Shakespeare in the Undiscovered Bourn

Les Kurbas, Ukrainian Modernism, and Early Soviet Cultural Politics

IRENA R. MAKARYK

SHAKESPEARE IN THE UNDISCOVERED BOURN

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Les Kurbas circa 1919. (HA)

Irena R. Makaryk

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The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns
(*Hamlet* 3.1.79)

Ukraïna: (1) 'borderland' from the Indo-European '[s]krei – to cut'
(2) 'minor territorial unit'
(3) 'country,' 'land,' 'state'
Ukraine: A Concise Encyclopedia 6

Bourn: limit, confine, boundary
(Schmidt, *Shakespeare Lexicon*)

This is pioneering in the thickets of the future, in a country as yet unknown to anyone; this is a peep behind the curtain of the art of 'tomorrow.'
(Volodymyr Yaroshenko, 'Pionery')

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Illustrations

Abbreviations

BNA	Bronislava Nijinska Archives. Private archives. With the permission of Gibbs Raetz. Pacific Palisades, California. Now in the Library of Congress.
HA	Volodymyr Hrycyn/Yosyp Hirniak Archives, New York, New York. Courtesy of Virlana Tkacz
IM	Photo by Irena Makaryk
M	Rpt. from Mikhail Morozov, *Shekspir na stsene* (1939)
Nf	Newspaper fonds, Academy of Sciences, Kyiv
OMS	Rpt. from Oliver Martin Sayler, ed., *Max Reinhardt and His Theatre* (1926)
SMTMCA	State Museum of Theatre, Music, and Cinematographic Arts (Kyiv)
STM	The Shevchenko Theatre Museum (Kharkiv), formerly Berezil Theatre

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Acknowledgments

The germ of the idea for this book lies in a paper presented a decade ago at the 1994 Shakespeare Association of America seminar 'Nationalist and Intercultural Aspects of Shakespeare Reception' led by Werner Habicht (University of Wurtzburg). While researching that conference paper (about a 1943 production of *Hamlet* in Lviv, Ukraine), I came across a few references to the earlier Shakespeare productions of director Les Kurbas, whose 1924 *Macbeth* was particularly and vehemently damned in Soviet theatre histories. Later, reading further afield, I had the first inklings of what I would soon come to understand: Les Kurbas was one of the great Soviet stage directors of the early twentieth century, on a par with Meyerhold and Tairov, but almost no one in the West seemed to know this. Curious, I began to unearth details about this production and its director but found little in English, although a growing body of published work in Ukrainian.

Coming to this work as a Shakespearean, not a Slavist, I found the process of researching this topic in Ukraine a revelation, although it is, doubtless, commonplace to those who usually work this field. Layers of censorship enveloped often even the most simple of documents. Manuscript material was blue-pencilled for grammar and style, as well as for 'unacceptable ideological tendencies,' and then published with the original assertions elided entirely or replaced with more acceptable variants. Archivists I met were not always willing to unseal supposedly now (post-Soviet) 'open' files or, worse, made my requests unpleasant and lengthy ordeals. Even ten years after the fall of the USSR, the State Museum of Theatre, Music, and Cinematic Arts had not changed the deliberate misinformation of the captioned exhibits to reveal the real date of Kurbas's death (1937, not 1942). Byzantine complexities of cultural politics, of imperial and postcolonial mentalities, of languages and values remained. I was hooked. But, it was clear that I would also have to read everything that I could in manuscript or original printed versions because subsequently printed sources could not be trusted.

In my travels across Ukraine, I also discovered like-minded scholars whose story of their fascination – even obsession – with the Ukrainian avant-garde closely paralleled my own. I would like to thank them here for sharing enthusiasms, for discussions, speculations, and suggestions. These are also scholars who formerly had to embark on their work with great caution, since (as this book will show) even Kurbas's name was, until recently, a dangerous commodity: Nelli Korniienko, who now heads the Kurbas Centre in Kyiv; Les Taniuk, director and theatre historian, now a deputy to the Verkhovna Rada (Supreme Council) of Ukraine, who helped smooth the way to some of the archives; theatre historian Natalia Iermakova of the M. Ryl's'kyi Institute of Literature, Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (Kyiv); Rostyslav Pylypchuk, Rector of the Theatre Institute of Karpenko Karyi (Kyiv); journalist Raisa Skalii, who personally tracked down many of the biographical details of Kurbas's life and shared these with me in an interview; Iryna Volytska, who wrote the first book on Kurbas's early theatrical career; theatre historian Valentyna Zabolotna; bibliographer Leonid Kruvoruchko; and art historian Dmytro Horbachov.

When this project turned into, among other things, a theatre history 'whodunnit?' I found many who were ready to assist. I would like to thank Margaret Norton and Lee Cox of the San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum (PALM); Leslie Getz of New York for access to the Nancy van Norman Baer Archives and for advice and suggestions; Heide Chipp for her hospitality; Gibbs Raetz (Pacific Palisades, California) for his great generosity not only in providing unfettered access to the complete archives of Bronislava Nijinska but, more, for opening up his home to a complete stranger. In Ukraine, I was thankful for the assistance of Tetiana Arseenko, Head of the Central National Library of the Academy of Sciences (Ukraine); Nina Maloletova, Head Bibliographer; Halyna Dovzhenok, Head of Archives, and Oleksander Kostiuk, Director, M. Ryl's'kyi Institute of Art, Folklore, and Ethnography, Academy of Sciences (Kyiv); and the newspaper and journal section of the archives of the Academy of Sciences. In Kharkiv, Olena Sedunova, dramaturge of the T.H. Shevchenko Theatre, and Nina Medvedeva, the overseer of the Theatre Museum, provided unlimited access to the library and archives of that institution. In Canada, theatre historian Valerian Revutsky shared his memories of a number of the productions discussed in this book.

Throughout the course of writing this book, I shared very preliminary findings at the following conferences: 'Shakespeare and Communism' (Pennsylvania State University, 1994); 'Shakespeare and the World of Communism' (Folger Shakespeare Library, 1996); The International Shakespeare Association Meeting ('The Uses of Shakespeare' Seminar, Los Angeles, 1996); 'Shakespeare and Theatrical Modernism' (McGill University, 1997), and 'Theatre and Nation,' Waterloo Eliz-

abethan Conference 16 (1997). I gratefully acknowledge the usefulness of the comments and suggestions of the conference organizers and participants.

Thanks also to my research assistants: in Kyiv, Ruslan Leonenko and, especially, Halyna Stefanova, who shared with me two of her loves, Kyiv and the theatre, and was a most helpful guide to both; in Moscow, Elena Zheltova (Institute of the History of Natural Sciences and Technology); and, here in Ottawa, Jessica Schagerl and Elena Ilina. Thanks to my colleagues Donald Childs, who refined my views of Henri Bergson, read the complete manuscript, and offered sound advice; Michael Naydan (Penn State), Myroslav Shkandrij (University of Manitoba), and Roman Weretelnyk (Academy of Kyiv Mohyla University) for their good counsel. Most particularly, however, I would like to acknowledge the friendship of Virlana Tkacz of the La MaMa Theater, New York, who read the whole manuscript more than once, and who is probably therefore as happy as I am to see the end of it. I profited enormously from her insightful publications and her practical theatre experience, as well as from a nearly continuous seven-year conversation about our mutual obsession, Kurbas and theatre, which we have had in the Nijinska Archives in Pacific Palisades, California, in Kyiv, Kharkiv, on trains and planes, and via hundreds of e-mails.

To the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) thanks are owed for a major research grant which permitted essential travel to various archives, and freed up some time for research and writing. To the University of Ottawa's Research Committee, the Faculty of Arts Research Publications Committee, and to the Professional Development Awards Committee (Policy 94), I am deeply grateful for seed money for this project. I am also grateful to the University for the privilege of sabbatical leaves without which it would have been impossible to write this book; and for the forbearance and support of Camille La Bossière and Keith Wilson, who were, successively, Chairs of the Department during the conceptualization and writing of this book.

Finally, thanks to my family – my daughters Talia and Larissa Zajac, and my husband, Yaroslaw – who permitted the continuous intrusion at the dinner table of two other men, Shakespeare and Kurbas, and who listened with patience, interest, and lots of encouragement.

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Permissions

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A Note on Transcription, Transliteration, and Archival Sources

This book is aimed at several audiences, but particularly Shakespeareans. For the non-Slavic scholar, transliterated names with their many soft signs and repeated vowel letters may appear daunting. Consequently, for readability and ease of pronunciation, I have chosen to simplify the spelling of Slavic names and titles in the body of this study, thus approaching transcription rather than transliteration (so, Yuri rather than Iurii; Les Kurbas rather than Les' Kurbas; Yaroshenko rather than Iaroshenko; Saksahansky rather than Saksahans'kyi). I have used commonly accepted English forms of the names of well-known personalities such as Joseph Stalin, Meyerhold, and Stanislavsky. The names of authors who have published in English (e.g., Tkacz, Grabowicz, Shkandrij) are written as published rather than as transcribed or transliterated.

For Slavic scholars wishing to follow up citation references and items in the works cited list, I have maintained the scholarly apparatus in the widely accepted modified system of the Library of Congress (without ligatures or diacriticals). It is hoped that the benefits of readability will outweigh the apparent inconsistencies of presentation. Names appear cross-referenced in both systems in the index.

Beyond complex issues of transliteration and transcription, this period also suffers from other peculiarities. The practice of using pseudonyms, even multiple *noms de plume*, was widespread. To avoid confusion, I have chosen to cite the names as published and have provided the real name of the author, when known, in parentheses. Because orthography was also in flux, the titles of journals may occasionally vary; these are recorded as published (for example, *Visty*, later spelled *Visti*) and as catalogued in their archival repositories. Place names follow the current practice (e.g., Kyiv rather than Kiev).

Wherever possible, titles and names of theatres and companies appear in the text in English; their original Ukrainian or Russian titles are presented in parentheses on first mention in the text. Two exceptions include Kyidramte, the short-

ened name by which the Kyiv Dramatic Theatre was best known, and Berezil, the name of Kurbas's third and most famous company. In the Notes and Works Cited, titles are given in Ukrainian and Russian, without translation. All translations in this book are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

An additional problem in researching this topic has been the fact that Les Kurbas's own documents and materials were confiscated and destroyed, most likely in the 1930s. While his published articles pose no particular difficulty (other than censorship), his important but unpublished director's diary is extant in a number of variants, as transcribed by others for their own particular purposes. I have attempted to consult as many of the typescript and published variants as possible, since each of these reveals different aspects of Kurbas's work. The duplication which appears in the works cited and references is thus more apparent than real. Similar problems were encountered when consulting the work of some of the other actors and directors. It is hoped that these difficulties are not evident to the reader for whom clear signposts have been developed. As this book was nearing completion, a good part of the painstaking work I had already carried out in the archives of Kyiv and Kharkiv was replicated – too late for me to make use of it – in *Les' Kurbas: Filosofiia teatru*, edited by M.H. Labins'kyi (Kyiv: Osnova, 2001). I applaud the editor's massive and much-needed volume.

SHAKESPEARE IN THE UNDISCOVERED BOURN

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Prelude

> Revolution is Revelation, an eschatological moment in human experience that announces the New Order, the New World, the New Life.
>
> (Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 3)

The premiere of Soviet Ukrainian director Les Kurbas's *Macbeth* on 2 April 1924 in Kyiv was met with a momentary silence after which the audience appeared to be thrown into confusion, and then suddenly erupted into loud and long applause. As if 'a bomb exploded in the audience,' wrote one of the actors, the spectators began simultaneously to shout out all of their pent-up responses. Three days after the event, all of Kyiv was still smarting from the outrage of the 'scandal' of turning Shakespeare upside down. A major critical storm was launched which swirled around two basic issues – repertoire and method – which continued to be the subject of endless, hot polemical debates throughout the 1920s in Soviet journals, newspapers, green-rooms, schools, cultural institutions, and communist party circles.

The scandal of Kurbas's 1924 production of Shakespeare was both aesthetic and political, as this *Macbeth* with its 'Brechtian' techniques (which preceded Brecht by nearly a decade) appeared not only to desecrate a classic of world theatre but also, in its concluding vision of endless betrayal, to reflect an amoral, power-hungry, violent world much like the one which looked on at the play. Kurbas's radical production of Shakespeare, a calculated risk aimed at rethinking theatrical representation itself by way of the most potent tool available – the classic – was also the endpoint of modernist productions in Soviet Ukraine. Vilified by some, admired by others, including Vsevolod Meyerhold, who invited Kurbas to stage it in Moscow, the 1924 *Macbeth* was the seminal production of the classics in the early Soviet period. For Kurbas, this Shakespearean play served the same purpose which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* did for Max Reinhardt: worked and

reworked, it offered the inspiration and occasion to consider the nature of theatre itself. It is also a production that Ukrainians are still coming to terms with today.

The focus of this book is the Shakespearean productions of the director, actor, playwright, film maker, and translator Les Kurbas, who first introduced Shakespeare to the Ukrainian stage, and created the foundations of the Soviet Ukrainian theatre and cinema. He was also responsible for their avant-garde direction: turning his back on a much-despised realism and a narrowly conceived idea of national art, he worked intensely toward the creation of a conceptual theatre, especially with his third company, the Berezil Artistic Association. Hailed by Meyerhold as the greatest living Soviet theatre director, Kurbas became one of the 'blank pages' of Soviet history. Executed in the far north in 1937, his papers, maquettes, photos, and company destroyed, Kurbas became a prohibited word until the late 1950s and a still dangerous one until the 1980s, when the process of his 'rehabilitation' began in earnest. His theoretical works were not permitted publication in Ukraine until the late 1980s, and even under glasnost were still severely censored. Only after Ukraine achieved independence in 1991 was it possible to discuss openly his career and investigate biographical details, including the year and place of his death.

Situating Shakespeare within the debates of the early Soviet period, this study traces the trajectory of his fortunes in Ukraine, at the same time as it investigates the challenges that Kurbas's modernist Shakespeare posed to early Soviet ideology. The general question explored here is how did Shakespeare manage not only to survive fourteen remarkable years of cultural turmoil and purges but also come to be recanonized in the 1930s and married to populist, ethnographic theatre? More particularly, *Shakespeare in the Undiscovered Bourn* examines why Kurbas's radical Shakespeare was not followed up with other such productions of the classics; why the Ukrainian director was immediately challenged and progressively stripped of his artistic control; and why the Ukrainian starburst of vital, innovative theatre metamorphosed so quickly into banality and provincialism.

With few exceptions, Shakespearean postcolonial criticism has limited itself to investigating the way in which culture has been contested on the battlefield of Shakespeare's work and reputation in North America, South Africa, the Caribbean, and India. For obvious linguistic reasons, only a limited number of scholars have ventured into the, arguably, even more complex terrain of the USSR, where the colonizer-colonized relationships are like geological formations which reveal seemingly infinite gradations of multilayered strata. (Interestingly, the recognition of the controlling power of representation in colonized societies, as well as the terms 'colonial,' 'imperial,' 'metropolitan,' and 'centre' – usually acknowledged as first coming into common use by literary critics in the 1970s – were already current with Les Kurbas in the 1910s and 1920s.) This study is an extended foray

into this postcolonial terrain, one which both confirms the difficulty of assigning a simple or single function to Shakespeare and the need for more supple and comprehensive theories of cross-cultural Shakespearean encounters.

Inflected by the theories of Uruguayan literary scholar Ángel Rama and Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz, this book will thus examine the complicated network of cross-cultural relations, and political and cultural programs invoked not only by Shakespeare's plays but also by his very name. At first employed as a kind of cultural equalizer and 'autoethnographic' text (one which explains or represents a people to itself by directly engaging the stereotypes others have created of them) immediately after the Revolution, Shakespeare is later used to probe the nature of theatre and representation itself. Kurbas's views about the classics (the established canon of European masterpieces), and Shakespeare in particular, as found in his four versions of *Macbeth* (1919–20, 1924) and in his various theoretical articles, will form a central part of this study. In opposition to his avant-garde theatre stood a romantic-heroic, populist tradition exemplified by the work of the director Panas Saksahansky, himself a devotee of Konstantin Stanislavsky. Saksahansky's production of *Othello* (1926) was a conscious riposte to the 'whimsies' and scandal of Kurbas's modernist Shakespeare. Little regarded at the time, by the 1930s Saksahansky's old-fashioned production was mythologized in a rewritten theatre history as the correct, 'realistic' model for staging the classics both in Ukraine and throughout the Soviet Union. In the early Soviet period, Shakespeare and other classics filled the gap in the repertoire when deafening silence met reiterated, desperate calls for new playwrights, new Shakespeares of the Revolution. In 1929, however, party officials finally attached the label of 'Shakespeare' to a mediocre playwright-propagandist, Ivan Mykytenko, in a calculated but paradoxical gesture which at once both dismissed Shakespeare's superiority in the face of Soviet achievement and acknowledged his greatness.

This complex and contradictory relationship to Shakespeare is viewed here in Ortiz and Rama's terms as a form of 'transculturation,' which reveals 'cultural plasticity' – the energy of the cultural community which chooses to take up a foreign text. Eschewing the term 'appropriation,' with its suggestion of an aggressive binary action, this study implicitly concurs with the more recent work of Ania Loomba, who, independently of Rama and Ortiz, has drawn similar conclusions: too much attention as been paid to dominant cultures and not enough to the resilience and strength of native cultures. Indeed, she insists that postcolonial critique has often displaced or simplified the indigenous (Loomba 138–9).

Rather than offering a single all-encompassing paradigm which would explain the multivectored influences, pressures, and ambitions brought to bear upon the acquisition of a classic, this study examines the 'cultural plasticity' of the Ukrainian encounter with Shakespeare within the context of established cultural

norms, practices, and prohibitions, and within the wider response to the classics on the part of directors and actors, party and government officials, and spectators. In its attention to issues of canon, classics, modernism, translation, populism, author, ideology, and text, this study echoes issues of contemporary theoretical interest, while examining them in the particular circumstances of the crucible of world war, revolutions, civil war, and its aftermath. As will become evident, in the USSR the struggle for cultural order and dominance was as complex and as contentious as that of the struggle for political, social, and economic order.

The issue of repertoire for the new Soviet society was complicated by a variety of cultural antagonisms and fissures: not only between centre and periphery, town and country, but also between past and present, modernism and *narodnytstvo* (roughly, 'populism'). Modernism, already introduced before the Revolution and fervently championed by its most committed adherent, Les Kurbas, looked West-ward in its (re-)conceptualization of cultural community, and thus represented Europeanization, cosmopolitanism, intellectualism, aestheticism – in other words, an open culture uninterested in a narrowly conceived national culture, although freely drawing from earlier, proscribed indigenous traditions (such as allegorical Baroque drama, puppet theatre, pagan rituals, and Christian iconography) as much as from American jazz, French cubism, German expressionism, and Japanese kabuki. *Narodnytstvo*, with its root in the word *narod* or people (and with some of the same connotations as the German *Volk)*, has been, it has been argued by some, the central term of Ukrainian intellectual history, subsuming in its connotations populism, Ukrainianism, patriotism, conservatism, realism, and a closed culture (Pavlychko). Perhaps most importantly, it seemed to embody the collective impulse, idealized in the notion of *sobornist* – unity. It was this tradition which Stalin chose to remythologize in the 1930s. In one of the many ironies of this period, Shakespeare eventually came to be allied not with the cosmopolitan or transnational but with the local and provincial.

Unlike the situation in Russia, where polemics concerning the future of the theatre and art as a whole focused mainly on the question of formalism, in Ukraine a wider spectrum of issues was involved including national identity; the right to independent national cultural development; Ukrainian theatre's relationship to Russian theatre and to Moscow's centrist political and cultural dictates; and Russia's attitude to the West – in other words, issues of periphery and centre, colonial and imperial power. These transcultural, intracultural, and intercultural encounters suggest some of the difficulties of generalizing and theorizing in the postcolonial terrain.

With the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening up of many hitherto inaccessible archives, it is now time to probe some of the master narratives created

during that regime. Of the former republics, Ukraine, the largest after Russia, has still received relatively little cultural attention. Its cultural history – an undiscovered bourn – has frequently been submerged within a homogenized Soviet experience, in which events in Moscow and Petersburg/Leningrad have stood as synecdoches for the experiences of a 'brotherhood of nations' – the vast geopolitical and cultural landscape which made up the USSR. Ironically, Western scholars, often as the result of a lack of linguistic skills, have replicated and reinforced old Soviet mythologies and narratives, blending the various languages, histories, cultures, and peoples into one 'Soviet' people, usually equated with the Russian people. Western Marxists have also contributed to these old imperialist myths by flattening discussion of complex cultural and linguistic politics and collapsing them into familiar categories of class, and into graspable binaries of communism/capitalism.

In this analysis, which draws from published as well as unpublished memoirs, journals, letters, newspapers, advertisements, manifestos, minutes of directorial labs, and meetings of collectives, Shakespeare serves as the lever by which to raise an occluded discussion of a complex network of cultural-political issues in which Kyiv, the centre of intellectual and cultural ferment, was an active participant in the international modernist dialogue. Isadora Duncan danced there; Bronislava Nijinska created the first abstract dances in her new *École de mouvement* and shared studio space and theoretical discussions with Kurbas and his troupe; Alexandra Exter, Anatoli Petrytsky, and Vadym Meller painted and created wonderful costumes and fantastic 'constructions' – set designs; Anatoli Butsky and Naum Prus-lin supplied the company with fashionable atonal music; Pavlo Tychyna and Mikhail Semenko turned literary notions upside down with their poetry; and, working in the medium of silent film, Alexander Dovzhenko re-articulated surrealism and dada, creating heroic landscapes and grand themes – all confirming that central works of modern art were produced in the peripheries and by exiles of one type or another. Many of these artists, who travelled widely and benefited from what Richard R. Bretell has called the 'graphic traffic' – the new, mass-produced distribution of images following the discovery of photography, the development of lithography, and the expansion of mass communication – had closer ties to Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and New York than to Moscow or Petersburg. Most importantly for the purposes of this book, Les Kurbas created a vital, innovative, conceptual theatre which set its sights on conquering the world, not just Kyiv or Moscow. Outside the purview of this study, Kurbas's stage, ballet, and opera productions, as well as his silent films, still await full interpretation by Western scholars.

Universality, value, canon, classic, high/low culture, ideology, power, imperial/colonial, periphery/centre – topics of contemporary interest to twenty-first-century Shakespeareans are the very issues which received significant attention and

debate through the catalyst of the double revolution in the Russian empire in 1917, world war and civil war. In the theatre, the *Ur*-question was always the question of repertoire, both the creation of a new body of plays and the usefulness and function of prerevolutionary drama for the new communist society and its vast, and generally unsophisticated audience. Within the eye of the critical storm swirled the name and the work of Shakespeare, a synecdoche for the world classics. In these debates, questions were raised about the universality of Shakespeare and his place in the new Soviet repertoire. Should the classic be scrapped or staged? The issue of *what* plays ought to be staged was soon followed by the ultimately dominant question of *how* to stage them. Should Shakespeare be reengineered or maintained as a museum piece? If so, for whom, exactly?

A contribution to studies of modernism, Shakespeare, Soviet, cultural and postcolonial studies, this book reasserts the Canadian scholar Constantine Bida's claim, made nearly three decades ago, that 'the question of Shakespeare's impact on the Slavic world looms in importance above all others dealing with Western influence on the cultural and artistic life of these nations' (Bida 340).

Chapter One

Ex Nihilo: The Classics, Wars, and Revolutions

Truly, we were like the gods ... attempting to create a whole new world out of nothing.
Volodymyr Vynnychenko

In the beginning there was nothing – but might and movement.
Pavlo Tychyna ('Creation')

Perchance to dream ...
Shakespeare

Building a nation or reviving it from its ashes requires a rethinking of the relationship between individual and community, past and present. Building a theatrical culture requires a similar task of reconsidering and reconceiving relationships: among playwright, actor, and audience; expectation, convention, and innovation. It raises, first of all, the explosive question of repertoire. What models, what sources should be used to reimagine and reflect the emergent identity? If a society in the process of transformation rejects the immediate past, then the question is to what past does it look for models? What, in themselves, do these models suggest? Omit? Express? And, finally, two related questions: what does this society want to become, and how will that becoming be reflected in its cultural projects?

When, in 1899, Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats issued their Manifesto of the Irish Literary Theatre, they proposed to 'show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism.' Intending to stage the 'deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland' and counting upon a 'freedom to experiment' absent in the theatres of England (Gregory 378), Lady Gregory and her compatriots initiated a tremendous renaissance of Irish culture and theatre; yet, ironically, most of the great works which this movement made possible were written in, and became a part of, the canon of English literary works. The Irish plays thus created both rewrote concepts of 'Irishness' and tacitly acknowledged the international reach of English.

Not all nations have followed or wished to follow the Irish example. At approximately the same time as Yeats and Lady Gregory were discussing their dream at Coole Park, on the other side of Europe similar debates and discussions were taking place in reaction to harsh laws imposed by an imperial power. In 'Ukraine,' a stateless, divided nation whose western extremity was ruled by Austro-Hungary and its central and eastern areas by imperial Russia, national culture was a luxurious and often dangerous dream. Under tsarist rule, draconian decrees and circulars of 1863 and 1876 had crippled the development of Ukrainian culture, scholarship, and religious activity. The 1876 Ems Ukaz, for example, banned the importation and publication of all books in and translations into Ukrainian. Library shelves were emptied of all Ukrainian books. Even seemingly innocuous folk songs were perceived as threats to the dominant culture. Forbidden in Ukrainian, they were permitted public performance only in foreign languages, such as French (Revutsky, 'Act'; Solchanyk).

In 1881, after two decades of severe repression, the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian government made a few small concessions to the Ukrainian movement, including permission for the creation of a travelling Ukrainian theatre troupe, which was nonetheless prohibited from performing in various politically sensitive regions of Ukraine (including Kyiv, Volynia, Podilia, Poltava, and Chernihiv), for, as the governor of Kyiv observed, 'In Petersburg this [theatre] is art, but in Kyiv it's politics' (cited in Ryl's'kyi, *Ukrainians'kyi*, 207). The company was subject to further regulations and restrictions, including limitations on the depiction of certain topics (no satire or history, no plays of middle-class life, no romantic verse plays), and language use (middle and upper class characters were to speak Russian). Further, Ukrainian plays were allowed only if a Russian play was staged first on the same night and consisted of the same number of acts – a policy requiring considerable stamina from both audience and actor.

Despite the endurance test for theatre-goers which this tsarist policy occasioned, the very fact that the theatre was able to exist and, moreover, that it was perhaps the only cultural medium which was permitted a measure of freedom, gave it extraordinary significance. This small concession also stimulated an already large and hitherto denied interest in the theatre. Thus, eight years before Lady Gregory and Yeats were to sit down over a Remington typewriter to compose their statement of intent for the creation of a new Irish theatre, the Ukrainian 'Theatre of the Coryphaei' (theatre of 'star' actors) similarly attempted to revivify Ukrainian culture. By the 1890s at least four professional troupes with over forty actors in each one came into being. The Coryphaei included, among many others, the playwrights Mykhailo Starytsky (1840–1904) and Marko Kropyvnytsky (1840–1910); the actress Maria Zankovetska (1860–1934); and the three talented Tobilevych brothers, each of whom had a different stage surname:

Ivan Karpenko-Kary (1845–1907), Mykola Sadovsky (1856–1933), and Panas Saksahansky (1859–1940). The eldest of the three brothers, Karpenko-Kary, was primarily a playwright, producing nearly forty plays in his lifetime. The youngest, Panas Saksahansky, was best known as a virtuoso character actor, although he also directed and managed theatre companies, and was later to stage the first *Othello* in Soviet Ukraine. The exceedingly slow and laborious path toward cultural liberalization under imperialist conditions caused the middle brother, Mykola Sadovsky, actor, director, and theatrical entrepreneur, despairingly to adopt a crown of thorns as his troupe's emblem.

Working during the period of greatest tsarist censorship when all other genres were forbidden, these playwrights, actors, and managers produced ethnographic (populist), historical, and social (*pobut*) plays. *Pobut* is not an easily translatable term; it refers to quotidian, domestic existence; hence, the dramas of everyday life. Unlike the English comedy of manners, these plays have no preciosity or brittleness, since they deal with the lower classes – a consequence of tsarist censors, who (as has been observed) had circumscribed both the topics and social classes represented. Peopled by shrewish mothers-in-law, hard-drinking peasants, manly but divided heroes, and modest, beautiful, and unswervingly loyal heroines who nonetheless often badly chose their lovers, these plays were essentially melodramas and comedies, which romanticized ethnographic aspects of peasant life. Successful playwrights like Marko Kropyvnytsky relied on a repeated formula for success: frequent recourse to folkloric expressions and sayings, good dancing and singing, authentic embroidered costumes, and idyllic verbal and scenic depictions of the Ukrainian landscape. The love of the land and sympathy for the peasants' lot were constant themes which underpinned the inevitable romantic plot. Economic, class, and social conflicts were lightly sketched in, and officials and bureaucrats were mildly mocked.

Another prolific playwright, Karpenko-Kary, followed in the same mould, although he introduced a more sociological and psychological slant to his dramas (Chornii 152). Building on strong contrasts, his plays centre on a heroic figure who is opposed either to his environment or to a specific antagonist. Fully formed from the beginning, the heroes of Kropvypnytsky and Karpenko-Kary's plays don't change during the course of the action, but remain faithful to their type. While the central issue is love (both as plot and theme), the overall message of these plays focuses on the moral-didactic rather than the romantic. Music was used to add liveliness and to underscore particular situations, while humour both made the romantic triangles and other tribulations palatable, and gently subverted some of the plays' assumptions. Presenting excellent choirs, impressively large crowd scenes, large orchestras, and lush, historically accurate ethnographic costumes, the Coryphaei established a native aesthetic (a 'lyrical-dramatic realism')

consisting of an amalgam of spectacle, song, and dance and thus created in its spectators a certain set of expectations.

An important distinction needs to be made here between the artificially conceived (because circumscribed by external factors) ethnographic texts and authentic folk theatre. The latter arose out of the rituals of daily village life and was linked with the rhythms of life, the seasons, and liturgical holy days. Its most impressive example was the elaborate wedding ritual, which consisted of two lengthy and independent dramas. One focused on the matchmaking, betrothal, and wedding; the other, on the introduction of the bride to her new family, her purification, and her designation as future mother of the next generation. The potency of such 'organic' theatre, which drew on archetypal patterns was soon to inspire modernists such as the choreographer Bronislava Nijinska, whose deeply moving ballet, *Les Noces*, derived from precisely such East Slavic sources. Nevertheless, the ethnographic and *pobut* drama served an important – even a central – national function in keeping the theatre alive in the Ukrainian language and in preserving aspects of popular culture. Already in the early twentieth century, Ukrainians referred to these plays as their classics, regarding them as public symbols, part of a system by which the community recognized itself. Bearing out Balz Engler's definition of the classic, these were works of literature which had 'left the book'; they became 'a defining part of those people's minds' (Engler 229); that is, the Ukrainian 'classics' served to define the restricted community which accepted them as significant.

Deeply respected and wildly popular because of the multiple roles which the Theatre of the Coryphaei represented, its creators had their place guaranteed in Ukrainian theatrical history. Thus, actor Yosyp Hirniak and others have quite rightly claimed for this theatre a spiritual significance which goes much beyond that of a mere historical function (Hirniak, *Spomyny*, 66). Dealing as it did with peasants and workers, this was a theatre allied with the people, and was thus conceived as 'democratic.' In performing folk music and dances, it served a memorial function and fostered a local pride heavily under attack from all official quarters. Its 'colossal' role lay in its identification with Ukrainian cultural survival (Vasyl'ko, 'Hastroli,' 1). Indeed, the public outpouring of grief when the playwright Marko Kropyvnytsy died in 1910 was enormous. His coffin was decorated with a crown of thorns and a banner with the words, 'To a Fighter, for his dreams' (Mari'anenko, 'Moie zhyttia – moia pratsia (pershi frahmenty),' 42).

In considering the long-lasting impact and influence of the ethnographic theatre, it might be useful to turn for a moment to the paradigm of cultural relations first proposed by the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s and later nuanced by the Uruguayan literary scholar Ángel Rama. Reacting against the simplistic (in Ortiz's view), Anglo-American term 'acculturation' to describe cul-

ture under conquest, Ortiz argued that 'transculturation' was the more useful term because it better expressed the different phases of the process of shifting from the modes of one culture to another. Observing the strong presence of African cultural practices in various domains of Cuban culture, Ortiz came to believe that culture evolves 'contrapunctally' to produce new syncretic or transcultural forms.[1] Never simply a process of acquisition, rather, Ortiz suggested, transculturation involves a three-step process: first, 'partial deculturation' or loss of elements of an earlier culture; second, the incorporation of elements of the external culture; and, finally, a recomposition or 'neoculturation' of elements taken from both the surviving elements of the original culture and the external, metropolitan culture (Ortiz 86). Following this schema, the ukazes of the nineteenth century may be regarded as resulting in deculturation: the loss of an indigenous metropolitan theatre (the two-centuries-old Ukrainian tradition of academic or school, liturgical, and political drama), the devaluation of populist theatre, and the concomitant acceptance of the stereotype of the Ukrainian drinking and dancing peasant, a Slavic version of the stage Irishman.

Resisting the 'geometric' quality of Ortiz's paradigm, Ángel Rama, who introduced this term into literary criticism in the 1970s, pointed out that Ortiz's theories did not sufficiently take into account the energy of the cultural host and its ability to select both what gets absorbed into its culture and how it is used – even though 'subordinate' peoples do not usually control what emanates from a dominant or conquering culture (Rama 38–9).[2] Receptivity, Rama argued, does not follow rigid or determined norms. From his point of view, it could be argued that, although denied access to a metropolitan culture, the Ukrainian ethnographic theatre may be regarded as not only a constricted theatre turned inward, but also, paradoxically and simultaneously, one that looked outward. In its naturalization of the melodramatic mode (discussed in greater detail below), and in the centrality of folkloric elements to the drama, it actually conformed to a widespread nineteenth-century Western European interest in 'the folk' and folklore as a way of uncovering 'national' character.

Transculturation is also related to the process of autoethnography, a term coined by Mary Louise Pratt. Both 'live' in the sphere of cultural contact, negotiation, clash, and struggle. An autoethnographic text, Pratt explains, is one in which 'people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them ... they involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror.'[3] As we shall see, modernist Shakespeare was to prove that effective autoethnographic text: a way of, first, engaging profitably with, and then attempting to supersede the idioms of both imperial and neo-cultural text.

'Thou art translated': Shakespeare and Melodrama

In the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution, when the Ems Ukaz was rescinded, the first stationary theatres were finally established and the ban on translated works was slowly lifted. Mykola Sadovsky was finally permitted to establish the first stationary Ukrainian theatre in 1907, an event as significant to the history of Ukrainian culture and theatre as Yeats and Lady Gregory's creation of the Abbey Theatre for the Irish or Stanislavsky's of the Moscow Art Theatre for the Russian. In Sadovsky's theatre, for the first time ever, the Ukrainian-born Nikolai Gogol's (Mykola Hohol) plays were finally permitted performance (they had been produced much earlier in Russia).

In addition to professional companies, the early years of the twentieth century saw an outburst of theatrical activity of all kinds, including the creation of amateur peasant theatre groups in all parts of Ukraine and the beginnings of workers' theatres in three cities, Kyiv among them. Between 1906 and 1916, Western European classics, contemporary plays, and new native plays were all concurrently being introduced on the Ukrainian stage, although permission to play Shakespeare was slow to be granted. In 1907, for example, the tsarist censors still refused permission to stage *Hamlet* because, they argued, a Ukrainian production might evoke laughter by its presumption of treating a world classic in a 'peasant' language (Revutsky, 'Act,' 72). Yet, by the year of the double revolution, 1917, and despite civil and world war, the process of 'Europeanization' was firmly underway. At last, Shakespeare could be performed.

Since both native and foreign works had endured a simultaneous ban, it is not at all surprising that in Ukraine (as in most European countries, although for very different reasons), the classics, including Shakespeare, would become associated with national and cultural revival. A theatrical challenge to a neonatal theatre, Shakespeare had all the magnetism and the potency of the taboo. But, although forbidden in the language of the colonized, Shakespeare had also been tantalizingly present in Russian productions in Ukraine. Consequently, Ukrainian cultural aspirations and taste were built upon that which was prohibited and that which was permitted, following the usual paradox of censorship which predictably creates sophisticated audiences.

The Ukrainian taste for Shakespeare is further complicated by the act of translation and transmission into the Eastern European world. Both censorship and translation, as Michael Holquist astutely points out, are strategies to control as well as to impart meaning; both necessarily leave something out. On the provincial stage (of which Kyiv was considered a part) as well as on the stages of Petersburg and on the pages of translators, melodrama and vaudeville continued to reign. La Place and Ducis, in particular, haunted the edges of Eastern European

translations. The common way of translating Shakespeare into Russian and Ukrainian was by way of adaptation and translation from languages other than English (usually from the German) and from literary models other than those of early modern England. When Edward Gordon Craig arrived in Moscow in 1911 to work on *Hamlet*, he was surprised and disappointed to learn that, despite eight Russian translations of the play, no one – not even Konstantin Stanislavsky – had thought of consulting the 'original,' that is, an English, text (Rowe 119). When a 'new' three-volume edition of Shakespeare's works appeared two years later, once again (and with only one exception) it consisted of reprints of nineteenth-century 'second-hand' translations (Alekseev 737).[4] This practice had already reached its apogee early in the nineteenth century in one of Alexandr Gavrilovich Rotchev's works, which announced on its title page, *Macbeth, a Tragedy of Shakespeare, from the Works of Schiller* (1830). Shakespeare in Russian, then, was known and loved in his melodramatic variants. (Perhaps this fact goes some way to explaining Tolstoy's infamous attack on the English playwright.) Filtered through foreign lenses, literary fashions, and contemporary translation practices, Shakespeare was only nominally an Elizabethan-Jacobean. Culturally controlled Shakespeare, the product of a long tradition of melodramatic, academic, and otherwise tamed variants, may still be found in Eastern Europe today. The Canadian director Guy Sprung, working on a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Moscow in 1989, described in his published director's diary the great resistance of actors to Shakespearean double entendres; when Sprung glossed a few passages, they protested in astonishment that surely the great English classic could never have intended such bawdy meanings (Sprung 7, 91–2).

Both the Ukrainian native dramatic tradition, deeply affected by colonialism, and the stage example of an 'imperial' classic in its provincial variant (pictorial Shakespeare in a declamatory style) met at the juncture of melodrama, a genre itself born from the French Revolution and its aftermath, and committed to the group. As Peter Brooks, James Rahill, James L. Smith, and others have shown, melodrama should properly be employed not as a term of opprobrium but as a descriptive, neutral term, designating a type of genre. Its dependence for action upon external pressures and adversaries (an evil-doer, a social group, a hostile ideology, an accident) necessitates its resort to extremity of incident, consequence, and solution. Tending toward the moralistic, it publicly acknowledges virtue and punishes (or converts) villainy. Of necessity entailing the conflict between clearly opposing sides usually represented by 'whole' characters incapable of development (though conversion is possible), melodrama at its best reaches toward the archetypal. Intent not on ambiguity, ambivalence, plurality, or polysemy, it depends upon boldly stated oppositions between light and darkness, good and evil. Bluntly delineating protagonists and antagonists, melodrama tends toward the moralistic and appeals to the

best, the most virtuous, of mankind's aspirations. I dwell at some length on the deeply rooted traditions of the nineteenth century and the prerevolutionary theatre because they were never entirely absent from the Soviet stage (as chapter 3, below, will argue) and were always (even when negatively constructed) part of the polemical debates of the period. Eminently suited to the propagandistic, melodrama was also the ideal mode for a depiction of the binaries of class struggle. Muted by officialdom in the 1920s, it was reinstated in 1934 as the officially sanctioned genre of the USSR under the new guise of 'optimistic tragedy.'

For a colonized people, melodrama may be the only possible genre, for, as Peter Brooks has argued, melodrama 'comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern' (P. Brooks 10). With its rhetoric of absolutes and its story of virtue assailed by external forces, melodrama presents a wish-fulfilment victory at its end, a 'dream world' of poetic justice (Smith 17–18) achieved by means of a necessarily public acknowledgment of virtue and the punishment (or conversion) of villainy. Indeed, the optimistic conclusion of melodrama with its sense of social purgation and its implied belief in the ultimate victory of merit over class or other domination is perhaps its most significant trait (Smith 54).

When Shakespeare was finally ushered onto the Ukrainian stage in 1919, it was in the company of modernism (and in reaction to the dominant melodramatic mode of both the Russian and the Ukrainian theatres) and under the direction of Oleksander Kurbas or, as he preferred informally to call himself, Les Kurbas. Born to Ukrainian actors in the province of Halychyna in Western Ukraine, and hence in the more liberal circumstances of Austro-Hungarian rule, Kurbas was a polymath: actor, director, playwright, translator, pedagogue, theorist, film maker, musician, costume designer. Himself an 'epoch' in the Ukrainian theatre – as one of his contemporaries referred to him (Tokar' 61) – Kurbas laid the foundations for twentieth-century Ukrainian theatre and cinema, educating and influencing hundreds of actors, directors, and designers. He prepared four Shakespeare plays (*Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear)* and did preliminary work on five others (*Hamlet, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night, Timon of Athens, Antony and Cleopatra*), intending eventually to produce the whole Shakespearean canon. However, it was *Macbeth* which came to serve for Kurbas a function similar to that which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* did for Max Reinhardt: it was an inspirational, flexible tool for examining the nature of theatre. As will be seen, his 1924 *Macbeth* was one of the most radical productions of Shakespeare of the early twentieth century.

Les Kurbas had arrived in tsarist Kyiv in 1916 with a passion, harboured at least since the beginning of the decade, to transform the Ukrainian theatre into a dis-

tinct and vibrant theatre without turning it into a mere provincial replica of foreign cultures;[5] more, he dared to dream of changing the nature of theatre as a whole, which, he believed, was in its death throes. Of the same generation as T.S. Eliot, Eugene O'Neill, Erwin Piscator, and Charlie Chaplin, Kurbas also shared some of their ideas. Antimaterialist, Kurbas sought spirituality in art, a recovery of wholeness in his fragmentary world. Trained in philosophy and philology (German, Slavic, and Sanskrit) in Vienna and in Lviv (Western Ukraine), he was a lifelong voracious reader and a lover of art. 'Art, especially the theatre,' he was to write later in his director's diary, 'must return to its primordial form: the religious act. It is, after all, in essence a religious act ... It is a powerful tool by which the coarse is transformed into the fine, raising it into a higher sphere, transforming matter ... theatre is truly a temple ...' (Kurbas, Rezhysers'kyi shchodennyk, Bila Tserkva, 10/8, 1920, 22).

Within a short time after his arrival in Kyiv, the charismatic Kurbas joined with like-minded actors and actresses, graduates of the Lysenko Institute of Music and Theatre, and created an informal study group, the 'Studio,' which privately began to work on the classics. The road to Starytsky and Karpenko-Kary (two nineteenth-century Ukrainian dramatists) – that is, the road to a distinct Ukrainian theatre – was, Kurbas proclaimed, to be sought through an exploration of Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Molière (Hirniak, *Spomyny*, 272).

Time, Motion, Spirit: Paris – Vienna – Kyiv

Before discussing Ukrainian modernism and Kurbas's distinct contribution to a modernist Shakespeare, it is worth pausing for a moment over his time in multilingual and multicultural Vienna, that great city of theatre, art, and music. As the capital of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Vienna enticed the intellectuals and would-be urban sophisticates of its numerous polyglot provinces, including the small-town Einstein and Freud, who were much talked about when Kurbas arrived in the city. As a great, modern metropolis, Vienna was also part of a network of urban centres which, because of technological advances (such as the railway and the mass distribution of images), shared ideas almost instantly. As Richard R. Bretell has pointed out, 'No one in modernist Vienna was uninformed about the latest developments in Paris or Berlin ...' (Bretell 47).

Enrolled at the University of Vienna in 1907–8, Kurbas seemed to have submitted to his grandfather's insistence that he never take up the penurious livelihood of his parents, acting. But if his grandfather, himself a Catholic (Eastern rite) priest (that is, one permitted to marry), hoped that philosophy and philology would settle Kurbas on the path of financial comfort, both the uncongenial positivist directions of the philosophy department, and the attractions of the

Les Kurbas in 1908. (HA)

Burgtheater (especially the acting of Josef Kainz) seemed to conspire to keep Kurbas to his original impulse: theatrical art.

The Vienna experience and the influence it had on Kurbas's life remains to be fully explored elsewhere; it can only be sketched here. These influences, theatrical, philosophical, and aesthetic, found their confluence in the revolt against rationalism and materialism. Already interested, Kurbas became a confirmed modernist, perhaps the only truly convinced outwardly (not simply Western-) oriented Ukrainian thinker of his time. The Russian theatre historian Alexandr Deich referred to him in his memoirs as a 'true internationalist' and yet a 'patriot of Ukrainian culture' (Deich 96). Intellectually and artistically enfranchised by the Viennese experience, Kurbas seemed to be affirmed in his creative, cultural self-confidence. Once in Kyiv, he would seek out and work with like-minded individuals such Vadym Meller, Anatoli Petrytsky, Mikhail (Michael) Mordkin, and Bronislava Nijinska, who felt at home in the world rather than simply in the Slavic world.

Discovering Vienna's rich theatre life would have presented a source of infinite pleasure for Kurbas, its glittering auditoriums and opulent spectacles something of a magic show after the relative poverty of theatre in Halychyna, his native province, then under Polish rule. Listing the many plays which constituted the broad repertoire of Viennese theatres in 1907–8, the Ukrainian director and theatre historian Iryna Volytska declared that they constituted what amounted to a university curriculum of important playwrights (Volyts'ka 23). Contemporary and classical plays of all genres were to be found on the various stages of the Austrian city. There was much to marvel at and learn from these productions, as well as from star touring players such as Eleanore Duse and Alexander Moissi, and from theorists and practitioners such as Georg Fuchs, Max Reinhardt, Adolphe Appia, and, especially Edward Gordon Craig.

While Kurbas later wrote and spoke about many of the actors he had seen, he was most struck by the theatrical lion of his day, Josef Kainz. Indeed, Kainz made a lasting impression on the Ukrainian director, as his articles, and the letters and memoirs of his wife and colleagues attest. In particular, Kurbas was taken with the Austrian's Romeo, Hamlet, and Mark Antony. Valentyna Chystiakova (who was to become Kurbas's wife) recalled that Kurbas was enthralled by Kainz's brilliant, virtuoso technique, his combination of emotion and intellectualism, elegance and restraint (Chystiakova, Letter, 243–4). In her study of Kurbas's early years, Volytska suggests that Kurbas was affected by Kainz's superb control of technique: a mastery over every part of his body, as well as a firm control over the musicality of his voice. His novel treatment of language was what seemed to have caught the attention of many observers, including Max Reinhardt, who noted that 'apart from the impression of [Kainz's] appearance, which while not extraordinary is uncommonly attractive, from his various ingenious shadings [and] his

strong temperament, there is the timbre of his voice, sometimes sensuous, sometimes audacious, defiant, *youthfully* powerful, that has an infinite charm. Above all the *tempo* and the clarity and purity of his speech are pleasures to the ear. *That* is pure rhetoric' (Reinhardt in Williams, *German,* 204).

In 1907 Kainz was already a legend. Returning to his native Vienna after a remarkable career at the Deutsches Theater, he brought with him not only attributes displayed so well in Berlin – rhetorical control, musicality, a nervous, individualistic, aristocratic presence – but also a new, darker vision. Known earlier for such youthful roles as Prince Hal and Romeo, Kainz had played the latter as a passionate, impulsive character quite unlike the solemn young man of previous interpreters. Kurbas, who chose to play Romeo not ten years later, must have been struck by Kainz's passion and energy, as well as by the concomitant absence of the declamatory and the conventional. The classics seemed to be revivified and made suddenly contemporary in Kainz's playing. In Hamlet, the other role which Kurbas so admired, Kainz best revealed his tendency to abrupt reversals, sharp contrasts, and oscillations from 'aristocratic graciousness' to 'a passionate Viking-like fury' (Williams, 'Shakespeare at the Burgtheater,' 28). Critical accounts grasp at ways to describe Kainz's modernization of the classics, often resorting to such words as 'architectonic' or 'contoured' – the very words later used to describe Kurbas's work.

Kainz's 'most consummate performance' (Williams, 'Shakespeare at the Burgtheater,' 28) was the one that Kurbas saw in December 1907: Shakespeare's Mark Antony (*Julius Caesar*). While Kainz had played Mark Antony as a genial figure in Berlin, in Vienna he interpreted the Roman as a cynical man, who carefully structured his prepared speech in order to manipulate the mob to his ends, while himself craving power, as his suddenly displayed royal purple toga attested. It was as Mark Antony that Kainz's newer tendency to confront his roles seemed most pronounced and it is this acting-against-the-text which some critics disliked, while others (like Kurbas) found intensely satisfying. The dissimilarity between actor and manipulative politician suggested by Kainz's use of rupture between role and person was distinctly modern in its discontinuity and analytic-intellectual elements, and it was a technique which encouraged the audience simultaneously to recognize both the history and the modernity of the play.

There was much to admire and to contemplate here for a young would-be actor and director of an already philosophical cast. The theatricalism of Kainz's conception of his role, the sense of independence from convention and even the text, the control over language and body, the grace and clarity of the delivery – these were to become (and remained) some of the key postulates of Kurbas's own vision of acting.

Kainz's theatricality and his ability 'to suggest an inner world that could not be fully grasped' (Williams, *German,* 204) were also qualities which characterized

two other major influences on Kurbas developed during his Vienna days, Max Reinhardt and Edward Gordon Craig. Although Reinhardt had been in Vienna in the summer of 1907, it is not clear when, exactly, Kurbas arrived there. Term did not begin until October, so he may have missed seeing Reinhardt's production of Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*; but, even if he did not see it, he would have heard about this production by one of the great masters of the stage. Most likely, as Volytska guesses, the best opportunity to have seen (or perhaps even to have participated in the mass scenes of) a Reinhardt production would have been in 1911, when Reinhardt staged his *Oedipus the King* (1910–12). Throughout 1910, when Kurbas was forced to return to Halychyna to attend the funeral of his father, the Polish press enthusiastically and 'systematically' informed its readers about Reinhardt's productions (Volyts'ka 56). In the constantly experimenting Reinhardt Kurbas would have found most congenial his notion of theatre as enchantment rather than locus of moral education (the traditional Germanic view) and his idea of the text as only the skeleton, not the dictator, of the production. From Reinhardt, Kurbas could have learned about the sculptural ordering of the movement of crowds and the rhythms formed by individual bodies. More specifically, the production of Greek tragedy would have confirmed Kurbas in his view of the power and the energy of ritual and nonrepresentational art.

Widely circulating at this time were the ideas of German theorist and director Georg Fuchs whose Künstlertheater, opened just across the border – in Munich – in 1908, created something of an international sensation. His *Revolution in the Theatre* (1909) with its title-page motto 'Re-theatricalize the theatre!' summarized many of his previously expressed ideas: the theatre as a tool for spiritually uniting the community; the power of ritual; the reiterated claim that realism was an obstacle to intoxication with the theatre; the significance of rhythm as infusing all elements of a production; the importance of the chorus as the main actor in the new theatre of community; the destruction of the proscenium arch. Most important was his intention to replace the perspectivist stage with a 'relief-stage,' a shallow stage in which foreground would be joined with background. In this space, the actor would play in a stylized, formal, and graceful manner like that of a dancer (whom he, like Craig, considered the father of theatre art). The relief-stage would make 'the actors stand out almost exactly like statues on a bas-relief panel' (Cheney 29), thus accentuating the visual beauty of line, mass, and movement, and endowing it with decorative value.

In Vienna, too, Kurbas would have had access to the ideas of the Swiss Adolphe Appia with his rhythmic treatment of space, dynamic lighting, and his use of music as the direct expression of the hidden, inner being. Like Fuchs, Appia conceived of the stage performance as a grand, spiritual event; he wanted to unite stage and auditorium in the 'cathedral' of theatre (Peter 283, 285).

What Reinhardt showed and Fuchs failed at in practice, Edward Gordon Craig articulated persuasively in *On the Art of the Theatre*. Sharing many of the ideas of Reinhardt and Fuchs, Craig also placed the harmony of setting, lighting, and movement in the service of the revelation of inner, imaginative truth rather than fascimile surface. Like his Austro-German colleagues, Craig believed that the theatre had nothing to do with literature or with realism, but rather with dance, which depended upon the vitality of the senses, the importance of seeing. In 'The Art of the Theatre,' Craig proclaimed, 'The father of the dramatist was the dancer' (140): 'action ... is the very spirit of acting; words ... the body of the play; line and colour ... the very heart of the scene; rhythm, ... the very essence of dance' (138). 'Masses must be treated as masses, as Rembrandt treats a mass' (Craig, 'Artists,' 34). There was such a thing, he reminded his readers, as '*noble* artificiality' (Craig, 'Artists,' 35). Drama, if it was not trivial, should take us '*beyond* reality' (Craig, 'Masks,' 21). The ideal actor, who possessed 'both a rich nature and a powerful brain,' would reveal this hidden reality to us through symbols (Craig, 'Artists,' 11).

Many of Craig's ideas were extremely congenial to and dovetailed with those of the philosophically trained Kurbas: the emphasis on movement and on the senses (especially seeing); interest in post-impressionist art and its attempt to reach 'beyond reality'; the primacy of the other arts (rather than theories of theatrical art) as creative influences; the notion that the ideal actor was possessed of a 'rich nature and a powerful brain'; the importance of a strong bond between audience and actor; the rejection of naturalism; the significance of symbols. More a practical man of the theatre than Craig, Kurbas would constantly test his ideas on the stage, eventually working out a concrete means of creating 'symbols' or 'objective correlatives' through what he was to call *peretvorennia* (transformation) (discussed below).

The common denominator linking these theatre artists and theorists is the idea of theatricalism (including new ways of conceiving of stage space) as a method of reaching hidden, inner reality. Space and time were also the topics of much debate in the world of science and technology. Sir Sandford Fleming's introduction of Standard Time suggested the simultaneity and fluidity of time. The discovery of X-rays and the electron, the theories of Max Planck (theory of radiation, 1906) and Freud's exploration of the psyche undermined materialist, rational ways of understanding the universe. Direct, empirical viewing – like the perspectival stage – was deceptive. Coming to his relativity theory by nonverbal, even aesthetic means (so persuasively argues Arthur I. Miller), Einstein revealed a space which was not empty but filled with movement, fields of energy. Every sphere of life seemed to be undergoing renewal and revolution. The musical Kurbas (who was an excellent pianist) was taken with jazz, blues, the work of Maurice Ravel, Claude Debussy, Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schönberg, and especially Alex-

andr Scriabin who, in Vienna in 1908 (at the same time as Kurbas), first developed his pantonal music, emancipating notes from keys. Scriabin created a 'mystic chord' and plans for a great work, inspired by Rudolf Steiner's theosophy, a 'Mysterium' which would bring together text, sounds, pictures, sculpture, and dance. Like artists and scientists in their spheres, he was attempting 'a complete reevaluation of the relation of the parts to the whole in "classical" music, and of the place of transitional material in that relation' (Everdell 282).

Also in Vienna in 1908, Grete Wiesenthal (who was the First Fairy in one of Reinhardt's early productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) gave a 'stunning performance' of the new 'expressive free dance' at the Cabaret Fledermaus. The editor of *Erdgeist*, who had devoted 'a rhapsodic article' to Wiesenthal, described her art as a 'new religion' (Werkner 78–80). Appearing in a Greek-like short tunic, Wiesenthal danced to the music of Beethoven. Photos of her irregular, asymmetrical positions with her head held far back and her long hair cascading behind her suggest the influence of the new eurhythmic system of Jacques Dalcroze. The undulating body, in evidence here, also found its way into the work of a painter admired by Kurbas, the Swiss Ferdinand Hodler, and also influenced another Viennese resident at that time, Oskar Kokoschka (Werkner 78).

Thus, the attractions of the theatre over university lectures and other aspects of intellectual life cannot be overstated in contemplating Kurbas's development. Kurbas would become one of the most philosophical of all Ukrainian directors – although he seemed little interested in Viennese philosophical thought of the materialist type. The French Henri Bergson, not the Viennese Ernst Mach and the positivist school, was the source of Kurbas's pleasure in philosophy. His reading of Bergson, as well as his fascination with Einstein's theory of the space-time continuum, would influence Kurbas's concept of fluid time and even his definition of acting as *durée*. Drawn to a spiritual, even mystical understanding of the universe, Kurbas was attracted to Bergson's idea of intuition and 'intellectual sympathy' as the only 'absolute' form of knowledge; to his belief that homogeneous time was a fiction ; and especially to his key concept of duration. According to Bergson, time is a heterogeneous flux or duration; it seems homogeneous only when corrupted by space. To conceive of time as a succession of moments that can be counted, or to conceive of the movement or flux of duration as a succession of fixed positions, is to corrupt time and motion by space, for it is only space that has number and can be counted, not duration or spirit. Such a conception of time is 'but an abstraction or symbol, a common measure' of duration (Bergson, *Matter*, 267) – in other words, a practical, mechanical intellectualization of what can only properly and purely be experienced by intuition. The necessity of the laws of positivistic science apply only to space (and to the impure time corrupted by space), not to pure time, or duration, or spirit. And so, accord-

ing to Bergson, 'To touch the reality of spirit we must place ourselves at the point where an individual consciousness, continuing and retaining the past in a present enriched by it, thus escapes the law of necessity ...' (Bergson, *Matter,* 313).[6]

Bergson's study of time, motion, spirit, relativity, and creativity fed into the ideas which Kurbas had already absorbed from Craig, Reinhardt, and others. Bergson's critique of fixing action, and his definition of real movements as 'indivisibles which occupy duration, involve a before and an after,' and 'link together the successive movements of time by a thread of variable quality which cannot be without some likeness to the continuity of our own consciousness' (Bergson, *Matter,* 268) would go on to affect Kurbas's definition of acting ('duration in an assigned plane and rhythm') and would be ruthlessly tested in his 1924 production of *Macbeth.*

Bergson's view of matter as an aggregate of images in some ways resembled the work of Ukrainian Oleksander Potebnia, philologist and literary theorist, and student of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who linked together myth, poetry, and science as ways of understanding and knowing the world. According to Potebnia, poetry was a 'thinking in images,' and language the objectification of spiritual knowledge. The word was not structured just into 'sound' and 'sense' but into three parts: sound, sense, and 'internal form' which mediated between the two (Fizer). Unlike Ferdinand de Saussure with his belief in the arbitrariness of the connection between word and sound, Potebnia contended that internal form determines external form. In his famous example of *okno* (window) which comes from *oko* (eye), Potebnia asserted that *okno* bears traces of poetic images which may be uncovered by scholarship and by poets. Thus, the arbitrariness of words is only apparent, not real.

To Potebnia, Bergson, and Einstein must be added the names of Paul Cézanne and Pablo Picasso. In tracing the genealogy of his first theatre collective, Kurbas insisted upon the centrality of the influence of the two artists to his thinking. In 1907, a year after the death of Cézanne, a major retrospective was mounted at the Salon d'Automne, which also resulted in a mass distribution of images of his paintings. This 'graphic traffic' meant that the images could be studied again and again. Closest in his concept of time to Bergson and echoing some of Fuchs and Reinhardt's ideas about space, Cézanne presented the viewer with multiple perspectives of the same subject. The subject itself was broken up into shapes of equal values; there was no negative space (Kern 161). As William Everdell has shown, Cézanne's technique, learned from Manet, was to 'flatten and lower the foreground, strain the composition by making the relationships of figures work against their placement in the design, and above all pierce the lies of artifice perspective' (Everdell 245). Like Reinhardt and Craig, Cézanne paid attention to the rhythmic quality of line, the structure of composition, mass, space, shade, and

colour (Roger Fry in Drucker 72). Considered the father of cubism, Cézanne was the first painter (followed by Picasso and Braque) to consider form independent of the subject (Glover 1). In cubism, objects were abruptly alienated 'from each other, their surroundings, and their corresponding originals in the known world' (Peter 235). The cubists' fascination with time and their motion-filled idea of the world dovetailed with scientific discoveries and with Bergsonian philosophy, as did their 'search for the essential beyond the accidental' (Peter 223): hidden reality, the fourth dimension.

At the same time as Cézanne's images were in circulation in 1907, news of the great Parisian scandal quickly spread: Picasso's first exhibition of the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*. If earlier Kurbas had been attracted by Picasso's 'blue period' with his outsider figures, circus performers, and, especially Harlequin (a metaphor for artistic creation), he was doubtless fascinated by Picasso's bold and complete rejection of realistic conventions in the *Demoiselles*. Outstripping Cézanne, Picasso brought together his discovery of symbolism, occultism, primitivism, and simultaneity in the 'outrage' of *Demoiselles*.

The thematic similarity in developments in science, technology (including the influential cinema), and art – only touched on here but explored at length by Stephen Kern, William Everdell, Arthur Miller, and Richard Bretell, among others – suggests the breadth of the cultural revolution which Kurbas encountered when he came to Vienna. He responded to these innovations, changes, and ideas with a sense of excitement which reverberated with deep feelings of certainty about the veracity of their claims. In turn, he would rethink these ideas of art, culture, technology, and science and begin to reshape them into his own version of modernist ideas-in-practice in his productions beginning in 1917.

