitute for soap. Having invoked Lenin several times -- clearly, he is the embodiment of an otherwise purely abstract notion of the Revolution in the minds of the uneducated peasants, assuming the role of folk hero and father-figure combined -- Kurilova resumes her seat.

She is followed by a representative of the sewage-disposal brigade declaring the impossibility of carrying out Kurilova's suggestion, and then, by Bratishka urging the mobilization of the temporarily unemployed teachers to nurse the victims of the epidemic. Following this build-up, the Chairman takes the rostrum, making a rousing concluding speech which neatly joins together the threads of the meeting. Rhetorically equating the struggle against the typhus epidemic with that against Denikin's forces, he sets the practical solutions in motion. He also gives a foretaste of the scene to come in his reference to summary execution for speculation in clothes and linen, an intimation that this is to be the fate of Zagoretskiĭ, presumably pour encourager les autres. The noisy reception of this speech is curtailed by a final rallying call by the Chairman and the scene

ends with an inspiring chorus of the Internationale.

Scene 4 shows the enemy plotting to subvert the efforts of the epidemic task force. The Voenruk is shown to be a traitor in reality. Initially, the audience is not made aware of his treachery as the first part of the scene consists of a dialogue between the Voenruk and the Garrison Commander in which the former ostensibly reprimands the latter for the collapse of discipline in the Uhlan barracks. This charade is sustained while the secretary is in the room, but, once he has left, the true nature and intention of the plotters are revealed. This delayed revelation serves to sharpen the audience's awareness of the action on the stage, as well as alerting them to the potential danger of the enemy within. It transpires that the Voenruk and the Garrison Commander are behind the unrest amongst the Komsomol, and that they are awaiting a signal from Denikin to join forces with him in a combined attack on the town. In the meantime, says the Voenruk:

Тиф -- наш верный союзник.<sup>41</sup>

Suspense is introduced into the scene when the secretary unexpectedly returns and the Voenruk and the Commander have to revert swiftly to their former roles. The secretary, suspecting nothing, even supplies a couple of unsolicited testimonials for the Voenruk who is thereby given the pretext to indulge in heavy irony, rather like the villain in a pantomime. In response to



the secretary's suggestion that, as a truly loyal comrade, the Voenruk should join the Communist Party, he remarks:

Так лучше. Могут быть в курсе беспартийных мыслей.  
(Хитро улыбаясь.) С коммунистами так не  
откровенничают.

42

A female employee enters, apparently bringing papers for the Voenruk to sign. He, once more, affects annoyance at the interruption, but once the woman leaves it is revealed that she, too, is a collaborator, and that she has brought a secret letter for the Voenruk which he reads before tearing it into small pieces.

Abramov, a young Communist member of the Red Army, is brought in to be told that his imprisonment (on a spurious charge) is to be extended as a token example of the Voenruk's intention to arrest many of the Communist soldiers before the counter-revolutionary attack which is planned for the Subbotnik when the population is due to be mobilized for wood-gathering and sewage disposal. This part of the plot is revealed in a conversation between the Voenruk and an old military civil servant collaborator.

Finally, in this scene, Ibrahim, a Tartar, is introduced. He is a steward who, it transpires, is the arch-colluder in the spreading of the epidemic by selling off the infected clothes and linen in the worker district of the town. The character of Ibrahim is

portrayed in this brief scene as coarse, greedy and primitive, with a personal chip on his shoulder:

(дико оскалив зубы.) Резать будем! Кровь пить! (Тыча себя в грудь.) Ибрагимов богач был . . . Ибрагимов 43  
руку жмал . . . Ибрагимов опять будет Ибрагимов.

In this entirely negative characterization of the steward, Ibrahim, it seems likely that we are being offered a blatantly prejudiced view of Tartars.

Ibrahim is the only character who displays such overtly repulsive greed and violence. The degree of racial prejudice exhibited in the portrayal of this character would certainly be unacceptable today for political -- if not moral -- reasons.

This scene in the enemy camp concludes with the messenger, left alone to clear up the Voenruk's office, piecing together the secret letter and declaring her intention of taking it to the Cheka.

Scene 5 starts with a didactic interlude in which the Party Chairman appears to spend an inordinate amount of time, given the circumstances, on a relatively trivial matter which he eventually delegates anyway. This concerns the efforts of a petty bourgeoisie to get into the Party in order to gain material advantage. As the woman is transparently foolish and mercenary, she falls easy prey to his questions, revealing not only her own dubious motives but also the names of Party members who are using their official positions to feather their

necks as well as to secure advantage for their friends. Presumably, this intelligence justifies the amount of time spent on the woman's application. The Chairman's use of heavy irony throughout the interview, which is not perceived by the petty bourgeoisie, together with Bratishka's exaggerated courtesy towards her, afford opportunity for humour at her expense. After she has been dispatched to a subordinate, already briefed, for further questioning, the Chairman resumes his other duties.

His terse response to impossible bureaucratic demands, telephoned from the regional Party headquarters, reveals the extreme pressure which the assailed local Party is under:

Те, что остались в живых, на куски разрываются.

44

Once more, the Chairman displays his qualities of leadership in suggesting a practical solution to the problem of delivering the Party line to each individual cell. A second telephone call, following swiftly upon the heels of the first one, conveys the message that the Voenkomb has died. The Chairman's response to a suggestion from the other end indicates that he does not regard the Voeruk as his natural successor and indeed, when Bratishka reappears, he is given orders to request the Gubvoenkomb to sanction the nomination of another person to the post. In addition, the Chairman sends out an order to all the Party cells

to submit reports on mortality figures among Party members and to nominate people to be responsible for the organization of the firewood collection.

The Chairman of the local soviet, the Predsovet, now appears, at his wits' end, seeking advice on how to dispose of the corpses of the victims of the epidemic, cope with the shortage of stretchers and clear the accumulated rubbish. The ever-resourceful Chairman advises storing the corpses outside on open ground where they will present no health risk in the sub-zero temperature, and covering them temporarily with snow until the ground is soft enough to be dug. Once the corpses have been put 'on ice', he suggests, the problem of the rubbish can be dealt with, after which time the corpses can be properly buried. The Predsovet demurs, pursuing the point of the necessity of conveying the bodies to the cemetery and, therefore, the need for stretchers. The Chairman loses patience, pointing out that it is immaterial where the corpses are stored as far as their owners are concerned, but of considerable advantage to the survivors if they do not have to transport them to the cemetery. The Predsovet does not want to accept the responsibility of leaving the bodies outside, on unconsecrated ground, ~~which~~ <sup>therefore</sup> He tries, to foist the responsibility upon the Party Chairman. For this, he is heavily upbraided:

Что?! Опять ответственность? Чинуша! . . . С поста  
снимем! Из партии исключим! Трус! 45



As the shamefaced Predsovet is sent off to do his duty, the petty bourgeoisie returns cock-a-hoop, in anticipation of receiving her Party membership card. Her enthusiasm is rapidly quelled by the Chairman's informing her that she will be required to do voluntary hospital duty.

Next, Shuĭskiĭ, the Commissar for Education, enters, outraged at the discovery that the Theatre and Education Department is going to be converted into an infirmary. In his objections, Shuĭskiĭ shows himself to be pompous, self-important, unsympathetic and stupid, which makes him an easy target for the Chairman and Bratishka, both of whom mock the traditional links between the Church and scholarship:

Он учёный, знает как смотреть одним глазком на небо  
поглядывает, а другим по земле пошаривает.

46

They follow this up with the serious accusation that Shuĭskiĭ has been receiving bribes which, unbeknown to him, the petty bourgeoisie has revealed. Additionally, he has abused his position by inculcating religious ideas into children whilst disseminating anti-Communist propaganda and driving away workers who were sent to him for literacy classes. Shuĭskiĭ refuses to accept their rebukes, although he cannot refute the accusations. As he storms out in high dudgeon, the Chairman of the Cheka enters with the news that the plot led by the Voenruk, Bogomolov, has been discovered, and that there will be an uprising in the Uhlan barracks the following day (at this point, they have

no knowledge of the impending attack by Denikin's forces). They work out a strategy to deal with the crisis: the barracks will be surrounded by the armed division of the local Cheka to ensure that the Subbotka proceeds as planned, while the ring-leaders will be rounded up that night and, it is implied, be prevailed upon to reveal where the roots of the plot lie. As he departs, the Chairman of the Cheka remembers to communicate to the Party Chairman the information that Shuĭskii plans to spend the night carousing with his cronies. The Party Chairman decides that this time he is beyond redemption, and makes the peremptory vow to have him shot.

In Scene 7, the setting changes to the Uhlan barracks where ailing young Red Army soldiers are lying without medical attention, while the convalescing and still healthy men wander around bored and listless being goaded by the agents provocateurs in their midst. The latter try to persuade the others that the Communists have betrayed them and left them to die. Inevitably, a fight breaks out between this faction and the staunch defenders of the Party. The situation becomes increasingly riotous with everyone vocally backing the warring parties. The tumult is brought dramatically to an abrupt end by the appearance of the Chairman of the Cheka, who fires his rifle in the air; behind him appear the Party Chairman and Bratishka flanked by two armed Cheka officials. The Chairman of the Cheka holds the soldiers at bay whilst Bratishka reasons with them, telling them that they would



be mutinying against their own people if they deserted now. The Chairman of the Cheka warns of the dangers of fleeing to the countryside and carrying the epidemic there. The infected linen racket is revealed to them and the announcement is made that they are to be issued with fresh supplies of uniforms and linen and that anyone found speculating again will be summarily executed. At this juncture, the Party Chairman seizes the opportunity to point out that the landowners in the countryside would be seeking revenge on those responsible for taking their land from them, and this compelling argument finally convinces the Red Army soldiers of their own naivety and shortsightedness. The Chairman warns of the dangers of political ignorance:

He так враг как незнательность ваша.

47

The Chairman of the Cheka offers amnesty to those Red Army soldiers who denounce the agents provocateurs. The most vociferous of the Communist supporters loses no time in naming the ringleaders who are immediately arrested and dragged off to be executed. The concluding words of the scene are uttered by one of their number who pleads political ignorance in defence of his action. The drama of the play carries the underlying moralism; his cries are grimly ignored as the scene draws to a close and the audience witnesses another salutary lesson.

Act iii consists of one scene only, the 'Subbotka'

scene, much praised for its effective deployment of the masses.<sup>48</sup> The scene opens with young Party members, Popov, Vasil'ev and Ivanova indulging in innocuous horseplay, partly as a means of keeping warm, while they wait for their work brigade to assemble. Disapproval of their behaviour is voiced by a prim schoolteacher -- representing yet another unsympathetic portrait of the intellectual class -- who accuses them of not conducting themselves in a seemly manner 'when there's an epidemic on'.<sup>49</sup> They reply that they are emotionally moved, but in their own way, rather than in the prescribed way of outward manifestation of grief. They ask the teacher whether she expects them to wear sackcloth and ashes and weep and wail like (old) women. The girl Communist chides her for judging too hastily because of her natural prejudices and counsels sobriety in her judgement of the Communists. The teacher suggests that gradual change and compromise should be the order of the day, and that the Communists should be less iconoclastic and less flagrant in their disregard for the old established ethical order. Naturally, this provokes the response that compromise is unacceptable in the moral code of their new society and that they 'spit on' bourgeois ethics. The argument degenerates thereafter with Ivanova proselytizing, backed up by Popov and Vasil'ev, producing such memorable aphorisms as:

Революция не классная дама.

50

The teacher -- with possible justification -- defends her own work and accuses Ivanova of behaving like a schoolgirl. Ivanova states her rejection of the inculcation of bourgeois ethics of which the teacher is clearly guilty, and finally, losing her temper, accuses the teacher of gaining Party membership under false pretences. She is again backed up by Popov who reproaches the teacher for trying to impose her own (wrong) ideas upon the Party of which she has only just become a member (and who thus, presumably, is politically illiterate). The teacher proceeds to spoil her argument by appealing to Ivanova 'as a woman'.<sup>51</sup> Ivanova vehemently denies all personal affiliations, declaring the Revolution to be her entire life:

Коллектив -- вот моя семья. Революция -- вот моя любовь.<sup>52</sup>

As she finally resorts to (roughly) pushing the teacher away, Popov intervenes to bring the 'debate' to a close and makes a conciliatory gesture towards the teacher, but she (not surprisingly) runs away.

A not wholly convincing portrait of the New Soviet Woman is represented in the young Communist, Ivanova. From the preceding quotation it may be seen that she asserts her total commitment to the new ideology in the language of political rhetoric. She expresses the blind faith and misguided enthusiasm of a zealot, allowing no sober reflection on the consequences of her slogans. As



described by Xenia Gasiorowska, she is one of

the pioneers of progress, aggressive, intrepid, ready to take on any adversary . . . the whole enormous hulk of the pre-revolutionary way of life. The keynote to their characterization was rebellion. Eager to destroy the old order, they were doing little to establish a new one, nor did they know exactly what it should be like. They denounced religion, neglected their homes (if they had one) and dedicated all their time and energy to work in new Soviet institutions. 53

The middle-aged school teacher clearly represents the unacceptable face of pre-revolutionary intellectual life and values. She will never succeed in embracing the new age of enlightenment, and, in this way, she resembles Gornostaeva, the unsympathetic professor's wife in Lyubov' Yarovaya.

Following the altercation between the two women, there is a quasi-choral commentary, presented by various small groups of characters, some of whom have already appeared, on the action of the play so far. The first group, consisting of the Station Commandant, also the secretary to the War Committee and the office cleaner, both of whom appeared in the previous act, discuss Bogomolov, the Voenruk. The Commandant expresses the view that experts are to be distrusted when they have no correct political foundation; the secretary demurs, pointing to Bogomolov as a fine example of a non-Party member helping to fight for the Communist cause. He calls upon the cleaner to endorse his statement but, naturally, the latter is not inclined to do so, although she says nothing about



Bogomolov's treachery, while the Commandant remains sceptical of the Voenruk's devotion to the Communist cause. Other voices testify to the new social order where experts will no longer expect material privileges or preferential treatment.

The second group discusses the situation in the Uhlan barracks, bearing witness to the demoralization and general neglect and breakdown in discipline, but at this point, Popov interposes a reassurance that all is now under control at the barracks.

The third group of workers greet with some merriment their task force leader, 'спец по чистке дворов',<sup>54</sup> the dvornik, who introduces himself thus:

Я уж не спец а ответственный работник.

55

Amidst general preparatory movement, a woman worker rushes in to join Vasil'ev's and Ivanova's work party, showing her determination to do her civic duty despite overwhelming personal difficulties. She highlights another of the problems facing Soviet women during this period, jettisoning everything in order to respond to the 'ringing call "the Revolution is in danger"',<sup>56</sup> thereby testifying to the supersedence of public over domestic duty and Party over family allegiance:

Думала опоздаю, детишки задержали -- ревут. . . .  
Заперла на ключ, а сама драла. Поглядеть некому.

57

Vasil'ev asks where Shuiskii, the Commissar for Education, is. From the general comment, it is clear that he is regarded as a renegade. Ivanova declares that he should be taken to task at the next public meeting. The representative from the Party tries to defend Shuiskii, but his ludicrous and feeble defence provides ammunition for more overt criticism of the intellectual class:

- А может он занят? Культурный человек никогда без дела не сидит.
- А мы не заняты? С семьей, женой почти не видишься.
- У него дело широкое.
- Зато у него помощники, и знание широкое? Ему и карты<sup>58</sup> в руки.

Ivanova demands that he be excluded from the Party and Shuiskii is promptly tried and judged in absentia and sentenced without a hearing, the assembled throng being in general agreement that he is guilty of failing in his public duty.

Silence is called for, at this point, so that Vasil'ev might read to the work brigade his poetry on a rousing revolutionary theme. The poem concludes on an optimistic note of victory over the typhus epidemic, and is enthusiastically received by the crowd.

The editor and lecturer now enter, arguing about the content of the Communist Manifesto. The editor provokes mirth at the lecturer's expense by dismissing his constant pedantic and irritating invocation of Marx and Lenin to

support his lofty contentions:

Оставьте вы, пожалуйста, и Ленина и Маркса в покое . 59

In complete contrast, Raevich now appears. He is an old Bolshevik, a former émigré who returned to fight for the Revolution. He is also a member of the intelligentsia, but, far from being vilified, he is held in general high respect. Although he is now very old and desperately ill, he insists on doing his public duty. He is warmly greeted by the others, who declare their intention of not allowing him to do any heavy work.

Finally, the Party Chairman enters and swiftly organizes the workers, appointing leaders to each sector and distributing task-force lists. Snippets of dialogue indicate the general conviction that public duty must supersede private allegiance, and the scene is brought to a close by the exit of the task-force marching in unison to a stirring military theme.

Act iv, Scene 8 is again set in the Party Chairman's office. It is night time and he has fallen asleep at his desk, worn out with overwork and impending illness. Bratishka enters and solicitously dims the light. The Chairman wakes up and promptly scolds him for this action, a reaction which Bratishka accepts with equanimity, acknowledging the strain under which the Chairman has been working. He hands over a newly-arrived telegram from the



Party Central Committee, endorsing the order to execute Shuřskiř. The Chairman expresses surprise as the Gubkom had initially challenged his decision, whereupon Bratishka reveals that he has engineered a movement at the general meeting declaring that the Party Chairman had their total backing. Without any expression of gratitude -- indeed one has the impression of unspoken disapproval of these unorthodox tactics -- the Chairman demands the remaining official communications from his secretary, amongst which he discovers that relatives of his have been shot because they were kulaks. The Chairman hangs his head while Bratishka offers tacit moral support. As the playwright deliberately does not develop this embryonic dramatic conflict, it is not clear whether the Chairman is grieving over the loss of kinsmen or their being on the side of the enemy. After a brief silence, work resumes.

Next, Raevich enters looking more ill than ever; the other two suspect that the typhus from which he thought he had recovered has returned. Raevich forgets why he has come and starts to ramble incoherently about the heady days spent with left-wing revolutionaries in France. The Chairman and Bratishka indicate to each other that old Raevich has lost his senses, but the latter suddenly rallies, realizing that he has been burbling deliriously and apologizes. The Chairman and Bratishka deal sympathetically with the old man, urging him to rest and reassuring him that a replacement will be found the next day to take over his work. Raevich is thus inadvertently



reminded of the object of his visit, which is to urge the Chairman to appoint his successor as soon as possible so that he might pass on to him the plan of his work while he is still compos mentis, for during his interludes of lucidity he has perceived that his sanity is fast dwindling. He continues to fulminate about the saboteurs of the Revolution whilst exhorting those present to continue the struggle. Before he is gently ushered out, he concludes on a practical note, requesting that he be cremated after death for the sake of economy. The Chairman once more demonstrates the humane side of the Party man by ordering the messenger to follow Raevich home to ensure that the old man reaches home safely.

An old peasant now enters, having travelled from the neighbouring volost, to announce the rout and massacre of Communists by kulaks led by the local landlord's son. The Chairman, alarmed that the attack should have taken place only twenty versts from the town, decides to send a cavalry detachment which is to remain under cover until dawn. He then orders Bratishka to get some rest; as usual, his unceremonious address belies his affection and concern:

Ложись спать, последнюю ногу свою пожалей.

60

Bratishka retorts that he should rest himself lest Raevich's fate overtake him too. He then leaves the Chairman alone in the office.

A strange character enters next, dubbed a rabble-rouser

by the Chairman. Initially, the purpose of his visit is not made clear, although he is obviously ill received by the Chairman who tells him to leave. The visitor, nevertheless, pushes his luck and stays to bandy words with him about his alleged shortcomings for which he is due to be punished. The Chairman indicates that he has already shown leniency in the hope that the young man would reform. The latter claims that his peccadillos -- it emerges that he is a womaniser and a drunkard -- do not warrant punishment. Clearly, he is a Party member who has not lived up to his badge. Whereas the young man's perception of himself is as an avenging champion of his class, the Chairman disapproves of his self-styled folk hero image, and he upbraids him for misusing his talent:

Демагог ты! Насколько раньше уважал тебя, настолько  
теперь ненавижу. 61

The Chairman, refusing to relent, is finally compelled to issue a full catalogue of his crimes which include bribery, corruption and abuse of official position. When he concludes by telling him that sentence on him has already been passed, the young 'dandy' then tries to bribe the Chairman, who, enraged, tells him to leave. threatening him with a revolver. Whilst seized by a sudden attack of coughing, the Chairman is attacked by the youth whom he wounds in self-defence. The youth retaliates by throttling the Chairman who is saved in the nick of time by the ever-vigilant Bratishka, who kills the assailant.

By ensuring that the Chairman is not directly responsible for this character's death, the playwright preserves his untarnished image and places him on a moral pedestal above the other characters. Again, this raises the question of whether Bill'-Belotserkovskii created a hero figure, albeit unintentionally. Also, the act of rough and ready justice shown here -- rather akin to that which has become familiar to us in the screen representation of the American Wild West -- is carefully vindicated not only by its defensive nature, but also by the use of a cripple as the killer.

Scene 9 is full of action; it starts immediately as Bratishka rushes in to rouse the sleeping Chairman to tell him that the town has been the victim of an early morning surprise attack by the anti-Communist forces from the neighbouring volost. The Chairman learns that the enemy has been tipped off by informers and has taken a different route to that taken by the Red Cavalry. Bratishka gives the Chairman a brief report on the situation in the town where the enemy forces have set fire to the hospital in order to divert attention and manpower resources, and are being held on two fronts. The Chairman swiftly gives orders to bring up reinforcements. He then telephones the Town Commandant apparently for no other reason than to upbraid him for the present situation. He then orders the messenger to prepare a cart with a machine-gun on it; he telephones the Fire-station Commandant, but the brigade has already left. The panic and fighting outside are conveyed



off-stage, aurally, by the device of the open window. Next, a messenger enters to announce that the textile workers have joined the fray, but that they have insufficient weapons, whereupon the Chairman dispatches those without weapons to the hospital to save the patients from the blaze. He then demands the classified papers from his secretary who, it transpires, is carrying them concealed about his person. The Chairman orders that they be handed over to Popov and asks for the safe to be brought in. In the meantime, the Commander of the barracks appears to receive orders to hold back the enemy on two fronts. The Chairman tells him that the forces from the Uhlan barracks are mounting an offensive against the attackers. The Chairman then delegates responsibility for the Party headquarters to his (reluctant) deputy, Popov, as he himself plans to man the machine-gun, leaving him with orders to destroy the classified documents in the event of capture.

Before he can leave, he is met by a large contingent of disabled patients from the military hospital. Still clad in their hospital gowns, they demand to be given weapons and accuse those present of leaving them to perish. Popov and the Chairman try to reassure them and urge them to return to the hospital or their homes, but the disabled men will have none of this and their obstinacy causes the Chairman to become desperate and to threaten them. Finally, Bratishka, a more credible spokesman in view of his permanent disability, demolishes their plaintive



accusations and proposes the idea that the invalids be used as look-outs, thereby releasing the able-bodied currently fulfilling this task to fight. The scene ends with the Chairman setting off with the machine-gun, accompanied by the loyal Bratishka who refuses to leave his side. Any mawkishness is avoided by the Chairman's cursing Bratishka for his stubbornness to conceal his concern for the latter's safety.

The final scene opens at dawn with a messenger arriving at the Chairman's office to inform the dozing Popov of the discovery of a cache of rifles in the quarters of the steward, Ibrahim, at the recruiting office, following which Ibrahim has been summarily executed. Popov orders the distribution of the weapons to the workers but they have already taken matters into their own hands. There follows a short speculative exchange between the messenger and Popov about the outcome of the battle in which they reveal their intention to blow themselves up inside the building should the enemy try to take them.

This exchange is interrupted by the noisy entrance of Raevich who has gone mad, singing, yelling and confusing friend for foe. Popov and the messenger try to tie him down, but Raevich breaks free and rushes out. Popov, fearing that Raevich will spread panic among the fighters, prepares to shoot him from the window, but he is spared this painful duty as Raevich suddenly collapses. Once again, one suspects a judicious deus ex machina

intervention by the author. The body of Rævich is laid out in the committee room while the battle continues to rage outside, commented on by Popov and the messenger, They observe the arrival of the stretcher-bearers carrying a body; the body turns out to be that of the Chairman accompanied by the ever-faithful Bratishka who has been injured himself. The Chairman is placed on the table and Bratishka, despite his injuries, staggers over to him to listen to his heart. Although he realizes that he is dead, he tearfully asks Popov for confirmation. As the three comrades, left alone on the stage, gaze at the corpse of the Chairman which the messenger has covered with a red flag, there is sudden shouting and tumult from outside. The messenger rushes out to see what has happened whilst Popov and Bratishka, fearing the worst, grab the gun and bomb respectively. The messenger returns with the joyful tidings that the Whites are on the run. Amidst the off-stage jubilation, Bratishka shakes the corpse of the Chairman, proclaiming their victory to his deaf ears, and conveying to the audience the ringing message that he has not died in vain.

This final tableau contains the obligatory positive tone as well as concluding on a note of moral uplift where personal sadness and loss are acknowledged, but not allowed to linger, because the individual has sacrificed himself for the greater good of the community.

In the three years following the premiere of Shtorm,

the few reviewers who paid any attention to the play gave it a largely favourable reception. There was almost unanimous praise for the acting, directing and designing talents of the original MGSPS production,<sup>62</sup> although lesser actors and directors were sometimes less successful in coping with the demands of the Naturalistic dialogue.<sup>63</sup> There were a few examples of praise, nevertheless, for minor and provincial troupes which tackled the play.<sup>64</sup>

The play was perceived by contemporary reviewers as marking a significant transitional phase in the development of Soviet drama. They recognized that it was not purely agitka, even though an (unnamed) writer in Rabochii i teatr referred ambiguously to MGSPS's 'так называемый " агитационный репертуар".'<sup>65</sup> The same writer considered that this sort of material could also prove to be popular entertainment:

Такой репертуар может быть и "кассовым".

66

Shtorm left an abiding impression, however, of being, above all, both didactic and inflammatory.<sup>67</sup> The links with agitative drama were indisputable. A. Obraztsova in Spektakli i gody refers to the slogans which Bill'-Belotserkovskii put into the mouths of some of the characters, such as:

КОЛЛЕКТИВ -- ВОТ МОЯ ЛЮБОВЬ

68

and



Мы умрём на фронте!

69

Contemporary reviewers, however, acknowledged the novel use of prosaic, blunt language, interspersed with touches of ironic humour and the (merciful) absence, by and large, of agitative rhetoric.<sup>70</sup> This feature was even more evident retrospectively:

Пафос агитационного театра был грубее и суше. "Шторм" означал новый этап -- рождение реалистической драматургии, пронизанной духом революционного романтизма.<sup>71</sup>

A couple of reviewers commented on its absence of plot.<sup>72</sup> The play consisted, rather, of a series of loosely-linked scenes, some of which were virtually self-contained and heralded another important development, namely the arrival of cinematic art, an impression heightened by the set designs.<sup>73</sup>

The play found its dramatic force not in the traditional personal conflict but in the newly-acquired notion of the mass struggle against counter-revolutionary agencies. Even though Shtorm was still considered by some to have vestiges of traditional individual heroism,<sup>74</sup> others -- in retrospect -- maintained that there was no intentional heroism.

In depicting the work of the Party, the play did not seek to glamorize its role but to convey accurately the everyday horror of the struggle.<sup>75</sup> As this necessitated showing banal and unsavoury aspects of daily life, the



concept of theatrical být came into being for which a contemporary critic, A. Krýzhinskiĭ, coined the stylistic description, 'condensed naturalism'.<sup>76</sup> Subsequently, however, Naturalism became discredited as shown in the following passage from Spektakli i godý in which A. Obraztsova refers to the pejorative remarks made by contemporary (unnamed) critics:

Критики писали о "стадии наивного бытовизма и жанрового натурализма", . . . Театр имени МГСПС не раз называли театром "сценического натурализма".<sup>77</sup>

The rejection of the undesirable býtovoĭ tag meant that another label had to be found to attach to the new departure in dramatic terms, as represented by Shtorm. The answer lay in the interpretation of everyday life; in the striving for a higher purpose, its undeniable squalor was transcended. Thus, the romantic-heroic style was born:

Драматург открыл пламенную романтику в самих повседневных фактах, выведенных им в пьесе, -- в приёме председателем укома посетителей, в том, как одним субботним утром отправились коммунисты на очистку уборных и помойных ям.

Новаторство заключалось уже в том, что для театрального представления был предложен материал, казалось бы, театру совсем не присущий. Но Билль-Белотцерковский сделал и большее: в революционном, неприкрашенном быте он увидел высокую романтику, в революционном энтузиазме -- высокий героический пафос.

78

The production of Shtorm was not rooted in the traditional theatre, nor was it performed in a traditional auditorium for much of the time, but was closely linked with provincial tours and amateur theatre clubs. Judging by some of the reviews, Shtorm's reputation as a play

undoubtedly suffered from the sub-standard production which was the inevitable penalty imposed by these harsh conditions. The following extract gives a clear impression of Volkov's set design:

На невысоком станке художник воздвиг своеобразную, лёгкую и простую конструкцию: два соприкасающихся повернутых ребрами к зрителям куба. Их контуры обозначены светлыми деревянными рамками и отчётливо вырисовываются на фоне тёмного задника. . . . Несложная установка обеспечивала бесперебойную смену картин. . . . Сцены спектакля напоминали порой кадры фильма: стенки полах внутри кубов, как рамки экрана, точно очерчивали границы выбранного из жизни материала. А коль скоро действие не умещалось в пределах указанного художника пространства, актёры непринужденно спускались со станка, размещались на авансцене и по обе стороны от конструкции. На маленьком экране появлялись в виде световых надписей названия картин. 79

Despite the varying degrees of success, it was by virtue of Volkov's imaginative sets which, if not directly borrowed, inspired adaptations, that the play lent itself to the exacting conditions of touring and amateur dramatic performances.

Additionally, the actors' doubling and trebling of roles meant that the play could be performed with modest resources. In contemporary accounts, however, there are some numerical discrepancies concerning the allocation of the fifty parts. The reviewer in Zhizn' iskusstva mentions thirteen actors each playing two or three roles,<sup>80</sup> whilst the writer in Rabochii i teatr reviewing the same production, four months later, mentions twenty actors each playing three or four roles.<sup>81</sup> He, moreover, stresses the effectiveness of the mass Subbotka scene with



twenty actors only. One can only speculate on the effectiveness of the same scene with thirteen players.

Reaction to the characterization was varied; the reviewer in Novyĭ zritel' considered that the positive characters were well defined, while the negative ones were less subtly drawn (in direct contrast to the usual criticism). He praised, however, the overall absence of crudely depicted heroes versus villains, and the presence of a wide variety of characters united by a single idea.<sup>82</sup> It was the first time that a whole gallery of individually defined characters had appeared on the stage, united as one strike force with the Party representing the heart and soul of the collective, even though, according to the critic, 'Sadko', as the play reaches its apogee, the Party appears to stand alone:

всё-таки, когда "Шторм" достигает высочайшей точки, "партаппарат" кажется зрителю каким-то одиноким, мало окруженным. 83

The absence of calculated heroism was also praised as was the discreet masking of passion with humour.<sup>84</sup> An example of the unfortunate effects of the comic element being mishandled, however, was given in Zhizn' iskusstva where the Vasileostrovskii troupe in Leningrad contrived virtually to dispel the tragic elements of typhus, ruin and betrayal with humour (!),<sup>85</sup> presumably in an over-zealous attempt to present a positive view of events.

The most interesting insights, despite their apparent

contradictions, appear in Blyumenfel'd's review of the touring production.<sup>86</sup> According to him, the play possessed the first hero (sic) not motivated by personal human passion. Blyumenfel'd considered that Bill'-Belotserkovskii had replaced the old-style heroes and introduced a new social background of 'mass movement'. The usual ingredients of drama had moved from the purely personal level to a popular and public one. He thought commendable not only the obviously outstanding scenes like the Subbotnik scene, but also those in which the masses had not yet emerged fully-fledged and were still living through their (vanishing) heroes. The notion of the masses was ever present even when there were only two characters on stage as each character was perceived and represented as no more than a distinctly composed part of the whole. What Blyumenfel'd praised, above all, was the strong dramatic tension, sustained by the stark counterbalancing of the opposing forces seen as:

Маски нюансированы до возможного предела, но противопоставлены друг другу в основной диссиметрии наш и не наш (председатель укома и бандит, матрос и барышня ищущая партбилета, интеллигент и рабочий, предчека и красноармеец<sup>87</sup> провокатор и т.д.)

There was a divergence of opinion on the staging and design of the play; in some quarters its innovatory sets were welcomed,<sup>88</sup> while in others Volkov's designs were criticized for their undesirable quasi-Constructivist quality.<sup>89</sup> In the original MGSPS production, Volkov and Lyubimov-Lanskoĭ were praised for seeking only to reveal the intention behind the author's work and to complement



it, whilst oblique reference was made to Meyerhold in alluding to recent examples of the over-prominence of the director's influence at the expense of the play's text, in other words, form superseding content.<sup>90</sup> The unnamed author of a review in Rabochiĭ i teatr commented on the rare phenomenon of author and director working harmoniously together, but condemned the scenery as dubiously 'Constructivist', abstract but not expressive thereby causing audience confusion:

декоративно-конструктивная установка довольно сложная но<sup>91</sup>  
не всегда выразительная.

The instant adaptability of the scenery was deemed a useless attribute, and its schematic design uninspiring.<sup>92</sup> Another director, Entriton, who adapted Shtorm for the Builders' Theatre in 1926 was criticized for attempting to 'freshen up' the play by mounting it on a sloping stage in a 'semi-Constructivist' style. Theatres in general were criticized for such recent manifestations of 'old wine in new bottles' which did not render the play 'new' in any true sense.<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, the writer signing himself 'S. Dr' in Zhizn' iskusstva found the application of technical innovation to be artistically effective and a boon to travelling troupes and theatre clubs.<sup>94</sup> Both A. Movsenshon and P. Konoplev in separate articles in Rabochiĭ i teatr also considered that rural communities were admirably served by such technical innovations which provided an invaluable service in bringing culture to the masses.<sup>95</sup>

This raises the point of the play's significance to theatre clubs and travelling theatre companies in the provinces, and its fate was probably inextricably bound up with their existence. It might well be that Shtorm would have had a far earlier demise if it had not been for its vital and effective contribution to the provincial theatre of enlightenment.

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## CHAPTER 2

How far it is relevant, in attempting to evaluate Bulgakov's Dni Turbinŷkh, to examine Belaya Gvardiya,<sup>1</sup> the novel upon which it is based, is debatable. Ultimately, the play must stand or fall on its own merits and not be assessed in the light of knowledge of the parent novel, its author or the attendant biographical detail. A passing glance at the novel can none the less be justified in view of the interesting illumination which it throws upon its later stage counterpart.

The origins of Dni Turbinŷkh are imbued with the same ambiguity which is the hallmark of Bulgakov's work. In the author's fictionalized but thinly-disguised account of the staging of this novel, Teatral'nŷi roman, the author gives the reader to understand that he had already conceived the play form of the novel before it was commissioned by MKhAT:

Родились эти люди в снах, вышли из снов и прочнейшим образом обосновались в моей келье. Ясно было, что с ними так не разойтись. Но что же делать с ними?

Первое время я просто беседовал с ними, и всё-таки книжку романа мне пришлось извлечь из ящика. Тут мне начало казаться по вечерам, что из белой страницы выступает что-то цветное. Присматриваясь, щурясь, я убедился в том, что это картинка. И более того, что картинка эта не плоская, а трёхмерная. Как бы коробочка, и в ней сквозь строчки видно: горит свет и движутся в ней те же самые фигурки, что описаны в романе. 2

He recounts how vividly he perceives his novel in concrete visual and aural terms:



С течением времени камера в книжке зазвучала. Я отчётливо слышал звуки рояля. . . . Но этого мало. Когда затихает дом и внизу ровно ни на чём не играют, я слышу, как сквозь вьюгу прорывается и тоскливая и злобная гармоника, а к гармонике присоединяются и сердитые и печальные голоса и ноют, ноют. . . . Зачем же гаснет комнатка, зачем на страницах наступает зимняя ночь над Днепром, зачем выступают лошадиные морды, а над ними лица людей в папах. И вижу я острые шашки, и слышу я душу терзающий свист. 3

Finally, he relates how he deals with the problem of pinning down these elusive visions by omitting all that is not actually seen, by plucking the essential action from the novel and by pruning it of the impersonal voice of the third person so that the characters and places are brought into sharply-focused three-dimensional existence:

А очень просто. Что видишь, то и пиши, а чего не видишь, писать не следует. Вот: картинка загорается, картинка расцветивается. Она мне нравится? Чрезвычайно. Стало быть, я и пишу: картинка первая. Я вижу вечер, горит лампа. Бахрома абажура. Ноты на рояле раскрыты. Играют "Фауста". Вдруг "Фауст" смолкает, но начинает играть гитара гитара. Кто играет? Вон он выходит из дверей с гитарой в руке. Слышу -- напевает. Пишу -- напевает. . . .

