THE PATH OF THE ACTOR

Michael Chekhov

Edited by
Andrei Kirillov and
Bella Merlin

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Michael Chekhov, nephew of Anton Chekhov, was arguably one of the greatest actors of the twentieth century. From his time as Stanislavsky's pupil, followed by his artistic leadership in the Second Moscow Art Academic Theatre, his enforced emigration from the Soviet Union and long pilgrimage around Europe, to his work in Hollywood, his life has made a huge impact on the acting profession.

Chekhov's remarkable actor-training techniques inspired many Hollywood legends – including Anthony Hopkins and Jack Nicholson – and his techniques remain one of the theatre's best kept secrets.

This first English translation of Chekhov's autobiographies combines *The Path of the Actor*, from 1928, and extensive extracts from his later *Life and Encounters*. Full of humorous and insightful observations involving prominent characters from Moscow and the European theatre of the early twentieth century, Chekhov takes us through events in his acting career and personal life, from his childhood in St Petersburg until his emigration from Latvia and Lithuania in the early 1930s.

Chekhov's witty, penetrating (and at times immensely touching) accounts have been edited by Andrei Kirillov, whose extensive and authoritative notes accompany the autobiographies. Co-editor, Anglo-Russian trained actor, Bella Merlin, also provides a useful hands-on overview of how the contemporary practitioner might use and develop Chekhov's ideas.

The Path of the Actor is an extraordinary document that allows us unprecedented access into the life, times, mind and soul of a remarkable man and a brilliant artist.

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GCTM – The State Central Theatre Museum named after A.A. Bakhrushin.
MMAAT – Museum of the Moscow Art Academic Theatre.
Private – images from private collections.
RGALI – Russian State Archive of Literature and Art.

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INTRODUCTION

Andrei Kirillov

Michael (Mikhail) Chekhov, nephew to the playwright Anton Chekhov, is renowned in the theatre world as a great actor of the twentieth century and a brilliant teacher of acting, who created his original approach to performance while dividing his life between Russia, Europe, Great Britain and America.

After his emigration from Russia in 1928 at the age of thirty-six, he lived and worked in Germany, Austria, France, Latvia, Lithuania, England and the US, where he finally died in Hollywood in 1955. Even though the theatre of the twentieth century was dominated by a series of directors who founded their own theatre 'empires', systems and trends, Chekhov remains among the most popular and acknowledged practitioners.

That said, little was known in his native Russia of Chekhov's activities following his emigration. For decades, the political stance of the Soviet regime made it impossible to search for and discuss openly the legacy of this 'traitor-emigrant'. His writings, which were published abroad from 1928 onwards, were known to a small circle of theatre professionals in Russia thanks to the underground reprinting of his work, although these were often carelessly copied and with incorrect translations. For a long time, an immense interest in Chekhov within the theatrical world conjoined with a minimal knowledge of his life and work. The gap was finally filled in 1986, when the first edition of Chekhov's literary heritage was printed in Moscow in two volumes (a second edition followed in 1995). This collection, which includes his books, articles, answers to questionnaires, rehearsals notes, letters

and diary entries, remains the most comprehensive and representative. In the English-speaking world, Chekhov is better presented in his writings on theatre pedagogy. Among these writings, his book *To the Actor* – which details his approach to acting – is the best known. This is essentially due to the fact that during his periods in Britain and America, it was his teaching of acting and the formulation of his method that became central to his activities. However, he himself as a person and an artist remains to a great extent mysterious and undefined. This situation seems even more regrettable considering that in the 1940s his second autobiography, *Life and Encounters*, was published in the US – although it did appear in Russian in an émigré journal.