'Brave conquerors': Kurbas's First Company

Having seen Vienna, the committed modernist Kurbas, now in Kyiv, was not interested in a world limited to the adulation of Moscow. On 12 March 1917 he attended the first ever free gathering of Ukrainian theatre artists, at which the group voted to support an autonomous Ukraine (Zhytyts'ka 20). By the fall of that year and buoyed by great hopes for a politically enfranchised future, Kurbas published an article which announced the intentions and goals of his newly created Young Theatre (*Molodyi teatr*) (1917–19), formed from a core of actors in his 'Studio' group. Allying itself with the progressive circles of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, the Young Theatre claimed a double orientation which was intellectual and spiritual. Young in its personnel and youthful and revolutionary in its creative impulses, the Young Theatre at first took up residence in an old hospital, which they enthusiastically converted into a theatre under the most penurious of

conditions, employing all available materials – transforming burlap bags into costumes and theatre curtains, and whatever was at hand into stage props.

The unifying and distinct goal of the Young Theatre was to reclaim the world masterpieces, to search for new forms and to catch up with their Western European colleagues. Their revolution was to be, first of all, a revolution in repertoire, where no one idea was permitted to dominate. Thus Kurbas explained: 'In our literature ... after a long period of Ukrainophilism, romantic Cossackophilism, and ethnographism, after the 'modernism' of purely Russian models, we perceive ... a great turn, the only correct one, the only profound one. This is a turn directly to Europe and directly to *ourselves.* Without intermediaries and without authoritative models. In art there is only one path. This evolution is also reflected in the theatre, in the appearance of a new repertoire and new actors ...' (Kurbas, 'Molodyi,' 87).

Kurbas's simultaneous dismissal of Russian models and the Ukrainian ethnographic tradition opened up a polemic with the recent past in which we may see his intention to rupture colonial bonds by insisting upon the right of Ukrainians to independent cultural development. In this project of aesthetic and cultural enfranchisement (and engagement with old stereotypes of stage Ukrainians), Kurbas turned to the world masterpieces. Foreign Shakespeare and Western European classics were thus paradoxically regarded as tools for recovering, discovering, and forming an integral part of the national self, a more authentic and truer self than had hitherto been permitted. They became, to use Mary Louise Pratt's term, autoethnographic texts, that is, texts in which 'people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them ... they involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror' (Pratt 35). If Ukrainians were hitherto often seen on stage as drinking and dancing peasants, then merely speaking Shakespeare or Sophocles in Ukrainian suggested a major redefinition of national stereotypes and identities.

With an impact on its culture similar to that of the Irish Literary Theatre on its milieu, the creation of the Young Theatre was met with enthusiasm, discussion, and controversy. As Volodymyr Yaroshenko remarked in 1919, its appearance alone was a 'surprising and revolutionary act' (Iaroshenko 24). Just as the Irish Literary Theatre hoped to 'show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment,' so the Young Theatre aimed at destroying similar stage stereotypes about Ukrainians. Like Yeats and Lady Gregory, Kurbas intended to create a national drama, to represent the 'real' Ireland/Ukraine on stage, but, even more, he was focussed on enfranchising and rethinking theatre:

> We group of young actors have something new to say, and therefore, *only therefore,* do we create a theatre. The old Ukrainophile Cossack- and domestic-ophile stuff does not exhaust our spiritual interests ... We want to create new values. And for them to be general values, and yet also national values, then they must, if possible,

> develop independently ... We want to be free of prejudices and to seek only our truth. We will apply our studies to all forms of theatre which interest us, and the more answers they [these forms] give us to [our] questions, the longer we will dwell upon them ... That art which doesn't go forward, which ossifies in tradition, stops living – is dead and ceases to be art.
>
> Our main work will be done in studio, where we will seek new forms, and the repertory theatre will be our field, where our research will find its application ... We begin precisely so that we ourselves will have a chance to learn. (Kurbas, 'Molodyi,' 90)

Here speaks the true modern: the insistence on novelty, experimentation, on fresh seeing (*savoir voir*; Bretell 83), on the value and truth of representation; the dismissal of narrowly conceived ideas of national art; the openness to unlimited sources of inspiration; the sense of liberation from all cultural conventions, stereotypes, and traditions. Such a broad-based feeling of liberation was, evidently, not linked to the October Revolution (which had not yet occurred), but to the already liberating circumstances which were created after the first revolution in March and which held out the promise of the real possibility of building an independent Ukrainian state.

For two seasons the Young Theatre consciously mounted a revolution in form and content, producing an astonishing range of difficult and different plays, the most varied repertoire of all the theatres in Kyiv and perhaps in all of the Soviet Union at that time (Iaroshenko 26). Commissioning translations and himself adapting, translating, and transforming various plays, Kurbas staged, among others, Sophocles, Gerhart Hauptmann, Georg Kaiser, Max Halbe, Franz Grillparzer, Henrik Ibsen, Carlo Goldoni, Jean-Baptiste Molière, and Bernard Shaw, as well as Ukrainian dramatists of various periods. While recovering world classics, Kurbas did not regard the Europeanization of the Ukrainian theatre as his end. Rather, it was a means to an end: the creation of great theatre. With especially the non-Ukrainian material, Kurbas intended to concentrate on style – for him the first postulate of art – and on what he called the 'culture of the word and the gesture' – the basic material from which theatre is created. Already with his 'Studio' group, Kurbas and his circle accepted the idea that style in forms of art was the main thing; everything – gesture, language, rhythm, tone – was connected to style.

It is perhaps difficult for a Western audience with an established theatrical tradition to understand the unconditional, enthusiastic, and (from our perspective) excessive quality of many of the reviews of Kurbas's early productions. Again, it is worth recalling the historical circumstances of the Ukrainian theatre and the sense that Kurbas was creating a modernist theatre ex nihilo. Volodymyr Yaroshenko, for example, personified the troupe in modernist terms as a 'youth, pioneer, knight, hero, leader'; and described its work as that of a questing theatre, a theatre of experiment, subversion, dissonance, scandal, and courage (Iaroshenko 26). In

his study of the historical and cultural context of the Great War, Modris Eksteins singles out as the most important impulse behind experimentation the quest for liberation, especially from the authority of European tradition as it was dictated by Paris: 'Then it is no surprise that much of the psychological and spiritual momentum for this break came from the peripheries, geographical, social, generational, and sexual. The emphasis on youth, sensuality, homosexuality, the unconscious, the primitive, and the socially deprived originated in large part not in Paris but on the borders of traditional hegemony. The modern movement was full of exiles, and the condition of exile, or the "battle on the frontiers," as the Polish-Italian Frenchman Guillaume Apollinaire described the endeavor of his cohort, became central themes of the modern mentality' (Eksteins 48).

In the Ukrainian case, we may substitute the authority of Moscow/Petersburg for Paris, and view the Western European tradition here as liberating rather than calcifying. In Kurbas's first company born on the very eve of the October Revolution and thriving despite the turmoil of the city, the foundational elements of Kurbas's theatre were apparent to those discerning enough, like Yaroshenko, to observe them: these were the elements of constant process rather than fixed, complete systems, and hence a concomitant insistence upon experimentation. Already, too, Yaroshenko correctly observed that Kurbas was more interested in theatre as a whole, rather than in a national theatre. He wished to create (in an echo of Craig) a complete (or, what he called a 'universal') actor, whose whole being – from his brain to his toes – was revelatory of and focused only on his art (an idea explored below, in chapter 2). In its experimental quest, the Young Theatre was perceived as following a 'Christlike crusade to free the sanctuary of the theatre'- again, a distinctly modernist task in which art becomes a surrogate, dionysiac religion, and the stage its 'temple.' Like Yaroshenko, Mykola Vorony also perceived the underlying 'questing' nature of the 'ferment' (Voronyi 296) which the Young Theatre embodied, while Avanti (probably the pseudonym of Volodymyr Blumshtein) referred to the Young Theatre as 'almost an orgy of youth – there was such an apple-blossom determination emanating from the stage to the spectators, such a youthful sincere enthusiasm, that one really believed, and felt that something unexpected, something hitherto never seen, something extraordinary was to come into the Ukrainian theatre ...' ('Avanti' n.p.). Yaroshenko's and Avanti's exuberance, however overstated it may appear to be, expresses the unrestrained joy of witnessing the birth of a new theatre, a new culture.

Shakespeare, 'Double Provincialism,' and Ukrainian Modernism

The concept of modernism, like all 'isms,' is a catch-all phrase of limited definitional clarity which reverberates with different meanings in different places. It is

also one which requires a special revisiting in light of the scholarly, archival, and curatorial work of the last decade. While generally considered a Western phenomenon, the Eastern, especially Ukrainian and Russian, contribution to international modernism only began to be more fully revealed after the fall of the USSR. As scholars have pointed out, aesthetic-cultural traffic between East and West was ongoing and heavy from the early years of the twentieth century to 1928 (Shkandrij, 'Politics'; Bowlt and Drutt; Bretell). Among the many Ukrainians and Ukrainian-born travellers and longer-term residents of Paris were the visual artists Vladimir (Volodymyr) Tatlin, Alexandra Exter, Sonia Delaunay, Klyment Redko, Mykhailo Boychuk, Vadym Meller, Natan Altman, David Shterenberg, and the sculptor Alexander Archipenko. Exter, while meeting with her many compatriots in France, also encountered the creators of the Western avant-garde: Picasso, Braque, Fernand Léger, and Apollinaire. Dividing her time among Kyiv, Moscow, Paris, and Venice, Exter, the 'consummate traveller' (Douglas 42), finally emigrated to France in the 1920s, a choice also made by a number of Ukrainian-born artists, who felt equally comfortable in all of these capital cities. Others studied, lived, and worked in the European modernist centres of Munich, Vienna, and Berlin.

The fertile cross-pollination which such travel necessarily entailed suggests that modernism, defined as a purely Western phenomenon, needs some reconfiguration; in particular, the assumption that cultural influences were unidirectional (Paris to Kyiv or Moscow) has recently been challenged. Dmytro Horbachov, among others, has shown that Ukrainian and Russian modernists were the first to bring to France and cubism 'an Oriental colourfulness, melodious and jubilant, drawn from the depths of collective creativity, from ceramics, *lubok* [inexpensive woodcuts; broadsides], icons, embroideries, dolls, carpets, and painted Easter eggs' (Horbachov n.p.). Hitherto subsumed under the general rubric 'Soviet,' the Ukrainian radical influence on both the theory and the practice of the international avant-garde is just beginning to be explored in art exhibitions around the world.[7] Availing themselves of models from East and West, the popular and the elite, Ukrainian artists confirmed the historical role of Ukraine as a crossroads between various cultures, a borderland – albeit still today an 'undiscovered' cultural bourn. An early centre of modernism, Kyiv was the home of the first avant-garde exhibition in the Russian Empire, the Link, in 1908. Kharkiv (briefly the capital of Soviet Ukraine) was another similar such centre, and a city which, in the late 1920s, welcomed, among others, Russian avant-garde artists when they were no longer permitted to work in their own country. Ukrainian-born artists made major contributions to what is generally called the Russian avant-garde: Kazimir Malevich to suprematism; Tatlin, constructivism; David Burliuk, futurism; Alexander Archipenko, cubist sculpture; Alexandra Exter, theatre design (sets and cos-

tumes), among many others. Richard Bretell observes that 'For the first time in European art history, the most advanced art was directly linked to equally advanced social and political theory ... There is no more important social/aesthetic/political experiment in the history of modern art than Malevich's Suprematism and its general offshoot, Constructivism' (Bretell 40).

If rupture – in the sense of the rejection of the immediate past – is one of the characteristic features of modernism (Quinones 7), evidence of it is not difficult to find in modernist Ukrainian artists. Looking back at this earlier period of his creativity, Kurbas would later observe that, since 1916, he and his theatrical colleagues had been in reaction not only to 'the Ukrainianophilic historical-ethnographic theatre,' but also to the 'prudently cautious' Europeanized prerevolutionary theatre. Hitherto, the spectator had been 'educated by authoritarian tsardom in a spirit of reverence toward the dominant culture, and could not objectively approach an evaluation of the achievements of the Ukrainian theatre' (Kurbas, 'Berezil' i teperishni,' 118, 120). That piety, passivity, and sentimental attachment needed to be set aside for a more critical, reflective stance on the audience's, as well as the actor's and director's, part. Kurbas urged Ukrainians to draw back from 'double provincialism' (Kurbas, 'U teatral'ni,' 183). As an anonymous critic put it, the proletariat needed to get rid of a slave mentality; it had to defeat both social and national problems, the result of generations of oppression ('Try osnovni,' 3). A communal search was required to seek out and discover new forms to accommodate the new times. Hinted at here is the unique framework within which Ukrainian modernism was to be founded: at the intersections of two revolutionary movements, nationalism and socialism/communism.

Not simply a synthesis of East and West, Ukrainian modernism also has its own distinctive features. If Western European modernism is generally conceived as elitist in impulse (Bristol 8), and its art said to reflect devolution (Greenberg 22), a sense of dislocation, fragmentation, and ruin, on the one hand, and a simultaneous desire for social coherence and meaning on the other (Halpern 34), Ukrainian modernism is an entirely different creation by virtue of its history and geopolitics. It shares with its Western counterparts a rejection of the rational spirit, in theatre as in other arts, and embraces the formal aspects of art. But what is distinct about Ukrainian modernism is 'its deliberate and conscious re-education and reformation of art's function in a national culture' (Mudrak 29). The spirit of the Ukrainian avant-garde was nurtured by a revisiting of previous periods in Ukrainian cultural and political life, which had also been identified as 'renaissances.' The ancient, prehistoric, massive and mysterious stone idols – the stone 'babas' – of the steppes provided a primitivist inspiration for sculptors and visual artists. More centrally for the theatre, the medieval and the baroque (mid-seventeenth to the early eighteenth century) periods served as a rich storehouse of

non-psychological, nonmimetic art. The former, the period of Byzantine-inspired Kyivan Rus, offered a variety of stylistic approaches eminently compatible with modernism. Richly painted icons presented Ukrainian modernists with a sense of cosmic space and simultaneity of time which chimed with the cubists' simultaneous planar viewing and the presentation of multiple focal points (Mudrak 28–9). The tradition of *skomorokhy* – medieval jugglers-acrobats-performers-bards – drew attention to the formal aspects of theatre and its fluid relationship with other arts (acrobatics, dance, poetry). The baroque offered another stimulus with its sensuousness of dynamic form (especially in architecture), its surprising contrasts, and its contours. The grotesque, stylized, physical action and social comedy of the popular puppet theatre (*vertep*), which alternated with the presentation of sacred events, was echoed, on the more intellectual level, by intermedii, or interludes, whose broad contemporary comedy similarly jarred with its serious 'frame' plays dealing with sacred and historical subjects. The abundant recourse to allegory, paradox, exaggeration, and the grotesque, and the general resistance to linearity of structure or narrative – all these provided inspiration for Ukrainian modernists.

Consequently, if as Everdell argues, the central feature of modernism is discontinuity (Everdell 10), Ukrainian modernism is its opposite: an attempt to restore continuity and cultural identity. In many circles, Ukrainian modernism was, in fact, considered a new baroque, and a revisiting of antimimetic traditions whose development had been ruptured and artificially suppressed in the nineteenth century. These traditions were antimimetic, antiethnographic, and antirational. As Horbachov, Mudrak, Shkandrij, and others have recently and persuasively argued, the cultural past of the Ukrainians functioned for them in the same way as 'exotic tribal and Eastern cultures' did for Western European artists (Douglas 14; Shkandrij, 'Politics,' 10). As Shkandrij observes, 'Ukrainians felt a special ability to domesticate the "primitive" because of their access to a rich, active folk creativity with roots in pre-Byzantine, pre-Christian times. As newcomers to the European high-cultural table, they presented themselves as carriers of a vitality, innocence and immediacy that others lacked. Their art was characterized by vivid colours and an extraordinary feeling for materials, an ability to integrate Cubist, Futurist and primitivist elements, a tendency to mix the ancient with the contemporary, and a penchant for collaborative and collective work' (Shkandrij, 'Politics,' 9).

Tamara Hundurova has argued that Western scholars have 'universalized' national differences in the modernism debate by extrapolating theories based on the example of the nation-state; because of this, they regard modernism as representing decadence and decline (Hundurova 9–10). Andreas Huyssen is typical in considering modernism an 'adversary culture': he distinguishes modernism from the avant-garde; the former, he argues, generally insists upon the inherent hostility between high and low, while the latter aims at 'developing an alternative relation-

ship between high art and mass culture' (Huyssen vii–viii). Such categorization is unhelpful for an understanding of Eastern European modernism. Kurbas and his circle, for example, consistently referred to themselves as modernists, although they exhibited all of the features generally associated with the avant-garde. Thus, as Hundurova concludes, while Ukrainian modernism must be examined in relation to Europe, it nonetheless possesses a 'differentiated dynamic' and followed a significantly different process (Hundurova 278).

Where Western modernists looked to cultures outside their own to revivify art (Picasso to African masks, for example), Ukrainians looked 'inside' their culture, resulting, as Mudrak suggests, in what might be called a 'hyper-sensitized self-awareness' (Mudrak 29). To look to their past was also to look past the rupture of external forces, to forge a continuum of culture by restoring dignity to past traditions, while simultaneously mediating these forms and approaches through the prism of contemporary circumstances and ideologies – political, social, and aesthetic. Ancient folk art was still part of daily life; it reached back to the roots of ritual, to the undefined and mysterious 'dark abysm of time' (to paraphrase Prospero). In the view of Kurbas and Ukrainian theatrical modernists, then, the nineteenth-century ethnographic theatre was not simply antithetical to their aesthetic, but, unlike folk art, it was also 'inauthentic.' While Western European's dialogue with primitivism was fraught with what postcolonialists have remarked as the paradoxes of a dialogue with the 'Other,' the Eastern European dialogue in art as in politics was (while not unproblematic) a dialogue with the 'Self';[8] to use Mudrak's phrase, it was a 'principled localism' (Mudrak 25). Perhaps here, again, the Irish example (and, in particular, Yeats's turn to Celtic mythology) offers a useful parallel.

Ukrainians' embrace of modernism and their rapid assimilation of abstraction may accordingly be explained by their vested interest in the complete and total transformation of society; their aims were necessarily a combination of the political, social, and cultural. A jubiliant rather than a 'melancholic' movement, an attribute which Richard Halpern, among others, assigns to Western modernism (Halpern 9), Ukrainian modernism applauded both tradition and experimentation, as both offering a euphoric engagement with, rather than rejection of, contemporaneity. As a self-proclaimed renaissance, it welcomed the accelerating transition of an agrarian society into modernity: speed, dynamism, jazz, social and political upheaval were all celebrated together. The perceived consanguinity of aesthetic principles and, to a degree, social conditions, between this period and the Renaissance contributed to the exhilarating sense of creating a new, great art.

In addition to differentiating Ukrainian from Western European modernism, it is also important to observe how much it deviates from the Russian variant. If, as Renato Poggioli points out, Russian modernism had a strong utopian-apoca-

lyptic-messianic thread (Poggioli 100), then Ukrainian modernism, lacking this feature, was instead characterized by the 'consistent application of culture-transforming principles to the goal of national liberation' (Shkandrij, 'Politics,' 10). Where Ukrainians differed among themselves was in how to achieve that transformation, and in what proportions or in what balance the sometimes exclusionary aims of socialism/communism and nationalism were required.

The deeply committed modernist, Les Kurbas, believed that assimilating and reconfiguring the styles of the past would eventually lead to an entirely new and distinct Ukrainian idiom, which would fall somewhere between the two poles of symbolism and classicism. Cubism and constructivism were among the new 'isms' of great appeal; in one respect, they constituted a type of renewed classicism with their focus on structure, form, and composition rather than subject or colour. Theatrical constructivism with its three-dimensional, dynamic sets would prove to be the dominant mode of many revolutionary productions; it permitted the directors to focus on the materiality of the theatre.

In this modernist enterprise, Shakespeare, because he was 'foreign' and thus came with little baggage, was to be one of many tools (along with other world classics – as they were called – such as Sophocles, Molière, Schiller, among others) used to discover a new theatrical idiom. Hence, the classics were at first valued by the modernist Kurbas for their good dramaturgical 'bones' – for their structure and their technique, which effectively served their purposes of moving an audience; later, the structure itself would be questioned. If modernist Soviet Ukrainian Shakespeare later became a 'deeply conflicted and contradictory phenomenon' (as Hugh Grady suggests of Western European modernist Shakespeare; Grady, 'Modernity,' 29), it was because the old divisions (centre-periphery; metropolitan-indigenous; classical-folkloric) were once again replayed in new ideological guises.

'Even in the cannon's mouth': Revolution and Civil War

Complicating factors in the rapid assimilation of Western classics and contemporary plays were the cataclysms of 1914–20: world war, revolution, civil war. Experiencing these events in its own distinct way, Ukraine was the battleground for many issues, cultural and political, not at issue in Russia. In retrospect, it seems astonishing that anyone could even be thinking about Shakespeare or about the creation of an avant-garde, indigenous theatre during these years. Perhaps the closest contemporary parallel would be to imagine such aesthetic and theoretical endeavours in the midst of the Bosnian atrocities.

While the First World War ended in the West in late 1918, it went on at least until late 1920 in Eastern Europe; moreover, the situation was complicated by revolution and civil war and punctuated by declarations of independence. From

1917 to 1920, chaos prevailed in Ukraine. According to Richard Pipes, 'both in its extent and its duration' the spread of anarchy was 'perhaps unique in the history of modern Europe. Over these three years, no fewer than nine different governments attempted to assert their authority over the land. None succeeded' (Pipes 148). Edward Acton has likened the extent of Ukraine's economic collapse in the aftermath of the October Revolution to that of the period after the Black Death (Acton 204). With unemployment at 60 per cent, and the complete breakdown of normal economic relations between city and village, and between parts of the old Empire, hostilities between regions and political affiliations were followed by atrocities, acute food crises, and, finally, civil war. William Henry Chamberlin recorded 'wave after wave of killing and plundering' by Red partisans, the Cheka (the predecessors of the KGB), and peasant anarchists (Chamberlin 232). The year 1919 in Ukraine – when the first Shakespeare play was in production – was a period of 'complete anarchy,' with six different armies operating on its territory. Five governments came and went in one year alone in Kyiv, the birthplace of the new theatre. With a population of 468,000 in 1917 (Pavlovs'kyi 1007), the historical capital of Ukraine had been a lively cultural, even bohemian, centre for many artists, poets, sculptors, and musicians of various national and linguistic backgrounds. But, in 1919, it became the centre of raging battles. All authority collapsed, and Ukraine was fragmented into numerous regions, each isolated from each other and from the rest of the world. In the capital city itself, 'governments came and went, edicts were issued, cabinet crises were resolved, diplomatic talks carried on – but the rest of the country lived its own existence where the only effective regime was that of the gun' (Pipes 137). Over 1.5 million people died during the seven-year period of war and civil strife (Subtelny 380).

During this period of extremes, later referred to as 'war communism,' a concentrated effort was made to centralize and produce everything by themselves. Ration cards were issued on a class principle, and all property was expropriated, including private homes and libraries, jewellery, and other personal objects. As Chamberlin has observed and others have confirmed, the 'state of misery' of the civilian population was 'far greater than that experienced by the civilian population in West European countries during the worst years of the [Great] War' (Chamberlin 105; Kenez 149).

In this liminal situation between regimes, in the midst of unimaginable turmoil, a Ukrainian theatre came to birth. Cut off from the rest of the world, Kurbas looked for inspiration to Western traditions of art and music created before the war and still in circulation. Attempting to recreate in his mind current German expressionistic productions that he could only read about through polemical critical exchanges in German theatre journals, Kurbas complained that the German military occupants of Kyiv brought with them only 'tin pots and old wares,'

but no hint of the fascinating style of expressionism, nor, alas, any of their theoretical texts (Kurbas, 'Nova,' 112).

The circumstances in which theatre artists worked were tremendously difficult and continued to be so well into the 1920s. Occupational forces frequently requisitioned the theatre space of the Young Theatre. In addition to the violence and atrocities of world and civil war, the attendant miseries of hunger and cold made work, to say nothing of creativity, especially hard. Some actors failed to attend rehearsals because they had to go begging for bread to the villages (Voronyi 299). The actor and director Vasyl Vasylko (the stage name of Vasyl Mylaiv) records a telling incident in his diary. The actress who was to play Lady Macbeth in Kurbas's production, Liubov Hakkebush, fainted in the wings. When a physician was quickly summoned to her side, he pronounced that she required 'not medicine from a pharmacy, but beefsteak from a restaurant' (Vasyl'ko, Shchodennyk, 108). Heat and electricity continued to be a problem. The appearance of bread was a significant enough event to merit recording in Vasylko's diary, even as late as 1924: 'Bread appeared in the dining hall, things got better. The audience revived; it was really bad before, but it's still cold and dark in the lodgings. There is no money for firewood or electricity' (Vasyl'ko, Shchodennyk, 30.2.1924; 108).

For actor as well as audience, even getting to the theatre was no easy task. Public transport came to a standstill at 9 p.m.; later, it was cut off at 6 p.m. No advertisements were permitted, supposedly because of a paper shortage (Nilsson 27). As the governments of this period underwent numerous changes, so the theatres endured consequent see-saws of nationalization and denationalization, and their directors attempted to adjust their repertoires accordingly – or to justify their artistic ideologies as best they could. Kurbas demanded that his actors rehearse from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., but they also worked on the renovation of their theatre, tearing up floor boards, repairing the flies, and constructing props and various necessities of the stage set.

Kurbas did not permit the difficulties of everyday survival to impede his work. His response to current events was typical of his ability to synthesize a feel for the needs of the times with his enthusiasm for new endeavours and his own artistic goals. In the second, troubled season of the company, Kurbas turned to Shakespeare; he was one of the first directors of the Soviet period to do so. The classics, and Shakespeare in particular, permitted the Young Theatre to engage directly in battle with those theatres in which either a declamatory and sentimental or a naturalist style prevailed. Abhorring the stereotypes of the ethnographic theatre – which included, among others, drunken peasants, lachrymose heroines, and saccharine heroes – Kurbas attacked such productions as signs of serfdom and colonialism. This is as bad as being locked up in one's own house, he exclaimed (Smolych, *Pro teatr,* 184). At the same time, the Ukrainian director was an equally

vocal opponent of pictorialism, costume drama, and naturalism with its 'pseudo-psychology' (Kurbas, 'Psykholohism,' 151–3). Realism was, according to Kurbas and in an echo of Edward Gordon Craig, 'the most anti-artistic trend of our times' (Kurbas, 'Teatral'nyi lyst,' 98). Along with Stanislavsky, Kurbas marked it out as the particular enemy of true art, despite the fact that Kurbas knew Stanislavsky only second-hand through accounts in the press (he did not actually see a Stanislavsky production until after 1923).[9] With evident relief, he remarked, 'Shakespeare cannot be played ethnographically, small-mindedly, naturalistically' (Vasyl'ko, 'Rezhyser,' 169). Shakespeare was to be the battering ram against the staid traditions of the Ukrainian and all the provincial stages. To the question posed by his contemporaries – why stage the classics anyway? – Kurbas wrote many lengthy replies. In one, he uses almost exactly the same argument as the French director Daniel Mesguich, writing nearly seventy years later, who declared that this was the 'most urgent political gesture open to a contemporary theatre director' (Mesguich in Heylen 125). It was important not only for what it meant, but also for where it could lead them. Kurbas's run at Shakespeare was part of a declaration of the Ukrainian theatre's right to exist as a world theatre.

'The kingly state of youth': *Romeo and Juliet*

In the early summer of 1918, Kurbas took his collective to Odesa, the Eastern European Hollywood, which, partly because of its temperate climate but also because of its relatively calm political situation, became the gathering place of stage and film artists. There, Kurbas intended that they would regain their strength and begin work on their next season. Before their departure, Kurbas announced a back-breaking repertoire aimed at appropriating the classics for Ukrainians and at training the actors in a variety of genres and styles of different periods. The group would work on Sophocles, Franz Grillparzer, Friedrich Schiller, Gerhart Hauptmann, Bernard Shaw, Henrik Ibsen, Lesia Ukrainka, Taras Shevchenko, a reworked Ukrainian baroque puppet play, and two Shakespearean plays: *Twelfth Night* and *Romeo and Juliet* (Labins'kyi, 'Cherez,' 19). But on 22 June *The Worker's Newspaper* (*Robitnycha hazeta*) (No. 300), which announced that the company had just departed for the south, also noted that the next season of the Young Theatre would include *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Labins'kyi, 'Den',' 263). Clearly, some adjustments or reconsiderations of the Shakespearean repertoire were taking place.

Kurbas's intended line-up of plays indicates his ambition, his wide-ranging interest in a variety of genres, as well as the significance that Shakespeare had for him. How much, if any, real preparation had been done for *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not known. The actor-director Stepan Bondarchuk tells us that when the Red Army invaded Kyiv in February, 1919, the company

was hard at work on *Romeo and Juliet* in Panteleimon Kulish's nineteenth-century translation of the play, reworked by the poet Mykola Vorony (Bondarchuk, 'Molodyi,' 163). This meant that roles would have been distributed much earlier. Extant is the assignment of roles for the production dated 5/VIII (no year), and signed by the secretary of the company, Vasyl Vasylko, with instructions in red pencil that 'everyone must copy out their roles before Monday' (Vasyl'ko, Rozpodil). It is most likely, then, that this document was circulated in the summer of 1918, and thus preparations for the production were ongoing throughout the late summer of 1918 and into 1919. The handsomely attractive Kurbas cast himself in the role of Romeo and the lyrical-dramatic ingenue of the company, Olympia Dobrovolska, as Juliet with Olena Rokotianska as her understudy.[10]

Throughout the summer of 1918, Kurbas was playing romantic leads. The newspaper *Free Life* (*Vil'ne zhyttia*), No. 114, 22 August 1918, reviewed Kurbas's production of Max Halbe's *Youth,* in which he played the romantic lead (the production had premiered in 1917, and had been one of Josef Kainz's roles, as well as a play produced by Max Reinhardt): 'Kurbas ... extraordinarily beautifully and truthfully conveys the intimate moments of first love, the tremblings of young passions, and the mindless, mad sufferings of youth' (Labins'kyi, 'Den',' 266). These are the very attributes which would have made him an excellent Romeo. 'The weak will of a young soul,' the reviewer continued, 'the powerlessness in the face of the gigantic charms of love were very thoughtfully conveyed by Dobrovolska.' *Youth*'s basic plot, concerning the short, passionate but doomed love of two young people, is very like Shakespeare's love tragedy. It was calculated as having a great box-office appeal to a wide social and intellectual spectrum because of its emphasis on passionate lovers and on the feminine heroine played by a well-known and beloved actress.

Plays like *Youth, Romeo and Juliet,* and Volodymyr Vynnychenko's *Black Panther and White Bear* showed off the charismatic qualities of Kurbas. Equally attractive to men and to women, descriptions of his physical appearance and of his acting style centre on his romantic good looks, voice, and bearing. Deich described Kurbas as an actor of the highest class, comparable in skill to Alexander Moissi: 'Of light build, with tragic eyes, a sharp, developed plasticity ... a richly modulated voice (he could sing well), he knew how to respond to his [acting] partner ...' (Deich 95). Upon seeing Kurbas at his debut in Kyiv, the actor Oleksander Serdiuk remarked on the beauty of his face, his proud forehead, passionate eyes, 'winged' brows, natural plasticity and musicality (Serdiuk, 'Chudo,' 7). Off stage, Kurbas cut an impressive figure in his theatrical garb: an extra-large brimmed hat, an unusually cut and very long coat, and a light scarf tied at his throat.

The role of Romeo as passionate, sensitive lead playing against Dobrovolska's Juliet thus followed the same mould as Kurbas's other roles in 1918. This may

have accounted, in part, for his choice of the play. But in addition to providing him with a familiar vehicle for his acting skills and in being a potentially good money maker, another of *Romeo and Juliet's* attractions for Kurbas was its construction. Throughout the 1920s, he advised his colleagues and students in the directorial lab to turn to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* in order to study the precepts of classical dramaturgy. 'Classical dramaturgy,' he wrote, is 'at base important and still useful to the present day in its structural aspects, which arose out of a certain understanding of the laws of human reception. It is maximally educative. And, although we can make deviations from it of one type or another, which are dictated by our times, classical dramaturgy is in its foundations very, very important' (Kurbas, 'Suspil'ne,' 91).

Yet another feature of *Romeo and Juliet* was that it was a text that could be made malleable for the times. The long-standing and destructive feud between the Montagues and the Capulets could stand in for a wide number of oppositions: the Whites against the Reds, the Russians against the Ukrainians, the imperialists against the social democrats. Against the background of social and political unrest, the story of the forbidden love of Romeo and Juliet unfolded. But despite the months of rehearsals, *Romeo and Juliet* was not produced in 1918–19. The season got off to a late start in November 1918 because, during the absence of the collective (which had travelled to Odesa), occupational German forces had once again requisitioned their theatre. Later in the season, by the command of the Theatre Committee of the People's Commissariat of Education, the Young Theatre was forcibly amalgamated with the ideologically and aesthetically conservative State Dramatic Theatre headed by Aleksandr Zaharov. This marriage of opposites, not desired by either party, led to rancorous disputes between left and right, conservative and experimental, young and old; its practical consequence was an unsatisfying repertoire of compromises.

After a few difficult months, on 23 March 1919, the newspaper *Communist* (*Komunist*) (No. 18) reported on the reorganization of the company and on Kurbas's election as the artistic director responsible for all productions. The previously slated repertoire was to be abandoned and, among new plays for the fall season *Hamlet* was announced, while *Romeo and Juliet* was ready to go except for a lack of funds for 'decorations' (that is, stage designs); also, work on *Macbeth* was almost completed (Labins'kyi, 'Den',' 280).[11] Kurbas declared to his company the new principles by which they would work. These included the abolition of all premieres – each performance was to be a premiere, with adjustments and changes as necessary after each performance; 'absolutely no compromises with anything,' including sets and costumes; the performance would only take place when everything was ready; and the choice of repertoire would depend entirely on each play's theatrical, not literary, value. This was an entirely idealistic, if not naive, position, considering the difficult economic and political circumstances in which they were

working but one which reveals the importance of the production as *Gesamtkunstwerk* to Kurbas's way of thinking.

By the end of the summer, when Kurbas was also busy preparing two operas, on 30 August 1919, Kyiv once again became a battleground. Denikin's troops entered Kyiv and began a wave of destruction aimed especially at visible signs of Ukrainian culture. Beautiful stage sets were destroyed, portraits were removed and used as target practice, and sculptures and busts shattered. The theatre was ransacked. The new occupants of Kyiv reintroduced many of the old tsarist restrictions on the Ukrainian theatre, including the refusal to acknowledge the existence of the Ukrainian language. It is likely that among the victims of this destructive rampage were the props and scene designs prepared by the young graphic designer Robert Lisovsky, who had begun his commission back in May (Labins'kyi, 'Den',' 282). Lisovsky was a follower of Yuri Narbut and Mykhailo Boychuk, who attempted to create a national 'monumental' style by fusing Ukrainian primitive art with a Byzantine style. A 40 per cent tax was slapped on all theatres; most, unable to survive in such circumstances, closed.

That same summer, in 1919, Dobrovolska and her understudy were no longer mentioned in reference to the coveted role of Juliet. The grim conditions of war had made it necessary for Dobrovolska, and many other actors, to flee Kyiv. At some point during the rehearsal process, Juliet's part went to one of the youngest members of the company, the elegant and extraordinarily beautiful dancer, Russian-born Valentyna Chystiakova, a student of choreographer-dancers Mikhail Mordkin and Bronislava Nijinska (sister of the more famous Vaclav Nijinsky). Given to romantic attachments,[12] Kurbas had, like Romeo, but fortunately without his success, attempted suicide on at least one occasion. This time, however, it seemed that his feelings were reciprocated. In their relationship off stage as well as on, the Ukrainian Kurbas/Romeo and the Russian Chystiakova/Juliet replayed the conflict between ties of kinship/community and personal fulfilment. Few Ukrainian actors and actresses were happy with their director's infatuation. Fearful that after the war years Chystiakova would depart for Moscow taking the most talented Ukrainian director with her and thus depriving the Ukrainian theatre of its innovator, many resented the irony of a Russian once again conquering a Ukrainian. Vasylko, one of Kurbas's actors, recounts that, in the interests of the future of the Ukrainian theatre, there was even talk about 'permanently trying to get rid of her' (Vasyl'ko, 'U Molodomu,' 233). Despite the actors' grumblings, which for the most part remained private, Chystiakova and Kurbas were married in the beautiful blue and white baroque green-domed Cathedral of St Andry on 6 September 1919; the groom was 32, the bride 19.

Famine in the Ukrainian capital (almost entirely the result of distribution problems) and the absence of pay meant that theatres had to put on lighter fare to attract audiences so that the actors could eat. Kurbas's plans for Shakespeare had

to be shelved once again for a trivial play, a comic farce, which Kurbas had reworked into something he called *The Dance of the Bureaucrats.* Ironically, the Red Army audience, the backbone of the revolution, cared little for thoughtful revolutionary fare, preferring instead a lighter repertoire, by which they could be mindlessly entertained or at which they could clearly mock the exaggerated antics of the bourgeoisie (Voronyi 300).

After his marriage and in response to the rapidly changed political circumstances, in which it was difficult to accept anything except political theatre or the diversions of frothy musical comedies, Kurbas appears to have reconceived *Romeo and Juliet* in a larger context. It was to form part of a larger, more ambitious project relating to revolution. This was to include Bernard Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple* (1901; a play he was finally to stage in the 1930s in the Gulag), John Galsworthy's *Strife* (1909), and a cycle of plays about the French Revolution. The last of these, while not specifically named, were probably two plays later produced by Kurbas on the theme of the French Revolution. Maurice Pottecher's *Liberty* (which Kurbas himself translated from the French) was staged as a open-air spectacle-meeting (that is, in the agitprop style) in 1921 with Kurbas's travelling troupe, Kyidramte, in the Sofiyivka Park in Bila Tserkva, amid grottoes and waterfalls – a production much admired by Commissar Anatoli Lunacharsky (Deich 99). Kyidramte also produced a double bill of A. Amnuel's (the pseudonym of N. Nikolayev) *Marat* and M. Lvov's *The Last Days of the Paris Commune.*

In such an obvious reflection of the chaos of the times, Kurbas's productions conformed to what Graham Holderness has called the politics of function, that is, politics confined to the content of a play (here, at least metaphorical content) and not extending to its form (Holderness 7).[13] Shakespeare the classic underscored the difficulty which the new society was having and continued to have with its relationship to the past, including its great works. These could not be uncritically acquired; nor was it likely that they would be completely abandoned. Both theatre artists and political commissars (including Lunacharsky and Lenin himself) were culturally conservative. Within a few years, Lunacharsky would call for a return to conservatism in aesthetic affairs as a whole. In the meantime, Kurbas's plan to synthesize the classic with the European and Slavic modern was necessary for the Ukrainian theatre in its catch-up phase; it also proved to be proleptic of the manner in which the classics would be treated by other directors – that is, Shakespeare was to be one of the many voices explored in the creation of a new proletarian culture.

Kurbas's *Romeo and Juliet* was never performed in its entirety, and only excerpts were staged by the students of Kurbas's studio Kyidramte troupe in the fall of 1921, according to Khanan Shmain (Shmain 135). But Kurbas seems to have retained a fondness for the play, referring to it on numerous occasions during his

directorial lab discussions, as minutes of these meetings show. In 1929 it was again announced for the upcoming season as part of a large cultural plan to 'demonstrate' the classics: to stage bourgeois and prebourgeois plays for workers and students in the mornings, while new Soviet plays were to be performed in the evenings.

Despite the setback in attempting to produce this particular Shakespearean play, the whole process revealed Kurbas's rapid development and coherence as theatre artist and theorist. In this process, the place of Shakespeare shifted. Although all extant references to *Romeo and Juliet* claim that material conditions were responsible for preventing its final production, it seems unlikely that Kurbas gave up so much hard work on the play for these reasons alone. Another reason suggests itself in its plot. As a love tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet* is hardly the best vehicle for attacking ethnographic and sentimental theatre. In its emphasis on the tragic fate of the love of two young enemies, in its emotionalism, and in its all-important final victory of the community, the play is a stone's throw away from melodrama and perilously close to many of the plots of Ukrainian ethnographic drama. Perhaps, working on this project, Kurbas came to understand that at least some Shakespeare can indeed be played sentimentally or romantically. If he wanted to shift Ukrainian theatre from character and emotion toward a modernist theatre of associative images (that is, a nonillusionistic theatre which, by means of its visual images, suggested the world of the spirit), of theatricality, then a better vehicle than *Romeo and Juliet* was needed. Tellingly, Romeo was Kurbas's last romantic part. He shed both this typecasting and, soon after, acting itself for directorial and pedagogical work.

Much more suited to a full-frontal attack on conventional theatre was the play which Christopher Innes has called the trademark avant-garde play since the 1960s: *Macbeth* (Innes 194). *Macbeth* lent itself much more easily than a love tragedy to political interpretation, stylization, and an exploration of theatricality. Here, Kurbas could explore a variety of ideas inspired by Denis Diderot and Benoît Coquelin, Craig and Reinhardt, among others – ideas about the actor's mastery over himself, the more surely to move others. *Macbeth* also had the added benefit of being a play which Kurbas could make his own. Hitherto, many of the classics he loved were also plays he had seen performed in Vienna by the great actors of his day.

Toughness, eloquence, emotional range, and historical sweep – these were some of the qualities Kurbas expected to mine in Shakespeare. To study and perform his works was to escape from the narrow confines of provincialism. Writing at about the same time as Kurbas was at work on his first productions of Shakespeare, the poet Maksym Rylsky came to a similar conclusion. In his poem 'Shakespeare' (Shekspir) (published in 1920), the speaker, Shakespeare, boasts of his 'unvan-

quished downpour of words,/Love, torment, tenderness and rage/Characters [made] of steel and silks,' which have presented readers with 'the eternal in the momentary' (Ryl's'kyi, 'Shekspir,' 173).

'Antic fables': *Macbeth* 1919–20

Macbeth was very much 'in the air' in the first years after the Revolution. Hitherto banned primarily because of its regicide, the play seemed to be particularly congruent for the revolutionary and early Soviet period; its apparently antimonarchical nature and brutality seemed to be tailored for the times (Rudnitsky 110). As the poet Mykola Bazhan remarked, Macbeth was a familiar power-hungry type walking down the streets of the Kyiv in the 1920s (Bazhan, 'Pod znakom,' 223).

While Kurbas's choice of *Macbeth* as a metaphor for the times was obvious enough, the fact that he returned to it four times suggests a farther-ranging importance to him than merely the political or the local. As this study will show, it seems to have served for him a purpose similar to that which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* did for Reinhardt; each variant expressed a development of his aesthetic. For Kurbas, *Macbeth* was the play in which, in 1924, he would work out his most radical interrogation of the materials of theatre (see below, chapter 2). Between 1919 and 1920 Kurbas created three redactions of the play; here, they are treated as one, since the scant material extant suggests variations and differences in accent rather than major revisions; more important, the general aim of the 1919–20 productions appears to be one and the same: the 'naturalizing' of a classic while refining concepts of style. Kurbas began preparing *Macbeth* at the State Dramatic Theatre in Kyiv in 1919;[14] the second and third versions were staged in 1920 in Bila Tserkva and Uman respectively by his second (touring) company, Kyidramte (short for Kyiv Dramatic Theatre). Later, the actor Stepan Bondarchuk would distinguish these *Macbeth*s from each other by their emphases: In Kyiv, 1919, a generally stylized version of the play was in preparation. In Bila Tserkva in 1920, the first production was particularly attentive to gesture and to the dynamic and rhythmic unity of the play; that is, it attempted to create a music-like unity by presenting scenes in a controlled, flowing, rhythmic manner rather than as discrete units or 'numbers' (as in the ethnographic tradition). Later that fall, in Uman, Kurbas concentrated more on clarity of gesture as a unified form (Bondarchuk, 'K postanovke,' 5), perhaps working out ideas he had seen in Max Reinhardt's productions.

Kurbas himself thought of his experimental work of this period as 'translation': 'First the poet created, then we did, or we did everything more consciously so that we didn't metamorphose poetic metaphors but directly translated into a language of gestures and group constructs that which the poet intended to say in metaphors' (Kurbas, 'Pro peretvorennia,' 127). As is evident from this quotation

(but also from his other, earlier productions not discussed here, including Taras Shevchenko's *Haidamaky* and Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*), Kurbas was, from his early years as a director, less interested in developing any notion of fixed character than he was in creating a poetic, associative drama. 'Sculptural,' 'symphonic,' 'melodious,' and 'harmonious' are some of the words which critics and spectators used to describe his productions; all of these lead back to Kurbas's intent to create a unified, organic production, attentive to style, gesture, and rhythm – and all underpinned by the philosophical content of each play.

When Kurbas turned to *Macbeth* it was not, he explained, to recreate a period piece in the fashion of Russian provincial theatres with their overblown rhetorical style, grand gestures, desperate cries, threats, and curses (Bazhan, 'Pod znakom,' 223). Instead, he was intent on pursuing three different aims. First, he was still aware of this production as a great historical moment which would confirm the right to stage Shakespeare in Ukrainian. For the actress Natalia Pylypenko, Kurbas's choice of a Shakespearean play was courageous, bearing in mind that the collective had next to no experience with Shakespeare, and considering that they had none of the usual and expected accessories of such productions, such as grand costumes and elaborate scene designs (Pylypenko 25). Actor Vasyl Vasylko particularly remembered the shock of his first encounter with the text. When he looked at his part, that of Banquo, his eyes alighted on the Ukrainian translation of the following passage:

> This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting [marlet], does approve,
> By his lov'd [mansionry], that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here; no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendant bed and procreant cradle.
> Where they [most] breed and haunt, I have observ'd
> The air is delicate. (I.vi.4–10)

In Panteleimon Kulish's translation, which clips the speech, making it even more oblique, these words were incomprehensible to Vasylko who momentarily panicked at having not only to make quick sense of the speeches but also to create a role out of them. But Kurbas patiently explained the text, Shakespeare's use of prose and poetry, and explored the psychology of the characters, their passions, and obsessions. There was, recalled Vasylko, 'a lot of talk at rehearsals about grand scale, monumentality, and about the grandeur of Shakespeare's characters echoing our times and we theirs.' Kurbas encouraged the actors to respond 'poetically' to the play's rhythm and be attentive to its imagery, while he worked at discovering

new ways of translating and revealing the tragic vision they represented into pristine, clear gestures (Vasyl'ko, 'Vesna,' 363).

In addition to confirming the right to stage the classics, Vasylko observed that Kurbas also indicated that this production would serve other, general political functions. Kurbas had declared, 'We aren't just staging a tragedy of Shakespeare. Utilizing the high art of an English classic, we are creating a production which is in harmony with our times. Using the tools of the theatre we fight against power-hungry tyrants and pretenders to the throne' (Vasyl'ko, 'Rezhyser,' 169). Pylypenko recalled that Kurbas explained to the company that the production was to stress the scale and grandeur of social events, the will to power and ambition, which were still alive then (Pylypenko 25–6). *Macbeth* was thus, in its subject, a contemporary play speaking to Ukrainians in images that they could understand only too well; at the same time, in its position as classic, the play also bestowed upon the company some of the reflected greatness of actorly tradition. Confirming this sentiment, Pylypenko quoted Kurbas as stressing that 'the production of a Shakespearean tragedy in the context of devastation and destitution will be our collective's revolutionary act, a demonstration of the creative potential of our artistic ambitions' (Vasyl'ko, 'Rezhyser,' 169; Pylypenko 24).

Third, and just as important, through this classic Kurbas hoped to explore and test some of his theoretical ideas. In this, he was less successful. The urban famine made it impossible to produce the play in Kyiv, although a first version was prepared there. To address basic issues of the material survival of his actors, Kurbas constructed a small touring company, the Kyidramte which, in the summer of 1920, left Kyiv for the countryside where it was possible to survive. With the breakdown of distribution systems, the food available in the countryside was simply not reaching the cities. The peasants' positive reception of Kurbas's productions, and especially their responsiveness to tempo and action, caused him enthusiastically to record that, more than ever, he believed in the success of Shakespeare on the village stage; their's [the peasants'] was, he claimed, a more intelligent, more cultured response than that of the Red Army soldiers or the average urbanite, the 'grey public.' 'But,' he also continued, 'they react first of all to movement (*rukh*). Movement, movement, and movement. Genuinely dramatic, and even more so tragic, intonations force the whole hall into a dead silence.'[15] Evidently buoyed by this genuine response, Kurbas produced *Macbeth* in Bila Tserkva in 1920, a town surrounded by many fronts and fifty miles away from the capital where the production's basic outlines had been prepared.

In the directives to his company on the verge of the production, Kurbas urged:

> Please write out all your roles by Monday, work on comprehension of the text, get used to reading the poetry absolutely smoothly and clearly and, if possible, memorize the text. The play will be put on after four or five rehearsals; the translation is

slightly ponderous; and whether it will go on in two weeks or, perhaps, in a month completely depends upon the active involvement of the company of actors in the work. If in a month, then the last week of rehearsals will be spent without food. The assistants will be announced later.

The premiere is slated for 14 August 1920. He who understands the horror of this play of words, 'Shakespeare, for the first time, *Macbeth*, after five rehearsals,' will not begrudge his sweat and one or two sleepless nights for the good of our great cause. I call upon everyone to bestir himself to the greatest energy, briskness, steadfastness. All for one, one for all! All for the show! Don't wait until work is placed in your hands. Help the property manager, the costumers, the machinists. We are doing a great, historical deed for Ukrainian theatre and culture. Throw your whole soul and energy into the fire of creative work on *Macbeth*. He who approaches art like a shopkeeper is not worthy of participating in historical exploits. Let theatrical work come to a boil, so that we may not regain consciousness from the greatest tension until after the premiere. (Kurbas, 'Nastanova,' 226)

The play was finally staged not on the 14th but on the 20th of August[16] – one assumes, therefore, with little food in the actors' stomachs. The production immediately achieved Kurbas's first two aims; the third was more difficult to attain under the circumstances. Like many of Kurbas's productions, the 1919–20 *Macbeth*s reveal an interest in mass scenes on the one hand and, on the other, in austerity of design. As Mykola Bazhan noted, Kurbas staged the play 'simply and severely' (Bazhan, 'Pod znakom,' 223). Kurbas's jottings in his director's diary once again reveal his modernist, analytical tendencies, that is, his wish to explore, in a rational and 'scientific' manner, the tension between word and gesture, text and body – an abstract concern rather than one which centres on recreating a facsimile surface of reality:

I have a natural tendency in theatrical art

1. to a separation between subject and object;
2. to a generally rhythmical character;
3. to the assignment of vivid moments in a role and in a play, effacing the rest.

(Some actors – emotional cattle.)

...

A play doesn't have a style. It's a self-deception that it exists. We are style. We will produce Shakespeare *impressio*.' (Kurbas, Rezhysers'kyi shchodennyk, n.d., 1)

'*Impressio*' is a problematic term, perhaps a coinage or simply an error for '*impresso*.' Kurbas appears to be suggesting that his Shakespearean production will

Poster advertising the first Shakespearean production on the Ukrainian stage, *Macbeth*, 20 August 1920 at the 'Palace' Theatre. (STM)

be contoured and in that sense, '*impresso*,' engraved or marked. He may also have had in mind a kind of impressionism, that is, an attentiveness to mood and sensation rather than to realistic illustration. On the whole, though, the sense of these jottings is quite clear: it shows his modernist predilection for sharp contrasts, disjunctions, and strong emphases while still subjecting the whole production to a single, general rhythmical line. This attention to the visual beauty of movement, the line of mass scenes, as well as his desire to convey that continuous visual enchantment to his audience allies Kurbas with Reinhardt, Craig, and Fuchs.

Despite his recently articulated firm principles, of necessity Kurbas had to compromise on the external elements of the production; the company's extreme poverty ruled out his intended unified design. Wigs and costumes had to be supplied by the general distribution centre (Holovmystetstvo) from Kyiv. Swords, shields, helmets, and all other properties were made by the actors. The stage set was 'laconic' – a triple arch with curtains, behind which were painted backdrops, a simplicity dictated more by the penurious economic conditions of the company than by Kurbas's design (Vasyl'ko, 'Vesna,' 362). Kurbas himself played Macbeth, a role (along with Lear) he had long cherished hopes of playing,[17] opposite Liubov Hakkebush (who had played Jocasta to his Oedipus). Throughout the summer of 1920, Kurbas resisted playing romantic leads and gave himself up to tragic roles like Oedipus and Macbeth.

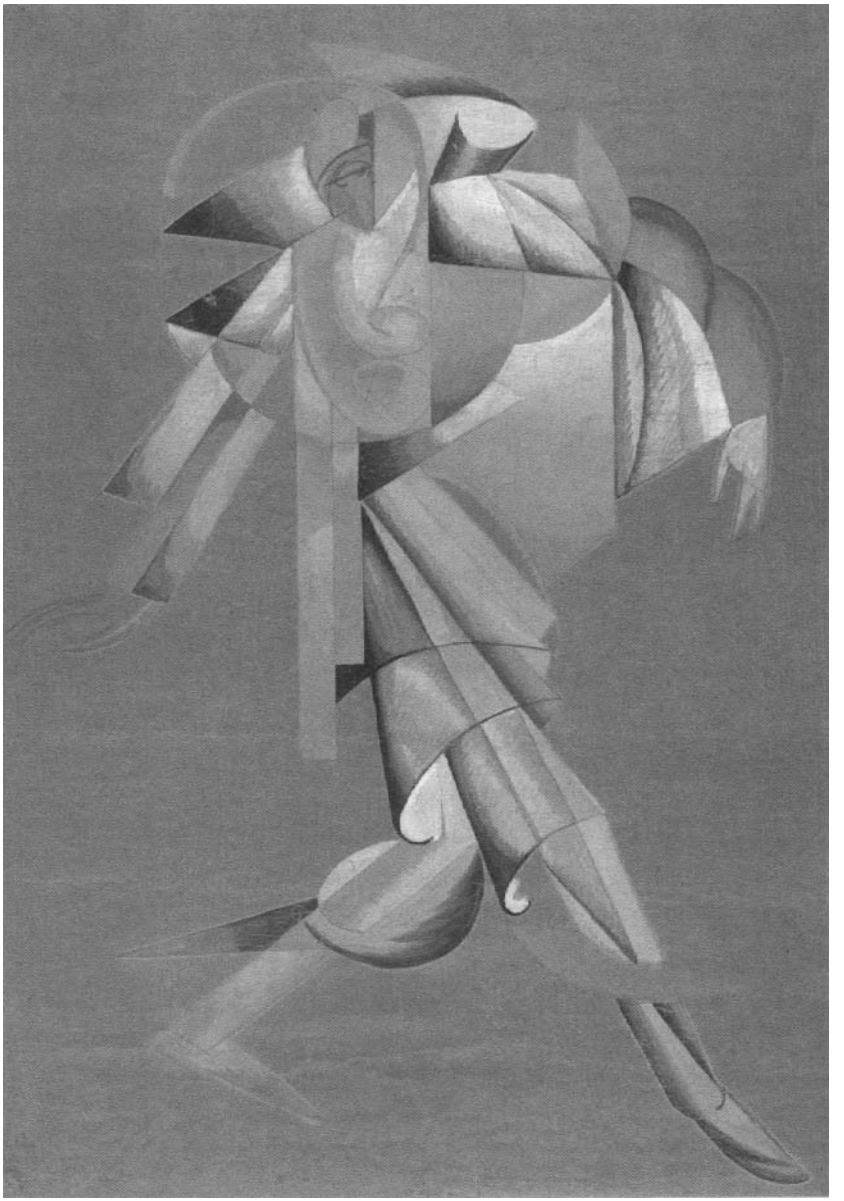
Although the play-text was based upon the rather stodgy, literary (rather than theatrical) nineteenth-century translation of the play by Panteleimon Kulish, the production was a great success. From Vasylko and from Pylypenko we learn that, although permeated with a heightened, but not a declamatory, style, this was generally a realistic production from which the emotional and romantic had not yet been completely shaken off. Not a demonic although a highly spirited Lady Macbeth, Liubov Hakkebush, in a fairly traditional interpretation, was, in the first part of the play, a loving wife at the height of her beauty and so besotted with her husband that she was willing to do anything to help aggrandize him. Wishing to make Macbeth king because this was the greatest glory the world could offer, Lady Macbeth, out of the extremity of her love, urged him to kill Duncan. Imagining his kingly glory reflecting upon her, she dedicated herself totally to her husband's ambitions; no personal sacrifice was too great for her idol of love. The more Macbeth's will seemed to weaken before thoughts of murder, the stronger and more obsessive about power Lady Macbeth became. Uncomprehending of the consequences of evil, she gave no thought to the future but laid out their tasks with impeccable logic (Vasyl'ko, 'Vesna,' 363). But the murder of Duncan brought her to two sudden, tragic realizations: first, there was no turning back for either of them; and, second, her husband was now a very different man. The sleepwalking scene revealed the depth of her pathos and madness. In her dream-

world, she replayed and restored her old role as his essential helpmate and partner, attempting to console, support, and calm an illusory husband.

Kurbas portrayed Macbeth as a valiant soldier who, having achieved the crown, dwindled into a fearful and obsessive, bloodthirsty killer, destroying all norms of moral behaviour in an effort to hold onto his power. It was, by contemporary standards, a low-key performance, as Vasyl Vasylko observed in his memoirs: no over-the-top-delivery, no 'rich declamatory style of speech'; yet, nonetheless, a 'passionate' performance. Kurbas tried to keep the actors under firm reign, avoiding the Scylla of naturalism and the Charybdis of ethnographic pathos (Vasyl'ko, 'Vesna,' 363). Mykola Bazhan confessed that only with the distance of time could he truly appreciate Kurbas's understated portrayal of Macbeth: the height and refinement of his actor's art. 'Although he neither shackled nor diminished the emotional range of Shakespeare's hero-villain, he did not permit anything to be overdone either in the false feigning or in the desperate insolence of the Scottish thane, thereafter the short-lived king' (Bazhan, 'Pod znakom,' 224). While he may not have immediately recognized the artistry of Kurbas's understated Macbeth, Bazhan was captivated by the production from the start:

> There was no greater joy at that time in my life than to see the old, worn out, patched curtain of the city theatre part, and [then] to see before me the gaping emptiness of the half-dark stage. In the wings, a sheet of steel rumbled and roared, reproducing a peal of thunder. A brief switching on of electricity pierced the darkness, imitating a flash of 'lightning.' From the darkness emerged three spectres, three figures, dressed in rags, the appurtenances of witches. But however the actresses attempted to portray themselves as ancient monsters with overgrown wisps in the midst of hair, the youth and grace of Valentyna Chystiakova, Ryta Neshchadymenko, and Vira Onatska still came through in the various motions of the bent figures of the sinister wizards.
>
> A deliberate acceleration was heard and a slightly exaggerated melody, the march of gnomes from the second suite of Grieg. The witches began their fantastic, convulsive, whirling ring dance. Their hoarse voices were heard:
>
> FIRST WITCH: When shall we three meet again?
> In thunder, lightning or in rain.
> SECOND WITCH: When the hurly-burly's done,
> When the battle's lost and won.
> THIRD WITCH: That will be ere the set of sun.
> FIRST WITCH: Where the place?
> SECOND WITCH: Upon the heath.
> THIRD WITCH: There to meet with Macbeth.

1. Kulyk's drawing of Liubov Hakkebush as Lady Macbeth in the 1920 production of *Macbeth*. (SMTMCA 2611)



Vadym Meller's painting of Bronislava Nijinska, *Mephisto*, also known as *Mephisto Valse*, Kyiv, 1919. (BNA)

> The witches vanished into the fog. The clatter of thunder diminished. Encircled by his train, the king came out onto the stage. After having played out his scene, he left the stage describing the feudal knights' excitement at the battle. Again the dark emptiness, and again three witches began their furious whirling and singing. Suddenly a drum rattled. It was Macbeth accompanied by Banquo, who was played by V. Vasylko. They were surrounded by a circle of dancing witches. Dispiritedly but insistently, Macbeth questioned them about his fate.' (Bazhan, 'Pod znakom,' 224–5)

Bazhan's description suggests that Kurbas was using very little more than commonplace Renaissance staging techniques to evoke his atmospherics. And yet, as Bazhan's recollections also indicate, they were enough to enthrall that spectator. The witches had posed a particular problem. According to Valentyna Chystiakova, who played the First Witch, the witches visibly 'grew' in strength and evil with each subsequent meeting with Macbeth. Kurbas had, in fact, worried about their portrayal and considered excising them from the play altogether, since supernatural beings seemed to have little place in a secular, postrevolutionary society.

He also did not want them to be the 'banal toothless spooks of fairy-tales with pointed hats and noses.' Rather, he wanted the weird sisters to personify Macbeth's innermost thoughts about his menacing, burning, escalating desire for power. In the end, Kurbas had the three witches appear first to music of his own composition, followed by that of Grieg (Chystiakova, 'Pis'ma,' 93–4). In their dances, Kurbas insisted that there be no 'beauty,' but only 'clarity' of ideas. All three 'danced,' or rather made jagged, 'plastic movements embodying the idea of their triumph' over Macbeth: 'their arms flew up, then sprang down to their bent knees, then [they] hopped on one foot and stretched out the second ...' (Chystiakova, 'Pis'ma,' 94). In preparing for the dances, Chystiakova observed that it was as if she were extending her lessons with Bronislava Nijinska (Chystiakova, 'Pis'ma,' 93). The witches' grotesque movements seem to have resembled the improvisational dances which they had created under the guidance of Nijinska to the music of Stravinsky, Debussy, Chopin, Ravel, and others (Chystiakova, 'Pis'ma,' 41–2), and which Vadym Meller immortalized in his 1919 paintings of Nijinska's abstract dances *Mephisto Valse* and *Fear*. Speaking in an interview of Meller's *Mephisto*, the art connoisseur Igor Dychenko commented: 'It's as if you have a photograph of the "biology" of dance, its magnetic lines, its elevated simplicity in the curve of the body and the poetically sad position of the arms.' What was particularly marked, observed Dychenko, was Meller's 'unique spiritualism, the arrangement of forms as if devoid of a spatially objective subtext. It's as if he "raised" the body, as a plastic material, to the height of movement spiritually rich in content' ('Sem' voprosov' n.p.).