Ночи три я провозился, играя с первой картинкой, и к концу этой ночи я понял, что сочиняю пьесу. 4

~~Whilst retaining the essence~~ (of the novel) The exigencies of the theatre obviously meant that ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> unwieldy cosmic scale had to be pruned to a much tighter and succinct dramatic structure <sup>without losing its essence</sup>. In this respect, Bulgakov might be said to have over-pruned; so much of the flesh of the novel has been removed that we are left with little more than the bare bones. In other words, unlike the other Civil War plays examined here, Dni Turbinŭkh has to rely heavily -- if not solely -- on its characters. It is by



no means a straight adaptation of Belaya Gvardiya; many of the characters who help to create the multi-faceted aspect of the novel, for example, Vasilisa, Vanda, Malýshev, Naĭ-Turs, Julia Reiss, Rusakov, Shpolyanskiĭ, Karas' and Anyuta are absent from the play, whilst others such as Nikolka and Elena have been modified. The Hetman, Tal'berg and Shervinskiĭ have been amplified, while Fedor, the footman, and the German officers have been written into the expanded scene of the Hetman's defection. Mýshlaevskiĭ assumes a more significant role, while Larion remains unchanged in essence and weight. The central novel figure of Dr Alekseĭ Turbin has been altered to a degree that he is something of a composite figure in the play, exhibiting traits of Malýshev and Naĭ-Turs as well as his namesake.

In the play much of the universal and historic quality is lost and there is no attempt to express the voice of the people, although these defects are attributable to Stanislavsky rather than Bulgakov.<sup>5</sup> As only those protagonists who are directly concerned with the action remain, the fusion, lyricism and epic scale of the original work are largely reduced to the proportions of a personal tragedy. The world of the play Turbins is far more enclosed and narrow than the world of their novel counterparts, with the result that the overall effect is an impoverished, skeletal version of the original. Despite this reduction of the cosmic to the parochial, in the play we witness people -- many of them admirable -- whose lives are undergoing cataclysmic upheaval, and whose stable

domestic environment is suddenly ruptured by violence and death. They are faced with a choice: either to perish with the old order, which is the choice made by Studzinskiĭ, or to welcome cautiously a future which is, at best, uncertain, but which, at least, offers hope.

The realization of the bankruptcy of hitherto dearly-held values and of the passing of a beloved way of life is central to both Belaya Gvardiya and Dni Turbinykh but emerges more emphatically and explicitly in the latter. Alekseĭ Turbin, caught between his rejection of the discredited old life and his inability to accept the new is morally, socially and politically a displaced person. Unable to compromise, he is left with no alternative but to 'do the decent thing'. Hence, Alekseĭ's motives for his (unduly) heroic defence of his cadets remain ambiguous, open to an interpretation that the gesture is at once also expiatory and suicidal, as suggested by Nikolka:

Я знаю, чего ты сидишь! Знаю, ты, командир, смерти от  
позора ждѣшь, вот что! 6

By the author's suppression of the emotional side of Alekseĭ's character and by the removal of the Julia Reiss character, Alekseĭ is given nothing more for which to live.

The play attempts to show the various factions involved in the events which took place in and around Kiev in 1918--19 with scenes set in the gymnasium, the Hetman's headquarters and in the Petlyuran camp as well as in the



Turbins' apartment (which effectively shuts out the other three) but the result is somewhat disjointed and static, as the individual scenes bear little relation to one another. The cohesiveness of the novel is altogether lacking and thus, an audience watching the play has the impression that it is witnessing not so much a succession or simultaneous occurrence of interrelated events, but rather, a group of sporadic, isolated incidents.

Apart from his own textual modifications, Bulgakov had to contend with the influence brought to bear on the production by Stanislavsky as a result of which scenes were either removed or inserted.<sup>7</sup> Thus, 'Aleksei's Dream' was cut<sup>8</sup> as were scenes depicting the lives of humble folk (see p.64) while the gymnasium scene was shortened.<sup>9</sup> More significantly, Aleksei's loss of faith in the White cause and Myshlaevskii's embracing of Communism were more clearly defined and the (controversial) last scene re-written.<sup>10</sup> The net result was a truncated, blander play, conventionalized in the traditional MKhAT style.

In their article, Ot 'Beloĭ Gvardii' k 'Dnyam Turbinŷkh',<sup>11</sup> Lur'e and Serman point out the conflicting views of contemporary reviewers who disagreed over the merits and demerits of the above-mentioned scenes. Hence, according to Blyum, the Hetman's palace, Petlyuran camp and gymnasium scenes were sharp and satisfying, while the domestic scenes were written 'по чеховскому штампу'.<sup>12</sup> A. Tsenovskii, though, considered that the 'epic' scenes, full of shots, bugles and noisy props, compared unfavourably



with the intimate domestic scenes which were incomparably more effective.<sup>13</sup>

Lur'e's and Serman's article also draws attention to the interesting review of the play by the critic, M. Zagorskiĭ, who challenges the whole concept of turning a novel into a play, which results in the latter being no more than an impoverished re-hash of the former. In having done this, says Zagorskiĭ, Bulgakov is guilty of 'первый художественный грех'. He continues:

вопреки мнению Достоевского о гибельности и фальшивости всякой переделки для сцены резко очерченных в своей основе и сюжетной структуре форм романа и повести -- М. Булгаков<sup>14</sup> сам перекраивает для театра "Белую Гвардию".

If Bulgakov's chief sin was not that of adapting a subject which was artistically complete in one genre to another, then there are two questions which arise. Firstly, is Bulgakov simply a superior novelist and inferior dramatist? Secondly, if the quality of the play, Dni Turbinĭkh is judged to be poor, why did it -- and does it still -- enjoy such popular (and, latterly, critical) success?

The first question may be swiftly resolved by looking at the rest of Bulgakov's dramatic output. Other plays are living proof of his skill as a dramatist. To take Beg as an example, whose subject-matter, like that of Dni Turbinĭkh, concerns the experience of the White Guard during and after the Civil War, the style is as fluent,

mobile and imaginatively original as that of Dni Turbin̄kh is disjointed, static and dully conventional. There is a tendency, in the West, to extol the virtues of Dni Turbin̄kh purely on the grounds of its worthiness in depicting an aspect of Soviet history hitherto ignored in Soviet drama. Although the play is undoubtedly an extraordinary product of this period in its sympathetic portrayal of the officially reviled Whites, well-documented evidence shows that Bulgakov's intentions were far from writing an anti-Soviet play. The spectator is shown brave and honourable men on the 'other' side and presented with a view of events from their perspective. There is none of the romanticizing typical of most other Civil War plays, no prescribed message of uplift, no crude black and white issues with the ubiquitous positive finale; all is depicted in shades of grey and imbued with ambivalence. The fact remains, however, that the play's undoubted merit in redressing the balance cannot be said to compensate for its artistic shortcomings.

The answer to the second question is rather more complex and must be based on conjecture rather than on solid fact. One suspects that the play's early success was due in part to its topicality and the controversy surrounding it and in part to the exceptionally talented original cast who succeeded in bringing the dialogue to life. Not only was the style of the play suited to MKhAT, unlike the mass epic dramas being turned out by other dramatists, but the actors were people who formed the



cream of the young MKhAT talent, selected for this play by Stanislavsky,<sup>15</sup> whose legend lives on today among those who never saw them, actors such as Khmelëv who played Alekseï, Dobronravov (Mÿshlaevskiï), Prudkin (Shervinskiï), Sokolova (Elena) and Yanshin (Lariosik). These people, trained in the Chekhovian style, according to contemporary critics -- even harsh detractors of the play conceded the skill of the acting -- were able to bring out all the psychological subtlety of the characters, missed no opportunity for humour and satire and succeeded in rendering the Turbins and their friends wholly sympathetic.

Although the performances of these great actors have not been surpassed since -- and to judge from productions at the New MKhAT, have been but palely imitated -- the play's popularity endures, largely owing to three factors. The first of these is that during its long sojourn in the Soviet repertoire, and with the official reinstatement of Bulgakov, the play has gained respectability to become regarded as something of a sacrosanct classic. The second factor is that of nostalgia, both for the great days of MKhAT and for the pre-Revolutionary life-style depicted in the play. It shows some of the best of Old Russia: the quality of life (for people of the Turbins' class), its grace, charm, warmth, colour and gaiety, in fact much that was and is lacking in the Soviet period. Thirdly, much of the play deals with eternal themes in its ideas, emotions and sense of history which transcend the hysteria and over-sensitive reaction of its immediate



context. Victor Nekrasov writing in Novyi mir in 1967 sums up the play's attraction to the Soviet audience:

Sakhnovsky, a director at the Moscow Art Theater, wrote that for the younger generation at the M.A.T. The Turbins became the 'the second Seagull'. . . . The Turbins was not just a play but something much more . . . it was a tangible piece of life, receding as the years passed, yet always very near to me. . . . I had never known a single 'white guardist' in my life . . . And yet we had something in common with the Turbins. A kind of spirit? The past? Things, perhaps? . . . For I fell in love with those people and I love them to this day. I love them for their honesty, their nobility and their bravery, and ultimately for the tragedy of their position. I love them, just as hundreds of thousands of people loved them who saw the play at the Moscow<sup>16</sup> Art Theater.

Thus, only a few years after the Revolution and Civil War, when the majority of dramatists were already portraying those events through the haze of romantic myth, here was Bulgakov offering a play of sober realism seen through the eyes of the defeated, while himself standing at the crossroads of history with a foot in both camps. He was late of the Turbins' class and life-style, yet conscious like them that his was a class hated -- and probably justifiably so -- by the majority. He saw the defects in his own people, knew that change was inevitable and accepted the Bolshevik assumption of power. Hence, as a product of one system, yet accepting life under another, whilst objectively observing the shortcomings of both, Bulgakov's work inevitably bears the mark of ambivalence. Like Aleksei Turbin, Bulgakov is unable to embrace the New Order with whole-hearted conviction because his intellectual honesty cannot

prevent his seeing both good and bad. He is unable to accept or reject without qualification because he is incapable of seeing events in simplistic terms of black and white and because he is also aware of the presence of the 'unknown quantity', the spiritual dimension which is not accounted for. He is conscious of some greater theme which is beyond the earthly struggle, eternal qualities, a continuity which prevails in spite of men's conflicts and which cannot be slotted into their rational scheme. In acknowledging this dimension, Bulgakov is virtually unique among early Soviet playwrights.

The initial collaboration between Bulgakov and MKhAT came about as the theatre found itself in a period of decline, attributable mainly to its repertoire and style which seemed to be stagnating in the now ossified Chekhovian mould, but also to the predominance of the elderly actors in the company. Moreover, by 1926, MKhAT desperately needed to add a play to its repertoire on an approved Soviet theme which would nevertheless benefit its own traditional style. Dni Turbin̄kh appeared to Pavel Markov, MKhAT's artistic director, to fulfil both requirements and, to a large extent, he was responsible for initiating and encouraging the adoption of Bulgakov's play.

There had been few new productions since 1918; one in the twenty-second season (1919--20), none in 1920--21 and one in 1921--22, followed by two seasons' absence on



tour. In the season following their return, there were again no new productions. The twenty-eighth season brought Trenëv's Pugachëvshchina (première: 19 September 1925) which had not proved a success and had run for forty-one performances only;<sup>17</sup> Ostrovsky's Goryachee serdtse (première: 23 January 1926) which had been a relative success with 690 performances,<sup>18</sup> but whose theme was scarcely 'Soviet'; A. Kugel's Nikolaï I i dekabristy (première: 19 May 1926), another flop with thirty-seven performances<sup>19</sup> and Pagnol's Les Marchands de gloire (première: 15 June 1926), an imported offering which notched up an unremarkable 103 performances.<sup>20</sup> The twenty-ninth season, however, brought Dni Turbin̄kh which ran for an astounding 987 performances,<sup>21</sup> a fact which may be said to disprove conclusively all insinuations that the play was anything but a popular success. Indeed, a survey of the performance records shows that, between 1919 and 1974, the success of Dni Turbin̄kh has only twice been surpassed by other productions, namely a dramatization of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina which ran for 1052 performances<sup>22</sup> and Oscar Wilde's An Ideal Husband which ran for 1029 performances.<sup>23</sup> The periods in which these two latter plays are set are, perhaps, noteworthy as they both relate to eras and societies quite outside the scope of the Soviet society in which they appeared. As this may also be said of Dni Turbin̄kh, it would seem to lend support to the speculative theory postulated earlier (p.69) on the reasons for this play's popularity.



Sadko, in his review of Dni Turbinŷkh in Zhizn' iskusstva<sup>24</sup> castigates the public for going to see the play. Whilst asserting that few people would be attracted by its political content, he attributed<sup>s</sup> the play's appeal to the 'romantika meshchanstva' which:

будет привлекать толпы людей в МХАТ, обогащать барышников и трижды в неделю до верху наполнять кассу театра. Все "уставшие" от революции, все "неверищие" в неё, все человеки в футляре, более всего боящиеся свежего воздуха и чувствующие себя хорошо только в спертой атмосфере уюта "личной жизни" -- все мещане и пошляки попережнему лавой 25 потекут в зрительный зал МХАТа.

Ironically, of course, the hysterical outcry on the part of the reviewers which greeted the play's appearance earned it a notoriety which could only do good as far as the box office receipts were concerned. Whether the audiences were indeed drawn out of curiosity suscitated by unintentional publicity such as the above or whether they actually belonged to the above-mentioned groups one may only conjecture, but even Sadko seemed to be resigned to the fact that, whatever the reason, 'tolpŷ lyudei' would be drawn to see the play. This constitutes one of several examples of the ambivalent attitude of contemporary reviewers.

The reference made to Dni Turbinŷkh's box office success indicates its importance to МKhАТ in financial terms, apart from any other consideration:

Театр добивался продления Дней Турбиных, как финансовой базы для своей дальнейшей работы. Два месяца, прожитые театром без Дней Турбиных на афише, были временем полной хозяйственной разрухи театра: остальной репертуар МХАТа не собирал достаточного количества публики, -- дело дошло до того, что началась, говорят, задержка зарплаты работникам театра.

хозяйственной разрухи театра: остальной репертуар МХАТа не собирал достаточного количества публики, -- дело дошло до того что началась, говорят, задержка зарплаты работникам театра. 26

This meant, in Sadko's eyes, that MKhAT was selling its ideological soul in return for economic survival, thereby condemning it to inevitable spiritual decline. Again, the question of the public's continuing support is eschewed:

Три раза в неделю ставятся Дни Турбиных, -- разве это не значит, что бывший "театр Чехова", болезненно чувствовавшего всякую пошлость и мещанство, стал "театром Булгакова", -- пророка и апостола российской обывательщины? . . . 27

Но ведь это же смертный приговор для театра, если он может существовать только за счёт пьесы, стоящей в самом кричащем противоречии с окружающей реальной действительностью, социальным строем, с мирозерцанием и настроением огромного большинства населения и т.п.!... 28

The reviewer's remedy for the company's predicament was to exhort it to make a conscious effort in rising to meet the challenge of its crisis by putting on more and more new plays as well as bringing back old ones

до минимальной нормы. 29

One wonders what a 'minimum norm' might be in artistic terms. Again, it was assumed that MKhAT's fundamental problem was its repertoire, although one is bound to suspect -- especially in view of what Bulgakov wrote about his relationship with the MKhAT -- that the problem lay in the stranglehold of the formidable and autocratic duo, Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko.



Finally, in his article, Sadko strongly advised MKhAT to rid itself of the nefarious influence of Bulgakov whose play he deemed a 'ненадежная отпора', supporting MKhAT in the same way that:

верёвка поддерживает повесившегося.

30

Shortly after the opening of Dni Turbin̄kh on 5 October 1926, the storm which had been brewing over it broke, and the debate which was to continue for many months started. The first manifestation of this was the public 'trial' of the play at the Dom Pechati which was reported in several papers and journals. The purpose of this apparently one-sided debate seemed to be to give Bulgakov's principal enemies -- most of whom had already condemned the play in print -- the opportunity to conduct a concerted denunciation of ~~some~~<sup>it</sup> in public; in short, to give author, play and all participants a 'горячая баня'. The author(s) of the article which appeared in Vechernyaya Moskva<sup>31</sup> reported that among others, Bulgakov's well-known adversaries, Orlinskiĭ, Litovskiĭ, Podgaetskiĭ and Levidov were present in their capacity as 'главные банщики'. The ensuing battle of words was reported with evident relish. The banshchiki severely condemned MKhAT for its pro-White political attitude in choosing to stage Dni Turbin̄kh<sup>32</sup> and the director, Sudakov, for slavishly following the author's (anti-Soviet) intentions in his interpretation of the play. They saw the play in the following terms:



Это насмешка русского шовиниста над украинцами. Таким образом, даже положительные моменты пьесы антиреволюционны. (Киршон)

33

This led them to their final assertion that:

Пьеса встретила отпор со стороны всей советской общественности. (Орлинский)

34

These predictable conclusions were reached, apparently, in the face of little opposition but, equally, with little sign of approbation from the assembled throng:

но сочувствия не было: публика пришла в хорошее настроение.

35

For their part, the MKhAT actors present maintained silence, on the grounds that they were not qualified to speak on the company's behalf and claiming that Stanislavsky was ill and unable to attend the 'hearing'. Presumably, the dignified silence and the diplomatic illness both reflected the management's policy of discretion rather than valour in the face of such biased censure.

36

Ultimately, Stanislavsky, despite having interfered extensively in the staging of the play, disassociated himself from the production, leaving Sudakov as the sole accredited director.

Two years later, 1929, marked the year of official disapproval of Bulgakov's plays and their subsequent removal from theatre repertoires. Rabochaya Moskva carried an article announcing the removal of Dni Turbinŷkh

from the MKhAT repertoire by the head of Glaviskusstva, L. L. Obolenskiĭ, in accordance with the board of Narkompros which had tolerated the play's inclusion only until a suitable replacement was introduced.<sup>37</sup> This had now happened in the form of Ivanov's Blokada which had its première on 26 February 1929.

In addition, Zol'kina kvartira and Bagrovŭi ostrov had already been removed from the repertoires of the Vakhtangov and Kamerny theatres respectively following 'protests from public organizations'.<sup>38</sup>

An article in Komsomol'skaya Pravda dealing with the same subject also came up with some interesting remarks on the economic results of the production. It set out the costs of the production against the box-office receipts, viz. 21,000 rubles against 792,301 rubles and concluded that having made this substantial profit from the play over 249 performances, the theatre would have suffered no financial loss by the swift exclusion of Dni Turbinŭkh from its repertoire.<sup>39</sup>

The article went on to say that the same was true of Bagrovŭi ostrov at the Kamerny which

вызвавшая протесты общественности, успела пройти 42 раза, дав сбору 49.011 руб. Постановка Багрового острова обошла<sup>40</sup> обошлась всего в 9.000 руб.

There was no attempt made to reconcile the anomaly of

public protest on one hand and (to judge by box-office receipts) public support on the other. Having served their remunerative purpose, according to the writer, these plays should be dispensed with without further ado, especially in view of the availability of 'better' plays on more appropriate themes:

Но теперь, когда эти антисоветские пьесы превратились уже в "дойных коров" и притом коров тучных, а в репертуаре МХТ и МКТ появились новые, более достойные пьесы, над ДНЯМ Турбинных и Багровым островом должен быть поставлен крест.<sup>41</sup>

No justification for this peremptory action was offered, apart from the incidental remarks quoted above.

Dni Turbinŷkh is known to Western audiences in a way that the other plays discussed here are not. The first English translation of the play was made by Eugene Lyons in 1932 under Bulgakov's personal supervision. Productions in England took place in 1934 at the Ambassadors; in 1938, there was a production by Michel St Denis at the Phoenix, based on an adaptation by Rodney Ackland, with Peggy Ashcroft and Michael Redgrave; in 1960, there was a televised version directed by Rudolf Cartier with Marius Goring as Alexeĭ, Sarah Lawson as Elena and David Cameron as Shervinskiĭ. In 1979, the Royal Shakespeare Company put on a production at the Aldwych directed by Barry Kyle and using a translation by Michael Glenny, in which the scene in Act ii in which a Jew is tortured was reinstated at the director's behest.<sup>42</sup> Most recently, in 1984, the BBC televised a production by Cedric Messina, again using the Glenny translation and



including the anti-Semitic scene, translator and author receiving equal prominence in the credits.

It seems strange that this play should attract Western directors as it seems to offer more in the way of historical rather than dramatic interest. Bulgakov's original conception of the play as a fragmentary drama on the lines of Lyubov' Yarovaya and Shtorm, depicting contemporaneous events during the Civil War, had been firmly quashed by Stanislavsky, and Bulgakov had been compelled to alter it to formal classical mode.<sup>43</sup> Because of this re-writing and interference by other parties at MKhAT, the play is disjointed, particularly in the scene set in Bolbotun's camp which is not linked up with any of the other common threads running through the play. The original Act ii, Scene 2, a potentially interesting dream scene, was removed on Stanislavsky's orders<sup>44</sup> (see p.66).

The events surrounding the play and the different factions must be perplexing to Western audiences; indeed, in recent productions, it has been thought necessary to provide background notes in the form of script and film footage to fill in the gaps in the awareness of the circumstances surrounding the play. Why, therefore, should there be the prevailing interest? What remains to attract Western directors? The dialogue, it is true, gives scope for humorous interplay, as the first MKhAT cast proved so admirably. The Turbins are attractive, witty, intelligent and merry, and thus engage the sympathies of the audience.

Their lives are affected by personal as well as political tragedy and upheaval with which people can easily identify. Moreover, their stand for moral integrity and freedom set against a lively, Bohemian style of living makes them both appealing and understandable whilst their predicament is accessible to Western audiences.

The action of the play takes place in and around the chaotic events in the Ukraine during the Civil War in the years 1918--19. At that time, the conflict lay not only between Reds and Whites -- the latter having placed their faith in the Ukrainian Hetman, a German-backed puppet ruler, -- but also between both Reds and Whites and a third faction, the bandit force of Petlyura which enjoyed popular support in the local rural areas.

The first act takes place in the Turbins' flat, the hub of their universe and a haven from the harshness of the outside world which is shut out by the cream-coloured blinds. Here, there is a seemingly unlimited supply of hospitality. The family consists of three children: the eldest, Alekseĭ, is a colonel in the White Guard; the youngest, Nikolka, is a cadet in Alekseĭ's division, and their beautiful sister, Elena, is married to Colonel Tal'berg of the General Staff.

The first scene opens amid mounting tension as Elena awaits the tardy arrival of her husband and Alekseĭ grimly prepares for the following day's confrontation of



Petlyura's forces by his woefully inadequate division. The brooding tension is suddenly broken by the arrival of Captain Myshlaevskii, an old family friend, a bluff but good-hearted type who has just returned from foot patrol outside the city. He is suffering from exposure and frostbite and brings news of the desperate situation in the field, first fulminating at the defection by the peasants to Petlyura and secondly, at the gross incompetence and callousness of the General Staff which have led to the appalling deprivation of the soldiers. He expresses his disgust in language which is both rough and picturesque. He requests that he be allowed to join Aleksei's artillery unit where they will be able to fight together alongside their mutual friend, Captain Studzinskiĭ. As Myshlaevskii is led away to thaw out, the doorbell rings again, but, once more, it is not the long-expected Tal'berg but heralds the entry of the chief comic-pathetic character Lariosik, the Turbins' accident-prone cousin from Zhitomir. Confusion ensues during his chaotic entry as, unbeknown to him, the family have received no forewarning of his arrival, nor do they know who he is. As this comic knot is finally unravelled and the cousin is warmly welcomed, there is a third ring at the door which, this time, turns out to announce the arrival of Tal'berg. There is sharp anti-climax as he informs Elena that he is leaving immediately 'on orders' to flee to Berlin with the Germans who are pulling out of the Ukraine, leaving it to the fate of Petlyura's superior forces. Elena discerns straight away that her husband's main preoccupation is with saving his



own neck while his second concern, prior to departure, is to ensure that his property, namely his wife and his rooms in the apartment, be safeguarded during his absence. Elena's initially incredulous reaction to Tal'berg's ignoble conduct gives way to cold disgust. During the remainder of the dialogue, Elena's coolly ironic tone betokens not only her ability to judge independently, but also the dissolution of her vows of love and fidelity. She prevails upon Tal'berg to perform at least one small act of decency in warning Alekseï of the situation. For this advice, however, he receives little gratitude from his brother-in-law who has grasped the full implications and who, consequently, bids him a cold farewell.

Hot on the heels of the departing husband comes the suspected rival for Elena's affections, her would-be lover, Shervinskiï. He is an opera singer by inclination but personal adjutant to the Hetman of the Ukraine by profession. He is a handsome but rather dandified character given to inventing fanciful stories to enhance his own reputation. He is as delighted at the news of Tal'berg's precipitous departure as Elena is downcast at his cowardly abandoning of her.

The family are now reunited with their friends, Myshlaevskiï, Shervinskiï and Studzinskiï (who has just arrived) and proceed to enjoy a lively supper complete with wine and defiantly rousing song. The outward cheer, however, belies the mood of impending doom, heightened by

Tal'berg's defection. In the course of an increasingly drunken meal poised between tears and laughter, the political views of the protagonists emerge clearly. Shervinskiĭ, with his customary capacity for self-delusion and shallow optimism anticipates the advent of Ukrainian rule by the Hetman under a restored Tsar of all Russia, blithely dismissing the reported death of the latter as wild rumour. His wishful thinking inspires enthusiastic but naive patriotism in Nikolka, the youngest member of the Turbin household. Studzinskiĭ, Myshlaevskiĭ and Alekseĭ take a soberly realistic view, aware that the Hetman is a hollow symbol, largely responsible for their present plight. Alekseĭ, their leader in both rank and spirit, a man of integrity and astuteness, voices their true predicament. He acknowledges that, as it is too late to turn the tide, the struggle against the Reds is virtually lost; he knows too that the odds against his inexperienced little division are hopeless, but he is still prepared to put up a fight in defence of the Russia in which he believes. The supper degenerates into drunken chaos and, finally, Myshlaevskiĭ, the worst affected, is removed from the scene by his fellow officers, leaving Shervinskiĭ alone, with the opportunity to court the tipsy Elena and denigrate her husband. Elena only half-heartedly repulses Shervinskiĭ's advances and defends her husband; her sense either of guilt or propriety reasserts itself in timely fashion as she suddenly realizes that they are not alone. The emotionally confused scene is



briefly and hazily witnessed by a maudlin Lariosik before he succumbs to the potency of the alcohol to which he is unaccustomed and passes out.

Act ii, Scene 1 depicts the Hetman's hasty, ignoble and undignified flight from the palace assisted by the Germans as witnessed through the eyes of Shervinskiĭ. As the news emerges that Petlyura has broken through the pitifully inadequate White defences, the initial panic and confusion and the subsequent display of self-interest is conveyed with irony and ridicule. The only altruistic act -- and that not purely so -- is performed by Shervinskiĭ who manages to warn Alekseĭ of the increasingly dangerous situation. The cynicism of the lackey, Fedor, throughout the scene is an eloquent comment on the behaviour of his so-called superiors. Additionally, Fedor, acting as a mouthpiece for the common man, expresses indifference at the passing of the old masters and the coming of the new.

There is an abrupt transition in Scene 2 to the enemy camp, the cavalry division of Petlyura's forces, led by the brutal, swaggering Bolbotun. The brief scene depicts a couple of incidents of gratuitous violence to indicate the sadistic and tyrannical nature of this faction. Harsh and unjust punishment is meted out to a frost-bitten deserter and a Jewish bootmaker bears the brunt of Bolbotun's anti-Semitism. Suddenly, the order to attack is phoned through to the camp and the scene concludes with the swift departure of the brigand cavalry, conveyed aurally.



In Act iii, the scene shifts to the Alexander High School where Aleksei's undermanned artillery division, consisting mainly of cadets, is posted. The cadets, on Myshlaevskii's orders, break up the classroom desks for firewood to light the stoves. Incredulity in the face of their vandalism is registered by the old caretaker who is apparently oblivious of the situation outside the school and who remains intent on carrying out his school duties as usual. As the division assembles in ranks, Aleksei enters to deliver the bleak message that the struggle is lost and that they must all now flee to their homes. This news is greeted by uproar and near-mutiny followed by noisy confusion. When order has been re-established, Aleksei first upbraids the young soldiers for their insubordination which conclusively demonstrates how useless they would have proved in battle. He then reveals to them in a speech of controlled, bitter passion the betrayal and flight of the Hetman and General Staff so that there remains no cause for which to sacrifice themselves. Studzinski suggests that they make their way to the Don to join Denikin's forces, but his suggestion is scorned by Aleksei who, in a brief key speech, indicates his change of heart:

Там на Дону, вы встретите то же самое, если только на Дон проберетесь. Вы встретите тех же генералов и ту же штабную ораву. . . .

Они вас заставят драться с собственным народом. А когда он вам расколет головы, они убегут за границу . . . Я знаю, что в Ростове то же самое, что и в Киеве. Там дивизионы без снарядов, там юнкера без сапог, а офицеры сидят в кофейнях. Слушайте меня, друзья мои! Мне, боевому офицеру, поручили вас толкнуть в драку. Было бы за что! Но не за что. Я публично заявляю, что я вас не поведу и не пущу! Я вам

говору: белому движению на Украине конец. Ему конец в Ростове-на-Дону, всюду! Народ не с нами. Он против нас. <sup>45</sup>

Following this speech, Alekseĭ once more orders his troops to disband, this time with an increased urgency which is dramatically underlined by a sudden explosion. As everyone leaves in disarray, tearing off their insignia as they go, Alekseĭ remains at his post, burning official papers and awaiting the return of a detachment of cadets from an outpost. Refusing to accompany Mŷshlaevskiĭ at the latter's bidding, Alekseĭ sends him home to Elena, but Nikolka defies his orders, refusing to leave without him. They jointly manage to cover for the remaining cadets who return, hotly pursued by Bolbotun's men, but as the latter take over the school, Alekseĭ is killed by an exploding shell, while the devastated Nikolka, although wounded, manages to escape.

Scene 2 is set again in the Turbins' apartment as Elena and Lariosik and then Shervinskiĭ, followed by Mŷshlaevskiĭ and Studzinskiĭ, anxiously await the return of Elena's brothers. As tension mounts, a row breaks out between the dandyish Shervinskiĭ and Mŷshlaevskiĭ as the latter accuses the former of colluding in the Hetman's departure. Shervinskiĭ justifiably points out that they owe their present safety to his timely warning; finally, this is acknowledged and the two men make their peace under Studzinskiĭ's order. Shervinskiĭ cannot resist telling one of his boastful lies, claiming that the gold cigarette case which he in fact removed from the Hetman's



desk, was a personal gift from the Hetman presented as a token of gratitude. Shervinskiĭ's displaying of the case is taken as irrefutable proof of the story.

A sudden knock at the window puts them on their guard, but it turns out to be the wounded Nikolka who has managed to drag himself home. The friends carry him in, trying not to arouse Elena's fears, but she realizes at once that Nikolka has been seriously wounded and her instinct tells her that Alekseĭ is dead. In the only scene where Elena exhibits an outburst of raw emotion, she blames the other officers for Alekseĭ's death. Studzinskiĭ accepts her blame and threatens to kill himself, whereupon the others prevail on Elena to retract her harsh words. This she does before Nikolka confirms her worst fears. The act concludes abruptly as Elena faints to the ground.

In contrast to the high drama which concludes Act iii, the opening of Act iv is set two months later in a quiet domestic scene as Larion and Elena decorate the Christmas tree, carrying on the household traditions despite recent tragedy to which no reference is made. Instead, they seem preoccupied with their own emotions. Elena gently rebuffs Larion's gauche declaration of love by revealing her existing relationship with Shervinskiĭ, a situation which appears to have escaped her cousin's notice. As Larion departs to drown his sorrows, he meets Shervinskiĭ on his way in. The latter has just come from his successful debut at the opera house. With his ever-strong instinct for



survival, Shervinskiĭ has now become a bona fide member of the civilian population and has even taken the precaution of donning shabby outer clothes over his magnificent suit and frock coat lest he be hounded by the Bolsheviks as a member of the Ukrainian 'boss' class. His references to the outside world reveal that Petlyura's army has fled before the approaching Bolshevik forces. Ever the opportunist, Shervinskiĭ uses this rare occasion of solitude with Elena to point out to her that a new life is beginning for them. He begs her to divorce formally her husband and marry him which, after a modicum of protest, she agrees to do on condition that he reforms his propensity for lying and deception. Shervinskiĭ triumphantly destroys the picture of Tal'berg on the mantelpiece before exiting with Elena to exercise his vocal chords in a joyous epithalamion. Against this background of musical euphoria, Nikolka enters, a poignant figure, still supported by crutches and now wearing a student's rather than a cadet's uniform. Seeing the empty portrait frame, Nikolka guesses what has taken place, which he proceeds to relate to Larion upon the latter's return. Larion, on hearing confirmation of this news, inevitably drops the precious bottle of vodka which he has only just managed to secure. This latest incident in Larion's series of clumsy misfortunes is still being dealt with when Myshlaevskiĭ and Studzinskiĭ arrive, both in civilian dress. From their talk, it emerges that the Bolsheviks will be arriving in the city the following day. There seems to be a general cautious curiosity about them, the

sole dissenter being Studzinskiĭ who rejects the Bolshevik authority and announces his intention, albeit vague, of joining Denikin's forces on the Don. In words of bitter irony, Myshlaevskiĭ reminds Studzinskiĭ of Alekseĭ's realization of their leaders' betrayal and of the price which he ultimately paid for this betrayal:

Довольно! Я воюю с девятьсот четырнадцатого года. За что? За отечество? А это отечество, когда бросили меня на позор?!... И я опять иду к этим светлостям?! Ну нет. 46

Although Myshlaevskiĭ is unsophisticated in the realm of politics and might even be described as a political illiterate, demonstrated by his declaration:

Я за большевиков, но только против коммунистов 47

he has, nevertheless, grasped the essential point, namely that the Bolsheviks have the grass-root support that the others have not. Moreover, he does not wish to be cannon-fodder for what has become a dishonourable cause:

Спереди красногвардейцы, как стена, сзади спекулянты и всякая рвань с гетманом, а я посредине? Слуга покорный! Нет, мне надоело изображать навоз в проруби. Пусть мобилизуют! По крайней мере буду знать, что я буду служить в русской армии. Народ не с нами. Народ против нас. 48  
Алексей был прав!

Given Larion's exemption from military service on medical grounds, his pacifist interjection:

Я против ужасов гражданской войны. В сущности, зачем проливать кровь? 49

is regarded as misplaced by the soldiers present and he is



roughly put in his place by Myshlaevskii. The latter pursues his pro-Bolshevik argument, expressing optimism in Russia's future as a great power and countering Studzinskiĭ who considers that Russia's glorious days as a mighty power have ended. Myshlaevskii further warns Studzinskiĭ of the dangers of leaving one's native land and becoming an exile abroad:

Нужны вы там, как пушке третье колесо! Куда ни приедете, в жарю наплюют от Сингапура до Парижа. Я не поеду, буду<sup>50</sup> здесь, в России. И будь с ней что будет!...

Before these points of view can be reconciled, Elena and Shervinskiĭ enter to announce their intention to marry. Larion is persuaded to add his congratulations to those of the others and the announcement naturally offers a pretext for toasting the couple. Celebrations are just getting underway when Elena's husband, Tal'berg, makes an unexpected reappearance. He, too, is apparently intending to join the White forces on the Don and wishes to take Elena with him. The latter, in a brief scene alone with him, tells him of her brothers' fate and declares her intention of divorcing him and of marrying Shervinskiĭ. At the first insult which greets this news, Elena, unable to cope, summons Myshlaevskii who hits Tal'berg and then throws him out without any further ado. The celebrations are resumed and conclude with Larion's sentimental speech about weathering the storm of civil war and coming to the safe haven 'с кремowymi шторами'<sup>51</sup> where they are all sustained by the warmth of human fellowship. The speech is brought to an abrupt and jarring conclusion -- perhaps



an intentional comment on it -- by the sound of cannon-fire. After momentary panic, they realize that it is a salute, heralding the arrival of the Reds. As the increasingly loud playing of the Internationale is heard off-stage, the Turbins and their friends go to the window to look out on the real world outside. Nikolka greets the arrival of the Reds with (incomprehensible) enthusiasm as:

великий пролог к новой исторической пьесе.

52

The only note of bitter resignation is sounded by Studzinskiĭ in the much-quoted last line of the play:

Кому -- пролог, а кому эпилог.

53

This line contained sufficient ambiguity to be regarded as ideologically dubious by Bulgakov's critics.

Despite Aleksei's death in Act iii, he remains the central figure of the play and the author's mouthpiece. He is the man of honour, an admirable representative of the ruling-class who acknowledges the inherent degeneracy of that class and, thus, its inevitable passing. This begs the question of his loyalty to the White Guard. His initial stance of patriotism and fealty (to a now dead tsar) are heartfelt, as is his will to defend the city against Petlyura's bandit hordes, but he also knows that the Communist forces will ultimately triumph because of their grass-root support. In them, he sees, lie moral strength and seriousness of purpose which cannot be denied

or opposed. Aleksei seems uncommonly wise and serious for his thirty years, possibly because of the heavy burden of responsibility which he has to bear. He is preoccupied with world events, appears austere and formal and displays no trace of the frivolity and facetious humour which he tolerates in his friends and family. Aleksei is given little opportunity to show his private emotions, although he briefly signals his contempt for Tal'berg by refusing to shake his hand in farewell. In his relationships with others, it is, above all, his qualities of humaneness, altruism and integrity which emerge. From dealing with a drunken and frost-bitten Myshlaevskii to covering the retreat of his troops, Aleksei assumes his responsibilities unflinchingly, placing others first and himself last. His ultimate sacrifice is possibly unnecessary and could well be interpreted as a (subconsciously) expiatory act, but it is also unquestionably noble and brave. His death means the loss not only of a military leader but also a moral guide. Although his authoritative pronouncements are used as a point of reference posthumously, with Aleksei's death, the strong focal point of the White Guard is lost and the other characters have to make their own decisions about their future lives.