This present volume is the first time that Chekhov's own narration of his life has appeared in the English language. His first autobiographical book, *The Path of the Actor* – published originally in Leningrad (now St Petersburg) in 1928 on the very eve of his emigration – is reproduced here in its entirety. His second autobiographical work, *Life and Encounters* is radically reduced and presented in extracts covering the period of his life after he left Russia. Until very recently, the height of Chekhov's career as an actor in Russia, along with the details of his development as an artist and his own path both in life and the theatre were not so well known in the West. Different facts and events, witnesses and legends are scattered throughout numerous publications where truth has often been muddled with fiction and errors. The reason for this is not always the result of language barriers, but often to do with Chekhov's own life, his personality and his unique approach to his performance work. There are so many features, events, twists and turns in his life; there are so many unexpected collisions between his life and his art. There are so many different people, influences, countries and theatres that are intertwined in his destiny, with the result that representatives of various different theatrical styles continue to battle for the right to ally Chekhov with their own particular trends. Meanwhile, each particular bridge between his own theatrical realm and somebody else's turns out to represent only one aspect of the multi-faceted 'Theatre of Michael Chekhov' by means of which this extraordinary actor embodied his art.

Chekhov was one of Konstantin Stanislavsky's best pupils. He was the friend and collaborator of Evgeny Vakhtangov. Vsevolod Meyerhold considered him to be a superlative 'eccentric' or 'grotesque' actor. Max Reinhardt named him the best performer of his time. And Chekhov's genius certainly lay in his ability to combine the very specific details of a particular character with incomparable generalization: in other words, he plumbed the depths of the individual human psychology of his characters as well as uncovering the impersonal, non-psychological aspects of metaphor and symbolism. His unique insight and capabilities with regard to the art of acting enabled him to bring together polemical, and sometimes even polar, theatrical trends. Indeed, on the one hand, Stanislavsky witnessed how the young Chekhov mastered his system in one year of training with him; on the other hand, Meyerhold dreamt of seeing him as an actor in *his* theatre. But ultimately Chekhov preferred his own unique way, and he devoted his life to the search and creation of the 'ideal' theatre of the future. The bridgehead of this search during his Russian period was the First Studio of the Moscow Art Academic Theatre, which was transformed under Chekhov's leadership into the independent Second Moscow Art Academic Theatre in 1924.

The beginning of the path

Michael Chekhov was born in 1891 to the family of Anton Chekhov's elder brother Alexander in St Petersburg, and it was there that he made his early steps into the theatre at the Suvorin Drama School and then in the Suvorin Theatre where he worked as an actor for two seasons. In 1912, Chekhov joined the MAT and at the same time became a member of the newly established studio that later became known as the First Studio of the MAT. This studio was founded by Konstantin Stanislavsky for the development of his method of acting and for teaching the young actors the principles of this method: this method then began to form itself into his famous and holistic 'system' of acting. Very soon, Chekhov became a leading actor of the First Studio, which was headed by Stanislavsky himself and by his collaborator Leopold Sulerzhitsky, and – after Sulerzhitsky's death – by Vakhtangov. When Vakhtangov also died, Michael Chekhov became an Artistic Director of the First Studio in 1922.

As Chekhov describes in *The Path of the Actor*, his perception of his youth was extremely contradictory and passionate, which in itself became a torment for him. On the one hand, this peculiarity of Chekhov's is entirely appropriate for the theatre, given that 'contradiction' is the underlying basis of all dramatic 'action'. On the other hand, Stanislavsky taught his pupils in the First Studio a *psychological* method of acting that was based on the exploitation of their own personal feelings and emotional experience. In the case of Chekhov, this meant that he was perpetually increasing his own personal inner contradictions, which finally – exacerbated by other internal and external circumstances – led him into a state of deep psychological crisis. This painful experience finally helped Chekhov to realize the inner limitations of his teacher's system and so forced him to search for his own method.

Chekhov's method of acting and teaching activities

It was never Chekhov's intention to invent his own system of acting. It arose as a natural result of his attempts to overcome the limitations and contradictions that he and the other First Studio actors (Stanislavsky's pupils) met on their common creative path. The first step towards release was Chekhov's refusal to exploit an actor's personal feelings in his art; instead there should be a clear differentiation between the actor as a person and the actor as artist – and these two 'identities' belong to fundamentally different realms or dimensions. Instead of taking the actor's personal emotional experiences, Chekhov based his own method on the capabilities of an 'ideal' *imagination*. *Imitating* the imaginary character – which is always 'ideal' in its nature – seemed to Chekhov to make a performance more objective. This shift in emphasis marked the end of Chekhov's period as Stanislavsky's pupil and the beginning of his search for the 'ideal' nature of theatre art in general and acting in particular.