With the sound of Macbeth's drum, the witches scattered and fell to the ground, appearing, in their rough, burlap clothes to turn into greyish rocks. During the conversation between Macbeth and Banquo, the witches slowly crawled together, forming a single large mound from which the First Witch gradually raised herself up to her full height, greeting Macbeth with solemn dignity and 'the manners of a court lady.' Towards the end of the scene, the three sisters embraced, their bodies rocking back and forth together. Then, putting their bony fingers to their lips and urging Macbeth to ask no more questions, they vanished (Chystiakova, 'Pis'ma,' 95).

The last scene with Macbeth was played at top speed, although the witches were particularly solemn as they gathered around their cauldron and prepared their terrible fate for the king. Acting as mere onlookers at the procession of higher spirits and the fate which those apparitions ambiguously revealed to Macbeth, the weird sisters once again ended the scene with a strange dance (Chystiakova, 'Pis'ma,' 96). In her letters to V. Hakkebush, Chystiakova insisted upon the cumulative effect of the witches. At first, they appeared to be airy spirits, making light movements, as if they were dark shadows of trees thrown about by the wind. They appeared to turn themselves into frogs, rocks, and trees. In the course of the play and as Macbeth's evil grew, so the witches' movements appeared sharper, brisker, more abrupt. From the playfulness of their first meeting, to the last, when they mocked Macbeth, the witches were a strong presence in the production, best interpreted by their movements rather than their speech.

In describing the witches' movements, Chystiakova explained, 'We did not take these dance movements from either a classical source or from character dance. These were movements, close in rhythmic figures to that of Dalcroze, modernized by us into conformity with our actorly representation of Macbeth's witches. The expressiveness of the dance gradually diminished' (Chystiakova, 'Pis'ma,' 99). The grotesque, jagged movements of the witches seem to have been replicated by other characters, too. In Liubov Hakkebush's extant manuscript fragment of the playtext, stick figures and their movements are drawn in the margins next to the speeches of the Porter, Siward, and the Murderers. Although impossible to decipher completely, these are obviously choreographed, deliberately irregular, movements. The stick figures, accompanied by directional arrows, are occasionally captioned with phrases such as 'arm up,' 'forward,' 'arm retrieved,' 'stands by door.' Full and half-steps are indicated, as well as upward and downward motions – all of which appear to suggest abrupt but clearly expressed, stylized movement (Hakkebush). The whole production was brought to an end not with Malcolm's regenerative monologue, but with Siward's laconic acceptance of his son's death, the display of Macbeth's head, and the old warrior's greeting of Macduff with the title of king.

Vadym Meller's painting of Bronislava Nijinska, *Fear*, also known as *Fire*. (BNA)

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Kurbas's *Macbeth* at the Palace (Palats) Theatre was welcomed, for the most part, by oral report rather than written reviews because of the alleged paper shortage. (The Bolsheviks had confiscated printing presses and bought up paper supplies.) One exception was Oleksa Slisarenko's account published in *Visty VuTsVk* (*News*; the daily organ of the Soviet Ukrainian State) seven days after the play's opening. Beginning with a comment about both the aesthetic and material success of the production, Slisarenko praised the first Ukrainian Shakespeare for its smoothness, and for being well thought through; he lauded the skilful hand of the director as well as the intense work of the actors on their roles (Slisarenko n.p.). Kurbas and Hakkebush had performed 'faultlessly.' Hakkebush's was a 'spirited' performance. The witches and Hecate (Chystiakova, Onatska, Hrai, Neshchadymenko) made a 'strong impression.' Generally, Slisarenko concluded, the actors' theatre 'culture' and 'intelligent' performances were in evidence. Only the weak local musicians of Bila Tserkva were criticized for their part.

This production of *Macbeth* became a kind of benchmark of comprehensibility to which later commentators would return. Positive later accounts of the production may attest to the fact that the 1920 production, while spare, nonetheless raised a strong emotional response in its audience; or, they may simply show that the political interpretation of the avant-garde had changed and it was expedient to maintain a distance from Kurbas's later and more radical experiments – hence the earlier and simpler productions were thought safe to praise. Notwithstanding the political agendas of the reviewers either at the time or later, it was clear that Kurbas had finally found a crowd-pleaser, not an easy task when audiences craved vaudeville or light comedies.

According to the stage manager of the 1920 production, Leonid Boloban, the success of the production was 'without a doubt' (Boloban, 'Vid,' 18). Boloban emphasized the 'vanquishing' of mimic expression, language, and other elements by a single-minded emphasis on rhythm. Boloban referred to this 'concrete-and-steel' resolve of the director as forcing the actors to participate in the production's 'score.' Hitherto, he noted, theatrical convention demanded a wider, sharper, more portentous gesture from the actor, along with overblown rhetorical intonations, supported by conventional mise-en-scène and costumes. In Kurbas's production, however, every element, from the 'opening chord' to curtain's close, conformed to a single key. Kurbas required that every gesture and word create a maximum effect through exactitude and clarity of delivery. But Boloban's recollections, written as they were in the mid 1950s, are not without problems; at times his memory seems to lapse as he conflates the 1920 with the 1924 productions. Where he appears unchallenged is in his claim – to which others attest – that the production was immensely successful and that many were struck by Kurbas's innovation: the firm directorial line and the consequent adherence of the actors to

this 'score.' This sense of 'line' or 'musicality' (the theatrical equivalent of controlled manipulation of rhythm) contrasted very sharply with the competing acting styles of the time. And the control over image and sound was, above all, dependent upon a philosophical understanding of the play. The actor and director Hnat Ihnatovych observed that the 'key to each production, to its form, and all the directorial decisions relating to its production, in the opinion of Les Stepanovych [Kurbas], must flow organically from the central concept – the philosophical apprehension of the dramatic material; everything else is coincidental' (Ihnatovych 133). Vasyl Vasylko similarly noted that the philosophical was all-important to Kurbas; yet, he admitted, this production had not yet mined all the possibilities of the text nor was it, he lamented, yet a fully philosophical production. But it did represent progress; the company had passed the Shakespeare test.

The production met with 'colossal success' in Bila Tserkva and ran for a full week. For the company, the production constituted 'an event,' a new direction (Vasyl'ko, 'Vesna,' 363). It may not unreasonably be argued that Shakespeare's first Ukrainian audience was essentially a rural, deeply provincial one, certainly not an intellectual elite; surprisingly, however, this untrained audience responded warmly and immediately to Shakespeare. From Bila Tserkva, Kyidramte fanned out to the surrounding villages, sugarbeet factories, village schools, and '*prosvita*' ('enlightenment') halls, thus gaining, as Slisarenko noted, new adherents for a classical repertoire among the proletariat and peasant classes, and crowning the Bila Tserkva period of Kurbas (Slisarenko n.p.).

In September Kurbas prepared his third variant of *Macbeth* in the town of Uman. The actors first had to play in a very small club on a tiny stage with the back-drop hanging directly from the rear wall, making it impossible to cross behind the scenes or in the wings. A little later the production was moved to the recently renovated and more spacious quarters of a former Dominican monastery (Boloban, 'Vid,' 20). This new location with its ecclesiastical associations must have contributed to the sense of the revolutionary overthrow of old authorities, and would have added a special piquancy to the supernatural scenes. The location may also have inspired the later, viciously satirical view of the clergy found in the 1924 *Macbeth,* although it is also true that, for personal reasons, Kurbas was himself not overfond of the clergy.[18] Yet a third stage for the play was created when the troupe rebuilt a wooden summer theatre for winter use (Boloban, 'Vid,' 20). Adding an old circus and a trade-union club to their already long list of stages (Kovalenko 181), the Ukrainian actors, like their Renaissance forebears, also worked in a variety of playing spaces and conditions under the watchful eye of the political wing of the 12th Division of the Red Army. Punctuating the performances were visits from the Army representative, Comrade Lyashko, who conveyed the consequences of events in the nearby fronts by means of a series of

agreed-upon hand gestures, which instantly informed the cast whether they were expected to drastically shorten the production or, when danger was truly near, to stop playing immediately (Vasyl'ko, 'Vesna,' 366–7).

In addition to peasants, the audiences consisted of many students, some from the local agricultural institute, others from a variety of secondary institutions, and Red Army soldiers. According to Boloban, the productions made them feel 'the echo of new, revolutionary movements' and raised their feelings of national consciousness (Boloban, 'Vid,' 21), thoughts echoed by Kurbas, who recorded in his diary on 31 August 1920, 'There were those who cried when we left. There were those who said they only became conscious Ukrainians after seeing our productions' (Kurbas, Rezhysers'kyi shchodennyk, Uman, 31/8/1920, 2). The magnetic Kurbas himself was the object of particular veneration in the late winter of 1921, when he became the recipient of a minor extravagance, especially considering the difficulty of obtaining paper of any sort: a bound folio-size formal greeting from the symphony orchestra of Uman, which at least on one occasion he had had to conduct (Vasyl'ko, 'Vesna,' 369). Written in Russian and signed with ten now barely legible signatures, the musicians addressed Kurbas as 'one of the better sons of the *narod* (people) ... who brought new strength to the Ukrainian theatre' and ushered it into 'the great international temple of art' ('Dorogomu' 1).

'A precious seeing': The Transformational Gesture and Movement

Leonid Boloban singled out Liubov Hakkebush for her 'notable success' in the role of Lady Macbeth; she created a 'complete, very flexible, and highly temperamental image of Lady Macbeth' (Boloban, 'Vid,' 21). But most other eyewitnesses cited the most moving moment of the play as occurring in act I, scene vii, Macbeth's soliloquy, which was directed to the crown left hanging from the throne by the trusting Duncan. The audience watched in suspense as the golden round shook and nearly fell when Macbeth inadvertently touched it while debating whether or not to commit the terrible deed. This 'transformational' gesture, as Kurbas called it, presented a concrete image of Macbeth's thoughts, and sharpened the audience's perception by making them pay attention to the contrast between what Macbeth was saying – his recoil from the crime – and what he was doing – his obsessive gaze held by the crown (Kurbas, 'Pro peretvorennia,' 128). Kurbas explained this tension between the aural and the visual, the narrative and the intellectual, thus: 'Macbeth delivers a soliloquy; he talks of one thing, but the other [thing] is the real process which goes on in his subconscious. This is revealed by the movement of the figure [character] around the crown. The attention of the spectator is split into two processes. The spectator pays attention both

to what Macbeth is saying and to what he is doing, and this provokes a sharpened perception in the spectator' (Kurbas, 'Pro peretvorennia,' 128).

The split between words and thoughts and the resulting critical response in the audience was incipient in the late work of Josef Kainz, especially in his portrayal of Antony. Kurbas would remain deeply attached to this technique of *peretvorennia* (literally, transformation, metamorphosis), which he came to identify as the key concept of 'left theatre,' and one which tends toward stylization and montage. It may usefully be understood as a kind of theatrical associative objective correlative, a concrete image presented to the audience to signal another reality (as the series of gestures indicated Macbeth's true thoughts about the crown). The theatre critic Petro Rulin explained that the transformational gesture was part of Kurbas's emphasis on a maximally economical and expedient acting style, which employs clarity of gestures not just to illustrate the text, but also to affect the viewer at the same time as the word does (Rulin, '*Berezil'*,' 443).[19]

While Rulin explained the external effect of *peretvorennia*, one of Kurbas's favourite actors, Yosyp Hirniak, recognized the significance of its inward pointers. He described the transformational gesture as 'an artistic and theatrical concept indicating a procedure by means of which the director and actor attempt to reveal reality as profoundly as possible'; it is a kind of theatrical symbol 'which presents the essence of a certain phenomenon, a certain reality, and helps the audience to see its real meaning' (Hirniak, 'Birth,' 287–8).'*Peretvorennia* is an associative method of otherspeak (*inomovlen'*), which may be surreal, unreal, lyrical, imagistic, tonal, plastic, imagistic, and so forth' (Vasyl'ko, 'Rezhyser,' 171). Bergson, Potebnia, and Craig lie behind Kurbas's effort to reveal the spiritual and hidden by way of concrete images. The philosophical underpinning to the theatrical gesture again suggests how Kurbas intended his to be a philosophical and spiritual theatre at once looking both outward and inward.

Providing one of many training grounds for Kurbas's actors as well as the testing of his theories, the 1919–20 productions of *Macbeth* also were among the first attempts to work out his principles of 'fixity, clarity, economy, rhythmicalness' (Vasyl'ko, 'Narodnyi,' 14). Two months before the first performance of the Shakespearean play, on 26 June 1920, Kurbas was mulling over ideas about rhythm. He jotted down in his directorial diary that he intended to test out specific ideas in his production of *Macbeth*. Everything on stage, he wrote, must be subject to a musical rhythm:

> That which great actors once delivered unconsciously, we must deliver both consciously and consummately. In this lies the solution to the theatrical crisis among the great past, the unknown future and the grey present. First, the musical rhythm of

everything which is on stage in the frame of time ... The greater the artist of the future, the more he will pay attention, in his play or production, to [rhythm], to [making] all strokes of meaning, [all] scenes follow in such a rhythmic succession that they will evoke in the viewer an analogous rhythm and will force the heart of the viewer to beat more smoothly, quickly or more unevenly.

Before the catastrophe in the play ... a livelier movement in the tempo of the scenes. Thus a comprehensible art places naturalism beyond the pale of art.

Now I consciously want to try this in *Macbeth*, to stage this problem as a foundation of the production, and by confirmation to accept this as the basic method, in my view, an entirely correct one.

What are 'pauses' in important, decisive moments of a play? Are these not a wide, broken up *grave*, a quivering chord of pain, where the rhythm of the striking of chords, the composer and the tempo, the performer – or one and the other – are the director?

Hence, rhythm: in the strikes of movement, in significant words or actions, in the pauses of silence (beyond words or in insignificant words) – (beautiful words), as an accompaniment – the pause for the right hand of the player.

Needs development: the sensation of some scene as a particular example of rhythm. Art only begins here.

And further: the problem of tempo, power, the painterly rhythm of poses and gestures. These are the essential elements of directing and of dramaturgy. All else is naturalism, not art. (Kurbas, 'Z rezhysers'koho shchodennyka,' Bila Tserkva, 26/6/1920, 32)

In the short rehearsal time available to him, Kurbas could not fully explore these ideas. He remained unsatisfied with the production and, later, referred to it as a 'failure.' But others detected the musicality and sculptural quality of Kurbas's productions, both here and in his earlier endeavours. Stepan Bondarchuk, for example, had observed that while there was very little actual music in Halbe's *Youth*, directed and translated by Kurbas in 1917 and in repertory in 1918, he was struck by the fact that 'the entire production seemed to be a harmonious quintet. This was due to its rhythmic structure. Accent and relaxation, the widening and narrowing of the backdrop, the plastic and vocal techniques of the actors 'sounded' like a well-worked out musical composition' (Bondarchuk, 'Molodyi,' 125). Similarly, Polina Samiylenko, an actress in Kurbas's troupe, remarked on the 'symphonic' qualities of all of his work (Samiilenko 40). Once more, these epithets suggest the contoured, associative, and poetic nature of his productions.

Rhythm and movement continued to occupy many entries in Kurbas's diary. At rehearsals, Kurbas occasionally made use of a metronome to help define the rhythm. From the first, ballet formed a significant influence on Kurbas's avant-garde theatre because of his conviction of the centrality of movement to the the-

atre. His speculations about and experiments with rhythm, movement, and space, formulated earlier through his reading, were refined by his work with the choreographer Mikhail Mordkin. Kurbas himself danced the part of the sheik in *Aziade*, a ballet composed by I. Hiutel to Mordkin's choreography (Bondarchuk, 'Molodyi,' 165). Mordkin, a modern dancer of international repute, was one of the first to claim equal status for the male dancer; he partnered Anna Pavlova in London and New York (1910) to great acclaim, but also had a wide following himself. Later, he emigrated to the United States, where he deeply influenced the course of American dance. A choreographer, teacher, and superb mime, he was invited to teach at the Young Theatre from 1916 to 1919. Three times a week he brought to his untrained students, the actors, lessons on movement, emphasizing rhythm and plasticity, in order to create images in motion which would reflect a specific inner reality. Like Kurbas, Mordkin believed in the need to revivify classical traditions through contemporary modes; in his view, jazz could serve this function for classical ballet ('Jazz' n.p.). Stepan Bondarchuk recalled that Mordkin 'sang' with his body; the actors struggled to imitate that expressiveness, some without great success (Bondarchuk, 'Molodyi,' 143).

A second important connection with dance was forged through Bronislava Nijinska. Fleeing Russia for Ukraine from which she hoped it would be easier to escape to the West and to her brother, Vaclav, Nijinska spent two years in Kyiv, where she established her *Ecole de mouvement/Shkola dvizhennie* (School of Movement) in 1919 as a way of preparing dancers for the new choreography which Vaclav had introduced most memorably and shockingly for Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring*. The Nijinskys (including their parents) had had a lengthy relationship with Ukrainian dance and culture going back to the nineteenth century (Nijinska, *Early*, 6). Born in Kyiv, Vaclav had made his first public appearance (at the age of five) in the *hopak*, a whirlwind Ukrainian dance consisting of acrobatic movements, high leaps, and frenzied rhythms. Bronislava herself had been a ballerina with the Kyiv Opera (1915–16), and later taught at a variety of dance and music schools in Kyiv, including the State Conservatory of Music. In 1919 she opened her dance studio with the aim of creating a new type of ballet artist, as the name of her school – movement, not dance – indicates. Combining and juxtaposing classical steps with contemporary movements, using stark images and strange new rhythms, Nijinska, like Kurbas, hoped that her choreography would release new energies, new spiritual depths; her ballets, like the productions of Kurbas, were aimed at transcending reality, at expressing rather than representing life (Baer 41).

Remaining in Kyiv for two years, Nijinska created the first abstract dances there. After her escape to the West, she would go on, later, to work with Max Reinhardt (including on his Hollywood version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). The years in Kyiv, whose 'importance to her artistic development cannot be

Bronislava Nijinska in Papillon costume, 1921. Her gestures and stance bear a striking resemblance to the stylized poses of the actors in Kurbas's *Macbeth*, 1924.
See illustrations on pp. 85 and 95. (BNA)

Bronislava Nijinska in Papillon costume, 1921. (BNA)

overestimated' (Baer 18), were also years in which she (like all Kyivans) was cut off from the rest of the world by the frequent bombardments in and around Kyiv in 1919. Theoretical discussion evenings took place at Nijinska's apartment. Here common emphases and interests would have quickly surfaced: the importance of movement as symbol, metaphor, and mood; the necessity of exploring new rhythms; the emphasis on mime and plastic movements; the notion of architectural form in dance and theatre; the necessity of reworking the classics in a contemporary idiom; and the general turn to the conceptual in art as a way of revealing inner truth. As for Kurbas, so for Nijinska, movement was the essence of theatre and dance. Their collaboration extended to sharing studio space, as well as actors (including Valentyna Chystiakova) and set and costume designers (Anatoli Petrytsky, Vadym Meller).

Conceiving the balletic heritage as a 'renewable legacy' (Baer 18) rather than fixed, classical forms, Nijinska criticized the current status of ballet which emphasized 'pose, position, and gesture' – just as Kurbas had attacked the conventionality and lack of fluidity of similar methods of acting. Rather than static points of a design, movement should be 'theatrically effective' (Nijinska in Baer 85). Nijinska's concept of a pause as 'also movement – a breath, as it were, in the action' (Nijinska in Baer 85) recalls Kurbas's previously cited idea of pause as an element of the rhythmic whole of the production (and may be compared to the sculptor Alexander Archipenko's similarly 'rhythmic' use of negative and positive space). Nijinska's School included, among other topics related to dance, art history, expression of movement, and art of the theatre. It may be that Kurbas was involved in the last of these. Certainly Nijinska was to write confidently about his mastery of theatrical art to one of her former students, Nadia Shuvarska (Nijinska, Letter). For his part, Kurbas invited Nijinska to take over the choreography of his theatre in 1920.

'My verse so barren': Shakespeare vs Shakespeare

The euphoria from Kurbas's Shakespeare production did not last very long for him. Shortly thereafter he began to anatomize its production principles and interrogate its theoretical underpinnings. One of the convictions he had reinforced by this experience was that the central issue for him – the apprehension of the rhythm of the production – could only be achieved by means of a new type of actor. The actor was not to relive the emotions of the character or identify with him, but, rather, through his craft, be able to objectify the character, to create and, at will, *re*create a moving mimesis of the situation (Vasyl'ko, 'Narodnyi,' 14; Kurbas, 'Iak,' 49–50; Kurbas, 'Na hrani,' 121–2). Since the actor should not be discovering himself, his craft should not be dependent upon his mood or condition.

Personal emotions were to be overcome at all costs, because, for Kurbas, true art was always and only control, not impulse. Shakespeare, Kurbas wrote in his diary, 'the poet will be defeated and will vanish ... when he is played as "theatre" where words are embroidered on the canvas of actorly-directorial rhythms of actions and emotions. I recall my "failure" with *Macbeth, Oedipus the King* and, in part, *Woe from Wit*. Shakespeare as theatre will be defeated and will vanish when a production is built upon the consummate literary rhythm of his verse, action, images, feelings. This would be classical "theatre" of a literary merit. Verse plays are a relic of the literary theatre ... Either theatre or literature. Shakespeare from the literary point of view is consummate and unsurpassed, but he is just now about to be translated into theatrical language' (Kurbas, Rezhysers'kyi shchodennyk, Uman, 23/1/1921, 2).

To a great extent Kurbas's convictions seem to echo Craig's beliefs that Shakespeare is an 'incomparable literary artist,' but that the poet is usually out of place in the theatre (Cheney 296). Kurbas considered his 1919–20 productions of Shakespeare a failure because they were too emotional, too literary, and not theatrical enough. A failure was, for Kurbas, his inability to get at the central aspects of theatre – the creation of a new actor and a new audience, the recreation of a classic in a new and original key. That his basic aims had not changed since 1916 – but that his production experience was teaching him how to be more and more his true self – may be seen in his diary, where he observes that he is like Dégas, who, when chided for turning from painting horses to painting women, responded by saying that he had not changed genres, he had always only painted lines, never horses or women. So, Kurbas noted, 'the line' was what was always important to him in theatrical art (Kurbas, Rezhysers'kyi shchodennyk, Uman, 23/1, 1921, 3). Fully cognizant of the complexity of the artistic process and attentive to all aspects of his art, Kurbas defined 'art' as not just form and content, but content, form, material, creativity, and reception (Kurbas, Rezhysers'kyi shchodennyk, Bila Tserkva, 16/8, 1922, 11). This multiple awareness prevented Kurbas from being or becoming a pure theorist and a directorial tyrant unconnected to audience or actor – though there is no doubt that he was a firm, often absolute, leader.

By working toward a new type of actor, Kurbas hoped more quickly to rupture the theatre's stereotypes, its *shabliony* or stencils for producing Shakespeare and other classics. 'The old mortals don't speak directly to us,' Kurbas remarked. 'Literature killed the actor and the theatre' (Kurbas, 'Teatral'nyi lyst,' 101). What was needed was a wise harlequin who could recreate theatre in its primordial sense as illusion and magic.[20] His definition of acting, a far cry from both the ethnographic or any naturalistic style, reflects the consistently intellectual elements of his work: 'duration in an assigned plane and rhythm.' Acting was the skill to discover and demonstrate in material (the actor's body, as well as other physical mate-

rial of the theatre) symbols for the transmission of the representation of reality (Kurbas, 'Aktor,' 54). Analytic in essence (that is philosophical and critical rather than 'merely' mimetic or affective), his theatre was to be a theatre focused on developing a distinct style, a style arrived at by taking whatever was appropriate and useful from the world theatre tradition in order to mould it and use it for new purposes and new creations. What style this would be was not predetermined; rather, Kurbas expected it to be discovered in the process of continual experimentation, but that it would be located somewhere between the two poles of symbolism and classicism.

Kurbas's tendency to an intellectual theatre was most evident in his practice, at times mocked, of appearing in front of the curtain, usually dressed as Harlequin, in order to expound the general aims of his theatre or of a specific production. In his Manifesto of the Young Theatre, for example, he castigated the audience for seeking oblivion in the theatre. Instead, he called upon them to share in the magic of the theatre by becoming its co-creators, by recognizing the theatricality of the theatre, by uniting with the actors, and, by themselves becoming Shakespeares and Don Quixotes. Neither party ideology nor the teaching of truth was to be found in the theatre – only the theatre itself. 'You cannot do without a tale *(kazka)*. And so, philosophers, moralists, socialists try to make this tale maximally didactic. But we – maximally enchanting.' Kurbas asked the spectators to be receptive to transformation, to be drawn into the actors' actions, to forget the self, and to become a co-participant, to respond to the essential: theatricality. 'The actors,' Kurbas concluded, looking at the audience, 'are here!' (Kurbas, 'Manifest,' 212). His Harlequin, then, is a product of the inner world; later, to better express this idea Kurbas coined the phrase 'psychological harlequinade,' which concurrently points in these two directions of the creative inward and the theatrical outward.

Vasyl Desniak and others attributed the beginnings of Ukrainian modernism in the theatre directly to Kurbas (Desniak 116). Ukraine was now, Desniak believed, poised to become an active participant in world culture. Kurbas was not simply renovating a medium, a task in which his Western European counterparts were engaged, but he was recreating a whole theatrical culture which had been suppressed since the eighteenth century while simultaneously creating a new culture for the new times. His theatrical modernism was distinctive by virtue of Ukraine's history. As the writer and political activist (as well as first secretary general and vice president of the first autonomous Ukrainian state), Volodymyr Vynnychenko wrote, 'Truly, we were like the gods ... attempting to create a whole new world out of nothing' (Vynnychenko 258). Thus, paradoxically, during this cataclysmic period when everything seemed destroyed, the country and its people ravaged, writers, artists, theatre artists were exploding with energy, ideas, experiments. Nor were these materialist and rationalist theories only.

Like other members of the Eastern European avant-garde, Kurbas subscribed to the idea of theatre art being most closely allied to music. The word, Kurbas wrote, is not just a typographical concept, but a concept of sound (Kurbas, 'Z rezhysers'koho shchodennyka,' 36). Like Scriabin and Schönberg, two of his favourite composers, he had a 'mystical' orientation, that is, one given to the abstract and spiritual in a very broad sense. The Eastern European avant-garde was deeply spiritual in this way (a topic which deserves its own, separate, book-length treatment). Like his musical and artistic contemporaries and like Rudolf Steiner, the occultist and social philosopher (another important influence), Kurbas reevaluated his artistic medium with every production and, more, questioned its very grammar. So, Robert P. Morgan's comments about Scriabin and Schönberg may also be taken as representative of Les Kurbas: as the two musicians attempted 'to disengage musical sounds from their inherited attachments, to set them free from conventional associations' (Morgan 49–50) in pursuit of the spiritual, so Kurbas (as he wrote in his diary) was rethinking not just inherited conventions, 'catalogues and categories' created by Enlightenment rationalism, but representation itself (Kurbas, 'Z Rezhysers'koho shchodennyka,' 37).

Thus his 'rational' *Macbeth* was, in his retrospective view, his worst failure of all because it indicated a failure of nerve. 'I must end this period of my life with a sharp and foundational change in my relationships and tactics ... To stand face-to-face with tragedy, one must know how to cut the knot. But this bourgeois and artistic fear of scandal – my god! – how just like Mrs. Hedda' (Kurbas, 'Z Rezhysers'koho shchodennyka,' 38). If, as Modris Eksteins suggests, scandal constituted success in the early twentieth century, then Kurbas's 1924 *Macbeth* would prove to be that success.

Chapter Two

Tilting at Da Vinci: Kurbas's 1924 *Macbeth*

Blessed be
matter and space, number and measure!
Blessed be colours, and timbres, and fire,
fire, tonality of the whole universe,
fire and movement, fire and movement!

Pavlo Tychyna ('Orchestra' I)

Scandal

Whenever the young composer Yuli Meitus entered Kurbas's Kharkiv apartments in order to discuss the music for a new production, he was first greeted by a staggering mountain of thousands of books, newspapers, manuscripts, magazines, and reproductions of paintings by van Gogh, Monet, Cézanne, Picasso, Gauguin, and others. Every conceivable corner of wall space all the way up to the ceiling, every table, was packed with evidence of Kurbas's broad interests in theatre, art, dance, music, philosophy, and psychology. Once he negotiated the entry, Meitus later recalled, he would find the director in dressing gown, pacing about his room and humming jazz melodies. Kurbas would then initiate the conversation by saying, 'Maestro – a scandal!' By that, Kurbas meant that he was undertaking something new, extraordinary, and risky (Meitus 14, 19).

Of the many 'scandals' that he created, Kurbas's 1924 *Macbeth* was, and still is, the most notorious; it is also undoubtedly the most remarkable Shakespeare production of the early Soviet period. Removing 'all the veils of "sacred art"' and 'exposing its mysteries' (Shevchenko 67), the production employed 'estrangement' techniques nearly a decade before Bertolt Brecht began to do so. Its innovations were admired and copied by many Soviet directors, including Vsevolod Meyerhold. So radical was this *Macbeth* in its questioning of the grammar and

materials of theatre, including the place of the classic, that many Ukrainian theatre artists and historians have, to this day, not quite forgiven him.

Shortly after the premiere one of the actors in the production, Vasyl Vasylko, recorded in his diary that there was a momentary pause after the first act, when the audience appeared to be thrown into confusion. Was the act over or not? After a temporary silence, long, loud applause burst forth. As if a 'bomb had exploded in the audience,' spectators shouted out their impassioned responses (Vasyl'ko, Shchodennyk, 3 April 1924, 122).[1] Even after two and three days, the whole city still reeled from the shards of the 'explosion.' Reviewing the production, Yakiv Savchenko wrote: 'The theatrical and literary townsfolk of Kyiv are extremely scandalized. How is this – "sacred," great Shakespeare – turned upside down on the stage of the Berezil. Everyone had expected to see a bloody tragedy of crazy Scottish thanes but, instead, saw a scandal, the total annulment of a theatrical classic, of clichés. The Berezil treated *Macbeth* in their own fashion and gave a good slap in the face to the "refined" taste of the impotent middle-class' (Savchenko, 'Shekspir dybom,' 6).

'A little academe': The Berezil Artistic Association

After a two-year absence from Kyiv, during which his touring company, the Kyiv Dramatic Association (Kyidramte), had played the countryside where the devastating effects of the economic collapse of the country were less severe (and where the actors had some expectation of finding food), in 1922 Kurbas returned to the capital, declaring, on the one hand, his rupture with aestheticism and, on the other, his full endorsement of the proletarian revolution. While the city had regained some sense of order, its citizens still lived under extremely harsh circumstances. Typhoid fever and hunger were commonplace, and reports of cannibalism occasionally surfaced. To survive, actors and writers worked as manual labourers. Even as late as 1927, the memoirs and diaries of the actors attest, economic hardship was the norm.

Kurbas's decision to create a new company with a new vision was, at least in part, a survival tactic (Hirniak, 'Birth,' 281). Kurbas had spent his time in the countryside reevaluating his artistic and ideological aims and values, and reconsidering his and his company's future. It was here, too, that he encountered the charismatic Red Army leader Yona Yakir, who, with his 45th Volyn Division, supplied the company with bread and milk, and generally took them under his wing. It may be that the 45th saved Kurbas and his troupe from certain death by hunger and perhaps from the Poles who were then attacking. Yakir's fervent commitment to communism may have helped sway Kurbas to a consideration of a political theatre. In any event, while the earlier productions of Kurbas were more

45th Red Army Division 'Volyn,' 'guardians' of the Berezil. (STM)

lyrical, those of the next period might be characterized as polemical and epic. The openly political and fully left viewpoint was reflected in his creation of a new troupe, which embraced a handful of the younger members of his former company as well as many new adherents.[2] With his new political ideas came a new name, Berezil – an archaic Ukrainian word meaning March, the first month of spring and the beginning of the year in the old calendar. Writing in 1929, Petro Rulin explained that the name meant 'March' and signified the time when the Ukrainian revolution erupted (Rulin, 'Ukrainische,' 710); unlike Russians, for Ukrainians March – not October – was the more significant revolution.

Names had a special, magical significance for Kurbas; they were always chosen as a reflection of the character and spirit of that particular troupe (Bichuia 875). Hence, the new company and times almost seemed to dictate the name of Berezil. Inspired by a poem by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnsone, which Kurbas himself adapted from the Norwegian, the second stanza of the Ukrainian version (in my English translation), reads:

I choose March,
because it's like a storm,
because it's like laughter,
because it has power,
because it's revolution
from which summer is born.

Berezil was 'not dogma ... but movement, and if it ever ceased to be so, it would contradict its name; it would cease existing' (Kurbas, 'Berezil',' 142). In an interview, Kurbas explained that the main task of the Berezil Artistic Association (its full title, *Mystetske obiednannia Berezil* or MOB) was to engage in the 'ideological *perestroika* of the spectator' both by destroying the remnants of the old naturalistic theatre with its 'psychologism,' and by focusing on the technique and texture of spectacle. He intended, by means of the theatre, 'to create a new, not a passive, man' ('Ia. Ia.' n.p.). Writing shortly after the 1924 production of *Macbeth*, the reviewer 'Dim-rov' claimed that Berezil not only engaged 'in theatre, or even in art, or culture, but in life. It seeks the future' ('Dim-rov,' n.p.). Left-leaning but not communist, Berezil promoted a modernist agenda: it stood for 'action, organization, tempo, Americanization, *le dernier cri* in scholarship, and for the contemporary moment' (Kurbas, 'Berezil',' 143).

In this new and last variant of his company announced on the founding day of the Paris Commune (30 March), Kurbas finally began to achieve the artistic scope of endeavour about which he had dreamed, and for which he had planned for nearly a whole decade. An organization for all theatre artists, Berezil was created to

produce plays, carry on theatre research, experiment with stage design, performance, and audience response, publish a journal, *Theatrical Barricades (Barykady teatru)*, and set up a theatre museum, the first in Ukraine. With all the characteristics of an academy, the Berezil – at Kurbas's insistence – was, nonetheless, not defined as either school or university because these were institutions which one attended temporarily, eventually completing them, and leaving them behind. But creativity, Kurbas argued, was without end. Instead, the Ukrainian director conceived of the Berezil as movement (*rukh*) and process; it was to be lifelong learning and training of the body, the intellect, and the voice. In an echo of Craig, Kurbas insisted that experimentation was essential to their task. Like Craig, who argued that experimentation was needed to 'find out for yourself. At any other school you become like a parrot, and you imitate' (Craig, 'Thoroughness,' 97), so Kurbas, while receptive to a multitude of influences, detested epigonism. Experimentation was necessary to 'sharpen the axe, to improve the instrument; lack of experimentation is inconceivable for a theatre which intends to go forward and to become the model for the many theatre collectives which were recently created in Ukraine' (Kurbas, 'Shliakhy i zavdannia,' 256).

Not bound by any particular aesthetic theory, open to different values and aesthetic codes, experimental and therefore ever-changing by nature, the Berezil embraced everyone interested in a revolutionary theatre. To this end, Kurbas created four theatre studio-labs, each of which had a specific focus, from village theatre to opera. Becoming pedagogue as well as director, Kurbas himself lectured and invited scholars to lecture on, among other topics, world history, art, music, theatre, rhetoric, aesthetics, literature, philosophy, biology, medicine, psychology, and anything new – books, plays, theories. The actors were also obliged to undergo rigorous physical training, including fencing (three times a week), acrobatics, classical ballet, juggling, and tightrope-walking. The Berezil actor was to be an intelligent, cultured being who created his role by reading, thinking, imagining (not emoting), and by being at the very apex of his technical craft. This was to be a very special type of harlequin.[3] At its height, the Berezil included six studios (three in Kyiv, one each in Bila Tserkva, Boryspol, and Odesa), close to 400 members, and various research committees, including a 'psycho-technical' committee studying applied psychology in order to develop new teaching methods in the theatre.[4] In effect, the Berezil laid the foundations for and influenced all the theatrical and cinematographic arts in Soviet Ukraine.

In his director's diary (16 March 1922), Kurbas worked out and clarified for himself the meaning and constituent parts of art (which, later that year, formed the basis of a lecture to his company on 11 December 1922). Art is, he wrote, not just form and content, but 'form, content, material, creativity, and reception. Content and subject are not identical. Art cannot be without content, but may be without

Members of the Berezil Artistic Association, 1922. (STM)

a subject (e.g., music, architecture). Left art is characterized by 1. attention to the material; 2. most important, the technical-organizational task (the ideological-organizational task is of secondary importance); 3. freedom from mimicking real life and old art, but with ties to scholarly and technical rules (construction); the creation of new artistic forms; 4. the fact that it originates with the creator, not with the receptor' (Kurbas, Rezhysers'kyi shchodennyk, 16 August 1922, 11).

This broad vision of art incorporating these basic principles was to be implemented in the work of the Berezil, which first turned to agitprop creations, *October* (1922) and *Ruhr* (1923).[5] Both responded to recent events; *October* presented the Revolution in mimed mass movement. *Ruhr*, performed before 3,000 Red Army soldiers and based on contemporary events in the Ruhr valley, was explosively immediate to the audience which was still both in the midst of fighting against the Poles and battling a civil war (Rulin, 'Perspektyvy,' 6–7). Incorporating newspaper articles, political speeches, and slogans into its narrative, *Ruhr* played upon the world outrage at France's invasion of Germany's industrial heartland. Tying the contemporary with the medieval, the spectacle drew upon Ukrainian baroque traditions (such as the mingling of allegorical characters like Capital and Death with realistic ones) of drama suppressed since the eighteenth century. In its large and attentive audience of soldiers, who were thereafter literally called upon to act, theatre and its relationship to reality became excitingly, if dangerously, blurred.

In both productions, Kurbas continued to explore his interest in sculptural mass scenes, choreographing the actors so that they moved fluidly together, narrating a story through the captured movement of their bodies. Not simply directing but also creating, Kurbas revealed himself to be the shaping force of the Berezil. While beautiful and rousing, these productions were, as Petro Rulin reminded both future scholars and his own contemporaries in 1927, works performed under particular circumstances, and not in the comfort of academic theatres (Rulin, 'Perspektyvy,' 6–7). Creating these works to fit (or, as has been argued, to survive) the times which had, as yet, not produced a great playwright, Kurbas used these spectacles to address immediate contemporary issues on the one hand, and, on the other and more importantly, to continue his experiments with stage imagery and rhythmic, lyrical composition of stage action. Masses, Kurbas explained, were not statistics, but rather the music of the production; everyone was an instrument who played his or her own distinctive part. The body must be able to show the inner idea of events: both that which is divine and that which is satanic (Knyha protokoliv, No. 7, 91; also Kurbas, 'Suspil'ne,' 89). A production must employ all methods of revelation; it should be a unified synthesis, like a symphony. Like many of his modernist contemporaries, Kurbas had come to the conclusion that music was the basis of all art. Earlier, he had noted in

his diary, 'Because everything in art moves through time, it must strive toward the ideal and toward music. To separate theatre from music seems absolutely impossible, because music [is] the basis and the model for perception in time' (Kurbas, 'Z rezhysers'koho shchodennyka,' 27 June 1920, 32).

Experiments with rhythm continued to occupy Kurbas for whom Bergson's notions of fluid time, as well as Einstein's theory of relativity, were appealing and completely persuasive: rhythm was not just a concept of time, but also of space. Everything had its own rhythm – even – he argued, a table (Kurbas, 'Aktor u nashii,' 56). His contemplation of and practical experimentation with rhythm was to lead him to his definition of acting: duration in time and space.

As is evident here, the effects after which Kurbas was striving – constant movement, musical organization, strong visual images – bear comparison to the aims and achievements of early abstract dance. The cross-pollination between the Berezil and dance was fertile and ongoing, even after Bronislava Nijinska escaped from Kyiv to the West in 1921. When, in 1924, two months before the premiere of *Macbeth*, the Berezil actors first saw Isadora Duncan perform in Kyiv, they were thunderstruck that Duncan had acquired universal fame for a technique which they were themselves perfecting in the Berezil. Astonished by the similarity of her dances to the 'mimo-drama' exercises which Kurbas had been assigning his actors on a daily basis for some time, the actor Vasyl Vasylko approvingly noted the simplicity, clarity, and economy of Duncan's expression, the comprehensibility of her actions and her character's motivations. His diary entry for that occasion concludes with the exclamation: 'A great actress!' (Vasyl'ko, Shchodennyk, 29 February 1924, 107–8).

'Mimo-dramas' were at the centre of Kurbas's experiments in rhythm, time, and space: these were short, mimed sequences on quotidian topics to be created by the individual actor, who was required to 'fix' and 'objectify' gestures and movements and then repeat them again and again at will.[6] For Kurbas the ability to repeat gestures exactly in the same way, over and over, was a key characteristic of the truly masterly actor. Precision of form should always be separable from the actor's mood or condition. A good actor, Kurbas claimed, could dramatize anything, even a sentence from an encyclopedia. There was no inherently dramatic topic; it was up to the actor to feel, understand, and express the conflict (Knyha protokoliv, no. 27, 26 April 1925, 144–5). The Berezil actors were constantly urged to perfect their technique, which was aimed at 'guaranteeing an equal and identical execution of a given role regardless of the ... condition or mood of the player' (Hirniak, 'Birth,' 277). But, cautioned actor-director Roman Cherkashyn in his memoirs, Kurbas's insistence on precisely 'fixing' a role should not be construed as making it 'cold.' The technique 'in no way limited the emotional range of the actors. Everyone had to find inner psychological motivation for his behaviour on stage and had to fill

the fixed artistic form with live emotions, notwithstanding which creative path the actor used to create his scenic image: whether he moved from inner feelings to outward clarity or the reverse' (Cherkashyn 110).

In such exercises Kurbas was inviting his actors to create a physical equivalent of Bergson's ideas of duration. To perceive, Bergson had claimed, was to immobilize (Bergson, *Matter*, 275), to break down undivided movement into instances of motion, which was an abstraction, a common measure: 'If there are actions that are really *free*, or at least partly determinate, they can only belong to beings able to fix, at long intervals, that becoming to which their own being clings, able to solidify it into distinct moments, and so to condense matter and, by assimilating it, to digest it into movements of reaction which will pass through the meshes of natural necessity. The greater or less tension of their duration, which expresses, at bottom, their greater or less intensity of life, thus determines both the degree of the concentrating power of their perception and the measure of their liberty' (Bergson, *Matter*, 279).

In an unusual approach, the Berezil actors were also asked to recreate in gesture and movement the essence of various artistic works. These compositional assignments included, among others, the study of paintings by Rembrandt, Matisse, van Gogh, Gauguin, and Veronese; the musical compositions of Beethoven, Scriabin, and Liszt; the poetic works of Byron, Goethe, Shevchenko, Ukrainka, and Pushkin. Only those who could think in images were truly artists, Kurbas observed (cited in Vasyl'ko, 'Rezhyser-novator,' 170). Images gathered up the thought and aspirations of a whole epoch (Kurbas, Konspekt lektsii Kurbasa, 27 February 1926, 44). By using what Bergson called 'intellectual sympathy' or 'creative intuition,' the actor could both comprehend a work and (as Potebnia had taught) also excavate its mythical, primordial potency. By creating 'objective correlatives' (to use T.S. Eliot's phrase) of these artistic works with their bodies, the actors themselves became creators. A study of the 'gestures,' rhythms, dynamics, and mood of these works helped actors be attentive to various artistic conventions, forms, and traditions of delineating space and time. By recreating them, they were to reveal their imaginative skills, their powers of observation, retention, and communication.

Working first on the 'culture of gesture' (as he called it), Kurbas then permitted actors to combine gestures with a variety of props, from the very simple (such as a cigarette) to the complex; each prop was to be used so that it evoked a clear image of an idea. Only when the actors mastered these two areas were they permitted to study and use language. In this system or scheme, gestures and physical objects were accorded the same value as words, and had their own grammar – or, to use Kurbas's terms, their own rhythms of space. Language (in the sense of play-text) was dethroned from its customary primacy.

There was no point to any of the exercises, Kurbas cautioned, unless the actors strove, at least for a moment, to be Shakespeares, to be people of genius (Kurbas, 'Aspekt,' 99). Although he sent the actors scurrying to libraries, galleries, and museums, knowledge of the history of the arts was not enough, the director argued, to create a great actor; the uniqueness of the artistic work had to be respected and understood – as these assignments also intended to suggest. Art itself was described as a communal activity: it was that form of a relationship among people in which they were made to share, feel, and experience one world view and view of life.[7] Indeed, as this unifying definition shows, although Kurbas paid close attention to his major tool, the pliable new actor, he never forgot about the audience. Aiming at a thinking audience as well as actor, he was scrupulous about attending to spectators' responses, sitting in their midst to observe at first hand their expressions and hear their comments, and also making a practice of distributing questionnaires after every performance. There is no usefulness to a production, he claimed, unless we can all be co-creators of the performance (Kurbas, 'Aspekt,' 99). There were to be no stars, but ensembles, no premieres, but performances. Every performance was perfectible: it could be adjusted, changed, and worked on extensively from one day to the next – but only during rehearsals, never altered during performance.

'Imagination amend them': The Classics, Shakespeare, and da Vinci

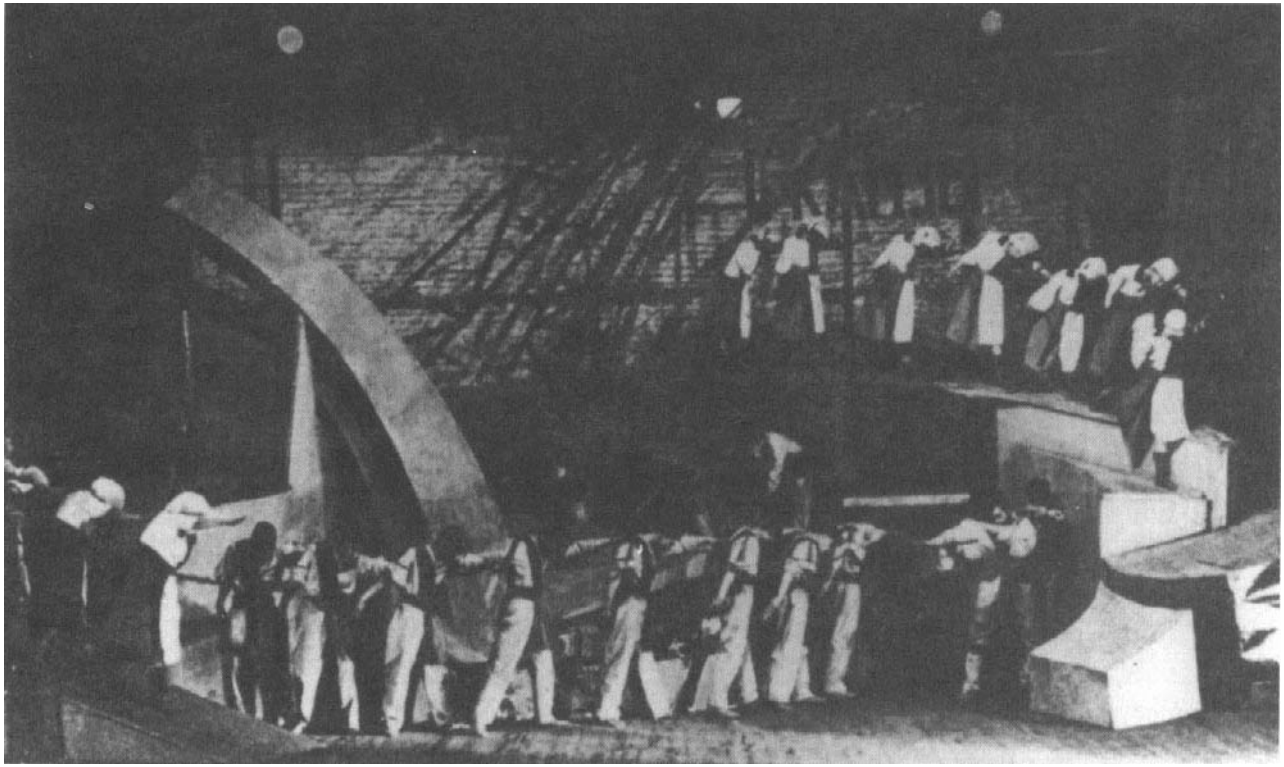
Little practical theatrical work could be accomplished in 1922 within still volatile political and economic circumstances. A regular repertoire was not established until 1923, when the integration of the borderlands was completed and the USSR was created. By a Russian decree Ukraine was absorbed by Russia, and the Soviet Republic of Ukraine came into being. As a political expedient, a policy of Ukrainianization was proclaimed. From his period of exile in Poland Lenin had learned, first hand, about the surprising powers of nationalism, which, he argued, was a tool that should be used conditionally and temporarily in the struggle for power. The Bolsheviks now turned to deploying that tool (Lenin 48–50, 297–9; Pipes 34–7). The 'nationalities problem' would be solved, it was thought, by acquiring loyalty through the conscious Ukrainianization of existing or the creation of new institutions, theatres, and journals. From the point of view of many in the artistic avant-garde, a policy of Ukrainianization freed them from thinking about national questions and allowed a turn to aesthetic issues. Kurbas's first great success with the Berezil actors came with his production of the German expressionist *Gas*, a play by Georg Kaiser. With this production, Yakiv Savchenko announced, 'a new era in theatre' had begun (Savchenko 3). Here, music, movement, mass scenes, and transforming gesture revealed that a new Rubicon had

been crossed, as actor Yosyp Hirniak suggested (Hirniak, *Spomyny*, 183). It was time to return to the classics in a new key.

Although very much aware of the weight imposed by history and events upon the first production of Shakespeare in Ukrainian, Kurbas had, in fact, been more interested in seeing what Shakespeare could be made to do. He promoted the study of the classics in part because he believed that their construction showed a deep understanding of audience response long tested by trial and tradition. As his earlier exploration of *Oedipus* and *Macbeth* had shown him, the classics seemed to push the right buttons; they were attuned to the spectators' responses, even to those who were the least sophisticated. Kurbas urged his students and colleagues to read Shakespeare and other classical plays; their close analysis would repay study: 'Classical dramaturgy is at base important and still useful to the present day in its structural aspects, which have arisen out of a certain understanding of the laws of human reception. It is maximally educative. And, although in our contemporary dramaturgy we can make deviations from it of one type or another (which are dictated by our times), classical dramaturgy is in its foundations very, very important' (Kurbas, 'Suspil'ne,' 91).

Returning to Shakespeare in 1923, the only classic in his repertoire (and the only playwright, along with Molière and Schiller taught at the Berezil in his entirety between 1924 and 1926),[8] Kurbas once again explained why the English writer and other classical dramatists were so important. The classics, he wrote, had a 'concentric unity' that was 'maximally' important (Kurbas, 'Aspekt,' 98). 'We understand the word "classic" to mean ... a certain balance of perfection (*doskonalist'*) ... typical of classics [is], first of all, the balance between the concept of creativity and the concept of skill, technique ...' (Kurbas, 'Teatr aktsentovoho,' 61). With complex characters and deep emotions, Shakespeare had a great deal to teach the contemporary theatre (Kurbas, 'Suspil'ne' 91). As may be seen, Kurbas's formulations about the classic were almost Aristotelian, directed as they were to aspects of the construction of the work and to its effect on the audience; at the same time, Kurbas's concern with the practical functions that the classics might serve for his own time remained the unshakeable lens through which all other elements were examined.

In his seminal article 'Estetstvo' (Aesthetics) in 1923, Kurbas argued that our twentieth-century difficulty with Shakespeare may be located in the issue of rhythm. Elizabethan plays, he asserted, paused much longer at key moments than we do now. By this, Kurbas did not mean the pauses imposed by Renaissance actors but rather by the rhythms of the plays, the 'pauses' in action created by the words themselves. Thus, for example, soliloquies forced the audience to stop and consider the full implications of central ethical and moral decisions; by twentieth-century standards, these moments seem to call a halt to or slow down the action.



Scene from Kurbas's production of *Gas*, 1923. (HA)

Yet, an understanding of these issues should not result in the revival of a pseudo-classical Shakespeare; 'classics are organisms, not mechanisms,' Kurbas meditated in his diary (Kurbas, 'Z rezhysers'koho shchodennyka,' 10 September 1922, 40). There were no specific formulas to be derived from them. Instead, the director should represent the work 'as it is refracted by the prism of the contemporary revolutionary world-view' ([Bondarchuk?], 'Do postanovky,' 6).

With the new ideological moment, Kurbas urged an analytic response both to his own time and to that of Shakespeare (Serdiuk, 'Ia vybyraiu,' 240). The time for mass scenes was now past, he declared; with the creation of Soviet Ukraine, the time was right for a turn to the individual. Preparing his audience for a radical departure from the usual homage paid to a classic, Kurbas, writing in *Proletarian Truth* (*Proletarska pravda*) and in the official organ of the Berezil, *Theatrical Barricades*, no longer felt any need to justify or delight in the mere right to stage a Ukrainian Shakespeare. With the official policy of Ukrainianization, autoethnographic texts were theoretically unnecessary. Having 'naturalized' Shakespeare with his first three *Macbeths*, Kurbas now turned to other uses for the English playwright. Shakespeare was to help train the new actor and cultivate the new audience. Above all, he was to be used as theatre, not as literature, and as a major weapon in a full-scale battle against naturalism and 'psychologism,' which Kurbas thought of as the particular legacy of Leonardo da Vinci. Following the philosopher Oswald Spengler, Kurbas dated the beginnings of the destruction of art and a narrowing of its range from the work of da Vinci (Kurbas, Konspekt lektsii, 25 February 1926, 88). Illusionist theatre was not really theatre: 'Theatre, before the revolution, before the turning point in art, was easel painting with theatrical devices. In the theatrical frame, as in a painting, we saw that same absolute correspondence to the real world; in the frame of the theatrical picture we saw an illusion. Now, there is no painting ...' (Knyha protokoliv, no. 27, 26 April 1925, 9). Like Craig, Kurbas dismissed the tendency 'toward the natural' as that which has 'nothing to do with art,' and instead espoused the theatrical or what Craig had called 'noble artificiality' (Craig, 'The Artists of the Future,' 35).

Spurning the Enlightenment, Kurbas found the artistic tendencies of the medieval and early Renaissance period closer to the spirit of his own time. There was a natural link between the medieval theatre, expressionism in art, and constructivism in the theatre (Kurbas, 'Psykholohism,' 152). Avant-garde art was thus, in part, a recovery project, but not, as Clement Greenberg has claimed, the devolution of a tradition (Greenberg 22); rather, it was an attempt to retrieve a lost spirituality, a sense of mythical, ritual energy. Like the Greek or medieval actor, Kurbas lectured, the contemporary actor was to play, not to emote; he was to concentrate on his craft, his technique, and dismiss all 'psychologism' and illusion.

Kurbas wrote numerous articles about the necessity of regaining a sense of the

theatrical, which included the active participation of the audience. It should be able to imagine a whole cap in a visor (Kurbas, 'Shliakhy i zavdannia,' 256). *Macbeth*, to which he now turned, should be not only 'theatrical' but 'agit-theatrical.' The theatre, which organizes spectators' emotions and moods, should be used to elicit action, determination, and a striving for the future. Looking back over his past achievements and preparing the ground for a new production, Kurbas classified his past work on *Macbeth* as falling into three stages. The first, conceived in Kyiv in 1919, was a general attempt to stylize conventions. The second, in 1920 in Bila Tserkva, focused on gesture as a dynamic and rhythmic value. The third, in Uman, further explored the concentrated clarity of gesture as a form. The new, fourth stage was to be more than the rearrangement of a classic from a contemporary angle; rather, this new production was to be Kurbas's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*: a reexamination of representation itself.

The fruit of the earlier exercises on recreating artistic compositions with the body became evident in the rehearsals for Kurbas's new, radical *Macbeth*. First readings began on 24 July 1923, when Vasyl Vasylko militaristically pronounced in his diary, 'We wage war for a new theatre, for a new actor' (Vasyl'ko, Shchodennyk, 24 July 1923, 49). A Canadian journalist, Matvi Shatulsky (pseudonym: Prolektor), who had travelled to Kyiv in early August in order to persuade Kurbas and his actors to come to Canada to establish a proletarian theatre there, was one of the witnesses of the company's work on the play.[9] During his stay in Kyiv, Shatulsky observed actors preparing for their role and exercising vigorously. He found it remarkable that fifty actors dressed in gym clothes moved in athletic unison to the music of a piano. Attending a rehearsal of *Macbeth*, he registered his surprise as the actors performed their roles silently, narrating the play using only facial gesture, expression, and movement, while Kurbas quietly and slowly read the whole play out loud, gently tapping out a rhythm with his hand while he did so. Most astonishing for Shatulsky was the fact that the play was completely comprehensible to him, even though he could not always catch Kurbas's every word (Prolektor 21). Virlana Tkacz observes that this experiment forced 'a discontinuity between the vocal and the visual devices available to the actors, forcing them to concentrate on the expressive powers of the visual. Kurbas was training the actors to narrate the story visually with their gestures. They were learning to work like actors in silent film' (Tkacz, 'Film Language,' 66). Whether, as Tkacz claims, silent film was the decisive influence, or whether dance and sculptural movement were the more significant, in any case, it was evident that, as Kurbas intended, performance did not 'decline' into literature, but remained theatre. The text became only one of the materials at the disposal of the creative actor, not the only tool.

Kurbas's preparations for the production of *Macbeth*, which was to explore, test, and synthesize these ideas and searchings, were interrupted by the serendip-

Gym exercises at the Berezil, 1922. (STM)

Acrobatic exercises at the Berezil. (STM)

ity of Shatulsky's visit. The journalist had left him a copy of Upton Sinclair's *Jimmie Higgins*. Fascinated by the book, Kurbas set aside Shakespeare to compose a blank verse tragedy based on the novel. Using film along with live actors for the first time on the Ukrainian stage, *Jimmie Higgins* (one of Kurbas's greatest stage successes) explored some of the theatrical problems with which Kurbas wrestled.[10] When he returned to *Macbeth* the following year, Kurbas brought to his new production an even richer amalgam of ideas and influences.

'Action is eloquence': Radical *Macbeth*

Actor Vasyl Vasylko's anxieties grew each time that Kurbas made more alterations to the production of *Macbeth* in preparation. Two weeks short of the opening, he chronicled the actors' privations on behalf of a very risky production: with all monies directed toward shows in the works, actors were reduced to eating only a bowl of potatoes served in unsalted, boiled water. 'Scary! A risky show – an academic play with a non-academic approach to it – I'm terrified!' (Vasyl'ko, Shchodennyk, 18 March 1924, 115) he anxiously recorded.

The production's allusions to the recent civil and world wars, as well as revolution, were made directly and incontrovertibly. Kurbas's understanding of the extraordinary risk he was taking is evidenced by the careful orchestration of published interviews on the eve of the performance. In the Ukrainian newspaper *Bolshevik* (*Bilshovyk*), Kurbas explained, 'Our [the Berezil's] approach to Shakespeare naturally must be the approach of our day. The restoration of Shakespeare in the manners and customs of his time is formally impossible and, in essence, unnecessary. The whole value of the scenic embodiment of the classical work in our day lies namely in the ability to present a work in the refraction of the prism of the contemporary world view' ([Bondarchuk?], 'Do postanovky,' 6).

The Berezil production of *Macbeth* was to be staged with 'an emphasis on our relationship to the contemporary moment. The idea of the work, as such, is coloured by the precisely delineated treatment of the director. The play has not been reworked by Kurbas. Only normal changes of the kind found even in academic theatres have been made. In so far as Shakespeare is a **master** of the stage, Kurbas keeps to the idea that our relationship to the work is defined not by its alteration but by **the director's interpretation**. The only reworked moments are those which, even in Shakespeare's day, were inserted into the play and had a topical origin' ([Bondarchuk?], 'Do postanovky,' 6).

Because the costumes were still not ready, the opening was delayed until 2 April, when another article appeared, this time in the Russian-language *Proletarian Truth* (*Proletarskaia pravda*). Authored by Stepan Bondarchuk, it, too, prepared the audience for a major departure from the usual ways of approaching

Shakespeare: 'Our approach to Shakespeare must certainly not be an academic approach; it must, first of all, be the approach of our day, the approach of revolution.' Asserting Shakespeare's value as a theatre artist, Bondarchuk argued: 'Shakespeare **plays**; he doesn't narrate. As a starting point, the structural montage of his theatrical spectacle is an image (*obrazets*), which must be staged by the discovered laws of the stage. His constructions of dialogues and monologues open up paths for future dramaturgy. Understandably, today Shakespeare may only be approached by a truly revolutionary hand in absolute mastery of the art of the stage ... This is the fourth stage of Kurbas's work on *Macbeth*' (Bondarchuk, 'K postanovke,' 5). Thematically, structurally, visually, conceptually, this fourth stage presented an extraordinary refraction of that play.