For his portrayal, Khmel'ev, the original interpreter of the role, won universal praise, which would seem to indicate that he was able to capture the passion which lay behind Aleksei's rather forbidding exterior, thereby creating a character to whom the audience could relate.

Nikolka, by contrast, is a lightweight character. In the main, he exhibits the general attributes of youth -- high spirits, impetuosity and idealism -- rather than specific personal qualities. He treats his elders and betters (including his Colonel/brother) with due respect and in no way resents his junior status. He acts as a foil to Alekseĭ; like him, he is patriotic and courageous, but unlike him, he is naive and eternally optimistic. His cheerful, defiant musical accompaniment enlivens the apartment scenes, punctuates the action and refers to outside events. Nikolka is presented as a sympathetic character who likes and is liked by everyone. His own disabling injury and grief over Alekseĭ's death make him a poignant figure in the final act and cause the last words which are put into his mouth to ring hollow. His apparent change of heart is both unheralded and unsubstantiated; there is no suggestion of such a change in his novel counterpart, which leads one to conclude that these words were wished upon the author.

Elena, the only female character in Dni Turbinŷkh, epitomizes the traditional notion of femininity. A description of Bulgakov's own mother would suggest that the portrait of Elena is, to some extent, based on her.<sup>54</sup> A quasi-romantic heroine, she is beautiful, accomplished and charming whilst being tolerant of unconventional behaviour and even indulging in it herself. Admirers, we learn, have always flocked to her side, and now, she is ardently courted by one of the characters and worshipped



from afar by another. The male characters defer to her wishes in domestic matters, and rush to protect her from the harsh realities of life; in the course of the play she never leaves the apartment. She is as indulgent towards the menfolk as they are towards her. Thus is Elena wooed, cosseted and protected, insulated behind the cream-coloured blinds of the Turbin apartment.

Elena's strength, however, lies in her female instinct for survival; she overcomes bereavement, a disastrous marriage, family misfortune and the passing of a familiar and beloved way of life. She represents hope for survival and renewal of life for the men whose role -- however justified -- is one of violent destruction. Assuming as required the roles of housekeeper, nurse and hostess, she ensures continuity in the quality of day to day living, supplying the comforts of domestic life: food, warmth, hot water and even an elegant style of living amidst chaos, fighting, misery and hardship. It does indeed seem strange that the Turbins' high standard of living should have been preserved throughout this period (notwithstanding the odd power-cut!) and that they appear to suffer none of the general deprivation. Not surprisingly, this point was pursued by several critics of the play. Additionally, Elena creates a haven of emotional warmth and security -- however illusory -- whither the menfolk repair after exposure to battle and danger. She offers a retreat too, for cripples (Nikolka) and misfits (Larion). The character of Elena is in marked

contrast to the female protagonists in the other Civil War plays discussed here. She is essentially unaffected by the war raging around her, except to the extent to which it directly impinges on her personal life. She appears to remain largely ignorant of events outside; the ideological struggle belongs to the world of men, and she spares little thought or concern for anyone outside her immediate clan. Devoid of notions of class consciousness and female emancipation, Elena in no way represents the New Soviet Woman or any of the variations on this type. Although she exhibits a measure of independence by abandoning her traitorous husband and forming a liaison with the dashing Shervinskiĭ, nevertheless she is running no real risk. She is financially well provided for, is protected against her husband's wrath by her brothers' friends and is even morally vindicated. The sudden break-up of her marriage, however, must surely be seen as symptomatic of a general breakdown of a way of life and traditionally-held values. Likewise, her flouting of moral convention in forming a liaison with Shervinskiĭ prior to her divorce and her unseemly haste in accepting a new proposal of marriage may be regarded as symptomatic of a desperately urgent need to grasp happiness and stability in uncertain times.

As with all romantic heroines, Elena's beauty and elegance give her carte blanche to behave as she pleases. Although her acceptance of Shervinskiĭ's hand can scarcely be seen as a wise move, her romantic desire for emotional warmth and gaiety is seen by the other characters as a



perfectly understandable right and her influence on her husband-to-be considered morally sound. It is debatable if Elena would have succumbed as easily to the charms of her new suitor or discarded her husband as readily for his morally reprehensible behaviour -- quite apart from the peculiar climate of the times -- if he had not been undemonstrative, unattractive and dull. These reservations apart, Elena must surely be seen to incorporate the romantic notion of woman as bearer of sustaining love, provider of domestic comfort and harmony and embodiment of beauty and grace.

The three family friends who collectively, together with the Turbins, represent the White Guard, are characterized by individual traits and attitudes. Captain Studzinskiĭ alone remains true to the White cause to the end, in spite of the betrayal by the General Staff. He places his hopes in the vague notion of a White counter-attack or backlash. He sees no place for himself in the new Soviet society. He tries, in his own way, to remain true to Alekseĭ's memory and regards it as a point of honour to fight to the bitter end, even for a lost cause, ignoring Myshlaevskiĭ's sermon on the worthlessness of the cause itself. He will clearly continue to support the old Russia and, as he sees it, the only true Russia. His patriotism and sense of honour are shown to be genuine but misplaced, and he is destined to become a sad, disenfranchised and disillusioned exile, a worthy member of the old régime who cannot accept the new. Hence, he is the



one to utter the bitter last line of the play.

Shervinskiĭ clearly lacks the integrity of his colleagues because he is essentially morally weak, but he possesses a quality which neither of the others does, namely a strong instinct for survival. Throughout the play, he contrives to be one step ahead ~~of the game~~. He abandons his well-cushioned post at the Hetman's palace just in time to avoid capture by Petlyura's army, and regains his civilian status just before the arrival of the Bolsheviks. His opportunism is also shown in his wooing of Elena and, eventually, winning her hand during Tal'berg's absence. Apart from his general affability, his attractions seem to lie entirely in his appearance, charm and talent, all superficial attributes, but his redeeming features are loyalty to his friends and homeland (irrespective of régime), his generosity and his irrepressible capacity for enjoying life.

Myshlaevskiĭ remains of the three friends the true soldier. He is courageous and has served his country well. His blunt expression belies his good heartedness and loyalty. He, like Alekseĭ, has experienced at first hand the moral bankruptcy, abuse of privilege and betrayal by his superiors and is no longer prepared to serve them. Instead, he intends to join the Red Army and approaches the new egalitarian society with an open mind. His attitude is one of realism, but a realism which is morally justified and not simply pragmatic.

The remaining member of the Turbin 'clan', acting as a foil to the other characters, is Larion, whose near imbecilic ineptitude and clumsiness are both tragic and farcical. He is a misfit and thus, a non-participant in the external turmoil of war and the internal emotional turmoil of the household. Larion is hors de combat in two senses, being unfit (both physically and mentally) for military service and unsuitable as a contender for Elena's affections. He nevertheless finds blissful peace of mind as a member of the Turbin household, declaring it to be a sanctuary from the harsh realities of existence. At the same time, the relatively Bohemian life of his cousins has been an exhilarating liberation from his provincial, insular and over-protected existence in Zhitomir. His role is almost akin to that of the 'holy fool' and, as such, he is accepted by the other characters, although one wonders how he will fare in the new Communist society.

The ostracized erstwhile member of the Turbin household, Elena's husband, Tal'berg, is cast in the mould of Karenin; a cold and insensitive husband, more concerned with outward appearances than with genuine feeling. He is a careerist, intent upon protecting his own interests, apparently devoid of finer sentiment but full of cant hypocrisy. He represents, in their midst, the worst kind of General Staff officer, bearing the tell-tale Germanic name, unlike them in every way, and by whose hand they have directly suffered. In just such a man lie the seeds of the White Guard's destruction. Tal'berg's two appearances are brief, but,



while he is little more than a caricature of his novel counterpart, he serves to illustrate the innate corruptness of those in power and to heighten the dramatic tension with his unexpected appearances and disappearances.

Other characters appear as caricatured representatives of the different factions involved in the complex civil war. Significantly, perhaps, the Bolsheviks are omitted as they are in the novel; they are, presumably, an unknown quantity. The Petlyuran forces are represented by the brutish Bolbotun whose main objectives in life are, apparently, to lead his marauding band on a trail of mindless destruction and violence and to instil abject terror in the hearts of all and sundry. This embodiment of evil tyranny emerges unequivocally as the enemy force against whom the Kievans must defend themselves, leaving the Bolsheviks occupying the third ground and emerging, ultimately, as the liberators of the city.

The scene at the Hetman's palace is broadly satirical, with the principal figures again caricatured. The Hetman himself is portrayed as a weak, vacillating puppet ruler who, when confronted with imminent defeat, is more concerned with face- and, ultimately, skin-saving measures than with standing by his supporters. The German officers are ruthlessly pragmatic as they help the Hetman to effect his hasty and undignified escape. Their quasi-farcical departure is witnessed by the cynical footman, Fedor, whose contempt for his outgoing masters and apparent



indifference towards the identity of the incoming ones marks the alienation of the ordinary people from the powers that govern them.

The caretaker, who plays a significant part in the action of the novel, appears only as a bit part in Act iii. His comments serve to illustrate the bewilderment of the ordinary working citizens in the city as their lives and deeply-cherished values are completely overturned.

The absence of the proletariat and peasants, the masses, from this play was criticized by contemporary reviewers as a glaring omission. Dni Turbin̄kh, they felt, could not claim to be an accurate and impartial portrait of the Civil War if the chief participants were not properly represented. Fedor, as a lackey, was deemed to be a mercenary rather than a member of the toiling masses. Indeed, it must be said that the novel, Belaya Gvardia, presents a richer panorama of the Civil War encompassing characters from all walks of life, whereas Dni Turbin̄kh focuses on a personal and one-sided view of the events in question, as the title suggests. Whether or not the play is of any lesser stature as a result of its local emphasis is, however, debatable.

The critical reception of the first production of Dni Turbin̄kh was, for the most part, hostile. Negative criticism ranged from the disparaging to the hysterically vituperative and was, naturally, based on ideological

rather than artistic criteria. Thus, in accordance with the literary tenets of the day -- quite apart from considerations of the prevailing highly sensitive political climate -- the play was deemed to be lacking in artistic merit because not only did it not bear the requisite political message but also because it bore a subversive one.

Typical of the sort of judgement Dni Turbin̄kh received came from Orlnskiĭ, one of Bulgakov's most virulent critics, in a review which appeared shortly after the first night. He castigated the play principally on the grounds of deliberate historical falsification and misrepresentation. He saw it as an attempt to idealize the White Guard, creating a halo of romantic glory, and to deflect the entire responsibility for their actions onto their leaders:

В качестве же исторического объяснения гибели бело-  
гвардейщины усиленно пропагандируется со сцены старая  
версия о плохих генералах, как единственной причине  
поражения.

55

Orlnskiĭ further criticized the play for its failure to represent the heroic struggle of the proletarian masses and for its over-emphasis of private emotional trivia:

Всё "историческое действие" благополучно завершается к  
общему удовольствию мещанским браком героини, ушедшей от  
мужа, изменившего белогвардейскому долгу, и попадающей  
прямо в объятие бывшего гетманского адъютанта, весёлого  
авантюриста-певца. Совсем как в добродетельных  
американских фильмах.

56

Moreover, Orlnskiĭ even considered the villains of the



piece to be negative for the wrong reasons, concluding, via a tortuous argument, that the Petlyuran forces were, by implication, synonymous with the Communists:

Отдельные отрицательные персонажи (Тальберг, Скоропадский) осуждаются самой белой гвардией, от этого только выигрывающей в своём моральном торжестве. Наоборот, петлюровщина изображена ярко, как озверевшее стадо мужиков "богоносцев", но вся беда в том, что поскольку подлинно революционные силы старательно сокрыты от зрителя, петлюровщина фигурирует, как некий, сценический псевдоним революционных сил. В общем же трусливая скоропадщина -- 57 прекрасный фон для белой гвардии.

It was in this same article that Orlinskiĭ first coined the pejorative term, 'Bulgakovshchina' which was employed freely in the subsequent critical 'disput'. Even he, though, was forced to concede the high quality of the actors' performance despite his inevitable lament that their talent should be squandered on such a sorry play. He declared, moreover, that the brilliance of their technique only served to highlight the historical 'fal'sh'' of the play. The actors: Khmelëv, Yanshin, Prudkin, Stanitsĭn and Dobronravov were singled out for their gifted portrayals.<sup>58</sup> This favourable view of the production from an otherwise hostile critic would appear to lend weight to the hypothesis stated earlier that the original success of the play was largely due not only to its controversial content but also to the sparkling talents of the original cast. Audiences, it appears, were quite happy to fill the theatre night after night to watch the 'gross misrepresentation' of history on the stage.

Although Bulgakov's public sponsors were not



particularly vociferous, nevertheless, in examining the critical reviews, there is a striking contrast in approach and attitude between those such as Orlinskiĭ's and that of Lunacharsky in which a tone at once conciliatory and moderate is adopted. Despite the now familiar reservations regarding Dni Turbinĭkh's ideological shortcomings, Lunacharsky saw the underlying theme of the play as one of rehabilitation rather than subversion and its author's intentions as the more universal ones of moral rather than ideological defence. In his article, Khudozhestvenniki i sovremennost', he says apropos of Bulgakov and Dni Turbinĭkh that the play is no more than an attempt to defend the White Guard morally and that only

с признанием вместе с тем их политической неудачи, их политических ошибок. 59

He was also alive to the satirical elements in the play particularly the Hetman and Bolbotun scenes, but he went on to express regret that this same acuity was not applied to the rest of the historical content.

Despite his reservations, Lunacharsky acknowledged that Dni Turbinĭkh represented a significant step for MKhAT, politically, although only an intermediate one, for:

степень интуиции и искренности внесѣнная артистами. в мнимо-положительные фигуры этой пьесы, свидетельствует о большой обывательско-интеллигентской закваске, сохранившейся в театре. 60

Now, according to Lunacharsky, the theatrical traditions of MKhAT ought to be harnessed and used to

better political effect.<sup>61</sup>

These comments stem from Lunacharsky's fervently-held belief, which was fundamental to the Party's cultural policy, that art was rooted in the 'byt' of society and, moreover, had a duty to reflect and serve that society in which it had its roots. This policy had been laid down in one of Lunacharsky's key speeches, made in 1920, and subsequently published under the title Chemu sluzhit teatr?<sup>62</sup>

Most other critics took a rigidly orthodox line and assumed that the author's intention was crudely tendentious. 'Starik', writing in Komsomol'sakaya Pravda, considered that the author was contriving an apologia of the counter-revolutionaries, and castigated the play with the usual clichés about negative characters, the absence of 'progressive ideological elements' and the inclusion of 'melodramatic emotional elements'. The author's attempt to portray the negative side of the White movement is regarded as sham, as is the Turbin family's joy (?) at the arrival of the Bolsheviki:

Лучше бы уже она не радовалась ...

63

he remarks ominously. It is interesting that the last scene of the play, which Starik regards as political humbug, should be the one generally understood to be a perfunctory gesture by the author and, therefore, one which is inherently weak in artistic terms.

The only approbation which appears in this article is for the 'mass' scenes (!); as an example of these, Starik cites the:

бунт юнкеров и офицеров, а потом бегство их.

64

These scenes (sic.) he finds better per se than the 'individual' ones. He also admires, in these scenes, the swift succession of events, the action and the short, sharp exchanges between several characters, rather than long, drawn-out duologues. The author concludes on a note of exhortation to MKhAT to portray the real truth of the Civil War.<sup>65</sup>

As the argument continued to rage, Orlinskiĭ, writing in Novyi Zritel' a few days after the appearance of the Pravda article quoted above, made a telling reference to Bulgakov's irresponsibility in misleading the unsophisticated audience:

Беда лишь в том, что как раз вся остальная белая гвардия сама расправляется с этими отрицательными действующими лицами пьесы и таким образом, по сути дела, своим презрением к Скоропадскому и своими пощёчинами Тальбергу только поднимает своё достоинство, свой авторитет и своё обаяние для неискушённого зрителя.

66

This judgement of the spectator's inability to discriminate for himself reveals the heavily paternalistic attitude of the Establishment with its implications of giving people 'what is good for them'.

Beskin, writing in Zhizn' iskusstva, took up the



'kremov̄e shtorȳ' motif. The cream-coloured blinds had, in his view, a singularly negative connotation. To him they represented the Turbins' insular, self-protective attitude as they carried on their lives of laughter and comfort inside their shell, impervious to the monumental events and hardship of the world beyond their apartment.<sup>67</sup>

Beskin also put forward the interesting if contorted view that Dni Turbin̄ykh might well have served as a positive tool if the interpretation had been different:

Но объективно в пьесе есть материал, который патетику автора даёт возможность перевести в план социально-сатирический, социально-критический. Надо лишь уметь и хотеть подчеркнуть всю пустоту и пошлость этих людей.<sup>68</sup>

As it was, MKhAT was severely reprimanded for giving a 'straight' interpretation of the play. There is what might be considered valid artistic criticism in Beskin's view that the outmoded form (in direct contrast to Starik's opinion) had a stultifying effect on the content:

Увы, форма организует содержание, а в складках старой формы всегда рискуют застрять где-то "там-внутри" и кусочки старого содержания.<sup>69</sup>

Zagorskiĭ's article, Neudachnaya instsenirovka, which appeared in Novyi Zritel,<sup>70</sup> has already been discussed above in connection with the play's relationship with its parent novel. According to Zagorskiĭ, the second 'sin' was committed by the director in taking the play at face value, for he, like Beskin, considered that the emphasis should be altered and the 'straight' interpretation eschewed:

Даже то, что осталось от романа М. Булгакова, можно было дать на театре совершенно в ином плане, усилив комедийность и снизив героику. Театр взял всерьёз всех этих булгаковских персонажей. 71

in favour of a broadly humorous one:

Режиссуре надо было обращаться с ними согласно их схематической природе, т.-е. усилив и обострив их типические черты в плане жанрового гротеска и тонкого юмора. 72

An article by E. Mustangov which appeared in Zhizn' iskusstva in 1926,<sup>73</sup> whilst not, strictly speaking, a review of Dni Turbin̄kh was provoked by the production. The article deals with Bulgakov, the writer, in more general terms; the comments are based on other works including: Diavoliada, Rokov̄ye yaĭtsa and Belaya Gvardia as well as Dni Turbin̄kh. The assertions made and conclusions drawn contribute another piece to the mosaic of contemporary critical opinion of Bulgakov. Firstly, apropos of the political vilification which Bulgakov's work had received, Mustangov writes:

Булгаков заслуживает внимания марксистской критики двумя неоспоримыми качествами: 1) несомненной талантливостью, умением делать литературные вещи и 2) не-нейтральностью его, как писателя, по отношению к советской общественности, чудостью и даже враждебностью его идеологии основному устремлению и содержанию этой общественности. 74

His assessment of Belaya Gvardia is laced with heavy irony:

Он не поёт гимнов и не проклиняет. Он лишь "объективно" рисует белогвардейцев, и они получаются у него безупречными "героями" на фоне петлюровцев и др. "звероподобных" банд. 75



The accusation of distorting the truth is also applied to Bulgakov's 'fantasy' works, again the implication is that the author's skilful art is (mis)used to disguise his intention to deceive the audience:

Диаволиада идёт от проницающего ума автора, Белая Гвардия, от "нутра" его. Но при разности "эмоциональной окраски" все вещи Булгакова объединены одним: искажением действительности, под соусом -- ли идеализации или иронии. 76

This critic credits the reader with greater discriminatory powers than does Beskin the spectator:

Но даже на самый неискушённый глаз пролетарского читателя эти идеализированные, опозитизированные "герои" производят впечатление безнадежных обывателей. Совершенно прав т. Бескин, когда он в своей статье о Днях Турбиных называет идеологию Турбиных идеологией Кремовых штор, а самих "героев" романа -- человеческими эпигонами. 77

Finally, Mustagov attacks the 'petty bourgeois' nature of Belaya Gvardia, again comparing Bulgakov's work to that of Chekhov, but exonerating the latter whilst castigating the former:

Дистанция между Чеховым и его персонажами была несравненно большей, чем между персонажами Белой Гвардии и её автором. Чехов давал обывателей обывателями, Булгаков делает обывателей "героями" с большой буквы. 78

The rehabilitation of Bulgakov some twenty years after his death finally vindicated his integrity both as an artist and as an individual. It was acknowledged that his intentions had not been subversive nor had he wanted Dni Turbin̄ykh to be used as anti-Soviet propaganda abroad. Moreover, Bulgakov himself had consistently affirmed his love for and loyalty towards his native land. 79



The initial hysterical reaction, however, was further fuelled by the appearance of another Civil War play running simultaneously with Dni Turbin̄ykh at the Maly, Tren̄ev's Lyubov' Yarovaya. Its rather more unequivocal treatment of the Civil War theme caused it to be compared frequently to Dni Turbin̄ykh, largely to the detriment of the latter, needless to say, although it cannot be said that Lyubov' Yarovaya was greeted with altogether unqualified critical acclaim. It soon became clear, nevertheless, that Tren̄ev's play would be considered as something of a rival to Bulgakov's Dni Turbin̄ykh.

Typical of such odious comparisons is that which appears at the beginning of an article by V. Ashmarin:

Если булгаковские Дни явились спектаклем чуждым советской современности, идеологически некривлённым в сторону правого сменоховства устряловского толка, то Любовь Яровая Трен̄ева в интерпретации Малого театра может считаться постановкой<sup>80</sup> на 100% удовлетворяющей советскую общественность.

Predictably, Komsomol'skaya Pravda also came out in favour of Tren̄ev's play as opposed to Bulgakov's:

Чутьем большого художника Трен̄ев понял, что недостаточно такого героя показать в тепличной атмосфере семьи "за кремовыми шторами" как это делает Булгаков в Днях Турбиных, а что надо вывести его из пределов интимной обстановки в атмосферу непосредственной борьбы, чтобы зритель убедился воочию, как субъективно честный и последовательный человек может в то же время объективно играть роль злейшего предателя интересов революции, предателя, более опасного, чем те, с которыми он идёт -- потому что именно он своей фанатичностью и непримиримостью укрепляет их способность<sup>81</sup> к сопротивлению.

The comparison is a totally false one; in no way could the

character, Yarovoĭ, be said to bear any resemblance to Alekseĭ Turbin and in no way could the Turbins be seen as 'conscious betrayers of the Revolutionary cause'.

In similar vein, the following review appeared in Nasha gazeta:

Если первый МКХАТ оказался не в силах обобщить и вскрыть сущность "белой гвардии" в спектакле Дни Турбиных, переключив её в план идеалистического настроенчества, то Малый театр обновлением своего состава, легко надущего на соединение с современностью "белогвардейщину" несомненно, показал "масками" социального типажа . . . Вообще, надо признать спектакль в артистическом отношении крепко слаженным, а в идеологическом, особенно после Дней Турбиных, для советского зрителя близким и необходимым.<sup>82</sup>

Vyach. Golichnikov, writing in Rabochiĭ i teatr, provides one of the more tempered appraisals of Dni Turbinŷkh even though it could be seen as damning with faint praise. Given the combined reputation of Bulgakov and МКХАТ, Golichnikov reports, audience anticipation was running high even before the play opened; moreover, thirty-nine members of the Komsomol were impelled to voice their protest against its staging (!)<sup>83</sup> Predictably, the reviewer considers that the expectations were disappointed and that playwright and theatre company had contrived to produce an insignificant play on a narrow, insular theme. He readily concedes, nevertheless, that the comic elements in the play were skilfully acted and directed and held the audience's avid interest.<sup>84</sup> The political content is condemned as weak arousing little interest amongst the audience while the final volte-face by the Turbin family



is deemed wholly unconvincing. It is scarcely surprising, given this dismissive assessment of MKhAT's pièce de résistance, that the theatre's success in terms of re-establishing itself in the cultural forefront was regarded as only partial, and it was felt that, henceforth, MKhAT should concentrate on producing a truly Soviet play.

By early 1927 it had become almost de rigueur to make comparisons between Lyubov' Yarovaya and Dni Turbinŷkh; Zagorskiĭ, writing in Zhizn' iskusstva, makes the statutory passing reference:

В отличие от правого попутчика М. Булгакова, попутчик К. Тренѣв обладает ясным пониманием совершившихся событий.<sup>85</sup>

The obvious implication of this false comparison is that Bulgakov, as a fellow-traveller of the Right, by definition, has no clear understanding of (recent) historic events.

Another major debate over Dni Turbinŷkh took place in February of 1927, but, this time, also involved the relative virtues and shortcomings of its contemporary, Lyubov' Yarovaya. Playing a key part in this debate was Lunacharsky whose speech was reported extensively in Pravda.<sup>86</sup> Comparing this speech with his earlier one examined above,<sup>87</sup> it is interesting to note that in the latter he adopts a sharper line of attack, although he still employs careful circumlocution. He points out the ideological deficiencies of the play but, at the same time, avoids direct criticism of either theatre company



personnel or author but, rather, suggests that the former have been unwittingly misguided in their efforts, while the latter has wrongly placed the emphasis of the play:

Ставя Дни Турбиных, Московский Художественный театр искренно полагал, что этим спектаклем делает значительный шаг вперед. На деле же Дни Турбиных представляя собой сдачу некоторых позиций антисоветской интеллигенции, вместе с тем, пытаются защитить память интеллигентского бело-гвардейского офицерства, как боровшегося с искренним само-88  
отвержением.

The strongest scenes of the play -- the ones which work successfully, according to Lunacharsky -- are those which satirize certain members of the White Guard (presumably a reference to the Hetman and Tal'berg scenes), whilst those which attempt to justify the actions of other members of the White Guard clearly display 'bourgeois yearning'.<sup>89</sup> He proceeds to offer a rational explanation for the popularity of Dni Turbinŷkh in what could be understood as an attempt to demolish the myth of its success in order to defuse its potentially dangerous influence. The reasons which explain (away) the play's popularity are as follows: public curiosity suscitated by the threat of censorship hanging over the play; the outstanding performances by the actors; the patronage of the bourgeoisie who delight in seeing their own sort portrayed on stage; the patronage of sympathisers with the attempt to rehabilitate the 'knights of the White cause' and, finally, the self-identification of the Turbins' acceptance of the Soviet system by certain members of the bourgeois intelligentsia.<sup>90</sup> Although he concedes that MKhAT is moving towards a political change of

heart, he points out that many intellectuals have already made the full transition to embracing the Communist Party ethic. He concludes in elliptical style by quoting Lenin's maxim:

У всякого свой путь к коммунизму

whose chivvying message is nevertheless clear.

Pursuing his theme by analogy, Lunacharsky holds up as a shining example Trenëv's Lyubov' Yarovaya:

Любовь Яровая показывает окончательный переход в лагерь революции колеблющейся интеллигенции и вскрывает пошлость белогвардейщины, а также внутреннее вырождение лучших из интеллигентов, примкнувших к контрреволюции, эта пьеса пропитана симпатиями к рабочему классу. 91

The success of Trenëv's play -- notwithstanding its inadequate portrayal of the workers<sup>92</sup> -- proves definitively, according to Lunacharsky, that artistic merit and Party orthodoxy are in no way incompatible:

Причиной огромного успеха Любви Яровой, повидимому, более прочного, нежели успех Дней Турбиных, явились литературные достоинства пьесы и блестящее исполнение (следавшее из этого спектакля триумф Малого театра), правдивость и радостное принятие революции, нашедшее отклик в среде не только широкой пролетарской публики, но и в значительных кругах интеллигенции. Любовь Яровая доказала, что академические театры хотят и могут работать заодно с нами<sup>93</sup>  
• • •

The critic, Orlinskiĭ, also present on this occasion, declared that the two plays did not so much complement as oppose each other. He summed up the essential qualitative difference between them, in the same article, thus:



В Любви Яровой -- спектакле исторически объективном -- показаны и борьба, и быт; и верхи и массы на обоих полюсах; показаны персонажи из разных классов; и каждый раскрыт и художественно, и психологически, и социально. В Днях Турбиных типы раскрыты художественно и психологически, но не социально. В этой пьесе есть попытка идеализировать то, что история окончательно осудила. 94

In his speech he also reproaches MKhAT for not making substantial alterations to the author's treatment of his theme -- overlooking the inherent absurdity of selecting a play with the sole intention of altering it -- whilst praising the Maly for revealing not only artistic talent but clear political awareness.<sup>95</sup> In his conclusion, Orliński declares that:

Массовый зритель очень вырос . . .

96

and that the theatre as a whole is concerning itself with the important issues of the day and that the old established theatres could become tribunes without any danger of loss of revenue:

Классовые пьесы становятся и "кассовыми".

97

This debate marked one of the seemingly rare occasions when Bulgakov was actually present to speak for himself. In the only record of his words in the Pravda article, however, he limits himself to a brief refutation only of various criticisms on factual details : firstly, it was MKhAT, not he who had insisted on changing the novel title for the play; secondly, he was unable to portray servants and batmen in the play because at that time in Kiev it had been impossible to find them as they had returned to their



homes in the countryside and thirdly, at that time in Kiev, there had been no

. . . рабоче-крестьянского фона, которого от меня требуют.

98

Bulgakov's words were immediately gainsaid by a 'voice from the people' namely, one 'tov. Yudin (rabotnik armii iz publiki)' who declared that he was in Kiev during the period in question and that he had witnessed the unremitting struggle of the Whites against Soviet power, and that, compared with the former, the Petlyuran forces appeared progressive, unlike those shown in the play. Moreover, according to him, all officers had had batmen contrary to the author's statement, and finally, there had been a flourishing worker and peasant movement under Bolshevik leadership in the Ukraine which was eventually responsible for the establishment of Soviet power in Kiev.<sup>99</sup>

P. A. Markov, the eminent critic and artistic director of MKhAT who had been largely responsible for selecting Bulgakov's play in the first place, staunchly defended the author making the obvious come-back to the detractors' reproach over the title change and the company's ~~interpret~~ interpretation. According to Markov, the title entirely befits the play which is primarily concerned with the fate of the Turbin family and MKhAT is justified in sticking to its traditional theory that the approach to a work of art is from the author's concept of his work. After all, says

Markov, it would have been easier to portray the protagonists in superficial, two-dimensional 'poster' style.

Но МХАТ идёт путём раскрытия внутреннего образа. Здесь дана трагедия людей, раскрыта их опустошенность. Этим спектаклем театр сделал серьёзный ход к современности: внутренний ход к судьбе человека и через неё -- к эпохе.<sup>100</sup>

V.K. Vladimirov, director of the Maly theatre, was the next to speak, but no report is made of any reference to Dni Turbinūkh, only a brief eulogy on the Maly production of Lyubov' Yarovaya.

Lunacharsky had the final word and, once more, gave the impression of an ambivalent attitude towards Dni Turbinūkh. Whilst admitting the play's merits:

Интеллигенция ставит здесь жгучую тему о своих переживаниях, и о них мы должны знать. 101

he eschews the vital question:

Наша критика не умеет анализировать социальную основу спектакля. 102

and places the ball back in Bulgakov's court as if to provoke him into coming out and stating his case:

Булгаков напрасно пытался здесь вилять, ибо он является выразителем настроений новой буржуазии. 103

He concludes on a safe hedge-betting note:

МХАТ сделал шаг вперёд, но недостаточный. Малый театр оказался впереди. Мы ждём от МХАТ, что и он более решительно пойдёт по новому пути. 104

As is evident from the foregoing selection of contemporary reviews, MKhAT came under critical fire almost as much as Bulgakov because of its so-called collusion in the interpretation and staging of the play. When the latter was revived after a two month break, almost a year after its première and on the eve of the anniversary of the Revolution, there was a renewed attack against the theatre. The critic, 'Sadko', after an outburst over the timing of this revival, wrote in Zhizn' iskusstva that he saw in it

реабилитацию и героизм белого кадрового офицерства с одной стороны, и романтику мещанства, более всего на свете ценящего "кремовые занавесочки" и "обиженного" раз-разившейся, как землетрясение, пролетарской революцией. 105

He prophesied that the staging of such material spelt the inevitable collapse of the hitherto illustrious company. One can only consider the irony of this assessment in the light of the play's quasi-permanent existence in the MKhAT repertoire and its enduring popularity in the USSR and, to some extent, in the West.



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CHAPTER 3

In the light of the largely negative reception which greeted Bulgakov's Dni Turbin̄ykh, it seems appropriate to proceed to an examination of the contemporaneous and dubbed 'rival' production at the Maly, Lyubov' Yarovaya. Although this play provided a pretext for odious comparisons, its own inception and reception were by no means untroubled.

Lyubov' Yarovaya represents an important stage in the development of the Civil War play genre. It has elements of the traditional drama exemplified by Dni Turbin̄ykh in that private emotions are given free reign. Love, hatred and jealousy all play a part and it is the only one of the four plays discussed here which features the classic civil war theme of conflict between private allegiance and public duty. In Lyubov' Yarovaya, however, care is taken to show the conflict as social as well as personal, so that private antagonist becomes elevated to the status of class enemy. Moreover, the greater struggle of the Civil War does not merely form a backcloth to the central drama but is an integral part of it. Whereas Bulgakov was accused of making the personal tragedy of disproportionate importance and <sup>r</sup>virtually excluding the narod, Tren̄ev was merely accused of giving insufficient prominence to the role of the narod. Looked at objectively, this is simply not true; the masses -- albeit not the homogeneous pro-Communist body -- are

featured throughout the play in episodic scenes reminiscent of the 'Subbotka' scene in Shtorm and heralding the non-verbal mass scenes of Optimisticheskaya tragediya almost a decade later. While some reviewers forbore to criticize the mass scenes, they found the characterization of the protagonists wanting. It is hard to see how Trenëv might have reconciled demands for depth as well as breadth, which appear to be mutually exclusive in this context, although this, apparently, was his ambitious endeavour.<sup>1</sup>

The inherent contradiction of giving pre-eminence both to the narod and to fully three-dimensional protagonists might account for Trenëv's 'falling between two stools' in his characterizations. Trenëv's solution to the problem posed was not to attempt to elaborate the psychological depths which are (allegedly) a feature of the characters of Dni Turbin̄ykh but to give each of his characters a name and a sharply-defined thumbnail sketch identity. In this he was strikingly successful as far as all the minor characters were concerned but considerably less so in the three central figures of Lyubov' Yarovaya, Yarovoi and, particularly, the Commissar, Roman Koshkin. The main reason for this might well be because the prominence of the two latter figures was wished upon him in the course of his 'co-operation' with the Maly theatre discussed later in this chapter. At any rate, these characters can be seen to mark a development from the characters of Shtorm who are types (though not yet

stereotypes) rather than individuals and who represent a far narrower range of characters collectively.

Unlike Dni Turbinŷkh -- not to mention more conventional Civil War plays such as Lavrenčev's Razlom -- there are no 'kamernŷe stsenŷ'; the drama is enacted out on the street rather than in the confines of the family home, which contributes to the idea of the Civil War taking over people's lives.

Neither Dni Turbinŷkh nor Lyubov' Yarovaya (prior to alteration) were didactic in aim, but both contain elements of broad humour and satire derived from dialogue and situation which set them apart from the earnest norm of Civil War plays.

When one considers the manifold alterations to the text -- many apparently made under duress -- it is scarcely surprising that the play has an awkward, manufactured quality. In this respect, Lyubov' Yarovaya may be said to have suffered the same fate as Dni Turbinŷkh, although the results of co-authorship were not necessarily always negative and may even be seen as felicitous in cases such as Optimisticheskaya tragediya. It is fair to say that Trenčev, the bellettrist, was possibly ill-at-ease in the theatrical genre and, indeed, in the preface to the 1936 revised version of the play, he conceded his ineptitude in a retrospective self-critical acknowledgement:



Когда я пытался изобразить в своей пьесе то, что происходило в Крыму и за Крымом в двадцатом году, я совершенно забывал о театре. А когда вспоминал о нём и примерял к сцене то, что я написал, приходил в отчаяние: так мало отвечало написанное условиям театра, требованиям сцены. И, действительно, когда "Любовь Яровая" отдана была Малому театру, она вызвала там большое смущение: её трудно было поместить на сцене и подчинить театральным законам. До сих пор я, беллетрист, плохо знал эти законы и писал, подчиняясь только законам беллетристики. Следы беллетристики носит, по-моему, "Любовь Яровая" в сильной степени.

Although both Bill'-Belotserkovskii and Trenëv used episodic form to convey the complexity of events, it was Trenëv who sought to perfect a highly structured form, in which he was allegedly more interested than the content. Once more this points to the ultimate result of a neatly ironic rather than an emotionally moving play.

Despite the criticisms of its artistic and ideological shortcomings, Trenëv's Lyubov' Yarovaya found official favour to the detriment of Bulgakov's Dni Turbinŭkh, not only because of its relative political orthodoxy, but also because of the Bulgakov witch hunt. Moreover, one can conjecture that the play Lyubov' Yarovaya -- and by implication its author -- were pawns in the official game to promote ideological rectitude by instigating rivalry between MKhAT and the Maly.

The Maly had a liberal tradition in its choice of plays and, as with MKhAT and the Kamerny, its fundamental problem was that plays were not being written which it both wanted for its own particular style and needed for the guaranteed continuation of its State grant.

First and foremost a fiction writer and a relatively inexperienced playwright, Trenëv's only other play, Pugachëvshchina, for MKhAT, had been a flop, running for forty-one performances only in the 1925--26 season.<sup>3</sup> He wrote Lyubov' Yarovaya between 1925 and 1926, basing the play upon events in the Crimea of five years earlier.

The story and setting of the play are derived from Trenëv's own experience and observations.<sup>4</sup> He was living in the Crimea which, in February 1918, had been occupied by the Germans and had subsequently become a rallying point for Northern Whites on the run, and for Don cossacks. Shortly after June 1919, following their defeat, the Crimea had come under Soviet rule. Later, however, the area had fallen back into the hands of the Whites and so Trenëv had seen it change hands several times and witnessed the remorseless, protracted power struggle between the several factions.

In May of 1919 -- not without some hesitation, according to Ustyuzhanin -- Trenëv had become head of the schools department of Krymnarkompros and had taught at the evening university.<sup>5</sup> With the Whites in control, he had been placed under considerable pressure to stop these activities and had been threatened with suppression and arrest.<sup>6</sup> He had, nevertheless, continued his work, protected to some extent by his popularity and the respect in which he was held.<sup>7</sup> It was in June of 1920, when the Crimea was in the hands of Wrangel's troops,



that the first seed of what was later to become Lyubov' Yarovaya was written under the provisional title, Nashi dni. This consisted of little more than rudimentary notes as Trenëv was, at that time, unable to compose a full-scale play:

В эпоху гражданской войны, я начал было писать пьесу, которая теперь известна под названием "Любовь Яровая". Но скоро же я почувствовал преждевременность этой работы и справедливость положения, что подлинно художественно изображать большие исторические события возможно, только отойдя от них на большое расстояние. Иначе будет искажена перспектива, иначе страсть и при- страстие участника событий, как бы они ни были высоки и ценны затемнят и искривят зеркало. Необходимо время, чтобы они перегорели и выплавились только в страсть творчества. Старая престарелая но, к несчастью, не- признанная истина.

8

Trenëv's preliminary notes are recorded as follows:

Написать эпопею больш(ую)<sup>9</sup> симфонию: вступл(ение) -- неск(олько) ударов, тема, разработка темы -- адажио, скерцо -- репетицию, заключение.

1. Тревога при эвакуации
2. Вступление и организ(ация) з 1-е дни.
3. Скерцо -- видим(ая) организация
4. Адажио -- бытие, развал, уход.
5. Прих(од) красн(ых)

10

Assuming that this rough draft is both genuine and accurate, it is a clear indication that, despite the play's being re-written four times prior to the version which was finally performed at the Maly in 1926, its essential structure remained unchanged from the author's original conception. Diev too, refers to early drafts of Lyubov' Yarovaya discovered in an exercise book in Trenëv's personal archive, but he is not certain whether these notes can be ascribed to the seminal 1920--21 period or later, to 1923, when Trenëv resumed work on the



play or later still, to the 1924--26 period when he was working on the revisions of the text.<sup>11</sup>

The four revised versions of Lyubov' Yarovaya which Trenëv produced prior to its first performance imply a complex history, which was indeed the case, and it has been well documented. The first draft was presented to the Maly directorate in June 1925; it was several months beyond the deadline for, even at this stage, Trenëv appeared to find working in the theatrical idiom an arduous experience. He had written to Vladimirov, the director of the Maly from Simferopol in March of the same year:

Но беда моя -- очень уж я медленно работаю. Такой тяжёлый метод: пока не выношу образ до скульптурной ясности, не могу заносить на бумагу. 12

Trenëv's first draft was based on the even earlier rough sketch referred to above in which he had already formulated the musical structure of the play and for which his original inspiration were the characters Shvandya, Dun'ka and Fol'gin in particular:

Сам драматург говорил, что эти образы он настолько реально представлял, настолько они творчески запечатлелись в его воображении, что сами требовали сценического воплощения. "Особенно нахальна в этом отношении, -- пишет Тренёв, -- была тройка: Швандя, Дунька и Фольгин. Может быть, потому, что они чувствовали под собой очень реальную почву ... Точь в точь такая же Дунька жила на нашем дворе. Был и матрос лично "видевший" Маркса" 13

The themes of the role of the intelligentsia and the enlightenment of the masses were drawn from Trenëv's

own experiences in the field of education, referred to earlier in this chapter (p.125 ). The people whom he encountered in the course of his official work supplied the prototypes not only for the heroine-teacher, Lyubov' Yarovaya, but also Professor Gornostaev and his wife, the smooth-talking journalist, Elisatov and the religious bigot, Chir.<sup>14</sup> There were also embryonic sketches of the pattern of character interaction.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the 'kolorit' which was to remain the play's outstanding achievement was established right from the earliest draft, while the ideological infrastructure which was to become a permanent stumbling-block for the author was conspicuously absent from his original conception.

The first thing to emerge from the preliminary discussions between Trenëv and the Maly was, consequently, concern over the political deficiencies. The author was urged, therefore, to represent more fully the unity of the working class, the poverty of the peasants and the role of the revolutionary leaders. The portrayal of the Bolsheviks as 'dark idealists' was deemed to be incorrect, while the central conflict was limited to an inner struggle between love and hate and, overall, there was no clear distinction ~~between~~ between the private and social aspects of the play.<sup>16</sup> Given the requirement to amend all these defects, it is little wonder that the initial deadline date slipped by.

It was in June 1926 that the first (amended)



variation was submitted to the Maly and Repertkom for review. Whilst conceding that it was a distinct improvement on the rough draft, there were a number of political errors still to be eliminated. Trenëv later referred to these alterations as 'minor',<sup>17</sup> but clearly they amounted to rather more. Prozorovskii was concerned lest the play be deflected from its serious purpose by degenerating into a trivial personal drama (even the title gave it an undesirable emphasis):

Основное в спектакле не личная драма супругов Яровых, а<sup>18</sup> классовая борьба.

The Whites had to be revealed in their true arrogant light during the occupation of the town and, understandably, great pressure was put on Trenëv to remove the 'atypical',<sup>19</sup> honourable White officer, Dremin, which he did reluctantly, to judge from the following account:

Тренёв вывел Дремина из состава действующих лиц в значительной мере под влиянием справедливой критики со стороны творческих деятелей Малого театра, которым удалось убедить драматурга, весьма дорожившего образом Дремина, что с исключением его из системы образов пьесы "Любовь Яровая" не только не потеряет своей объективности, чего серьёзно опасался Тренёв, но, напротив, значительно выиграет и в идейном отношении и в отношении композиционной<sup>20</sup> стройности.

The noble self-sacrifice 'во имя народа',<sup>21</sup> was felt to be reminiscent of the conduct of the White officers in Dni Turbinukh:

Этот "идейный", "благородный" противник большевиков, кончавший жизнь истерическим подвигом . . . весьма напоминал по своему типу персонажей из пьесы М. Булгакова



"Дни Турбиных" и свидетельствовал об известном объективизме автора "Любови Яровой" на раннем этапе работы над пьесой.

22

The above seems somewhat inconsistent with Prozorovskii's assertion that the Whites had to be portrayed as a politically committed force in order to show convincingly the threat which they had presented in reality:

Здесь легко было впасть в односторонний схематизм и в преувеличение: белых показать извергами, идиотами, разлагающимися ничтожествами, а красных -- исключительными сверхгероями (от чего, к сожалению, не отказались некоторые театры и до сих пор: они не могут себе представить штаб белогвардейского командования без вина и пьяного офицерства).

23

As usual, it is difficult to get at the truth of the matter through the veil of ambiguity; one might even speculate that the latter remark is a back-handed reference to Dni Turbinŭkh. To some extent it does explain the character of Yarovoĭ to whom some of the Dremĭn characteristics were assigned in subsequent variations.

The portraits of the Reds as they stood in the first variation were ideologically unacceptable. Shvandyā appeared crassly naive, while Koshkin was portrayed as being preoccupied with his affair with the petty bourgeoisie, Panova. Moreover, prior to being removed at the end of the first act, he delivered a speech of embarrassing political ineptitude on world Communism.<sup>24</sup>

Another weakness was the absence of plot to hold

the action and characters together which Trenëv resolved with the Zheglov Bridge narrative in his next variation although the preposterous plot and implausible devices were to remain a major weakness.

Apart from requirements to rectify the foregoing defects, other recommendations from the Maly directorate included increasing the number of characters with Prozorovskii stressing that each role, however minor, be a cameo; establishing a link between Koshkin and Lyubov' so that the representative of the revolutionary Communists would appear as the source of inspiration and guidance which would lead the Party sympathizer to full political consciousness and, finally, the re-writing of the bombastic 'plakatnõi' finale.

Prozorovskii's version of these exchanges is that Trenëv meekly accepted the criticisms and obediently set to work to revise the script:

Почерпнув много ценного из замечаний и советов, высказанных ему творческими работниками Малого театра по поводу первого варианта, Тренёв продолжает работу над текстом пьесы. 25

Trenëv's terse reference to this same period implies, instead, a tight-lipped grudging compliance which presumably tried his patience to the utmost:

Я и директор Малого театра Владимиров вступили в переговоры с Репертком. Переговоры кончились разрешением пьесы при условии некоторых, в сущности небольших, переделок. Пьеса стала звучать более чётко политически. В этом, несомненно, Репертком оказал мне помощь. 26

In the second variation, Trenčv succeeded in weaving a stronger narrative line; the Red leaders were made more positive and the relationship between Koshkin-as-mentor and Lyubov' Yarovaya was made apparent, resulting in the latter's full participation in the work of the revolution. There still remained, however, the inappropriate (for a Party representative) liaison between Koshkin and Panova, and an equally unsuitable relationship between Lyubov' and the bourgeois Tolstoyan idealist, Kolosov, who tries to persuade her to his view. With him she has a running philosophical dialogue on the subject of love versus hate and even though she rejects his ideals, her final affirmation still sounded like:

известная реминисценция абстрактно-гуманистических  
воззрений Колосова.

27

All in all, too, it was felt that there was insufficient evidence of the integral role of the Party in the revolutionary struggle. Once more, therefore, the full weight of the Maly was brought to bear on the luckless author, expressed euphemistically thus:

Драматург в тесном творческом контакте с коллективом  
Малого театра продолжает упорные поиски правильных  
идейно-художественных решений темы революции и ~~граж~~  
гражданской войны.

28

In the spring of 1926 the third variation was presented to the Maly, this time for the actors to read through as only Vera Pashennaya had been privileged to see the earlier versions.



Between May and August the set and costume designs were completed and the roles were distributed prior to the summer recess. On 8 July 1926 Vladimirov communicated to Trenëv the news that his play had now passed the scrutiny of the Khudozhestvenno-politicheskogo soveta pri upravlenii Gosudarstvennami akademicheskimi teatrami. As if oblivious to this long-awaited endorsement, Trenëv, safely ensconced in Simferopol, continued to work on a fourth variation, possibly, one might suppose, from force of habit. Having finally succeeded in endowing Koshkin with all the necessary attributes of a Bolshevik leader, Trenëv was now making a desperate eleventh hour bid to salvage him as a character:

Пересмотр трактовки образа Кошкина позволил Тренёву по-новому, правильно раскрыть в пьесе целый ряд серьёзных проблем. 29

He attempted to flesh out the Commissar by making his comradely friendship with Shvandy a expression of genuine affection thereby forming a direct parallel with the Party Chairman-Bratishka relationship in Shtorm. More importantly, this personal link reflected a desirable social message:

Эта тема (союза в революции и гражданской войне рабочего класса и крестьянства) воплощена в образах Кошкина и Швандии, взаимоотношения которых приобретают глубоко символический характер: они выражают теперь идею союза рабочего класса и крестьянства, идею ведущей роли в этом союзе пролетариата. 30

The relationship between Lyuba and her husband was

made less equivocal in the fourth variation with the heroine bearing more of the characteristics of the New Soviet Woman and fewer of the sacrificial victim. As a result of these changes, the confrontations between her and her husband are, arguably, less effective than in the third version. The irony of history is such that in modern revivals of Lyubov' Yarovaya such as the one at the Maly in 1977, it is this very conflict -- as originally intended by the author -- which lies at the heart of the drama.<sup>31</sup>

By the end of October 1926, the 'final' amended version of the play was ready for rehearsal. Producer Prozorovskii refers ironically to the 'final' version<sup>32</sup> as Trenëv continued to revise it right up to and beyond the first performance, indeed he continued to revise it at intervals for most of the remainder of his life producing new variations in 1933, 1935, 1936 and 1940.

One cannot help but think that Ustyuzhanin's whimsical statement:

Конечно, у этой пьесы (как любил повторять и сам Тренëв)<sup>33</sup>  
двое родителей -- драматург и театр.

tends to misrepresent the relationship between author and theatre company. In acknowledging his uncertainty in translating his ideas into theatrical terms, Trenëv laid his work open to a great deal of interference which the Maly team was quick to exploit. The producer's

account would seem to substantiate this view:

Наивно было бы отрицать влияние такого художественно  
мощного коллектива, как коллектив Малого театра, на  
любого автора. 34

Apart from his self-confessed inexperience, Trenëv  
had to contend with further loss of faith in his  
abilities by the obstreperous cast, which Surov  
attributes to the conspicuous failure of Pugachëvshchina  
at MKhAT:

Работа над "Любовью Яровой" была начата в Малом театре  
уже после того как неудача "Пугачёвщины" стала очевидной.  
В этих условиях Малый театр легко мог бы поддаться  
чувству недоверия к писателю тем более что первая  
редакция "Любови Яровой" страдала рядом существенных  
изъянов. 35

In view of this humiliating flop, it was doubly hard for  
Trenëv to persuade the cast to accept the innovatory and,  
at first sight, 'difficult' form of his play. Vera  
Pashennaya, the eminent actress who was to portray the  
title role is recorded as giving the play's first  
variation a cool reception:

Пьеса в первом варианте была рыхлой, содержала множество  
эпизодических, не связанных между собой сцен. Роль  
Любови Яровой состояло из отрывочных, скупо написанных  
коротеньких сцен, была расплывчата и неясна. 36

thereby fuelling the prejudice, according to one source. 37

Prozorovskii claimed (with hindsight) that its virtues  
shone through:

Коллектив Малого театра тогда же заявил в печати, что,  
"несмотря на композиционную рыхлость, пьеса . . .  
таит в себе прекрасный материал для замечательного,  
общественно необходимого, идейно полноценного, подлинно



революционного спектакля". . . . Малый театр вступил в творческое содружество с драматургом, начал напряженную, кропотливую работу над "организацией материала пьесы".

38

He also claimed that the author's integrity was preserved at all costs:

Можно с полным основанием констатировать, что Малый театр чутко прислушивался к пожеланиям К. А. Тренёва и что никаких идейных, композиционных изменений в пьесе не производилось, ни одна строчка, ни одна авторская ремарка не только не изменились, но даже не перемонтировались, прежде чем её не перерабатывал сам Константин Андреевич.

39

The repeated earnest affirmations of sincere and harmonious co-operation and trust immediately lead one to suspect that the contrary was the case. The contrasting reticence of Trenëv's own account of the 'joint' composition of Lyubov' Yarovaya likewise suggests a strained relationship between him and the theatre company. In particular he appeared to resent the (self-seeking) interference by the actors:

Писать роли, представляя в них в то же время того или иного актёра, как рекомендуют у нас некоторые драматурги -- это значит, по-моему, идти по ложной дороге театральщины. Автору, конечно, необходимо работать в самом тесном контакте с театром. Но это уже после того как пьеса предъявлена театру. До этого же театр не должен стоять между автором и жизнью, а актёр между автором и образами.

40

Trenëv remained aloof from discussions of the production and rehearsals, preferring to remain at home working on the textual revisions:

История её постановки в Малом театре такова: так как я жил в Крыму, то на репетициях мне приходилось при

-сутствовать мало. Помню, только однажды, в разгар репетиций, я приехал в Москву, и то не по своей воле: театр уведомил меня, что для переговоров с Репертком необходим мой приезд. 41

It would not be surprising, in view of his disappointment over Pugachëvshchina and dissatisfaction with the Lyubov' Yarovaya text, if he was anticipating another disaster and therefore wished to be as far away from the ignominious event as possible, for he declined to be present at the première on 22 December 1926. To his enormous surprise, the play met with immediate success. About a month after the opening night, Trenëv returned to Moscow to see this phenomenon and his reactions were mixed. He was both astonished and delighted at the transformation of his play from the diffuse, semi-literary form to the streamlined, compact structure of the stage drama. He also admired the fast, smooth-flowing pace, but he was unhappy about the cutting of some of the individual scenes (deemed 'inconsequential' by Prozorovskii) so that interminable (in Trenëv's view) discussions predominated in places. He also found unacceptable some interpretations, perceiving them crude and two-dimensional, including those of Shvandya, Koshkin and Gornostaev<sup>42</sup> and he particularly disliked the scene of the Whites' entry into the town.<sup>43</sup> On these points Trenëv apparently prevailed upon the producer to make changes, while coaching the actors himself, with their full co-operation.<sup>44</sup> No re-writing of the text took place during the play's run, despite Trenëv's reservations about it, but in the course of the next ten years, it was



revised twice although, even then, requiring five to ten rehearsals only.<sup>45</sup>

Trenëv acknowledged the dedicated work on the characterization by the original Maly cast and also the complementary artistic direction by the joint producers, I.S. Platon and L.M. Prozorovskii. Although he received equal credit for the production, the exact nature and extent of Platon's contribution remain obscure. All one can surmise from documentation is that he was employed in an advisory capacity:

В своей работе они счастливо дополняли друг друга. Если И. С. Платон привёл в спектакль громадную вековую культуру Малого театра, то Л. М. Проzorовский явился проводником в нём того нового, что дала театру революция: революционного одушевления, идеологически правильных установок. 46

In the ten years following the première, Trenëv records increasing disenchantment with the Maly management in the late twenties and thirties as they limited the play's performances to one per month despite public demand for more;<sup>47</sup> a claim supported by Blyum.<sup>48</sup> The author was particularly peeved that Lyubov' Yarovaya received no official mention in the press on its tenth anniversary,<sup>49</sup> although his version is at considerable variance with Morozova's account of mutual eulogies.<sup>50</sup>

Lyubov' Yarovaya remains a play of enduring historical rather than theatrical influence in the development of Soviet drama. Certainly, it has been exhaustively documented, the volume of analytical material appearing



disproportionate in relation to the number of performances. Although there have been no productions recorded as outshining the original Maly one overall, there have been others in which the protagonists have been played with equal -- if not more, in the case of the Koshkin role -- competence, particularly in the 1936 MKhAT production, directed by Nemirovich-Danchenko, based on the third post-1926 version of the text. The 1927 production at the Bol'shoi dramaticheskii teatr in Leningrad was completely overshadowed by its more illustrious predecessor, and, to judge by the dearth of comment, did not arouse much interest. The most notable productions since have been the periodic commemorative revivals at the Maly in 1961, 1967 and 1977.

Tren'ev was said to have cared a great deal more about the form of his play than its content and this would seem to be borne out by its meticulously neat construction but crude and careless plot. In Lyubov' Yarovaya he chose to use a form both epic and episodic to show simultaneous events and the way in which the lives of the characters are linked by the common experience of the Revolution and Civil War. A rudimentary version of this technique was used by Bill'-Belotserkovskii in Shtorm, but Tren'ev developed it to a degree of sophistication which others may have sought to emulate but failed to equal.

The life of each character forms a thread which

interweaves with those of others to create the whole tapestry of the Civil War period. The audience is required to follow the fate of each individual as he/she is confronted by choice and dilemma and is forced to make decisions which will have life-long significance, (following the maxim 'all drama starts with decision'). Whether or not it is possible to depict sufficiently rounded characters to sustain an audience's interest amidst ever-changing, hectic action is debatable and, ultimately, this responsibility falls as much to the actor as the playwright. The characters follow, independently of each other, their personal routes -- possibly never meeting, as in the case of the peasant, Mar'ya, and the Commissar -- but their fates linked by the Revolution and Civil War, as the different threads of the plot unwind in a swift succession of scenes. It was this very structure which caused the initial difficulty for the producers and cast as they tried to wield the fragmentary elements of the play into a dynamic whole, but despite the many re-workings discussed earlier, the structure remained essentially unchanged from the author's original conception. Its innovatory episodic form was perceived, as the initial rough drafts revealed, as musical (as was Optimisticheskaya tragediya by Tairov) with major themes: the Civil War, foreign interventionism and the Bolshevik struggle; minor themes: Yarovaya's torn loyalties and the hostility between Mar'ya's sons, with various leitmotifs, echoes, contrasts and reprises loosely held together by the narrative of the Zheglov bridge.



The plot is developed piecemeal, virtually one line at a time, with the various subplots and personal intrigues running concurrently. As a result, there is a perpetuum mobile sustained throughout the play, but interspersed with humorous cameo scenes in which verbal misunderstandings and mutual misconceptions furnish small comic situations.

The dramatic structure is classically balanced; thus the Reds confront the Whites, whilst political opportunists such as Elisatov and Dun'ka move from one camp to the other as the tide of fortune changes. The main characters are each dramatically counterbalanced by another character. Lyubov' Yarovaya confronts Panova throughout the play; both are educated women, both have lost their husbands, but they have nothing in common. Lyuba is honest, passionate and committed, whilst Panova is devious, callous and cynical. Lyuba and Koshkin also balance each other; the former is educated while the latter is not, but both are allies, united in the work of the Party. Gornostaev, the wise but unworldly professor who wishes to give his services to the people is balanced by Elisatov, the cunning, unscrupulous journalist who makes a fortune by trading on people's weakness. Gornostaev is reduced to selling sugar crystals from a tray (which he gives away), whilst Elisatov speculates in sugar. Gornostaev, the man of learning, is plain and unpretentious, whereas Elisatov uses inflated language and is a self-important hypocrite. Gornostaev also acts as



a foil to Pikalov, the ultimate simple soul. Pikalov, an enlisted man who understands nothing of the Civil War, finds himself prisoner first of one side then the other and when he finally succeeds in becoming the arrester, his prisoner turns out to have been granted safe conduct. Mar'ya, an old peasant woman who loses both sons to different sides in the Civil War, finds them both and then loses the one fighting for the Whites again, has her counterpart in Lyuba who loses, finds then loses her renegade husband. Kolosov, a holy pacifist is balanced by Chir, a vindictive religious bigot, while his pacifist idealism is countered by Koshkin's belief in the principle that revolutionary ends justify violent means. Shvandy, an illiterate but politically-conscious peasant finds a fellow peasant ripe for conversion in the politically ignorant Pikalov. Gornostaeva, the snobbish wife of the professor meets the baroness who, like her, is a lady in reduced circumstances, while Dun'ka, a former lady's maid has become a member of the new bourgeoisie. Koshkin's assistants, Khrushch and Mazukhin who engage in a double act of friendly banter contrast directly with Yarovoï's fellow White officers, Malinin and Kutov whose exchanges reveal bitter rivalry. Ultimately, Lyubov' Yarovaya, the committed Red is counterbalanced by her husband, the token committed White. This internal structural harmony is reflected in the play's classical five-act form with the main dramatic crisis taking place in the fourth act.

The play's settings move from the Revkom headquarters

in a requisitioned private apartment to a street in the town to a ravine outside the town, back to the apartment of Act i, now in the hands of the Whites, to a boulevard in the town to a school-yard, to a court-yard outside the Whites' headquarters. The same characters appear throughout, interacting directly and indirectly, some never actually meeting. Whites and Reds are shown in triumph and adversity amidst the changing fortunes of war, together with an array of political opportunists, Nepmen, adventurers, bourgeois, peasants, workers, agents provocateurs, traitors, turncoats, the politically committed, the politically neutral and the politically confused.

That the complexity and speed of the action was conveyed with clarity was due in large part to the skilful design of the set for which N. A. Men'shutin was responsible. It was an example of the new style of architectural construction, influenced not only by early Constructivist design, but also by the cinema. It was a revolving set which, placed at slightly different angles, created a new setting for each act and speeded up scene changes. Its multi-planed design enabled the key dialogues to take place against a background of simultaneous activity and action scenes or mass scenes to be enacted in full view of the audience with the different factions clearly visible, as in a cinematic long shot. The sets were painted white and had clean lines so that the characters, in coloured costumes, stood



out sharply against them.

The play's dynamism lies in three areas: the struggle and alternating predominance of the two main opposing political forces; the personal, physical and ideological struggle between their proponents and, finally, the moral dilemma confronting those with divided loyalties. Internecine strife, an obvious central theme for civil war drama, although deliberately eschewed by Bill'-Belotserkovskiĭ in Shtorm, is here exploited to the full, even if it was relegated to a secondary theme in the original production.

Act i is set in the Revkom headquarters which is based in a requisitioned private apartment. The audience is plunged immediately into the action as the premises are abuzz with activity. A telephone message, taken by a revolutionary worker, indicates that there has been some major unexpected turn of events centring on the Zheglovskiĭ Bridge which is subsequently to represent the focal point of the Red / White confrontation. Vikhor', the apparently trusted second-in-command, later revealed as the double agent, Yarovoĭ, hints at his own treachery by making a visible attempt to conceal his glee when the news is communicated to him that the Whites have occupied the bridge. He suggests to Koshkin's other assistants that they blow up the bridge to cut off the White advance on the town and they hurriedly repair to the office of the Commissar to voice this proposal.



The scene having been set for the main narrative, it is now the turn of the various minor characters to start weaving their individual stories. The characters, Panova, the typist and Shvandy, the archetypal bratishka, a sailor and assistant to Koshkin, enter. Shvandy is relating to Panova the incident of the mutiny by French crews forcing the withdrawal of their ships from Odessa during the French Intervention. He pursues his tale enthusiastically, exaggerating for effect and employing his own brand of blunt, sailor's vernacular, refusing to be put off his stroke either by Panova's scepticism or by the telephone ringing. The tale concludes with his account of seeing Marx in person -- a comic leit-motiv running through the play -- whom he fervently believes to be alive and well and leading the 'world proletariat'.

Next, Groznoĭ, assistant to and blood brother of Koshkin, enters; his interests clearly lie on a lower plane than world revolution as he lingers close to the glamorous Panova on some flimsy pretext. He proceeds to pay court to her, showing off his fine clothes concealed beneath his army coat and, finally, offering her gifts of jewellery which he produces from his pocket. She declines to be seduced by these gifts and suggests that he will be in trouble if it is discovered that he has been lining his own pockets. Groznoĭ hides his ill-gotten gains as Professor Gornostaev and his wife enter. They have come to lodge an official complaint against Vikhor' who has been billeted on them. It transpires that he has reduced

their apartment to a squalid mess, used foul language, slaughtered their hens and written slogans over the apartment walls in blood. He has also confiscated the Professor's personal library. Groznoĭ does not receive their complaint very sympathetically and lightly dismisses Vikhor''s apparent wild excesses. The Professor is immediately established as a genuinely learned and sensitive man who instantly detects Groznoĭ's inherent weakness and defensiveness. He is not cowed by Groznoĭ's bullying threats and, indeed, seems oblivious of external appearances, whilst nevertheless getting to the heart of the matter. His wife is a shrill, shrewish individual, with the heart and mind of a petty bourgeois housewife, unable to see beyond her immediate trivial domestic problems. Just as the couple are about to give up hope of getting a fair hearing, Shvandyā enters and immediately assumes that the grey-haired, bearded Professor with the forename Max is Marx himself.

Next, Elisatov enters; his exact official function is never made clear but he seems to have secured himself some sort of rearguard sinecure vaguely related to journalism. He recognizes the Professor straight away but, before he can make amends for his treatment, Koshkin enters, surrounded by a group of citizens demanding news from the front. Koshkin is deliberately off-hand and suggests that they go to dig trenches at the front if they want to know the news. Ignoring their clamouring, he dictates the agenda

for a forthcoming committee meeting. As in the closely corresponding scene in Shtorm, the agenda focuses on day to day matters, in this case, mainly education and housing (with revolutionary activity added as an after-thought) all of which seems implausible at a time of military crisis. Elisatov is clearly not 'one of us' and his repeated attempts to ingratiate himself with all present in order to glean information, receive short shrift. Now he introduces the Gornostaevs to Koshkin. By chance, Koshkin overhears a catalogue of their complaints (in which Vikhor's name is not mentioned) and immediately orders that the Professor's books be returned to him before enjoining him to contribute his knowledge to the cause of popular education. For some unspecified reason, Koshkin has temporarily taken over the duties of Commissar of Education, and there follows a brief sermon on the theme of ignorance being darkness (of which the Professor, unlike Koshkin, has no experience). He is invited to return later, an odd invitation in view of the circumstances.

Chir, informer and religious bigot, enters briefly but does little more than establish his identity.

Elisatov returns to confide in Panova that he has seen through Koshkin's bluff and that he knows that the Whites have broken through the Red defences so that they will be forced to evacuate the town.



Dun'ka, a former lady's maid, who now seems to be a woman of independent means, flouncing around in her ex-mistress's dresses, enters next, and after exchanging verbal abuse with Shvandy, starts to complain vociferously about her accommodation allocation, demanding more on the grounds of her numerous visitors (who include Vikhor'). Koshkin, appearing briefly on another matter, curtly suggests that she join a union to defend her interests.

Next, Mar'ya, an old, confused peasant woman enters, first abusing Dun'ka roundly for making profit out of other people's misfortune, and then seeking help to trace her two sons. Shvandy receives her sympathetically and rapidly deduces by a simple logic that the two sons are on opposite sides in the war. As he gently ushers the old woman out, Lyubov' Yarovaya, a teacher, arrives on urgent business with Koshkin.

Elisatov greets Lyuba and the audience learns that despite only recently recovering from typhus, she has travelled twelve hours on foot to reach the town. She reports that her village has been shelled and destroyed by the advancing White forces. An acrid exchange with Panova whom she despises reveals her uncompromising nature as she sharply rebuffs any attempt by the latter to find common ground. Clearly, Lyuba regards Panova as both personal and class enemy.

Kolosov, an electrician, enters, having learned of Lyuba's arrival. His solicitude on her account appears to be based on a long-standing platonic friendship. Their conversation is interrupted by Koshkin who emerges from his office to receive a call. Whilst delivering (improbable) orders to dispatch the bourgeoisie to dig trenches, Koshkin simultaneously signs forms and inquires why a member of his staff is still using the old-style spelling; the latter observation is particularly remarkable as he himself is only semi-educated. This all-encompassing awareness of matters great and small is again reminiscent of the Party Chairman in Shtorm as well as others in the same genre. In this case, it would seem to be inconsistent with both character and circumstance, while his inability to distinguish between the important and the trivial would seem to be a serious failing in a revolutionary leader.

The news which Yarovaya is bearing is already known to Koshkin, but she also tells him that the villagers have gone into hiding in the surrounding woods and are awaiting his orders to launch a guerilla counter-attack. He tells her that he will send them instructions but that he wishes her to remain in the town for a special assignment. She is obviously a trusty comrade despite being a non-Party member.

Kolosov re-enters to dismantle the telephone line and in the ensuing dialogue, Lyuba reveals another part

of the (contrived) plot, for she has seen her own hand-embroidered towel, given to her late husband, hanging in the window of the Gornostaevs' apartment. Kolosov assumes that it is a figment of her imagination because she is lingering in the past. She confesses, in a short, impassioned speech, her shame at being a belated convert to the Red cause and thereby failing to support her husband in his political efforts before his death.

Kolosov's gentle words of comfort, encouraging her to look to a new future, are interrupted by gun-fire and then Gornostaeva who now enters carrying the aforementioned towel (!) which is pounced on as evidence by Lyuba.

The scene shifts abruptly -- by use of spot lighting -- to Koshkin's office where he is holding a council of war with his deputies. He communicates to them the official order that they are to retreat from the town temporarily in view of the White advance, and wage guerilla warfare in the countryside. The strategically vital task of blowing up the bridge to cut off the White advance is unwittingly entrusted to the traitor, Vikhor' who is to lead a band of genuine comrades including Khrushch and Mazukhin who have already established their engaging double-act routine. The former says good-bye to his sister, the telephonist Tat'yana, but feigns nonchalance about his mission which is, of course, secret. Poignancy is injected into this scene as Tat'yana, suddenly anxious, watches her brother set off on the doomed mission.



Koshkin and Panova remain alone; the former asks the latter where her true political sympathies lie. She replies ambiguously that she likes the Reds only selectively, and proceeds to hint at Groznoï's misappropriation of luxury goods. A pregnant pause precedes another scene shift back to the waiting-room where Dun'ka is once more badgering officials about her property. She is unceremoniously sent on her way by Groznoï who reveals the true extent of his bad nature by declaring that all the prisoners will have to be shot indiscriminately prior to the withdrawal from the town. With contrived nonchalance, Koshkin compels Groznoï to produce his illicit booty. Groznoï panics and threatens Koshkin with a gun. The latter, calling his bluff, orders him outside and summarily executes him (off-stage) returning, with apparent calm to continue dictating the evacuation orders where he left off. Thus Act i concludes on a note of high melodrama.

Act ii opens on a scene of feverish activity as the Reds evacuate the town against a background noise of artillery fire, denoting the White take-over. Obviously, the plan to cut off the White advance has failed. Dun'ka, the ever-resourceful survivor, appears, making a desperate bid to move her worldly possessions to safety, whilst Chir makes his own observations about sinners fleeing from the sight of God.

Shvandyia and Koshkin enter next, the former carrying

out the last boxes of rifles. Koshkin initially tries to hide his disquiet at the dawning realization that they have been betrayed. Shvandyā ingenuously hits the nail on the head by asserting that he should have been sent with Vikhor'. Koshkin, with grim irony, supports Shvandyā in this view, adding that Vikhor' should have had the same treatment meted out to him as Groznoĭ. Shvandyā is restrained from rushing off to the rescue and is ordered to save himself from the enemy. Shvandyā exhorts Koshkin to do likewise before slipping off into the crowd. Elisatov also urges Koshkin to escape while there is still time, but Koshkin is determined to be the 'last man to abandon ship'. Lyuba then enters expressing concern and bewilderment at the turn of events. Koshkin, presuming that the Red saboteurs have been captured, entrusts her with the task of discovering the circumstances of their capture and their place of imprisonment.

As Koshkin and Lyuba exit, Elisatov encounters Dun'ka returning with her barrow of belongings, declaring that the main exit from the town has already been taken by the Whites and that she intends to try another way out.

At this point, Shvandyā re-enters, accompanied by a worker, apparently still shifting boxes of weapons from the Party headquarters. A girl, Makhora, wanders onto the scene and, to distract her attention from the boxes, the resourceful Shvandyā engages her in a passionate farewell embrace. As the girl indignantly flounces off,

the audience catches a glimpse of Vikhor' just prior to the entry of Gornostaeva and Lyuba who also catch sight of him. Lyuba is obviously shaken but gives away nothing in response to Shvandy'a's solicitous enquiry. She tells him what he already knows, that the Whites have captured their comrades. In view of what she has just seen, she implores the impulsive Shvandy'a to exercise caution.

Dun'ka and Mar'ya both reappear, pursuing their own missions. Dun'ka, the opportunist, manages to secure the protection of the quartermaster, Kostyumov, by offering him a billet, whilst Mar'ya carries on the search for her lost sons.

There follows an interlude in which Shvandy'a, who has been unable to find a way out of the town, meets a peasant conscript, Pikalov, who is hopelessly confused as he has been captured and re-captured many times as the fortunes of each side wax and wane. At the approach of a White officer, Shvandy'a performs a charade to save them both, pretending that Pikalov is his prisoner. After a comic exchange in which neither can decide which one is the prisoner of the other nor which is the way to the prison, they decide to go their separate ways.

Chir now enters to change the flags, thereby confirming the White victory. He promises to help the desperate Shvandy'a to escape but promptly betrays him to a White patrol which marches him away.



Against a background of church bells and band music, the bourgeois citizens turn out to welcome the White Army troops with flowers. Elisatov appears, accompanying both the General and Yarovoï, now showing his true colours. As the General commences his victory speech to the assembled throng, Lyuba and her husband finally meet face to face in an emotional reunion. Only when Gornostaeva enters and charges Yarovoï with being a member of the Reds does it emerge that he is really an undercover agent working for the Whites. As he is congratulated on his successful mission by the General, the Zheglovskiï Bridge prisoners are marched in and, in another melodramatic high point, Lyuba faints with shock at the full realization of the truth.

Act ii, scene 2, which takes place outside the town, is devoted entirely to Shvandyia's successful escape from his two guards by a quick-witted ruse using the divide and rule principle. He succeeds, moreover, in recruiting one of them to the Reds and, with his help, dispatches the second.

Act iii shows the White occupying forces fully ensconced in the former Red headquarters in which this scene is set. Posters on the wall advertise a benefit dance in aid of the Southern Russia armed forces. Panova is still working as a typist at the same place and Kolosov is now repairing the recently dismantled telephone wires. Lyuba is seen hanging about the headquarters, trying to

elicit information about the time of execution of the Zheglovskii Bridge prisoners, but no one seems to know anything.

The dance organizer interrupts to bring news of the evening's social highlight. Lyuba intimates to Kolosov that she must leave so as to avoid her husband with whom she cannot now be reconciled. Colonel Kutov enters, accompanied by Elisatov. From their conversation it emerges that they are colluding on the exaggeration of news reports from the front in their favour. As soon as they are sure of not being overheard, they get down to their real business which is haggling over the price of a bulk quantity of sugar which is going to be re-sold on the black market. As Panova returns, they resume their official conversation. Kutov tries to prevail on Elisatov to use his influence to persuade the people onto the street in greater numbers to cheer the procession of the Commander-in-Chief of the White forces whose arrival is imminent. This request furnishes an opportunity for facetious wit on the part of Elisatov whose underlying implication is nevertheless serious. He suggests that the Whites' policy of indiscriminate terrorism is scarcely guaranteed to encourage large numbers of the populace onto the street.