After yet another one-hour delay, the performance finally got under way at 9 p.m., although some of the costumes were still being completed even as the production unfolded. Before it began, however, actor Stepan Bondarchuk appeared in front of the curtain to explain, yet again, the director's particular approach to Shakespeare. Vasylko laconically describes the premiere in his diary:

> First scene of witches. Bare stage draped in black; in the middle a green screen 4 × 4m with red text, 'Precipice,' and beside it a green raised platform 2½ long by 1½ wide by 1½m. The frame attached with four knots to the flies. And that's the whole set. The witches in grey-blue costumes (in wide pants) and in red peaked wigs. The idea was to create all the wigs out of fabric, but, because of the cost, regular wigs were retained. The witches perform in an exaggerated theatrical manner without any pretentions to mysticism; [they are] 'witchy' in the clichéd sense of the word.
>
> About the audience. The auditorium not full ... Lots of intelligentsia, few workers. I sat not far from L.M. and O.M. Starytsky. When, after the first scene, the screen with its title raced up to the flies in full view of the audience, and the actresses-witches walked out into the wings using their normal walk (as normal actresses, no longer as witches), Ludmyla Mykhailivna [Starytska, a scion of the old Kyivan aristocracy and herself a playwright], terrifiedly exclaimed, 'O, God!' and I felt that she must have crossed herself. (Vasyl'ko, Shchodennyk, 3 April 1924, 121)

Indeed, there was good reason to cross herself. This was an aggressive, out and out attack on pictorialism and 'costumery' – illusionist theatre – while exploring theatricality in its broadest sense. Disruptions, contrasts, juxtapositions, minimalist costumes, montages of stage action, atonal music – these were to help make ironic the moral tale of an ambitious man. Kurbas employed various techniques to create a cubist expressionist production, which would reflect his beliefs about audience, actor, and art work. A self-conscious creation of fragments to be reassembled by the spectator, this production (as one of the sympathetic critics

observed), intended to destroy the remnants of the ethnographic-domestic theatre, which had, of late degenerated into hackneyed 'Little Russian' drama (Desniak 116).

While only twenty-three pages of the director's copy (Kurbas, Rezhysers'kyi eksempliar)[11] of the play have survived, they reveal a consistency in their cuts; these appear to be excisions aimed at simplifying the emotional range of the play by omitting small choral scenes, such as II.iii.100ff (both Malcolm's response to his father's death and the rest of that scene disappear), II.iv (Ross and an Old Man), and III.vi (Lennox and another Lord), which would have created sympathy for Duncan, something Kurbas wanted to avoid. While excluding sympathy for the victim, Kurbas also removed any heroism or bravado from Macbeth's speeches. Thus, V.vii, which includes both Macbeth's brief heroic speech (in which he compares himself to a baited bear) and the pathos of the death of Young Siward, is also blue-pencilled in Kurbas's copy.

Some basic blocking instructions are noted in pencil in the margins (such as points where a character must stand or sit). In a few other places, Kurbas slightly adjusted Panteleimon Kulish's translation, the only one in Ukrainian available to him. In still other spots, Kurbas indicated the stress marks for punctuation. There are also a number musical notations, which corroborate composer Yuli Meitus's claim that Kurbas always knew exactly what musical effect he wanted. A 'musician in his soul' (so Meitus claims), Kurbas was very aware of the way that music could be used as dramatic revelation or subtext rather than simply musical interlude (as it had been used in the ethnographic theatre) (Meitus 14). The romantic music of Edvard Grieg, used in the 1920 production (played on the piano), was abandoned for the atonal work of Anatoli Butsky, an adherent of Schönberg. Supplemental selections came from Franz Schubert (a 'march' is introduced in V.vi, as Malcolm's army advances) and from Pietro Mascagni in the very last scene of the play (possibly from *Cavalleria Rusticana* – an appropriate choice, since the subject of that work is a Sicilian blood feud).

The whole production was austere and harsh. In Vadym Meller, the theatre's designer, Kurbas discovered a like-minded friend and colleague who shared his artistic interests and could translate them into reality. Considered the father of constructivism on the Ukrainian stage, Meller was responsible for some of Kurbas's most inventive, original stage designs. Turning to stage design after his paintings were destroyed during the First World War, Meller made his theatrical debut in 1918, when he sketched costumes for the ballet 'miniatures' (short, subjectless dances) of the studio of Bronislava Nijinska, which were set to the music of Liszt, Chopin, and Prokofiev, among others. Like Kurbas, Meller had also studied in the West: not in Vienna, but in Munich, Geneva, and Paris. After a very successful first exhibition in the Salon des Indépendistes (1913) and then in

the Salon de Printemps (1914), he had been invited to show his works at the Salon d'Automne, where Picasso, Gris, and Braque had exhibited their works (Kucherenko 3).

For the 1924 *Macbeth*, the stage was painted black, and the audience sat on bleachers facing the stage's brick back wall (Kuziakina, 'Ledi,' 193). In creative consultation with Kurbas,[12] Meller rejected decorative scenery and created enormous placards or screens of varying sizes (some as large as 4 × 4 metres high), bright green screens of stretched canvas, on which were printed giant modernist red block letters which announced 'Castle,' 'Precipice' (the translator's word for 'heath'), and so forth. These simultaneously evoked medieval-Renaissance locality boards, contemporary political posters, and, Tkacz convincingly argues, silent film titles (Tkacz, 'Film Language,' 69). Kurbas had an encyclopedic knowledge of film (especially the American films of D.W. Griffith), and shortly after incorporating film and filmic devices into his stage productions, he was himself to turn to the creation of movies.

The starkness of the set of *Macbeth* urged the audience to creative completion: to imagining what each of these locations might be like. The size of the screens or 'shields' dwarfed the actors, and diminished their usual centrality on stage, suggesting that the characters were subject to forces other than their own individual wills, to other discourses, interpretations, and frames. The characters were the equivalent of cubist geometric forms in new, discontinuous relations with each other and with the world around them. Raised or lowered when needed at the sound of a gong, the screens served as more than background. They gave each scene its particular rhythmic character. Kurbas fulfilled Craig's dream of taking framed, self-supporting screens a step further; he made the screens living things. Lowered at the same time, they indicated the simultaneity of the action in different parts of Scotland. At other times, they moved in slow, stately rhythm to underscore the emotions of the lead actors, to emphasize tension, the dynamics of the action, or even to interfere in the action – as, for example, in the banquet scene, when they physically blocked off Macbeth's attempt to follow Banquo's ghost – represented by a spotlight (Shmain 135–42). Or, they could open up the whole stage. Their movements were, according to Natalia Pylypenko, who played the Second Witch, 'fixed in a certain rhythm-tempo synchronized with the rhythm of the production. The set played a constituent part of the dramatic action' (Pylypenko 117). Even a half-century later, actor Oles Serdiuk recalled best the dynamism and 'temperament' of the screens (Serdiuk, 'Ia vybyraiu,' 254) which seemed to be characters in their own right.

Props, too, acquired their own life. Fragments of furniture, chairs, and a throne were, like the screens, lowered and raised when needed and added to the rhythmic qualities of the production. Pylypenko referred to Kurbas's 'characteristic rhythm

Murder of Banquo (S. Karahalsky), *Macbeth*, 1924. (STM)

... that rhythm of accumulation' [or, intensification, *narostannia*], which 'became one of the main elements of Kurbas's individual style' (Pylypenko 14). The actors were often lit by the harsh light of projectors, and moved in a 'restrained' way; the whole rhythm of the production followed this general style (Hirniak, *Spomyny*, 197). Lighting engineer-electrician Fedir Pozniakiv was endlessly creative in his ability to find new ways to change each scene; the lighting did not simply illuminate or create atmosphere, but accentuated the form, sculpted the actors and objects in space. Pylypenko recalls Pozniakiv's magical ability to create tempests with their sudden flare-ups as well as moments of darkness, and his ability to suggest flames of fire lighting up a building (Pylypenko 117). Special lighting effects were also used to create the various ghosts of the production. Banquo's progeny was created by lights projected onto the stage through which the audience could

clearly see Macbeth's terrified visage (Vasyl'ko, 'Narodnyi,' 30), while Banquo himself slowly stalked the stage in a strange, 'stone-dead'-like rhythm.

Like the stylized stage space which both suggested place and yet also mocked any such certainty, so the costumes were spare and theatrical, emphasizing the duality of the actors as characters and as people, and of their time frame: both time present and past, as well as, possibly, future – Bergson's simultaneity and duration. Wearing either militarized garb or contemporary work clothes very like those worn by many people in the audience, the actors were distinguished from them by only a few ancillary articles: stylized long medieval tunics or cloaks, decorated with modernist geometric appliqués. This was a creative solution to the perennial poverty of the company. Vasylko's diary gives a good sense of Kurbas's development of the concept of the costumes, at the same time as he informs us of the physical hardships of the company. At first, specially constructed, 'exciting' and 'very complicated' costumes/'constructions' were to be made for the production. When the continuing absence of funds made this impossible, costumes borrowed from the Solovtsov Theatre were briefly considered but these turned out to be too naturalistic for Kurbas's taste. Finally, Kurbas and Meller hit upon the idea of the minimalist but effective work clothes with their modernist-medieval touches.

At the centre of this production was the 'naked' actor – the major experiment in this version of *Macbeth*. 'This time,' Leonid Boloban noted, 'Kurbas crossed yet another threshold of conventions' (Boloban, 'Vid,' 18). While the props and screens often moved together in dynamic, stylized interrelationship, the characters were cut off from each other in discontinuous, 'cubist' segments. Kurbas's challenge to the actors was to display the perfection of their technique by turning their roles 'on' and 'off' at will. The pure craft of acting was laid bare without the attendant 'mysteries' of sustained, realistic character, illusory sets, grand costumes, extensive music, and numerous props.[13] In medieval-Renaissance fashion and with similar effect, actors' roles were doubled or tripled. Thus Yosyp Hirniak, for example, played Donalbain, the Murderer of Banquo, and the Doctor; each role carried over associations from the previous one, contributing to the spreading of guilt in the realm, and limiting the audience's habit of dividing the characters into goodies and baddies or of closely identifying with any character.

The mechanism of acting itself was openly displayed and stressed the actor's corporeality: each actor came on stage at his or her own pace, sometimes greeting the audience, and assuming his role only when he was properly positioned. Similarly, after performing his part, the actor exited as 'himself.' Film director Khanan Shmain explained that the actors were like workers: they came onto the set in their own, normal gait, 'worked,' and then departed once again as themselves. The unit of acting in character was thus clearly delineated against the actor's 'real' self, drawing attention to the artificiality of theatre and, in particular, to its traditional con-

Macbeth (Ivan Marianenko) and Lady Macbeth (Liubov Hakkebush), *Macbeth*, 1924. (STM)

structs of character and its usual 'invisible' performativity. Analogues for the roles we all put on and take off in life, for all our actions as performativity, these clearly segmented actions simultaneously pointed to artificiality and to commonality. Like Cézanne's paintings, this technique drew attention to and exploded the relationship between surface and frame. It suggested a spatialization of time: halting the time-flow of traditional dramatic narrative at key moments, it drew attention to what Bergson called 'real movements': 'indivisibles which occupy duration, involve a before and an after, and link together the successive moments of time by a thread of variable quality which cannot be without some likeness to the continuity of our own consciousness' (Bergson, *Matter*, 268). Kurbas was exposing our usual spatialization of time by attempting to catch a glimpse, through his discontinuous images and characters, of the real time or duration within them and beyond them.

In the first scene, the witches came on stage wearing wide blue-grey trousers and red wigs. Mysterious little electrical lights flickered in their costumes and around their eyes when they uttered their prophecies. A surreal violet blue light was used to emphasize their horrible grimaces. Like priests, they held censors in their hands, thus immediately announcing the bitingly satirical thread of the interpretation. But, after this eerie scene, the screen with the word 'Precipice' disappeared from sight, the violet light vanished, and the witches calmly left the stage as actresses, that is, as themselves, shorn of their character.

The sleepwalking scene was performed with the same emphasis on actor in and out of role. Liubov Hakkebush proceeded to centre stage, where she placed her candle, took off her mantle, shook her head until her long dark hair tumbled around her shoulders, and only then proceeded emotionally to 'Out, damned spot!' Similarly, after Macbeth delivered his powerful soliloquy in I.vii, he seized his dagger and turned to go to kill Duncan. Taking a few steps, he resumed his identity as Ivan Marianenko the actor.

The 'on/off' technique proved to be extremely hard on the actors, for it went to the core of the actor's relationship to his character, and tested, as no other method did, Kurbas's system of 'fixing' [an action]. Actress Iryna Steshenko, who played one of the witches, wrote in her memoirs of the difficulty of maintaining a balance between restraint and involvement in the role (Steshenko 170), while Liubov Hakkebush, who played Lady Macbeth, was admonished at rehearsals for descending into pathology and bad taste in creating the sleepwalking scene (Avdieva 153). She was to show, by way of her plastic movements, the process of the breakdown of Lady Macbeth's plans. Indeed, the inclination to overdo the acting segments was one of the dangers of this technique, as Kurbas reminded his actors; all acting, he emphasized, proceeds from thought, not emotion (Samiilenko 64). Theoretically possible, in practice even Kurbas found it difficult to sustain this

Scene of witches with Macbeth, *Macbeth*, 1924. (SMTMCA 65287-1)

technique. Actor Danylo Antonovych, who appeared in the first version of *Macbeth*, recalled that Kurbas had already begun to lecture and work out the 'on/off' principle four years earlier, in 1920:

> In one of Kurbas's early morning sessions on the art of the actor, we struggled for a long time with that tricky 'turning on and turning off.' Watching our unsuccessful efforts to create mimo-dramas on that theme, Kurbas finally demonstrated an *étude* which struck us all by the ease and directness of its immediate transition from his role of lecturer (which he was then) into the state and character of the imagined person of his *étude*. Everything was so straightforward, persuasive, and clear, that we couldn't get over it: why couldn't we have come up with this? That same day, in the evening, *Macbeth* was on. I hid myself in the wings, so that I could carefully observe how Kurbas, playing Macbeth, would 'turn off' his 'inner self' and use only his 'technical mastery' to 'endure' [*tryvaty*, from Kurbas's definition of acting as 'duration in time and space'] in the tragedy. The Bila Tserkva spectator tensely watched the progress of the act. He [the spectator], just like me in the wings, couldn't tear his eyes away from Macbeth. Even when he was silent, [Kurbas] by his sheer presence, had the power to command everyone's rapt attention – and not just that of the spectators in the auditorium but even that of the whole behind-the-scenes personnel. Suppressing our breath, we couldn't tear our attention away from the passionate words, from the overtones of his pregnant intonations, from his bestial thirst for the blood of his enemies, from the rapacious Macbeth-Kurbas whose hands held the royal crown in a paralysed grip. With bloodshot eyes, escaping from the vengeful ghosts at the end, he ran right into me in the wings. Unadvisedly, I grabbed Macbeth by his kingly mantle and asked, 'Mr. Les, what's this? Technique or naturalistic interiority?' Instantly regaining his composure, Kurbas barked back, 'What wretchedness!'– and rushed into the dressing room to take off his royal clothes. (cited in Hirniak, *Spomyny*, 195)

Surely this was an acknowledgment of his use of raw emotion and the challenges of sustaining the 'engage/disengage' technique.

Despite the difficulties, Kurbas directed all of the actors in the 1924 *Macbeth* to follow it. While he could count on the seasoned actors (Marianenko was then age 50) of the experimental Fourth Studio to make the best effort, it was, in fact, the older and more experienced actors who protested most against the technique. Leonid Boloban observed that this play, which 'in its traditional rules demands the most explosive emotions from the actors, [and] which offers a world-renowned example of "gigantic" passions, was squeezed particularly carefully into a grid. With extraordinary care, the director removed everything that could allude to sensitivity, depth, and emotions in the relations among the key characters, in the decorations, props, and set, and he forced his Shakespearean heroes to

Scene from *Macbeth*, 1924. Ivan Marianenko as Macbeth in the centre of the photo. (STM)

suffer, hate, [and] avenge only at the pull of the director's strings' (Boloban, 'Na verkhiv'iakh,' 5).

The 'on/off' principle was repeated again and again in the production, thus isolating and drawing attention to key moments in the play, as well as to the points of transition – forcing the audience and the actor to focus on the constituent parts of theatre, on the clash between 'picture' and 'frame,' stasis and dynamism, duration and simultaneity. As Vasylko ('Narodnyi artyst' 29) suggested, the impetus for the 'on/off' device was a purist one, in that it aimed to test the direct and unmediated influence of the actor on the audience, unaided by the usual intermediaries of props, atmosphere, and realistic costumes.

While perhaps indeed purist, Kurbas did not intend a merely cerebral response from the audience. The Berezil actors were reading the Russian formalist theorist Viktor Shklovsky at that time, the common source for both the later development of Brecht's alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*), *vidchudnennia* and for Kurbas's notion of *ochudnennia*. While externally or superficially similar, the two 'alienation' effects were, in fact, based on different philosophies. As theatre historian Valentyna Zabolotna has astutely observed, Kurbas deliberately used the term *ochudnennia*, not *vidchudnennia* (Zabolotna, *Aktors'ke*, 49). The prefix 'o' literally means to make, or to endow with *chudo* (the miraculous, the marvellous) and thus to transform. Brecht's reliance on *vidchudnennia* or alienation carries the significant prefix *vid*, meaning 'from' or 'away'; distancing is thus at the centre of Brecht's views. For Kurbas, on the other hand, the spiritual and joyous functions are what are uppermost in his understanding of *ochudnennia*. He found Konrad Lange's formula for the aesthetic moment particularly apt: it lay in the notion of joy which we experience when a certain object is transferred into another conceptual framework. This substitution of one set of ideas for another (Kurbas gives the simple example of a frog standing in for a human in fables) results in a sudden, joyous perception or, to use James Joyce's word, epiphany; this was, Kurbas argued, truly *ochudnennia* (Kurbas, 'Pro studiuvannia,' 80).

Inspired by Shklovsky and Lange, Kurbas remained true to his life-long conviction of the importance of the inner world – something he shared with the expressionists and post-impressionists. While the expressionists' basic assumption, that no true communication is possible, was alien to the Ukrainian director, the cubists' view was more congenial. They regarded art as a communal project, and the artist himself as only one-half of the communicative act. As Benjamin Bennett has pointed out, 'the cubist regards space as a repeated intellectual or artistic *achievement* on our part, comparable to the achievement of creating a unified composition from different points of view' (Bennett 33). Indeed, Kurbas was much inspired by such artistic movements in his creation of *Macbeth*, which may be regarded as a cubist expressionist (as Romana Bahrij Pikulyk has termed it) or a cubist construc-

Scene from *Macbeth*, 1924. Near Birnham Wood. (STM)

tivist production, although these terms should be used advisedly; Kurbas was not presenting a theatrical analogue of any particular style of visual art. Constructivism was particularly interested in the way that new objects could be created (instead of imitating old forms) and 'loaded' every unit of the aesthetic work with meaning, while subordinating everything to a single theme.[14] It was equally interested in the methods by which the separate parts of a work were linked. Thus, at one point, Kurbas writes that expressionism is the only style of his age; in another lecture, he lauds constructivism (Kurbas, Konspekt lektsii, 25 February 1926, 88). It is best to remember that Kurbas was receptive, as always, to new ideas but was, above all, committed to testing all the conventions, preconceptions, and materials of theatre and to creating his own, distinct synthesis. His work not only resists 'isms,' but questions them. As Picasso transformed the portrait into a many-sided dynamic which spoke as much about the genre of portraiture and the traditions of painting as it did about the individual subject, so Kurbas consciously attempted to force the audience to contemplate the multiplicity of the subject and the materiality of the theatre, the traditions and conventions from which it had grown.

Shorn of the fourth wall, of its period costumes, of its comforting status as dead and safe classic, this was a *Macbeth* for its revolutionary time. The central organizing structural principle in *Macbeth* was a montage of contrasts and analogues, which required an active spectator as a co-participant in the action in order to bring together the constituent parts of the play. Every aspect of the production was placed in quotation marks, every theatrical convention was questioned, including the idea of the tragic hero. The traditionally heroic Macbeth (heroic in part because he was anti-monarchical) was portrayed by Ivan Marianenko (hitherto noted for his tragic roles) as a common, unimaginative soldier, dressed in contemporary clothes, including sloppy puttees. This Macbeth combined simplicity of character with single-minded cruelty; his doubts were not indicative of a conscience, but were rather a revelation of his fearfulness, a fearfulness revealed right after the regicide, when he threw himself at his wife with the very same knife he used to murder the king. Marianenko's interpretation contrasted with his usual roles and with his 'heroic' appearance: he was an attractive man with a strong, reverberative, baritone voice. Actress Natalia Pylypenko recalled, 'In scenes of emotion, in scenes of great tension, it seemed to all of us that walls moved apart because of that voice, and, in the vacuum, a storm screeched, raged, and played on all possible registers. I have never since encountered such an external strength of voice, such an outward purity and flexibility' (Pylypenko 117).

Duncan (Pavlo Dolyna) was presented as a drunken fool, whose death at first seemed, if not deserved, then at least not completely reprehensible. The audience laughed at and approvingly applauded his scene of drunkenness. Both Macbeth and his wife counted on the fact that most of Scotland would not discover their

Lady Macbeth (Liubov Hakkebush) and Macbeth (Ivan Marianenko) in *Macbeth*, II.ii, 1924. (SMTMCA 1-15-14)

crimes, and the knowing rest would keep silent out of fear. (The resemblance to the Soviet institutionalization of terror, beginning in 1919 and gaining sophistication under Stalin, as well as the population's fearful, silent compliance, seems uncanny in the whole interpretation.)

Lady Macbeth was more austere than her husband. Aristocratically beautiful and elegant, Hakkebush had played such roles as Jocasta, Elmira, Mrs Alving, and Beatrice. But in Kurbas's production, she was not a beauty but a mature, ugly, and sharp-featured woman, in love only with power and herself – a caricature of the new stereotype of the heroic Soviet woman. While the other characters had little make-up, Hakkebush was not only heavily made up to emphasize her angularity, but additionally had pasted features to accent her hardness (Hirniak,

Spomyny, 197). Passionless toward her husband, she seemed, rather, to be annoyed by his fearfulness. When Macbeth left to kill Duncan, she followed him, comfortably holding the dagger like a practiced killer (Kuziakina, 'Ledi,' 193). The Macbeths, not particularly clever and both common, were understood as products of their time – a Scottish Middle Ages which Kurbas interpreted as inherently and reflexively spiritually hollow and cruel.

The only moment which contained a remnant of traditional tragedy was the sleepwalking scene. The scholar of the Ukrainian theatre Natalia Kuziakina referred to this scene as the only 'white spot on the black and grey background of the production,' the moment of the recognition of the loss of the feminine in a world of common, vulgar evil (Kuziakina, *Stanovlenie,* 40). Deathly ill, defenceless, and dressed in white, Hakkebush seems Ophelia-like in photos taken of this scene. While in the rest of the production she was costumed in restrictive, unattractive clothing (a dark, shapeless three-quarter length robe over a white shift, pleated at the bottom, vaguely recalling a Ukrainian peasant's costume), and a severe headpiece (a white kerchief held in place by a metal band), in this scene she wore only the long white shift over which her long, luxurious, unfettered hair cascaded. Robbed of the dignity of her usual severity, yet feminine for the first time, she was subject to the hallucination of an imminent assassination on herself.[15] The consequences of her past cruelty were apparent in the stark contrast to previous scenes. Here, she was palpably terror-striken by her inability to achieve real power or to control events.[16]

Grappling toward a new relationship with the audience, Kurbas wished to break drama down into its constituent subsystems, forcing the audience both to reexamine the individual materials of the theatre and then to reconstitute them into a new whole. He employed some devices to destroy traditional audience expectations and engagement (as, for example, the 'on/off' device), while others were to draw the audience in at moments when they least expected it. Thus, for example, he had the witches wired so that small electric lights lit up as they moved in their deliberately exaggerated 'witchy' way. But, when it came time for Banquo and Macbeth to speak to the weird sisters, the witches were lit up from behind and below, casting huge shadows onto the dress circle. The thanes spoke to these shadows and thus to the audience which, just after being alienated but amused by the odd creatures, now just as suddenly found itself implicated in the dark world of *Macbeth.*

The closest link between actor and contemporary audience was provided by major additions to the text: mimed sequences and three intermedia ('directorial pearls' worth including in any director's manual, according to I. Turkel'taub, 'Ledi Makbet,' 4). Changes to the text or improvisations, Kurbas explained in an interview, should be made only where Shakespeare seems to have invited or permitted

Lady Macbeth (Liubov Hakkebush) in the sleepwalking scene, *Macbeth*, 1924. (SMTMCA 1-51539)

Lady Macbeth (Liubov Hakkebush) in the sleepwalking scene, *Macbeth*, 1924. (SMTMCA 65307)

such intrusions. His additions, Kurbas felt, were entirely justified. A year later, critiquing Borys Tiahno, who followed Kurbas by introducing intermedii into a work he was directing, Kurbas explained his intentions in his *Macbeth*: 'When I worked on *Macbeth*, I even put an intermedia into the exposition and I gave it a certain design, so that the play would be understood from that angle and not another. Every intermedia has its justification; they have a certain wholeness [integrity], they form part of the principle of the whole concept of the material of the play ... [but] we don't set out to be didactic, but rather to influence, to reeducate ...' (Knyha protokoliv, No. 38, 22 May 1925, 144–5). The intermedii were extended examples of *peretvorennia* – transformation: symbolic evocations of the play's themes of ambition, power, betrayal, hypocrisy.

The Porter (played by Amvrosi Buchma), called the Fool in Kurbas's production, appeared in the intervals between the acts. During the first interval, Buchma was dressed in fool's cap and traditional fool's clothing, with exaggerated, garish make-up, including a bulbous nose which occasionally lit up (Boboshko, *Rezhyser*, 85). The Porter's costume clearly linked him to the Old Vice of medieval drama, the attendant of the Devil – a connection confirmed and developed in an additional mimed sequence following I.iii (that is, just after Macbeth and Banquo first encounter the witches). After the 'Precipice' screen ascended to the flies, a devil carrying a pitchfork appeared on stage, while, on either side of the stage, two others stood with bowed heads. When he threatened the abject devils with his fist, the first devil turned and was 'metamorphosed' into a priest. As the devils lifted their heads, they were 'transformed' into a cardinal and a Jesuit priest by the simple technique of lifting their cowls, on which had been painted gaping devilish faces. The diabolical hypocrisy of the clergy was thus literally revealed. An organ portentously marked the end of the sequence. A buffoonery-analogue of secular, as well as clerical, abuse of authority, the devilish sequences both grotesquely reduced the play and yet thematically enlarged it.

Generally recognized by Shakespeareans as a dark parody of medieval Harrowing of Hell plays, the Porter sequence (II.iii) was particularly potent. Because the Harrowing was (and still is today) a tradition alive in the performative aspects of the Holy Saturday Eastern liturgy – where the priest and the congregation reenact Christ's harrowing by way of a special ritual procession around the church – Kurbas's decision to play up the Porter scene (and, in fact, to add to it) must have given this scene something of the shock value which it had had in Shakespeare's day. Thematically, Kurbas linked the Porter/Fool to other satirical, anticlerical elements of the production, including the opening sequence in which the outrageous witches entered bearing liturgical censors (Kuziakina, *Makbet* Shekspira, 60). Visually, the director connected the Porter/Fool to the witches by having them all electrically wired.

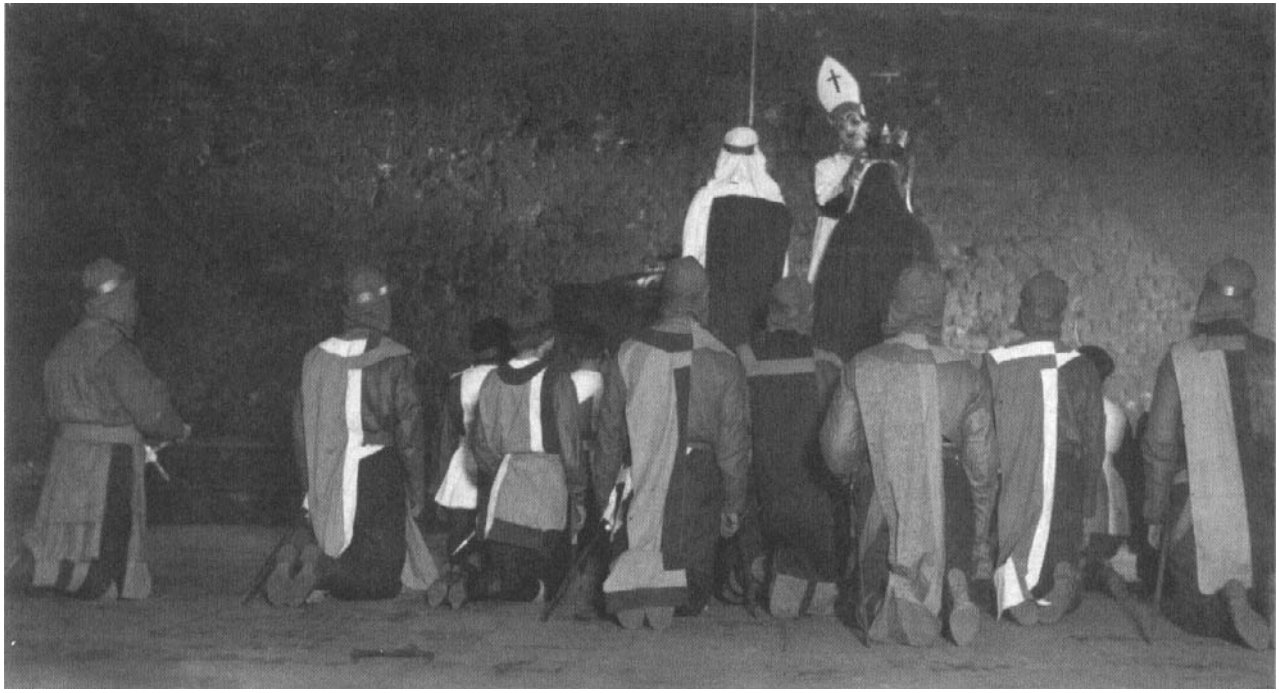
Amvrosi Buchma as the Fool (Porter) in *Macbeth*, 1924. (STM)

As Fool/Porter in the garish make-up of a clown, the talented Buchma, a one-time dancer and musician, performed clownish tricks, acrobatic leaps and dance steps, not unlike those which Nijinska had choreographed. (It should also be remembered that she herself taught character dance, and choreographed gymnastics and acrobatics.) In her memoirs, fellow actor Natalia Pylypenko writes that any circus performer would have been envious of Buchma, and compared his antics to those of a rubber ball, which flew across the stage, apparently weightless and unpredictable, at one time flying up to the ceiling, at another descending by the trap door and shooting up again (Pylypenko 15). Buchma made seemingly impromptu speeches, phrased in satirical couplets, on contemporary political and social issues (such as the deposition of the tsar, the League of Nations, various reli-

gious superstitions, even backstage theatrical disputes). This use of a low form of satire popularized in the circus (Stites, *Russian Popular*, 21) was Kurbas's analogy to Shakespeare's references to the Jesuits' equivocations. Every day, the director insisted, the jokes and references had to be changed. Actor Stepan Bondarchuk was responsible for transforming items in the morning newspaper into couplets by nightfall. In this, as in other elements of the theatricality of the production, Kurbas was consciously reaching back to the rich, Western medieval and Renaissance traditions of the audience-actor relationships, as well as to the Ukrainian baroque drama with its mingling of allegorical and real, and to the popular circus. In permitting the Fool some creative freedom, Kurbas was also consciously drawing upon English fools like Will Kempe and circus clowns, renowned for impromptu conversations with the audience, extempore comic remarks, as well as acrobatics and physical clowning.

In the fourth act, during the intermedia referred to as 'Haymaking,' Buchma entered the stage as a Reaper, singing a harvest song. While his whole body bespoke weariness, he crossed the whole stage on a diagonal as if it were a field, methodically reaping away shards of light as he went. From the scenes of bloody-mindedness, Kurbas had moved the audience in a Shakespearean manner to consider the response of the apparently undisturbed or compliant common man. The simplicity of the peasant's task contrasted with the violent, over-the-top actions of the main characters; but it also connected them – as Yuri Kosach laconically pointed out, 'A great deal is said here about the hero' (Kosach 103). For, rather than embodying any sentimental or folkloric association, the reaper was also the Grim Reaper, mowing down 'the rays of light, [and] extinguishing them with his broad sweeps.'[17] Fatigued by the work, he would then approach members of the audience sitting on bleachers in front of him and take cigarettes from them; thus he connected the main plot and the intermedia to reality itself.

The Fool's third and last appearance occurred in the final moments of the play, when Macduff comes out carrying the head of Macbeth on a spear. Still wearing his Fool's make-up – the mocking, grinning face – Buchma came in costumed as a bishop, in gold tiara and white soutane. The clownish make-up contrasted grotesquely with his clerical robes and his calm and serious tone of voice. He blessed and crowned the new Scottish king, Malcolm, to the solemn music of an organ made ironic by the delicate sounds of the piccolo and the rougher accordion (Korniienko, 'Teatral'naia,' 294). Just as he did so, a new pretender approached, killed the kneeling Malcolm, and seized the crown. Without pause, the clownish bishop unperturbedly once again intoned the same words, 'There is no power, but from God.' As the new king began to rise, yet another pretender murdered him and the ritual was repeated once again. The grotesque, anticlerical and antiauthoritarian conclusion rounded out a production which had commenced with similar devilish



The coronation scene, Act V, in *Macbeth*, 1924. (STM)

cavortings and revelations of hypocrisy and abuses of power. Substituting the procession of kings in Shakespeare's play for a parade of murderers and hypocrites, Kurbas's production questioned the methods of creating a new political order which seemed as corrupt as the last. Using grotesque and nonsense as a weapon against theatrical clichés, Kurbas seemed to make the Fool – not Macbeth – the central character of the production. Like the circus fool, this Fool linked the acts together, broke down the tension of the play, ridiculed and satirized everything. Untouched by all, only he survived the madness, violence, the moral wasteland. The dadaesque interest in clowning, the rule of fantasy, joke, irony, parody, and exaggeration gave the lie to early Soviet narratives which attempted to mythologize the Revolution and its aftermath. *Macbeth* was Kurbas's *Demoiselles* or, perhaps more accurately, his *Guernica*.

When the shouting and applause died down, questionnaires were distributed to the audience. Ludmyla Starytska assertively wrote out her full name on the form, and appended a livid response: 'I like Shakespeare, – but Bondarchuk (his intermedii), No! ... About the set: nothing will come of nothing. The costumes are good and it's a shame that a great artist is wasting his talent. What you are doing with Shakespeare, obscuring the content of his play and in particular making idiots of Duncan and his son, shows that you don't have a director who understands how such a treatment destroys the whole play ...' (Vasyl'ko, Shchodennyk, 3 April 1924, 123).

In contrast to the response of those, like Starytska, who detested the production, the actors were elated. They understood that the intelligentsia was as appalled by the political references in the intermedii as much as it was shocked by the 'sacrilege' of the radical treatment of Shakespeare. Vasylko recorded that the actors attributed such responses only to the old fogeys in the crowd (a claim, for the most part, supported by extant questionnaires), since the auditorium rang out with prolonged ovations, especially for Buchma. Vasylko underscored that this was not just applause but sustained ovations, which thrilled him. Both Kurbas and Meller were called out to the stage to acknowledge the audience's delight. Exultant, Vasylko praised 'the great master' and his achievement: 'I am happy for the Ukrainian theatre, for its actors. We, young Ukrainians, desire to bloom, as Kurbas said. Some of us have bloomed rather late (Marianenko) but have bloomed with such abundant and sweet blossoms!!' (Vasyl'ko, Shchodennyk, 3 April 1924, 123).

'To any other's, a profanation': Heretical Shakespeare

Even three days after the opening, 'the shards of the exploded bomb still had all of Kyiv crying out, "gvalt"' (Vasyl'ko, Shchodennyk, 3 April 1924, 124). Fascinated, audience and critics alike were deeply divided in their response. In some quarters,

the production was acclaimed as a 'great artistic achievement' and a work of genius (Mohylians'kyi 282; 'G-tov' 6). In others, it was simply 'a scandal.'[18] *Macbeth* launched a major critical storm in the capital, which swirled around issues of the classics, the new repertoire, politics, modernism, and the avant-garde. In order to focus attention on and interrogate the material and form of the theatre in the most radical way, Kurbas was right in having chosen Shakespeare. Evidently, burlesque, acrobatics, buffoonery, agitprop, intermedii, and Grand Guignol formed an explosive mix when applied to a world classic, a text regarded with some piety. As in another context Charles Marowitz has observed, only Shakespeare, 'so well-established, so often performed, so widely studied, [can] provide the given circumstances for this salutory shock, and in a way that no new play could possibly do' (Marowitz 27). In Kurbas's view, this was the only and right way of going about the task of creating a new Soviet Ukrainian culture: mining a text for what it could contribute to the contemporary and the future theatre. But Kurbas and his Berezil collective became caught up in a mesh of complicated debate.

As the debate unfolded in the days, months, and even years to come, it exfoliated in various directions. On the political side, the play's interpretation and especially the intermedii seemed – even for some detractors like the critic I. Turkeltaub – coherent and correct; the play did more, he grudgingly admitted, than any agitprop to discredit the monarchy. For others, the political message was not quite so apparent. The Kyivan audience, which had recently endured a Macbeth-like period of rapid and bloody exchanges of power, was forced to exercise a very Renaissance type of activity. This 'history' play induced the spectators simultaneously to apprehend Ukraine, Shakespeare's England, and Macbeth's Scotland. Shakespeare was their contemporary. Was he also their prophet? Whom was the production satirizing? Whom was it destroying? How were the issues of conscience, power, loyalty, treason, silent complicity, and destruction of innocence supposed to be interpreted in 1924 with the recently dead Lenin, and with the backroom power struggles which ensued? How could it be that the bloodiness and ineffectualness of the tsar (Duncan) was, in the end, indistinguishable from the Soviet power that took his place (the Macbeths and the Malcolms of the world)? Where was the morality of the new regime? Was it possible that regicide was neither romantic nor heroic, and that evil was simply banal, repeatable, and unconnected to ideology? By 2 April 1924, when the play had its premiere, Lenin had been dead nearly three months, and the fledgling Republic of Soviet Ukraine was nearly one year old. Dreams of independence were withering and the metaphorical and then literal political backstabbing first initiated during Lenin's illness and then accelerated by his death were beginning to be felt. The proclaimed policy of Ukrainianization did not wipe out national inequalities. Instead, there was a pronounced growth in the Russian bureaucracy. And Joseph Stalin began his rapid ascent to power.

Not only were the politics underlying this production possibly questionable, but the treatment of a world classic was evidently so. Kurbas was accused of 'blasphemy' in his treatment of Shakespeare, of completely annulling a theatrical classic, of presenting a 'cold' and unfeeling production (Hirniak, *Spomyny*, 193, 197), of showing life as it should not be, instead of how it should. Could one really be permitted to transform a classic like *Macbeth?* Only Kurbas could, Savchenko confidently asserted. Separate articles need to be dedicated to specific scenes of the production, he urged. Kurbas had made 'huge progress'; 'every one of his new productions reveals the great riches and variety of his mastery.' Noting that adherents of the bourgeois theatre attacked the production, Savchenko observed, 'Truly, *Macbeth* killed off the remnants of those traditions. Nothing was left. Unshaken, the *Berezil'* follows its own path. Its revolutionary power does not wane ... the future lies with it' (Savchenko 6).

Unexpected support for the production came from some scholars such as Mykhailo Mohyliansky:

> Kurbas's production of *Macbeth* at the beginning of April was really a spring delight, although wise men and specialists attempted to drown it in a whole flood of questions about "principle," the first of which is: may the classics, and especially Shakespeare, be modified? All the questions of "principle" stank of boredom because, really, is it so important whether joy is derived in accordance with principles or contrary to them? As long as there is joy, so long is there is artistic achievement! With the production of *Macbeth*, the great directorial talent of Kurbas achieved a great victory, passed a by no means easy test, and by giving the spectator a classical tragedy with kings, witches, and so forth, he preserved (in the impressions gained by the spectator) the main characteristics of the profound intentions of the dramaturgic genius and poet of human passions ... What else can be asked of a director? ... No Shakespeare play has ever been put on without some modification. (Mohylians'kyi 282–3)

What were these sacred principles which Kurbas had ignored? Yakiv Savchenko, whose review titled 'Shakespeare Upside Down' ('Shekspir dybom') understood the 'scandal' of the play as both political and theatrical, enumerated the hitherto expected and traditional approaches to staging Shakespeare as embracing, first of all, a realistic recreation of Elizabethan theatre in its costumes, props, and sets; secondly, a tradition of strong actors playing in a heroic-romantic style; and, lastly, an interpretation which centres all the attention on the main characters. The Berezil production had none of these characteristic features. Instead, it 'approached *Macbeth* with its usual revolutionary confidence and boldness ... In the end, it gave the whole play an agitprop function' (Savchenko 6).

For many purists, Kurbas's production made no sense because it was not easily

classifiable. The notion of the Shakespearean play as classic already implied the preclassification of the work of art as something unchangeable, enduring, sacred. The second category by which this production might be judged was the category of new Soviet art, that is, as politically correct proletarian theatre. The 1924 *Macbeth* also failed to conform to this category. As the literary critic Oleksander Kysil explained, the basic principles which ought to be adhered to in the new Soviet drama were to praise the proletariat; to give it moral strength; to popularize and explain the new ideals; to destroy the old; and to deploy satire against its ideological enemies. It should also be easily understood (Kysil', 'Novyi,' 41, 44).

Still others, unsympathetic to modernism, critiqued the production for its discontinuity and unpredictability. They found it austere, exclusionary, elitist. While lauding its politics, the drama critic I. Turkeltaub faulted Liubov Hakkebush for being too mannered and her acting too 'cold,' while praising Marianenko only when he forgot to keep to the 'on/off' principle. Conceding that Kurbas's intermedii were works of 'genius,' Turkeltaub nonetheless found that 'Morpheus set in' as he watched the rest of the play; this was the most boring production of the Berezil he had ever seen (Turkel'taub, 'Ledi,' 4). Kurbas was wrong, he argued; the audience needs emotion, not technique. An anonymous critic fumed that the production lacked any Shakespeare whatsoever ('Z pryvodu'), while Yuri Mezhenko observed that 'certain boundaries' had been crossed with this 'clearly destructive' production. Such productions destroyed attention, action, emotion (Mezhenko, 'Shliakhy,' 91).

The correct way of staging Shakespeare advocated by critics of various political and aesthetic persuasions appeared to be very close to old traditions and conventions of the commercial and the ethnographic romantic-sentimental theatre, where the relationship between audience and stage was based on the idea of the stage as representing reality or, more accurately, a heightened reality. The idea of style as potentially wrong or right seemed to rest on the bedrock of a particular understanding of community and, further, on the strength of the social fabric. Considering itself under ideological siege from within and from without (not having yet recovered from world war, civil war, and revolution), Bolshevik polemicists of the Soviet Union in 1924 had little tolerance for a notion of theatre (or art) that was not unifying or celebratory of great deeds. Ironically, in a place in which God was proclaimed dead, only moral and religious terms could be found to convey the depth of their condemnation of modernist Shakespeare.

Kurbas's intention – to problematize all the elements of theatre (including the classic, plot, role, character, hero, time, space, acting, prop, costume) – was, as we saw, an attempt to reconceive the whole notion of theatre. Whether one considers Kurbas a naive convert to the new order or an aesthetic idealist, he believed that the struggle had to be, could only be, the struggle to reinvent all systems; and this aim could only be achieved by constant experimentation. The avant-garde style

was intended to make audiences think critically and to unite them in analytical thought through their complicity in the action. Devices which broke down the conventional barrier between stage and audience, actor and character, were, in Kurbas's logic, rupture on behalf of a new communion. But this harmony could only be achieved by the special cooperation of the audience, which had to fill in the hermeneutical gaps. It required, then, not a suspension of disbelief, but a very special and shared belief – a belief in the possibility of forms emptied of traditional associations and codes in order that they be recreated and filled with something entirely new.

Those audience members who understood and responded to this call for a critical and involved spectator were rhapsodic about the production. 'Avanti' basked in the delightful thought that something really new, unheard of, unseen, and extraordinary had come into the Ukrainian theatre, and pronounced Kurbas the 'number one' director of the contemporary theatre in the whole of the Soviet Union. He predicted that, when the Berezil went on tour to Kharkiv, Poltava, and Odesa, youth would beat a path to the production just as if they were rushing to take Communion. Vasyl Desniak lauded the revolutionary interpretation of the play, which was 'thrilling'and 'masterly' (Desniak 116–17). 'Al. G-tov' wrote of the '**brilliant** clown with a healthy humour about burning issues,' who was created 'in the spirit of Shakespeare's play and, at the same time, [remained] close to the contemporary audience.' He noted that the audience had met Buchma's 'every word with applause.' Praising the design of the play, the Shakespearean multiplicity and parallelism of the scenes, as well as the 'the system of placards' (screens), 'G-tov' was happy to contemplate that this production might mark a revival of Renaissance staging practices. He praised the production for its 'courageous approach' to tragedy which mirrored a 'contemporary world view' ('G-tov,' 6). Unhampered by principle or categories, stage-struck amateurs immediately began copying the powerful ending. The Canadian theatre historian Valerian Revutsky recalled that, as a thirteen-year-old boy, he and his friends were so mesmerized by the production that, at their school, as at many others, they immediately staged *Macbeth* à la Kurbas with the audacious conclusion (Revutsky, Letter, 24 July 1994).

Curiously (from Kurbas's point of view), his peers also attacked his *Macbeth* for being too bourgeois, for taking the 'bourgeois aesthetic' to its 'absurd' conclusion by not reflecting objective reality but only hinting at it, by presenting a system of signs, marks, and ideas instead of concrete reality; and, finally, for creating overly abstract forms (Iura, 'Natsionalistychna,' especially 746–57).[19] Art for art's sake – the principle which was really under attack here – was a movement that never struck deep roots in Eastern Europe, where art had always generally been approached from an ethical (religious or social) perspective.[20] The critics' offensives were, in part, a reflex regression to ethical models of criticism developed over

the past two centuries (and perhaps most notoriously found in Tolstoy's critique of Shakespeare). The traditional, ethical approach to the arts also fed naturally into the new political terminology of error, heresy, and deviation.

Reviews of this and other Berezil productions reached Moscow, where Meyerhold was so impressed that he requested permission to stage Kurbas's version of *Macbeth.* In his own production of *D.E.* (staged over two months after the premiere of *Macbeth*), Meyerhold appeared to be inspired by Kurbas's use of moving screens, slides, and projectors, as well as by his cinematic devices. Meyerhold had been in Kyiv in 1923, where three of his productions were pitted against three of Kurbas's. One reviewer had regarded this theatrical contest as a battle between the centre and the periphery – the 'Nazarene' Kurbas ('Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' the reviewer rhetorically inquired). Comparing the two directors, 'F. Ia.' observed that Meyerhold's 1923 productions had heroes, while Kurbas's had masses, whose 'movements were organized harmoniously like musical waves ... not a photographic but deeply artistic reflection of the struggle of the proletariat' ('F. Ia.' 3).

The Russian and Russophone critics who insisted, throughout the 1920s, on linking Kurbas with Meyerhold (and claiming that the Russian influenced the Ukrainian) received an outraged response from Kurbas, who bristled at this centrist condescension. He was not influenced by the Russian directors, he reiterated many times publicly and in print, but rather by Western art and theatre, as a careful chronology of his productions showed. Kurbas refused Meyerhold's invitation because, he argued, he did not need to prove himself in Moscow; his theatre was not aimed at impressing Moscow, but the world. As late as 1927, Kurbas was still furious: 'I don't intend to contradict the fact that the flying screens in Meyerhold's *D.E.* and in my *Macbeth* ... are the same device, but the critic must verify [the information]; it's his duty to find out that *Macbeth* was put on a whole three months earlier than *D.E.* How could I, a director in Kyiv, know what would be put on in Moscow three months hence!' These are bits of silliness, Kurbas fumed. 'Don't they know that Craig, Reinhardt, the classics, [Otto] Brahm, the Chinese and Japanese theatres, the devices of the medieval theatre are available not only to Meyerhold in Moscow, but also to us – in Lviv, in Kharkiv. Isn't it funny that for him [the critic] this is an America [i.e., a discovery]. He just doesn't get it' (Kurbas, 'S'iohodni,' 213).

To a large extent, Kurbas located the attack on his approach to the classics as the result of, on the one hand, an inherited imperialist, and on the other, a colonialist, mentality. He defended his position noting that, since 1916, he and his theatre colleagues had been in reaction not only to 'the Ukrainianophilic historical-ethnographic theatre' but also to the prudently cautious Europeanized prerevolutionary theatre. Hitherto, the spectator had been 'educated by authoritarian

tsardom in a spirit of reverence toward the dominant culture, and could not objectively approach an evaluation of the achievements of the Ukrainian theatre' (Kurbas, '*Berezil'* i teperishni,' 118, 120). That piety and passivity needed to be set aside for a more critical, reflective stance on the audience's, as well as the actor's and director's, part. He urged Ukrainians to draw back from 'double provincialism' (Kurbas, 'U teatral'ni,' 183). As an anonymous critic put it, the proletariat needed to get rid of a slave mentality; it had to defeat both social and national problems, the result of generations of oppression ('Try osnovni' 3). A communal search was required to seek out and discover new forms to accommodate the new times.

With *Macbeth* a kind of aesthetic Rubicon was crossed. Kurbas had naively assumed that the revolution would stay one; that it would permit the kind of exciting transformations he envisaged with every production. Instead, as his comments indicate, he began to recognize that provincialism and colonialism were difficult to dislodge. The difference lay in the use of new terms, new slogans which made ethical and political treachery out of the inability or refusal to reflect 'the needs of the proletariat.'

While, as autoethnographic text, the 1919–20 *Macbeth* appeared to be a liberating gesture, pointing to a conscious break with imperialist stereotypes, codes, conventions, and pretensions, in fact, it was dependent upon them in its mostly negative and bipolar response. In the attack on Ukraine's recent historical past, the 1919–20 *Macbeth*s had still presumed and (from all accounts) experienced a 'unified' audience. Essentially using a traditionally mimetic approach to the play, based on the convention of a shared, communal suspension of disbelief, the earlier version of the play was a more comforting one. Canon (in the sense of repertoire) unified director-actor-audience in a single project with multiple agendas; further, Shakespeare as repository of value linked Ukrainians to the larger brotherhood of Western European culture. Canon, in other words, provided consolation by confirmation. This was what had been provided by merely imitative versions of classical texts in the English Renaissance (such as, for example, the vogue for the very forgettable Senecan plays in the 1560s). If Kurbas had done nothing more with Shakespeare, he would not be a terribly interesting director. Simply to acquire Shakespeare so that he could prove that the classics could be done in a language which had been said not to exist, while politically significant, is aesthetically banal; it is yet another sad story in the world's cultural history.

By contrast, the 1924 *Macbeth* may be regarded as a gesture of unshackling from its own community, although this was not at all Kurbas's intent. Paradoxically, this dark production may be seen as an optimistic gesture, a belief that new modes of art, new modes of thinking, new politics could indeed be created by a communal spirit and will. More than renovating a medium – Clement Green-

berg's decisive feature of modernism (Greenberg 19) – this was a more radical and idealistic project, which seemed to fit exactly Astradur Eysteinsson's defining features of modernism: 'Modernist practices often point toward an (impossibly) revolutionary restructuring of the codes, and thus toward a cultural reorientation the impact of which is hard to imagine because of the very "openness" of the semiotic revolt.' Modernism, continues Eysteinsson in one of the most perceptive studies of the topic, helps us resist 'innocent' reception and is of primary political importance, 'since it breaks through habitualized communicative structures and calls signifying practices into question.' He calls modernism 'a mode of skeptical hermeneutics' (Eysteinsson 222, 228–9). Indeed, Kurbas insisted, the Berezil sought out an active, not a passive, spectator. That Kurbas understood the radical quality of his production is evident by the tactics which he pursued: the numerous preproduction articles, puffs, and the scripted brief statement of purpose before the curtain. But these tactics neither mollified the critics nor created the kind of new audience-actor relationship he intended.

Instead, to its critics, the 1924 version of the play seemed to be an abandonment of the spectator-actor-playwright bond. As supplement, it challenged its originary text. As autoethnographic text it turned on itself in its reconsideration of assumptions about victim and perpetrator. It engaged not only the dominant culture's representation of Ukrainians (as did the 1920 production) but, more importantly, engaged the Ukrainians' view of themselves. In his new vision of the play and of the fate of Scotland/England/Ukraine, Kurbas presented a dark vision of the banality of evil, not easily explained nor psychologized. It was, in particular, the last scene which brought about a tumultuous response. Not falling into any clear-cut generic category of drama, the production, to paraphrase Modris Eksteins's comments about Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring*, the scandal of *Macbeth* was that the 'theme was devoid of readily identifiable moral purpose. Primitive, pre-ethical, pre-individual man was portrayed'; instead of 'sentiment,' there was 'only energy, exultation, and necessity,' accompanied by jarring music, dissonance, and cacaphony (Eksteins 50).

Kurbas's production questioned the methods of creating a new nation at the same time as he questioned conventions of representation. The audience's difficulty and confusion lay in its inability to choose sides. Rather than presenting simple oppositions (as was the norm in agitprop or ethnographic theatre), this production stressed the universal complicity of society in acts of evil. Such an interpretation of the play's ending robbed the audience of comfortable assertions about the classics and their setting in a remote past. In its replacement of history by an apparently allegorical fable set in a multiple time frame, it denied the newly constructed narrative of the inexorable march of progress toward a paradise on earth. In its exaggerated technique, black humour, and its general atmosphere of

Grand Guignol, it also seemed to rob Ukrainians of their acquisition of Shakespeare, and, by extension, of equality before Russian and world culture. Kurbas made Shakespeare their uncomfortable contemporary and critic.

Extant questionnaires from the November production of this play show a wide variety of responses. Perhaps surprisingly, many workers (plumbers seemed to be particularly well represented in this sampling) indicated that they enjoyed the production and 'understood everything.' One respondent even asked, 'Is it possible not to understand?' (Ankety 3). As 'Avanti' had predicted, young audience members were indeed generally very enthusiastic. Some of the intelligentsia expressed concern that, although *they* understood everything, no doubt the production was well above the capability of the workers' understanding. Still others were confused about the fact that this production was 'neither fish nor fowl.' Behind this splintering into a number of different audience constituencies was the unarticulated and perhaps not even completely understood fear of a multiplicity of views, of the breakdown of audience unity. In the press, many reviewers praised the 1919–20 productions to the detriment of the 1924 version. The earlier versions were symbols, however tenuous, of unity restored with other cultures and nations, as well as with themselves. This Shakespeare, however, revealed insecurity and instability; it emphasized the transitional stage of their cultural and political life.

Kurbas had hoped through the 1924 *Macbeth* to get his audience to imagine a truly liberating cultural and stylistic alternative to inherited and prevailing conventions. Far from attempting to alienate them, he wished to insist upon the audience's share in the play's action; he called for an audience of 'co-creating Shakespeares.' From lighting to costuming and gesture, the production emphasized that the past was the present and perhaps, horrifyingly, the future; all needed interrogation. It invited questions about what a classic was, what preconceptions the audience had about high and low, character, hero, role, plot, stage imagery, properties, and scene design. Like his favourite painters, Cézanne and Picasso, Kurbas was attempting to reimagine the very materials of his art, to rethink representation itself. He had already envisaged vastly different kinds of theatre in the future, including the perhaps fanciful vision of a people-less drama of geological formations, of the conflicts between tectonic plates, a drama of pure *agon*.

The 1920s debate concerning *Macbeth* usefully points out many of the broader difficulties with modernist Shakespeare and the modernist project – at least in Ukraine. While modernism provides freedom in opening up space and, especially, time, and attempts simultaneously to distance and to draw in, often only its discontinuities and ruptures are immediately evident. By contrast, the mimetic approach to the theatre, although only a convention and without objective validity is, as Benjamin Bennett has astutely pointed out, a 'communal initiative': 'if the realistic begins by being discredited, if it is recognized from the outset as mere

convention, then the conscious decision to accept that convention *is* undoubtedly communicative, shared with others, a communal process.' What is crucial, then, continues Bennett, 'is not meaning, but *style* as the token of an ethical decision repeatedly taken in the theater' (Bennett 26–7).

Conservative, academic, or commercial theatre with its apparently easy acceptance of 'ordinary reality' thus functions in a seemingly harmonious manner; it provides a readily identifiable common ground for actor and audience. Such a desire for clearly-defined and understood concepts of communion were most obviously found in the first years of the Revolution. Thus, Nikolai Evreinov's staging of *The Storming of the Winter Palace* on the third anniversary of the October Revolution with at least 8,000 participants and 100,000 spectators (whose participation, observes Lars Kleberg, 'was merely a question of degree rather than kind'; Kleberg 64) was both an expression of this conflation of life and art and a harbinger of things to come. Inspired by the artistic precedents created during the French Revolution and by the ideas of Richard Wagner and Romain Rolland, such huge spectacles, mass festivals and glorifications of revolutionary leaders, it is true, did not last very long. But that does not mean that the desire for such 'realism' and the communion which underlied it disappeared; rather, it found a less obvious outlet in the theatre's return to 'realism' as the officially approved approach to art in the Soviet Union – the topic of chapters 4 and 5 (below).

Rather than foreground the audience-actor connection, Kurbas's modernist productions presumed that the audience wished to co-create a new ground for interpretation and communion while creating a semiotic earthquake where nothing remained stable or certain. Modernism optimistically endowed the audience with the desire to work while at play, to think critically and to question in an individual way in order to achieve a long-term project of a new community. Thus, for many Ukrainian modernists, it was commonplace to think of the theatre as the temple of literature, the best expression of collective ceremonial thinking.[21] Here, we may see that the modernists themselves reverted to religious and, in other cases, to moral terms. For both camps, this emotion-laden terminology revealed the deeply ingrained belief in the monumentality and potency of the classic for our culture.

Chapter Three

'Authentic' Shakespeare: Saksahansky's *Othello*

Les Kurbas, along with Vasyl Desniak and others, believed that the Berezil had 'buried forever' both the academic and the old ethnographic-populist theatre, which had degenerated into a 'hackneyed "Little Russian" [that is, colonial] theatre' (Kurbas, 'Krakh,' 134; Desniak 116). Although acknowledging the technical mastery of its best practitioners, Kurbas was convinced that the new epoch had created new tastes in and demands from its spectators. While to call Panas Saksahansky's production of *Othello* in 1926 either 'hackneyed' or 'academic' theatre would be vastly inaccurate, it certainly fit Yakiv Savchenko's description of the kind of Shakespeare Ukrainians had hitherto seen performed by Russian provincial companies: a historical costume drama focusing on character and performed in a heroic-romantic mode. Only the second Shakespeare play to be produced on the Ukrainian stage, Saksahansky's *Othello*, premiering in the distant industrial town of Katerynoslav (later Dnipropetrovsk), surprisingly was also to become something much more: the future approved model for nearly seventy years of Soviet Ukrainian and, in many cases, Russian and other Soviet republics', Shakespeares. In 1926, its future fame was completely unanticipated. Indeed, the financially precarious position of the elderly director Saksahansky, barely eking out a living under a regime which did not offer him any subsidies and prevented him from playing regularly in significant Ukrainian urban centres, suggested quite the opposite.

For Saksahansky's *Othello* to achieve such a mythologized status, a number of changes had to occur which will occupy the bulk of this and the following chapter: the gradual, official reinstatement of ethnographic-romantic traditions; a renewed regard not only for the classic work but also for its author; a 'realistic' and character-centred idea of theatre; and redoubled efforts to conceptualize the masses, their 'true' needs and capabilities. The process by which Shakespeare became domesticated and allied with popularly, nationally, and ethnographically

based notions of theatre in the second half of the 1920s and early 1930s was a complex and deeply ironic process which will require some unpacking. It came about not only because of the gradual imposition of a Stalinist view of art from above – an interpretation generally found in theatre histories which cover this time period – but also because of pressures from below, in the form of the entrenched, perceived or imagined demands of the spectator. In other words, the revolution, at least in the theatre, was, as we shall see, vanquished to some degree by what, in the West, was called the box office and by its rallying call for a 'realistic' theatre and an 'authentic' Shakespeare. In the Ukrainian context, it meant the victory of *narodnytstvo* or populism over modernism and the avant-garde.

Concurring with the need to incorporate the classics into the new Soviet Ukrainian canon, Panas Karpovych Saksahansky, however, vehemently disagreed with the 'left' approach to art, finding in it – especially in the work of Kurbas – an affective vacuum. Saksahansky's production of *Othello* was a deliberate salvo directed at the 'wild,' 'left' experiments of Kurbas and galvanized into existence by his 1924 *Macbeth*. As a character actor who appeared in dozens of ethnographic and social plays, Saksahansky commanded the loyalty of thousands of Ukrainian theatregoers. He was to take this popularity into the field of directing the classics, Schiller and Shakespeare, where he intended to show how they really ought to be done. His *Othello* is a case study of the dominant way of construing canonical values in Ukraine, a way which inadvertently confirmed its colonial cultural position by embracing the authority of author, character, and the literary text.

'Our dance of custom': Saksahansky and the Authority of Popular Genres

The last and youngest representative of the Coryphaei, Panas Saksahansky would, unknowingly, come to provide the missing link between a Soviet realist aesthetics and the nineteenth-century tradition of Ukrainian theatre. In birth, education, training, outlook, and sympathies, Saksahansky was the complete opposite of Les Kurbas. Unlike Kurbas, Saksahansky never travelled to the West (although he performed in Poland and throughout Russia), remaining firmly within the orbit of his originary culture. His Slavo-centred travels became an important element in the subsequent Stalinist rewriting of his career in the theatre. By contrast, his brother Sadovsky had spent seven years in self-imposed exile in the West. Although Sadovsky eventually returned to Soviet Ukraine, the authorities never permitted him to live down that act of 'betrayal'; to his death, he was referred to as an 'immigrant.' On the whole, however, the Tobilevych brothers possessed a genealogy which would become more congenial to a Stalinist point of view than that of the middle-class intellectual Kurbas. Born in the village of Kamiano-Kostuvaty in the Kherson region, Saksahansky completed the Elisavethrad middle school, which

Panas Saksahansky, People's Artist of the Republic. Photo in *Nove mystetstvo* (New Art) 13 (30 March 1926). (Nf)

eschewed a study of the classics for practical subjects which would prepare the student for further technical training.