The arch-priest, Zakatov, now enters and is invited to offer a few inspiring words at the forthcoming civic reception. Zakatov is only too pleased to accept before

reporting the 'happy' event, namely the triumphant return of Colonel Malinin from a punitive expedition in the countryside. The swaggering Malinin himself now enters, greeted by the fawning arch-priest and Kutov. Malinin showers Panova with crudely extravagant flattery and she, in turn, flirts with him, implying that he has a rival in Kutov. Elisatov requests an interview with the 'conquering hero' in which his barbaric treatment of rebellious peasants is revealed. As Malinin continues to lavish attention on Panova, Kutov sneers at his rear-guard 'heroism' to which Malinin responds in kind. Yarovoï interrupts the argument, suggesting that the arch-priest be removed from this unedifying spectacle. Zakhatov is, anyway, anxious to discuss a property deal with Elisatov in the latter's capacity as land speculator. Kutov and Malinin continue their argument with Kutov claiming credit for the capture of the Zheglovskii Bridge gang. Yarovoï succeeds in restraining the hot-headed Malinin from requesting an order to execute the gang as he wishes to use them as bait to lure Koshkin who, while at liberty, remains a threat. An argument breaks out concerning the treatment of Bolshevik sympathizers in which Yarovoï betrays his emotional involvement.

They are interrupted by Gornostaeva complaining that her husband has been arrested yet again. Zakatov offers sanctimonious words of comfort which have little effect and meet with even less gratitude as Gornostaeva continues



to voice her justifiable resentment at being subjected to such ill-treatment from 'her own kind'. She reveals that there has been a policy under the White occupation of imprisoning all members of the intelligentsia. As Gornostaev is now released, Zakatov preaches a lesson of humility and Divine justice. Gornostaev, suddenly recognizing Malinin as a former member of the Secret Police, observes with quiet irony that he was responsible for sending him to prison on an earlier occasion.

Kolosov now appears to appeal to Panova's better nature in the hope that she will release information relating to the execution of the Zheglovskii Bridge gang, but she refuses to co-operate.

Elisatov and Dun'ka enter and start to negotiate over the sugar which Elisatov eventually sells to her for a considerable profit, but also in part exchange for wheedling a pass for her to enable her to get to the front where she thinks she will be able to do good business.

Now Lyuba enters also in a bid to draw information from Panova concerning her comrades but their mutual hatred means that she achieves nothing. Once Panova has left the room, Lyuba starts to search feverishly through the papers on her desk, convinced that Panova is withholding information, but she is observed by Chir who reports her to Malinin. The latter questions Lyuba

who plays a convincing charade in order to be released. As soon as Malinin disappears, she resumes her search and is caught red-handed. This time, she is saved by the timely intervention of her husband.

Finally, Panova is accosted by Koshkin himself who appears before her in disguise, but they are disturbed by Chir and Yarovoï's suspicions are aroused, although Panova gives nothing away.

Kutov now comes to pester Panova, bewailing her inconstancy, but offering her as a lure the vast quantity of dollars which he has managed to transfer to a London bank. His offer does not seem to cut much ice with Panova and his wooing is, anyway, interrupted by Elisatov. The latter appears very smug and self-assured as he has guaranteed himself against all eventualities and made a considerable profit into the bargain. He too -- in a rather more suave fashion -- offers Panova his protection should they find themselves compelled to flee abroad.

Now the Commander-in-Chief arrives to deliver a pompous speech on the achievements of the White forces. He is officially welcomed by various representatives of the citizenry. The general atmosphere of obsequious flattery is marred by Fol'gin, who, speaking on behalf of the liberal intelligentsia, declares their support for constitutional monarchy as opposed to autocratic rule. As the Commander-in-Chief is led away from this

embarrassing scene, Malinin has time to arrange a rendezvous with Panova. This is witnessed by the jealous Kutov who warns Panova against playing a dangerous game. Her cool, off-hand rebuff causes him to threaten her, as a result of which, when Lyuba approaches her in a final desperate appeal for help, she tells her that the information which she requires is in Kutov's brief-case.

Dun'ka appears briefly to rail over Elisatov's dishonesty as she has discovered that the sugar he sold her has been mixed with sand. She disappears just before Elisatov enters loudly proclaiming his honesty and disinterest to Kutov. The latter then exits alone.

Meanwhile, Lyuba and Yarovoï have met again, by chance, and they each try to justify their own stance and persuade the other to their point of view. She accuses him of being a turncoat and of murdering innocents. He relates the circumstances which have caused his political volte-face. It transpires that he has suffered permanently disabling injuries at the hands of Russian deserters during the War, and that during his recovery he has come to admire the German model of social democracy in which his political faith now lies. He reaffirms his vow to defend democratic freedom to the bitter end and to spare no mercy for those:

кто эту свободу захаркил и потопил в народной крови.



Lyuba tries to show him that he is misguided, pointing out that those who now command him are former members of the Secret Police. Yarovoï confidently asserts, however, that these commanders are doomed and that they will soon be replaced by 'their own'. Lyuba again accuses them of being hangmen to which his response is that on a battle-front, ruthlessness is necessary. As he then pleads with her to change sides so that they can be together, an officer rushes in to announce that Kutov has been murdered and his brief-case stolen. Yarovoï's glance darts significantly from Lyuba to Panova as the curtain falls.

Act iv depicts the swan-song of the Whites; black-marketeering and merry-making are rife, masking underlying disquiet. The scene is an avenue in the town centre; there is also a café terrace and a band stand. The benefit dance is in full swing in the background. Street vendors apparently peddle their wares but are shown to be underground agents working for the Reds. In the midst of this activity, Elisatov is making a fortune through land speculation with citizens clamouring to buy shares in Elisatov's extravagant building scheme, as well as continuing a flourishing trade in commodities such as furs and grain.

Malinin and Panova emerge from a drinking pavilion; the former, intoxicated by Panova as well as the drink, woos her ardently with promises of material wealth. She, meanwhile, reflects bitterly on the sordid dinginess

of Russia and her own degeneration into maudlinism. As Malinin proposes that they join the dance, Yarovoï approaches to warn him to be on his guard, revealing (laboriously) that Kutov's unknown assassins have managed to return the stolen brief-case intact and that, suspecting Koshkin and his comrades, he has set a trap for them.

A diversion is created by the peasant woman, Mar'ya, who is, at long last, on the track of one of her sons. As she is about to receive punishment at the hands of Malinin following a verbal insult to the tsar, the very son whom she has been seeking steps forward under orders to deal with her. Her relief at finding him safe and well is mitigated by the discovery that he has lost an eye in battle (which Malinin tells her is just reward for her remark) and that he has vowed vengeance on his brother, Grishka, for having stolen his hard-won wealth. Mar'ya scolds him for the trouble he has caused her and for his spoiled looks which will reduce his chances in the marriage market. Thus grumbling to herself, she goes off to bake him some cakes (!).

Lyuba and Kolosov now exchange conspiratorial whispers about the execution of their comrades, planned for that night and Lyuba arranges to meet Koshkin behind the school house.

Fol'gin and Elisatov now enter, locked in a political

argument about the principles of laissez-faire and state control to which Zakatov makes the pious contribution, 'the poor shall inherit'. Confronted by the examples of Gornostaev, who has been reduced to working as a watchman for Dun'ka in order to earn a crust of bread, and Fol'gin, who is sharing living quarters with two typhus victims, Zakatov assures everyone that a new world will be born out of the horrors of the old. Elisatov declares that he lives by no creed other than self-interest and in a swift exchange with Zakatov conclusively demonstrates the hypocrisy of the Church. Gornostaev, meanwhile, calmly censures the greed and dishonesty of free enterprise.

Fol'gin re-enters, panic-stricken, fearing that he has contracted typhus, and seeks advice on what significant act he might perform during his final fortnight of life on earth. Alone with him, Kolosov suggests that he help the Zheglovskii Bridge gang escape death, but Fol'gin demurs at such an uncompromising act of commitment and goes off 'to think about it'.

Panova and Lyuba meet accidentally face to face; Panova remonstrates violently over Lyuba's using her and directly implicating her in Kutov's death. Lyuba remains unmoved by her words and Panova vows vengeance. Chir, who has eavesdropped on this exchange immediately reports it to Yarovoï.

Gornostaeva, who has been forced to take over her



husband's vending tray because of his commercial incompetence, engages in conversation with the baroness who is bewailing the loss of her fine house which has been traded in by her husband, a victim of Elisatov's confidence trick, in exchange for everyday necessities. She accepts a gift of bread from Kolosov who insinuates himself into the company of the two women who launch into dual monologues as they both reminisce, in salivating detail, over luxury dishes. Kolosov, to whom they remain oblivious, has meanwhile started to foment unrest, taking advantage of the general disquiet and immediately succeeding in stirring up a series of wild rumours. Realizing that underground agents have been at work, Malinin and Yarovoï together with other officers swiftly re-establish order and the band plays the national anthem. Gradually, the normal activities of trading, enlisting, speculation and idle gossip are resumed, conveyed by fragments of conversation. As the hubbub dies away, workers start to assemble to be addressed by Koshkin who, knowing that a trap awaits them, cancels his original order for a concerted attempt to free the prisoners on the way to their execution. He arranges to meet them later behind the school house.

Kolosov and Koshkin now engage in a key dialogue in which their ideological differences emerge. The former, sickened by years of war, has become a pacifist and hopes fervently that human love will come to stop the shedding of blood. Koshkin is both sceptical and disapproving,

making a clear distinction between the blood of the oppressors and that of the oppressed:

Я тоже, брат, видал кровь, и увидал -- кровь разная бывает. Бывает кровь чистая, а бывает гнилая: её выпустить надо.

52

As far as he is concerned, the class war must be fought ruthlessly to the bitter end. In its resolute conviction, Koshkin's declaration echoes that of Yarovoï so that they appear to be equally matched in strength if not in rectitude. Although Koshkin and Kolosov have irreconcilable differences, the latter, out of the love he bears humanity, wishes to see the comrades released and so willingly takes a message to Lyuba from Koshkin.

Shvandyа enters and Koshkin reveals that the Whites are now retreating before the advancing Red forces, but that relief will not reach the town before morning. Their task is therefore to ensure that the prisoners are not executed that night. Shvandyа opines that they need popular support and volunteers to go and raise it, although Koshkin is sceptical of his success in this venture. He charges Shvandyа with bringing the remaining supporters to the school house rendez-vous. A comic interlude follows in which Shvandyа again contrives to get rid of unwanted interlopers.

A group of citizens pass close by, observing that the Whites' repeated assertions that all is well are a sure sign that the contrary is true. Shvandyа, over-

hearing their talk, assumes that they are ripe for conversion and wades in against the Whites. His plan backfires as he is taken to be a fifth columnist working for the Secret Police, and the group starts to turn ugly. Again, Shvandy'a's quick tongue which got him into trouble also gets him out of it. He hails the passing Gornostaev as Marx, inviting him to raise the consciousness of his audience. In the ensuing clamour and confusion, Shvandy'a makes his getaway, leaving the bemused Professor to deal with the angry citizens.

Gornostaev obligingly commences an oration on an anti-White theme, advocating persuasion by words rather than by violence. Unnoticed by him, his audience slip away leaving him to face Yarovoĭ and a patrol who have just appeared. The Professor appeals to them to shed no more blood, but is roughly sent on his way by Yarovoĭ, only to be confronted by the wrath of his employer, Dun'ka, for failing to guard her house properly.

Yarovoĭ sends for Colonel Malinin to tell him that the Reds have broken through their front and that they have orders to evacuate the town prior to retreating the following day. They decide that Koshkin remains a danger to them personally if he is not captured and executed that night. Yarovoĭ then questions Panova on her earlier conversation with Lyuba. Panova does not give him any information immediately and, even when he threatens her, she only gives an enigmatic clue. The motive behind this act is presumably personal spite of



Lyuba rather than political consciousness. Following her directions, Yarovoï sets off towards the school-house, but not before he has instructed Mar'ya's son Semën to keep an eye on Panova whom he distrusts.

Act iv, Scene 2 depicts the crucial turning-point for Lyuba. As she anxiously awaits the arrival of the comrades, Yarovoï appears and, in a touching scene, vows genuine, undying love for her. Putting her trust in him, Lyuba urges him to release the Zheglovskii Bridge men, but Yarovoï, by chance, catches sight of Shvandyia and realizes that Koshkin must be in the vicinity. As he leaves, ostensibly to do her bidding, Lyuba is elated at Yarovoï's apparent change of heart. She anticipates a successful completion of the mission as Koshkin and Shvandyia gather with their supporters to collect the hidden weapons. As Yarovoï returns stealthily with armed reinforcements (who include Semën pursued by his mother with her cakes), Lyuba realizes, belatedly, that she has been deceived. She is bundled into the school-house and in the ensuing ambush, Koshkin and Grigoriï, Mar'ya's other son, are arrested. The brothers thus come face to face and their mother interposes herself to stop them killing each other and curses Semën. As Mar'ya laments giving birth to her feuding sons, Lyuba emerges from the school-house lamenting the day she was born.

Act v is set in the court-yard outside the White

Army headquarters, towards the end of the day. The panic-stricken Whites are rushing to leave the town. Malinin has been put in charge of the evacuation of the town and Yarovoï has been made responsible for its defence. The audience also learns that Koshkin and his men are to be executed without delay, as soon as the order has been signed. Various members of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy are shown making an undignified scramble for the limited number of private vehicles. The self-centred survivors are, of course, in the forefront: the Baron and Baroness, Elisatov who has made sure of securing a vehicle, Gornostaeva (who is unable to persuade her husband to leave with her), the arch-priest, Zakatov, and his wife who become involved in an unseemly tussle with the irrepressible Dun'ka who has occupied the car reserved for them and who refuses to move and finally, Panova who has decided to go to Paris under Elisatov's protection. Before leaving, she finds time to spit a stream of venomous abuse at Lyuba. In the general panic and confusion, there are last-minute reports of an Allied landing, which, although it causes one or two people to hesitate, is not sufficient to deter the majority from leaving.

Lyuba seeks out her husband and demands that he free her comrades, which obviously meets with a negative response. She accuses him of cynically using her to get Koshkin. He denies that he used her, makes a last bid to win her to his side and tries to soothe her conscience over Koshkin's arrest for which she naturally blames herself.

She draws a revolver, threatening to kill herself (not him), but is restrained by Yarovoï who locks her up for her own safety whilst she continues to vow self-immolation if Koshkin is executed. Kolosov, in turn, pleads with Yarovoï to release Koshkin, offering himself in his place, so that Lyuba will have the will to go on living. Yarovoï rejects his noble offer, but tells him to return to collect Lyuba after the execution.

As the dejected Kolosov leaves, he meets Shvandyá, who is now disguised as a White officer, and tells him of Lyuba's detention. By a ruse of bluff, the ever-resourceful bratishka secures her release from the gullible guard. Meanwhile, Khrushch's sister, Tat'yana has started to rouse the fearful workers to mount a mass attack on the prison. Lyuba arrives to direct them to the (apparently limitless) arms cache behind the school. In the background, different voices are heard bewailing the financial crash and their own destitution as the last of the Whites flee the town.

Yarovoï discovers Lyuba's escape and receives news of the armed assault on the prison. Yarovoï refuses to give the order to open fire when he learns that the crowd is led by Lyuba. Before this dilemma is resolved, news arrives of the prison guards' capitulation. Yarovoï stubbornly persists in his belief that this is but a temporary setback for the White cause even though officers are deserting before his very eyes and Semën tells him



that the Bolsheviks have now seized power in the town.

Shvandyia arrives to arrest Yarovoï but he escapes. At this stage, Pikalov enters with, for some unexplained reason, Gornostaev as his prisoner. Unable to find an officer to give him orders, Pikalov is at a loss to know what to do with him. As captor and prisoner discuss this problem, Shvandyia -- apparently no longer pursuing Yarovoï -- strolls onto the scene to engage in light-hearted banter with the peasant girl, Makhora, then to scoff at Chir and finally, to interrupt the cross-talk between Pikalov and Gornostaev. Their problem is solved by the discovery in an unopened letter that Gornostaev has been granted safe-conduct.

In the final confrontation, the wounded Yarovoï is cornered; Kolosov appeals to Lyuba to protect him for her own peace of mind, but she refuses, marking her final rejection of him. The saintly Kolosov prepares to shield Yarovoï's escape by exchanging clothes with him. As the latter is about to make his escape, Lyuba, outraged at his acceptance of Kolosov's sacrifice, betrays him to a worker patrol.

Amid general rejoicing, the freed Zheglovskiï Bridge men enter, led by Koshkin, and have an emotional reunion with Shvandyia. Gornostaev joins in the euphoria and is enlisted by Koshkin in the war against ignorance. Mar'ya

is united with her son, Grigoriĭ, but his brother has fled with the Whites. Yarovoĭ breaks free of his captors to say farewell to Lyuba, but she turns away from him. She recovers her self-control to be warmly thanked by Koshkin for conducting herself as a loyal comrade. She humbly asserts that her true loyalty has only just begun:

Нет, я только с нынешнего дня верный товарищ.

53

In the final tableau, against a background of suitably rousing music, Shvandyia hoists the red flag.

The foregoing shows not only the major weaknesses of Lyubov' Yarovaya, namely, the crass plot, crude devices and cheap melodrama, but also the major strengths. These lie in the large variety of sharply-defined, credible characters, each with his or her clearly-differentiated speech pattern and, despite brevity of appearance, devoid of neither wit nor humour. The language of Lyubov' Yarovaya remains Trenĕv's abiding achievement, rich in irony, emotion and playfulness (a quality singularly lacking in the language of Civil War plays generally), it bears the mark of a literary craftsman with a sensitive ear. The characters communicate in natural speech; with the exception of one or two political harangues which were included perforce, the verbal exchanges are swift and laconic, while declamation and cliché are largely avoided.

The whole gamut of characters of the Revolution and Civil War appear in this play, but the representatives of

the broad political spectrum who are anti-Red to a greater or lesser degree and who are collectively loosely referred to as 'Whites' were far more vividly depicted than the Reds. The latter who, although not portrayed as a solid homogeneous mass, are, nevertheless, less vital -- with the exception of Shvandya -- and less numerous than their White counterparts. Moreover, out of the forty-four speaking parts, only three: Koshkin, Khrushch and Mazukhin, are true members of the proletariat and the latter two are minor figures.

The role of the eponymous heroine found its definitive interpreter in Vera Pashennaya for and with whom the part was created. Her initial antipathy, recorded earlier, probably amounted to no more than a standard Thespian reaction to being given a 'rotten part' and is comparable to Alisa Koonen's reaction on first acquaintance with the Commissar's role in Optimisticheskaya tragediya (see chapter 4). Trenëv conceded that the role of Lyuba had been underwritten in the first draft. The following extract from a letter he wrote to Vladimirov during the early stages of the play's creation implies that he fleshed out the role in order to lure Pashennaya to it:

Волнует меня очень самая Любовь. Говорите -- Пашенную она не интересовала? Я хочу думать, что речь идёт о впечатлении её от первой прошлогодней редакции пьесы, когда Любовь была очень мало показана и вся её драма шла подземным течением. Но сейчас, мне кажется, матерьялу, и <sup>54</sup> разнообразного, дано много.

Even revamped, the role was still considered, in some



quarters, to be a shade too elliptical:

Надо сказать что в постановке Малого театра эта психологическая драма недостаточно обыграна. Немножко слишком сразу и уж очень легко поверила Любовь в "возвращение" Ярового. Правда, авторский текст тут до крайности лаконичен . . . 55

Whether Lyuba is a true Soviet heroine or not is debateable. The initial reaction in the press reviews voiced some disapproval of her lingering loyalty to her renegade husband, but, with the more balanced wisdom of hindsight, it is her very ambivalence towards him which invests her with dramatic interest. According to Blyum she bears all the hallmarks of the traditional Russian heroine:

Со своей Любовью К. Тренёв обеими ногами стоит на хорошей традиции великой русской культуры -- изображая передовую женщину, исполненную сосредоточенной целеустремлённости ко всей полноте человеческой жизни и беспредельной жадой и жертвенностью подвига. 56

Although, broadly speaking, Lyubov' Yarovaya fits into a pattern already established in Soviet fiction in which women are forced to choose between private and public allegiance as, for example, is Dasha Chumalov in Tsement, she is not a prime example of Soviet female emancipation. Even though she eventually chooses the path of political commitment against the life of her husband, Blyum considers that her outward manifestations of growing independence prior to that point, are more characteristic of the Western model of female emancipation:

Любовь выглядит немножко "курсисткой", "стриженой" -- не на курсах ли она выучилась и курить? Тяга

к просветительной деятельности, серьезность и пытливость взгляда, настороженное "святое беспокойство" -- всё это так традиционно для художественного образа хорошей русской души! Но этой буржуазной (её социологический коэффициент, без всяких укорительных кавычек) женщине-человеку не чужды черты известной чисто феминистской ограниченности: она слишком хватается за иллюзии былого счастья, она не сразу понимает, что надо "убить" свое прошлое, чтобы возродиться в новом мире. 57

The role of Lyubov' Yarovaya is a difficult one for any actress to portray because she is a hybrid creation. On one hand, she is Trenëv's original literary heroine, agonisingly torn between her profound sense of social duty and justice and devoted love for her husband, whilst on the other, she is a symbolic figure carrying the banner of the good Socialist travelling the path towards Communism. As a result of these divergent functions, the motivation behind her crucial choices do not emerge as emotionally convincing, so that the final betrayal of her husband ultimately relies heavily on the emotive skill of the actress. Vera Pashennaya's account of her interpretation of this role, itself fraught with tortuous reasoning and contradiction, underlines the inherent difficulty of producing a portrait which is both credible and doctrinally sound:

Такой сложный и глубокий образ советской женщины возник передо мной впервые. Скажу прямо, мне было органически непонятно, как может женщина, провожая на смерть мужа, не заливаться слёзами. И, играя тогда Яровую, в заключительный момент я плакала настоящими слёзами слабой женщины. Теперь же, глядя на уводимого на расстрел мужа -- предателя и врага, я не плачу, и, если у меня навернутся слёзы, я делаю всё чтобы скрыть и не показать никому своей слабости. Я стыжусь этих слёз. 58

Another major flaw in Trenëv's central figure is her



static quality. For a character which purportedly develops through conflict and decision, there seems to be negligible change from the position held at the outset. Thus, throughout the play, she remains unquestioningly loyal to the Bolshevik cause, selfless, tenacious in adversity and transparently sincere. Indeed, the only reference to her development towards political commitment comes in a retrospective speech of self-criticism in which she expresses her guilt at having failed to support her husband's political activism.<sup>59</sup> This, incidentally, raises again the question of her motivation.

As a member of the teaching profession, Lyuba is strategically important to the major underlying theme of the play, namely, the attitude of the intelligentsia to the new Soviet society and their role in it. Although a representative of this group, Lyuba is not a satisfactory mouthpiece because she is given no opportunity to explain the reasons behind her passionate conviction. The task of debating the issues is left to the men (!), while the force of Lyuba's political argument is implicit only in qualities of integrity, courage and altruism. In fulfilling an albeit limited didactic function, Lyuba is sometimes forced to express herself in an uneasy brand of heroic realism:

Есть паразиты хуже вшей. Вот они моего мужа съели и ребёнком закусили. Ваш муж дворцы строил, а мой в это время в тюрьмах сидел. Дворцы вы себе строили, а нам казематы ... А на германской войне ваш муж был? 60



which sounds leaden in comparison to the sharp dialogue of the minor characters. These flaws notwithstanding, Lyuba's wry observations, gallows humour, sensitivity, despite being hardened by physical deprivation, and uncompromisingly bitter exchanges with Panova have provided ample scope for numerous Soviet actresses. In spite of Pashennaya's initially unenthusiastic reception of the part of Lyubov', she helped to create a memorable portrait of the tortured heroine which has since become one of the more coveted female roles of the Civil War drama.

Pashennaya's attempt to adhere to the tenets of non-tragedy was, fortunately, temporary. Her initial intuitive response to the role was eventually seen as the authentic one:

. . . в первых спектаклях Пашенная плакала, и эти слёзы были естественны. Она прощалась с мужем, которого любила, она прощалась с прошлым. А это не просто. 61

She herself, like Alisa Koonen in her interpretation of the Commissar in Optimisticheskaya tragediya, emphasized the feminine rather than the feminist aspects of the role:

Я стремилась при этом сохранить в образе Яровой. её прекрасную преданную женскую любовь, её глубокое материнское чувство тоски об умершем ребёнке. Мне хотелось донести этот образ до зрителя без фальши, без плакатности, убедительно показать, как эта простая женщина приходит к переоценке ценностей и постигает правду 62

reverting to the tried and tested formula of passion and pathos, a portrayal 'ermolovskogo masshtaba' as more than

one contemporary critic labelled it.

By contrast, the role of Commissar Koshkin offered little scope for the actor. Koshkin is a stereotype the 'New Soviet Hero'. A direct descendant of the Party Chairman in Shtorm, he is a plain-spoken, unpretentious man from the working class. Like the Chairman, he is uneducated in the formal sense, but literate, omniscient, astute and devoted to the cause of the Revolution. Unlike his earlier counterpart, however, he shows almost no qualities of humanity; he never deals directly with the petitioners who call at headquarters, but delegates this task to his subordinates. Instead, he is the 'Man of Iron', busy with planning campaigns of action. As with Lyuba, public duty supersedes private allegiance and is taken to its logical extreme in his summary execution of his blood-brother, Groznoĭ. His relationship with Shvandyia is potentially similar to that between the Chairman and Bratishka, but their alliance exists only by virtue of their shared experience of the Revolution and Party struggle and there is no development of a friendship at any other level. Despite heroic efforts on the part of Trenëv to imbue him with life, Koshkin was to remain a dismal failure, a colourless creation of improbable implacable motive. Surkov sums up the general assessment:

Ему (Kohskin) очень не повезло, к сожалению, и на сцене и (в) в критике. . . . это -- "кожаная куртка", скучная, "железобетонная схема", что в Кошкине выражена только



суровость революции, но не раскрыт её человеческий смысл,<sup>63</sup>  
её жизнетворческий пафос.

The fault, in fairness, cannot be laid at Trenëv's door. As shown earlier in this chapter, his original portrait of a morally flawed Koshkin was expurgated so thoroughly that all that remained was a bland substitute with which he could do little, and his dissatisfaction with the character was never resolved.

Adapting to the requirements of Soviet roles was a problem which confronted every actor in the big established companies, but some accomplished the transition more smoothly and successfully than others. Sadovskii, the original interpreter of the role of Koshkin, was one of the Maly's eminent actors, accustomed to playing aristocratic roles, and he regarded the part of the Commissar as both alien and thankless:

. . . Кошкин был первым советским героем в репертуаре Прова Садовского. Раньше актёр играл по преимуществу романтических героев в трагедии и высокой драме. Не мудрено, что новая роль давалась ему с трудом, и незадолго до премьеры Садовский от неё отказался. Потребовались усилия со стороны режиссуры и дирекции театра для того, чтобы он вернулся на репетиции. <sup>64</sup>

It was only with much difficulty, according to Prozorovskii, that Sadovskii came to terms with the didactic function of this role,<sup>65</sup> and the actor himself claimed that he had gained illuminating insights into the role only after much searching.<sup>66</sup> The key to Koshkin, it appears, lay in his simplicity, and the object was thus to convey his ordinariness.<sup>67</sup> Given that both Prozorovskii



and Vladimirov knew that Sadovskii had been grotesquely miscast:

Это верно, что Садовский не походил на матроса, не было в нём ничего типического, не было и молодости. И было 68 что-то от романтического театра.

one can only wonder at the forbearance and stubborn tenacity of both actor and producers.

Shvandyа is the mandatory comic bratishka of early Soviet drama, bringing an element of broad humour to relieve the play of its potential turgidity. Uneducated but politically sound, Shvandyа's humour, which issues from his intellectual naiveté, or conversely, his native wit, disguises his didactic function, rendering it more palatable to his listeners. As a self-appointed peripatetic proselytiser, he comes into contact with many of the characters, engaging them in philosophical debate. Despite his failing to win over all his interlocutors, he harnesses the sympathy of the spectator where Lyuba and Koshkin fail to do so. Shvandyа combines the simple good-heartedness of Shakespeare's mechanicals or stock comic characters from Russian folk tale with the quickwittedness of the traditional Arlecchino figure, and thus embodies the true popular appeal of all clowns.

Historically, he is a direct descendant of Bratishka in Shtorm, although it could be argued that the latter is a more subtle creation whose humour and

language<sup>are</sup> more spontaneous and less contrived. Despite Blyum's assertion that their respective proletarian and peasant roots make them entirely different characters,<sup>69</sup> others considered Shvandyа to be the natural successor of of Bratishka. According to Dmitriev, worker-peasant characters had, hitherto, expressed the harsh, grim determination of revolutionary fighters. Bratishka established a new breed of sailor-revolutionaries who demonstrated that:

(Дело революции) может быть делом радостным и даже  
весёлым. 70

Trenëv's Shvandyа represented an even more positive affirmation that:

. . . о самом серьёзном можно . . . говорить с  
юмором. 71

Stepan Kuznetsov, the Maly actor who created the role of Shvandyа, deeming it 'samoigral'naya',<sup>72</sup> by all accounts played the part for cheap comic effect. As a result, he enjoyed enormous popular success but received censure not only from a number of critics, but also from the author and directors who considered that, in over-playing the broad humour, the underlying sincerity of the character was lost.<sup>73</sup> According to Prozorovskii, it was difficult to prevail upon Kuznetsov to stop playing to the gallery as there was a clash of interests:

Ни режиссуре, ни автору не удалось убедить его в том, что Швандя не "комик", а романтик-революционер, поэт

революции. И в течение долгого времени он всю свою первую сцену с Пановой комиковал, мотивируя это тем, что-де лексика Швандии "специально придумана" автором, чтобы смешить зрителя.

Прошло время, прежде чем Ст. Кузнецов, убедившись, что прав автор, права режиссура, стал проводить всю эту 74 сцену совершенно в другом ключе.

Although Kuznetsov remained the actor most closely identified with the role of Shvandy, other actors were seen to handle the role with greater sensitivity and depth:

А может быть, феерический талант Б. Н. Ливанова, подобно таланту Пашенной, независимо от воли и намерений режиссуры определил доминирующее в постановке положение человека из народа, для которого победа революции является единственным смыслом жизни. Пожалуй, ливановский Швандя был даже интереснее, крупнее, героичнее, чем Швандя Кузнецова. 75

Yarovoï represents the focal point of the political opposition to the Reds. He is a social-democrat disgusted and disillusioned by the desertion of the peasants conscripted to fight in the War and himself a victim of their violent hatred. Unlike Malinin and Kutov, he is no regular army officer, nor does he share their sadistic pleasure in killing. He has aligned himself with them pro tempore in order to crush the Reds, but, by virtue of his ideological stance and intellectual contempt, he remains aloof. Yarovoï's passionately-held convictions compel him to betray Lyuba's trust so that, ultimately, like her, he puts belief before private allegiance.

Trenëv was confronted by the problem of creating a credible and substantial counterrevolutionary character,



one with genuine commitment who, nevertheless, must be seen to be despicable and unworthy. As Blyum observed ominously:

Предостерегающий прецедент ("Дни Турбиных") стоял перед его глазами: "искать хорошее в дурном -- и дурное в хорошем" -- этот метод был скомпрометирован и явно не годился ... 76

Thus he is portrayed as a politically sincere but misguided idealist, a student revolutionary with half-baked notions. The forsaking of his apparently beloved wife is never justified and constitutes one of the inherent weaknesses of the plot as a result of which Yarovoï's actions seem implausible. The actor, Ol'khovskii, succeeded in mustering sufficient sincerity to create the necessary drama, for which he received due acknowledgement, but the inconsistencies in the characterization meant that ultimately, Yarovoï remained type rather than person.

Professor Gornostaev, who, at the end of the play, finally embraces the new era of Communism, represents the predicament of the intellectual who is emotionally uncommitted. He has suffered at the hands of both Reds (Vikhor's excesses in Act i) and Whites and is thus unable to put his trust in either. He strikes an immediate rapport, however, with Koshkin who, like him, is an honest and unpretentious man. From the outset, the Professor's sincerity and intelligence are never in doubt. In the original production, he was presented

sympathetically by the actor, Kostromskoi, as an absent-minded, kindly man who never pulls intellectual rank, contrasting effectively with his snobbish wife who is too stupid to relinquish her false values even when confronted by evidence of White injustice.

The contrast between the values placed on intellectual life by Whites and Reds respectively is crude but expressive; under the Bolsheviks, the Professor is invited to found a prototype of the Open University, while under the Whites he is reduced to selling sugar crystals from a tray.

Kolosov and Fol'gin complete the quartet of representatives of the intelligentsia. The former is a throw-back to the Old Russian intelligentsia whose demonstrations of saintly forgiveness label him a Tolstoyan. Blyum, however, argues hotly (and lengthily) that he is not, for the following reasons: firstly, he is, on his own admission, still seeking truths, which indicates that his convictions are not firm. Secondly, he is not a contemplative ascetic, for he actively participates in the release of the captured Red partisans, disseminates disinformation and loves Lyuba, albeit from afar. His attempt to foil Yarovoï's captors identifies him as a 'yurodivyi' which is dismissed as a temporary aberration by Blyum who attributes the Tolstoyan interpretation to the author's own known sympathies:

Вспомним, что А. В. Луначарский отметил в "Любови Яровой" "некоторые черты, напоминающие нам прежнего Тренёва с его нежностью к толстовским персонажам" ... Дело шло, конечно, о преодолении -- в Колосове и через Колосова -- толстовского (интеллигентского) в жизне- 77  
ощущении самого автора.

Despite Blyum's strenuous arguments to the contrary, the character Kolosov was intended as an exponent of the principles of Tolstoyism and was portrayed as such.

Fol'gin expresses liberal democratic views. He is in favour of a constitutional monarchy, but voices his objection to the return of an autocracy. He is, however, faint-hearted and lets slip his one opportunity to make a stand against the would be oppressors, remaining no more than an armchair theorist.

The role of the femme fatale, Panova, offered considerable scope to the actress, Gogoleva, who first portrayed her, but who received mixed reviews. She is a potentially interesting negative character, undoubtedly intelligent, amoral and incapable of emotional commitment at either political or personal levels. She appears to despise both sides equally; the Whites for their vulgarity, the Reds for their apparent philistinism and single-minded devotion to duty. She is embittered by the death of her husband, an architect, in the War, and the passing of (for her) the good life. (In Trenёv's original conception of the play, Panova's husband represented the noble side of the White Guard and was subsequently amputated from the body of the text as recounted earlier



in this chapter.) Panova vents her bitterness on Lyuba in particular, possibly because of her sneaking regard for her selfless dedication to the cause. Her jealousy and resentment are twisted into callous egotism and she repeatedly pronounces herself unwilling to involve herself in the struggle to protect the welfare of others. Her venomous exchanges with Lyuba serve to heighten the dramatic tension and prevent the latter from fading into total insipidity. She indirectly destroys the men who lust after her, but receives no retribution herself, finally making her escape to the hoped for life of refinement in Paris under the protection of Elisatov who will assuredly be able to provide all her material desires.

Dun'ka is a familiar low-life figure, lusty, with an infallible survival instinct and no scruples. She and Elisatov have a great deal in common; the former operates on a more sophisticated level, but both are shameless opportunists. Reds and Whites are all one to them; whatever the régime, they learn its rules in order to exploit them to their personal advantage. In Lyubov' Yarovaya, neither of these characters receives his just punishment; both succeed in fleeing abroad. The message contained in the line:

Пустите, пустите Дуньку в Европу!

78

(a line always greeted by applause according to Dmitriev) is that this type of cynical opportunist has no place in

the new Soviet society, but belongs instead to the corrupt capitalist west. Dymova and Yakovlev both received good notices for their performances with some reservations about Dymova's slightly exaggerated mannerisms.

Pikalov and Mar'ya are both tragi-comic figures representing the eternal woe of the down-trodden peasant. Pikalov is ignorant of all events beyond his immediate environment and is preoccupied with the latter to the exclusion of all else. The gradual dawning of enlightenment comes to him via his fellow muzhik, Shvandyia, who is able to communicate the word at a level that Pikalov can understand. The original interpreter of this role, Sashin-Nikol'skiĭ, was praised in the press reviews, while the character of Pikalov, successful from the start, spawned many imitations.

Mar'ya is the proverbial matushka figure; like Pikalov, totally immersed in the daily grind of living. She is unaware of external events to the extent that she pursues her son with trays of cakes when he is actively engaged in a military operation. She endlessly grieves over her recalcitrant feuding sons and, although they cause her nothing but worry, her harsh admonishments belie her abiding maternal love. She appears to be more politically conscious than Pikalov, narrowly avoiding arrest for insulting the Tsar and disowning the son who

is fighting for the Whites. The actress Ryzhova was widely praised for her interpretation of this role in which, according to Dmitriev, she followed the best Maly tradition of combining comedy with tragedy.<sup>79</sup>

The Platon-Prozorovskii which finally came to the Maly stage on 22 December 1927 met with popular success but had a mixed critical reception. In the midst of the eulogies and brickbats, it was both Trenëv's characters and the Maly actors' portrayals which were commended or faulted. The most successful character in popular terms appears to have been Shvandyia who, in Stepan Kuznetsov's portrayal, had both sentimental and comic appeal, as a number of reviewers readily conceded.<sup>80</sup> Others, however, reproached the actor -- as did both author and directors (see page 179) -- for overemphasising the broad humour of the character and thereby failing to bring out the true revolutionary purpose behind it.<sup>81</sup>

Both Trenëv's weakly-defined character, Commissar Koshkin, and Sadovskii's hapless portrayal, described by 'Sadko' as:

. . . мёртвая, напыщенная фигура

82

received virtually unanimous criticism. In the creation of this character, both author and actor were accused of an inability to shed the mantle of heroic-romantic tradition. In this respect, Sadovskii was to prove less adaptable than other established actors and actresses.