Saksahansky's mother, formerly a serf, was to a certain extent responsible for his love of the theatre. As a serf-nanny, she had attended some theatre performances with the children of her master, and her unusual gift – a prodigious memory, which Saksahansky inherited – helped her recite whole plays to her own sons. Like many youngest children, Saksahansky was the most amusing and cheerful, loving to recount stories, anecdotes, and to imitate the behaviour of his elders. Entering a military college in Odesa, he was nonetheless drawn to the theatre, and began his career by illegally performing in a comic troupe renowned not for its art but for its broad comedy. After serving for three years in the military, in 1883 Saksahansky joined Marko Kropyvnytsy's troupe in Odesa, a group which also included his elder brother, Mykola Sadovsky, from whom he learned all of his thirty roles, mimicking his elder in his actions and intonations.[1] From his brother Karpenko-Kary, he heard much spoken about the great black actor, Ira Aldridge, whom Karpenko-Kary had seen on stage, and whose passionate style he much admired. During Lent, when performances were prohibited by law, Saksahansky used his leisure time to read, in Russian, the works of Shakespeare, Schiller, and Lessing.

While in Odesa, Saksahansky also subsequently saw five productions of the German actor Ernst von Possart, including *King Lear* and *Othello*, both formative experiences for his own comprehension of theatrical art. Possart, a classical actor with deeply conservative views (he was the intendant of the court theatres in Munich), had earlier in the century vehemently opposed the creation of the Munich Schauspielhaus with its modernist repertoire of symbolist and social dramas. Possart believed that the creation of the new theatre in Munich would lead to a vulgarization of culture rather than to a healthy vitality. It was precisely the Schauspielhaus repertoire of Oscar Wilde, Max Halbe, Bjørnsterne Bjørnsone, Frank Wedekind, Maurice Maeterlinck, and others which attracted Kurbas and which Saksahansky, like Possart, intensely disliked; he even wrote a short satire, *Hypocrites* (*Lytsemiry*) 1910, lambasting it. In observing the classical acting of Possart, the untrained Saksahansky suddenly and for the first time understood that dramatic art was about metamorphosis and that gesture, expression, and voice could work together in one harmonious whole. Interestingly, Saksahansky recalled that there was 'something mathematical' about this moment of recognition (Saksahans'kyi, *Moia robota*, 14). But, having no one to teach him this art, Saksahansky spent the rest of his life attempting to teach himself and to work out a logical system of acting. His primary influence, however, would always be his observation of others, both performers and not. Possart would remain a vivid memory for some time: 'For a long time I couldn't forget [his] *King Lear* ... *Othello* gave me no rest' (cited in Mel'nychuk-Luchko 174). Despite this awareness of a unified art in

which language is only one element of the theatrical experience, Saksahansky would be unable to shake the primacy of voice.

Appearing in populist, historical-romantic plays (particularly those written by his eldest brother) and broad comedies, Saksahansky had a lovely baritone voice, which he used to best effect in singing folk songs, and a natural talent for mimicry, which he continued to hone by observing other actors. Although he played some heroic parts, he was predominately a comic character actor of a very fine technique. Like Eugene O'Neill's fictionalized father Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Saksahansky was an acknowledged master of diction; in the Ukrainian theatre, he was the Beautiful Voice. Where Kurbas emphasized movement, Saksahansky stressed language. Well into old age, he continued the daily discipline of training his voice by reading out loud from the monologues of Shakespeare and Schiller. Those in his audience who recorded their reminiscences of Saksahansky's performances reiterate the same effect which he had on the poet Maksym Rylsky, who, entranced by the actor, queried, 'Where is the acting? This is life' (Ryl's'kyi, 'Panas Saksahans'kyi,' 114).

This response acknowledges the love which audiences, rather than critics, have for the character actor whom they greet with a particular enthusiasm born out of recognition of sameness with variation. Perhaps of all actors, the character actor is most openly in love with the act of performing and transforming himself, of staging himself before the spectator. Saksahansky's sheer delight in his role, whatever it happened to be, seemed to transfer itself into a kind of courtship of the audience, which, in turn, became willingly 'enslaved' by his acting. A master of timing, manipulation of voice, and transformations, Saksahansky, like Peter Sellers and similar such comic character actors, could, with the benefit of the audience's keyed-up anticipation, arouse instantaneous mirth simply by making his appearance. Even such a penetrating and confirmed left-wing Soviet drama critic as Yakiv Mamontov fell under his spell. Almost despairingly, Mamontov queried, how was it that 'spectators, including specialists of literature and theatre, forgot about the "theatre crisis" and about "ethnographic-*pobut* theatre," and simply revelled in the masterliness of Panas Saksahansky?' (Mamontov, 'Dolia,' 2). The failure of theory before the fact of experience is nowhere more evident than in this response.

From 1890 to 1898, Saksahansky and Karpenko-Kary led their own troupe of 'Russian and Little Russian actors,' playing in Petrograd and Moscow, but not in Kyiv, a place forbidden by the tsarist censors. By 1898, his reputation well-established, Saksahansky became the head of the Association of Ukrainian Actors, an organization which embraced all Ukrainian actors of the ethnographic school (1898–1905). For a time, he also worked in this organization under the leadership of a younger actor and relation, Ivan Marianenko, who, when he turned

fifty, was to repudiate everything that the older actor had taught him by joining Kurbas's avant-garde theatre and becoming his 1924 Macbeth. During the Revolution and the civil war, Saksahansky studiously ignored the revolutionary fare, as well as the modernist urge, and continued to play the classical Ukrainian repertoire of the nineteenth century – a repertoire he would defend to the last against critics and anonymous, rancorous letter-writers, and for which he was branded a 'bourgeois-nationalist.' From 1918 to 1922, Saksahansky was involved with the People's Theatre (Narodnyi teatr), taking on a variety of functions, including that of artistic director.

Vehemently opposed to new modernist drama as well as modernist interpretations, Saksahansky nonetheless considered that the People's Theatre repertoire should be broadened by turning to the Western European classical tradition. Significantly, the playwright to whom he first turned was Friedrich Schiller, a dramatist universally connected with the birth of nationalist theatre. In the later heightened Soviet rhetoric of the day, his nephew would claim that Saksahansky particularly loved 'the great humanist' Schiller as 'the poet of freedom, happiness, uplifting human feelings' (B. Tobilevych 242). While this may be so, no doubt the early, romantic-heroic Schiller, whom Saksahansky loved best, appealed to him because of the similarity of tonal range and melodramatic action to the Ukrainian nineteenth-century classics. The first of Schiller's plays which he would stage, *The Robbers*, for example, is full of incident, strange plot twists, numerous villains, a flawed hero with a villainous and deformed brother, and an ever-faithful beloved. The scope for extreme emotions, the frailty and helplessness of the heroine – at the mercy of two unwanted and aggressive lovers – her undying loyalty to the hero, Karl, all of these are the standard fare of successful melodrama, the mode with which Saksahansky grew up and matured as an actor.

Melodrama's dependence for action upon external pressures and adversaries (an evil-doer, a social group, a hostile ideology, an accident) necessitates its resort to extremity of incident, consequence, and solution. Tending toward the moralistic, it publicly acknowledges virtue. While grandiose and extreme – leading Peter Brooks to call it the 'aesthetics of astonishment'[2]- melodrama is also seductive on stage. In the hands of a great actor, like Saksahansky, its vapid qualities dissipate, and the grandiose, seductive feelings take over.

For a colonized people, melodrama may be the only possible genre. With its rhetoric of absolutes and its story of virtue assailed by external forces, melodrama presents a wish-fulfilment victory at the end, achieved by means of its special 'scandal' of 'excessive feeling.' Such theatre filled with music, song, pleasure, and the delight of the recognition of character actors playing familiar types would be both comforting and a welcome release from the horrors of revolution, civil war, and world war. Indeed, an important appeal of melodrama is that (as Robertson

Davies has observed) it is 'oblivion's balm,' an escape from the world of fact into poetic justice and fine emotions. To quote Davies, who, had he known Saksahansky's views, might well be citing him: 'What do you suppose Shakespeare meant by "nature"? Did he not mean that which is recognizable and acceptable by an audience – that which commands assent and belief, that which speaks not merely to the eye ... [but] to the soul?' (Davies 6).

Discussing the difficulty of creating truly effective melodrama, Bernard Shaw explained that it should be 'a simple and sincere drama of action and feeling, kept well within that vast tract of passion and motive which is common to the philosopher and the labourer, relieved by plenty of fun, and depending for variety of human character, not on the high comedy idiosyncrasies which individualize people ... but on broad contrasts between types of youth and age, sympathy and selfishness, the masculine and the feminine, the serious and the frivolous, the sublime and the ridiculous, and so on. The whole character of the piece must be allegorical, idealistic, full of generalizations and moral lessons' (Shaw 93). Melodrama is, in other words, a democratic genre with a strong appeal to the emotions.

Not only feeling but also comedy was an indispensable element of classical nineteenth-century Ukrainian theatre. At odds with the Soviet period, in which barbed satire (particularly directed at 'enemies of the people') was preferred, comedy, its gentler and more humane variant, offered the appeal of democratic imperfection and simple fun to a society in which even public holidays were beginning to be seriously regulated.

'Dainties that are bred in a book': The Authority of Author and Text

Unlike the philosophically trained Kurbas, who was naturally drawn to a conceptual theatre, Saksahansky was primarily an intuitive, not an intellectual, artist, whose knowledge of literature was, to a great extent, the result of autodidacticism. His 'chamber' study of texts was combined with a long Ukrainian tradition of reverence for books and, perhaps even more importantly, for authors, a reverence born from the consequences of the severe tsarist censorship which was later reimposed in a new form during the Stalinist period. The veneration of particular authors – such as the romantic revolutionary writer Taras Shevchenko – continues to this day, sometimes reaching near-religious proportions, and constricting, if not sometimes disabling, much incisive literary criticism.[3]

Saksahansky's attitude to the author is also intricately bound up with his own gift of a wonderful voice, with his love of mimicry, and with his understanding of how these work or ought to work in the theatre. From his own experience, Saksahansky derived the view that the actor's aim was 'to supplement the image provided by the author, so that the needed type will be revealed in all his essence

before the spectator' (Saksahans'kyi, *Moia robota*, 16). The text, in other words, was an incomplete script which acquired fullness or wholeness only when engaged by the reading actor, who discovered in it that which the author had not fully released. This insight (however obvious) came to Saksahansky when he acted in one of his brother's plays. After the performance, Saksahansky was surprised when his sibling remarked that he had never thought such an interpretation possible. Karpenko-Kary's comment made him consider the actor in a new light – as one who simultaneously added to an author's work and yet also discovered or revealed what was already there. In attentively studying the text, the actor could uncover the already-present: the typical, the universal. Such an approach (criticized a few years later by other actors as an 'external' method of study) tended to smooth over contradictions and complexities and to resolve characterological problems into psychological, national, racial, or other 'types.' For a character actor and essentially a mimic like Saksahansky, this working from the external to the internal was a natural means of creating a role.

Saksahansky's relationship to the text and his ideas about acting are best outlined in his monograph *My Work on a Role* (*Moia robota nad rolliu*), the ideas consolidated while he was teaching directing in 1920 to the theatrical group Dniprosoyuz in Kyiv and published that year; subsequently, Saksahansky refined, reworked his ideas, and republished them throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. In his extant opening lecture on 21 July 1920, Saksahansky explained that theatre art 'is the method of observing and revealing the main, characteristic traits of people' (cited in B. Tobilevych 254). Stressing the general, the type over the individual, realism over theatricality, in this lecture Saksahansky took an ethnographic interpretation of the aims of theatre, arguing that not even the Romans had created a truly populist (*narodnyi*) theatre; only the Ukrainians did. It was an achievement which should make them especially proud. The people truly need such a theatre because it develops a national consciousness, an identity, and encourages an interest in its history and culture (cited in B. Tobilevych 254, 260).

Outlining the fact that every artist is doubtless a part of a family of masters, of artists, but also of his age, class, nation, and society, Saksahansky's monograph insisted that Shakespeare was a part of his epoch – a stress which obliquely countered Kurbas's view of Shakespeare as our contemporary. The artist, Saksahansky argued, is not a photographer but one who transforms art so that 'in addition to the realistic reflection of a form and all of its inner essence, every bystander might feel the role of what is reflected and its meaning for present-day life or for humanity as a whole' (Saksahans'kyi, *Moia robota*, 9, 11). The artist creates a type, a characteristic. For Saksahansky, 'art is a consummate reflection of nature, life. The whole concern of the artist is to render in the round as best he can the essential traits of character' (cited in B. Tobilevych 255). He sees with other-worldly eyes,

which observe but should also 'understand the mechanism of the human soul.' The artist 'should know how to forget himself and incarnate what is necessary for a reflection of the type' (Saksahans'kyi, *Moia robota*, 11–12). Where Kurbas stressed control and awareness of role, Saksahansky emphasized abandonment to the role, which, in turn, would lead the audience to abandon itself to the actor's creation.

Unlike Kurbas, Saksahansky's approach to theatre was character, text, and voice centred. Gesture, blocking, scene design, and a unifying philosophical conception of the play were all secondary elements. Supplementing his own repeated reading of the text were two additional elements: historical research and, most important, attention to his own experience of watching and responding to other actors, notably Possart, Rossi, and 'the king of art' (as Saksahansky styled him), Salvini. Nineteenth-century Europe and, to a degree, North America, owes a huge debt to Salvini, who travelled widely on both sides of the Atlantic, finding admirers everywhere and 'converting' many to Shakespeare. In Russia, as is well known, his performances were of central importance to the development of Konstantin Stanislavsky's ideas on theatrical art. In Ukraine, Salvini appeared in the cosmopolitan, although primarily russophone, city of Odesa, where, among others, the Meiningen troupe had also performed in the 1870s. Salvini's temperament, his emotional performances based on contrasting passions, drew the most ardent admiration from Saksahansky, himself an enthusiast of Stanislavsky. This is the trickiest material for the theatre historian to pin down: probably even more powerful than the language of the text, the complicated heritage of gesture, movement, intonation, and facial expression, a tradition passed on by actors to subsequent generations – as Salvini passed his effects on to Saksahansky – defies scholarly exactitude and refuses to be pinned down in formulaic expressions. While the individual idiosyncracies of Salvini's interpretation of his role are lost to us, they were physically transcribed on Saksahansky's body, which edited, translated, and transmitted these to his own audience and to other actors. Seeking to achieve that effect which Salvini had on him, Saksahansky sought a method that might enable him to incarnate and recreate that affective, direct influence of enslavement, of abandonment on both sides – by actor to role, and by audience to actor.

An extremely disciplined actor, hard-working and consistent, known for his integrity and frankness but also for his quarrelsome and envious nature, Saksahansky prepared himself for a role by reading the text at least ten times, then memorizing his role and the exchanges between the main characters by writing out the parts himself. Once the text was fixed in his mind, he added notes to himself about positioning and movement across the stage, as well as notes about pauses. He would then attempt to 'draw' the character. At night, he imagined the type of

character he was supposed to play. After five or six rehearsals, Saksahansky would practise before a mirror to catch inappropriate gestures or expressions. On the day of the performance, he refrained from lunching, avoided conversations, and made his way to the theatre, where he applied his make-up two-and-a-half hours in advance of the performance. He then began the process of 'separating from himself' and actively moving towards emotional and psychological identification with the character.[4] This kind of preparation was rare not only in Ukrainian actors, but in any actors at the time, as I. Kruti points out in his paean to Saksahansky (Kruti 1). But it was also a preparation which was essentially solitary and literary, one which placed the voice first as the constructor of character, with little or no emphasis on movement, or of any sense of the character's connection to the rest of the ensemble. It was, of course, a traditionally nineteenth-century approach to theatre, in which everything depended upon the star actor rather than on the ensemble, the interpretation of the play, or, in fact, on the play at all. When in his sixties, Saksahansky's insistence upon the independent preparation of his role resulted in his appearances with companies with whom he had not had a single rehearsal. His fellow actors would rehearse with a proxy and would later be surprised actually to encounter him for the first time on stage on the evening of the performance.

In his biographical monograph, *My Work on a Role*, and in other published and unpublished pieces, Saksahansky strongly argued the importance of looking to one's predecessors in art to supplement textual study. Observing that Salvini took ten years to thoroughly prepare his Lear, he urged young actors to 'work, work and yet [do] more work' (19). In turning and returning to Salvini and Possart, Saksahansky kept in his mind the romantic-melodramatic tradition of the nineteenth century, the rotund oratory and sweeping gestures of nineteenth-century theatrical tradition, the glorious costumes, and magnificent sets. Saksahansky's sense of a role thus depended upon three elements: first and foremost, his own experience of watching other actors' performances; second, his intuitions shaped by his reverence for the author; and, last, historical research. On the basis of these three elements, Saksahansky derived his claim for the authority of his interpretation from Shakespeare himself, a claim first and foremost to transparency and fidelity.

While dedicated to memorizing the text and uncovering its meanings, Saksahansky had little interest in the theory of drama. His opposition to Kurbas is perhaps best located in his diametrically opposed view of the masters of theatrical art. Diderot's concept of the theatre artist left him cold; his 'truth' was as 'shallow,' 'dead and cold' as a 'lifeless Galathea.' To be an actor meant not to perform but to shed real tears (*Moia robota* 14). Molière, much admired by Kurbas as one of the few true men of the theatre, was (surprisingly, for a comic actor) dismissed by Saksahansky as of historical interest only.[5] Either to imitate the example of

other actors or to imitate people, both the same mode of representation rather than expression – these were the methods which Saksahansky as actor employed and which as director he taught.

'What's past is prologue': Schiller's *The Robbers* and Shakespeare's *Othello*

Although Saksahansky envisaged producing Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, and dreamed of playing Falstaff, instead, he began his foray into Western classics not with Shakespeare but with another project which was personally, politically, and more locally congenial in 1918: a cycle of Schiller plays, the first of which was to be *The Robbers*. In addition to his early plays, Schiller's theories were also appropriate to an actor-director of a 'people's' theatre. In his essay on 'The Pathetic' (1793), Schiller had argued that the pathetic was 'the first condition required most strictly in a tragic author' (Schiller, 'The Pathetic,' 459). Schiller advanced the idea that patriotic writers were needed in order to create a truly national drama, which, in turn, would help create a nation. In 'The Stage as Moral Institution,' Schiller further explained that the theatre was a unifying, moral force, which 'commands all human knowledge, exhausts all positions, illumines all hearts, unites all classes, and makes its way to the heart and understanding by the most popular channels' (Schiller, 'The Stage,' 444). It was a sentiment with which Saksahansky could easily concur and which he would have found to be particularly suitable in the circumstances of 1918, the short-lived period of Ukrainian independent statehood. Schiller provided Saksahansky with both a theoretical statement and a real example of a play that could move people's hearts while tracing out a national theatre. Saksahansky himself took the role of Franz von Moor, a mixture of Iago, Edmund, and Richard III. Not as speculative as Iago but, rather like Richard and Edmund a knavish man of action, Franz mocks and scorns religion, and as Schiller observes in his Preface to the 1781 edition, glorifies reason 'at the expense of his soul'; 'to him God and man are alike indifferent, and both worlds are as nothing' (Schiller, Preface, xiv). The last act includes a scene of Franz's growing madness, his rantings vaguely recalling Richard III's anguished thoughts after he experiences the nightmare visitation of his murdered victims, and his eventual suicide.

Playing opposite Franz/Saksahansky was Borys Romanytsky as the 'strange Don Quixote,' the Robber Captain, Karl von Moor, presented in 1781 in the advertisement to Schiller's published text, as 'the picture of a great misguided soul, endowed with every gift of excellence, yet lost in spite of all its gifts. Unbridled passions and bad companionship corrupt his heart ... Great and majestic in misfortune ... Such a man shall you pity and hate, abhor, yet love, in the ROBBER

MOOR ...the sorrows of too enthusiastic love, and the tortures of ungoverned passion' (Schiller, Preface, xiv). The plot and the audience's conflicting emotions, the tension between thought and feeling, the central character of a romantic yet tragic Moor, who, moved by fellowship and deceit, makes a tragic oath by which he is compelled to kill his own beloved, Amalia – these form the obvious bridge between Schiller's Sturm und Drang melodrama and Shakespeare's *Othello* with his Moor, an epithet, a description, which serves in the play – even in the mouth of Desdemona – as a kind of surname.

Saksahansky made a number of serious cuts in the play, including the omission of Karl's terrible and decisive deed – the command to burn down a city in order to free one of his companions from the gallows. Absolving his hero from the crimes with which Schiller had deliberately endowed him, Saksahansky also deprived him of Schiller's Hamletesque scenes of hesitation and nostalgic desire for an impossible return to innocence. Saksahansky's Karl remains an untainted hero. All of act three, with the attempted rape of Amalia, and Karl's growing recognition of his damned situation, were excised. Act IV, too, was gutted, the majority of the scenes removed, which included Karl's return, in disguise, to his ancestral home, and his slow discovery of the evil wrought by his brother.

Thus, Saksahansky simplified the plot, streamlined the number of characters and the complexity of Schiller's checkered vision of his characters, transforming *The Robbers* into melodrama with its fixed and opposing polarities. Later Soviet interpreters explained that this production transformed Schiller's play into a call for struggle against tyrants with its underlying ideals of equality and freedom. In truth, it seems to have been a damning critique of a distorted, false society which destroys its best men and prevents the triumph of love, honour, and decency. Saksahansky's vision of political reality in October 1918 could not be more unambiguous – nor was it so very far from the romance of Kurbas's *Romeo and Juliet*, in the works at the same time and, like the Schiller play, concerned with innocence destroyed by society. But a widely appreciated political reading of Saksahansky's production of Schiller was hampered by his long association with comic roles and with the ethnographic-populist theatre as a whole. His tragic roles few, Saksahansky as the villainous, ambitious brother, Franz, was not very successful. He was criticized by some for turning the character into a social type, for losing any sense of irony, and, simply, for not being very demonic.[6] The character actor who loved being loved by his audience may have found it difficult to try to make them hate him as a villain.

Despite the decidedly mixed success, Saksahansky was lauded, as were other directors at that time, for attempting to broaden and 'Europeanize' the Ukrainian repertoire. In 1918 this seemed like a necessary step in the move to make Ukrainian theatre the equal of its Western European counterparts. Saksahansky's next

production was to be Schiller's *William Tell*, another play in which social struggle is formulated as melodramatic action, and which concludes with the triumph of the *narod* – the people. It was to be followed by a cycle of Schiller plays but civil war intervened and, despite rehearsals, the play did not reach the production stage, as some actors fled for their lives, while others, less fortunate, were forced to lay barbed wire, and sometimes their lives, at the front. Although Saksahansky did not succeed in staging any more Schiller in his career, this, his first European classic, presented him with the basic model for his interpretation of Shakespeare.

'The true performing of it': 'Authentic' Shakespeare

By 1922, political conditions had changed once again. The Ukrainian state no longer existed, the country, especially the cities, still reeled from the devastation brought about by numerous changes of government, looting, destruction, and terror. Kurbas had returned to Kyiv and had publicly launched his third company, the Berezil Artistic Association, with articles, manifestos, and much hoopla, while Saksahansky had joined the newly created touring Theatre of Maria Zankovetska (its name a tribute to the great Ukrainian actress), as the most senior of its three directors. Established in September under what Borys Romanytsky called 'catastrophic conditions,' the theatre collective attempted to manoeuver through the 'ideological labyrinth in which it was so easy to lose oneself ....' (Romanyts'kyi, 'Spohady i dumky,' 1).

The Zankovetska Theatre was created from the ashes of the former People's Theatre and with many of the same personnel. The minutes of their meetings throughout the early to mid-1920s and various extant letters reveal not only their economic and physical hardships, but also their ideological ones, as they struggled to maintain an artistic foothold in the opaque political morass. Perhaps unbeknownst to the traditionalist Saksahansky, the collective attempted to position itself not so far from the general left-wing tendencies of the Berezil. With actors of different political affiliations (or of no particularly marked ones), the collective was concerned that it was perceived by officialdom to lack political cohesiveness. By 1925 the minutes of the meetings indicate that the troupe had painstakingly come to the decision to become a theatre directed at peasants and workers, and would, accordingly, shift its repertoire from the old populist (*pobut*) drama to a new repertoire with social 'motifs' and a 'healthy revolutionary-artistic fare.' To assist them in their 'cultural work' of Marxist self-education, they ordered books, journals and other materials. Among the first items of the day was the decision to create a 'translation bureau' to help them broaden their repertoire. Following the successful example of the Berezil, they intended to develop the plasticity of their movements by learning fencing (Protokol, 22 September 1924,

Katerynoslav, 10). It was, doubtless, the introduction of such necessary survival tactics which finally resulted in some official support by way of granting the company the title of a 'state' theatre (their financial support did not improve significantly until about 1929).[7]

Although Saksahansky had been formally associated with this theatre since its inception, in fact he continued to maintain an independent career as an actor and had little actual contact with the *zankivchany* (as the members of that theatre were called), as their minutes reveal. By 1925 he must have been a bit of a liability, since he was now branded a 'bourgeois nationalist.' Against the tide, he continued his opposition to avant-garde theatre and its repertoire, stubbornly holding to his belief that the ethnographic theatre was the only possible one for Ukrainians. Barred from extensive runs in the main venues of Kyiv and Kharkiv, his performances were limited to three nights only by the Central Committee, which, by regulating the ethnographic theatre, hoped to speed up its demise and thereby to promote a revolutionary theatre. When he did appear on stage, even when he played in unprepossessing venues and during snowstorms, Saksahansky continued to attract full houses.[8]

After inviting Konstantin Stanislavky to direct the first Ukrainian production of *Hamlet* and being coldly rejected by him,[9] the Zankovetska ensemble turned to Saksahansky, the dean of Ukrainian actors, who, with his reputation, could also be counted on to bring in a large audience and thus some revenue. While continuing to appear with other, inferior companies, in the summer of 1925 Saksahansky agreed to prepare what would be his last directorial work for the Zankovetska ensemble, *Othello* (Kulyk 16). In extending his invitation and by way of encouragement, Borys Romanytsky wrote to Saksahansky that they would put the play on 'as it should be: we'll sew costumes and we'll make new decorations' (cited in B. Tobilevych 262). In contrast to the austerity of the avant-garde revolutionary theatre, then, this was to be a spectacle in the old style with gorgeous costumes and grand sets.

Saksahansky brought to this, his last production, both the fruit of his four decades of experience and thought about theatre art, and a directing style essentially unchanged since the nineteenth century (Mar'ianenko, 'Moie zhyttia – moia pratsia (pershi frahmenty),' 38). Now in his late sixties, Saksahansky joined the troupe briefly in the fall, when he gathered the actors outside the theatre at a table to read the text and talk about the play.[10] Privately he had acted the part of Othello in front of his siblings, but he had never had the opportunity to play that role on the stage; by 1925 he was too old (Sofiia Tobilevych, 'Frahmenty,' 22). When he met with the actors, he began by telling the collective about the great performers of the past and explaining their interpretations of their roles. Beginning with 'biographies' of the heroes, he worked toward delineating social types. Direct and

frank, making no extravagant claims nor proclaiming any radical manifestos, Saksahansky simply described the characters both from within and from without. His mise-en-scène was equally simple; the gestures he suggested were to emerge from the 'logic of the type' (Romanyts'kyi, 'Spohady pro Panasa,' 39–40). Although he insisted on textual accuracy, he did not, however, spend much time with the actors, joining them only sporadically rather than remaining with them throughout the rehearsal process. This was in keeping with his own method of preparing for a role 'at home,' and may, incidentally, explain why Saksahansky was such a quarrelsome actor-manager; he gave himself little opportunity to develop a team spirit.

Criticizing mass spectacles, the new forms and methods, and the agitational plays of revolutionary content, as well as modernist plays, Saksahansky asserted that 'the better theatre artists' gave youth both world classics and their own Ukrainian classics. Such directors 'carried to the *narod* (the people) their high art and culture, and were met with sympathy thanks to their democratic directions and humanism' (B. Tobilevych 257). Only 'nihilistic' youth, he claimed, opposed realism and the classics, while they cunningly but falsely claimed to support 'proletarian' art. 'The art of the stage is a mighty engine of culture. It moves the culture of humanity forward. It is that aspect of art which we serve with love, because it teaches and cultivates people, it awakens new thoughts, it poses important social problems and ideals, which are needed for the upbringing of the masses.' The Soviet theatre's aim was to 'influence the spectator, to bring him up, to raise his level of culture and to deepen his class awareness'; the Soviet theatre constituted a 'true school' (Saksahans'kyi, *Moia robota*, 12).

For Saksahansky, the greatness of *Othello*, as with all of Shakespeare, lay in its provision of an 'extraordinary technique for the artist' (cited in B. Tobilevych 265). Whereas Les Kurbas stressed the construction of the classic and its effect on audience reception, Saksahansky emphasized the text as a vehicle for the star actor. Similarly, in his reminiscences, Borys Romanytsky (the romantic lead cast as Othello in Saksahansky's production), confirmed that the great interest of the play lay in the exploration of emotion, the growth of passion and its great tension, which had a great ability to move audiences (Romanyts'kyi, 'Moia robota nad obrazom Otello,' 3).

One of the main sources for a recreation of Saksahansky's *Othello* is the unpublished notebook of actor Les Oles, entitled 'Directing on the Ukrainian Stage' (Rezhysura na ukrains'kii stseni), a large portion of which is a memorial recreation of Sakshansky's first meeting with the actors and his presentation to them of his interpretation of the leitmotif of the play, as well as an explication of the central roles. While Oles, who played Roderigo, cautions that his recollections cannot be trusted absolutely, his views are corroborated by the memoirs of other

actors. Unfortunately, where Oles's work is needed most – a complete reconstruction of the staging of the play – is where he abandons the task as too detailed for all but the specialist. He turns his attention, instead, to the interpretation of the characters themselves, as unfolded by Saksahansky to the eager group of actors sitting around the table and hanging on his every word (Oles' 60).

Like Kurbas's first Shakespearean production, so Saksahansky's first and only Shakespeare served as an autoethnographic text. In his preamble to the discussion of the play, Saksahansky had mourned the pathogenesis of the Ukrainian theatre in tsarist times, the limits placed upon actors' dreams, and the resulting condescension still faced by a Ukrainian theatre, which for many continued to be identified only as a theatre of 'happy khokhols' (a derogatory term for Ukrainians), who danced the hopak, drank whiskey, and ate kovbasa (sausage). This is why, Saksahansky observed, it would be much more difficult for Ukrainians to play Shakespeare than for any other collective, including even the weakest of the Russians (cited in Oles' 61): 'Inasmuch as in his creativity W. Shakespeare is sincere and true, when we don't understand this, we won't comprehend this, it will be difficult for us to act. The actor must thoroughly master his feelings, so that he will be able within a short time to switch from being a 'shepherd' to a passionate Othello at the demand of the director. That is an actor. Suit the word to the action, the action to the word ... The truth of feelings, authentic movements, gestures, facial expressions, the complete transformation of the actor in the role – this is the guarantor of success' (cited in Oles' 61–2).

As may be seen, Saksahansky slipped easily from Shakespeare's truth to nature to the actor's truthfulness acquired when he takes on the author's authority by *feeling* what he ought to. Yet these feelings must also be controlled and reined in so that the actor can become an instrument, transformed by and at the will of the director. The authority of the director is thus circuitously conflated with that of the author, in the process leaving to the actor the uncontested sphere of emotions. Indeed, if Kurbas's 1924 *Macbeth* was restrained, austere, and discontinuous, Saksahansky's 1925 *Othello* was an emotional, passionate narrative focusing on three main characters. In preferring to privilege illusion, actor, character, voice, and author over signification, ensemble, mass scenes, and theme, Saksahansky challenged modernist Shakespeare and the then prevailing official attitudes toward the individual and the masses. If he insisted on the unity of the production, it was a nineteenth-century unity, which was concentric, emanating from the star actor in the group.

Saksahansky needed to reach back no farther than his own production of Schiller's *The Robbers* for an interpretive through-line. Indeed, the basic approach to the play was facilitated by the fact that he was working with the same three main actors, who were essentially typecast ethnographic-heroic-romantic actors. Romanytsky, who had played Karl von Moor, became the Moor, Othello; Varvara

Liubart, who had played Amalia, now took on the role of Desdemona; and Vasyl Yaremenko, who played the villainous Spiegelberger, became Iago.

Despite later Soviet claims, the lion's share of day-to-day directing must have been taken over by Romanytsky, the assistant director, who, having worked with the elder actor before, and, certainly from the Schiller production, knew the effects which he was after. Saksahansky continued to perform elsewhere throughout the fall of 1925.[11] Saksahansky's mode, one which he himself had followed in creating his own masterliness as an actor, was to work through mimicry. He showed actors what to do rather than, as Kurbas, inviting the actors themselves to reach through a series of discoveries (especially in mimo-dramas) to the creation of character. Although he rehearsed with the text beside him, Saksahansky's astonishing memory apparently permitted him to retain the whole play in his head (Sofiia Tobilevych 17). It was a gift which in itself helped him retain his ascendancy over many other actors.

Rehearsals for *Othello* began in the fall but the premiere was delayed until the winter because Romanytsky had contacted typhoid fever and pneumonia. Four months after the first reading, the play was finally produced on 6 February 1926 in Katerynoslav (Dnipropetrovsk). Saksahansky did not attend the premiere (perhaps because of illness, as Vsevolod Chahovets' suggests, 65), nor did he hear anything of the production. On 1 March 1926 he wrote to a friend to say that he had just picked up a copy of the poster and wondered how things had gone. No doubt, he mused, it was a disaster, because no one bothered to write to him about the production (Saksahans'kyi, Letter to D.U. Iavornyts'kyi).[12]

'A local habitation and a name': *Othello* and the Ethnographic Theatre

Writing in the monthly journal *Star* (*Zoria*), an anonymous reviewer described the excitement which this production had generated. The theatre hall was packed and the audience abuzz, primed by advertisements for the first Shakespeare play ever to be produced in Katerynoslav and, moreover, directed by the famous Panas Saksahansky. Full of local pride, the reviewer explained, 'The production of this wonderful tragedy of Shakespeare is a significant event in the history of the Ukrainian theatre and it is even more pleasant that it – this tragedy – was staged here in the provinces, in a theatre which has very few material means for a production ... And what about the capital city – in its rush for doubtful "new art," has it presented anything new and useful to the Ukrainian theatre?' (Hliadach [Spectator] 28).

Focused on the novelty and excitement of a classical play directed by the renowned Saksahansky in his (the reviewer's) home town, 'Spectator' provided little sense of the production, other than obliquely to suggest the unfortunate phys-

ical inadequacies of the stage. As had Kurbas in his preparation for the 1920 *Macbeth*, so 'Spectator' centred on the foundational historical moment, the inscription of a world classic into the halls of Ukrainian theatre tradition, on the conflation of local with national identity and pride. If the capital city bred doubtful and ephemeral art of little use to a national theatre, the periphery could offer a more stable and more permanent source of value; moreover, its achievement would link it to world traditions.

Touring other cities with the production, the Zankovetska ensemble was greeted by similar outbursts of enthusiasm in the press, which gave little indication of any penetrating consideration of the director's interpretation. If the premiere in Katerynoslav was, according to 'Spectator,' a 'concert' version of the play, subsequent cities toured apparently saw lush costumes and props. (So claimed some of the reviewers, perhaps as a public relations ploy to encourage audiences to attend the performance; extant photos, however, suggest the continuing poverty of the company.) The reviewers, however, never mentioned the period in which Saksahansky set the play nor any other details about the production except for two facts: they never failed to emphasize the coming-of-age of the Ukrainian theatre and language with this Shakespeare play; and they focused on the star actors. Thus, 'V. M-sh,' writing in *Worker* (*Rabochyi*) in Kherson:

> One of the best works of the English genius – the tragedy of the Venetian Moor – has for many centuries agitated millions of hearts of various nations ... The Ukrainian theatre in staging classics breaks down the erroneous view that, supposedly, the Ukrainian language is more suitable to some hopak-whiskey-swigging miller than to the mouth of the beautiful Desdemona.
>
> The Zankovetska theatre resurrected a play from the dusty archives of translators and presented it on stage. There was a lot of originality in the staging and in the highly-artistic acting of the players. The luxurious costumes, impeccable wigs, makeup, decorations – gave the play a lovely artistic staging ... Romanytsky played thrillingly. A little uneven in the first exchange, he ever more unfurled into the strong and finely delineated figure of Othello ... Especially beautiful and luminous was Desdemona/Liubart. Her sincerity, pleasant voice, beautiful countenance – these are the givens of Desdemona. Liubart has these, and so the image of the poetic Venetian turned out charmingly. Employing a juicy variety of 'disguises,' Yaremenko lightly and effortlessly created a vivid image of the ensign Iago. Among the other artists especially noteworthy were Polovko (Emilia), Oles (Roderigo), Slyva (Cassio) ... One of the great achievements of the company is the fact that they played without a prompter. ('M-sh' 4)

(The latter comment about the prompter needs some clarification: from 1923, the prompter had been abolished as a 'class enemy.')[13]

While there is little here to provide us with a clear sense of the production, evidently the major effect of the play was achieved by the delineation of the characters, the primacy of which Saksahansky had insisted upon. Valerian Revutsky, who witnessed this generally realistic production, recalled that Desdemona was an exceptionally gentle heroine, while Othello was a gullible hero destroyed by apparent betrayal. Although reviewers 'highly valued' the performance of Desdemona/Liubart, Revutsky characterized her acting as 'lyrical' rather than truly dramatic (Revutsky, Letter, 3 December 1992).

Yuri Dold, writing in the Russian-language newspaper *Star* (*Zvezda*), similarly focused on character. Describing the play as a 'full bouquet of people of different dispositions, strengths, temperaments, and so forth, beginning with the most heroic and the most pure and ending with the most negative and frightening types, like Iago,' Dold centred on the three main figures: Othello/Romanytsky, who 'exchanged his loving passion for an unrestrained tide of rage,' Desdemona/Liubart, who embodied 'innocence and womanly tenderness,' and Iago, the most difficult role of all but 'masterly formulated' by Yaremenko and most loudly and warmly applauded by the audience (Dol'd 4).

Like 'Spectator,' Dold also judged the production on its use value. In this respect, it passed the 'Shakespeare test.' Dold attested to the company's worth by citing this first production of *Othello* in Ukrainian. The tragedy 'demands of the artist not only a knowledge of the role, but a good and thoughtful understanding of the type which he produced.' Thus, according to Dold, the production directly refuted a certain 'Mykola M.,' writing in a recent issue of *Art and Physical Education* (*Iskusstvo i fizkultura*) who had criticized the ensemble for not being as good as others. Shakespeare was the litmus test of artistic maturity.

If the reviewers paid little attention to any nuances of or innovations in Saksahansky's interpretation of the play, they were consistent in their response to the emotional effect of the play, produced by actors playing characters resembling, in their basic traits, stereotypes of the melodramatic and ethnographic-*pobut* school. Romanytsky identified his first and main goal as 'activating the spectator,' that is, 'moving the hearts of the people' (Romanyts'kyi, 'Moia robota nad obrazom,' 3). This was only possible to achieve, suggested Saksahansky, when the actor sincerely felt his part. 'Then the spectator will join with you, will begin to live through you in your actions and your feelings' (B. Tobilevych 243). Saksahansky urged that 'the strength of the creative idea must be directed into the revelation of those great feelings that Shakespeare invested in the image of Othello. The author gave his hero a great heart, a passionate desire, a physical strength, a beauty of soul, a princely bearing, the wisdom of a general, and a poetic inspiration ...' (cited in Oles' 68).

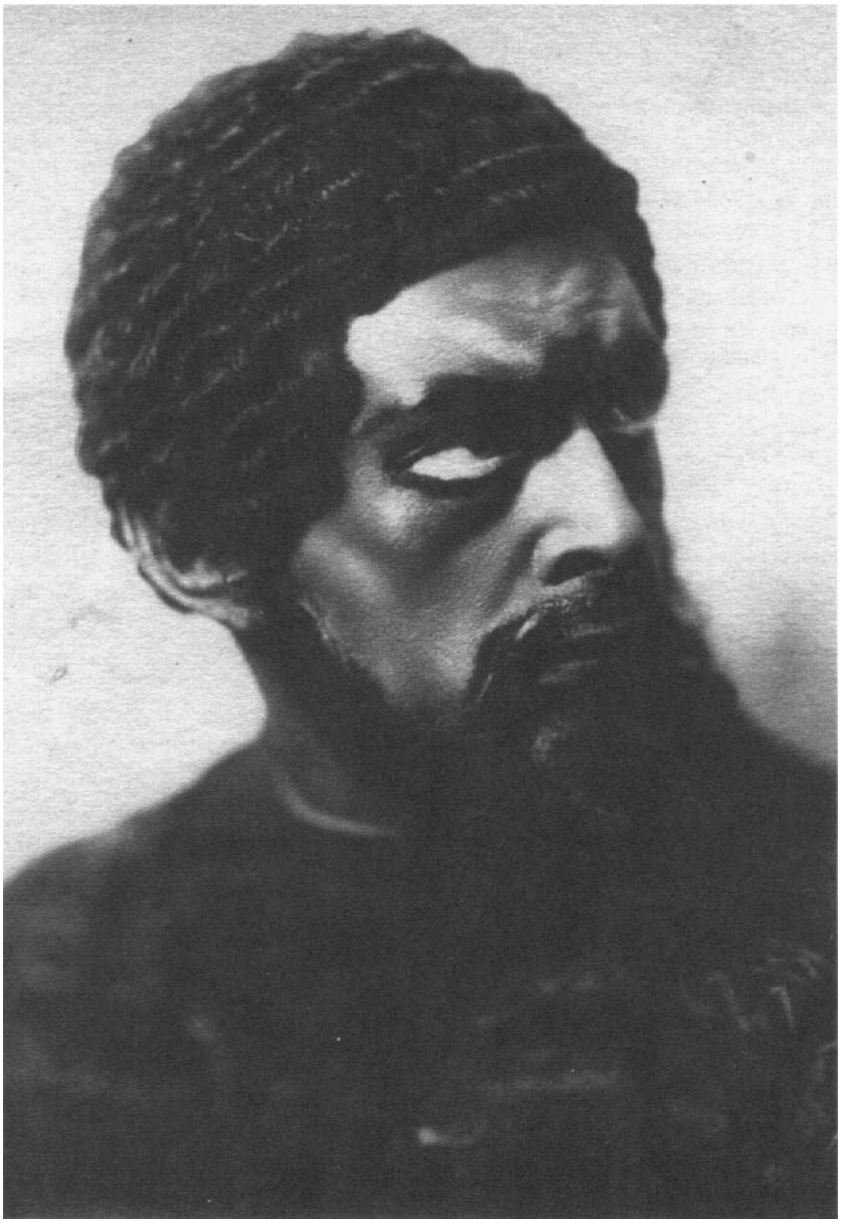
Shakespeare's kinship with Ukrainians and his instant acceptance by the audiences of Katerynoslav, Kherson, Vinnytsia, and other cities was ensured by the

familiar emotional effect which the play evoked and by the types underlying the characters with which the audiences were already (if often unconsciously) familiar. Unlike Kurbas, then, who used *Macbeth* to undermine audience's familiarity with Ivan Marianenko as hitherto heroic-romantic lead, and thus to challenge and question ideas about character and role, Saksahansky intuitively played on confirming the identity of actor and role, of character and local traditions. Othello was interchangeable with Karl von Moor and with dozens of nineteenth-century Ukrainian dramatic heroes. Evidence of this smooth process of domestication is also found in the fact that, remarkably, not one critic mentions that Othello is black. Shakespeare by Saksahansky was familiar, comprehensible, immediately accessible, and, in that sense, democratic – of the *narod.*

Saksahansky built his interpretation upon the idea of the play as a tragedy of love, deception, and fate, not of jealousy. Here, too, local tradition assisted in Shakespeare's domestication. As Natalia Chechel has astutely observed, the popularity of *Othello* on the Ukrainian stage also stemmed from its plot, which conforms to an old theme of the Ukrainian nineteenth-century drama and poetry: the tragic marriage of unequal or incompatible partners (Chechel', *Ukrains'ke teatral'ne vidrodzhennia,* 115). Perhaps for this reason, Saksahansky regarded the plot as 'thin' and located the play's greatness in its opportunities for showing off the actor. The question was how to reveal the broad spectrum of Othello's complex emotions.

Saksahansky insisted that Othello's dominant characteristic was love. 'Othello shouldn't be played as a jealous man; this would be an actor's mistake ... Othello is not a jealous man; he is passionately loving in the extreme. His love for Desdemona is stronger, more passionate than the love of Romeo for Juliet. Romeo loves Juliet with a pure, young heart. Othello loves Desdemona with a steadfast mind and heart, loves her as a man filled with the desire of an African temperament' (cited in Oles' 68). Resorting to type in delineating character – the passionate, mature African – Saksahansky's Othello is also built on the simple binaries of earlier plays. As he put it, 'If in the first part of the play Othello revealed his great feelings of love for Desdemona, if he sang a song of love, then, in the second part, Othello reveals his great feelings of human suffering, bitterly affronted by the besmirching of his love, by the loss of faith in what is miraculous, ideal, holy; and when Othello believes that he has been soiled, betrayed, and that the meaning of life has been lost for him, he swears to heaven an oath to revenge himself for the violation of honour, love, and feeling' (cited in Oles' 69).

Indeed, Romanytsky, who played heroic-romantic roles his whole life, had most difficulty with the variety of Othello's emotions. Separating these out into recognizable polarities, he began to master the role as consisting of 'love and friendship; pleasure and disillusionment; clear reason and mad passion; boundless



Othello (Borys Romanytsky). (SMTMCA 22493)

trust and unchecked jealousy; severity and tenderness; and hot tears, the groans of suffering and despair; and the whispers of revenge' (Romanyts'kyi, 'Moia robota nad obrazom,' 5).

Saksahansky imagined Othello as a frank, direct, but also gullible person possessed of a 'soldier's soul,' not that of a 'cold-blooded killer.' He insisted that Desdemona was killed by a harsh judge, not a murderer, but as 'a sacrifice to heaven for the earthly sin of his treacherous wife. But when he finds out that he has killed his wife because of Iago's false slander, then his sufferings are worthy of sympathy, not of condemnation. Othello calls himself an honourable killer ... The actor must remember this. Please draw your attention to the last words of Othello, when he turns to Lodovico and the others present ...' (cited in Oles' 70).

Romanytsky followed the director's advice in interpreting Othello 'as an honourable person, a person of great, deep heart, of hot blood and a trusting nature. He falls low and horribly, [descending] to the most unbelievable human passions – he murders his wife ... But, basically, with this murder, Othello doesn't carry out revenge, but [rather] a lawful and unavoidable execution, which he, as a faithful son of the views of his age, had to carry out' in order to punish falsehood and betrayal (Romanyts'kyi, 'Moia robota nad obrazom,' 3). The real danger in playing Othello, Saksahansky saw, was in overplaying the emotion: 'The actor who must play Othello should very carefully calculate his strength, and not get too carried away by the toxin of jealousies, shouldn't force his throat, nor frighten the spectator with shouting'; instead, he should so husband his strength that he should have enough energy to 'play out two performances, even if the plays were performed every day for a decade' (cited in Oles' 70). Restrained emotion, then, was the key, Saksahansky advised, citing Hamlet's directions to the players.

Varvara Liubart, who in *The Robbers* had played the unswervingly loyal Amalia murdered by her beloved, repeated her image of a gentle, tender, pure victim. Saksahansky urged Liubart to 'transform herself completely into the image' and reveal Desdemona as possessing 'the finest gentle feelings of the human soul.' He had cautioned that 'the least lack of caution, any vulgar touch to this tapestry, will destroy the little connecting threads of emotions and [then] the work will collapse, as the butterfly dies when dust is beaten from it. Desdemona resembles a butterfly in which children take pleasure in the early warm spring, following it in its flight, running after it, catching it with special delight ... From his first encounter with Desdemona, from the very first moment, the spectator must only experience feelings that are filled with purity. Desdemona must charm with her tenderness, with her youthful beauty, with her great mind and her courage. Not every girl, not even a well-brought-up one, would find fortitude in herself to speak so boldly and wisely in front of the senate, her father, and the servants, about her feelings, responsibilities, and obligations ...' Saksahansky advised Liubart to, 'above all ...

find and develop in herself these internal qualities that would breathe forth boundless love, tenderness to her husband, so that these feelings of love would overflow into the audience into thousands of rivulets, filling the hearts of those girls and women who come to watch the performance of *Othello*; in turn, they would leave the theatre full only of the wish to love purely, devotedly, boundlessly, and sincerely, just as Desdemona loved the Moor. Shakespeare wanted this; I want this; this must be desired and attempted by the actress' (cited in Oles' 62–3).

As the idealized romantic heroine, gentle, loyal, and devoted, Desdemona-Amalia resembled the female characters of Saksahansky's favourite playwright, his brother Karpenko-Kary. Like Sophia in *Who Is Guilty?* (*Khto vynen?*), she is the pristine figure who, despite her unconditional love for her husband, is nonetheless caught in a web of deceit and brought to destruction.

For Saksahansky, Desdemona, Ophelia, and Cordelia were 'three sisters,' not only in their modesty and gentleness but also in their relationship to their fathers. Saksahansky urged Liubart to maintain a balance between respect for her father and love for Othello. When, at rehearsals, Liubart emphasized the passion she felt for the Moor, Saksahansky corrected her, and suggested the 'through-line' of her monologue in the senate should be 'a feeling of contrition and suffering because she offended her old father, whom she boundlessly loved and respected' (Kordiani and Mel'nychuk-Luchko 44). Saksahansky seemed to be casting Liubart/Desdemona into the mould of the good, dutiful daughter of nineteenth-century Ukrainian melodrama, who attempted to placate an unconvinced parent in the face of a disastrous marital decision.

Approaching the role of Desdemona for the last time in 1939, after 150 performances, Liubart wrote:

> Understanding and feeling Desdemona as exclusively a lyrical role, I attempted not only to live through the whole depth of her feelings internally, but also to underscore all this within the external frame of the role. She does not have various movements, various notes in her voice, does not have a countenance twisted by suffering. The fine plasticity of movements somewhat reflects the serenity of her nature, but in this peace beats the dammed up riches of her feelings, carved not sharply and externally, but deeply and internally. Desdemona deeply loves Othello with all the strength of her beautiful and rich being, with all the strength of her quick and sharp mind ... For her, this is all so straightforward and comprehensible, because she is straightforwardly true. This is why, without any affectation, but movingly and quietly, she decides on such a great step for a woman of that time. With her own free will and against her father's will, she follows her beloved and changes her life ... the leitmotif of this role must be all-embracing love, gentleness, together with a naive comprehension of everything evil. In addition to deep feelings, Desdemona is straightforwardly

playful, witty, talented. All of these qualities must be concentrated in the role of Desdemona.' (Liubart 7–8)

While Liubart's vision of an idealized Desdemona apparently remained gentle and unchanged from 1925 to 1939, by contrast, Romanytsky, also writing on the eve of war and in the well-entrenched circumstances of the Stalinist period, speculates more chillingly about the relationship of the play to his society and its women: 'The Soviet spectator, from the point of view of our Soviet life, from the point of view of the relationships of Soviet marriage, should ponder this tragic history of the unfortunate Moor' (Romanyts'kyi, 'Moia robota nad obrazom Otello,' 3). Saksahansky's nostalgic vision of domestic relationships, of purity and loyalty in love, as embodied by his actors in the mid 1920s, seem to have given way – at least in Romanytsky's vision, to cynicism. The effects of the multitude of Stalinist-period *donosy* (denunciations) of neighbours, friends, spouses, of charges of betrayal of the goals of the revolution, made belief in friendship, love, and community difficult to sustain. Romanytsky's avoidance of the trite phrases of Soviet optimism in his published comments about a play so centrally concerned with deceit, betrayal, spying, and mistrust are surprisingly candid.

If Saksahansky insisted upon the spiritual idealization of the two main characters, he imagined Iago as possessing an enormous ego and a complex personality; he refers to him as a sort of *Übermensch* not too distant from Richard III (Saksahans'kyi, 'Kharakterystyka'):

Iago – this role demands an actor with a great masterliness. Iago is an elastic wonder. Notice the line of his behaviour; he does not rest even for a moment. He is always active, in action. His thoughts flow from an unstoppable source, and whatever he does, Iago does with especial passion, with pain, with self-laceration, with a sadistic tension, with the nuanced evil of the politician, with covetousness, with envy, and with tens of other vicious passions, which flow through the souls of the low. What the actor must avoid in his work on the role of Iago: he should not strive to show the spectator that Iago is base; that is unnecessary. Iago's whole behaviour will, in itself, tell the actor his tasks, how to transform himself into the role so that the feelings and thoughts of Iago will live in him and thorough him, be intimate with him, trouble him and torture him. Then the work of the actor will be crowned with creative success. W. Shakespeare gave a lot to the actor and when this 'all' can be grasped by the actor, can be mastered and ruled and truthfully transmitted to the other side of the stage, the role of Iago will be on the proper level, the actor will be in the focus of interest. Don't try to find some particular, assigned line in the role for Iago. This can only restrict the field of action. Iago is not a hero, not a lover, not a simpleton, not a raisonneur, not a comedian, not a tragedian. Iago is both a simpleton and a hero, and

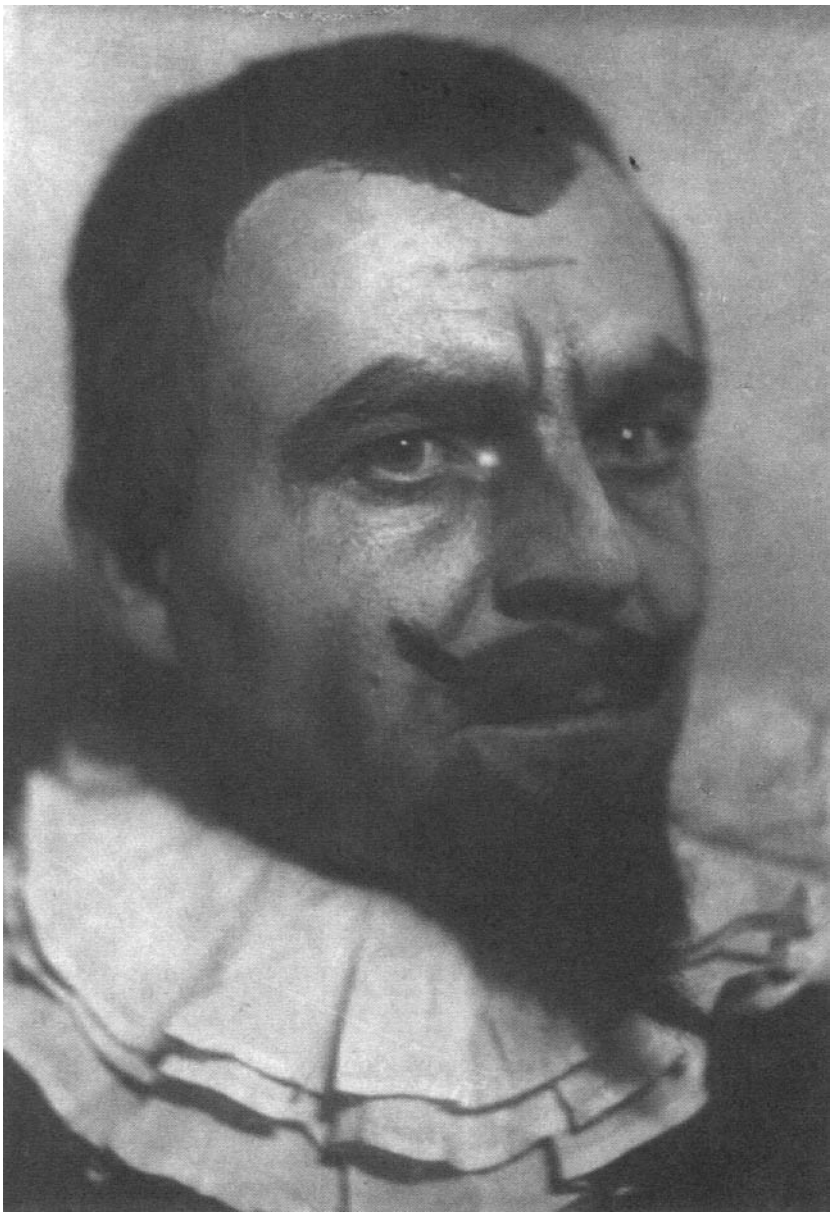
Desdemona (Varvara Liubart), 1939? (SMTMCA 22494)

> a raisonneur, and a lover, taken all together. The issue is not on which plane the actor plays this role. The main thing is truly to understand Shakespeare and masterly to carry out those tasks which the great author gave to this role. (cited in Oles' 64–5)

In explaining his idea of the role, Vasyl Yaremenko commented that 'Shakespeare cannot be played using only external methods (as we often do in other plays), this would only be caricature. In the Shakespearean role one must absolutely recreate oneself, tame oneself to the role, but not the opposite; only in such a way will the role come alive and be interesting' (Iaremenko, 'Robota,' 3). Like Romanytsky, Yaremenko voiced a concern about conveying the complexity of his character. Saksahansky drew the actor's attention to two motives, sexual jealousy over Emilia and, second, professional envy of Cassio. These, he argued, formed only the first foundation to which Iago would later affix a multitude of threads. 'The canvas must be properly stretched, and then learn how to embroider the patterns in the process of the work' (Oles' 66–7).

Of the over 200 roles he had played by 1939, Iago was, Yaremenko claimed, the most complicated. Criticized in 1926 for simplifying Iago, not only in the interpretation of his inner but also his external self (including make-up), Yaremenko was faulted for presenting the audience with too overt a portrait of his ego, the smirk revealing rather than hiding the Janus-faced character of Shakespeare (Kulyk 17). Others critiqued Yaremenko for elements of the *pobut* drama in his interpretation, especially in the vulgarity and earthiness, which also found their way into the depiction of Emilia. The other actors similarly reverted to familiar social and national types. Cassio was played as an educated, worldly officer of aristocratic manner, who, like such types in Ukrainian populist theatre, lived a kind of double life: admiring honour and praising women in his professional life, he was deceitful in his sexual relations. The object of his affection, Bianca, was also played as another recognizable stereotype – the loose and untrustworthy gypsy (B. Tobilevych 265).

Like Romanytsky and Liubart, Yaremenko went on to play this same role for over 200 performances and two new redactions by other directors, Ivan Chabanenko (1932) and Viktor Kharchenko (1936). Where Saksahansky imagined Othello as simple and gullible, after 1934 official interpretations increasingly insisted on emphasizing Othello's nobility. Thus, from a straightforward man of soldierly simplicity in Saksahansky's production, Othello became a person of high culture, a master tactician and strategist. 'This is not a barbarian, but a person of great intellect, an idealist, who doesn't have a grasp of people, but believes in their goodness, loves them, and passionately seeks good in others.' Othello's murder of Desdemona was not the result of jealousy or even doubt, but rather the effect of 'exaggerated trust and idealization' (cited in Mel'nychuk-Luchko 176). The play



Iago (Vasyl Yaremenko). (SMTMCA 11631)

Emilia (A. Frazenko?) and Iago (Vasyl Yaremenko), 1939? (SMTMCA 11633)

was not a 'primitive treatment of jealousy,' but a 'deeply humanistic text' (Kordiani and Mel'nychuk-Luchko 45). In other words, Othello became the new Soviet man, attempting to persuade and teach new goals and values to a recalcitrant and decadent society. This newly emphasized idealization helped circumvent charges that the play was really about individuals and their personal relationships, a narrowly individualistic topic supposedly extirpated from the Soviet repertoire and replaced by socially meaningful works.

'They do speak our language': Extending the Authority of the Director

If the premiere of *Othello* had taken place off the beaten cultural path and seemed little remarked upon even by Saksahansky, then by the 1930s it was recast as his great oeuvre and the proper way of staging Shakespeare. Shunned in the 1920s, in the 1930s and beyond Saksahansky was lauded as a great master who had remained true to his *narod* and its traditions of realism (Iaremenko, '35 rokiv,' 1); he had been (it was claimed) consistently critical of the West, its theories, its capitalism, its liberalism; moreover, he had never committed the folly of severing cultural ties with the fraternal republic to the north (Luchko 4; Martych 272–3). Upon his seventy-fifth birthday in 1934, Saksahansky was greeted with official telegrams and a public celebration.

A significant factor in the process of mythologizing Saksahansky was the collapsing of the author-function with that of the director. Saksahansky's *Othello* acquired authority throughout the Stalinist and subsequent Soviet period not only through its filiation from the Ukrainian classical, ethnographic theatre, the theatre of the people, but also through another route, the route of translation, thereby doubly strengthening the claim to authenticity and fidelity to Shakespeare. Throughout the Soviet period, the profession of translator was a noble one and conferred much privilege and prestige. It is not surprising in the subsequent refashioning of Saksahansky's life that his hand at translating not any author, but Shakespeare himself, should be so frequently reiterated but so little examined.

Saksahansky's authorship of the translation of *Othello*, the only Shakespearean work translated by the actor-director, has never been challenged.[14] Orthodox opinion in published Soviet theatre histories glosses over this question, usually in a half-sentence, and focuses, instead on the motive for translation: the claim that Kurbas's outrageous *Macbeth* spurred Saksahansky into working on his translation of *Othello*, many monologues of which (it is claimed) he had already translated before the Revolution. Saksahansky himself is quite laconic in his references to this work of translation, something for which he was hitherto not particularly well known, although he did engage in a small number of translations in his youth (from Russian into Ukrainian), and, as an adult, translated his brother Sadovsky's memoirs (from Ukrainian into Russian). His major work, his memoirs, was worked and reworked throughout the 1920s and 1930s, when he was touring extensively. To recommence one's career as a Shakespearean translator in so unstable an existence (constantly touring and without ready access to libraries), so late in life, and with no knowledge of English is, while not impossible, highly improbable.

Two Ukrainian translations of *Othello* were already in place, one published, one not. Panteleimon Kulish produced a number of Shakespeare plays in the

nineteenth century, which were published in Western Ukraine. Among these were the *Macbeth* which Kurbas adjusted for his own needs, and *Othello.* Writing in 1939, the Soviet critic O.M. Borshchahovsky mentioned, in passing, that Saksahansky made use of Kulish's translation (Borshchahovs'kyi 143). In editing, adapting, and otherwise transforming the text (as he had earlier done with the Schiller play), Saksahansky could be said to have translated the play. Indeed, in an extant letter to D.U. Yavornytsky, he announced that he had completed a translation of *Othello*, which he had shown to a mutual friend (Saksahans'kyi, Letter, 3 April 1925). No mention is made of the source from which he was working.

There was, however, also an unpublished text of the play which might more readily have been used for Saksahansky's purpose. It was the first translation of this play into Ukrainian by the playwright and translator Marko Kropyvyntsky (who died in 1910), Saksahansky's early and significant first mentor. A friend of the family since 1862 and in many respects a role model and avid producer of plays by Karpenko-Kary (Saksahansky's eldest brother), Kropyvnytsky was also one of the first to pique Saksahansky's interest in Shakespeare. Kropyvnytsky himself had played Othello with a Russian company of actors, and had a lifelong ambition to see his translation performed in Ukrainian. Saksahansky's opinions about Shakespeare (including the plays he was interested in producing) duplicate almost exactly Kropyvnytsky's and the views and ambitions of his (Saksahansky's) two elder brothers.

Kropyvnytsky had hired Saksahansky for his first acting roles, and corresponded with him thereafter, occasionally quoting from Shakespeare in his letters. He passionately wished to see the English bard on the Ukrainian stage, but was unable to obtain the permission of the tsarist censor. Failing to do so in eastern Ukraine, in the 1890s Kropyvnytsky offered to travel to Lviv and to put on his translation of *Othello* in western Ukraine, then under Austro-Hungarian rule and subject to less stringent censorship. 'Such deep works as those of Shakespeare will never be unnecessary on any stage,' he wrote (Kropyvnyts'kyi in Shapovalova 94). Translating with a view to the stage, Kropyvnytsky also worked on *The Merchant of Venice* in 1906. The translation of *Othello,* he noted, was made necessary because the previous version, by Panteleimon Kulish, was written in a bookish, archaic Ukrainian. Not knowing any other languages, Kropyvnytsky worked from the Russian translation of P.I. Weinberg, which (as the Ukrainian scholar M.S. Shapovalova observes), not only misses the complexity of the original, but also often descends into banality and, moreover, completely misunderstands and mistranslates many phrases (Shapovalova 95). Kropyvnytsky followed the Russian text in all its errors, but continued to refine his efforts up until at least 1906.

In their overviews of Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare, Soviet Shakespeareans altogether fail to mention Saksahansky's translation. This omission, coupled

with contradictory evidence in published references, throws further doubt on the originality of Saksahansky's work. For example, in his review of the 1926 production, 'V. M-sh' spoke of the play as being translated 'a long time ago,' before the Revolution, and of 'the Zankovetska theatre resurrecting a play from the dusty archives of translators' ('M-sh' 4). 'Spectator' (Hliadach), however, commented that the translation of the play, by Saksahansky, was 'very good' (28). Yet, while reviewing the stage history of *Othello* in Ukraine in the program notes to the 1939 production, O. Pysarevsky (who had played Cassio in that production) makes no mention of Saksahansky's translation, and writes only of Kropyvnytsky's translation, the censor's refusal to license it in the 1890s (it was marked as 'unnecessary' and 'inaccessible and tradesman-like'), and finally of the dream fulfilled in 1926 (Pysarevs'kyi 1). Saksahansky is mentioned only as 'staging' the play. It seems likely, then, that Saksahansky, who was not a playwright or primarily a translator but had himself acted with Kropyvnytsky's troupe in the 1880s and had access to his translation (or perhaps inherited it from his mentor), adapted the play to suit his style and purpose. Under attack by the left-wing press, by advocates of the avant-garde theatre, and by the Party, Saksahansky (who, as even his greatest admirers admitted, had a tendency to self-aggrandizement) may have exaggerated his role from adaptor to translator.

If staging Shakespeare was, in fact, actually a question of authority and fidelity, then this issue of translation was by no means a minor one. Conferring upon Saksahansky the role of sole translator was another way of glorifying his achievements and, ostensibly, setting him against his polar opposite, the modernist Kurbas, who 'deformed' texts. Subsequently, Saksahansky's way of staging Shakespeare became the correct and only way to stage Shakespeare. As translator and therefore 'creator' of the text, Saksahansky himself fulfilled the author-function, replicating the intentions of the author himself. In the struggle for literary authority, for a precise delineation of a Soviet canon of correctly presented dramatic works, Saksahansky's double source of proximity to the author as director/interpreter and self-proclaimed translator provided his production with substantial reasons for its later remythologizing as a 'democratic' model of producing Shakespeare on the Soviet stage. While significant, more weighty factors contributed to this process. As the following chapter will show, the rewriting of theatre history occurred in tandem with other political events which, combined, resulted in an early rejection of avant-garde theatre, an official return to 'realism,' and a reconstructed vision of the classics.

Chapter Four

Toward Socialist Realism: Hnat Yura's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

only theory will save us!

Mikhail Semenko

Burn the proclamations, trample the decrees!

Pavlo Tychyna ('Burn')

'To the strictest decrees': The Road toward Orthodoxy

Panas Saksahansky's and Les Kurbas's Shakespeare productions represented two diametrically opposed ways of staging and interpreting the classics. The former was actor-, character-, and author-centred. The latter, foregrounding the theatrical, resembled what Charles Marowitz has called 'quantum leap Shakespeare,' which relocates the original play in a different intellectual climate (Marowitz 9). In the mid-1920s, the coexistence of two such different approaches to Shakespeare reflected the vitality and diversity of the Ukrainian theatre, but this ebullient independence was exceedingly short-lived. This chapter traces the processes by which the starburst of theatrical activity was rapidly transformed into banality and provincialism, a process during which directors lost power over their theatres and their theatrical visions, and in which there was little place for the humane or the idealistic.

Shakespeareans and other non-Slavic specialists still tend to regard 1934, the year in which the famous Soviet Writers' Congress affirmed socialist realism as the only possible method of artistic creativity, as the watershed year which ended experimentation and marked the beginning of the decline and calcification of Soviet art.[1] In fact, the Ukrainian avant-garde's battle over supremacy in culture was already lost by the late 1920s (although the grim consequences of this loss were not fully felt until the 1930s), even though hot polemical debates about the future direction of the theatre – which raged throughout the second half of the

1920s, engaging everyone from plumbers, theatre directors, to Party officials – seemed to suggest otherwise. Two of these extensive debates, in 1927 and 1929 (preceded by similar but more contained public discussions), were organized by Party officials as formal, public 'theatre disputes,' and centred generally on repertoire and method. Under particular scrutiny was the function and place of the avant-garde theatre in Soviet Ukrainian society and its relation to the masses. Unlike the situation in Russia, where polemics concerning the future of the theatre and art focused primarily on the question of formalism, in Ukraine a wider spectrum of issues was involved: the right to an independent national cultural development, Ukrainian theatre's relationship to Russian theatre and to Moscow's centrist political and cultural dictates, and Russia's attitude to the West. In a paradigmatic situation which has not changed much today, in politics and culture Ukraine was torn between East and West, any step in the direction of either subject to attack by other opposing political factions. By the end of 1927, only a decade after the October Revolution, the avant-garde theatre, under siege for its 'inaccessibility,' lost its ground to 'realistic' theatre. Imposed upon all the theatres of Ukraine as the 'correct' approach to staging plays, 'realism' had, throughout this period, undergone a variety of definitional changes, coming, finally, in the 1930s, to be defined as socialist realism and identified with, on the one hand, ethnographic and, on the other, Shakespearean drama.

If attention in earlier chapters to the interpretation and function of Shakespearean plays presented a reasonably accurate reflection of their directors' attitudes to canon, text, tradition, and contemporary culture, it is much more difficult to make such transparent and direct connections between productions and directors' intentions after 1926. Only one other Shakespearean play was produced in Ukrainian before 1934, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1927), directed by Hnat Yura (discussed below). That no other Ukrainian Shakespeare was produced does not mean that interest in Shakespeare had waned; rather, state controls and political pressures made Shakespearean drama less possible on the stage, even as 'Shakespeare' continued to be part of the public debates and as his reiterated iconic name served as shorthand for various, sometimes contradictory, ideas: at times, suggesting the proper inheritance due to the masses and hitherto denied them; at others, serving as an example of psychological or realistic theatre; and, still at others, as representing an exemplary, intellectually challenging theatre which would help raise the level of Soviet achievement in the theatre and which the Soviets hoped that their artists could both replicate and surpass.

For 'realism' to come to dominate theatrical discourse, and for it to be translated into practice, at least three factors needed to work in tandem. From above, the Party and state made early and continuing incursions upon cultural policy and artistic endeavours until the process of control was, in effect, complete by the end

of the 1920s. From below, clamouring for a 'comprehensible' theatre, were growing numbers of a new type of spectator, a semiliterate yet increasingly powerful and vocal citizen (controlled by the Party) who came to rule theatre councils, which, in turn, eventually regulated all aspects of the theatre, including repertoire, administration, and personnel. Finally, occupying the middle ground, were the theatre artists and intelligentsia who continually reinvented themselves as they struggled to survive the incomprehensible labyrinthine meanderings and recursions of state directives, which finally made it impossible to oppose socialism and realism without the mortal danger of being branded counterrevolutionaries.

To lay out the above tripartite schema, centrifugally and implicitly meshed together by the multiplication of mechanisms of control, intimidation, and coercion, is considerably to simplify each of the elements and the interactions among them. In fact, each of these constituencies experienced internal struggles and tensions over what constituted culture, for the struggle for the creation of a new cultural order proved to be as confusing, fractious, and dangerous as the attempt to change the political and economic foundations of society. Rather than reiterating the full complexities of the cultural debates,[2] this chapter will highlight only those issues which are pertinent to a discussion of the reception of the classics in the theatre, a still relatively little-studied subject. Beginning with an overview of the tensions and ambiguities found among each of the three strata of society throughout the 1920s – material little known to Shakespeareans – the chapter builds towards Hnat Yura's unusual blunder, his 1927 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

'Great ones of the city': The View from Above

To set the scene for the polemical debates which occupied the second half of the 1920s, some historical backtracking is necessary. As Ruslan Leonenko has very recently shown, within a month after the March Revolution and in an atmosphere of national euphoria, a Ukrainian theatre committee comprised of actors, directors, composers, historians, pedagogues, jurists, and others was spontaneously struck in order to create the first Ukrainian state theatre.[3] From 1917 to 1919, two basic types of theatre – one, a European-oriented, the other, populist – were consistently promoted. Government leaders at the highest level, such as Volodymyr Vynnychenko (the vice president of the Central Rada) and the general secretary of Education, Dmytro Antonovych, were among those who participated in the committee and in discussions about this, the most significant of cultural institutions. As a result, the Ukrainian theatre was, as we have already seen, able to develop in different directions, despite privations, economic chaos, and many changes of government. By 1925, however, the newly established Soviet political order achieved some stability, and cultural incursions from Moscow brought to a halt a hitherto essentially independent cultural development.

The relative stabilization of both the economy and the political scene after the tumultuous years of the period of 'war communism' led to the possibility for both more leisurely reflection and debate, and more control. An official policy of Ukrainianization, calculatedly introduced to provide communism with a broader basis of appeal and to quell and control the Ukrainian populace, resulted in the massive publication of Ukrainian books and newspapers, the opening of hundreds of new schools, and, generally, in the more extensive use of the Ukrainian language. In some quarters, including the theatre, this also led to an open reaction against revolutionary fare. In turn, Marxist political activists, critics, and theatre artists responded by decrying any attempt to turn back the clock. The battle for the spectator was seriously launched.

Unlike Les Kurbas and the theatrical avant-garde, the political elite of the Soviet state did not believe that an artistic revolution was necessarily the consequence of a political revolution, although they generally shared a belief in the functional use of culture. Since there was no sustained theory of culture to fall back on, Bolshevik policy makers and government authorities were often at odds with each other, with their expressed goals, and with the methods of achieving them. What each faction did share with the others was an absence of tolerance. One extreme viewed the classics as inspiring, universal, worth absorbing and 'reupholstering,' while the other regarded them as easily disposable cultural refuse.

The Soviet leadership was similarly divided on matters of cultural policy. The Bolsheviks, the policy makers of the early period, were members of the middle-class intelligentsia, as was Lenin, who believed in the importance of raising up the masses to the higher cultural level of the elite. Unlike Marx, Lenin envisaged the masses as objects, not authors, of cultural transformation, and thought of art and culture as purposeful, functional, yet certainly not harmless or without effect. Himself fond of Beethoven, classical paintings (which he wanted widely reproduced, replacing the images and texts of popular chapbooks), and the romantic acting style of Sarah Bernhardt, Lenin, the heir of nineteenth-century Russian 'Westernizers,' admired Germany's efficiency and its organizational and technological advances, and America's Taylorism. While giving little serious, sustained thought to culture, Lenin believed that bourgeois, prerevolutionary art was the most acceptable for the transitional period and therefore should be absorbed, not thrown out. Like 'soft-hearted Tolya' (Anatoli) Lunacharsky, his Commissar of the Enlightenment and himself a playwright, 'Lenin took it for granted that the new society would inherit both traditional Russian culture and Western bourgeois culture' (Meisner 289). Lunacharsky had argued that the 'culture of the new class is a new variant, an organic metamorphosis of the single universal culture' (Lunacharsky in Read 98). In the view of the older Bolshevik leaders, then, Soviet art should not constitute a radical break from tradition (which encompassed the achievements of Russian drama), but, rather, should form part of a continuum of

great works in which Soviet achievement would be its apogee. In this regard, it is significant, as Richard Stites has perceptively observed, that the decree preserving historical and other monuments preceded the decree of the removal of those without such interest by more than four months (Stites, 'Iconoclastic,' 16). Indeed, the only cultural project to occupy Lenin was an old-fashioned one: the creation of statues and busts to heroes of the Revolution. As Robert Weimann has suggested in another context (Weimar Germany), 'What the idea of a 'positive heritage' stood for was the elimination of (un)necessary friction and the obliteration of any (un)bridgeable rupture between Renaissance values and Leninist evaluations. Seeking to emphasize areas of identity, or at least concurrence between then and now, these positions attempted, without ever saying so, to construct tradition as a principle of orientation and control' (Weimann 183).

'Orientation' and 'identity' suggest an unproblematized view of the past as a model for the future, while 'control' more ominously alludes to the constrictions which this vague view of tradition would soon serve to underwrite. The obverse of Lenin's cultural sense of 'universality' and tradition was his ridicule of experimental art and proletarian culture, which attempted to mirror the political revolution in its forms and content, and, which, more importantly, identified itself with rupture. Yet, while Richard Stites may be correct in arguing that Lenin and his supporters' fear of 'cultural nihilism' or cultural drift made them prefer tradition, didacticism, even sentimentality rather than the individualism of the avant-garde (Stites, 'Iconoclastic,' 18), it is also true simply that Lenin gave little thought (certainly no sustained or systematic thought) to these issues and, when he did, he preferred those theories and forms of art which more closely resembled the nineteenth-century models with which he grew up. While he felt uninspired to dictate policy in cultural matters, the vacuum he left in theory and policy was rapidly but variously filled by other Bolshevik policy makers and local authorities.

The irony of the leadership's position – revolution, but not in culture – was found not only in relation to the products of culture but also in relation to their creators and their consumers, the so-called 'objects' of artists/art. Deeply distrusting the workers' ability or desire to act on behalf of their own interests, Lenin regarded the masses as a new front formed after the Revolution, a front consisting of ignorant, uncultured people, who needed to be swayed to the Revolution's cause. Lenin's cultural conservatism went hand-in-hand with his conviction that the working classes would be enlightened and elevated by their education in and contact with the great art of the past. The working class would master the past which it would treasure as a precious inheritance of previous ages; this knowledge of past monuments (verbal, musical, sculptural, visual) would help transform them as a class.

A second, equally troublesome front with which Lenin had to contend was the

independent, and therefore subversive, tendencies of the artists and intelligentsia (of which he was, of course, a part). He was entirely unsympathetic to the ideas and demands of Proletkult (which represented a centre of power outside the Party), a loose association of cultural-educational organizations founded just before the Revolution (later joined by many from the avant-garde) and dedicated to founding a new proletarian culture. In the second half of the 1920s, it came under attack for its 'errors' and for being 'artificial,' terms suggesting its expendability.

Lenin's deep distrust of both classes contributed to the already existing imperative to control all mechanisms of cultural production and discourse. Repeating catchwords rather than seriously thought-through principles, government authorities who were to implement or craft such controls were frequently incompetent and themselves internally divided. Although the road to authoritarianism was not a direct one, its general outlines are, nonetheless, apparent in retrospect. From the very beginning, the Bolsheviks were conscious of the need to control the arts, media, and language as a whole. Following the first Russian decrees on issues of property and peace on 9 November 1917, the theatres were nationalized under the Commissariat of Education. Such an early decree recognized the centrality of the theatre in the task of educating and creating a socialist society; at the same time, it attempted to circumscribe its age-old danger – the ability to sway large, public gatherings – by controlling it and, further, by closing all cabarets and coffee-house theatres, where 'enemies of the revolution' could gather (Piskun 10). Again, by comparison it is worth reiterating that, in Ukraine, the situation was more liberal, despite or because of the many changes of government, and theatres were not nationalized until 1919. The state of flux (nationalizing and denationalizing theatres) continued, however, until the USSR was firmly established some years later.

Lenin's proposal to create a revolutionary single-party state involved intrusions in all areas of life, as Christopher Read has so thoroughly demonstrated. Cultural issues were developed and controlled by the state apparatus, as well as Narkompros (the Ministry of Education) and, in the early years, by Proletkult. By 1920 most organs of control were established. These included Agitpropotdel (The Agitation and Propaganda Department) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party; Gosizdat (the state publishing house), Glavlit (censorship apparatus), and Glavrepertkom (censorship of performing arts, later including music); and Glavpolitprosvet (political education section). At the 1923 Party Congress, the Twelfth Resolution marked out the theatre as a special vehicle for mass propaganda in the struggle for communism. Opposition was suppressed in a very practical way. All right-wing, then liberal, and, finally, all non-Bolshevik socialist and anarchist newspapers were closed down; foreign newspapers were prevented from entering the country and, most important, the state bought up all newsprint. The

secret police was established on a permanent basis. In the second half of the 1920s, Party power extended further: it expanded into Ukrainian cities and began to infiltrate the countryside – as Saksahansky, who toured extensively, confirmed with his horror stories about networks of informants.

Under what has often been described as a period of liberalization, the NEP (New Economic Policy), the mechanisms of control and censorship were further extended and included the termination of the universities' autonomy and the deportation of many intellectuals. Cultural and agitational propaganda issues took on a much more prominent place in Party Congress and Conference decisions (Read 142). But control of all mechanisms of discussion was only one aspect of creating a homogeneous socialist cultural order; it was incomplete without the concomitant creation of new rituals, symbols, and playwrights who would become Soviet classics – new Shakespeares. Throughout the 1920s, the 'famine' in the Soviet repertoire continued to be felt, as critics ceaselessly reminded their readers, as if such iteration could itself magically induce the birth of a great playwright.

As the prose writer and publicist Yuri Smolych observed, it was also necessary to create a new theory, and this not only for the cognoscenti, but for the average lover of the stage too (Smolych, 'Teatral'na nauka,' 3), who, in the meantime, flocked to the theatre – or at least to certain types of theatre – and was also engaged in creating his own. Indeed, the Revolution had unleashed a widespread interest in the theatre which showed no signs of abating. In 1927 *Culture and Daily Life* (*Kultura i pobut*) claimed that there were 'minimally' 6,000 dramatic groups in Ukraine serving 12 million spectators ('Masovyi teatr' 6–7). A year later, the journal *New Art* (*Nove mystetstvo*) made even greater claims: over 70,000 people were involved in amateur theatricals throughout Ukraine, and over 5,000 people laid claim to being dramatists.[4] The hyperbolic assertions made, doubtless, to glorify the occasion (the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution and its achievements), nonetheless expressed a groundswell of interest in theatre on the one hand, and a wishfulfilment for great new Soviet playwrights on the other. But, despite all measures, slogans, and debates, the Party was unable to create great new dramatists on demand. It was, however, more successful in controlling the spectator, who was beginning to be more vocal in his demand for an art which evidently was not much supported by the Central Committee. The mounting pressure from various quarters, including from the spectators, resulted in a number of public debates which had little effect on the stated aims of Party officials; rather, the debates served to flush out opinions and to provide the illusion of free discussion. Eventually, the statements of officials made during the debates would also lead to a retrospectively formed theory of revolutionary or communist art, one which would emerge in its final form in 1934 as the official and only possible way of creating art in the Soviet Union: socialist realism.

'Sweet smoke of rhetoric': Studying the 'Object'

In the mid-1920s attention shifted to a concern with the spectator for the simple reason that, under the New Economic Policy, state subsidies had, for the most part, been withdrawn and theatres of all political stripes were forced to woo the audience. From a concern with filling the auditorium came a renewed interest in studying from a 'scientific,' systematic point of view the effect of repertoire on the spectator or 'object,' as Yuri Smolych called him. To do so, however, meant to distinguish carefully the nature, type, and formation of the spectators. Early Soviet interest in the audience and a keen awareness of the fact that the audience was by no means an indistinguishable, homogeneous group but rather an amalgam of different constituencies, precedes Western interest in this topic by about fifty years. In particular, Smolych proposed observation and analysis of 'the object's' reflexes, his/her reactions to discrete 'conventions, methods, elements of influence.' The same play should be performed exactly the same way before different constituencies (such as peasants and workers) in order to observe the effects of class. These observations, Smolych expected, would yield a 'photographic record' of the spectator. Acknowledging that Kurbas's Berezil had already undertaken exactly such work for its own purposes, Smolych suggested that all theatres should distribute questionnaires and study their results. They should also place observers in the audience to watch the reactions of spectators to dramatic different forms, episodes, and techniques (Smolych, 'Pro vyvchannia,' 4). These would be recorded with a view to uncovering specifically those conventions and methods which would most affect and thus best direct the spectator toward the goals of socialism. The idea or the hope was that a great socialist play of Shakespearean proportions could be created by merely bringing together in one work those techniques and effects identified by such scientific study and classification as producing a visible reaction in the spectator. The spectator was thus construed here as a passive object, reacting but not contributing to meaning, and therefore capable and in need of direction and guidance.

With a growing emphasis on the 'masses' (who, increasingly, came to be identified with urban workers) and on the need for theatres to be attuned to their desires and reactions, a series of changes were instituted which assured those masses influence over repertoire, that is, over genre, choice of author, content, and, ultimately, method. Representatives of the trade unions, from 1919, had been given a place on theatrical councils in Russia. Imposed upon the Ukrainian theatres in the mid-1920s, at first these were merely advisory groups, comprised of illiterate or semi-literate workers. Gaining in official authority and power throughout the period (all the while controlled by the Party), they increasingly demanded a theatre which was 'comprehensible' and 'realistic.' Even as directors and scholars devised 'scien-

tific' studies to study the 'objects'' reactions to art, those 'objects,' which insisted upon their subjectivity, were, in theory represented by controlled workers' councils. The escalation of demands 'from below' coincided with and sometimes contributed to increasing controls from above; at other times, they were in conflict with the very desires of those masses which the controls were intended to serve.

In a variant of Horace's dictum, *docere et dulcere,* so beloved by the Renaissance, the Soviets wished to create a culture for the masses which would, first, edify and, only second, entertain. Such a traditional, ethical approach to the arts, developed over the past two centuries, was the default reflex of most criticism; it also fed naturally into the new political terminology of error, heresy, and deviation. That the people should be given what was good for them was argued, at various times, by government officials, writers, and old-line and avant-garde intellectuals alike. Similarly united by a disdain for commercial culture, which sometimes embraced 'popular' culture in the sense of *narodnyi* (*Volk*) culture (that is, the ethnographic theatre), they fulminated against it, formulated various unsuccessful alternatives, and finally tried to extirpate it completely. It was decided, for example, to exclude from publication all light fiction, amusing reportage, and stories of crime and disaster, so that only pieces which would enlighten the reader (rather than simply entertain) would be available for reading (J. Brooks 163). But the tension between what Bolsheviks thought people should read at home or see in the theatres, and what they actually went to see or read was not so easily dispersed. These tensions, as well as the continuing absence of great new Soviet dramatic works, resulted in the periodic eruptions of public debates about the theatre, its directions, its repertoire, its forms. Minutes of the meetings of theatre companies, letters, memoirs, and journals attest to the attempt by directors to negotiate or even compromise in their staging practices and repertoire to meet the ever-changing demands of state apparatuses on the one hand and, on the other, of pressure from 'below,' where, urban workers continued to prefer commercial (including American movies) to revolutionary fare.

In 1925–6 the Peoples' Commissariat of Education (Narkompros) created a network of nine state theatres (the numbers later fluctuated), lowered ticket prices, made an intensive attempt to fill up the seats of the auditorium, and, generally, aimed at submitting theatrical productions to greater state policing. The Commissariat yet again raised the cry for new young directors and playwrights, on the one hand, and, on the other, urged that the ethnographic theatre needed to be disposed of once and for all (Shevchenko 97–8), a sure indication that this type of theatre continued to attract large audiences, despite or because of its familiar, old-fashioned techniques and the absence of a politically correct ideology.

In the press the theatre historian Oleksander Kysil argued that to attack the ethnographic theatre was quixotic and unnecessary, since it had long since given up

any pretensions to cultural leadership, let alone dictatorship, in theatrical matters. This theatre, Kysil noted, 'has left behind a modest, but honourable, place for itself; pseudo-academic, it is therefore safe for influencing the taste of a wider public' (Kysil', 'Novyi,' 43). There was no point in attacking psychological theatre either since, argued Kysil, it had never set down deep roots in Ukraine because its subject matter was too distant from the lives of urban workers and peasants. While easily dismissing the latter two types of theatre as harmless, Kysil nonetheless speculated that the problem with the new revolutionary theatres lay with their 'constructions,' their circus conventions and rapid tempo: all this was too much, too soon for the masses. Only further study would, with certainty, reveal the kind of theatre that the masses truly wanted. In the meantime, revolutionary theatres like the Berezil needed to be supported both financially and morally (Kysil', 'Novyi,' 43–4). Kysil's half-hearted endorsement of the Berezil theatre suggests his awareness of the tensions between the popular drive for 'realistic,' traditional, but ideologically retrograde theatre art and the (for the moment) ideologically sound but not broadly popular experimental theatre, which everyone ought to support.

Whatever Kysil's endorsements, other voices also suggested that the ethnographic theatre was alive and well and bringing in huge audiences, although the circumstances and limitations placed upon performers associated with this tradition were even more restrictive in the 1920s than in tsarist times. Thus, as the sharp debates unfurled in Kyiv and Kharkiv, the elderly Saksahansky continued to tour the provinces, attempting to eke out a living while being limited to playing a maximum of three performances in one venue, and being subject to the local censor, who was not immune to the influence of bribery.

Already at the end of 1925, just as Saksahansky's *Othello* was in preparation and still in the visible wake of the scandal of Kurbas's *Macbeth*, a simmering public debate erupted on 6 December. Although Kurbas had been named a People's Artist in August of that year – recognition of the high calibre of his achievement – his avant-garde collective was chastised for its 'inaccessibility by the masses, its sophistication, its antidemocratic stand.' For his part, Kurbas responded to critiques of the Berezil and to calls for a return to realism with his own offensive. Unhappily conceding that old bourgeois tastes die hard, Kurbas attacked the 'cultural Baal' of realism, the 'fetish' of ethnographic theatre, and the sentimental melodrama preferred by the proletariat. 'It's cheap demagoguery' to claim that left art is not comprehensible, he fumed (Kurbas, 'Z pryvodu,' 244). More, this was uncritical, unmarxist behaviour (Kurbas, 'Z pryvodu,' 241). Already in 1925, then, 'realism' became a battering ram with which to attack the experimental work of Kurbas. The honeymoon with the avant-garde theatre was over.

Without doubt, however, the frequency and virulence of attacks on Kurbas himself, as well as on the Berezil theatre, increased significantly after his produc-

tion of *Macbeth*, and he needed to protect himself and his company as best he could. This particular series of public disputes, however, resulted in conflicts not only between Kurbas and Party officials but also between Kurbas and his actors and fellow directors, including Vasyl Vasylko. Kurbas was not, however, without his supporters. The critic I. Turkeltaub deeply regretted the theatre's ties to the box office, and recognized the pressures which were being exerted upon experimental directors like Kurbas to turn back the clock. 'No step backward,' Turkeltaub insisted; the burghers are the enemies of all good things, especially in art. To adhere to their tastes is to ensure boring, dull, limited, and always reactionary plays (Turkel'taub, 'Ne piddavatys',' 2). On the whole, Kurbas and the Berezil managed to weather this particular storm, even as more intrusions into his theatrical decisions and artistic control were soon to follow.

A month after the premiere of Saksahansky's *Othello,* a national theatre conference took place in March 1926, gathering together theatre artists from all over Ukraine in Kyiv, their tempestuous meetings and contradictory ideas spilling over into the press. Shaping much of the discussion, voicing the concerns of the Party, and providing an ominous taste of the future was Yuri Ozersky (real name, Zebnytsky), a pedagogue, a high-ranking representative of Narkompros, and a political activist, who presented the leitmotif of the conference: the Party's firm resolve to 'regulate' the contemporary 'anarchy' (diversity, in another view) of the Ukrainian theatrical market, including the intent to shape and direct the spectators' emotions and interests, which had newly been 'awakened' by the theatre.

Among the many solutions to the Party's difficulties with establishing a Soviet culture was the absence in the newly created capital of Soviet Ukraine, Kharkiv, of a theatre worthy of emulation, one which was aesthetically mature and ideologically sound, and would thus shape the spectators' consciousness. As a result, Kurbas and his Berezil, regarded by the Party as the best in the country, were packed off to the easternmost part of the country and in very close proximity to Russia, while the Ivan Franko Theatre of Hnat Yura was sent, in exchange, to Kyiv. This was not only a way of ensuring that the new capital would have an excellent Ukrainian theatre, but it was also, from the point of view of Moscow, a way of controlling the Berezil's vast and growing influence, and curtailing its extensive network of theatrical activities.

While publicly declaring support for the politics of the Berezil, Ozersky advised that the theatre, responsible as it was for the education of the masses, should be only half, not a whole, step ahead of the masses. What kind of theatre did this entail? Ozersky argued that it was now time for a new, dynamic psychological theatre, one which had not been possible during the revolution when it could have been 'harmful' because it would have led to inner, not external, struggle. Theatre, further urged Ozersky, must reflect the tempo of the times but it must be under-

stood. Those genres which were not comprehensible by the masses must be eliminated. The theatre must be realistic, but not naturalistic, although some constructivist elements might be retained. He urged theatre artists to emulate the best European and Russian techniques, to raise the artistic level of their theatres, and to upgrade the skills of older actors. Now, entering a period of economic and political stabilization, he argued, no abstract politics were possible; rather theatre and cultural politics as a whole were to be focused on the single goal of raising the culture of the masses. As a first principle, he reminded his listeners, the theatres were not just intended for the 'higher intelligentsia,' but for the masses. The theatre must be more than entertainment; it must be the source of education. Ukraine was especially ready for classics like Shakespeare and for the building of the new socialist state ('Pro teatral'nu polityku' 1–2).

In this view, then, Shakespeare was recommended as accessible, transparent, 'mass-friendly' theatre, easily comprehensible and realistic, as well as educational. While the struggle with the bourgeoisie must be continued, and experimental theatres supported, above all, Ozersky bluntly urged, a classical repertoire should be 'thrust upon the masses' ('Pro teatral'nu polityku' 2). Theatre councils required particular strengthening. The theatre market would be 'regulated' and 'organized' by the state's complete ownership of all theatres as well as cinemas and related property. Echoing Ozersky's aggressive sentiments, the editorial of *New Art* (*Nove mystetstvo*) edited by Mykola Khrystovy and V. Khmury in Kharkiv, applauded Ozersky's directives and urged all theatres to open their next season with a combination of revolutionary drama and reworked world and Ukrainian classics. Except for *Othello*, the editorial observed with disappointment, the classics had been quite nearly forgotten. Good, new translations of classics were desperately needed ('V spravi repertuaru' 1).

Such a proposed regimen of classics and proletarian drama, high and low, was paralleled by a similar trend in other cultural spheres, including the use of music. As Richard Stites has shown, in scripted Soviet celebrations from as early as 1917, the official cultural configuration of classics such as Beethoven followed by rousing revolutionary songs united heart and mind: the former instilled a 'reverence for the high art of the past,' as well as a mood of cultural 'solemnity,' while proletarian songs provided 'emotional release' and 'pious celebration' (Stites, *Russian Popular*, 45–6). A combination of Shakespeare and Ukrainian revolutionary plays could be seen to fulfil a similar function.

While Ozersky focused on repertoire and infrastructure (the creation of theatre councils and other forms of direct and indirect intervention into the artistic decisions and composition of theatre companies), others, like Volodymyr Volkhovsky and Mykola Krystovy called for a 'wise, Marxist-educated, cultured reviewer,' that is, one who would focus on ideological content above all (Volkhovs'kyi 3) and

The Shevchenko Theatre, formerly the Berezil Theatre (Kharkiv), June 2000. (IM)

would follow the recent resolutions of the Party about aestheticism (Khrystovyi 1–2). Intellectually and aesthetically worlds apart from these views were the concurrently published theoretical articles of Les Kurbas, who invoked not subservience to the Party but the individual talents of Tatlin and Picasso. Stressing the joy of creation, Kurbas insisted on mastery of art, on the necessity of having a 'feel' (*vidchuttia*) for the craft, the material of art. Theatre was a mirror of culture, he proposed, but not a reflective, rather a 'corrective' mirror; left theatre like that of the Berezil was reflexively critical not traditional in its stance, and it concomitantly demanded that its audience be co-creating Shakespeares.[5]

In the wake of the conference, in April the theatre critic Yakiv Mamontov began a series of articles analysing the contemporary currents of Soviet theatres with a view to mapping trends and laying out directions for the future (Mamontov, 'Novi

vidannia,' 14). Following Lunacharsky's recently published comments in Russia, Mamontov predicted that the Ukrainian theatre's future, like that of Russia's, lay only with realism and strong psychological elements. Rejecting conceptual theatre as 'mystical' and as centred on the dictatorship of the director, not on the material (that is, the text) or the actor, Mamontov proposed for Ukrainians a realistic theatre or what he called a 'theatre of the living person.' Such a metaphor suggested, by implication, the artificial and 'dead' nature of avant-garde theatre, its distance from 'real,' everyday life and its concerns. Realistic theatre, Mamontov further explained, was realistic in detail not in order to imitate life, but rather to reveal what happens to a person in particular circumstances. In other words, realism implied a 'scientific' study, an approach congenial to Soviet thinking, which considered itself based on reason, science, and functionality. By contrast, conceptual art, linked to terms like 'mystical,' appeared to be the obfuscating, subjective product of individual whimsy rather than collective truth. Indeed, Mamontov dismissed conceptual art and aestheticism such as that of Oscar Wilde (whose aphorisms Kurbas had translated a decade earlier) as 'an enemy of theatre.' More neutrally disposed to the academic and the provincial theatres, Mamontov referred to these as acceptable 'theatres of compromise' (Mamontov, 'Suchasnyi teatr,' 5–6).

In further articles in this series, Mamontov examined the issue of the classification of new theatrical forms, succinctly posing the oft-repeated problem: how could the Soviets take up the European repertoire without its attendant bourgeois trappings? (Mamontov, 'Pid molotom,' 234–5). It was important to discover, he noted, whether these plays were truly universal or whether they merely pretended to be so. Thus, further study, classification, and analysis were of crucial importance. While Mamontov did not outrightly reject Shakespeare, others did, arguing that the 'universal' Shakespeare and other 'bourgeois' writers were unnecessary for and alien to the newly created society, which required a repertoire all its own with correct proletarian views and with scientific answers to the problems it raised. Indeed, some argued, if no classics were performed, a new canon would emerge (Shmyhel's'kyi 2). (Such an argument has been made in various periods, in various countries, including Canada in the 1970s–1980s, and the United States by blacks in America.) To these latter attacks, Kurbas's colleague, the writer Mykola Khvylovy (pseudonym of Mykola Filitov), replied that great dramatists and a distinct national voice could only emerge from the critical appropriation of great traditions. Marx, Khvylovy argued, would not have been possible without the preceding tradition of English economic works; nor would the first good Russian playwright, Griboyedov, have created his masterpieces if Molière had not been introduced into Russia sixty-seven years earlier (Khvyl'ovyi, '*Zolote*,' 351). But not merely repertoire was at issue here; how this repertoire was to be presented was becoming as consequential an issue.

'Barren tasks': Theses, Disputes, and Celebrations

Throughout 1926 directors and actors attempted to negotiate the difficult, ever-shifting political terrain from which cries for realism more frequently erupted. Preparations for the tenth anniversary of the celebration of the Revolution spawned new retrospective studies of Soviet achievements but also acknowledgments of inadequacies, including those in the theatrical sphere. The public articulation of these inadequacies laid the ground for further state intrusions and controls over artistic creativity. The first and critical soundings came in early January of 1927 with the publication in the journal *New Art* (*Nove mystetstvo*) of the Ukrainian translation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party's 'Theses about Theatre Criticism' ('Tezy pro teatralnu krytyku'). These urged the proletariat to take over all leading roles in the cultural revolution; to take command of as well as critically to rework all of the classical heritage of the past, and to destroy all 'harmful' works of the bourgeois-feudal period. An 'attentive' attitude was needed to prerevolutionary as well as to contemporary (Soviet) theatre, and to works of the best of Russian and world classical dramaturgy which had not lost their social and artistic significance. Works which reflected characteristics of the present era and which were 'saturated' with the spirit of the proletariat's class struggle were to be actively promoted. 'Because of the poverty of our dramaturgy in terms of truly revolutionary plays, a tactful attitude needs to be taken to productions of dramatic works which, to a certain extent, satisfy the demands of workers and peasants and that, at the same time, possess artistic value.' In other words, in the continuing absence of a Soviet Shakespeare and with some sense of caution, Shakespearean and other classical plays were permitted performance.

While some theses, like these, suggested a prudent and flexible response to earlier models of theatrical art, others, in reference to modes of staging and interpretation, were much less accommodating. Thesis Four, for example, implicitly condemned experimental productions, claiming that the problems of revolutionizing both form and content led to problems of comprehension, resulting in some quarters in a return to 'salon' drama of the prerevolutionary type. The theses concluded with the firm resolve to 'uproot' and 'persecute' poorly digested cultural politics. Content was henceforth all-important; only socially significant works were to be permitted. Theatre criticism, even in strictly reporting facts, was always and only to be directed toward supporting Soviet productions. Criticism was no longer just explanation; henceforth, it was to be propaganda. Academic theatres were to be responsive to Party directives, and private theatres and collectives were exhorted to 'democratize' their work and get rid of 'recidivism.' Experiments were not to be permitted for their own sake, but only when they were aimed at a search for revolutionary forms. All 'boulevardism' was to be extirpated; all expressions of

'hack work, illiteracy, or half-understanding in the area of theatre criticism, hiding under a poorly appropriated Marxist phraseology [are to be] ... necessarily and mercilessly persecuted ...' And, because the theatre 'was an important factor in popular education, an active weapon in the cultivation of a socialist consciousness of the popular masses' (Piskun 9), the Party resolved that, above all else, it had to be accessible, which meant comprehensible and 'realistic,' not avant-garde. These published directives, coming from Moscow, made it impossible for Ukrainian theatres to transgress official policies, and for local government officials to avoid enforcing them. For the first time, Les Kurbas's work in the theatre was put under serious restriction.

Preparations for the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution presented further substantial indicators of the rapidly deteriorating status and tenuous future of avant-garde art, as well as of Moscow's resolve to control all aspects of Soviet Ukrainian life. The Commission of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR for the Organization and Conduct of the Tenth Anniversary of the October Revolution was the first body created to regulate (that is, script, control, and thus homogenize) festivities throughout the USSR. Preparations were supervised by local Party organs and by the Worker-Peasant Inspectorate. Individual initiative was completely discouraged and, once celebrations were underway, the popular participation of spectators was kept at a distance (von Geldern 219). The Berezil was one of the approved groups invited to contribute to such a scripted celebration and Kurbas, accordingly, prepared what one of his contemporaries called a gigantic 'oratorio,' consisting of recitation, dance, and puppet theatre – the last time that such a mass spectacle was permitted in Ukraine.

The centralized organization of the anniversary celebrations proved an ominous harbinger to both avant-garde artists and citizens alike. Attendance at all state celebrations had became mandatory by the end of the 1920s. Portraits of leaders and posters by amateurs were destroyed and replaced by official ones in specific iconic poses. All celebrations, including sporting events, book day celebrations, even children's parties, were to be military and militant in spirit (Vaughan-James 80). The 'spontaneity' of the masses was discouraged and specific emotional responses were dictated (Zakharov 214). Rest days were no longer free from the incursions of officialdom, as the literary historian, scholar, and publicist Serhi Yefremov bitterly complained: 'And the free holiday of the free worker has been transformed into a forcible gathering of slaves to which the participants are forcibly herded' (Iefremov, 1 May 1923, 36).

In addition to the control of celebrations, of grave concern to Ukrainian artists was the revival of Russian chauvinism in Bolshevik circles. The official policy of Ukrainianization, which had just barely got underway, came under attack by Russian intellectuals. As Abbott Gleason remarked, the durability of Russian nation-

alism, despite the explicit internationalism of Bolshevism, was unexpected (Gleason, Introduction, vii). Some demanded that the Ukrainian language and culture merge with the Russian language and culture. Others referred to Ukrainian as a Russian 'dialect,' while still others, like Vagarshak Vaganian, even went as far as to deny the existence of a Ukrainian culture (Vaganian 109). Such a neoimperialist position was met with Ukrainian insistence upon the right to independent national artistic development; but this was, in turn, interpreted not as a reaction to colonialism but as a rejection of Russian proletarianism and a preference for bourgeois European values. The poet Mykola Zerov, a member of the so-called neoclassicists, best summarized the argument of those who believed that the turn should be made away from Russia and towards Europe: 'Let us not avoid ancient or even feudal Europe. Let us not fear its psychological contamination (who knows, perhaps it is better for a proletarian to become infected with the class determinants of the Western-European bourgeois than with the indolence of a Russian "repentant nobleman"). We must appropriate the sources of European culture because we must know them; otherwise, we will always be provincials. To Khvylovy's "Quo vadis?" let us answer: *ad fontes*, to the original sources, to the roots' (Zerov 261–2).

How to escape provincialism without falling into the trap of epigonism or neocolonialism of one sort or another is the classic situation of colonized countries. Khvylovy, a sophisticated and nuanced polemicist and committed Communist, was very much aware of this snare and explained what he meant by Ukraine's orientation to Europe: 'Europe is the experience of many ages. It is not the Europe that Spengler announced was "in decline," not the one that is rotting and which we despise. It is the Europe of a grandiose civilization, the Europe of Goethe, Darwin, Byron, Newton, Marx, and so on and so forth ... We are not helpless epigones, we are brave pioneers moving "into the dazzling world of Communism" ... we never confused Europe with "Europe." And we now sense that we are strong enough to mock all discussions about the influence of alien ideologies' (Khvyl'ovyi, 'On Copernicus,' 75).

To the question, which particular Europe, Khvylovy responded: 'Take whichever you like, "past or present, bourgeois or proletarian, eternal or ever-changing." Because, to be sure, Hamlets, Don Juans, or Tartuffes existed in the past, but they also exist today; they used to be bourgeois, but they are also proletarian; you can consider them "eternal," but they will be "ever-changing." Such is the coquettish path the dialectic takes when it wanders through the labyrinth of superstructures' (Khvyl'ovyi, 'Psychological,' 120).

Khvylovy categorically refused to orient Ukrainian literature and culture on Russia. 'This is definite and unconditional. Our political union must not be confused with literature.' He cited the example of the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz,

who would never have achieved acknowledged greatness had he oriented himself only on the art of Moscow. To nourish young Ukrainian art, Khvylovy argued, was to avoid slavish imitation and subservience. But to reject the models of Russia for Europe was 'not with the goal of yoking our art to some other wagon bringing up the rear, but with the aim of reviving it after the asphyxiating atmosphere of backwardness. We will travel to Europe to study, but with a secret idea – after several years to burn with an extraordinary flame' (Khvyl'ovyi, 'Moscow's *Zadrypanky*,' 223).

Similarly affronted by the paternalistic attitude of Russians, Les Kurbas had lambasted critics at the lengthy Theatre Disputes held from 28 March to 15 April 1927 in the Blakytyny Building in Kharkiv for not being more responsible when they cited apparent Russian influence on his productions. Who was influencing whom, he asked. Ukrainians also have had direct access to Western theories and art, he reminded them; inspiration did not have to reach Kyiv by way of Moscow. Having travelled to Moscow in 1926, where he was warmly welcomed and where he was urged to stay, Kurbas reported that his trip was, on the whole, very disappointing. Moscow was even more boring than Kharkiv. With the exception of Meyerhold, Moscow was simply a cultural 'transfer point,' not a fount of originality. There was no reason, he argued, to look to Moscow, especially since, historically, it had always imposed provincial stereotypes on Ukrainians by its control of repertoire, roles, and language (Kurbas, 'Informatsiia,' 168). By contrast, he remained enthusiastic about his perambulations through Germany in 1927 (on the occasion of a major exhibition of theatre art associated with celebrations of the centenary of the theatre in Magdeburg), where he had also seen many productions, lectured on Ukrainian Expressionist theatre art, and met with German theatre artists. Among the latter, claimed V. Tsekhansky, who much later became one of Kurbas's fellow-zeks, were Brecht and Piscator (Tsekhans'kyi 815).[6] Zek is the acronym of 'zakliuchennyi kanaloarmeiets'; these were political prisoners who were forced to work on the White Sea–Baltic canal in 1932–3. Later the term came to be applied to all prisoners of the Gulag.

While Kurbas travelled (and, some scholars claim, met or even worked briefly with Max Reinhardt) and seemed temporarily oblivious to the sharpening of positions in the USSR, at home the theatre critic and historian Petro Rulin responded to attacks on the young avant-garde Ukrainian theatre. Attempting to keep alive the memory of the vibrant and revolutionary qualities of the Ukrainian theatre of the war and early post-war years, which were being made to conform to the centre, Rulin reminded his readers of the stormy years of the previous decade – the years of famine, destruction, depravation, and war. He implored his contemporaries to preserve that past by collecting theatre archives, and exhorted future scholars to remember the context of the productions of those times. Look-

ing both to the past and to the future, Rulin evidently saw the contemporary Ukrainian theatre as not just embattled or under siege but headed for its demise.

One of the sparks for the extensive 1927 Theatre Dispute in Kharkiv, the new home of the Berezil theatre, about the future directions of the Ukrainian theatre came from Yakiv Mamontov's article, 'Sadovsky or Les Kurbas?' (Mamontov, 'Mizh'), whose title encapsulated two possible directions, two polarities: one, the old ethnographic theatre (exemplified by Saksahansky's brother, Sadovsky), pronounced dead so many times in the past but yet evidently still lingering, and the other, the experimental theatre of Kurbas. A formal public discussion was organized with literary critics and Party officials who placed the issue of realism at the centre of the debates. But the particular type of realism which should be pursued remained an open question. Arguing from empirical evidence, 'K. Krav-ko' insisted that the masses preferred realism and that this preference was strictly a matter of form, not of content or ideology. The masses 'need those theatrical forms which are easier' to understand, which do not 'stress' the spectators to convince them of 'the realities of this revolutionary content.' If this is so, 'then why,' he asked, 'should our revolutionary theatre insist upon rejecting realism and turn to constructivism which appeals to a small group of the intelligentsia?' ('Krav-ko' 4). By this he meant the avant-garde fascination with structural elements of form, including aspects of the stage design, which often consisted of moving components.

Attacked once more for its 'inaccessibility,' the Berezil was now also, it was suggested, lining up against the proletariat. In response, Kurbas defended the trailblazing artistic path of his collective, arguing that it was not possible to have one theatre for all. Some would understand their productions better than others. Chastising those who mistook the 'Ukrainophile,' ethnographic theatre for the national, typical, and representative, Kurbas championed an art open to all influences – the theatre of Japan, China, Reinhardt, the Middle Ages.

Others lined up behind 'Krav-ko,' in support of a return to realism, although further disputes arose about the nature of this realism ('Dysput'). Was it to be realism with some touches of constructivism, as 'Krav-ko' suggested, or was it to be a conceptual realism, as the scholar Robert Pelshe insisted? Or, could there, perhaps, be some other kind? What model or models should be emulated? Yakiv Mamontov believed (against contrary mounting evidence) that all kinds of approaches were possible in the Soviet Union and that, unlike the field of bourgeois art, there would never be any single standard imposed on Soviet art. In his concluding remarks, Kurbas warned once again against Soviet Ukrainian art espousing realism: 'The average Ukrainian theatre worker still simply does not understand this term, which immediately devolves into a habitual, ordinary naturalism, a crude interiority, a primal amorphousness ... This realism is especially inaccessible here in Ukraine, where the proletariat is searching for our contempo-

rary national image, an image which was lost in the village glades during the times of oppression. The enormous task facing our art is that of altering at the very root the world view formed by our backwardness. We cannot be simple eclectics in this, measuring out old theatrical forms in shopkeeper's ounces. We have to insist on achieving a fusion of the old, bourgeois eclecticism with our new content in a completely new theatrical form, one that is homogeneous and entire, one that glimmers to us only from a distance' (Kurbas, 'S'iohodni,' 221).

Among the theatre artists, the Dispute kept open the troublesome and unsettled issues of method (realism or modernism?); direction (ethnographic or revolutionary theatre?), affiliation (Europe or Russia? national or international?); and level (comprehensible or challenging?). Among official representatives speaking at such debates, the issues were, if not settled, then at the very least on the path to a specific direction. The state's control over the arts was thus being achieved simultaneously from 'outside' (by means of resolutions and prohibitions) and 'inside.' Kurbas responded to the growing pressure to return to an ethnographic and a popular 'realistic' theatre by forcefully resisting; to follow that route was to be 'locked in our own house.' Rejecting a single type of theatre for all, Kurbas urged diversity: a nation cannot simply have a theatre for peasants; its city dwellers, its workers, its intelligentsia also have their needs, he explained. At the end of the year, he prepared a speech (later published) outlining the aims of the Berezil in which he again insisted upon the importance of the European roots to Ukrainian theatre art. But his announcement that *Othello* was in preparation in his directorial lab for the next season turned out to be premature. 'Damned circumstances completely beyond the control of the artistic director' prevented its fulfilment ('Teatr Berezil' v 2 polovyni' 10). Worse, by the end of 1927 the uncompromising tenor of the earlier-published 'Theses' and the new controls had evidently had their chilling effect on all the theatres. As Yakiv Mamontov blandly noted, the 'theatrical front was evening itself out' due to 'pressure from the organized mass of spectators'; all the directors had written 'realism' on their standards. Mamontov identified the 'newest and best' of these realisms as 'constructive realism,' a synthesis of the traditional with revolutionary artistic forms – European techniques allied with Ukrainian national forms and revolutionary content (Mamontov, 'Teatral'nyi front,' 2–3). The growing uniformity of approaches and the fear which underlay such a tendency was reflected in a number of published articles. Thus, for example, Borys Romanytsky (who had starred in Saksahansky's *Othello*) prepared a 'survival tactic' for his Zankovetska Theatre. Explaining his theatre's choice of repertoire for the upcoming theatre season in the journal *New Art,* he elaborated that the plays were chosen, first, in order to reflect or touch upon the interests of the workers or to reflect social problems of contemporary life, and, second, to acquaint the spectator with world literature, that is, with classical plays. In order

to 'be understood by everyone,' the Zankovetska ensemble employed 'realism,' which was, he assured readers, not a copying of life but 'an artistic/creative process' established 'on the foundations of a realistic perception of life ... [and which] actively guides the thoughts of the spectators in a particular direction' (Romanyts'kyi, 'Zan'kivchany,' 10–11).

Responding to Lunacharsky's announcement in Moscow that the Soviet Union had now entered a new phase and that theatres should all take up realism, the Ukrainian satirist Ostap Vyshnia (pseudonym of Pavlo Hubenko) mockingly reviewed the achievements of the past decade in the Soviet theatre. In the last ten years, he ironically boasted, nine types of realism were created: expressive realism; postmonumental realism; static-monumental realism; generalized realism; conceptual realism; understood-by-everyone realism; neorealism; constructive realism; and retrorealism. Extrapolating from these statistics, Vyshnia predicted that such a great achievement in the first decade after the Revolution meant that in twenty years there would be eighteen realisms, and, hundreds of years later, so many that they would be able to take over the world (Vyshnia 8–9).

'Base authority from others' books': Hnat Yura's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

If *Macbeth* had obvious political resonances in the early 1920s, and *Othello*, as we saw, echoed ethnographic Ukrainian plays of the nineteenth century, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*[7] presented a much less obvious, even peculiar, choice of Shakespearean play to stage, especially in 1927, when the push toward realism was becoming impossible to resist. The oddity of the selection was noted by the critics. Petro Rulin, writing under the pseudonym of P. Chorny, suggested some of the critical bafflement. Judging that the tragedies were, in his view, Shakespeare's best work, Chorny/Rulin pointed out that, nonetheless, the director, Hnat Yura, had decided to stage a mere 'entertainment,' a comedy, and not just any comedy but a 'masque,' a genre closely tied to dance, music, and courtly performance (Chornyi 5). The bizarre choice of an aristocratic genre for a Soviet theatre impelled Chorny/Rulin to draw Soviet directors' attention to the necessity of an 'appropriate coefficient' by which to bring Shakespeare to a contemporary audience. This play, he observed, posed very particular challenges which a director had to overcome in order to reconcile its fairy-tale qualities with its historical distance from everyday Soviet reality.

A Midsummer Night's Dream was staged by one of the survivors of the Stalinist period, the actor-director-entrepreneur Hnat Yura (1887–1966), one of the founders of the Ivan Franko Theatre (1920), born in the village of Fedvar (now in the Kirovohrad region). To be a survivor (as present-day television series confirm)

is already to suggest something about the character of Yura. Well before the massive purges, Yura had the reputation of being an opportunist, a blatant plagiarist of ideas, stage designs, and even the repertoire of other companies. Most damning have been the published memoirs of his prompter, L. Bilotserkivsky, who described Yura's inability to think through concepts, his unpreparedness at rehearsals, and his despotic treatment of actors, among other failings (Bilotserkivs'kyi 183; also Revutsky, 'Frankivtsi,' 7). Similar critique came from the dramatist and theatre critic Yakiv Mamontov, who castigated Yura for his 'absolute absence of principles' (Mamontov, 'Pid molotom,' 238).

Founding his theatre in the provincial town of Vinnytsia (later forever branded by the fact that it became Hitler's headquarters in Ukraine), Yura struggled with his fledgling theatre there and in villages and towns throughout the heavily industrial and mining region of Donbas, in Cherkasy and Chyhyryn, then Kharkiv, arriving finally in Kyiv in 1926, where he had been sent by the government which had forced the Berezil and Franko Theatres to change places.

Yura's theatre represents a type of middle ground between the radical productions of Kurbas and the old-fashioned nineteenth-century style of Saksahansky, although it is a more distressing one than the latter, since Yura's epigonism marked his theatre as provincial in the worst sense – in his touring days he imitated the work of Kurbas, in Kharkiv he imitated the productions of his Russian predecessor, Nikolai Sinelnikov. Regarding himself as Kurbas's natural antagonist, Yura was mocked for his artistic pretensions by a whole spectrum of critics and theatre artists throughout the theatre disputes of 1927 and 1929; yet, he survived and, after the dismissal of Kurbas from his post, hired Kurbas's best actors. If he could not achieve originality or masterliness, he could certainly recognize it.

Throughout the 1920s, Yura remained an embattled director, attempting to defend himself from various charges: of being third-rate,[8] of having no directorial vision, of directing a 'static,' 'academic' theatre, of failing to be 'youthful' and 'bold,'[9] and especially of running an 'eclectic' theatre, which did not reach the same heights of achievement as Kurbas[10] – whom he 'slavishly imitated'[11] in repertoire and in style throughout the early 1920s (and with whom he had briefly worked in the Young Theatre). In his memoirs, Yosyp Hirniak describes his work with the testy Yura, who – unlike Kurbas – was uninterested in inspiring his actors or developing new cadres but rather considered them mere tools in the creation of a production (Hirniak, *Spomyny*, especially 89, 100, and 240). In Kyiv Yura's company was badly received on the heels of the departure of the Berezil, as he (Yura) noted with much bitterness. To help fill his auditorium (which, according to the diary of Serhi Yefremov, only attracted fifty to sixty people; 8 November 1926, 427), Yura organized 'demonstrations' of their productions, accompanied by lectures delivered by members of the cultural section of Politosvita, which preached

to captive listeners the revolutionary-artistic goals of the Ivan Franko Theatre, and the significance of culture as a whole. Since Yura's theatre did not receive much in the way of state subsidies, he threw his efforts into augmenting the number of subscribers by introducing a simpler subscription process, lowering prices, and making direct sales pitches in factories (Iura, 'Pidsumky,' 8–9).

In the early months of 1927, Yura continued to repeat the correct mantras of 'realism,' 'accessibility,' and the need to 'conquer the mass spectator.' He also actively cultivated ties with the Red Army and with the Agitpropotdel (Iura, 'Pidsumky,' 8–9). During the spring Theatre Dispute of 1927, defending himself with apparent surprise from the charge of 'eclecticism,' he insisted that 'the path of the contemporary Soviet theatre should be the path of realism ... In our work, we have always tried to bring our repertoire closer to the contemporary [i.e., Soviet] world view ...' ('V Derzhavnym' 5).

On 16 October 1927, however, all claims to realism seemed to evaporate, as Yura premiered a clearly conceptual *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Three photos published in the illustrated weekly *New Art* show a production with expressionistic-constructivist overtones. In one, the typical zig-zagging ramp of expressionist productions is peopled with scantily clad dancing girls, some reclining, some standing, in stylized poses. In another, a formal, symmetrically arranged court scene shows characters in pseudo-Greek costume in what appears to be the opening sequence of the play: Egeus kneeling in supplication before Theseus. A third photo shows the mechnicals dressed in simple, short workaday shifts, their expressions and poses suggesting a lively and humorous scene. But, surprisingly, no effort was made to play up the mechanicals as the true worker-heroes of the production. Indeed, none of the reviews found any connection to contemporary reality; nor, it seems did the spectators – a fact reflected in unusually low attendance records. Although performed twenty-two times, the production only filled the auditorium to 64.2 per cent, one of the lowest percentages of all of Yura's productions ('Reestratsiia vystav sezonu').

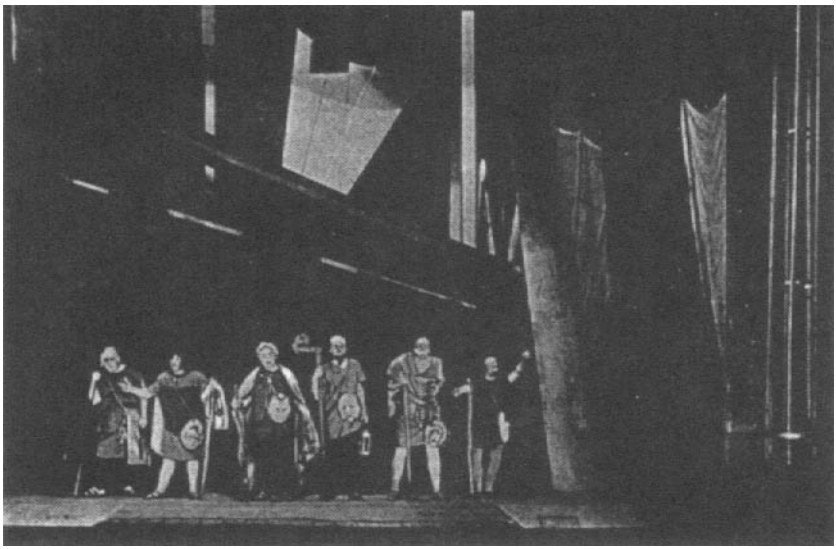
In an interview, Yura explained that the production was created in a 'theatricalized-realistic' style. It was meant to be an example of 'synthetic' theatre, in which the actors were 'entirely in correspondence with all the theatrical elements' of the production ('K postanovke' 4). Extremely proud of his *Dream,* Yura boasted: 'The demands of Shakespeare's play for a contemporary transformation were met in our theatre' by an 'original treatment of Shakespeare's comedy,' with special attention paid to the lightness of the verse, to movement, and to music. This 'great success,' he claimed, resulted in a 'higher level of theatre culture' for the Ivan Franko Theatre (Iura, 'Persha,' 10). Following the model of the Berezil, Yura announced the introduction in his directorial lab work of 'stations' in literature, voice, and choreography – with others to be arranged in the future. 'In this way and through this

work, the theatre collective ties itself to the scholarly and literary circles of Kyiv. Such collaborative work promises new, interesting achievements in our theatre culture' (Iura, 'Persha,' 10). It was a boast he did not repeat. Both Yura's subsequently published articles and his autobiography either elide or entirely omit reference to this production, which almost immediately became a grave liability rather than the triumph he expected.