A single (and inexplicable) exception to the general condemnation was Lunacharsky's commendatory reference to the 'heroic simplicity' of Sadovskii's portrayal.<sup>83</sup>

Both creation and interpretation of the eponymous heroine earned some embarrassingly bad reviews, although, in both cases, the fault was seen to lie in the ideological interpretation rather than in the absence of skill. Somehow, the character failed to please the critics altogether and, despite Ashmarin's reference to Pashennaya's 'Ermolovian' performance, the feminine aspects which she had sought to emphasise were seen as inappropriate by several reviewers. Sadko disparagingly referred to the 'женские мотивы' behind Lyuba's actions.<sup>84</sup>

Gogoleva's Panova, the obvious villainess of the piece, surprisingly failed, likewise, to impress the critics. This ultimate negative character received bad notice in Zhizn' iskusstva,<sup>85</sup> but was otherwise overlooked.

Ol'khovskii, sporting a goatee beard and pince-nez, was considered by several critics to have produced an accurate portrait of a typical socialist-revolutionary.<sup>86</sup> Otherwise, critical acclaim was reserved for the 'episodicheskie figur̄y'. There was consensus on the skilful creation and interpretation of D̄ymova's Dun'ka, Kostromskoi's Gornostaev, R̄zhova's Mar'ya, Yakovlev's Elisatov and Sashin-Nikol'skii's Pikalov.

In many respects, Trenëv's Lyubov' Yarovaya is just another example of unconvincing heroes confronting compelling villains, exemplifying the eternal problem of making 'positive' characters dramatically interesting. In Lyubov' Yarovaya the most convincing characters are undoubtedly the morally flawed ones, such as Dun'ka and Elisatov, and as Trenëv either failed or refused to allow his positive protagonists, Yarovaya and Koshkin, to dominate the play, this may well account for its overall artistic success. In other respects, this play highlights the apparently insoluble problem of the artist -- in this case an eminent pre-Revolutionary bellettrist -- trying to conform to the stultifying demands of political orthodoxy. The insistence upon flawless heroes and heroines clearly implies artistic death and underlines the impossibility of aligning artistic merit with Socialist Realism.

Apart from the individual roles, the reviews focused mainly on the ideological virtues of Lyubov' Yarovaya vis-à-vis Dni Turbin̄kh, as discussed in the previous chapter. The general consensus may be summed up in the following assessment by Lunacharsky:

В отличие от "Турбинных", это не сменовежовская пьеса, а пьеса глубоко попутническая. Её можно было бы принять за коммунистическую пьесу, если бы не некоторые черты, напоминающие нам прежнего Тренёва, с нежностью к толстовским персонажам боящимся крови, осуждающим внутренне обе стороны, желающим послужить "любви вообще".<sup>87</sup>

The principal artistic criticisms were, firstly, -- and

not surprisingly -- the incoherence of the plot and the motivation of the characters; according to Zagorskiĭ, writing in Zhizn' iskusstva, this was the inevitable result of employing a literary writer who had no understanding of the rules of drama.<sup>88</sup> Lunacharsky's article refers to the complete disintegration of the main thread of the plot in Act iii into a series of anecdotal scenes.<sup>89</sup> The observation by Professor Sakulin in the same article that Lyubov' Yarovaya showed an epoch like a mirror which had been shattered into many small splinters might appear as an endorsement of Trenĕv's skill in creating a multi-faceted picture of a complex period. With the reassertion of conservatism in the theatre, however, the observation was a negative one, the implication being that the 'splintering' destroyed the continuity of the 'beginning, middle and end' sequence and thus served only to impede the spectator's comprehension of the events portrayed.

Secondly, despite all efforts to the contrary by the author and directors, the larger theme of the Revolutionary struggle was seen to be dominated still by the personal tragedy of Lyuba and her husband.<sup>90</sup>

Thirdly, the weakly-defined proponents of the Revolution were seen as a major artistic as well as ideological weakness, as was the hazily-depicted proletarian mass.<sup>91</sup>



The critics tended also to concur on the play's good qualities, namely its vitality, rich observation, substance and variety. Sadko's assessment in Vechernyaya Moskva is typical:

Хороший, большой спектакль -- сочный, полнокровный и бодрый. 92

These merits were deemed, in some measure, to compensate for the play's dramatic deficiencies.

'A Ts', writing in Trud, considered that this play had raised the Soviet drama to a new level by provoking spontaneous emotional reactions in the spectator rather than foisting crude stock slogans on him.<sup>93</sup>

As far as it affected the Maly's standing, Lyubov' Yarovaya was regarded as a progressive play. Despite one or two hortatory notices on the subject of the Maly's need to replace its traditional heroic-romantic style, manner and delivery with one of plain realism (presumably this applied to the older members of the cast), the company was commended for its overall efforts in exploiting its bright young talent to produce a high-quality product for the Soviet public's consumption.

In Lyubov' Yarovaya Trenëv offers a rare example of a range of political views which are aired, if not rigorously or even (post adulteration) fairly debated. Nevertheless, Trenëv depicted some of the so-called

'Whites' in a sympathetic light, in particular Yarovoï and Kolosov, whilst (narrowly) avoiding the trap of the precedent set by Bulgakov in Dni Turbin̄ykh. The author's main objective had been to convey the complexity of the Civil War period whilst allowing the dramatic focal point of the play to develop and retaining a tight structure.

The original production offered an impressive spectacle; with the cast of more than fifty actors, the vertical planes of the stage set and swift action and dialogue, it bore not only vestigial traces of the experimental theatre of the early twenties, but also the marks of cinematic influence.

Trenëv was either an unwitting or unwilling pawn in the game of theatre and propaganda. As the only true mass medium at a time of widespread illiteracy, the theatre was particularly vulnerable to officially-sanctioned 'режиссёрский империализм',<sup>94</sup> There was, therefore, little that Trenëv could have done about the extensive expurgation of his play except to try to make the best of a bad job. In attempting to write in the required ideological content after the essential germ of the play had been formulated, he never achieved anything more than a clumsy superstructure and was himself unhappy with the result(s). It is only by virtue of Trenëv's original vital elements, discussed earlier, which were allowed to remain, that the play survives today.



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57. V. Blyum, "Lyubov' Yarovaya" na stsene moskovskogo Malogo teatra, p.35.
58. V. Pashennaya, 'Moya Yarovaya', Narodnoe tvorchestvo, no.8 (1937), pp.14-16 (p.14)
59. K. Trenëv, 'Lyubov' Yarovaya', i.
60. Ibid.
61. Yu. Dmitriev, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya"', in Spektakl̄y i god̄y (Moscow, 1956), pp.100-107 (p.105).
62. V. Pashennaya, 'Geroi' nashego vremeni', Teatr, no.11 (1954), p.173.
63. E. Surkov, 'Traditsii sovetskoi' dramy. "Lyubov' Yarovaya"', Teatr, no.3 (1952), pp.103-122 (p.104).
64. Yu. Dmitriev, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya"', p.103.
65. P. Sadovskii, quoted in V. Vladimirov, 'K 125-letiyu Malogo teatra. Iz istorii Malogo teatra', p.153.
66. V. Diev, 'Stranitsy tvorcheskoi' istorii p'esy "Lyubov' Yarovaya"', pp.473-474.
67. P. Sadovskii, Narodnoe tvorchestvo, no.9 (1938). (Quoted in footnote of 10 above (p.474). Full details not given. This article does not appear in the Leningradskaya teatral'naya biblioteka catalogue.)
68. V. Vladimirov, 'K 125-letiyu Malogo teatra. Iz istorii Malogo teatra', p.153.
69. V. Blyum, "Lyubov' Yarovaya" na stsene moskovskogo Malogo teatra, p.64.
70. Yu. Dmitriev, 'Sud'ba chelovecheskaya -- sud'ba narodnaya. "Lyubov' Yarovaya" K. Trenëva v Malom teatre', Sovetskaya kul'tura (25 March 1961), no page number.
71. L. Prozorovskii, 'Iz istorii Malogo teatra', p.434.
72. S. Kuznetsov, quoted in V. Vladimirov, 'K 135-letiyu Malogo teatra. Iz istorii Malogo teatra', p.153.
73. L. Prozorovskii, 'Iz istorii Malogo teatra', p.434
74. L. Prozorovskii, 'Iz istorii Malogo teatra', pp.434-435.
75. N. Tolchenova, Zhivaya Pashennaya (Moscow, 1969), p.118.



76. V. Blyum, "Lyubov' Yarovaya" na stsene moskovskogo Malogo teatra, p.42.
77. V. Blyum, "Lyubov' Yarovaya" na stsene moskovskogo Malogo teatra, p.52.
78. K. Trenëv, 'Lyubov' Yarovaya', v.
79. Yu. Dmitriev, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya"', p.107.
80. Sadko, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" K. Trenëva v Malom teatre', Vechernyaya Moskva (28 December 1926), no page number; V. Ashmarin, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya"', Novyi zritel', no.1 (1927), p.6; Anonymous, Rabochaya gazeta (24 February 1927); N. Volkov, Krasnaya Niva, no.4 (23 January 1927), p.22 and S. Voskresenskiĭ, Rabochii i teatr, no.10 (8 March 1927), p.12.
81. A. Lunacharskiĭ, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya"', Ivestiya TsIK (31 December 1926), no page number; Ya. Tuzendkhol'd, Krasnaya gazeta (23 January 1927) and M. Zagorskiĭ, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" v moskovskom Malom teatre', Zhizn' iskusstva, no.1 (1927), pp.10-11 (p.10).
82. Sadko, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" K. Trenëva v Malom teatre',
83. A. Lunacharskiĭ, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" K. Trenëva'.
84. Sadko, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" K. Trenëva v Malom teatre'.
85. M. Zagorskiĭ, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" v moskovskom Malom teatre'.
86. Sadko, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" K. Trenëva v Malom teatre' and V. Ashmarin, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya"'
87. A. Lunacharskiĭ, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" K. Trenëva'.
88. M. Zagorskiĭ, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" v moskovskom Malom teatre'.
89. A. Lunacharskiĭ, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" K. Trenëva'.
90. Sadko, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" K. Trenëva v Malom teatre'; A. Ts., Trud (4 January 1927) and S. Voskresenskiĭ, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya"', p.12.
91. Sadko, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" K. Trenëva v Malom teatre'. A. Ts., Trud, and S. Voskresenskiĭ, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya Yarovaya"', p.12.
92. Sadko, '"Lyubov' Yarovaya" K. Trenëva v Malom teatre'.
93. A. Ts. Trud.
94. V. Vladimirov, 'K 125-letiyu Malogo teatra. Iz istorii Malogo teatra', p.151.

CHAPTER 4

In a number of ways, Optimisticheskaya tragediya follows the pattern set by Shtorm a decade earlier. Both plays present a romanticized, heroic view of the recent past; both have a high moral tone and in both, the central figure ultimately sacrifices him/herself for the cause. Both plays feature virtuous but boring 'heroes/heroines' whose comic, loyal henchmen act as a foil, and implacable and irredeemable enemies. Both authors obviously felt that the cause needed clearly-defined enemies and martyrs. They both use speech which is simple and straightforward so that the plays' didactic function is effective. This function is particularly embodied in the principal figures of the Party Chairman and the woman Commissar who hammer home their message with deeds as well as words. Both plays portray an impressive attempt to establish law and order 'with a human face' amidst war, anarchy, deprivation and social disintegration. Both show pattern and order being forged out of chaos and are thus soothing in their presentation of a simplified, ordered, clear-cut and idealized packaged version of 'this is how it was'. Shtorm, however, failed to capture the imagination of the Soviet audience long-term in the same way as Optimisticheskaya tragediya probably, one must surmise, because it did not have the advantage of Tairov's genius to elevate it above the comparative humdrum drabness of the Mossovet production. It was clearly Vishnevskii's good fortune to have gained the services of the Kamerny



because, by 1934, Bill'-Belotserkovskii had already established a reputation as a better playwright than Vishnevskii (an albeit modest achievement) acknowledged by the critic, O. Litovskii:

Почти одновременно с Оптимистической трагедией появляется новая пьеса Билль-Белоцерковского Жизнь зовёт, где автор, преодолевая известный схематизм своих старых произведений, твёрдо становится на путь углублённой психологической драмы. Биллю это удаётся в большей мере, чем Вишневскому.

A weakness of both plays is their failure to reveal the motivation of their characters who appear to act for no reason other than dogged adherence to one creed or another. No rationale is offered to explain their actions. More importantly, neither play addresses itself seriously to the burning issues at stake. Even though Optimisticheskaya tragediya (to a far greater degree than Shtorm) raises important questions, such as why people should be expected to commit themselves to an unknown and untried political party and system; why cases of genuine grievance should receive rough justice; and philosophical questions such as why one man should hold power over another; and why the masses, collectively, should be so inert, it fails to offer either cogent argument or close examination. Instead, the usual devices for dealing with the perpetrators of awkward questions are either to kill or convert them, whilst philosophical imponderables are simply ignored.

Given the degree to which Optimisticheskaya tragediya



was slated, it must be said, in fairness, that it did possess some redeeming features: interesting questions are raised, if not answered; non-stock characters are introduced; the dramatic construction is good, with head-on clashes sustaining the tension throughout (independently of Tairov's conception of the seven 'kul'minatsii'); the pace is varied and there is plenty of action. The device of the ghostly chorus revisiting their descendants, if not entirely successful, is, at least, an interesting borrowing from classical drama. Finally, the play's resounding message of (Bolshevik) triumph over adversity communicates itself clearly without recourse to agitative monologues, and the early audiences found themselves able to identify with the characters irrespective of their schematic composition:

Особенно в пьесе показательно руководство женщины в области повседневного строительства своего полка. Постараюсь эту постановку описать в письме и послать домой родителям (Курсант т. Смолов).

2

Again, to what extent these virtues are attributable to Vishnevskii rather than Tairov remains an open question.

Optimisticheskaya tragediya was written almost a decade later than the other three plays examined, in a period characterized by artistic stultification and decline, in a year which saw the transition of political influence in the literary arts from the notorious excesses of RAPP to the imposed uniformity of Socialist Realism by the Union of Soviet Writers. By then, the theme of the

Civil War itself had become too well-worn even for official tastes, and Vishnevskii was accused of over-milking his inspirational source:

Совершенно очевидно, что Вишневский сказал уже всё, что мог сказать, о своих матросских героях. Их биография исчерпана "Первой конной", "Последним решительным" и "Оптимистической трагедией". Можно и должно ещё вернуться к матросской теме, но в совершенно ином разрезе. Период любования братишечным фольклором, братишечным героизмом и оригинальностью прошёл. Братишка, преодолев свою колоритность и анархичность, давно уже стал дисциплинированным, советским военным моряком, большевиком, комсомольцем, участником социалистического строительства. <sup>3</sup>

Vishnevskii himself bore witness to his repetitious theme:

13 лет варьировалась различными путями одна тема <sup>4</sup>

but, apparently, did not see this as grounds for self-criticism.

The play was based on a tale or, more accurately, ocherk, 'Kak dralis' baltitsi', from a collection, Za vlast' sovetov.<sup>5</sup> The text of the play, in its first form, appeared initially in Novyi mir in 1933. Using this version as a rough draft, the Kamerny theatre, in well-established tradition, extensively re-worked, honed and finally forged it into a spectacular drama:

. . . освобождая наш сценический багаж от ненужных наростов и балласта . . . Я (Тайров) стремился в результате произведённой работы создать большой синтетический спектакль, монументальный по своим масштабам и классический / суровой простоте. <sup>6</sup>

The play was adopted by Tairov at a time when he was under ever-increasing pressure from the Communist writers



to abandon his independent brand of 'Structural Realism' in favour of the new orthodoxy of Socialist Realism. The Kamerny had been, moreover, increasingly harshly criticized for its repertoire which was predominantly culled from foreign sources,<sup>7</sup> and its productions which were branded 'formalist' and 'aesthetic'.

In his article, 'Korni optimizma', O.Litovskii shows how the Kamerny, by 1933, had long been treading the perilous line between public popularity and official disapproval. The Kamerny's radical departure from the Stanislavskian tradition of realism which had become dull and outworn was openly (and later, implicitly) sanctioned in the pre-Revolutionary period:

Эстетская программа Камерного театра была не только направлена против натурализма . . . Художественного театра, против бытового реализма всех других театров, но и против жестокой, серой, грубой жизни

as was its policy of 'pure art' and 'lively entertainment' during the War period, but its political stance of passivism was considered an insufficiently positive political commitment and was seen as a

. . . протест бессильных, растерявшихся людей, неспособных на борьбу, и в конечном счёте такого рода пацифизм играл на-руку империалистической буржуазии. 9

Official disapproval set in as the Kamerny continued to remain in an ivory tower both artistically and politically:



Беда и вина Камерного театра заключалась в том, что он задержался на этих позициях и после Октябрьской революции.

10

It was accused of failing to acquire a modern (Soviet) repertoire because it persisted in clinging to its own brand of 'aesthetic formalism' which could not accommodate plays which were being written by Soviet (Socialist) dramatists, and this at a time when

. . . советский театр даже в лице его наиболее левых представителей пришёл уже от нигилистического, чисто формального отрицания старого театра к борьбе за новую тематику, за новое содержание, когда театр искал новые формы не в лаборатории, не изобретал и выдумывал их в тиши кабинетов и репетиционных зал, а исходя из нового содержания.

11

Ironically, it was the very reversal of this formula which accounted almost entirely for the success of the Kamerny's first approved Soviet play, for -- as even the most orthodox critics had to concede -- Optimisticheskaya tragediya was an indifferent play raised to a standard of excellence by virtue of an inspired production.

With Vakhtangov long dead and the hounded Meyerhold all but silenced by the authorities, Tairov was the chief remaining exponent of non-realist drama and consequently, given his standing, a sizeable thorn in the flesh of the conformists. Undoubtedly, therefore, Optimisticheskaya tragediya can be seen as a concession to the hardliners which got Tairov off the political hook -- a fact which emerges clearly in contemporary theatre reviews and later articles -- and bought him an indefinite stay of execution.

Optimisticheskaya tragediya lent itself to Tairov's dictum that written texts existed to be exploited rather than served by the theatre,<sup>12</sup> and while he abandoned his more extreme techniques in this production, he succeeded, by all accounts, in creating a highly original piece which was both visually and aurally stunning. The preparation of the play took place over a period lasting almost a year. Whatever its shortcomings, Optimisticheskaya tragediya offered potential for Tairov's particular talents. Its episodes of overt hostility and confrontation were its obvious source of dramatic tension representing the underlying theme:

. . . борьба между жизнью и смертью, между хаосом и гармонией, между отрицанием и утверждением 13

and from this starting-point, Tairov built up the dynamic force of the drama:

Поэтому вся эмоциональная, пластическая и ритмическая линия спектакля должна быть построена по своеобразной кривой, ведущей от отрицания к утверждению, от смерти к жизни, от хаоса к гармонии, от анархии к сознательной дисциплине. 14

His conception of the play was, as in many of his other works, musical; he saw the pull of the opposing forces as essentially contrapuntal:

Это движение, борьба центробежной и центростремительной сил, естественно должно найти своё сценическое выражение в определённом построении мизансцен, которым надлежит передать в контрапункте режиссёрской композиции: с одной стороны -- постепенность нисхождения и конечное падение центробежной силы, с другой -- утверждение возрастающей силы, центростремительной. 15



The impression gained from documentary evidence is that the staging of the play took place entirely independently of its author, rather as one might see today in the screening of a novel; Tairov's own reference to the author's intentions amounts to little more than lip service:

"Оптимистическая трагедия" произведение драматургическое, поскольку автор выявляет в нём свои идеи при помощи сценических образов, действующих в драматургических конфликтах и коллизиях.

Это произведение лирическое, поскольку автор ~~использует~~ использует не только драматургические приёмы . . . но и (дополняет) эти конфликты и сценические образы личными лирическими мотивами. 16

Even though Vishnevskii was credited with authorship of the revamped script, the 'close association with the Kamerny' is, one suspects, a euphemism for the re-writing of the play at Tairov's bidding, to meet his own requirements and constitutes another (happy) instance of the director's predominance in the Soviet theatre.

Tairov conceived the play as a series of seven dramatic clashes ('kul'minatsii'), followed by seven resolutions and the creation of seven new situations. The first of these kul'minatsii is the arrival of the commissar:

(Матросы) увидели женщину, для них необычайно интересную, импонирующую, (невольнo) разжегшую в них ещё с большой силой жажду полноты жизни перед лицом возможно близкой смерти. Отсюда желание этой женщины, отсюда то, что даётся в ремарке у автора -- "ХОХОТ, ГОГОТ жеребцов";



отсюда --огромное наслоение эротического начала, налитые кровью глаза, раскрытые рты, тянущиеся руки, напряжённые мышцы -- похоть разлита в теле каждого и в общем теле всех. 17

It is interesting to note that Tairov sought to exploit the element of sexual tension inherent in this confrontation at a time when both explicit and implicit sexuality were almost entirely absent from the Soviet stage. Additionally, Tairov's conception of this scene illustrates his desire to convey the underlying emotional truth of a shallowly-depicted episode, a problem more akin to operatic productions and significant in view of the success of Optimisticheskaya tragediya as an essentially musical play and, subsequently, as an opera.

The shooting of the sailor by the Commissar resolves this confrontation and Tairov saw the play setting off in a new direction; now the anarchists know that the Commissar is a force to be reckoned with. The second kul'minatsiya is the farewell dance; here, the Commissar has already taken the first step towards gaining the support of the crew and Alekseï by granting permission for the dance to take place against the wishes of the anarchists' leader, 'Vozhak'. The third kul'minatsiya, according to Tairov, is the declaration by the Commissar that she is 'с полком'. This is not seen as a definite decision to back either one side or the other (one might even say that it is a politically astute hedging manoeuvre) but, by its very ambiguity, it concentrates the attention of the audience on the action to come.

The fourth kul'minatsiya constitutes the crucial turning-point of the play when, owing to a series of circumstances, the Commissar gains the upper hand over the anarchists:

Это последняя стадия борьбы центробежной и центростремительной силы, самая глубокая воронка, и в эту воронку опрокидывается вожак. Победа центростремительного организующего начала над хаосом. 18

The fifth kul'minatsiya was perceived by Tairov as the moment when the Commissar tells Alekseï to play his accordion to encourage the troops in battle, thereby proclaiming the moral victory of the regiment over the enemy and, by extension, the moral victory of the Commissar, notwithstanding their subsequent capture, imprisonment and (in this version) death. The sixth kul'minatsiya, as it originally stood, was the total commitment of the captive sailors to the Commissar-as-personification of the Party which they voice to the priest:

Мы сыны трудового народа

19

This affirmation was altered in the final version to a more subtle declaration:

Комиссар: И здесь здравствуйте, товарищи.

(Негромко, ровно остатки полка ответили комиссару.)

20

The triumphant formation of the unified force (despite temporary defeat) was put back to the end of Act ii. The sixth was swiftly followed by the seventh

kul'minatsiya when the regiment went to its death 'как на большое партийное дело', and the Commissar called upon new generations of naval regiments to carry on the struggle.<sup>21</sup> This ending was later deemed to be less than optimistic and was therefore modified so that the final version involved the death of the Commissar alone. The timing of this alteration is not clear as Tairov mentions both the Commissar's heroic death (alone)<sup>22</sup> and the regiment's marching to its death after the scene with the priest quoted above<sup>23</sup> which does not appear in the modified 1933 text.

Alterations notwithstanding, the shape of the play was determined by the seven kul'minatsii, while the pace in between these moments was maintained by virtue of the perpetual -- not to say frenetic -- motion of the action:

В пьесе нет покоя, нет обыденного состояния людей: здесь бушуют и плаваются человеческие страсти отдельных людей и масс, брошенных в водоворот, порожденный социальными сдвигами Великого Октября. 24

This contributed significantly to the masking of deficiencies in the plot and dialogue.

The elements of the play which were borrowed from classical drama, namely catharsis and chorus, were largely successfully exploited, although several reviewers considered that the latter was entirely superfluous. According to Tairov, the role of the chorus was three-fold. Its main function was to reinforce the lyricism



of the play; secondly, its members participated in the action as members of the regiment; and, thirdly, it expressed the audience's reaction to the events depicted on stage.<sup>25</sup>

The play's cathartic elements Tairov saw as double-layered; on the general level, chaos and confusion were transformed through trial and torture into harmonious order, whilst on the personal level, the Commissar's heroic death sowed the seeds of hope for the next generation. The irony of the essentially Christian theme of this tale is taken up by Litovskiĭ in a reference to the printed version of Optimisticheskaya tragediya:

Объективно же мораль "Оптимистической трагедии" заключалась в преодолении смерти смертью. Идея не ахти какая новая, вполне укладывающаяся в рамки обычного христианского тезиса: "и смертью смерть поправь".<sup>26</sup> "Оптимистическая трагедия" оказалась пессимистической.

The above expiatory scene was matched by a second Christian message, this time damnatory. In his exposition of the play to his actors, Tairov likened the outbreak of the Revolution and Civil War to the opening of floodgates, so that those who tried to swim against rather than with the tide perished by it:

Эти встречные потоки центробежной и центростремительной сил неизбежно создадут в процессе своего развития крутые водовороты, которые втягивают всех тех, кто пытаются плыть не в ту сторону. Так гибнет Вожак, так гибнет и Сиплий.<sup>27</sup>

To sum up, Optimisticheskaya tragediya was a cross

between a morality play and a classical tragedy. Tairov conceived the play largely in abstract terms and executed it as a choreographic design based on contrapuntal movement to convey conflict and resolution. The emotional force of the play was created by situation rather than character, with the mass rather than the individual scenes making the most striking impact and leaving the most lasting impression. The different moods and emotions were underlined by Knipper's music and Samoïlov's expressive, quasi-cinematic lighting which included use of giant projections and silhouettes. All these elements combined to make Vishnevskii's play artistically satisfying where it was textually impoverished and presumably account for its enduring popularity with Soviet directors.

The revival which received most attention was Georgii Tovstonogov's at the Pushkin theatre, Leningrad, in 1955. for which he was awarded the Lenin prize in 1958 after the play had run for two hundred performances.

Optimisticheskaya tragediya also enjoyed a modest success in the West albeit as a vehicle for politically committed theatre companies. Thus it was performed at le Théâtre Indépendant in Paris in 1950 and again in Paris in 1959 at le Théâtre des Nations. It was also performed twice by the Berliner Ensemble in 1958 and 1961. The author himself is said to have taken part in a production

in Madrid in 1937.<sup>28</sup> New productions of this play are still appearing in the 1980s (Tovstonogov mounted another major production in 1981) and there are both film and opera versions.

The play has three acts and is not sub-divided into scenes. It stands apart from the other plays discussed here by virtue of its choreographed set 'batal'nĕ kartinĕ' and its musical punctuation which, following cinematic tradition, plays a crucial part in setting the mood and underlining the action as well as being incorporated into the actual fabric of the play. The author also employed in his tragedy the device of classical drama, the chorus, (a technique already used by him in Pervaya konnaya) whose leaders address the audience directly at regular intervals, narrating the wider circumstances of the drama and commenting upon it.

The plot, which concerns the subjugation of an anarchic crew of revolutionary sailors and their subsequent transformation into a disciplined Communist fighting regiment by a woman commissar, is one which (mutatis mutandis) is familiar to cinema audiences. The sheriff 'cleaning up' the town which is in the grip of outlaws; the detective confronting the gangster and calling his bluff; the initially unpopular teacher / social worker reforming the delinquent by a mixture of compassion and toughness are all comparable situations



whose underlying moral message is that might is not always right and that greater strength is derived from universally acknowledged virtues of courage and a sense of justice. Again, this would seem to echo a Christian theme.

The characters are recognisable types: the heroine who exerts her authority quietly but firmly, whose justice is tempered with humanity but who can be ruthless when necessary. She never flinches from difficult decisions, never fails to make the right one and, ultimately, sacrifices herself for the cause. Also featured is the loyal henchman, initially the Commissar's lone ally, the natural heir to the comic 'bratishka' characters who abound in the Civil War literature and drama, here embodied in the 'little Finn', Väinönen. The reformed hooligan who, like all converts, becomes the most fanatical of supporters, rejecting totally his former life and associates, is here represented by Aleksei. In the original Kamerny production, care was taken to ensure that this character did not degenerate into yet another 'bratishka' role.<sup>29</sup> The chief enemy is the bullying leader of the anarchists, designated simply 'Vozhak', whose power over the crew is maintained by physical threat and who is utterly devoid of redeeming features. His principal accomplice, Sipliyi, is also a political incurable unable to shake off the malignant influence of Vozhak, which is crudely symbolized in the disease to which his name alludes, contracted initially

in the West:

По два раза сифилисом болели: один раз европейским, другой -- американским.<sup>30</sup>

The representatives of the Whites, the captain and the two prisoners, are essentially 'decent types' who see the error of their former ways and who, subsequently, embrace Communism. Against their example is set the faceless enemy, the Interventionist forces, who refuse to acknowledge Communist supremacy and are, therefore, doomed to defeat.

The minor characters are Communists -- with the exception of the boatswain who may be seen as a fellow-traveller -- and are designated 'old sailor', 'tall sailor' and 'pock-marked sailor'; they alone speak out against the tyranny and inhumanity of Vozhak. The remaining mass of the crew is cast in the familiar mould of good but simple souls who are too easily intimidated but who require nothing more than the strong leadership of the commissar to reform and set themselves once more upon the path of unswerving loyalty to the Party.

Clearly, these superficially-drawn characters offered little scope for penetrating psychological insights but plenty for emotional registration, potential which, by all accounts, was well exploited by Tairov's highly-trained actors in the original performance.<sup>31</sup>

The author's notes which feature in the body of the text are not simply stage directions but, with their poetic descriptions and ironical references, are clues to the director about the mood and message which Vishnevskii is seeking to convey to his audience. The opening note, for example, is clearly designed to be read:

Музыкальное вступление. Рев, подавляющий мощью и скорбью. Стремительные взрывы могучего восторга, теснящего дыхания и обжигающего. Шум человеческих деяний, тоскливый вопль "зачем?", неистовые искания ответов и нахождения.

Нас было восемьдесят пять тысяч балтийских и сорок тысяч черноморских матросов. Мы также искали ответов.

И вот двое и их разговор.

32

It represents a legacy of the play's original literary form as presented in Novyi mir in early 1933.<sup>33</sup> The first variation was called Gimn matrosam and then changed to Triumfal'naya tragediya before the final title was arrived at.

Act i opens with the musical prelude referred to above. The ghosts of two sailors who fought and died in the Civil War appear onstage and proceed to discuss their descendants, the audience, who are alive and well, thanks to their sacrifice. The conventional roles are reversed and the members of the audience find themselves the object of the players' curiosity. They are addressed directly but not forced to participate. The sailors' language moves abruptly from the vernacular to the declamatory as they formally introduce the play:



Ну что ж, начнём! (как вступление к поэме). Отложите свои вечерние дела. Матросский полк, прошедший свой путь до конца, обращается к вам -- к потомству.

34

Huge armour-plated covers slide back to reveal the hatch leading to below deck. In brilliantly-reflected light, the ship's company marches in and assembles in front of the audience as a vast chorus. The second sailor from the opening dialogue becomes the coryphaeus and, on behalf of the sailors, addresses their bereaved womenfolk, exhorting them to be happy, for life continues despite tragedy and the sailors who sacrificed themselves were glad to ensure the survival of posterity:

Люди умеют смеяться и есть пищу над могилами ближних. И это прекрасно! "Будьте бодрей! -- просили бойцы, погибая. -- Гляди веселей революция!" Полк обращается, сказал я, к потомству. Он избавляет вас от всяких поминок. Он предлагает молча подумать, постигнуть, что же в сущности для нас борьба и смерть. Итак, началось с того, что ...

35

By using the cinematic device of flashback, the audience is invited to go back in time to the period of the Civil War. As the drama commences, the mood is changed by the use of sad music and dimmed lighting. The first exchange is between the 'little Finn', Vaïnonen, and the 'pock-marked' sailor, while off-stage, Alekseï can be heard tormenting his latest woman, an activity which is clearly disapproved of by the Finn. Alekseï then appears on stage, hawking the woman, an offer which is declined by Vaïnonen. Alekseï is unrepentant and stoutly defends his behaviour as justifiable comfort-seeking in an indifferent and inhospitable world:

Во первых, уют, во-вторых, ласка, в-третьих, ей материальное обеспечение.

36

Alekseĭ claims that the social upheaval of the Civil War has left him confused, an amoralist with no well-defined laws to follow. Vainonen is revealed as the Party man when, in response to Alekseĭ's question:

Что теперь значит хорошо?

37

he offers the coming Socialism. Alekseĭ asks what comfort may be derived from this Utopian future by those facing the immediate prospect of death in battle, to which Vainonen replies 'everlasting memory'. This -- not unnaturally -- provokes a sardonic response from Alekseĭ, but Vainonen counters his negativism with a vigorously impassioned speech:

Это совсем не смешно, и ты дурак!.. Кто погибнет, так погибнет, чорт его дери, первый раз почеловечески ...  
А то как мясо, убойна, потроха, по две копейки шли ... 38

Alekseĭ pursues his argument no further but remains sceptical about putting his hope and trust into an unknown future. 'Ryaboĭ' observes that Alekseĭ's flippant exterior belies genuine doubt and despair; he has travelled the world and found neither happiness nor meaning to his life.

This exchange is followed by a musical interlude, a melancholic song sung by one of the men underlining the disaffection and despair of the sailors. The prevailing mood of despondency is suddenly disrupted by the

announcement that a commissar has been appointed to their ship. The news is greeted with dismay by the crew -- with the exception of Vaïnonen -- and is conveyed immediately to the anarchist leader, Vozhak, who now makes his entrance before the cringing company. The ensuing pronouncements indicate that the Commissar will be given a rough reception. Unbeknown to them, the Commissar is a woman who is already in their midst so that, forewarned, she is forearmed. In the meantime, there is a sharp exchange between Vozhak and his henchman, Alekseï, over whom he attempts to assert his authority -- an indication of the incipient rift between these hitherto close allies.

The Commissar with her natural perspicacity realizes that she must deal with Vozhak to whom she now proceeds to show her official papers. Vozhak remains inscrutable on meeting her, betraying no surprise at her sex, appearing to accept her official status and enquiring only into her political affiliation. The effect of her entrance on the rest of the crew is devastating; tension is created by the mere presence of the Commissar, which is at variance with her surroundings, rather than by dialogue, for she says relatively little. This latter fact was, precisely, to prove one of the difficulties of the role as recorded by its first interpreter, Alica Koonen.<sup>39</sup> From the outset, the Commissar establishes her independence. She is an example of the new Soviet woman; hence she



firmly declines the (semi-ironic) offer by Vozhak and Siplýř to carry her luggage. At this point, the newly-appointed Captain appears, a former officer of the Imperial Navy. Labouring under the misapprehension that the Commissar is a damsel in distress, he finds not only his gallant offer of assistance rebuffed, but also his use of pre-revolutionary rank censured. Thus the Commissar establishes the professional basis of their relationship which is accepted correctly, if not gracefully, by the Captain.

This encounter is immediately followed by the first open mutiny by the crew where the anarchists, led by Alekseř, threaten to rape the Commissar. She stands her ground, refusing to be intimidated. Eventually, one of the sailors tries to call her bluff, whereupon she shoots him dead. At this dramatic high point (Tairov's first kul'minatsiya) with the tables turned and the men retreating, the Commissar, employing derisively prim language, first challenges the men and then delivers to them a short homily as if she were remonstrating with a group of over-excited children. The ensuing tense silence is broken first, by the belated arrival of Vařnonen and a small group of would-be rescuers and, secondly, by the entrance of Vozhak who, summing up the situation, casually kicks the corpse down the hatch.

The next trial of nerves follows immediately; the

Commissar orders Party members and sympathizers to remain behind, but they -- with the exception of Vaïnonen -- are prevailed upon by Siplýř's strong arm tactics to attend the 'general meeting' instead. The Commissar and Vaïnonen are left face to face alone, but acknowledging the invisible presence of the Party. At this point, the coryphaei interpose to point out to the audience the number of Communists who were actively engaged in fighting during this period.