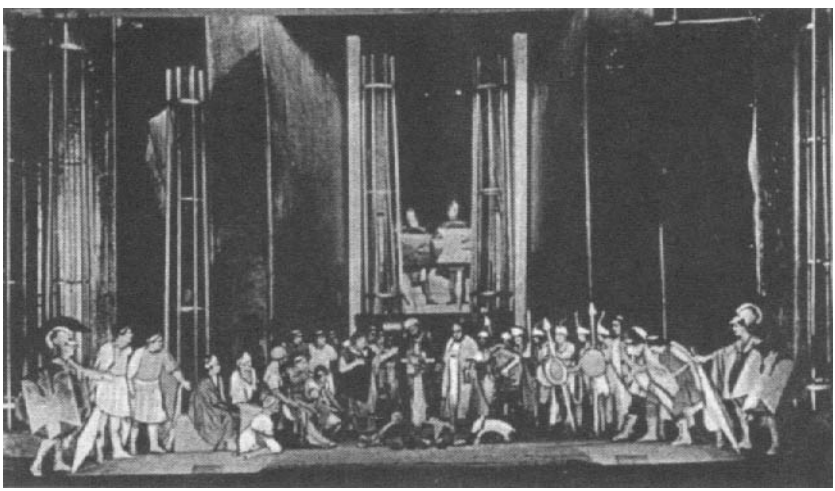
In his review of Yura's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, P.B. speculated about reasons for producing this play. Concurring with the views of nineteenth-century Danish critic Georg Brandes, P.B. observed that this was 'the most poetic of all of Shakespeare's works,' with its 'light tone,' 'beautiful verse,' and 'masterly construction' (P.B. 10). One of the main reasons for choosing to put it on would be to reveal 'the high artistic value of the play, which offers irreplaceable material for a synthetic theatre,' a kind of theatre seen for the first time in Ukraine – so claimed the reviewer with a notable loss of memory about all of Kurbas's productions. What he meant by 'synthetic theatre' or 'theatrical realism' was, in essence, a theatre in which all the elements acquired equal value and worked together: actor, music, movements, properties, stage design. (Similar comments were made by 'R. S-s'kyi.')

The set for Yura's production was designed by a newcomer to Kyiv from Moscow, V. Komardionkov, who placed the action mainly in the forest, presented as a number of planes of countless columns (tree trunks) from which large branches stretched out. 'The major attraction of the production was a revolving stage, which moved 'to emphasize the quick movements of the main characters,' each time revealing a new variation of the forest landscape. The actors' movements were choreographed to make their movements fluid and unified, approximating dance rather than delineating separate choreographic numbers. In his review, P. Nestorivsky drew attention to the austerity of the set, which gave it a hard, almost graphic, quality (Nestorivs'kyi 5). Stepan Haevsky was brought in to provide the actors with vocal training, to emphasize the melodic aspects of Shakespeare's blank verse and its 'ties to classical movements.' Yakiv Savchenko, the translator, did not feel compelled to stay with Shakespeare's blank verse, but rendered much of the play into rhyme. As Nestorivsky put it, Savchenko transformed 'the old language of Shakespeare' into 'a new Ukrainian' (Nestorivs'kyi 5).

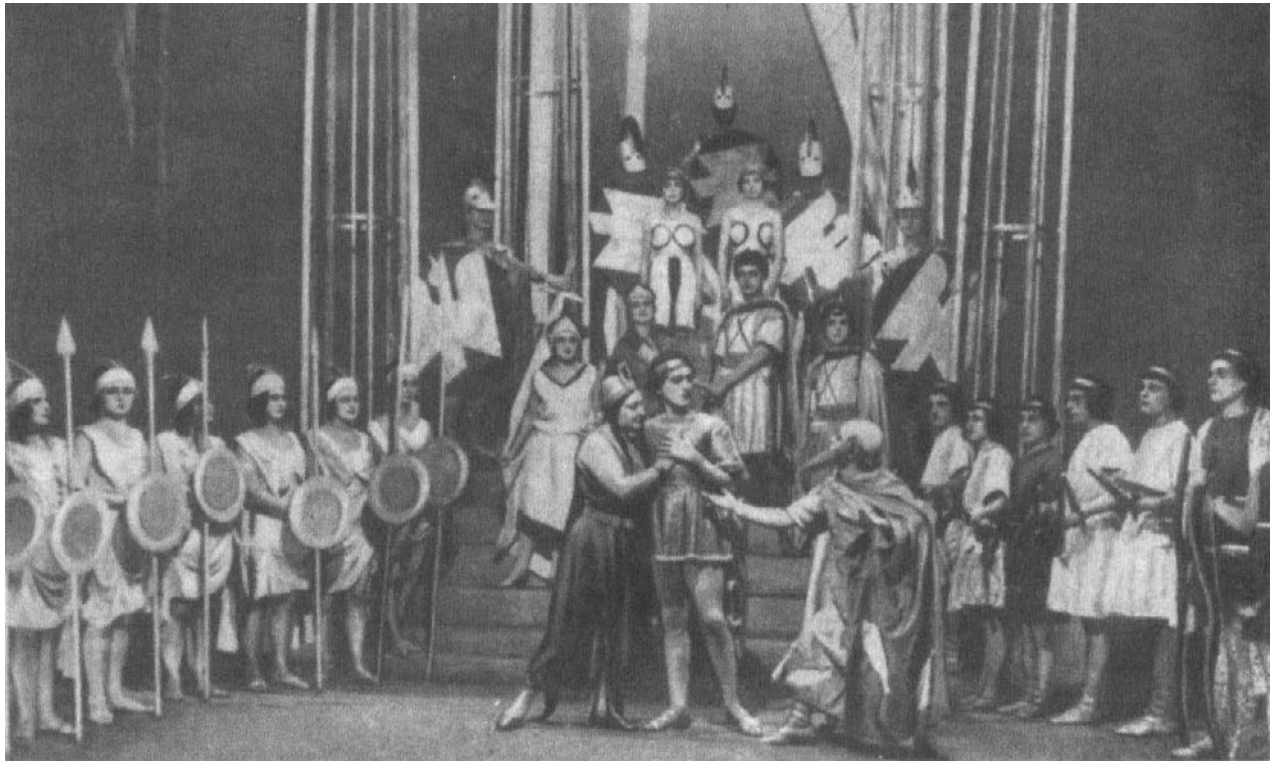
The costumes were designed to differentiate each of the three groups of characters: the Athenians wore antique Greek-style garments; the mechanicals were dressed in simple clothing – what was imagined as an Elizabethan version of work clothes; and the fairies, perhaps improbably, were dressed in ballet costumes with abstract constructivist touches – a fact which led Chorny/Rulin to comment that the only benefit of so scantily cladding the characters with halter tops and 'ribbons' was that as little fabric as possible was expended.



The Mechanicals in Hnat Yura's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1927. (Nf)



A Scene from Hnat Yura's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1927. (Nf)



A scene from Hnat Yura's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1927. (Nf)

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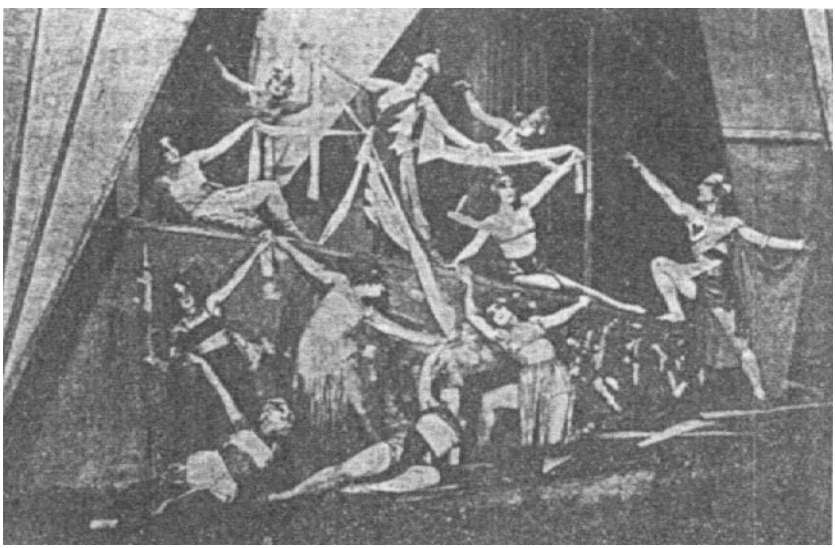


A scene from Hnat Yura's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1927. (Nf)

As Nestorivsky observed, the whole production seemed to have an operetta-ish quality, in its costumes, gestures, and movements, and, especially, music, which was written for the production by Naum Pruslin, who added 'satirical emphases and sharpened particular moments' (P.B. 10). Composing over forty new musical numbers, Pruslin created a theatrical rather than a lyrical score, relying upon only three excerpts from Mendelssohn's famous score; even these, too, were reworked in a 'lighter' style. Pruslin had also worked with Kurbas and his satirical edge is typical of their collaborative efforts. The satirical elements were also a part of the intermedii, created by Yakiv Savchenko, and were associated with the mechanicals. No description of these is extant and only one reviewer mentions them, in a critique of Savchenko (who was evidently imitating Kurbas's example in the 1924 *Macbeth*). Here, Savchenko was faulted for the lack of organic unity between his intrusive additions and the play proper, as well as for failing to connect his intermedii with current Soviet reality (Nestorivs'kyi). Nestorivsky's assessment of the premiere, on the whole positive, sounded a few alarm bells in his singling out of the 'aestheticism' and 'stylization' of the costumes, dances, and set.

While Yura emphasized his show as the first truly 'synthetic' production in Kyiv, Chorny/Rulin disagreed. He submitted the production to a thorough-going critique, beginning with what he saw as a clash between the concept of the stage design – constructivist in inspiration – and the fairy-tale concept of the play itself. Criticizing the exaggerated use of contrasts, Chorny/Rulin focused his attack on the boisterous, hearty laughter of Bottom as ass, which was used too often for his taste and which he criticized for not serving any good purpose. 'Healthy laughter,' he remarked, is 'good for spectators,' but what good is served by an ass's cries? This rhetorical question revealed the basic difficulty of creating a space in the Soviet repertoire for the genre of comedy, which necessarily resists didacticism, false rhetoric, and serious pretensions. Creating truly funny plays which were also necessarily 'educational' – that is, which also included ideological messages – was one of the most difficult, if not impossible, tasks of Soviet directors.

Since theatre was supposed to be instructive above all, the lifeblood of comedy – overstatement, irreverence, and exaggeration for no particular end – came under attack. Thus, Chorny/Rulin blasted the 'exaggerated relationships' and behaviour of Demetrius and Helena, and the peasant-like cat fight (a staple of the ethnographic theatre) between Helena and Hermia. He also castigated Yura's decision to stage Shakespeare's 'greasy' parts. No contemporary translator, Chorny/Rulin observed, would actually dare to translate Hamlet's exchange with Ophelia just before 'The Mousetrap' nor any other similar such vulgarities from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. While failing to state exactly what was at issue here, Chorny/Rulin was certainly representative of an old puritanism reintroduced after the first few heady days of revolution (with calls for free love), and reinforced throughout the

Stalinist period, which resulted in a sanitization of the classics lasting well into the 1980s.

In addition to the double entendres, Shakespearean comedy as a whole posed a special problem throughout the Soviet period.[12] Its slippery use of language resisted control; its tendency towards reconciliation and harmony, its gentle celebration of the power of life and its link to the natural seasons was at odds with the repeated declarations of sharpened class warfare. Most of all, Chorny/Rulin disliked the absence of ideology (*bezideistvo*). In conclusion, he cautioned that much more work was needed in order to transform the play properly for consumption by the Soviet spectator.

A few critics, supporters of Yura, dared to gainsay the criticism. Lauding the production's 'dynamic' and 'colourful' qualities, Nestorivsky returned to the question of the position of 'old art' in the new Soviet reality. Reinforcing the idea that ten years after the Revolution, Soviet citizens should now be able to 'relax' and allow themselves to be 'simply amused' by theatrical productions, Nestorivsky argued that it was now time to move away from the 'coldness' of agitprop. Since Soviet society was 'stronger, and better,' there was no reason for not being able to enjoy a simple comedy. Moreover, the Soviets were now building the great engineering project of the Dniprelstan; in the theatre, analogous bold endeavours were needed to prove that 'we are stronger.' Similar sentiments were voiced by Yuri Mezhenko, who enthusiastically greeted another Shakespeare production. While Kurbas's *Macbeth* turned Shakespeare 'upside down,' Yura's interpretation, Mezhenko argued, was more comprehensible; it bridged the gap or 'jump' between ethnographic theatre and the avant-garde theatre of Kurbas. Rather than rush forward, Mezhenko insisted that it was more important to return to the 'colossal theatre culture which had hitherto been prohibited from being appropriated' by the Ukrainians (Mezhenko, 'Vidkryttia,' 5). Like Nestorivsky, Mezhenko praised the musicality and theatricality of Yura's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Only two aspects gave him some pause: the slightly vulgar humour of the play ('But that's Shakespeare,' he resignedly commented) and, more troublingly, the 'aestheticism' of the production.

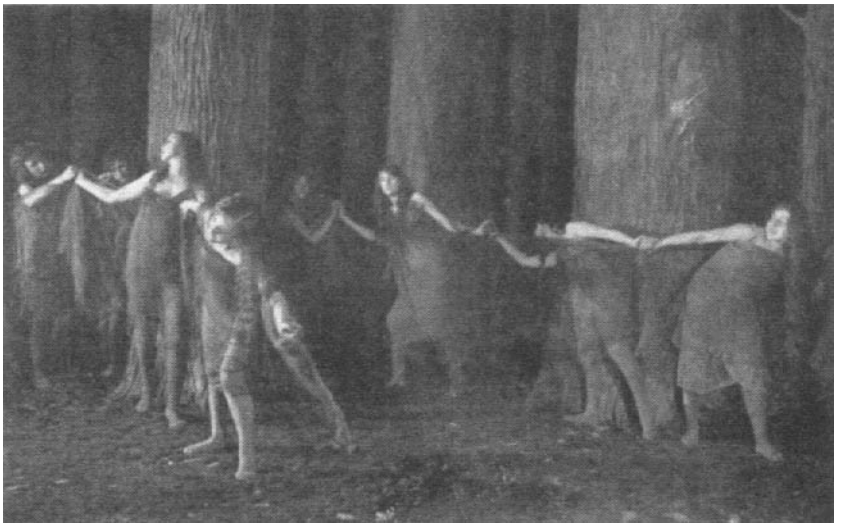
The fact that the play was described with loaded, critical terms like 'stylization' and 'aestheticism' pointed to the oddity of the production. It was uncharacteristic of Yura's style (except in so far as it seemed to imitate Kurbas once again) and careless of avoiding political opprobrium. What had transpired between Yura's advocacy of realism in the spring of 1927 and his late fall presentation of a decidedly illusionist and unrealistic play? Along with Kurbas, Yura and a few other theatre artists from Ukraine were permitted to travel to Magdeburg and Berlin in the summer of 1927 to view the major exhibition of theatrical art occasioned by the centenary of the theatre in Magdeburg. As Hirniak describes it in his memoirs, on

a beautiful island opposite the city, theatre exhibits were installed showing the development of the whole history of German theatre. Technical advisers and engineers were on hand to describe the functioning of innovative machines. In the evenings, theatre performances took place before an international audience. Such an important exposition of German theatrical arts could hardly fail to include the work of a master, Max Reinhardt, whose 1905 *Midsummer Night's Dream* in Berlin at the Neues Theater made his reputation.[13] The Austrian critic Rudolph Kommer had referred to Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a 'revelation,' a production which instantly won the battle against drab naturalism. Its central feature was a fairy-tale setting of lavishly presented and ingeniously managed woods: a revolving stage. Reinhardt's light hand with the classics seemed magical; it transformed the play without making any cuts to the text simply by its attention to 'life, colour, music and joy' (Kommer 6–7) – themes reflected in the treatment of the fairies, who, dressed in soft-coloured gauzy costumes, moved in quick and ceaseless motion, creating the impression that the woods were alive, and teeming with life and mystery. An eyewitness of the later Oxford production of the play described it as follows:

> It was the production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that always remained nearest to the heart of Max Reinhardt. His conception of it has grown with him. At first it was the fairy-tale, all the romance of the woods, that fascinated him. His productions in Berlin and Vienna were so sensational, not only because the best actors of Germany ... took the parts: the whole settings – a revolving stage leading fairies and lovers through real woods, over thick moss, along glades to the torchlit nuptial feast – was an entirely new experience; not to speak of dance and music, woven into the dialogue of the play. A symphony of words, sound, and colour was thus obtained, fascinating to a public who had lost almost every feeling for the unique aim of the theatre ... However, the mystery of this deep play tempted Reinhardt still further into its enchanted, unexplored groves ... it was the delight to give the essence of those deep-rooted passions, to let feeling dominate, and to contrast it with the primitive scenes of the clowns, thus giving highstrung emotions a vent in laughter. (Gusti Alder cited in Fiedler 81)

Yura, who had great ambitions but little original creativity, was euphoric when he viewed the Magdeburg exhibition. He crowed about the discovery of a 'treasure-trove of ideas to mine,' took out his sketchbook, and began to record as much as he could. After a spirited verbal attack by a German official whom he did not understand, Yura's notebook was confiscated (Hirniak, *Spomyny*, 263–4). But the production of Shakespeare's comedy which he mounted later that same year was, undoubtedly, an imitated recollection of Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

The Mechanicals in Max Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Neues Theater, 1905. (OMS)



The Fairies in Max Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* (OMS)

The Mechanicals perform at court in Max Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Neues Theatre, 1905. (OMS)

the forest setting, the revolving stage, the three types of costumes representing three distinct groups, the dance-like movements, the contrast between the gross clowns and the passions of the two couples, all pointed to Reinhardt as its source. (Not by accident, one of the reviewers, B.R., was brought to mind of an open-air Reinhardt production of this play.)

If Shakespeare's comedy had made Reinhardt's career, Yura may have hoped that it would, finally, make his mark, too, as a great, innovative director. But for once in his career, he miscalculated. Rather than being awed by the technical elements of the play (especially the revolving stage), critics were struck by the lack of cohesiveness in its concept (the same criticism which continued to dog Yura throughout his career), its coarseness, and its lack of connection to Soviet reality. Rather than initiating a new style or approach to theatre – as did Reinhardt's 1905 production in Germany – Yura's unconsidered enthusiasm for Reinhardt's innovations and his imagistic, poetic treatment of the Shakespeare text was, in this period, viewed as simply alien to Soviet culture. No doubt the politically savvy Yura, uncharacteristically and briefly overcome by his enthusiasm for Reinhardt, immediately recognized his gross miscalculation and the potential danger: the possible attack on its 'formalist' unrealistic elements. A further problem, were it more broadly known, was his unspoken source of inspiration, German theatre. As it was, Ukrainian directors were already under heavy attack for ignoring the influence of Russian theatre and for preferring Western, especially German, theatre. Thus, rather than reiterating his praise of his own production, Yura immediately announced that all of the Ivan Franko Theatre's subsequent productions in that season would focus on Ukrainian and Russian Soviet plays presented in a 'romantic-heroic-realistic' style. The victory of 'realism' was nearly complete.

Chapter Five

Coda: The 'Tractor of the Revolution' and 'Vanya Shakespeare'

Who needs these
rickety songs and sonnets?

Pavlo Tychyna ('Letters' III)

'Other strict observances': Shakespeare and the Cultural Revolution

The 'Cultural Revolution,' which was to reshape life in the theatre and beyond it, finally arrived in 1928. In its wake, it brought not merely more controls and 'other strict observances' (to use Berowne's phrase) but also the triumphant annunciation of Ivan Mykytenko as the long-awaited Soviet Shakespeare. This chapter builds toward Mykytenko's 'coronation' and to the new cultural work which 'Shakespeare' was called upon to fulfil in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

During 1928 more regulatory controls were issued at the same time as even more insistent calls were made for a new Soviet Ukrainian dramaturgy. In early February, at a meeting of directors of the state theatres at which the Party representative, Mykola Khrystovy, was the main speaker, a new slogan was announced: 'Orientation to Ukrainian Dramaturgy.' Directors were advised to follow the directives of the Party and to create a rapprochement with the masses by establishing workers' councils. In March 1928 a 'corrective' in the struggle to 'fight hack work' was issued: all amateur theatre clubs were to be closed ('Korektyv' 9); in October additional theatre 'reforms' were issued in Moscow in the name of 'ideological purity.' 'Class-alien' culture was to be rooted out and replaced with new art forms. Thus, for example, the 'arch-bourgeois' genre of opera was to be banned, as was jazz and the 'decadent' foxtrot, which were said to unleash 'African passions.' The 'cultural clean-up' also involved a purge of the political intelligentsia in May of the following year. For its part, the working class was urged to develop 'respectable' traits and habits. Those unsympathetic to this cause or who

were otherwise nonconformist were denied access to all public intellectual discourse. Prerevolutionary culture was banned, including folksongs and all foreign imports except for the classics, although these were to be subject to revision and expurgation (von Geldern, Introduction, xvi). The 'Cultural Revolution' had begun: through censorship and prohibitions, alternative points of view were being erased. But, once again, Shakespeare would survive the purges.

The critic Yakiv Mamontov publicly mused about the relationship between the base and the superstructure, and, noting that it was really very complex, suggested that there was nothing in Marxism which actually prohibited the use of Western forms in the Soviet Union. Shakespeare, in fact, presented one of the best models and authorities for the Soviet playwright: Shakespeare's genre, tragicomedy, was the most important genre for their times. Tragicomedy did not need a high style, but it was serious; it was ideologically most suitable to revealing the battle between antagonistic worlds – the bourgeois and the proletariat; it was 'the architectonic of contemporary life – its main form.' Ukrainians should resist the example of Soviet Russian playwrights who give way to melodrama in their new works, Mamontov urged. Constructive realism must be allied with tragicomedy, not with the daughter of romanticism, melodrama. National forms allied with European techniques were what were required to create the new drama (Mamontov, 'Trahikomediia – zhanr' 4–5; 'Trahikomediia i lohika' 2–5; 'Teatral'nyi front' 3).

For his part, in his article 'The Theatre of October' (Teatr Zhovtnia), Kurbas proudly observed that the Ukrainian theatre had broken out of the narrow themes of peasant 'Little Russian' provincialism; yet the reconstruction of culture involved a more complex matter than simply a change of theme or repertoire. Cultural construction was a process which would take quite some time and would be achieved by different collectives at different times. Still, the biggest achievement of the Berezil was 'breaking through the window of the provincial framework of its existence.' And it had done so while attracting ever-growing numbers of proletariat spectators (Kurbas, 'Teatr Zhovtnia,' 301–2). Kurbas continued to ride high in the opinion of many circles, and appeared on the 12 August cover of the Russian journal *Contemporary Theatre* (*Sovremennyi teatr*) (1928), whose editorial called for an 'olympiad' of national theatres – Ukrainian, Belarussian, Russian – to be held in Moscow. National theatres, it observed, were too often conflated with provincial theatres; Russians should acquaint themselves with the Ukrainian theatre about which they really know very little.

The year of the 'mobilization of the proletariat on the ideological front,' 1929, was intended to usher in a new 'reconstructive phase' of socialism (Rulin, '*Berezil'*,' 434), a euphemism which meant that still tighter controls were implemented and content ruled – although it was content decided not by the theatre artists but 'by the organized spectator-prole, with all of our cultural collective' – so announced

the Commissar of Education in Ukraine, Mykola Skrypnyk (Skrypnyk cited in Rulin, '*Berezil*',' 436). Representatives of unions and Party organs constituted the membership of these councils which were charged with the task of overseeing administrative activities and vigilantly supervising all artistic decisions by attending theatre lectures, meetings, and rehearsals of individual companies. The continuing incursions of the Party (whatever their zig-zagging direction) on artistic creativity already exceeded the censorship and control of tsarist times and were paralleled by a heightened rhetoric found in newspaper articles, journals, and Party resolutions; together, they sounded the unmistakable and growing note of doom for Ukrainian modernism. The constant tensions and struggles among the different cultural constituencies – the avant-garde, the ruling communists, 'the people,' the intelligentsia – over what constituted culture and over the response to past traditions of culture had become more polarized and there was little room to manoeuver with safety. The call for new Soviet classics, new Shakespeares, to come forward became more desperately pronounced.

In the meantime, workers were being schooled in the classics. Les Kurbas announced in an interview that he would present a theatre season with the classics of the prerevolutionary theatre played in the mornings, and contemporary plays in the evenings ('Berezil' pro nastupnyi sezon' 497). Early-morning performances did not result in reviews and there is no other published evidence to confirm whether such a proposal was actually carried out; however, Kurbas had earlier announced his intention to stage *Othello*, and minutes of the directorial lab show that *Romeo and Juliet* had been played in part in workshop by the Berezil actors. To these two Shakespearean plays, Kurbas announced he would also add a third unspecified play by Molière.

Although a few talented Soviet writers and playwrights did, in fact, begin to emerge, officialdom was careful to praise only those whose content reflected the currently proclaimed correct ideology. Les Kurbas tied his fortunes for the next few years to one of the most talented of this generation, Mykola Kulish, whose play *The Commune of the Steppes* (1928) represented the first major dramatic achievement of the Soviet Ukrainian period. But Kulish's dramas, which presented the human, cultural, and social complexities of the civil war period (*Sonata pathétique*, 1931), the inadequacies of Soviet life, the absurdities of the Ukrainian colonial mentality, and Russian linguistic imperialism (*Myna Mazailo*, 1929), met with great difficulties in gaining permission for performance in Ukraine. In an echo of tsarist times, his *Sonata pathétique* was refused permission in Ukraine but permitted production in Russia (by Alexander Tairov in Leningrad and Moscow, where it was triumphantly received) – although withdrawn after a few months when it was personally attacked by Lazar Kaganovich, who became the head of the secret police (GPU/NKVD, Cheka, later KGB). Most scandalous was Kulish's *The*

People's Malachy (*Narodnyi Malakhii*) (1928), which was banned after a number of performances. This play focused on an idealistic character, a latter-day Soviet Don Quixote, who set out to transform the world after having read Bolshevik literature, and, confusing it with previously digested religious books, ended by being incarcerated in a madhouse. The play was withdrawn for its 'oppositional tendencies,' and for its supposedly dangerous fanaticism. However, in actor Roman Cherkashyn's view, it was the gentleness and the humanity of Malachy which offended most, since it blatantly contradicted the officially promulgated policy of the sharpening of class conflict (Cherkashyn 164).

Instead of celebrating the more nuanced work of Kulish, the considerably inferior, dogmatic writer Ivan Mykytenko, who plagiarized one of Kulish's earlier plays, was hailed by the critics and by officialdom as 'Ivan Shakespeare,' a 'Homer' of the Revolution. The staging of his first play, *Dictatorship* (*Dyktatura*), was pronounced the most important theatre event of 1929. Mykytenko's dramatic works emerged in response to the push to industrialize the country and to collectivize the farms. In the words of one orthodox Soviet account, *Dictatorship* appeared 'in the days of the great "rupture," when the tractor of revolution had ploughed over the age-old borders of single-owner properties, and when the last exploitative class – the kulaks – had departed from the arena of history ...' (Kysel'ov 318). The editorial published in *Literature and Art* (*Literatura i mystetstvo*) (No. 2, 8 June, p. 1) announced that 'the foundational role of the theatre should lie not in entertainment or in aesthetic pleasure but in social significance as a powerful factor of the ideological ... organization of the toiling masses for class struggle ... The period of socialist reconstruction of all aspects of life demands as a prerequisite the cultural elevation of the widest mass of workers.' The contemporary moment entailed not 'spontaneity,' 'but a planned, hard' struggle. The politics of repertoire thus demanded contemporary plays along with the most suitable examples drawn from world culture.

Mykytenko's play was precisely this kind of a contemporary drama which exploited the hot topics of the day, turning the collectivization issue into a class war set in a village, in which politically opportunistic and wily 'kulaks' were pitted against the ultimately victorious communist forces of progress. Little if anything of Shakespeare is to be found in Mykytenko's propagandistic works, now justifiably forgotten and difficult to obtain; however, what is significant is the semiotic significance of his appellation. It had become more important to use Shakespeare than to stage or study him. 'Shakespeare-Mykytenko' onomastically indicated the continuing love-hate relationship of Soviet culture to the West and its traditions. 'Shakespeare-Mykytenko' implicitly acknowledged the West's greatness in the iconic figure of the English playwright by resorting to the use of its potent semiotic sign as an emblem of approval and achievement of Soviet art, while claiming

Soviet ability to supercede the West. Thus it simultaneously acknowledged inferiority as it claimed superiority. By endowing a third-rate writer with this grand title, the Party also ensured that banality and provincialism were reintroduced and institutionalized in Ukrainian culture; the autoethnographic text was turned inside out. If Mykytenko was the best – the Shakespeare – of Ukrainian culture, then Ukrainian culture truly was second-rate and, justifiably, should look for direction to the metropolitan urban culture to the north.[1]

Mykytenko's play *Dictatorship* and his subsequent *Cadres* (1931) spoke from the position of and for the centrality of the Party, glorifying its past, and 'battling' on behalf of 'ideological purity.' Having for so long heard nothing but deafening silence in response to a call for new Soviet playwrights, some critics were delighted with the 'stern and masculine colours' of Mykytenko's plays (cited in Kuziakina, *Narysy*, 153), which were, essentially, didactic melodramas in a new Soviet guise. These also appealed to a growing constituency in the audience – the semiliterate workers and the 'worker-peasants,' who fled to the cities to escape hunger in the villages caused by collectivization and the forcible requisitioning of grain – and to the more powerful, politicized, 'democratic,' theatrical councils. Or, at least, they appeared to appeal to the wider audience. Their presence was mandatory (Revutsky, 'Frankivtsi,' 7).

Swinging into survival mode, most theatres agreed, albeit reluctantly, to open their 1928–9 season with Mykytenko's play, since it was enthusiastically supported by both the Central Committee (including Lunacharsky) and the local Party, which praised the fact that it 'so well embodied' the slogan of 'Liquidate the kulaks!' 'For the first time, ' enthused Petro Rulin, a Soviet play 'spoke entirely in a contemporary idiom and actively dealt with the issues of the building of socialism.' It was a play that was 'completely' and 'fundamentally' at one with its political moment, 'ably realizing on stage the slogan of liquidating the kulaks as a class' (Rulin, '*Berezil*',' 437). Throughout the year its author reworked and removed 'incorrect' elements as the play was in production and as the volatile political terrain continued to shift (438). Since the play's content was so 'correct,' and content was now deemed everything by the Party, there was, it was said, no need to do anything except simply transfer it to the stage. Most theatres did just that: presented unimaginative representations of a clearly inferior work which employed shopworn conventions and banal, predictable polarities. The theatres thus became 'literary' in their complete dependence upon text, and in their fear of exploring, let alone exploiting, their own medium – a prolepsis of the 1934 slogan, 'Orientation toward literature.'

Few, like Kurbas, had the temerity to resist the demands to produce *Dictatorship* or to critique, even gently, as Petro Rulin did, Mykytenko's play for not being stylistically interesting or truly innovative (Mykytenko had plagiarized Mykola

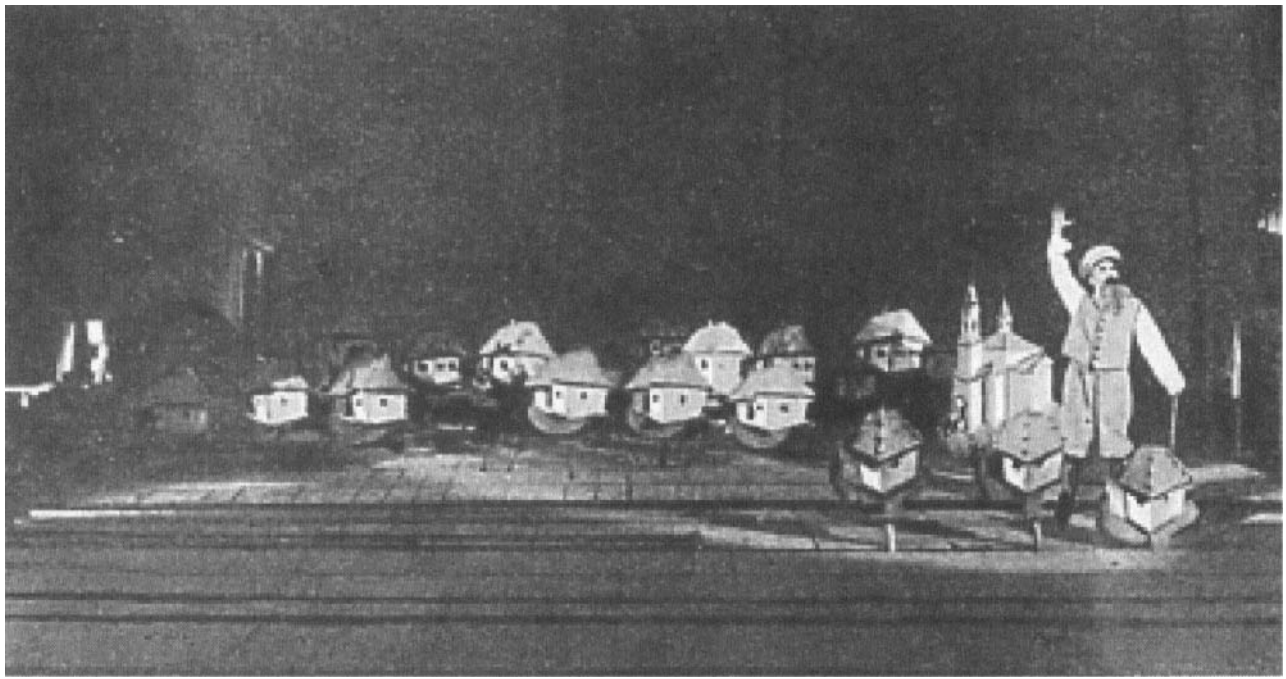
Kulish's earlier work, *97*). In private, Les Kurbas mocked Ivan Mykytenko-Shakespeare as a 'Vanya Shakespeare' – a vulgar, opportunistic pretender to greatness whose works he refused to stage. Vanya, a Russian diminutive of the name Ivan, alluded to Mykytenko's willingness to play the 'Little Russian,' and to fawn on Party officials. But, under Party pressure, not only Ukrainian state theatres but also Belarussian and Russian theatres were forced to take up *Dictatorship*.

Mykytenko's play aimed at being a new Ukrainian 'classic' in a literal way – that is, it depended upon images, characters, and their functions similar to those found in the nineteenth-century ethnographic or (as they were called) 'classic' Ukrainian plays. In proclaiming his adherence to a 'realistic' tradition, Mykytenko pronounced his dramas part of an 'unbroken chain' going back to Karpenko-Kary and Kropyvnytsky (Kuziakina, *Narysy*, 124), that is, to ethnographic, social dramas focusing on injustice as the major theme – a studied contrast, critics pointed out, to the 'rarified' and decadent 'boudoir' melodramas and plays of the West (Kuziakina, *Narysy*, 64–5). As Shakespeare's Soviet double, then, Mykytenko was touted as the face of the new classic: purportedly the equal of the great English bard, a mouthpiece for progressive forces leading the masses into a triumphant future, an explorer of weighty themes concerning the history and future of the collective.

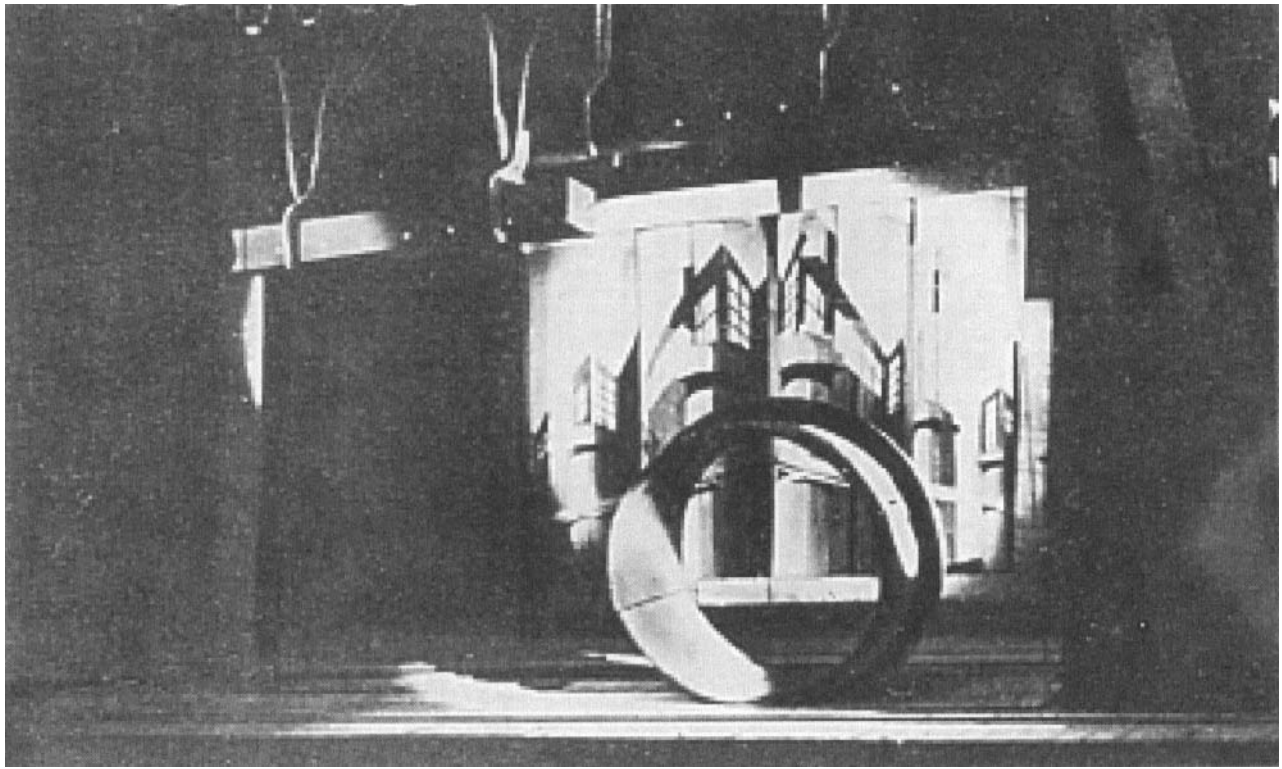
Abjuring the delicacy of Petro Rulin's response to Mykytenko's coronation as the Soviet Shakespeare, Les Kurbas viscerally attacked the 'gypsy romances' which were making their way back onto Ukrainian stages under the guise of new Soviet reality. In a bold but, in retrospect, foolish article (because it doubtless contributed to his liquidation), 'On the Discussion Table' ('Na dyskusiinyi stil') (1929), Kurbas attacked Mykytenko's play as superfluous agitprop which should be read against the grain by the theatre director. Contrary to the cowering attitude of other theatre directors in staging unreflecting productions of this play, Kurbas urged a dialectic with the author's text (Kurbas, 'Na dyskusiinyi stil,' 248). The result of the absence of such a dialectic, Kurbas bluntly observed, was 'cultural menshivism' – a satisfaction with the second-rate, with putting on uninteresting plays just to please everyone. Earlier, an exasperated Kurbas had argued in public forums about the importance of struggling against the spectator: 'When there is perfect harmony between the theatre and the audience, then it's time to close the theatres,' he harangued. 'Revolutionary theatre must be revolutionary' (Kurbas, 'Promova,' 2). Kurbas's ire stemmed from his clear-sighted recognition, fearlessly and bluntly articulated in this published piece, that the debate about the value and reception of Mykytenko's works was not at all about his *Dictatorship*, but rather about what everyone knew but few dared to say: the general direction that the Party was taking in cultural politics; that is, the tightening of the noose on any expressions of true creativity.[2]

Kurbas's attacks on Mykytenko made no impression on the policy makers or on the theatre councils and succeeded only in creating an extreme, nearly hysterical at times, enemy of Mykytenko (as his letters and denunciations reveal), who thereafter became bent upon destroying Kurbas and his place in the theatre. The atmosphere became increasing more tense, as two of Kurbas's actors (Les Serdiuk and Oleksander Podorozhny) were arrested. Forcibly imposed by Party officials on all the theatres of Ukraine, including, finally, the Berezil, *Dictatorship* was, in an act of artistic integrity more than defiance, completely reshaped by Kurbas, who, with the help of composers Yuli Meitus and Mykola Koliada, turned the work into a 'musical': a drama using melodic language, and including duets, tercets, and choral passages, its musical score running into 400 pages – in other words, a style in tension with its mediocre text, and almost totally unrecognizable by its own author. In this transformed version of the play, critics found themselves genuinely moved by moments which seemed to emit the power of Greek tragedy. Kurbas reworked the banal clichés of class war into potent ritualized voices, which, according to some accounts, were like kulaks' 'jeremiads.' While a number of critics raved,[3] Mykytenko detested the transformed version of his work, hardly recognizing that the director had tried to save the author from himself. Supporting Mykytenko, officials attacked the 'subjectivism' of Kurbas's interpretation and its distance from authorial intention. In the Berezil version, officials argued, the impending dictatorship of the proletariat was turned into an imminent nightmare.

Narkompros organized two other formal, public Theatre Disputes, one in Kyiv (29 May), and the second in Kharkiv (8–11 June 1929), which centred on the work of the Berezil, Kulish, and the future directions of the Ukrainian theatre. But like other public debates, this one was also officially directed and scripted, offering only the illusion of a real exchange of ideas and, instead, sharpening the general atmosphere of coercion and fear. Kulish, himself a Communist Party member, was accused of being a 'nationalist' and 'counterrevolutionary,' while Kurbas was charged with being a 'bourgeois-spets [specialist] tyrannical director' so in love with himself that he had forgotten about the class struggle (V. Sushyns'kyi cited in Boboshko, 'Ukrains'ka rezhysura,' 37). Kurbas defended himself from a variety of angles and attacked the inaccuracies, and the censored, and otherwise falsified minutes taken of his speeches and other public utterances. Preferring Kulish to Mykytenko, the Berezil seemed to be rejecting the otherwise universally approved 'realism' as a method of staging plays. Explaining his own collective's philosophy and aims in speeches during the Dispute, Kurbas categorically resisted the Party's demands to submit his theatre entirely to the interests and dictates of its propaganda. Kurbas urged his co-debaters and listeners not to take the line of least resistance, not to reinstate the melodramatic, ethnographic tradition, and not to unthinkingly confirm imposed values and visions of the



Scene from Les Kurbas's production of Ivan Mykytenko's *Dictatorship*. (HA)



Scene from Les Kurbas's production of Ivan Mykytenko's *Dictatorship*. (HA)

world. The audience, Kurbas continued to insist, must be permitted, no, forced to think. In response to the attacks on the Berezil's 'inaccessibility' and ideological deviations, Kurbas poignantly appealed to his listeners:

> I work for the masses but in a new way and seek for new paths to combat sleepiness and stabilization, so that the revolution may go forward in those forms and methods that we create. The nature of art is such that ... we must always move forward and we must ask ourselves whether proletarian culture necessarily must be a step backward in comparison to bourgeois art. We can't stand still ... we live in fast-paced times ... [C]omrades, you who have a revolutionary past and who, right now, are struggling on behalf of the revolution, permit me to be a revolutionary; it is my right to suffer; it is my right to be misunderstood; it is my right to suffer blows; my right to struggle stubbornly on my front, in a way which I understand, honestly and consistently, in order to bring our goal of communism closer by a day or two. Permit me to do this; do not let me take the path of least resistance, because to do what you want costs me nothing. It means to put my feet up on a stool and do nothing, just show a play. Permit me, a living person, to live. (Kurbas, 'Kintseve slovo,' 2)

His pleas were unheeded. Despite the range, eloquence, and the length of the debates, the official line prevailed: 'The foundational role of the theatre should not lie in entertainment, nor in aesthetic delight, but in its social significance' (cited in 'Robitnychyi hliadach' 1).

Support for Mykytenko, located in the highest Party circles, ensured that his next play, *Cadres,* would also achieve a broad audience. *Cadres* praised the 'categorical imperatives' of the Party, confirmed the importance of the Party as a leader in all areas of life, especially in class warfare, and concluded with the achievement of a communist 'paradise.' In addition to Ukrainian theatres, Georgian and Russian theatres were compelled to stage the play, making Mykytenko the first Ukrainian playwright to have a broader resonance in the Soviet Union. Taking his 'Shakespeare' status as a real indicator of his worth, Mykytenko tyrannized stage directors by forcing them to accommodate their theatres to his banalities. Peppered with Latin tags and names taken from legend and myth, *Cadres* consciously attempted to marry a pseudo-Renaissance flavoured play with the earthy elements of ethnographic theatre. When Kurbas continued to resist staging 'Ivan Shakespeare's' plays, Mykytenko launched a campaign to destroy the Berezil. In 1930, at the plenum of the VUSPP (the All-Ukrainian Union of Proletarian Writers, sponsored by the Communist Party of Ukraine), Mykytenko aggressively attacked Kurbas for his numerous 'sins': 'metaphysical,' 'mechanistic,' 'anti-Marxist, idealist-formalist,' and 'Nietzschean' work (Mykytenko, 'Shliakhy,' 74–5). Kurbas was forced to produce Mykytenko's play on pain of 'extreme measures' and because

'Kharkiv's citizens deserved to see it' (Hirniak, *Spomyny*, 314). With a Soviet Shakespeare, there was no longer any need for Shakespeare.

Love's Labours Lost: Purges and Revisions

In August 1930 a resolution of the Central Committee and of the Council of People's Commissariats (Rada Narodnykh Komisariativ) placed all Ukrainian theatres directly under the rule of local Party committees which were given the power to confirm or to fire directors and other theatre personnel; to approve, as of May 1931, and to dictate the repertoire; and to directly control the ideological-artistic direction of the theatres. The method of staging a work of art was now unequivocally equated with the expression of the director's ideology. Any deviation from accepted norms and methods was perceived not just as criticism but as political treachery (Groys 118). Left-theatre was now conceived as 'artificial' and 'nihilistic,' especially in relation to the culture and tradition of the past. In overviews of the ten-year work of the Berezil, critics continued to single out the 'grating' and 'annoying' 1924 *Macbeth* (for example, Rulin, '*Berezil*',' 426).

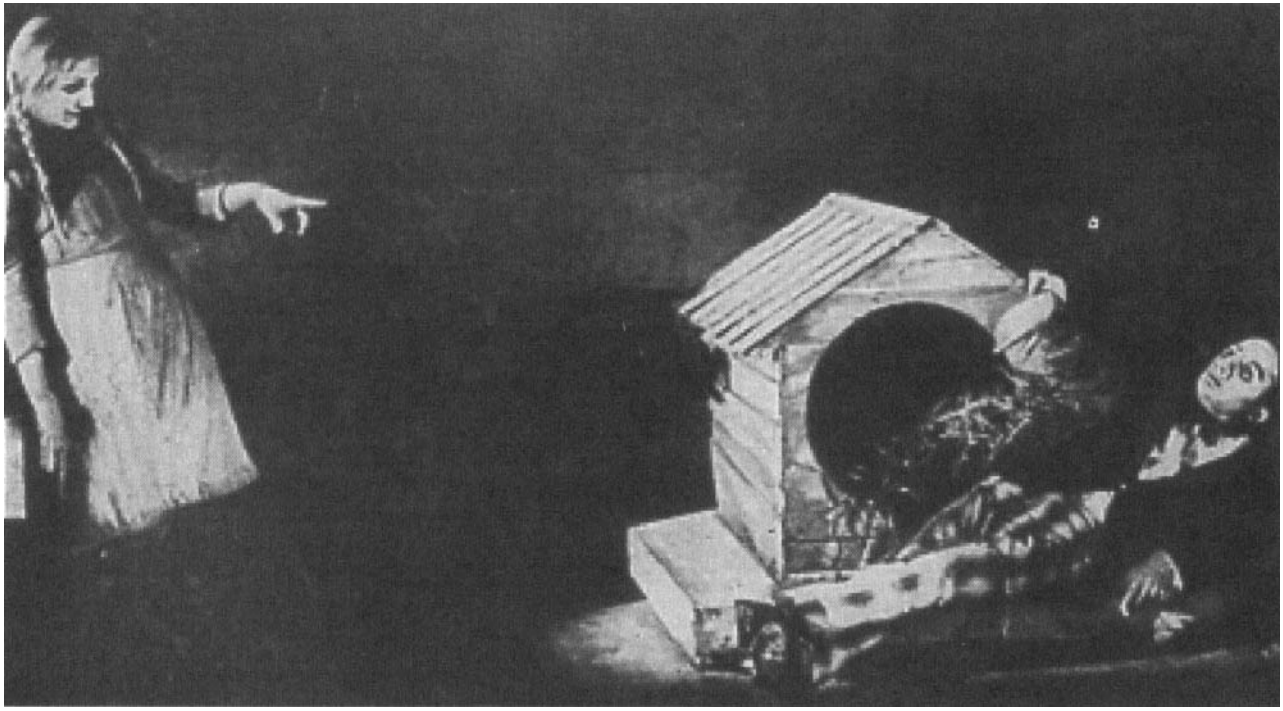
During the new purges, the Ukrainian cultural elite was being eliminated, while the cities became crammed with peasants escaping hunger from collectivization. According to British historian Alan Bullock, 5 million Ukrainians died in the man-made famine of 1933 (Bullock 270–1) – 'conservative figures,' according to Robert Conquest, who suggests closer to 7 million would be more accurate (Conquest 304). In total, Conquest estimates that 14.5 million died as the result both of famine and 'dekulakization' (Conquest 301). Kurbas was hauled up before the local Party officials for not staging optimistic, cheerful plays. Passing by bodies bloated by starvation on the way to the theatre, he replied that the current reality did not inspire him to do so.

Ironically, the primitive realism and folklore of those same peasants which had been deplored until so recently was now being reinstated (Groys 119). Positive opinions about the Theatre of the Coryphaei were resuscitated in Party criticism; Saksahansky and Sadovsky were lauded for drawing their subject matter from the life of the *narod*, for promoting the aesthetic ideas inherent in folklore, for typifying life. The 'organic' nature of their theatrical tradition was praised: it was in a relationship of 'continuity' with national traditions, and with the Russian tradition of the Moscow Art Theatre of Stanislavsky. Although adapted (all religious elements were expunged) state-sponsored folk culture was finally legitimized, even as the 'folk' were themselves dying. Himself with only a few more years to live, Saksahansky was delighted at the victory of ethnographic and Stanislavskian over avant-garde theatre. At his last public appearance, a celebration of his career, he ended his speech by adding his voice to those who shouted 'Long live Stalin!'

After 1936, as Richard Stites reminds us, 'virtually all of Soviet mass culture became 'folklorized' under the impact of literary models' (Stites, *Russian Popular*, 71). But also, interestingly, this legitimation occurred in tandem with the canonization of classics of various sorts: classical music, ballet, realistic theatre, and didactic painting. Thus, in the Stalinist centralized, homogenized Soviet culture, Shakespeare became the unforeseen ally of folklore. As Stites thoughtfully observes, 'Late love is a powerful force, and when leaders and managers who had spent their youth in a village or factory dorm discovered traditional high culture they canonized' it (Stites, *Russian Popular*, 65).

In the Stalinist state, content became everything, while form as a question no longer existed since 'reality itself became the total work of art, which the artist was left to "truthfully" copy' (Groys 122). In 1932, in the midst of massive arrests of theatre directors, scholars, writers, whole boards of film studios, editorial and judicial boards, Les Kurbas audaciously but improbably announced that he was preparing productions of *Hamlet* and *Bartholomew Fair* (Blakytnyi 59), plays which had little hope of receiving approval for production. The first (a play Stalin despised), with its very unproletarian, intellectual hero and rotten state, could hardly appeal to the Party-directed theatrical councils, nor could the second, in its widespread satiric attack on authority and pseudojustice. According to Yuri Boboshko, Kurbas was also planning to stage *King Lear* and Vsevelod Vishnevsky's *Optimistic Tragedy* (Boboshko, *Rezhyser*, 183). Neither Shakespeare's nor Ben Jonson's plays proceeded beyond the director's lab work, because Kurbas enthusiastically took up a new project, Kulish's latest play, *Maklena Grasa* (1933), and began rehearsing it. This tragedy, about a bankrupt Polish stockbroker who arranges his own death in order to gain insurance money for his family and about the young girl who agrees to take on this dreadful task to help her starving father, was a veiled allusion to the bankrupt communist 'stockholders' and to the contemporaneous famine they created. In the view of Kurbas's contemporary, Yuri Dyvnych (pseudonym of Yuri Lavrinenko), *Maklena Grasa* was a play of Shakespearean proportions and method:

> Kurbas sought Shakespearean realism and the entire production was raised, so to speak, to the Shakespearean style. Here were portrayed colossal passions in their naked, absolute reality ... The classic red draperies with their golden tassels which framed the stage indicated this intention to present a classic Shakespearean production in its post-Shakespearean European form, so to speak. Kurbas welded the play, which was interspersed here and there with separate and individual scenes and episodes in the action, into four perfect acts. The Shakespearean realism of Kurbas was a refuge from 'socialist realism.' 'Socialist realism' demanded the type of 'truth' which was convenient for the Party. Kurbas' Shakespearean realism gave the truth as it is, the naked, insane truth of life.



Scene from Les Kurbas's production of Mykola Kulish's *Maklena Grasa*. (HA)

> The theater portrayed the inner life of the main character at its clearest and most typical, in an almost hyperbolized form. The Shakespearean theme of passion, the idea that a man may use even his own death in his gamble with life, demanded of the Berezil actor the greatest artistic sympathy and the greatest technique. The theater, the actors and the director seemed to feel that *Maklyena* [*sic*] *Grasa* was their last expression, the apotheosis of fifteen years of endeavor. (Dyvnych cited in Hirniak, 'Birth,' 333)

The dress rehearsal took place literally at gunpoint before the Repertoire Committee and Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Communist Party of Ukraine. In his memoirs, Yosyp Hirniak presents a terrifying account of this harrowing event, after which the play was removed from the repertoire and banned from performance. 'This is my last time here in this crematorium of Ukrainian culture,' Kurbas presciently announced to Hirniak.[4]

Mykola Skrypnyk, the chairman of the 1929 Theatre Dispute and the author of the official policy of Ukrainianization, despairing at the new campaign launched against Ukrainian culture, committed suicide, as did a number of writers and intellectuals, including Mykola Khvylovy. Stalin's newly arrived henchman, Pavlo Postyshev, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Ukraine, who had ordered the gunpoint rehearsal, resolved to restore 'normalcy,' and to root out 'nationalist counterrevolution' which isolated Ukrainian workers from the 'positive influence of Russian culture.'

Published attacks on Kurbas began appearing with more frequency in journals and newspapers. Hnat Yura assaulted the 'nationalist aesthetic' of Kurbas in a scathing, lengthy review of all of his productions, the 'most absurd of which was *Macbeth*,' which avoided all 'objective' reality. The 'schematic' scene design, costumes, and generally conceptual rather than realistic production represented the height of bourgeois formalist nonsense for Kurbas's detractors and were indicators of his directorial 'tyranny' (Iura, 'Natsionalistychna,' 746). Yura's fame – or infamy – has been particularly tied to this published attack on Kurbas as a 'fascist,' 'counterrevolutionary,' 'nationalist,' and 'formalist' (Iura, 'Put',' 1). Whether Yura actually authored these slanderous pieces, consented to have his name attached to them, simply refused to act, or perhaps agreed that this was the price he was willing to pay for silence about his own, 'heretical' Shakespearean production with similarly formalist elements will probably never be known.

Shortly thereafter, Kurbas was 'relieved' of his post as artistic director of the Berezil Artistic Association, and stripped of his title of People's Artist of the Republic (which he had held since 1925). His actors were forced to disavow him and his principles, and the theatre was renamed the Shevchenko Theatre – its name ironically derived from the surname of the greatly revered Ukrainian bard of the nineteenth century, the former serf who became the voice of Ukraine against

Scene from Les Kurbas's production of Mykola Kulish's *Maklena Grasa*. (HA)

tsarist oppression and who himself was exiled and forbidden to write and paint on the express orders of the tsar. Kurbas was charged with a list of trespasses, including ignoring the building of socialism, directing the Ukrainian theatre toward nationalist goals, isolating the Ukrainian theatre from the beneficial influence of the Soviet art of the 'fraternal' republic of Russia, taking a bourgeois-nationalist line, and creating 'cold, schematic, formalist' productions which were not under-

stood by the broad masses.[5] Later, to these charges was added the improbable claim that Kurbas belonged to an organization which conspired to overthrow the government (a charge from which he was posthumously cleared in 1957, that is, a few years after the death of Stalin and during the so-called Thaw of the Khrushchev years).

For those who hoped to survive, the price was also high: loss of artistic integrity, constant fear, and the necessary repetition of mindless slogans, as may be seen, for example, in actor Yuri Shumsky's publicly proclaimed artistic 'credo': 'I attempt to present an image truthfully, realistically and persuasively, just as the most cultured spectator in the world – the Soviet spectator – demands. I study literature to create these images, and study the folklore, the customs of the epoch. I greet the 18th Anniversary of the October Revolution with great joy and emotion. Because only October gave me the possibility of following a great, creative path, of creating the opportunity for the development of my artistic activity ... I will be emulating the best people of our age – Stakhanov ...' (Shums'kyi, 'Stvoriuiu,' 51).

Similarly, in articles published throughout the 1930s all the way up until his death in the 1960s, Hnat Yura ensured his longevity with his toadying refrains that Ukrainians always 'looked up' to the culture of their 'fraternal' republic, and especially to their Moscow Art Theatre. During the Second World War, Yura's published articles celebrated the fruitful 'orchard' of Ukrainian theatre, which had 'come to full bloom only under Stalin.' The 'eternal works' of Shakespeare and other classics, coupled with those of the Russian drama, had 'truly assisted' the Ivan Franko Theatre in its development and in achieving its artistic standing. Such theatre art was 'ideal, realistic art,' which was 'understood and accessible to all' and was contrary to all 'formalism,' 'European innovation,' and 'nationalistic directions' (Iura, 'Do novykh,' 82). In all the stages of its work, the Ivan Franko Theatre, claimed Yura, had always been supported by the Party, by the proletarian spectator, and by the Soviet regime. Its formula – socialist in content, national in form – was the result of the 'genius' of 'Leninist-Stalinist policy' (Iura, 'Dvadtsiat',' 2). Thanks must be given, acknowledged Yura, to Stalin, 'who helped create unexpected heights of art' (Iura, 'Dvadtsiat',' 4). Reference to his own constructivist *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was absent from his insistent refrain that the Ivan Franko Theatre had always been 'the carrier' and the 'promotor'of realism, a long-standing tradition in the Ukrainian theatre (Iura, *Zhyttia*, 12, 15).

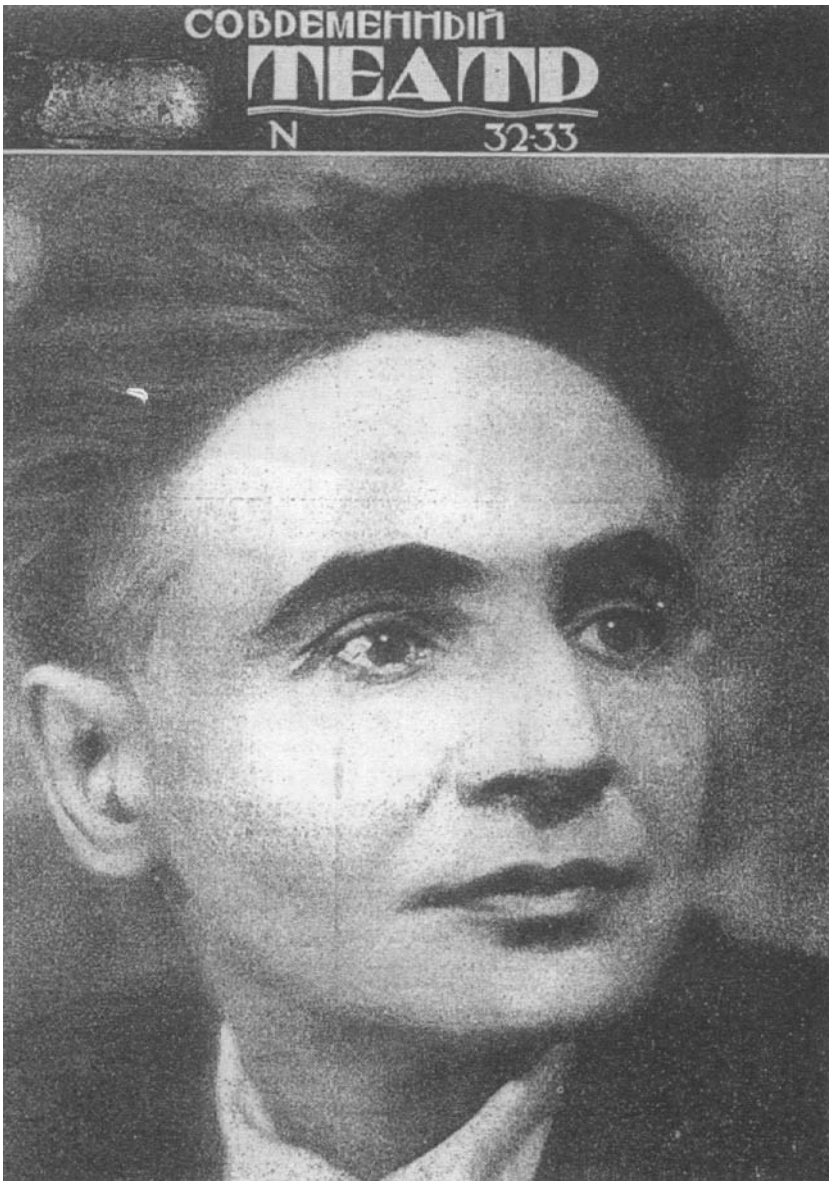
After his dismissal from the Berezil on 6 October, Kurbas travelled to Moscow at the invitation of Solomon Mikhoels, the great Jewish actor of the GOSET (the State Jewish Theatre), who, for over a decade, had been attempting to persuade the Ukrainian director to move to Russia in order to work with him. On 27 May 1924, for example, Vasyl Vasylko had noted with great relief in his diary that the Berezil company had managed to persuade the Ukrainian director to stay in Kyiv

rather than succumb to the tempting invitation of the Jewish actors to join them in Moscow (Vasyl'ko, Shchodennyk, 9). Later, at a celebration of the arrival of Berezil in Kharkiv in 1926, Mikhoels, who was on tour with his company in that city, warmly greeted Kurbas as a 'blood brother' (Kapitaikin 79). Seven years later, with Berezil disbanded, the Berezil actors' concern that Kurbas remain with the Ukrainian theatre was no longer an issue. Enthusiastically welcomed by Mikhoels in Moscow, he began preparations to stage *King Lear* and, concurrently, *Othello,* at the Maly Theatre at the invitation of the Georgian director Amaglobelli (Hirniak, *Spomyny,* 370).

Kurbas, who spoke Yiddish, loved working with Mikhoels and, as he told his Ukrainian colleagues, derived great joy from his relationship with this fine ensemble. He wrote in December 1933: 'I can't be content: I lost my theatre, I was hounded out of my fatherland; everything that I have achieved has been cancelled out, slandered, and cursed. And I had worked with one aim: to be useful to my nation, to be serviceable, in the measure of my strength, to the world revolution – if only using the tools of art. But, imagine, joy has not left me. Believe me, what a great happiness it is to work in such a theatre as GOSET: Mikhoels, Zuskin – this is world-class talent. And the whole collective with its most beautiful traditions. A wonderful, sensitive, creative ensemble' (Kurbas, 'Buty korysnym,' 818).

Kurbas shared this joy with his old friend Mykola Bazhan, who had travelled to Moscow on literary and film business. Bazhan recollected that 'almost daily, some time after five o'clock,' when the rehearsals of *King Lear* where over, the two convened at the Metropole café. To Bazhan, Kurbas unfolded the idea of 'an unusual Lear' which he was rehearsing with Mikhoels. He was to be 'a strange character, an egotist blinded by an illusion of autocracy. But the bitterness of truth opens his eyes, awakens in him his humanity and his humaneness; the tempests of life tear off the mantle of self-importance from him, sending him back to earth to be among human beings and their sufferings. Spent, bald, beardless – Mikhoels will play him almost without make-up; he will have to, while carrying the dead Cordelia, raise himself up in all his human grandeur, casting aside the pride and malice of a blind despot' (Bazhan, 'U svitli,' 149).

Some light was shed on the rehearsal process by Mikhoel's widow, Anastasia Pavlovna Pototskaia, who, in the 1960s, revealed 'that Kurbas had discussed the conception and even individually rehearsed with Mikhoels. This had to be done secretly, hidden from the public, since agents were following Kurbas in Moscow, too. According to Pototskaia, Mikhoels kept a diary of rehearsals in which he noted all the director's instructions, and kept this diary up to the beginning of the war. Only the possibility of a search and the danger of arrest compelled him to burn the diary' (cited in Korniienko, 'Detektivnaia istoriia,' 15).



Les Kurbas, People's Artist of the Republic, from the cover of *Sovremennyi teatr* (Contemporary Theatre) (Moscow) 32–33 (1928). (Nf)

Kurbas never saw this play or *Othello* to completion. On 26 December 1933 on his way to rehearsals, Kurbas was arrested and taken to the infamous Lubyanka Prison, where he was interrogated; a short time later, he was sentenced to five years in the Gulag. *King Lear* finally premiered at the GOSET, starring Solomon Mikhoels, on 10 February 1935. After Kurbas's arrest and because even his name was now prohibited, the production had to be 'signed' by a 'loyal,' safe director. Sergei Radlov eventually came to occupy that position.

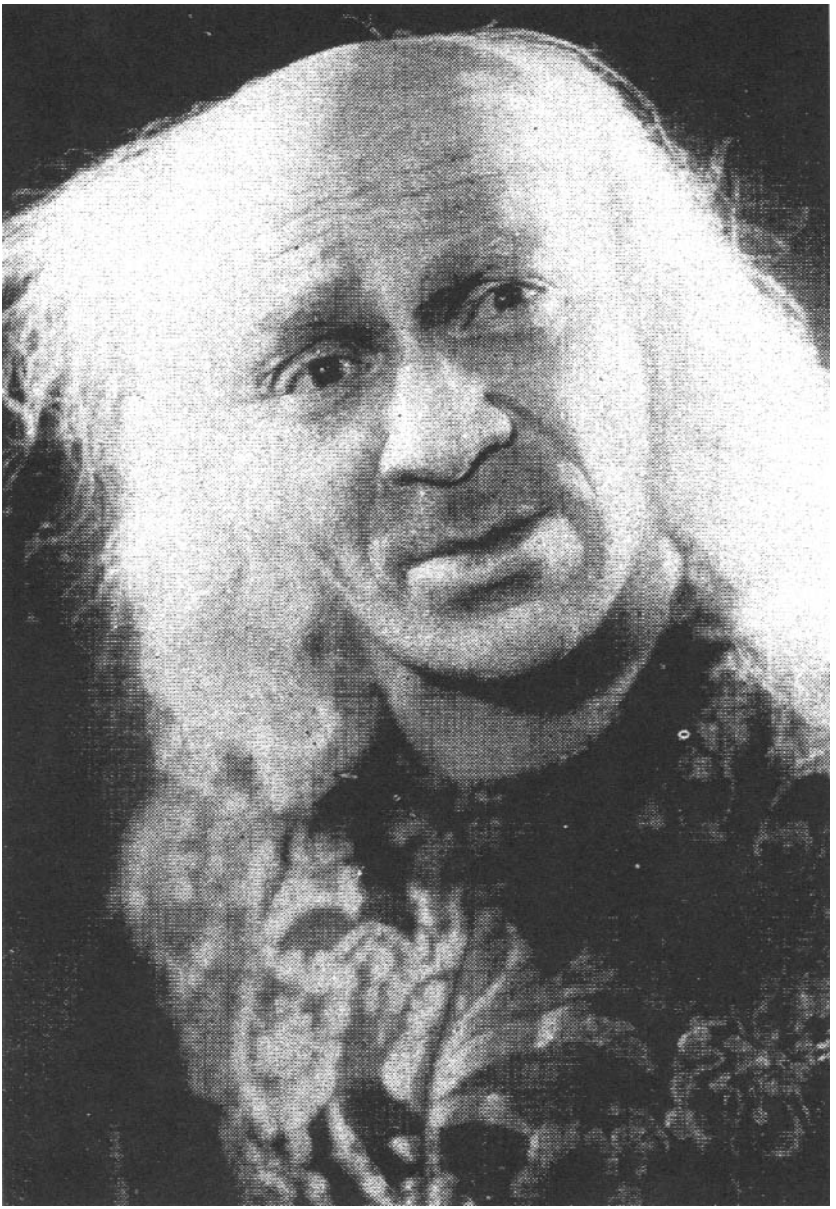
Edward Gordon Craig, who twice saw the production, was 'without exaggeration' 'astonished' and 'deeply shaken' by the powerful production of his favourite Shakespeare play. He commended Veniamin Zuskin, who played the Fool, but especially lauded Mikhoels as a superb Lear who surpassed all English actors of the time. Aleksandr Tyshler's set design provoked envy in Craig, who was amazed at the harmony and organic unity between the design and the interpretation of the play ('Tri razgovora' 2).

Much has been written about this *King Lear*, by all accounts one of the greatest Shakespeare productions of the 1930s. One of the earliest commentators, the Soviet Shakespearean scholar Mikhail Morozov, was, like Craig, taken with the 'remarkable harmony of conception' and its 'rhythmic quality' (Morozov, *Shakespeare on the Soviet Stage*, 35, 37). He located the 'soul of this production' in Solomon Mikhoels, the bald Lear, whom he described as 'truly ... an actor-philosopher.' Morozov's description of the production coheres with Kurbas's interpretation as revealed to Mykola Bazhan:

> Lear is at the beginning of the play entirely absorbed in his own subjective ideas of the world, a world of illusions created by himself ... The division of his kingdom is planned by Lear as a kind of philosophic experiment which ought to prove the truth of his conception of what the world really is and stands for: Lear wants to prove to those around him that even stripped of power, that is to say, even without his kingly attributes, he will remain what he has been heretofore.
>
> But the moment the kingly mantle drops from his shoulders, the scales drop from his eyes ... (Morozov 35)

Also like Craig, Morozov remarked on the 'out of the ordinary' stage design of Aleksandr Tyshler which combined 'a fairy-tale atmosphere' with 'something of the charm of a child's toy in it' and 'realistic features of Elizabethan England (in the details of the individual costumes, for instance), a combination of "romanticism" and "realism," to use these terms in their widest possible connotations' (Morozov 37).

The philosophical underpinning of this interpretation, the attention to rhythm and to harmony of conception, the tension of styles point to some of the



Solomon Mikhoels as King Lear in the GOSET production, 1935. (M)

key characteristics of Kurbas's directorial signature. It is significant, too, that Morozov, writing in the 1930s – when Kurbas's name was prohibited from being mentioned – nonetheless did not attribute this production to someone else; he simply silently passed over reference to any director.

The debate among theatre historians about the extent of Kurbas's influence over the final interpretation of an acknowledged masterly production of *King Lear* will never be fully resolved without more material evidence, something which is unlikely to surface, since both cautious actors and vigilant interrogators destroyed hundreds of 'suspect' documents. Thus, Konstantin Rudnitsky's firm conviction that 'the directorial interpretation of *King Lear* in its fundamental, original outlines was created by the marvellous Ukrainian director Les Kurbas, one of the boldest theatrical innovators of the 1920s' (Rudnitsky 107–8) is unlikely ever to be proven conclusively. But there are many reasons to dismiss Radlov as the shaping influence on this production. The Radlov-Mikhoels relationship was a notably conflicted one. Unlike Kurbas, Radlov did not speak Yiddish, nor, more importantly, did he approve of Mikhoel's philosophical interpretation of Lear. Among other particulars, he was offended by the idea of an beardless, bald old Lear. The violent quarrels with Mikhoels led to Radlov's threats to abandon the production. His more stereotypical view of the old king was one which he finally produced in Riga in 1955. Radlov's dissatisfaction with various aspects of the production extended to the work of Tyshler, who produced the expressionist-conceptual set so lauded by Craig and Morozov (the latter had avoided the dangers associated with the terms 'expressionist' and 'conceptual' by replacing them with 'fairy-tale,' a term favourably associated with folklore). Tyshler was also a close friend of Kurbas (Korniienko, '*Les' Kurbas*,' 446). As the Russian scholar S. Bushueva much later perceptively observed, the 'laconic' set seems to have been influenced by the old Ukrainian form of puppet theatre, *vertep* (Bushueva 47), a form which Kurbas explored in some depth over a decade earlier. Even D. Zolotnitsky, who makes the case for Radlov, points out that Radlov's quarrel with Mikhoels was not so much about methods as about ideas and images (Zolotnitskii, 'S.E. Radlov,' 71) – precisely the centre of any production according to Kurbas. Since the production of *King Lear* marked a break from everything that Radlov created before and after this production, it seems logical to conclude with S. Bushueva that this magnificent production was shaped by someone else. Who that someone else was and whether it was perhaps Mikhoels himself, Mikhoels in collaboration with Kurbas, or someone entirely different will probably never be known (Bushueva 48).

Whatever Kurbas's actual contribution to the artistic vision of *King Lear*, he no doubt savoured the idea of staging a play about an aging and irrational ruler who leads his family and country to ruin. Kurbas's appreciation of irony stayed with him to the very end: his years of exile in the far north, the Solovetsky Islands,

where he was eventually permitted to stage plays. In the late 1980s, the Ukrainian scholar Natalia Kuziakina discovered that probably in April of 1936, Kurbas had staged Bernard Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple* (Kuziakina, *Theatre*, 138). A play he originally intended to produce during the civil war, it now carried even more difficult freight. Was its production a quixotic gesture of despair or an example of Kurbas's mordant humour? The crucial scene – the satirical and cynical trial of Dick Dudgeon in which authority and justice are mocked – written by a playwright permitted by Stalin to visit the Soviet Union, must have provided the camp authorities with some interesting questions. No doubt the zek audience, perhaps as innocent as Dick Dudgeon, laughed nervously with appalled recognition and fear at General Burgoyne's response to Dudgeon's appeal to the future: 'History, sir, will tell lies, as usual.'

The following year, in 1937, Stalin audaciously and incredibly personally ordered the removal of the whole Ukrainian government, and 'cleansed' all educational, scientific, and cultural institutions – by the British historian Alan Bullock's estimate, 30,000 executions took place (Bullock 492). Kurbas and, in spite of his political orthodoxy, Ivan Mykytenko were shot in that same year. Kurbas's Shakespearean and all his other productions were removed from the repertoire of the theatre and prohibited from even being mentioned for over two decades. His director's diary, lecture notes, maquettes, films, and photos were destroyed; even his name became one of the prohibited words of the Soviet period until after Stalin's death in 1953, when it was tentatively first mentioned. The Buryat Soviet director Valeri Inkizhynov, who had worked with both Meyerhold (1916–24) and Kurbas (1927–9), and later lived and worked in the West, referred to the execution of Kurbas as a horrific act comparable to the destruction of an Einstein (Inkizhynov 450).

Stefania Andrusiv has claimed that 'no regime guarded its monopoly on the word as much as the communist regime. And no other succeeded to such an extent in brandishing language and shaping it to its own purpose. The purpose: to make everyone submissive not only physically, but also psychically, with the aid of fear and of language: its homogenization and lexical limitation, including the withdrawal of "unnecessary," "harmful" words (there will be no protest, no explosion, if there are no words, which can form such thoughts, because one cannot think about that which has no name) ...' (Andrusiv 148–9). Kurbas became one of these unspeakable, 'unnecessary' words excluded from all Soviet theatrical lexicons for over two decades; reference to his work, a 'prohibited zone,' a 'dangerous topic' (Cherkashyn 163). Not until the death of Stalin, and in the early period of the Khrushchev 'Thaw,' was Kurbas's name finally permitted public mention – but only when accompanied by severe criticism. The full 'rehabilitation' of Kurbas and what he had 'done' to the classics came only with glasnost. The details of Kurbas's

biography were tracked down by the Ukrainian journalist Raisa Skalii, who was finally able to publish her findings in 1991 (Skalii, 'Istoriia,' 4, 9). But even in 2000, the State Museum of Theatre, Music, and Cinematic Arts still refused to acknowledge the Stalinist past and change the date of Kurbas's death in the exhibition hall from 1942 (with its suggestion of death during the Second World War) to 1937, when he was shot at the orders of Stalin and on the occasion of the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution. His body was never recovered.

After painstaking work by members of the St Petersburg 'Memorial' group trawling through KGB documents since 1989, it was discovered that, in the northern forests of Russia, close to the city of Medvezhyegorsk and not far from the White and Baltic seas, from 27 October to 4 November 1937, planned, daily executions took place. In 1997 the mass graves of 1,100 men and women of various nationalities were uncovered. On the list of those executed at close range was Les Kurbas (Shelest and Shcherbyna 3; Krushel'nyts'ka 3, 6).

'March all one way and be no more oppos'd': Shakespeare in the 1930s

By the mid 1930s, a united front was established on the attitude toward the classics. Combining a deep reverence for genius with an appeal to justice, O. Pysarevsky asserted that the classics were now regarded as the 'riches, created by geniuses of all times and nations,' which had hitherto 'belonged to the exploitative classes ... [O]nly in our time, has the proletariat, as the only legal inheritor of all cultural acquisitions, approached the utilization, the study, and the mastery of the best examples of classical literature and art'; among these are the plays of the 'author of unsurpassed works, which shine out with the rays of diamonds, the famous English playwright William Shakespeare' (Pysarevs'kyi 1).

With Gorky's suggestion at the First Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934 (17 August – 1 September) that an all-Soviet theatre be established in Moscow to produce plays about the quotidian life of the national republics with the 'consolidation of Soviet literatures,'[6] and with Yura's takeover as the leading director of a major state theatre, provincialism in its 'Little Brother/Little Russian' variety was formalized, the vestiges of a cultural menshivisim (to use Kurbas's term), reestablished. The official entrenchment in 1934 of socialist realism with its source in folklore as the only correct method of creating art in the USSR was, as this chapter has been suggesting, not a new turn but rather a return: the final, official codification of a nearly twelve-year attempt at univocality, homogeneity, and control on the one hand, and, on the other, a growing awareness of the necessity of compromising with the recalcitrant tastes of the 'masses.'

Along with socialist realism, Stanislavsky's method was proclaimed the most congenial for the masses, that is, for the most primitive intelligence. It was a policy which ignored the protests of 'minor' nationalities, such as the concerns of the Georgian writer Mitsishvili, who feared that, without the possibility of individual national cultural development, 'minor literatures' were in danger of becoming 'pale copies of Russian literature, and as restrained in the choice of new subjects as in the search for national forms' (cited in Robin 63). One of the effective methods of creating a single Soviet culture and battling the 'raging nationalism' in the republics, especially Ukraine, was, the Russian writer Maxim Gorky suggested, to 'interpenetrate' cultures by way of translations (cited in Robin 63–4). Among the over-sized portraits adorning the walls of the 1934 First Soviet Writers' Congress was the portrait of The Realist, Shakespeare, one of the few survivors of the confusing and confused first twelve years of the USSR. The massive project of translating Shakespeare's works into all of the more than twenty-eight languages of the Soviet republics began shortly thereafter. By 1966 the Shakespearean Soviet scholar Roman Samarin was able to claim that over 5 million copies of Shakespeare's works had been published in the various languages of the USSR (Samarin, Preface, 7).

Although Kurbas disappeared from the Ukrainian stage, Ukrainian productions of Shakespeare did not entirely vanish. *Romeo and Juliet* and *Much Ado about Nothing* were produced in the second half of the 1930s. *Othello* in Saksahansky's general interpretation was twice reprised and had very long runs. On the eve of the Second World War, *Macbeth* (1938), directed by one of Kurbas's colleagues from the Berezil theatre, Vasyl Vasylko – he who wrote admiringly in his diary of the scandal of this production in 1924 – produced the play as a vehicle for his wife, Liubov Hakkebush (Lady Macbeth in Kurbas's versions of the play), who had received little professional challenge from contemporary Soviet plays. None of these Shakespeare productions was deeply memorable. Of the various ways of producing Shakespeare in the 1920s, only the melodramatic-'realistic' was permitted in the next decade, bringing with it a return to the 'star system' of acting and to folklore as the major 'colour' of the production. Indeed, folklore and folklorism (which Kurbas had pegged as Uncle-Tomism, not true culture) became a major industry, and, curiously, folklorism in all republics was regarded 'as a binding force to the center, a signifier of loyalty, and a commitment to ethnic equality' (Stites, *Russian Popular*, 95). At the same time, the centre (Moscow) maintained a metropolitan – not a folk – culture.

In P.A. Markov's *The Soviet Theatre*, an official publication intended, as its publishers noted, to 'describe and explain the Soviet system and method in various branches' to an English-speaking audience, Markov explained that at the time of its publication (1935), the Repertoire Committee, part of the People's Commis-

sariat of Education, 'does not permit the performance of plays which are socially insignificant or harmful, and it assists the theatres in the correct interpretation of a play,' not censoring but rather 'regulating and assisting' (Markov 21–2). Doing away with ephemeral and 'shallow' plays, which centred on 'individual and personal relationships,' the Soviet theatre had turned to the classics of world theatre, and thus carried out 'one of the principal tasks of socialist culture – the study and critical assimilation of the heritage of the past' (Markov 29). The theatre's role was to bring to the people the loftiest examples of world culture. This focus on 'the great masters arises out of a thirst for the best that the culture of the past can give and the desire to raise the Soviet theatre to a high level of craftsmanship and so develop its capacity for treating great problems' (Markov 30). In taking up the classics, Markov argued, Soviets reinterpreted them in a new way, linking them with the social ideas of this time, and 'purifying' them of past interpretations. 'They now appear on our stage in their true guise with their original simplicity and austerity' (Markov 31).

Ivan Mykytenko had made a similar case: in England dramatic art was 'cold and indifferent, dead and without a future,' although it was 'dressed in fashionable, expensive costumes ... The English have no right to the best cultural traditions of Europe,' he scolded. 'The classics belonged to the Soviets, too' (Mykytenko, 'Teatr,' 168). In taking up Shakespeare, then, the Soviets were performing a rescue operation for all of humanity even as they laid claim to being the only rightful inheritors of this dramatic tradition which, hitherto, had been the purview of the 'decadent' capitalist British. The 'Soviet style,' then, involved a stripping away of layers of false interpretation and a return to an austere 'truth' with its direct, transparent simplicity: 'The drama is a reflection of life and is profoundly, fundamentally true ... To be truthful means to bring out the full significance of the historical processes which are taking place; to show the audience the direction in which they are moving; to exhibit profound, vivid, heartening and stirring characters typical of our day; to show, with all the strength, craftsmanship and observation at one's command, *in the name of what* and *for the sake of what* the Revolution is taking place' (*sic*, Markov 41).

The chief aim of the Soviet theatre was 'to change the world' (169). 'It remains in its essence agitational, for it has a message, a summons to a new life, a new classless society' (170). Art must be 'proletarian in content, and national in form' and thus will result in 'significant and original plays' (158). The usual delays associated with translation and publication meant that, when Markov's book (which praised the work of Les Kurbas and his Berezil theatre) finally appeared in English, Kurbas was already incarcerated and the traces of his Berezil were being wiped out.

Equating the 'masses' with the spectator-worker in particular, and lacking a consistent and fully articulated theory of art, the Party leaders had scrambled

throughout the 1920s to create an approach, if not a theory, which would, retroactively, accommodate both the fact of the Revolution and the conservatism of the spectator. Its basic ethos – give the masses what they want, or should want, comprehensible theatre – meant that, in a fashion, the revolution in the theatre gave way to the equivalent of what in the West was 'the market' – the demands of the box office, as well as the demands of the Party. As we have seen, already by 1929 the most radical approaches were no longer possible as each theatre attempted to survive by claiming that (whatever its real approach to art) it was truly realistic. The process of the homogenization or plebianization (as Myroslav Shkandrij has termed it) of theatrical art and cultural life had begun.

In the formal establishment of what came to be called 'socialist realism' in 1934, the ethnographic theatre, which had seemed to be on its last legs in the early 1920s, was thus not only revived but re-interpreted and re-mythologized. Curiously, then, by the mid-1930s, Shakespeare, realism, and national-ethnographic plays were all made unlikely allies. As Yuri Sherekh (Shevelov) observed some time ago, among the many paradoxes of this time was the paradox that the best Ukrainian artists of the time were destroyed not for 'nationalism' but for 'universalism' – for their belief in the universal freedom of artistic creativity, for their independent 'struggle against provincialism and palsied banality' (Sherekh 46).

Thus if in the early 1920s the utility of Shakespeare was very much debated, by 1939 it was unquestioned. On the occasion of the 375th birthday of the bard, a full page of the Ukrainian newspaper *Red Zaporizhzhia* (*Chervone Zaporizhzhia*) was dedicated to 'the giant of drama and poetry' (Veleten' dramaturhii i poezii). Among the many favourable citations about the excellent qualities of Shakespeare were excerpts taken from Pushkin and Marx (in whose family, it was said, there was a Shakespeare 'cult') – but, interestingly, none from Ukrainian scholars or writers (23 April 1939: 3). The three actors associated with *Othello* for the past fourteen years, Borys Romanytsky, Varvara Liubart, and Vasyl Yaremenko, however, all contributed to this special issue, as did the director Viktor Kharchenko. Yaremenko stressed both the 'great love and respect' of the Soviet spectator for the 'titan of world poetry' (Iaremenko, 'Robota nad p'esamy Shekspira,' 3) and the 'colossal training' which Shakespeare provided actors, while Kharchenko affirmed that 'Shakespeare has firmly entered into the [Ukrainian] *pobut* (daily life), into culture, into creativity. The thoughts, images, aphorisms of the great poet may be heard everywhere – from the capital to the most far-flung collective farm. In love with life, full of trust in the best qualities of man, the great humanist, Shakespeare, is close to us, the citizens of this young socialist country. The bard of the power of human thought and of a noble heart, Shakespeare created and left behind for his successors unsurpassed images of real people, real epochs in all their riches and in their social-class relationships. That is why his works live eter-

nally, that is why his works are the immortal source of an understanding of a whole period of mankind's development, that is why his heroes, thoughts, and feelings move us today' (Kharchenko 3).

Epilogue: 'A winter's tale'

In Ukraine, shortly after December 1991, when 90.3 per cent of the population voted for independence, two productions of *Macbeth* were found on the stages of the capital, Kyiv.[7] For an outsider, the obvious conclusion would be that Shakespeare's play represented an interpretation of the past seventy years as a period of tyranny, cruelty, and treachery comparable to the barbaric world of medieval Scotland. And the productions, whatever their merits, no doubt partly served that function. Consider how Macduff's words would have reverberated in the minds of an audience which had just been released from Soviet rule, and whose memory of Stalin was still fresh:

> O nation miserable!
> With an untitled tyrant bloody-sceptred,
> When shalt thou see thy wholesome days again? (IV.iii. 103–5)

The 1991 productions of *Macbeth* could indeed be perceived as meditations upon the recent past only just being unearthed, documented, and articulated. In the unexpectedly rapid unravelling of the USSR, playwrights, like politicians, found themselves without a prepared text with which to respond to the political situation, just as they had in the 1920s. Shakespeare the classic was conveniently ready-made material which yet again could speak to the contemporary moment and to an audience long trained in reading allegorically. Alla Babenko's production of *Macbeth* was intended to pursue the existential question, 'How to be?' by diminishing the role of Lady Macbeth and focusing, instead, on the constant moral choices made by a great general tempted by ambition. In his review, Genrikh Yeremin explained that this production played out the 'eternal battle between despotism and justice.' Macbeth was a 'dictator,' the play a lesson to 'carefree power holders' always morally and legally to weigh their every step (Ieremin). The second production, prepared by Ihor Cizkewycz, was completely unlike the philosophical version of Babenko. Instead, Cizkewycz produced an 'agitbrigade' *Macbeth* which consciously diminished its high tragedy, turning it into quotidian violence (Savchuk n.p.).

It is not surprising that both of these productions took their inspiration from the same source, the rich theatrical renaissance of the 1920s, and that they both focused on the same play. Part of an unfinished dialogue with the West initiated

before the Revolution and cut off by the late 1920s, the productions also constituted an unspoken conversation with the 'repressed' master, Les Kurbas, whose 1924 *Macbeth* remains one of those seminal productions in the history of the stage – like Max Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – which engaged wider issues concerning the value and significance of the classic, the theatre tradition and its directions, the audience, and, in Kurbas's case, the force of ideology.

Kurbas's fate was emblematic of the fate of non-Russian republics' cultural histories: erased both in the USSR and in the West, which either replicated neoimperial discourses or reduced discussion into familiar Marxist categories of class, capitalism, and ideology. The result of both has been a historical homogenization of the variety and richness of the republics' cultures into a single, monolithic Soviet culture. Also not unscathed by this process, Shakespeare nonetheless survived debates and purges, revisions, reconstructions, and reversions. It is hoped that this study has revealed something of the complexity and plasticity (if, inevitably, not the heart of the mystery) of Shakespeare's relationship to the processes of cultural acquisition and renewal in the particularly volatile circumstances of the creation of a new political order. With archives ever more open, and sources yet to be discovered, there is room for many more Horatios to tell – and analyse – the story.

Appendix

A Chronological Handlist of Shakespeare Productions Discussed in This Book

The establishment of cast lists and production credits is no easy matter. Many documents were deliberately destroyed in the 1930s. This handlist has been pieced together from a variety of references, including both printed and, especially, archival sources.

Romeo and Juliet, directed by Les' Kurbas, Young Theatre Company (Molodyi teatr), 1918–19, in Kyiv. Roles distributed in the summer of 1918 as follows: Romeo – Kurbas; Juliet – Olympiia Dobrovols'ka (replaced by Valentyna Chystiakova by January, 1919); Montague – Stepan Bondarchuk; Capulet – Volodymyr Kalyn; Mercutio – Semdor (pseudonym of Semen Doroshenko); Friar Lawrence – Marko Tereshchenko; Benvolio – Hnat Iura. Stage design: Robert Lisovs'kyi. The play was in rehearsal but was not premiered for 'financial reasons': the Red Army invaded Kyiv in February 1919 and destroyed sets, costumes, and properties. *Romeo and Juliet* was staged in fragments in 1921 by the students of Kurbas's travelling troupe, the Kyidramte (Kyiv Dramatic Theatre). Kurbas subsequently returned to this play in a number of his theatre lab workshops. Although announced for the 1929–30 season as part of a large cultural plan to 'demonstrate' the classics to workers and students, there is no extant evidence to prove that it was indeed performed.

Macbeth, directed by Les' Kurbas, 1919–20. Three redactions of the play were created. The play was first in preparation in 1919 in Kyiv but no mention is made of details other than that it was performed at the State Dramatic Theatre in Kyiv (probably only in rehearsal, not in final production). The premiere was announced for 20 August 1920 at the Palace (Palats) Theatre in Bila Tserkva with the travelling company, Kyidramte. A third version, staged in Uman, focused particularly on gesture and on the working out of a rhythmic unity to the play. Macbeth – Kurbas; Lady Macbeth – Liubov Hakkebush; Ban-

quo – Vasyl' Vasyl'ko; Duncan – Leonid Predslavych; Macduff – Hnat Ihnatovych; First Witch – Valentyna Chystiakova; Porter – Faust Lopatyns'kyi. Set design: Anatolii Petryts'kyi. Music: Edvard Grieg.

Macbeth, directed by Les' Kurbas, premiere 2 April 1924, the Berezil' Artistic Association (Mystets'ke obiednannia Berezil'), at the Bergonier Theatre (Teatr Bergon'ie, now the Lesia Ukrainka Theatre), in Kyiv. Macbeth – Ivan Marianenko; Lady Macbeth – Liubov Hakkebush; Duncan – Pavlo Dolyna; Banquo – Serhii Karhal's'kyi; Macduff – Oles' Serdiuk; First Witch – Hanna Babiivna; Porter – Amvrosii Buchma. Set design and costumes: Vadym Meller. Music: Anatolii Buts'kyi.

Othello, directed by Panas Saksahans'kyi and later by Borys Romanyts'kyi, premiere 6 February 1926, Zan'kovets'ka Theatre (Teatr Marii Zan'kovets'koi) in Katerynoslav (Dnipropetrovsk), Othello – Borys Romanyts'kyi; Desdemona – Varvara Liubart; Iago – Vasyl' Iaremenko. With the exception of the three starring actors (Liubart, Romanyts'kyi, and Iaremenko), the establishment of a casting list is far from certain. According to V. Tobilevych (263), the cast included Liubart/Kolyshko (Desdemona), Iaroshenko (Emilia), Iaremenko (Iago), Bohdanovych (Brabantio), Slyva (Cassio), Oles' (Roderigo), Dotsenko (Bianca), Fed'kovych (Doge). The 1926 poster, reprinted in the program notes to the 150th production, lists the main actors in large bold print, but does not specify the minor roles; a barely legible list of actors follows but it does not include all of the same actors mentioned by Tobilevych. Probably because of financial difficulties, as well as the difficulties of being constantly on the road, there was quite a bit of turnover in actors playing minor roles. So, for example, various archival sources cite the names of different actresses all playing the role of Emilia in 1926. Even the SMTMCA seems to be subject to such confusion. The photos purportedly extant from the premiere of the 1926 *Othello* show an Emilia who seems not to have acted in the premiere. Soviet theatrical histories notoriously either omit dates in printing photos, or they simply jumble various productions together. It is thus difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty even the exact costumes or set of the production. Again, from such archival sources, it is evident that the wear-and-tear of travel resulted in the abandonment of consistency of style, to say nothing of historical accuracy, and, by the late 1920s, they played in whatever the available costumes and sets were of the towns in which they found themselves.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, directed by Hnat Iura, premiere 16 October 1927, at the Ivan Franko Theatre, in Kyiv. Theseus – Delevs'kyi; Aegeon – Iurs'kyi; Lysander – Vasyl'iev; Demetrius – Ternychenko; Bottom – Pylypenko; Lubok (Quince?) – Sahatovs'kyi; Dudka (Flute) – Iura; Hippolyta – Leinova; Hermia – Barvins'ka; Helena – Iurvina; Titania – Luchyts'ka [no first names are listed]. Set design: V. Komardionkov. Music: Naum Pruslin. Choreography: E. Vigil'iov.

King Lear, preparatory work by Les' Kurbas (October to 26 December 1933), completed and directed by Sergei Radlov, GOSET (State Jewish Theatre), premiere 10 February 1935. Lear – Solomon Mikhoels; Veniamin Zuskin – the Fool. Set design: Aleksandr Tyshler.

Macbeth, directed by Alla Babenko, premiere 30 April 1992, at the Zan'kovets'ka Theatre, in L'viv. Macbeth – Bohdan Kozak; Lady Macbeth – Lida Ostryns'ka.

Macbeth, directed by Ihor Cizkewycz, premiere 15 June 1992, at the Theatre of the Young Spectator (Teatr iunoho hliadacha), in Kyiv. Macbeth – Vitalii Savchuk; Lady Macbeth – O. Sikors'ka.

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Notes

Whenever possible, I have attempted to track down and cite manuscript sources, even though some of these subsequently found their way into print. State censorship, even as late as 1989, often occluded or distorted the original meaning or even the basic facts presented in these texts. Archival collections of individual theatre companies (Molodyi teatr; Kyidramte; Berezil'; Derzhavnyi teatr im. M. Zankovets'koi; Natsional'nyi akademichnyi teatr im. Ivana Franka), actors (Les' Kurbas, Ivan Mar'ianenko, Amvrosii Buchma, Panas Saksahans'kyi, Liubov Hakkebush, Oles' Serdiuk, Valentyna Chystiakova, Vasyl' Vasyl'ko), as well as lectures, minutes of directorial lab meetings, memoirs, photographs, and letters have been consulted at the following institutions. Their abbreviated names, indicated here, are used throughout the book, including in the Works Cited:

- Derzhavnyi Muzei Teatral'noho, Muzychnoho ta Kinomystetstva Ukrainy – State Museum of Theatre, Music, and Cinematic Arts (Kyiv) – SMTMCA
- Instytut Mystetstva, Folkloru i Etnohrafii im. M. Ryl's'koho, Akademia Nauk Ukrainy – The M. Ryl's'kyi Institute of Art, Folklore, and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences (Kyiv) – IMFE
- Literaturnyi Instytut im. T.H. Shevchenka, Akademii Nauk Ukrainy – T.H. Shevchenko Literature Institute, Academy of Sciences (Kyiv) – LI
- Teatral'nyi Muzei Derzhavnoho Teatru im. T. Shevchenka – the Shevchenko State Theatre Museum (Kharkiv) – SSTM
- Hazetni Fondy Akademii Nauk Ukrainy – Newspaper fonds of the Academy of Sciences, Kyiv, Ukraine – Nf
- Bronislava Nijinska Archives. Private archives. Pacific Palisades, California. (Now in the Library of Congress.) – BNA
- Nancy Baer Archives. Private archives. San Francisco, California. (Now at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.) – NBA
- San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum – PALM

The Notes and Works Cited indicate the inventory number and file (when this exists) by which a text is known in its particular repository.

Chapter 1: Ex nihilo: The Classics, Wars, and Revolutions

1 Ortiz published on a wide range of subjects, including race, music, theatre, ritual, and politics. His two early fundamental works are *Hampa afrocubana: los negros brujos* (1905; 2nd ed. 1917) and *Hampa afrocubana: los negros esclavos* (1916). *Orbita de Fernando Ortiz* (1973), an anthology, provides a good cross-section of his interests. I am indebted to Mary Louise Pratt's article in *Profession 91* (MLA) for first introducing me to Ortiz. See her 'Arts of the Contact Zone.'

2 I am grateful to my colleague from Modern Languages and Literatures, Gaston Lillo, for directing me to the work of Rama.

3 Pratt's subject of study is Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's twelve-hundred-page letter to King Philip III of Spain, *Nueva corónica* (1613). Pratt contrasts autoethnographic with ethnographic texts, 'those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others)' (Pratt 35). While appropriating Pratt's very useful term – autoethnographic text – and applying it to issues of theatrical repertoire, I am also slightly altering and expanding her definition.

4 The only new translation in this collection was N. Rossov's *Hamlet*, although it was also a romanticized, even bowdlerized, version.

5 Kurbas was very disappointed by Central Ukrainian theatres. Despite the poverty of the Western Ukrainian theatre, where Kurbas began his acting career, it was, if not steeped, then at least educated, in the traditions of Western European drama. See Yosyp Hirniak, 'Birth,' 257. Kurbas was himself the son of actors, Stepan and Vanda Kurbas (stage name Ianovych), who had performed with a number of troupes, including Rus'ka Besida, the leading company in Western Ukraine. Kurbas himself later worked with this company (among others), playing, like his father before him, many romantic leads. Rus'ka Besida, like the other Ukrainian troupes, was, perforce, a touring company. Its repertoire included both Western and Eastern European plays and it often encountered Polish and German troupes. On the early Kurbas, see Iryna Volyts'ka.

6 I am grateful to my colleague Donald Childs for his refinements of my interpretation of Bergson.

7 For example, exhibitions have been mounted in Zagreb (1990–1), Munich (1993), Toulouse (1993–4), Winnipeg (2001), Hamilton (2002), and New York (2002).

8 The influential medieval period of Kyivan Rus' was as highly regarded as the 'Kozak' baroque, the latter being that period in which the first coherent attempts to create an independent, democratic form of government (independent of both tsarist Russia and Poland) and territory on the borderlands of the steppes took place.

9 Kurbas's natural inclination toward stylization and expressionism made him discount realistic modes almost out of hand. He would have been surprised to find that

Stanislavsky shared some of his views and that, in practice, their preparations for actors were, in some respects, similar, as for example, both directors' use of the metronome during rehearsals.

10 Citing Yosyp Hirniak's unpublished article, 'Kytytsia spohadiv na mohylu Leny Holitsyns'koi,' from the private archives of Hirniak in New York, Valerian Revutsky claims that Kurbas planned to cast the actress-singer Olena Holitsyns'ka as Juliet for the Young Theatre's production. See Revutsky, *Neskoreni*, 141. However, Revutsky must be mistaken, since Holitsyns'ka did not join Kurbas's company until 1927, when it was known as *Berezil'*. The production of *Romeo and Juliet* which Hirniak mentions must have therefore been one of the attempts to stage this play late in the 1920s. Further difficulties with Revutsky's claims come when he writes that Hirniak's article is dated 1978 (ibid.) but, later, as 1973 (179).

11 However, sometime that month Kurbas announced to his collective that in addition to these Shakespearean plays, he was adding *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the fall season, and was also considering *Antony and Cleopatra*. See Labins'kyi, 'Den',' 281.

12 So, according to the journalist-researcher Raisa Skalii, who has been responsible for tracking down many of the factual details of Kurbas's life, including the place and date of his execution, his various domiciles, and his romantic attachments. The suicide attempt of 13 October 1913 was reported in the press. Interview with Raisa Skalii, Kyiv, 11 September 1995. The more sceptical Iryna Volyts'ka attributes a number of reasons for Kurbas's attempts to kill himself. See her *Teatral' na iunist'*, 126. Valerii Haydabura, however, seems to suggest that he saw the suicide note (Haidabura 26).

13 Graham Holderness distinguishes three categories of political theatre: a politics of content, a politics of function, and politics of form. The first, which he describes as a rudimentary Marxist theatre, overtly and directly addresses matters of political issues (such as class war). The second is more oblique but nonetheless limits its politics to its subject matter. The third may be regarded as political both in its form and content, as, for example, the theatre of Brecht, which through its 'alienation devices' and self-reflexiveness simultaneously questions received dramatic and cultural traditions, perceptions, ideologies, and the society to which the play is addressed. (Holderness 6–9). Kurbas's last company, the Berezil' Artistic Association, may be said to follow Holderness's third model: a theatre political in form and content.

14 Natalia Kuziakina, '*Makbet* Shekspira,' believes that Kurbas's *Macbeth* did not get beyond the stage of directorial planning (51). This may be so, since Kurbas refers to the Bila Tserkva version as the first Shakespeare play in Ukrainian. However, it does not explain why the actor Stepan Bondarchuk and Iurii Smolych identify the first version as having been staged (a dress rehearsal?) in Kyiv.

15 Kurbas, director's diary (Rezhysers'kyi shchodennyk), 5 July 1920, leaf 1, entries composed during his travels through the villages of Salivonka and Hrebinka. Although parts of the diary were reprinted in M. Labins'kyi, ed., *Berezil'*, this specific passage, which appears on pp. 32–3, is censored and edited. Kurbas's phrase about the Red

Army is excised (by the censor or by Labins'kyi), sharpening class differences and retaining an uncritical view of the Army.

Kurbas's diary is problematic. Since Kurbas's own papers were destroyed sometime after his arrest in 1934, the diary, like other documents, survives only in the versions which others dared to save. The diary is extant as excerpts (Rezhysers'kyi shchodennyk; iz staroho zshytka, f. 42/49 IMFE) copied out between 1929–30 by the director and pedagogue Mykhailo Verkhats'kyi, who was working on a book-length study, entitled 'Works and Days' ('Dni i pratsi'), of Kurbas's last company, the Berezil'. This project is, in itself, an indicator of how highly valued Kurbas was in his time. Verkhats'kyi, among other scholars, insisted that many books needed to be written about this extraordinary director. Verkhats'kyi's own manuscript of the book has also disappeared or, more probably, was destroyed. On Verkhats'kyi see Labins'kyi, ed., *Berezil'*, endnote, p. 497, and also see the reminiscences of Viktor Kisin, 'Kil'ka,' 2–5; and Mykola Merzlikin, 'Khai,' 22–4.

16 *Macbeth*, premiere 20 August 1920 in Bila Tserkva. Macbeth – Kurbas; Lady Macbeth – Liubov Hakkebush; Banquo – Vasyl Vasyl'ko; Duncan – Leonid Predslavych; Macduff – Hnat Ihnatovych; Macdonald – Pavlo Dolyna; First Witch – Valentyna Chystiakova; Porter – Faust Lopatyns'kyi.

17 According to a friend from his student days, Mykhailo Rudnyts'kyi, Kurbas long dreamed of staging and acting Shakespeare. See Rudnyts'kyi, 'V naime,' 75. Rudnyts'kyi also notes that when he teased Kurbas about the fact that the material conditions of his stage would be very poor given the times (1913), Kurbas retorted by referring his friend to both the Japanese and the Shakespearean theatres, whose simplicity did not prevent great plays or productions.

18 Kurbas's grandfather, who was a Catholic ('Uniate') priest of the Eastern rite, disinherited his own son for pursuing an acting career. He also sent Kurbas to Vienna to study on the promise that Kurbas would avoid the theatre and the arts.

19 According to the actor and director Roman Cherkashyn, no comparable Russian or other term exists to explain Kurbas's notion of *peretvorennia*. It reflected Kurbas's focus on broadly associative, imagistic thinking, which, in his view, was the key characteristic of the new intellectual art. Cited in N.V. Kuziakina, 'Les' Kurbas,' 24. Kuziakina incorrectly refers to Roman as 'V.' Cherakyshyn.

20 The notion of the Wise Harlequin is central to Kurbas's theories of acting, argues Nelli Korniienko in 'Teatral'naia estetika.'

Chapter 2: Tilting at da Vinci: Kurbas's 1924 *Macbeth*

1 Vasyl'ko's diary is extant in two versions, as typescript and manuscript; the former contains some stylistic and, in a few cases, substantive changes (most likely those of a censor). I cite from the manuscript version unless otherwise indicated.

2 How left-wing Kurbas really was seems debatable. Those closest to him, like Yosyp Hirniak, argued for Kurbas's political naivety, and for his attempt simply to survive the times. Others, like Mykola Bazhan, make Kurbas sound like a firmly committed Marxist. That he was not a communist is indicated by an article in *Barykady teatru* (October, 1923) in which he affirms that the Berezil' was not creating a communist culture or theatre, although it happily accepted communists into its ranks, along with others of all ideological stripes interested in the theatre. While Kurbas's use of terms like the 'materials' of the theatrical craft and 'materiality' suggest a left-leaning tendency, attention to the materials of art is a hallmark of modernism and constructivism. That Kurbas cared for the theatre above politics of any sort can be seen from reading the corpus of his extant work: his director's diary, lectures, published articles.

3 Kurbas never tired of saying that the theatre of feeling was always and everywhere an amateur theatre. When actors 'feel,' he claimed, they 'roar.' See 'Pro svidomyi pidkhid' 112–18, especially 114.

4 For an excellent, detailed description of the demanding academic program see Prolektor [Matvii Shatul's'kyi], 20–1. From the actor's point of view, this rigorous program is described in Hirniak's *Spomyny*, especially 158–83. On the art assignments see Verkhats'kyi, especially 152–3.

5 Hirniak claims that the agitprop productions were part of Kurbas's compromise with the times. See Hirniak, *Spomyny*, 148 and 280. In conversation with me (7 January 1995), Valerian Revutsky argued that Kurbas's agitprop productions were calculated efforts to 'bring the genre back to health,' that is to, make it truly aesthetic. In particular, Kurbas was indirectly attacking the very schematized (e.g., evil capitalists versus good workers) productions of M. Tereshchenko. As a result of Kurbas's very successful and poetic creations, Revutsky claims, the genre died in its older form.

6 On objectifying and fixing exercises see Vasyl'ko, 'Narodnyi artyst,' 14.

7 Throughout his career, Kurbas made constant references to art and used visual metaphors when writing about the theatre. See, for example, his essays 'Estetstvo' (1923); 'Shliakhy *Berezolia* i pytannia faktury' (1925); 'S'iohodni ukrains'koho teatru i *Berezil'*' (1927), and 'Treba pereminyty okuliary' (1929). Kurbas himself befriended many of the revolutionary artists in Kyiv, and loved to discuss French art with them. He liberally sprinkled his discussions with references to cubists, fauvists, surrealists, and others.

8 See the list of books for Professor Oleksander Bilets'kyi's drama course, IMFE, f.42/49, p. 16. Of the forty-nine critical books on the reading list, eight are directly concerned with the English Renaissance theatre, a greater number of books than on any other national theatre. Les' Kurbas himself gave at least twelve lectures on the English theatre. See f. 42/49.

9 Shatul's'kyi's special report for the Canadian labour journal *Voice of Work* (*Holos pratsi*) begins with a series of rhetorical questions that have a hollow ring to them today:

'Who in Ukraine doesn't know the name of Les Kurbas? Who has never heard about the Artistic Association Berezil'? Only a person who is uninterested in anything, and who neither reads nor wants to know about anything, knows nothing about these renowned names. The names Les Kurbas and the Berezil' are now known throughout the whole territory of the Soviet Union; they are known in Europe and among Ukrainians in the United States and Canada. The Soviet press writes about these names in different languages; even beyond the borders of Soviet Ukraine, the Ukrainian enemies of Soviet rule write about them, and brag, 'Look at what a theatre we Ukrainians have!' (Prolektor 18). Sadly, the pride which Shatul's'kyi felt and the renown which the Berezil' was garnering were not to last. After 1934, Shatul's'kyi and his own labour temple colleagues omitted any reference in their subsequent publications to this trip and to Kurbas, when they followed Moscow's tacit prohibition against even mentioning Kurbas's name for over five decades. But that was in the future.

10 See Virlana Tkacz's interesting and persuasive argument on the production of *Jimmie Higgins*. V. Tkacz, 'Les' Kurbas's Use of Film Language.' D.W. Griffith was, she argues, an important influence on Kurbas, who was very soon to turn to film-making himself.

11 *Makbet*, translated by Panteleimon Kulish (Lviv: Naukove tovarystvo im. T.H. Shevchenka, 1900), Kurbas Archive, inv. 9193, SMTMCA. The first 15 pages of the text are missing, as are pages 65 to 96.

12 Kosach, *Dushi liuds'koi charodii*, 102, and Hirniak, *Spomyny*, 197, among others, claim that Meller's first versions of the set, using heavy curtains and interior sets, were rejected by Kurbas for being 'static.' The final product thus appears to be the result of a lengthy creative process involving both Kurbas and Meller.

13 Hirniak noted that the work of Viktor Shklovsky was widely read by the members of the Berezil'. Interview with Hirniak 10 August 1982 (New York), cited by Tkacz, 'Les Kurbas and the Creation of a Ukrainian Avant-Garde Theater,' 65.

14 The idea of 'loading' even the smallest detail of a work with the most content is typical of constructivism in Eastern Europe. See Bojtar 81.

15 So, at least, my examination of the photos in the archival collection of in the SMTMCA suggested to me. In one, Hakkebush faces the viewer in a close-up which shows her heavily made-up eyes, and her whole face shrinking in terror from something. In the second photo, looking beautiful and innocent, she carries a light in front of her in her outstretched hand. This is the only photo extant I have examined which shows her in an upright posture, her head back, her long hair streaming behind her. In other photos from the earlier parts of the play, she is never upright, always stylized in her movements, and usually hunched over, whether reading the letter from Macbeth, walking with him, or responding to his rage (probably after the murder of Duncan). In the sleepwalking photos, she is also shown sitting or, more accurately, reclining. Had I not known that these were photos taken of Lady Macbeth, I would certainly

have thought that they were photos of Ophelia. The stage imagery of femininity – the white colour of her shift, the loose hair, the feminine and less stylized gestures – suggest this. See illustrations 20, 21, above.

16 On the three Lady Macbeths of the Soviet Ukrainian stage, all played by Liubov Hakkebush, see Smolych, *Pro teatr*, 155–66, and Kuziakina, 'Ledi,' 190–8.

17 So, according to Valentyna Zabolotna, a theatre historian and great-granddaughter of Amvrosii Buchma, who played the Fool in this production. See her *Aktors'ke mystetstvo*, 53. Also, similar views were voiced in an interview with me in Kyiv on 12 September 1995.

18 The word 'scandal' is frequently repeated in reference to this production, not only in printed sources but also in public, polemical discussions, as an eyewitness, Valerian Revutsky, confirms. Revutsky, in correspondence with me, letter dated 3 December 1992. The interpretation of the production as scandal is best indicated by I[akiv] S[avchenko]'s review, 'Shekspir dybom.'

19 This vicious attack appeared the same month in which Kurbas was arrested; however, it may have been written by someone else but conveniently attributed to Iura, who had often been unfavourably compared with Kurbas throughout the 1920s. See below, chapter 4.

20 This is a point many scholars of Slavic drama have made, most recently, Lars Kleberg 4.

21 See Bennett, *Theatre as Problem*, 60–83, for a discussion of ceremony. The notion of theatre as church occurs frequently in the writings of Kurbas and other modernists.

Chapter 3: 'Authentic' Shakespeare: Saksahansky's *Othello*

1 A number of biographies note this point about Saksahans'kyi. Representative is Ivan Mar'ianenko's memoir, 'P.K. Saksahans'kyi' (undated, SMTMCA, inv. 5690, 2). In this version of his memoirs (of which there are several in the archives), Mar'ianenko insists that Saksahans'kyi copied his roles and his stage mannerisms both from his eldest brother, Karpenko-Karyi, and from Marko Kropyvnyts'kyi, his first professional mentor.

2 The title of the second chapter of Brooks's book.

3 For example, George Grabowicz's *The Poet as Mythmaker*, the most penetrating study of Taras Shevchenko, caused a scandal when it first appeared because, among other things, it hinted at the possibility of Shevchenko's homosexuality. The outraged response which followed is a good measure of Ukrainians' investment in this author, as well as in the notion of authorship. The theatre historian Natalia Iermakova, in fact, argues that the Ukrainian attitude toward the theatre is not so much literary as author-oriented. She referred to this as 'super-ultra-author-oriented' in private conversation with me in Kyiv, 19 June 2000.

4 This summary is taken from Saksahans'kyi's monograph, *Moia robota nad rolliu*, and Oles''s unpublished memoirs, especially 43–7.

5 Molière was 'never a true artist,' claimed Saksahans'kyi. His plays were all the same. See Saksahans'kyi, 'Derzhavnyi Narodnyi Teatr u Kyevi,' 1.

6 As Petro Rulin diplomatically put it, the 'zan'kivchany' (the actors from the Zan'kovets'ka Theatre) did much better with positive heroes (*Na shliakhakh revoliutsiinoho teatru* 116). Ivan Mar'ianenko was more blunt. He observed that as a comic actor Saksahans'kyi was a 'virtuoso', but, when he took on 'heroic' roles, he was too obviously posing. His acting was also marred by his evident enchantment with his own voice (Mar'ianenko, 'Moie zhyttia i moia pratsia,' 36).

7 The theatre did not become a stationary one until 1931 but then endured yet another move in 1944 to Lviv, where it has since remained and where it acquired a new name – the Lviv State Academic Dramatic Theatre of M. Zan'kovets'ka. In 1970 it also acquired an additional title, that of an 'academic' theatre, a reflection of its long-held views of the classics. The group's aims were and have remained twofold: to maintain a living contact with its inherited Ukrainian tradition and to master and transmit the treasures of world drama.

8 One of the important sources of information for this period is Serhii Iefremov's recently published diaries (*Shchodennyky*). Iefremov, a great admirer of Saksahans'kyi and the nineteenth-century theatre, writes throughout this period of the adulation with which the old actor continued to be received, notwithstanding the meteorological circumstances or the theatres in which he appeared.

9 See the correspondence between the troupe and Stanislavsky (Derzhavnyi Teatr im. M. Zan'kovets'koi): the ensemble's letter to the Russian director, 'Lyst trupy im. M. Zan'kovets'koi do Ks. Stanislavskoho,' 21/8/1925, and his reply, SMTMCA, inv. 1630.

10 With the exception of the three starring actors (Liubart, Romanyts'kyi, and Iaremenko), the establishment of a casting list is not a simple matter. According to B. Tobilevych (263), the cast included Liubart/Kolyshko – Desdemona; Iaroshenko – Emilia; Iaremenko – Iago; Bohdanovych – Brabantio; Slyva – Cassio; Oles' – Roderigo; Dorsenko – Bianca; Fed'kovych – Doge. The 1926 poster, reprinted in the program notes to the 150th production, lists the main actors in large bold print, but does not specify the minor roles; a barely legible list of actors follows but it does not include all of the same actors mentioned by Tobilevych. Probably because of financial difficulties, as well as the difficulties of being constantly on the road, there was quite a bit of turnover in actors playing minor roles. So, for example, various archival sources cite the names of different actresses all playing the role of Emilia in 1926. Even the SMTMCA seems to be subject to such confusion. The photos purportedly extant from the premiere of the 1926 *Othello* show an Emilia who seems not to have acted in the premiere. Soviet theatrical histories notoriously either omit dates in printing pho-

tos, or they simply jumble various productions together. It is thus difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty even the exact costumes or set of the production. Again, from such archival sources, it is evident that the wear-and-tear of travel resulted in the abandonment of consistency of style, to say nothing of historical accuracy, and, by the late 1920s, they played in whatever the available costumes and sets were of the towns in which they found themselves.

11 The diaries of Serhii Iefremov, as well as many unpublished memoirs and letters, attest to the fact that Saksahans'kyi had a busy schedule in the fall of 1925; he continued to tour on his own. His meeting with the actors of the Zan'kovets'ka ensemble in the fall of 1925 is the only actual recorded meeting with them. The minutes of the collective's meetings for 1924–6 make no mention of Saksahans'kyi. Romanyts'kyi's part in this production, interestingly, is indicated by one of the extant programs which refers to him as the director, and to Saksahans'kyi as being responsible for the 'staging' (*stavlenia*). See 'Otello,' SMTMCA, inv. 7857 (no date) and 5008 (1928–9 season).

12 In the same letter Saksahans'kyi rails against Kurbas, the avant-garde theatre, and the 'kaka-demics' (as he mockingly referred to academics) who remained silent in the debate about literature and its relationship to theatre.

13 See the memoirs of a prompter, L. Bilotserkivs'kyi, *Zapysky suflera*, who mentions this in passing but does not provide the rationale (if there was any) behind this decision, nor does he mention when prompters were officially reinstated. Bilotserkivs'kyi's narrative of hunger, typhoid fever, and lack of fuel is especially revelatory of the difficult circumstances in which actors continued to work throughout the 1920s.

14 B. Tobilevych provides details about the manuscript, which, he observes, concludes with the following words: '1920 19 February – 3 September completed. Opanas Saksahansky. City of Kyiv.' Tobilevych notes that parts of the manuscript were reworked in 1924, and formed the basis of the director's copy. The translation was completed in 1925. Unfortunately, despite numerous attempts to contact the nephew of Saksahans'kyi, I was unable to obtain a copy of the manuscript.

Chapter 4: Toward Socialist Realism: Hnat Yura's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

1 For a contrary view (which the evidence of this chapter supports) developed over the past fifteen years or so, see the work of Richard Stites, Lynn Mally, Abbott Gleason, James von Geldern, William G. Rosenberg, and Lars Kleberg.

2 Much of this terrain as it relates to the literary 'discussion' (the name given to the polemical debates about culture) has been mapped by George S.N. Luckyj, in his ground-breaking *Literary Politics in the Soviet Ukraine, 1917–1934*, first published in 1956, and also, more recently, by Myroslav Shkandrij and Oleh Ilnytzkyj. Theatre, however, has not yet received separate or focused study.

3 After studying newly accessible archives, Leonenko has carefully reconstructed the his-

tory of the early Ukrainian state theatres, in the process debunking the false chronology later imposed during the Stalinist period and subsequently repeated by Soviet theatre historians of later decades.

4 These figures were released at the Conference of Directors of State Theatres. See 'Narada dyrektoriv' 9.

5 See, for example, Kurbas's articles, 'Aspekt i teatral'ni zhanry,' 'Pro LEF,' and 'Pro svidomyi pidkhid do tvorchoi roboty, pro sut' maisternosti.'

6 This claim is made advisedly, since it has not been confirmed by other sources.

7 The cast list of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* follows: Theseus – Delevs'kyi; Aegeon – Iurs'kyi; Lysander – Vasyl'iev; Demetrius – Ternychenko; Bottom – Pylypenko; Lubok (Quince?) – Sahatovs'kyi; Dudka (Flute) – Iura; Hippolyta – Leinova; Hermia – Barvins'ka; Helena – Iurvina; Titania – Luchyts'ka. No first names are listed. Premiere: 16 October 1927. Dir. Hnat Iura, music N. Pruslin, choreography E. Vigil'iov, set, V. Komard'ionkov.

8 For example, I. Turkel'taub, 'Pro Frankivtsiv' (1), attacks Iura for copying nearly everything that his predecessor, Nikolai Sinel'nikov, did in the Russian theatre which Iura took over – with the difference that Iura did things badly. He vacillated between 'conceptual symbolism' and 'realism,' without having any sense of boldness or verve. Also see, Turkel'taub, 'Maibutnii sezon,' 2.

9 In Turkel'taub's devastating critique ('Maibutnii sezon' 2) Iura is attacked for an 'eclectic' repertoire about which 'in the best case, one can say that it's the result of "an accident" and, in the worst ... that there is no direction at all.'

10 See his various published articles, defending himself against these charges, including 'V derzhavnym' 4–5.

11 Iura quotes Khrystovyi as making this charge against him at the Theatre Dispute in 1927. See Iura, *Zhyttia i stsena,* 59.

12 For a more detailed view of this question, see my 'Soviet Views of Shakespeare's Comedies.'

13 For a description of Reinhardt's evolving vision of this play over thirty-four years, see Styan, 'Reinhardt's Shakespeare,' especially pp. 54–61, and Fiedler.

Chapter 5: Coda: The 'Tractor of the Revolution' and 'Vanya Shakespeare'

1 A similar indicator of this uneasy relationship of East to West was the concurrent appearance of a new character type in Soviet literature and drama: the foreigner, whose specific function was to be astonished by the various achievements of the Soviets who had outdone their American or German counterparts.

2 Typical of the response to the official adulation of Mykytenko was that of Kost' Burevii, an experienced political figure, who shared Kurbas's views about Mykytenko. His extant manuscript article 'Shakespeare or Kulish?'concluded by advising Mykytenko to

ignore those voices which referred to him as a Shakespeare or a Homer of the Revolution and, instead, counselled him to follow Kurbas's advice and begin seriously to acquire some theatrical technique (Burevii 552). Burevii's article never saw print because the publication of the journal for which it was written, *Prolitfront*, was prohibited and no one else was ready to publish a critique of an officially sanctioned playwright.

3 Positive reviews include those of S. Hets, *Komsomolets' Ukrainy* (5 June 1930); Kh. Tokar', *Proletar* (3 July 1930); Petro Vershyhora, *Mystets'ka trybuna* (1930): 12–13. Cited in Revutsky, 'Les' Kurbas i teatr,' 52.

4 See Hirniak, 'Birth,' 330–1, for a detailed account of this harrowing rehearsal.

5 See the complete details of the charges signed by the Party representative, Andrii Khvylia, in 'Postanovka.'

6 This is the title of an eponymous book by Mykhailo Pryhodii, *Vsesoiuzna konsolidatsiia literatur*, which studied the 'organic' development of the 'consolidation' of Soviet national literatures from the Revolution to the 1934 Congress.

7 *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, directed by Alla Babenko, performed by Bohdan Kozak – Macbeth and Lida Ostryns'ka – Lady Macbeth, at the Zan'kovets'ka Theatre, premiere in L'viv, 30 April 1992, later on tour in Kyiv. *Macbeth* directed by Ihor Cizkewycz, performed by Vitalii Savchuk – Macbeth and O. Sikors'ka – Lady Macbeth at the Teatr iunoho hliadacha, Kyiv, premiere 15 June 1992.

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