The next scene is devoted to a move by the Commissar to consolidate her position on board. Her orders, given to the Boatswain and Commander are uncertainly received in view of the continuing influence of Vozhak. The Commissar reveals that the company is to set sail the following day to engage the Interventionist forces. She then sets herself to resolve the leadership struggle with Vozhak. The latter has already revealed to his accomplices that his tolerance of her is based on self-interest. He thinks that it will be easier to manipulate her than any other (male) commissar who would undoubtedly be sent to replace her if she were killed. In the scene which follows, the Commissar, with the blind courage of a fanatic, decides to engage, single-handed, the combined forces of her three chief opponents, viz. Vozhak, Siplýř and Alekseř, in verbal combat. The ensuing debate has an authentic ring about it, allowing as it does the anarchists to put forward a convincing case. They question the Party's assumption that they should accept on trust the authority of a naive

and relatively inexperienced young woman and that they should be prepared to die for a cause which means nothing to them. Their (entirely defensible) argument is met by the simplistic glibness and unfounded self-assurance of a bigot:

Вожак: . . . Партия, твоя вот партия, у власти стала людям, которые за неё головы отдадут, какие-то условия. Это что же, как же?

Комиссар: Очень просто. Знаем, куда и как идти, и ставим, и принимают. Не принимали бы, мы не могли бы ставить.

Алексей: Вы, может, нас и умирать учить будете?

Комиссар: Придётся -- увидим.

40

A secondary conflict breaks out in the course of this scene when, in a genuine cri de coeur, Aleksei declares that he can put his faith in neither the Commissar nor Vozhak as both are lying. He reveals Vozhak's intention to frighten off the Commissar -- an accusation which is nervously laughed off by the former, with the latter ostensibly playing along -- and declares the Commissar's words to be so much cant:

И ты тоже, тихоня, переговорчики делаешь, смиренная, умная сидишь: " вас учиться буду...." "Понимаю ..." Стерва -- тоже врешь! Видели мы, как моряков шлепает: раз и готово.

41

The Commissar, in true political fashion, ignores the direct criticism and underlying political argument to enquire whether Aleksei is a Communist anarchist. He retorts that no one asked to see his Party membership card when he was storming the Winter Palace and declares that he owes allegiance to no political party. The Commissar,



at this point, leaves the men with the message that in their experience lies the Company's hope of victory. Having sown these seeds of positive thought, the Commissar hopes that they can all come to an understanding. The anarchists, however, are far from being won over. The short exchange which follows the Commissar's departure, nevertheless, bears witness to the disintegration of the long-established partnership between Aleksei and Vozhak. Whilst, outwardly, reconciliation takes place over Aleksei's betrayal of Vozhak's intentions to the Commissar, there remains mutual distrust. Once Aleksei has left the room, Vozhak renounces his friendship before the weak and fearful Siplýř who, having witnessed the scene, is left with no support to which to cling:

Кому доверять? Только тебе?

Vozhak's comfortless answer betrays the depths of his own nihilism:

Тоже не верь. Все лживые скоты. Все отправлены. Под 42  
корень всех рубить надо -- в каждом старая жизнь сидит.

At this point, the coryphaei again interpose a reminder to the audience of the foreign enemies, counter-revolutionaries and anarchists who were besieging the Reds. Thus punctuated, the struggle continues in the next scene with another confrontation.

The Captain, asserting his authority, orders the boatswain to summon the men to assemble on deck. A few of the Party sympathizers obey, but the order is largely

ignored and then cancelled by Vozhak's countermand that the men be left undisturbed to enjoy their last day in port. The band-master is exhorted to play non-military music for the benefit of the men, which he proceeds to do. The music soon dies away, however, as Siplýř storms in to announce that an old woman has had her purse stolen by one of the sailors. Their concern seems uncharacteristic and, indeed, represents a weakness in the plot, but this incident heralds the kangaroo court scene in which one of the Party sympathizers is accused of the deed on very flimsy evidence and is summarily executed by being thrown overboard. The subsequent discovery of the purse lying accidentally forgotten in the old woman's pocket sanctions the same treatment for her. The Commissar arrives too late to prevent the second murder and is herself prevented from finding out about it by Siplýř's stifling of the old sailor who wishes to speak out.

A change of mood occurs with the entrance of Alekseř (who has taken no part in the preceding action) asking for permission to hold a ship's farewell dance. There is general jubilation at this prospect, almost immediately subdued as the baleful Vozhak enters. The Commissar, in timely fashion, pre-empts his objection by giving the order for the dance to take place and thereby carrying with her the consensus of the ship's company (Tairov's second kul'minatsiya).

As preparations for the dance take place, the first coryphaeus reminds the audience of the poignancy of the farewell dances which took place during that period, when the participants knew that many men would never return from the front.

The dance and leave-taking is then acted out in pantomime -- the first of several which were unanimously praised in the original production -- using the music to express the agony of parting. In the ensuing silence, the ship sails away from the quay and the act concludes with an uneven valedictory volley of guns.

Act ii commences with another pantomime, this time a simulated night attack in which the sailors eventually repulse the enemy. As the music, representing the sounds of battle, recedes into the background, the lights go up to reveal the scene set on the moored ship on the morning after the battle. All is apparently -- and surprisingly -- calm. The Commissar is shown reading (aloud) through her letter home -- the only reference throughout the play to her personal life -- in which she voices her difficulties in her present position. She is interrupted by the boatswain bringing orders for her to sign; she is clearly in charge of the practical day-to-day running of the ship and no detail escapes her notice. She is also supremely confident about the country's future, given the turmoil around her, and is quick to give reassurance



to those who still have doubts:

Боцман: Неужели порядок в России начинается.

Комиссар: Будьте спокойны, начался.

43

Vainonen appears next; he has by now assumed the role of the Commissar's chief confidant and uses the familiar form of address. She discusses with him her strategy for welding the crew into a single harmonious body: firstly, she plans to summon the Party faithful; secondly, divide -- and so conquer -- Vozhak and Alekseĭ and finally, sound out the Captain to see whether he can be persuaded to the Communist cause. Vainonen is sceptical about this latter point and looks askance at the said Captain as he now appears in response to the Commissar's summons. He is congratulated on his high standard of professional conduct in the previous night's skirmish but, although polite, he is not to be easily won over. He is, moreover, dubious about the Commissar's chances of coaxing the crew to her side with promises of a better future. In the course of the wide-ranging discussion which follows, in which respective misconceptions are mutually aired (although, naturally, the Commissar retains the upper hand), it emerges that the Captain has a genuine grievance, for his family has been killed by the Reds. The Commissar sympathizes, and denounces the indiscriminate slaughter of Whites by over-zealous Communists; rather, she advocates propaganda and persuasion to bring non-supporters over to her side:

Может быть, такие прямолинейные, как ты, (Vainonen) и расстреляли его семью. . . . Он (the Captain) растерян, бравирует, барахтается, но служить он нам будет. 44

Alekseĭ is called next as the Commissar initiates her 'divide and rule' campaign. This scene constitutes the central political debate of the play and marks Alekseĭ's incipient conversion to Communist orthodoxy. Alekseĭ is first reprimanded (mildly, in view of the circumstances) for his distinct absence of valour during the previous night's attack. He defiantly retorts that he is only concerned with saving his own skin, that he is a petty bourgeois at heart and that any call to sacrifice himself for the sake of unknown masses is meaningless to him. He rejects outright the Communist ethic and accuses the Party of basking in self-created glory. The Commissar wins this round, however, by extracting the reluctant admission that Alekseĭ voted for the Bolshevik party at the election if only because:

Вы всё-таки получше, чем другие.

45

The Commissar tries a different tack, suggesting that Alekseĭ is afraid of Vozhak, which he denies. She proposes order against anarchy and the tyranny of Vozhak; Alekseĭ counter-proposes freedom:

Да людям хочется после "порядка" свободу чувствовать, хоть видимость свободы, а не порядок. 46

There follows an exchange on private property and self-interest. The Commissar's words ring hollow to Alekseĭ:

Кого обманиваете? Себя. Этакая маленькая штучка -- "моё". На этой вот штучке и споткнёмся ... 47

In her vision of a better world, the Commissar presents the romantically naive image of the peasant who, recognizing that he has been ill-served by previous ruling bodies, will, after due consideration, come to realize that Communist philosophy will bring security and prosperity:

И пойдёт твой мужик, умный он, глазастый: "Нельзя ли с вами в долю?" 48

The Commissar's arguments clearly start to make an impression on Aleksei although he is not yet prepared to capitulate and disguises his emotion with facetiousness. Moreover, he is captivated not only by her eloquence (rather than soundness of argument), but by her other charms which possibly give her an unfair advantage:

Гляжу я на тебя, мы тут всё насчёт принципов перебрасываемся, а я не стыдно признаться -- вот думаю: отчего такая баба и не моя? 49

His overtures are firmly, albeit good-humouredly, rebuffed by the Commissar in the quaint euphemistic language employed in her previous ordeal:

Опять браком заинтересовался? 50

as she hands him a glass of water (!).

There follows a timely interruption by the Captain and Boatswain, the former demanding to be allowed to take



full command of the ship as his present position is untenable. Hard on his heels come Vozhak and Siplýř with a harsh counter-demand that all former tsarist officers be removed from positions of command. The Commissar is put on the spot; both sides pressurize her to declare her backing. She declares herself, finally, to be 'с полком' which is taken as withdrawal of support from the Captain, (Tairov's third kul'minatsiya). The respectively crest-fallen and exultant parties exeunt, leaving the Commissar alone to consider her position. She draws small comfort from the tiny group of supporters assembled by Vainonen to whom she now communicates the bad news that Vozhak has sent for reinforcements. Clearly, their only recourse lies with the rest of the ship's company. Their deliberations on whether or not to incorporate the Captain in the struggle and how to convey their message to the remainder of the crew are interrupted first, by a disconsolate Alekseř who is wandering in a political no-man's land, as yet unaccepted by the Communists, and secondly, by Siplýř. The latter is acting as errand-boy for Vozhak who has lost no time in making out an order for the Captain's recall to H.Q. which the Commissar is to sign. Hurriedly, the little group decides that it must make a last-ditch attempt to persuade the men to their side by addressing them directly, from the heart. It is agreed that they will speak individually, in turn, commencing with the Commissar, and that they must be prepared to die in the event of their sermons being ill-received. This dramatic

moment is punctuated by the two coryphaei declaring that all partisan detachments which refused to submit to Bolshevik authority and who persisted in fomenting unrest in the regular ranks were executed, but as the Commissar is so overwhelmingly outnumbered, this option is not open to her. The dire straits of the Communists are now underlined by the appearance of the anarchists; Siplýř is seen cleaning weapons as an ominous prelude to the second kangaroo court scene. Two captured officers are brought before Vozhak. It transpires that they have escaped from a German PoW camp and, hearing of the momentous changes in their native land, have made the long journey back in the hope of reaching home and being reunited with their families. One of them is suffering from shell-shock and has lost his hearing, while his fellow officer, who acts as his interpreter, has lost an arm. The two men are sympathetically portrayed. They have been victims of circumstance who were mobilized to fight in the Imperial Army and who hold no allegiance to the old régime. They are obviously genuine in their welcome of the Bolshevik government, wish to take part in the new society and are willing to put their entire trust in its members; hence their bewilderment at the hostile reception from these sailors. Despite the demonstrable truth and transparent sincerity of their story, Vozhak's implacable prejudice finds a spurious pretext for having the two men shot. The harrowing sight of these two victims of such a miscarriage of justice even provokes a modicum of reaction from the hitherto remarkably inert company, although it is



left mainly to the old sailor and Alekseï to speak out.

The Commissar arrives on the scene to be told of the events; she issues the order to the execution squad to hold fire which is communicated seconds too late. This creates the grounds for Vozhak to be challenged before the assembled crew with the catalogue of his crimes. He shrugs them off, asserting that Whites past or present deserve to be killed. Anticipating the forthcoming dispatch of the Captain, he urges the Commissar to read out the order for his recall. The Commissar produces the order and, with a theatrical pause, alters the contents to an improvised condemnation of Vozhak which is met by general approbation. Thus, the tables are finally turned on the arch-enemy who is executed forthwith, thereby freeing the crew from his reign of terror (Tairov's fourth kul'minatsiya which marked the turning-point of the play). His final cry of 'Long live the Revolution' is rejected by Alekseï on the grounds that the Revolution cannot be tainted by this deviant loyalty. It was true that the anarchists had helped to overthrow the ruling class, thereby serving the Bolshevik cause, but those who subsequently failed to abandon rebellious anarchy in favour of disciplined service to the Party had no place in the new Soviet society. With the ship's company won over, the Commissar reinstates the Captain before finding herself faced with a new threat, the arrival of the anarchist reinforcements. The latter are rapidly advised of Vozhak's execution and, following a few words from the Commissar



in which she prevails upon them to give the military salute, and faced with the closed ranks of the company, they feel compelled to join the regular force which promptly marches off in exemplary military order to face the perils ahead. Although the perfunctory nature of this scene would seem to indicate a change in the script as discussed earlier, and the march past of the unified force does not coincide with the verbal declaration of allegiance as originally intended. The conclusion of the act is nevertheless both visually and aurally impressive:

Комиссар: Ну, товарищи, теперь -- первое здравствуйте в регулярной Красной армии!

(Полк даёт громовой ответ. Он звучит как первый крик могучей армии. Движение полка прекрасно.)

51

Act iii, the last and shortest act, depicts the ultimate test and sacrifice of the Commissar. As it opens, she is deploying her troops. She divides them into three battalions, one of which is to be led by the Captain, one by the old sailor (who is rather flustered by his promotion) and one by her. She announces that they are to engage the enemy, an infantry brigade, which is marching towards their sector. They discuss strategy; the Captain advises meeting the brigade head on with two battalions whilst keeping the third (with the least experienced leader) in reserve. Naturally, his suggestion is dismissed as old-style Imperial strategy which is not appropriate to their situation. Aleksei enters diffidently, but is invited to join the initiated, an indication that he is now regarded as a true comrade. He

is called upon to endorse the Commissar's own strategic plan which calls for a pincer movement. Finally, it is agreed that the battalion led by the Commissar, accompanied by Alekseï, Vaïnonen and the Boatswain, will bear the brunt of the attack, while the second and third battalions carry out outflanking manoeuvres to deal a combined body blow to the enemy.

The preparations for the military operation are now conveyed in pantomime whilst the Coryphaei relate the glory and hardships of the Soviet Navy at war.

The plot is resumed as the relief guard, Siplýï, arrives to take over from the duty guard, Vaïnonen. The unwise (and implausible) choice of Siplýï is revealed when he stabs the Finn to death in retaliation for the debacle of the anarchists and then, abandons his post, leaving a breach for the enemy. The latter promptly arrive and attack the first battalion which puts up a brave fight, spurred on by the rallying call of Alekseï's accordion which he plays at the Commissar's bidding (Tairov's sixth kul'minatsiya). The comrades are eventually overpowered and captured. Amidst stifled shouts of solidarity, they are led away.

Again, the action is commented upon by the Coryphaei who bear witness to the courage and loyalty of Communist troops who defended the cause until death.

The scene is now set in the enemy camp where the captured sailors are imprisoned but not subdued. Indeed, they are even more united in adversity. The only dissenting and potentially disruptive voice emanates from the deposed leader of the anarchist reinforcement detachment who is unsympathetically portrayed as a thickly-accented native of Odessa. His function in this scene is to seek to undermine the trust which the prisoners have placed in the Captain, for in him lies their only hope of salvation. The Commissar, addressing her men, stresses the importance of holding silence under interrogation and of holding out until the arrival of the other two battalions.

At this point, Siplýř is brought in under guard and his treachery is revealed. He is led away before he can be lynched by the sailors. His departure, however, is overshadowed by the removal of the Commissar for interrogation. There is only a quarter of an hour left before the time appointed for the Captain's attack.

As the tension mounts, the anarchist leader loses control and throws a fit, which the other sailors regard as an act of cowardice. An officer returns to invite the men to save their necks by divulging information, but the sailors close ranks and refuse to co-operate. A priest is sent to give the last rites prior to their execution. The men, following Alekseř's example, profess interest in the salvation of their souls in order to prolong the



proceedings and so buy time.

At the eleventh hour, they are, of course, saved by the arrival of their fellow men. The storming of the prison is conveyed almost purely aurally, in darkness. As the lights go up, the re-formed company emerges, solemnly bearing the blood-drenched body of the dying Commissar. She has held out under torture and thus saved the day. The general grief is conveyed by Alekseï who, in a scene reminiscent of the finale of Shtorm, proclaims their victory to the dying Commissar. She asks Alekseï to play a tune on the accordion and an appropriately poignant theme is chosen. The Commissar's expiring words are (inevitably):

Держите марку военного флота ...

52

The company pays its respects in silence. After a pause, this silence is broken by a musical military call enjoining the men to carry on the fight. The music concludes on an upbeat note, affirming the continuation of life for the majority, thanks to the sacrifice of the few, and underlining the general optimism to be derived from this individual tragedy.

By and large, Tairov may be said to have suppressed any potential character development. One might speculate that he was more interested in form than content or, perhaps, recognising that the characters were superficial and psychologically unconvincing, he dispensed with any in-

depth analysis, but sought, rather, to define broadly and exploit the pathos of each character as well as the conflict between them. Additionally, Tairov sought to imbue the characters with credibility by means of an emotional truth and to establish the motivation underlying their actions. In this way, coherence and conviction were achieved in otherwise shallowly-depicted character interaction. Thus, for example, the Commissar's sincerity is never in doubt even though she is little more than two-dimensional as a character. The characters offered no opportunity for subtle portrayal; the actors could not analyse them in depth because there was no depth. The strongest scenes were, by consensus, those featuring sailor masses rather than individuals. The former were, in Tairov's words, of a very different nature from the 'bratishki' who had hitherto been represented on stage. These sailors were:

крестьяне, пришедшие из деревень, и рабочие, пришедшие из города с фабрик и заводов. Но это рабочие, которые в большинстве случаев ещё не до конца сумели стать пролетариями, так как на военную службу поступали очень рано и пролетарские навыки не успели по-настоящему внедриться в сознание каждого отдельного матроса.

53

Siplýi is also a peasant and obviously a poor one. He is used to being dominated, is emotionally and morally weak and is therefore compelled to rely on Vozhak. Unable to cope with the freedom of anarchy, he is in a constant state of fear, and his mindless terror leads him to betray the crew, 'like Judas'.<sup>54</sup> His outward swaggering totally belies inner turmoil; peace eludes him as he finds him-



self unable to join the Communist brotherhood and he represents a canker in society. This is symbolized by his rotting body:

Он чувствует, что его организм отравлен ядом. Смерть подстерегает его с двух сторон, извне и изнутри 55

Vozhak, the arch-villain of the piece, represents the kulak class. He is physically powerful -- he was played in the original production by the bulky actor, Tsenin -- and is a tyrant and bully who has scant regard for human life even among his so-called supporters. Vozhak is, therefore, both a personal and a class enemy whose black nihilism is symptomatic of a destructive will and inner despair:

Утверждение себя вопреки всем. Здесь есть национальные корни русского "зажиточного мужика", как говорили до революции, со всеми нарастающими в нём индивидуалистическими хозяйскими навыками, навыками кулацкими. 56

The Captain, bearing the tell-tale Germanic surname, is the representative of the former ruling class who is held in suspicion by the rest of the crew. Perhaps surprisingly, he is an essentially 'decent type' who is ahead of his time and, presumably, untypical of his class in recognising the inevitable destruction of that class and embracing the Communist brave new world. Writing from the perspective of the thirties, Vishnevskii causes his all-wise Commissar to perceive in the Captain a potential ally, thereby expressing the Party's policy of conciliation and gentle persuasion rather than confrontation and coercion.



The boatswain is another character who is in a political no-man's land. He is a petty bourgeois, a bandsman to whom the Navy is a way of life. He abhors the disorder and despairs of the anarchy among the crew. He sees the Commissar as the crew's only hope of salvation and so he puts his faith in her and supports her in her struggle to establish order and discipline. The boatswain's religious faith was dismissed by Tairov as 'привычная и подсознательная',<sup>57</sup> whereas, he claimed, the sea and his ship constituted his true spiritual life. It is his emotional and spiritual commitment to them which accounts for his unswerving loyalty to the Commissar, according to Tairov.<sup>58</sup>

Vaïnonen, the 'little Finn', the first and, initially, only Communist ally of the Commissar, is a bratishka figure without any trace of the broad humour which characterizes them in the earlier plays. He is an honest, loyal and courageous partisan, ready to voice his support and to stand up to the verbal pressure and physical threats of the rest of the crew. His refusal to be bullied or browbeaten makes him an admirable figure although his intolerance of less committed souls taints him with self-righteousness and dogmatism, a danger against which the more enlightened Commissar warns. Initially, Vaïnonen is the trusted confidant of the Commissar, the only person on whom she can rely for support and with whom she can discuss strategy but later, he is replaced by the flawed but more

human Aleksei. Vañnonen gives his life for the Communist cause although, oddly, his death passes almost unremarked and unmarked by his comrades, which possibly represents a dramatic oversight. A question mark also remains over his nationality as one wonders why Vishnevskii should have chosen a Finn rather than a Russian for this politically important role.

Aleksei is an ex-factory worker who proclaims his urban origins by singing workers' rather than peasants' songs. This representative of the proletariat holds the key role of convert transformed from anarchic rebel to disciplined Communist fighter as a result of his exposure to the ideas of the Party as expounded by the Commissar. This rather begs the question whether Aleksei would have responded as positively to any other (male) Party representative and whether his motives for changing political allegiance are politically pure or, indeed, purely political. The potential love interest in the plot -- which Tairov referred to as a genuine, great and tragic love<sup>59</sup> -- is not allowed to develop. At best, Aleksei's love for the (prim) Commissar can be seen as unrequited and, therefore, unfulfilled, and at worst, a passing unrealistic (and inexplicable) fancy. The overriding impression left with the audience is genuine affection and admiration for a true comrade. This has to be played as such, otherwise Aleksei's reaction to the Commissar's death would sound false and would weaken the dramatic impact of her death. Tairov saw in Aleksei the



most interesting character of the play undoubtedly offering more meat to the actor than the other roles.

Alekseĭ was played in the original Kamerny production by the insufferably egocentric actor, Zharov, who relates a telling incident about the staging of the crucial interview scene in Act ii between Alekseĭ and the Commissar which Tairov altered during one rehearsal for artistically valid reasons. Zharov took umbrage at being made to stand with his back to the audience instead of in profile and stormed out of rehearsal. Vishnevskii took it upon himself to soothe the actor's ruffled feathers and persuaded him to rejoin the cast. Clearly, inflated egos were still one of the major problems with which the director had to contend. This anecdote was related by Zharov, not against himself, but in praise of Vishnevskii.<sup>60</sup>

According to Alisa Koonen, Tairov's wife and the actress who created the role of the Commissar, she considered this to be the most difficult role in the play (which could possibly be interpreted as a euphemism for the role which offered the least acting potential). The difficulty derives not only from the fact that such a role was far removed from the exotic and romantic roles which Koonen was used to playing, but also and mainly from the fact that the Commissar is used largely as a mouthpiece for the Party and, other than that, has little to say. Tairov decided to tackle the problem by making the role essentially pantomimic, claiming that in the silences lay



the key to the role.<sup>61</sup> His idea was that she should convey inner depths by means of her reactions (rather than actions). By then entrusting the role to his diminutive leading actress, a memorable portrait of the Commissar, judging by contemporary theatre reviews, was created out of minimal raw material. Despite the Commissar's representing the Party, Koonen claimed that there was a total absence of agitative monologues.<sup>62</sup> She is the embodiment of:

сила разума, сила воли, сила идеала, сила идеи . . . 63

who acts as a counterweight to the brutal force of Vozhak and is a small, vulnerable but morally superior figure making a gallant stand against apparently overwhelming odds. The emotive element of this role lies in the nature and, to some extent, appearance of the Commissar rather than in her actions. In the hands of an appealing and accomplished actress such as Alisa Koonen the 'patetika' could be exploited to the hilt. Interestingly, Koonen's portrayal was essentially feminine rather than feminist:

В этой роли мне прежде всего хотелось отойти от ~~театрального~~ театрального штампа, от трафарета "железного комиссара", хотелось создать образ, воздействующий глубокой внутренней верой и убеждённостью. Хотелось показать, что логика и страстность партийной правды могут звучать в женском образе не менее убедительно, чем в мужском. Работая над ролью комиссара, я отказалась от игры "под мужчину", практиковавшейся в те годы на сцене в подобных случаях. Мне хотелось показать свою героиню женственной, лиричной, спокойной, человеческой.<sup>64</sup>

As this new departure from the female type typically represented in the Civil War drama of the twenties

coincided with the new departure in Koonen roles, the development could be seen as symbiotic. Not only would the early crusading, mannish 'leather jackets' have seemed uncomfortably ludicrous ten years on, but it would also have been inconceivably inappropriate for the petite and sophisticated actress to have attempted such a portrayal. The advent of a more feminine 'new Soviet woman' as well as an approvable Soviet role for the distinguished actress was gladly received in official reviews:

Вот перед кем (Alisa Koonen) стояла действительно трудная ответственная задача, трудная и субъективно, потому что образ комиссара не имеет никаких точек соприкосновения со всей галлеей трагических героинь, которые исполняла до сих пор эта замечательная актриса, -- и объективно, потому что предстояло дать образ настоящей боевой партийки, лишённый однако всех канонических для "женщины в кожаных куртках" черт. И надо признать, что победа Камерного театра и его руководителя А. Таирова явилась также победой его и лучшей актрисы. <sup>65</sup>

The same point is taken up by I. Aleksandrov three years later:

Для образа комиссара А. Коонен нашла такие краски и интонации, что все знавшие её прежде были поражены новизной этих приёмов, широтой и глубиной её актёрского диапазона. Коонен искала характер роли в походке, в манере разговаривать и глядеть на партнера, двигаться и действовать. Но главное в этой новой для Коонен роли было то, что актриса играла не только женщину-комиссара, но и комиссара-женщину. Она не скрывала природную женственность своей героини. Поэтому комиссар не стал скучной "кожаной курткой", хотя Коонен весь спектакль носила именно такую куртку. <sup>66</sup>

The actress recollected many years later how the aforementioned jacket took a lot of finding as no one could provide an authentic-looking model. Eventually, a sailor



who knew that the company was looking for this particular prop, succeeded in finding the genuine article which he proudly presented to them.<sup>67</sup>

To sum up, the sensitivity and touching lyricism of Koonen's performance were unanimously praised and it is doubtful, notwithstanding subsequent excellent productions of Optimisticheskaya tragediya, whether it has ever been surpassed:

Смысл "Оптимистической трагедии", весь характер, внутренний мир женщины-комиссара проясняется в сцене смерти, прощальных словах: "Держите марку Красного флота!" С исключительной простотой, с душевным пафосом, в котором много и суровой трезвости и лирики, произносит Коонен эти<sup>68</sup> слова.

The minor characters who form a significant part of the large cast do not so much contribute to a rich fabric of character interaction as perform a symbolically representative function. This is particularly noticeable in the 'polk' which is portrayed as a singularly passive corporate mass. The two PoW escapees are shown as ingenuous souls whose cruel fate engenders pity but little else. The anarchist reinforcements are unremittingly bad and, consequently, their unquestioning loyalty to Vozhak appears out of character. The only incidental interesting feature about them is that their own leader is designated a native of Odessa whose cowardly behaviour and crude, thick accent would appear to indicate the same racial prejudice which was noted in Shtorm. The Interventionists



scarcely appear; they remain, by and large, the faceless enemy whose brutality is fully implied in the torturing of the Commissar. The priest who is summoned for the last rites in Act iii supplies the pretext for a satirical stab at the Church. The doubling of the ship's company as the chorus of ghosts of perished sailors is both dramatically and symbolically effective even though the leaders' utterances are ponderous rather than moving.

From records and reviews it would appear that brilliant acting and ensemble playing together with imaginative set design, lighting and music under Tairov's direction overcame the turgidity of the text. Although, technically, Optimisticheskaya tragediya was first put on at the Kievskii russkii teatr in 1933, the Kamerny production was and is considered to be the definitive first production of the play.

Given the extraordinary political pressures of the thirties begs the question whether there is any value in an examination of contemporary critical reviews. The majority of theatre critics were undoubtedly Party hacks, but there is some virtue, nevertheless, in examining their impressions recorded 'between the lines'. There was virtual consensus on both the strengths and weaknesses of the play and production, namely: the indifferent quality of the text, the superb quality of the acting and the superlative quality of the whole production, particularly the choreography of the pantomimic scenes and the set

designs.

The Kamerny's production of Optimisticheskaya tragediya, which had its première in December 1933, met with immediate success. Despite the general acknowledgement of its high artistic standard, the critics' praise was not, of course, unmitigated as they were bound to find fault -- however nit-picking -- with the hitherto recalcitrant director who persisted in his 'formalist' and 'aesthetic' path as well as hedging his political bets. The criticism, however, tended to be of a vague, unspecified nature and in no way diminished either the merit or success of the production. The reviews could be seen as furnishing Tairov's critics with the opportunity for castigating him for his previous artistic deviations whilst rewarding him for his apparent reform.

For Tairov it was a question of survival; if he wished to retain his post (at the very least), he had to make more than a token placatory gesture to the authorities. Optimisticheskaya tragediya offered an ideal vehicle for appeasing official wrath whilst displaying the talent of the Kamerny's ensemble playing and allowing it to follow its own dictum of using rather than serving history, as Litovskiĭ observed.<sup>69</sup> The mass scenes gave opportunity for bold choreography, mime and movement accentuated by lighting and, above all, music. The sets allowed for the creation of spatial patterns and the frenetic pace of the

action disguised the deficiencies in the characterization. It would appear from the reviews that the scenes of high dramatic tension were saved from melodrama by the convincing acting of the company who, presumably, knew how much was at stake. Without this conviction, the play would have disintegrated.

The negative criticism which may be deemed valid in artistic terms focused mainly on the weakness of the characterization. S. Valerin in Lëgkaya industriya<sup>70</sup> and Mart. Merzhanov in Vodnõi transport<sup>71</sup> both comment on the implausibly quick and simple conversion of Alekseï and the demoralized detachment. Oddly, Litovskiï, writing in Teatr i dramaturgiya,<sup>72</sup> who makes harsh criticisms of other aspects of the play, is almost alone in detecting emotional development in any of the characters. This he claims to do in the Captain and Alekseï, although he assesses the rest as static. The objections to the characters on the basis of political criteria range from those by the avid proponents of artistic orthodoxy such as S. Rafailov:

мастерство формальности композиции массовых зрелищных сцен пока ещё сильнее разработки индивидуального классового портрета. 73

to those by zealots such as A. Sol'ts:

жалкими и ничтожными выглядят в пьесе окружающие комиссара коммунисты сильными и яркими изображены долженствующие представлять кулачество анархисты. 74

Sol'ts was the only critic to give Optimisticheskaya



tragediya an unqualified bad review, apparently ignoring the production and dubbing the play 'трагический оптимизм':

Хорошо играют артисты, а пьеса плохая, несмотря на то, что взяла себе такое претенциозное название. В ней нет ни фактической ни художественной правды, в ней отсутствует и<sup>75</sup> настоящий подлинный оптимизм.

Responding specifically to Sol'ts's point concerning the 'bad Communists', N. Osinskiĭ defended Vishnevskii two days later in a review in Izvestiya TsIK i VTsIK, by explaining that he was writing about the Civil War and not about the era of developing Communism so that he was perfectly justified in including Communists with negative characteristics.<sup>76</sup> Osinskiĭ goes on to damn with faint praise by observing that Optimisticheskaya tragediya is, at least, a better work than Vishnevskii's previous efforts and so represents an improvement which deserves encouragement.<sup>77</sup>

Some critics questioned Vishnevskii's ability to write at all, referring to the merciful intervention by the Kamerny theatre not only in re-writing the text but also in disguising its thinness.<sup>78</sup>

The remaining negative criticism centred largely on the chorus whose leaders' speeches were found to be both declamatory and verbose by several reviewers,<sup>79</sup> and whose presence one reviewer considered superfluous as its sole function appeared to be to point out the obvious to the audience.<sup>80</sup> The only reviewer to defend the use of the

chorus was Iog. Al'tman who felt it was a necessary device to raise the audience's consciousness.<sup>81</sup>

The only reviewer to commend the plot per se was Mart. Merzhanov who felt that it kept the audience in suspense,<sup>82</sup> although I. Luppol, taking a different slant, discerned the pattern of dialectical process through Tairov's imposed structure of 'kul'minatsii' (despite erroneously attributing this structure to the author):

Развёртывание сюжета протекает в бурных всё нарастающих противоречиях от первого до последнего момента. Это -- не схема, но глубоко продуманная автором и образно прочувствованная театром живая диалектическая концепция.<sup>83</sup>

By virtue of this structure, he concludes in his article, dramatic tension is sustained throughout the performance:

Противоречия художественно развиваемые автором и в живых представлениях подаваемые театром в своей совокупности свиваются в такую захватывающую нить действия, что держат аудиторию в напряжении.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the absence of agitative monologues, two critics found the play's language crude and slovenly,<sup>85</sup> a prudish objection symptomatic of the puritanical vein then running through all aspects of Soviet cultural life.

Without exception, the production was praised by the critics, often with specific references to the music, sets, lighting and choreography. The quality of the acting too was unanimously commended with leading actors, particularly Koonen, given the unfamiliarity of her role, singled out for



individual praise. The only exception to these glowing tributes was one mealy-mouthed reference in Vechernyaya Moskva to slight overrestraint on Koonen's part.<sup>86</sup> Again, this only serves to reinforce the overall picture of the problematical nature of the role of the Commissar.

The production was generally welcomed as the Kamerny's political salvation, but only one reviewer stated explicitly the mutual advantage gained by the collaboration of author and theatre company, albeit couching his statement in formularistic jargon:

Творческое сотрудничество театра и драматурга оказалось ценным и плодотворным для обеих сторон. Театр помог драматургу своей громадной, подлинно европейской культурой, своим опытом в области работы над образцами трагического жанра прошлых эпох, присущим ему острым чувством театральной формы, выразительной лаконичностью и скульптурностью в построении сценических образов. Драматург помог театру своим громадным политическим темпераментом, великолепным знанием изображаемой эпохи и морской среды, своей установкой на максимально правдивое воспроизведение действительности первых лет революции, в которой Вишневский был не пассивным наблюдателем, а активным участником классовых боев. 87

Obligatory admonishments to Tairov and his company appeared in almost every review, but tended to be limited to perfunctory remarks in the last paragraph.

A few reviewers gave the impression of having either fallen asleep during the performance, gone to the wrong theatre or mislaid their notes as they refer variously to the absence of music,<sup>88</sup> (an error later taken up by Litovskiĭ),<sup>89</sup> the audience identifying with the Boatswain<sup>90</sup>



and the absence of romantic quality in the play,<sup>91</sup> not to mention degenerating into the impenetrable language of pseudo-literary criticism:

Суровый пафос романтики. . . . Стиль явился само- 92  
критической для автора и театра.

S. Mokul'skiĭ, writing in Rabochiĭ i teatr, arrives at the happiest definition, 'a synthesis of realism and romance'.<sup>93</sup>

Litovskiĭ's review, entitled 'Korni optimizma',<sup>94</sup> is worthy of a more detailed analysis not only because it contains acute observation and incisive comment, but also because it represents a prime example of an attempt to reconcile artistic excellence with political shortcomings, hence it bears the thirties' hallmark of inherent self-contradiction. As in the other reviews, it is Vishnevskiĭ rather than Tairov who comes under fire. There is a passing reference to the expressionist excesses of the production, but the main criticism centres on the failure of Vishnevskiĭ's work to develop beyond its limited range of 'agitative', 'publicistic' and 'one-track' plays. Additionally, Litovskiĭ blames the original literary version of Optimisticheskaya tragediya for some inadequacies of the stage version, an observation which recalls Zagorskiĭ's admonition to Bulgakov (see p.63). An integral part of Vishnevskiĭ's inadequacy as a playwright lies in his inability to create anything but the sketchiest of characters. Again, it is the Commissar who

is singled out:

В течение трёх актов комиссар занимается агитационной дидактикой на очень бедном газетном языке. В образе нет сложности и глубины. Он не растёт, остаётся неизменным на протяжении всей пьесы. 95

This would seem to substantiate Tairov's intimation and subsequent efforts to compensate for the underwriting. An anecdotal reference by Koonen would likewise seem to suggest that Vishnevskii had neither the inclination nor the ability to create three-dimensional characters, neither of which seemed to trouble him greatly:

Я как-то сказала ему (Vishnevskii), что мне хочется, чтобы текст письма, которое во втором акте Комиссар пишет подруге, был интимным. Он ответил: -- Ну, что ж, валяй, пиши сама ... 96

The second major shortcoming of Optimisticheskaya tragediya Litovskii sees as the isolation and insulation of the detachment to the events surrounding it. No impression is given of the great struggle taking place all around except by the laborious device of the chorus commentary. Oddly, this same criticism was -- mutatis mutandis -- levelled at Dni Turbin̄kh. The crew's isolation creates an irreality which is reinforced by

абстрактно<sup>т</sup>стью событий, тем, что в них нет локальности и конкретности. В пьесе вообще революционный отряд, вообще белые, борющиеся в какой-то вообще местности. 97

The play's content seen as an abstract notion rather than a credible experience would suggest that it was still well and truly locked in 'agitka' mode, but Litovskii staunchly (and inconsistently) maintains that



with all its faults, Optimisticheskaya tragediya constitutes a development towards the 'агитационно-психологический жанр.'<sup>98</sup>

The theme, however, was completely outmoded, as Litovskii rightly points out; he readily concedes that the Kamerny had qualitatively better plays in its repertoire but none was deemed politically appropriate:

В репертуаре Камерного театра были пьесы и посильнее. Тем не менее за все годы революции Камерному театру ни разу не удалось сделать из них полноценных спектаклей, в которых художественное и политическое находились бы в полной гармонии. <sup>99</sup>

Having enumerated the play's deficiencies, Litovskii goes on to give qualified praise for its virtues which are seen as its:

эпичность, героический пафос, патетика, яркая эмоциональность и страсть. 100

Despite damning evidence to the contrary, Litovskii tries to redeem Vishnevskii by the extraordinary contention that the pre-eminence of the playwright is in no way undermined by Tairov's production. Vishnevskii is credited with servicing the theatre (and no more) even though Litovskii's elaborate circumlocution implies a far greater contribution. Inevitably, he is forced to reach the same conclusion as his fellow reviewers, namely that the Kamerny succeeded in breathing life into a mediocre dramatic offering where a lesser company would have failed, triumphing despite, rather than because of, the author. He then proceeds to wax lyrical over



the superlative stage-craft exhibited in the (non-dialogue) pantomimic scenes which he sees not as an empty embellishment but as an integral part of the play. By implication, these scenes supply the emotional element so singularly lacking in the dialogue:

Это всё равно когда у человека нехватает слов от подъёма, от радости, от горя, от страсти и когда он переходит на пение, музыку, движение. Прощальный бал в "Оптимистической трагедии" мог бы и не быть. 101

as well as providing the ideal vehicle for the Kamerny company's particular talents:

Ритмическая музыкальная культура Камерного театра как нельзя более пришлась "ко двору" в "Оптимистической трагедии", пьесе больших страстей, где эта страсть и напряжение должны найти выход не только в диалоге -- его, кстати, и мало, но и в продуманной, строго рас-102 считанной и выразительной линии движений.

The exponents of these particular skills are highly praised and the performances of Koonen, Klarov and Zharov singled out. The long-serving actors are praised for having freed themselves from the nefarious influences of formalism, while the younger generation is given encouragement to contribute to the consolidation of the 'new-style' Kamerny with its more appropriate brand of realism.

Litovskiĭ feels that Knipper's music which contributed so much to the play was generally underrated by the other critics and that the highly sophisticated staging of the battle scenes which set it apart from all other Civil War productions was altogether overlooked:

Одним из крупных достоинств "Оптимистической трагедии" следует считать то, что этим спектаклем почти абсолютно найден советский батальный жанр. Бесспорной заслугой театра МОСПС является постановка советских батальных спектаклей из гражданской войны. И "Мятеж" и "Чапаев" -- волнующие страницы в истории советского театра. Однако, в этих спектаклях, особенно в "Мятеже", театр шёл по проторенной дороге батальных зрелищ, пышных, торжественных, овеянных, бесконечным количеством знамен и внешних аксессуаров. Вовсе фальшиво, совершенно в ложно-классическом, ура-патриотическом стиле представлен батализм в спектакле "Первая конная" в театре Революции.<sup>103</sup>

Litovskii's final pious hope is that the undoubted success of this production will persuade the Kamerny to continue down the 'path of Socialism'.

To give Vishnevskii his due, there are unusual if not entirely original features in Optimisticheskaya tragediya which are noticeably absent from early Civil War plays. The chorus of ghosts -- despite their speeches recalling the worst aspect of his play, Posledniĭ, reshitel'nyi,<sup>104</sup> -- is a dramatically effective device which could only be part of a retrospective play. He also created characters which, however crudely-drawn, were neither purely heroic Communists nor wholly villainous Whites. He introduced a new class of partially converted Whites such as the Captain, who has a justifiable grudge against the Reds, the Christian Boatswain and the two POW escapees, in addition to reformed hooligans and Party converts such as Vainonen and Aleksei.

Although its long-lived existence in the Soviet repertoire is largely a legacy from Tairov rather than



Vishnevskii, the play lent itself to theatrical design and emotive acting, the stuff of 'good theatre', as a result of which there have been some memorable productions since the original one. The unqualified praise for the Kamerny production -- despite the brickbats directed at Tairov personally -- reflects accurately its theatrical impact and subsequent influence. The choreographic manipulation of the mass scenes was rated as masterly as was the overall stark but visually stunning simplicity of the production, the minimal but imaginative sets, the high contrast lighting and the evocative music.

To sum up, this marriage of convenience between Vishnevskii and the Kamerny produced a play which could be said to have captured the romance of the recent past, 'романтика революции', and thus held a certain nostalgic appeal even though, by now, the theme was hackneyed and and there was an official, if not public demand for plays on contemporary Soviet themes. From the perspective of the thirties, Optimisticheskaya tragediya must have been, at best, a romanticized view of the Civil War and, at worst, a gross distortion of reality. It is, therefore, even more a measure of Tairov's genius that the piece was such a success then, and that it continues to form part of the Soviet repertoire today.

The vilification of Vishnevskii's literary efforts



can doubtless be attributed to his being embroiled in the acrimonious thirties' debate on the incompatibility of the notion of tragedy with the tenets of Socialist Realism. Ironically, therefore, despite the mandatory upbraiding, it was Tairov, the political maverick, who won the (grudging) artistic praise rather than Vishnevskii, the political conformist. Ironically, too, it was the predominance of form over content, a formula for which Tairov was constantly reproved officially, which accounted for the popular and critical success of Optimisticheskaya tragediya. These factors, above all, would seem to give credence to the contemporary theatrical reviews.

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A retrospective view of the four plays examined must lead one to conclude that they each have some enduring qualities. Shtorm stands up well as a modest theatrical achievement, bridging the gap between agitka and stage drama. Its didactic tone is alleviated by its undoubted truth and sincerity as well as its touches of humour, best summed up by the following remark by N. Abalkin in Izvestiya (21 November 1967):

"Агитка" когда ей отданы ум, сердце, вдохновение художника, возвышает, облагораживает искусство.

Dni Turbin, the staple item of Soviet repertoire, is perhaps overrated and lies outside the mainstream of Soviet Civil War drama. Its satire, irony, wit and broad humour have been its saving grace, while its specific focus rather than broad sweep set it apart from the other three plays examined.

The abiding achievements of Lyubov' Yarovaya remain its dialogue and characterization which contrive to overcome the deficiencies of the melodramatic plot. It is the only play here, to feature the classic dilemma of torn loyalties, and combines sweeping breadth with sharp individual observation.

Optimisticheskaya tragediya harks back to Shtorm a decade earlier in its didactic and moralistic intentions. It possesses neither true depth nor breadth but lives on as a spectacular heroic pageant full of pathos.



The Civil War plays may be said to constitute a genre as they contain the common elements of noble self-sacrifice of the individual in addition to (with the exception of Dni Turbinŷkh) the collective struggle against a clearly- but crudely-defined enemy from the sole and unchallenged perspective of the Bolsheviks, the glorification of the Communist cause and, finally, the expression of fervent optimism.

Although this study presents a selection of the best Soviet Civil War plays, the naive simplification of events, the superficiality of the characters, the fading topicality, the innate contradiction of the denial of tragedy which ultimately challenged its very nomenclature amidst endless political ramifications meant that it was doomed as a genre. The prevailing if limited interest in these plays, however, demonstrated by their revival over half a century later, indicates that they serve firstly, as a patriotic reminder to new generations of the Soviet Union's historic past. Indeed, as recently as 1983, during the period of leadership of Yuri Andropov, there was a renewed call for theatre to play its part in 'political education' and to deal with 'military, patriotic, historic and revolutionary themes'. (Times (28 February 1983)). Secondly, they fulfil a symbolic function, helping to sustain the modern myth of Communist supremacy and moral rectitude. Thirdly, their revival as classical set pieces of the Soviet theatre demonstrates the value and importance of that theatre which still serves to express collective emotion,

notwithstanding the censor's pen.

These plays lived, and were enjoyed -- and to some extent are still enjoyed -- by virtue of the artists who made them despite the contradictions inherent in the official control of art. It is a great tribute to them that they found ways of producing living theatre which ensured its survival through bleak and dismal times.

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Shtorm (4 acts, 10 scenes)

Author: V. Bill'-Belotserkovskii

Première: 8 December 1925

Theatre: MGSPS

Director: E. Lyubimov-Lanskoï

Designer: B. Volkov

First Cast:

Predsedatel' Ukoma	. . . . .	A. Andreev
"Bratishka" - matros (deloproizvoditel')	. . . . .	G. Kovrov/ V. Vanin
Prodrazvërstnik	. . . . .	V. Vanin/ N. Temyakov
"Iz tsentra" - intelligent	. . . . .	M. Rozen-Sanin
"Poddëvka" - ukrainets	. . . . .	- Doroshevskii
Lektor	. . . . .	A. Shtunts
Krest'yanka	. . . . .	K. Yakovleva
Voenruk	. . . . .	K. Davidovskii
Kur'ersha	. . . . .	M. Kholina
Vasil'ev - molodoï kommunist, rabochii-poét	. . . . .	N. Firsov
Ivanova - podrostok	. . . . .	M. Mravina
Raevich - starïi partiets, intelligent, bývshii émigrant	. . . . .	A. Kramov

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(Complete cast list unavailable)

Dni Turbinŷkh (4 acts, 7 scenes)

Author: M. Bulgakov  
 Premièrè: 5 October 1926  
 Theatre: MKhAT  
 Director: I. Sudakov (K. Stanislavskiĭ)  
 Designer: N. Ul'yanov  
 Conductor: B. Izralevskiĭ  
 First Cast:

Turbin Aleksei Vasil'evich - polkovnik-artillerist, 30 let	. . . . .	N. Khmelëv
Turbin Nikolaĭ - ego brat, 18 let	. . . . .	I. Kudryavtsev
Tal'berg Elena Vasil'evna - ikh sestra, 24 let	. . . . .	V. Sokolova/ Tarasova
Tal'berg Vladimir Robertovich - genshtaba polkovnik, eĝ muzh, 38 let	. . . . .	V. Verbitskiĭ
Myshlaevskiĭ Viktor Viktorovich - shtabs-kapitan, artillerist, 38 let	. . . . .	B. Dobronravov
Shervinskiĭ Leonid Yur'evich - poruchik, lichnŷĭ ad"utant getmana	. . . . .	M. Prudkin
Studzinskiĭ Aleksandr Bronislavovich - kapitan, 29 let	. . . . .	E. Kalunsskiĭ
Lariosik - zhitomirskiĭ kuzen, 21 goda	. . . . .	M. Yanshin
Getman vseya Ukrainŷ Bolbotun - komandir 1-ĭ konnoĭ petlyurovskoĭ divizii	. . . . .	- Ershov
Galan'ba - sotnik-petlyurovets, bŷvshiĭ ulanskiĭ rotmistr	. . . . .	- Anders
Uragan	. . . . .	- Maloletkov
Kirpatŷĭ	. . . . .	- Guzeev
Fon Shratt - germanskiĭ general.	. . . . .	- Mordvinov/ Butyugin
Fon Dust - germanskiĭ maior	. . . . .	- Stanitsyĭ
Dezertir-sechevik	. . . . .	- Shilling
Chelovek s korzinoĭ	. . . . .	- Titushin
Kamer-lakeĭ	. . . . .	- Blinninov
Maksim, gimnazicheskiĭ pedel', 60 let	. . . . .	- Istrin
Gaidamak - telefonist	. . . . .	- Kedrov
Vrach germanskoĭ armii	. . . . .	- Kedrov
		- Novikov
		- Stepun/ Mordvinov/ Raevskiĭ
1-ĭ ofitser	. . . . .	- Lifanov
2-ĭ ofitser	. . . . .	- Aksenov
3-ĭ ofitser	. . . . .	- Gerasimov

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Lyubov' Yarovaya (4 acts, 5 scenes)

Author: K. Trenëv  
 Première: 22 December 1926  
 Theatre: Malyï  
 Directors: I. Platon, L. Prozorovskii  
 Designer: N. Men'shutin  
 Composer: - Ippolitova  
 First Cast:

Lyubov' Yarovaya - uchitel'nitsa . . . . .	V. Pashennaya/ E. Kolosova
Mikhail Yarovoï - eë muzh ofitser . . . . .	V. Ol'khovskii
Pavla Panova - mashinistka . . . . .	E. Gogoleva
Roman Koshkin - komissar . . . . .	P. Sadovskii S. Kuznetsov
Shvandyä - matros . . . . .	M. Tumanov
Khrushch pomoshchniki Groznoï Koshkina . . . . .	A. Istomin
Mazukhin Maksim Gornostaev - professor . . . . .	O. Fedorovskii
Elena Gornostaeva - ego zhena . . . . .	N. Kostromskoï
Malinin polkovniki Kutov . . . . .	E. Turchaninova S. Golovin
Arkadiï Elisatov - deyatel' tyla . . . . .	I. Ryzhov
Ivan Kolosov - elektro- tekhnik . . . . .	N. Yakovlev/ M. Klimov
Dun'ka - gornichnaya potom spekulyantka . . . . .	N. Solov'ev/ N. Ryzhov
Makhora - devushka . . . . .	M. Dymova/ N. Grigorovskaya
Mar'ya - krest'yanka . . . . .	N. Grigorovskaya/ V. Orlova
Semën - eë sÿn . . . . .	V. Ryzhova
Pikalov - mobilizovannÿi . . . . .	A. Rzhanov
Fol'gin- liberal'nÿi chelovek . . . . .	A. Sashin- Nicol'skii
Baron . . . . .	I. Krasovskii
Baronessa . . . . .	E. Velikhov
Chir - storozh . . . . .	E. Sadovskaya
Inspektor gimnazii . . . . .	I. Skuratov
Zhena ego . . . . .	Yu. Sabinin
Dirizher tantsev . . . . .	E. Mezentseva
Zakatov - protoireï . . . . .	A. Korotkov
Kostyumov - kaptenarms . . . . .	V. Lebedev A. Mirskii

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Optimisticheskaya tragediya (3 acts)

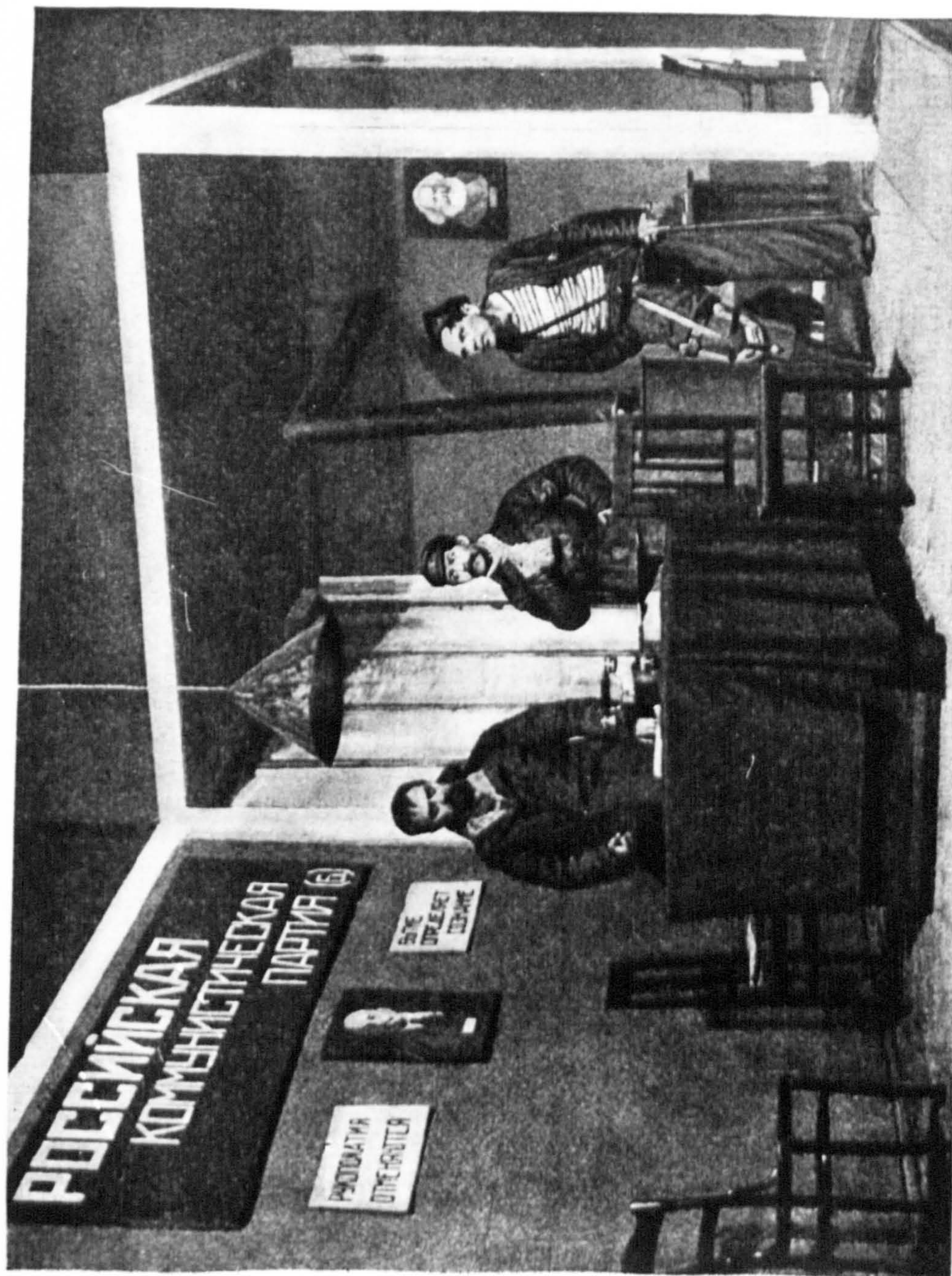
Author: V. Vishnevskii  
Première (2nd variation): 18 December 1933  
Theatre: Kamernyi  
Director: A. Tairov  
Designer: - Ryndin  
Composer: - Knipper  
First Cast (2nd variation):

Pervyi starshina	. . . . .	I. Aleksandrov
Vtoroi starshina	. . . . .	N. Chaplygin
Komissar	. . . . .	A. Koonen
Vainonen	. . . . .	- Novlyanskiĭ
"Ryaboĭ" - matros	. . . . .	- Khmel'nitskiĭ
Aleksei - matros	. . . . .	
Baltiiskogo flota	. . . . .	M. Zharov
"Vozhak" - matros, anarkhist	. . . . .	S. Tsenin
Leĭtenant Bering - morskiĭ ofitser	. . . . .	G. Yanikovskii
"Siplyi" - matros, anarkhist	. . . . .	V. Klarov
Botsman	. . . . .	I. Arkadin
Glavar' anarkhistov	. . . . .	- Dorofeev

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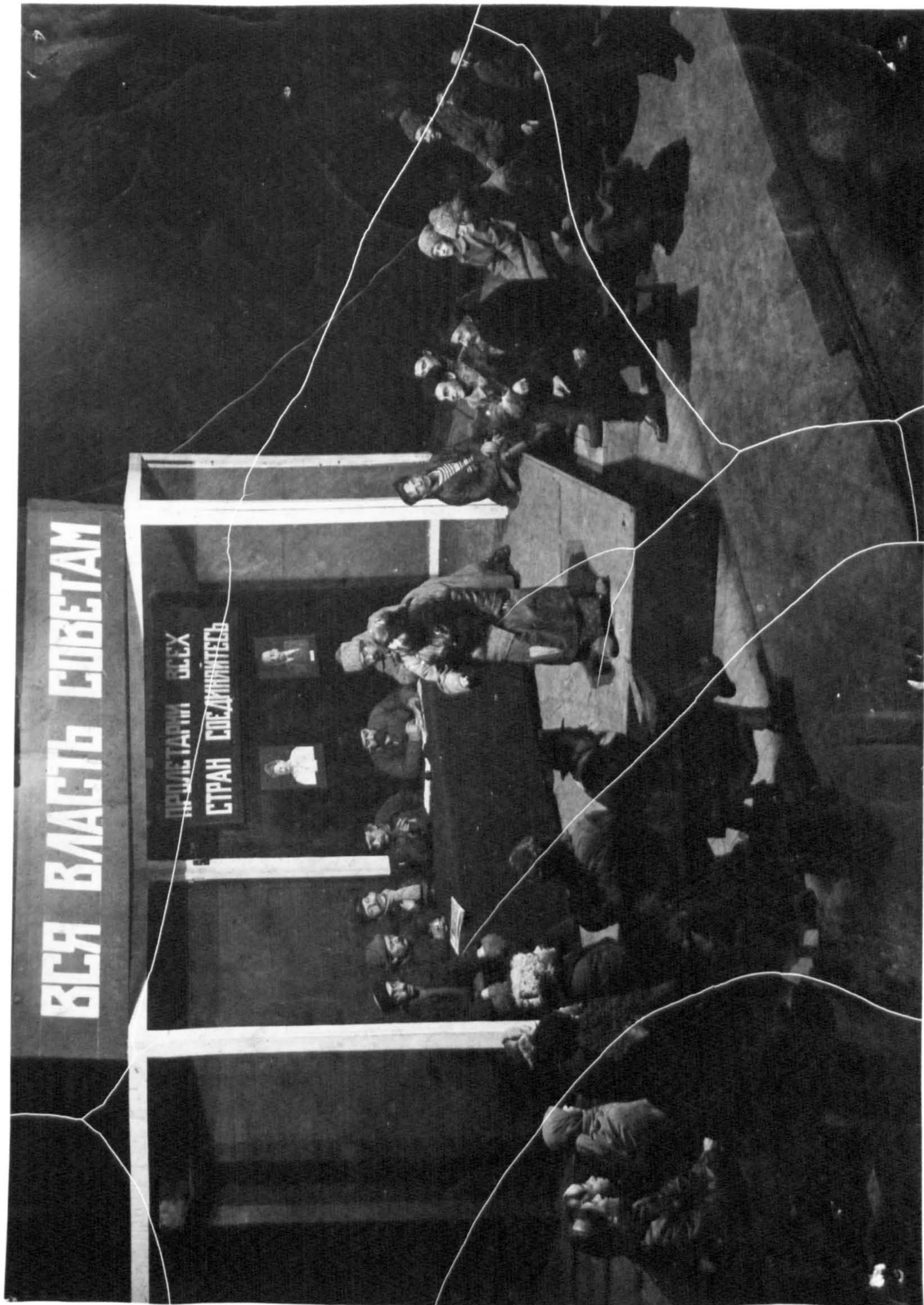
(Complete cast list unavailable)





Сцена из спектакля «Шторм» В. Биль-Белоцерковского.  
Театр имени МГСПС, 1925 г.









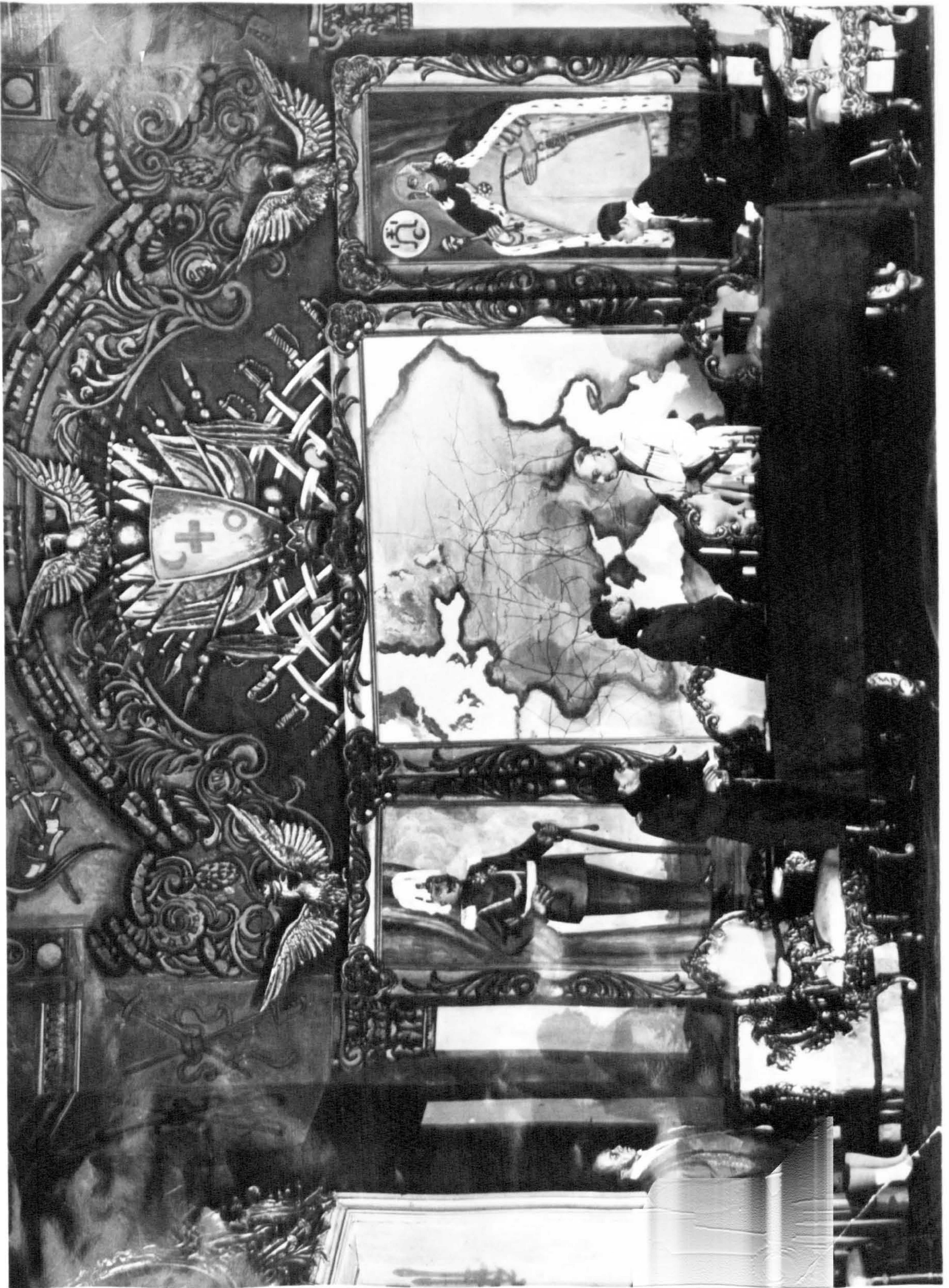










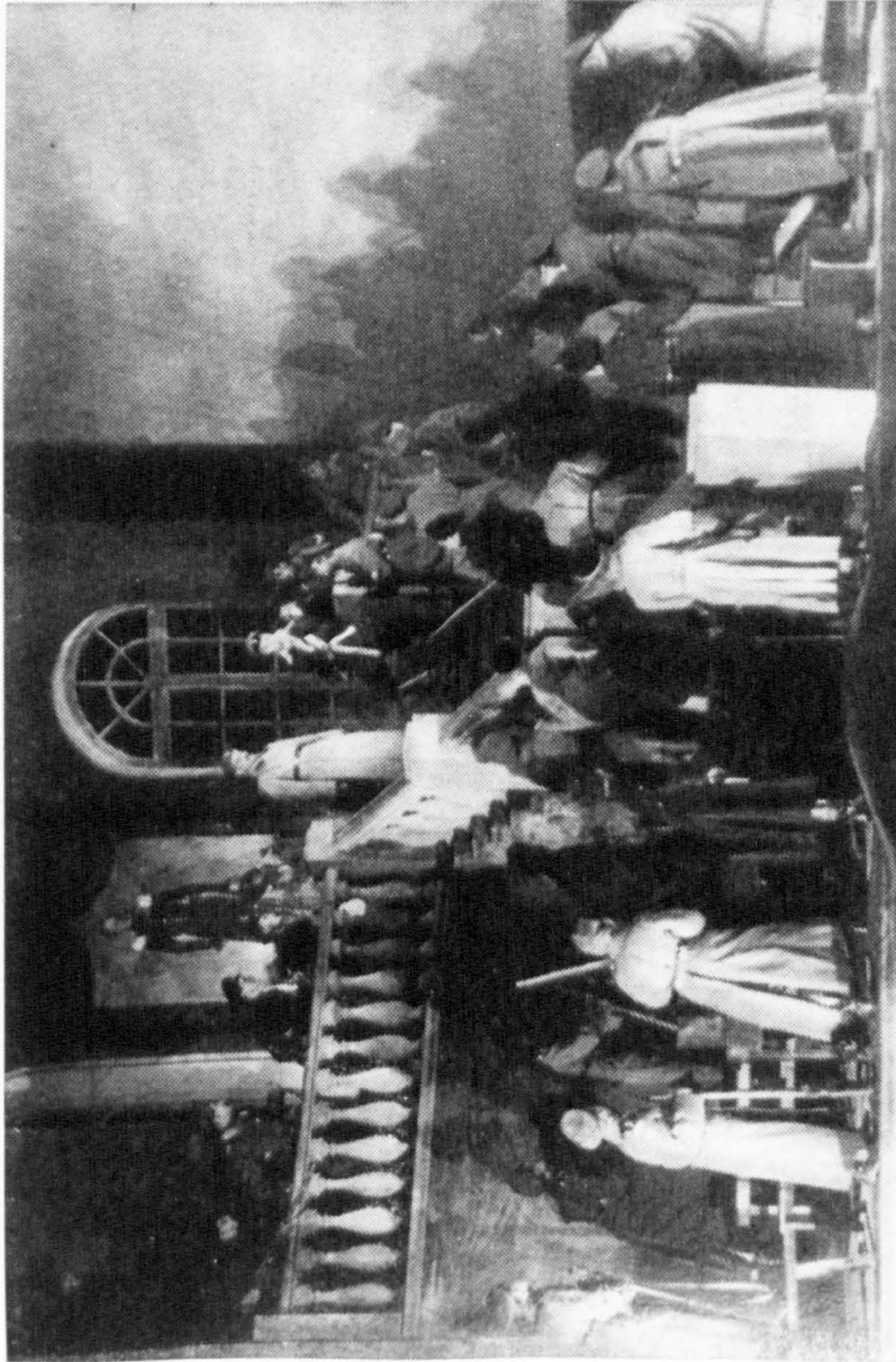




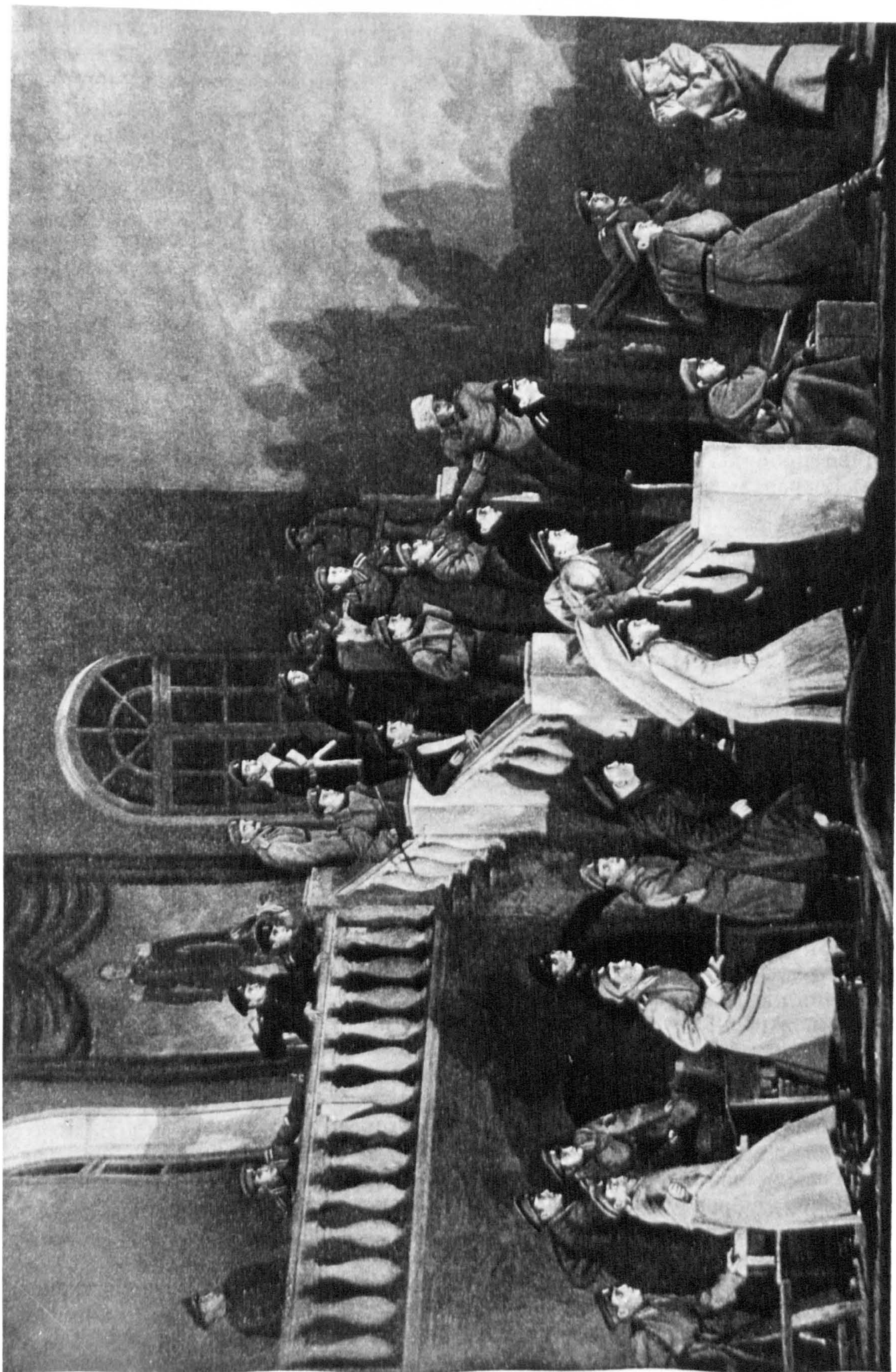




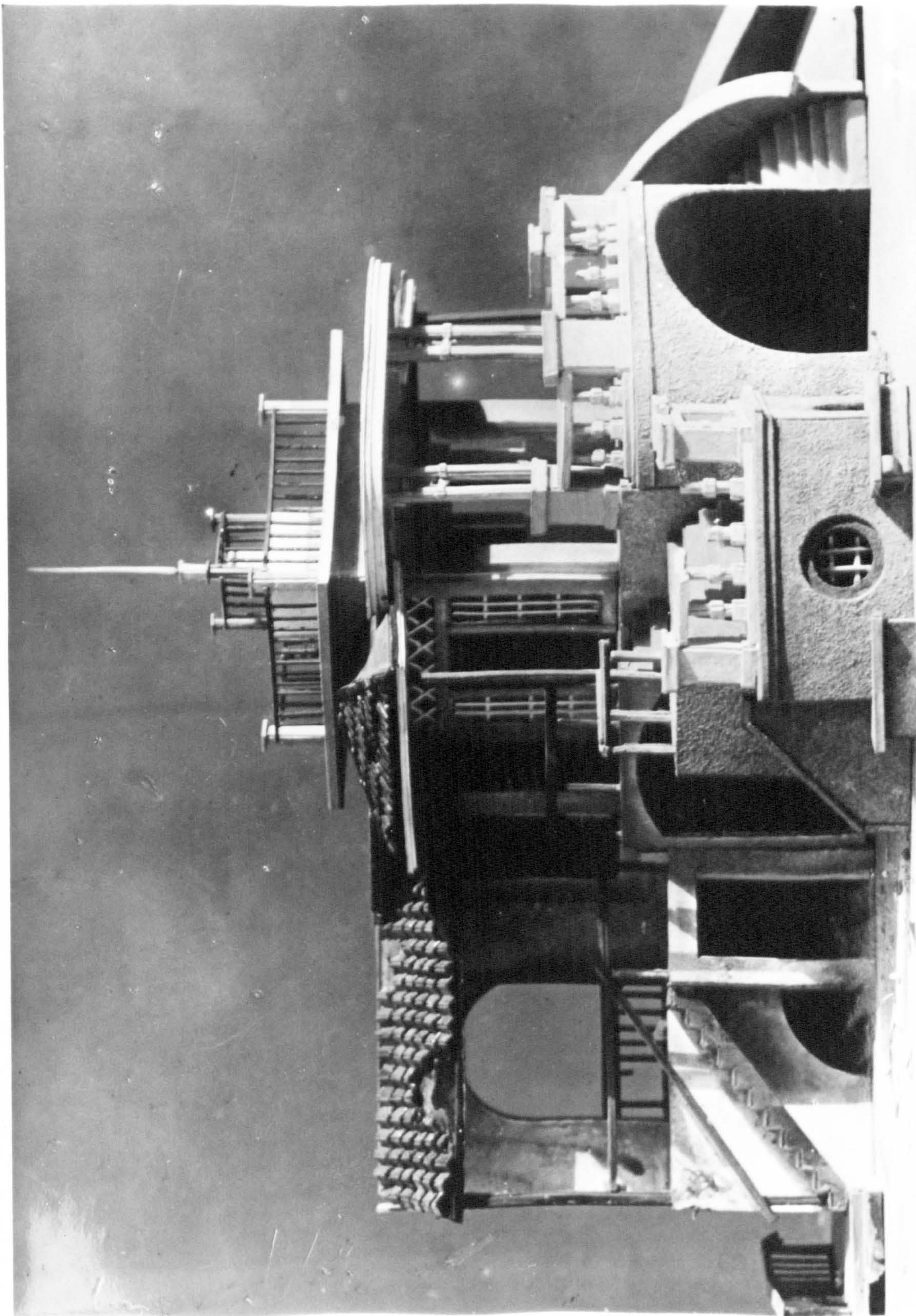
Третъе действие. Гимназия











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