Reaching towards artistic objectivity opened, for Chekhov, the gates to a high state of inspiration and free improvisation, which in his method of acting are not just brief and chance moments in performing, they are its basic principles. His 'grotesque' portrayal of Khlestakov in Nikolay Gogol's *The Government Inspector* directed by Stanislavsky

at the Moscow Art Academic Theatre in 1921 began a gallery of great characters portrayed by the genius of Michael Chekhov. That gallery included Hamlet, Ableukhov in a dramatization of Andrey Bely's novel *Petersburg* and Muromsky in *The Case* by Alexander Sukhovo-Kobylin – all performed at the Second Moscow Art Academic Theatre. The process of the production of plays was transformed by Chekhov into a process of the search for a new acting technique. However, the last character on which he worked during his time in Russia – Don Quixote from the dramatization of the novel of the same name by Miguel Cervantes – was curtailed by his emigration. Don Quixote and King Lear remained Chekhov's two favourite characters although he never actually performed them, and yet he continued to think about them for the rest of his life and they often featured in his discourses on the art of the theatre.

In theatre literature, there is a perception of Michael Chekhov as the actor who emigrated from Soviet Russia due both to political pressure and to his inability to remain there any longer as an independent artist. While this is true, it is only part of the truth. A dissatisfaction with the theatre that surrounded him hounded Chekhov throughout his whole life in all the countries in which he lived and worked. Naturalism in art was no less an enemy to him than communism in life: both were alien to the spirituality – idealistic in its very nature – which was so dear to Chekhov. Although he was able to leave communism behind in Russia, naturalism in its different forms and appearances continued to chase him in his acting work after his emigration. In actual fact, he spent the rest of his life continually 'emigrating' – and not just from everyday life and political circumstances: as an artist who had discovered and adopted the 'ideal' nature of performance, he 'emigrated' from non-idealistic theatre into the 'ideal' realm of art. He continued to search for the principles and rules of 'ideal' theatre and to teach young actors his new acting technique. In all this, however, it is important to understand that Chekhov did not 'invent' his 'ideal' theatre from nothing: he followed his own artistic experiences, his various observations and his teaching of *real* acting. He was undoubtedly an idealist, but he clearly understood that 'idealist' is a synonym for 'artist'.

Chekhov began his teaching of acting in Russia. Initially it was in his Chekhov Studio in Moscow. Later, he developed his pedagogical

practice in the Second Moscow Art Academic Theatre where he taught the actors of this theatre the entire course of his own acting method. After emigrating, Chekhov continued to establish his teaching and theatre studios in all the countries in which he lived and worked. In his teaching, he was able to follow and realize those 'ideal' artistic principles that he was not necessarily able to manifest on the professional stage. The fact that he was able to act and teach in so many countries gave Chekhov a unique knowledge of international theatre practice that was important for him to test the objectivity of his proposed acting method.

Chekhov's international Theatre Studio in Dartington Hall, England formed a very special part of his teaching activities. Never before in his life or since had Chekhov had such an opportunity to pursue calm, gradual 'laboratory' investigations into his pedagogical approach to acting without the distractions of earning a living or other digressions. From Chekhov's correspondence and some other evidences and materials it is clear that this period, which consisted of one year of preparatory work and over two years of teaching practice, was one of the happiest in Chekhov's life. Unfortunately, he left no recollections in his memoirs of this idyllic 'episode', nor of his first tour to America in 1935 and his life and work there in the period between 1939 and 1955 after he had left Great Britain. Chekhov breaks off his narration in *Life and Encounters* at the point of his forced departure from Latvia in 1934 after the nationalistic overturn there. Following medical treatment in Italy, he joined the group of Russian actor-emigrants who had gathered in Paris for their tour to the US.

America made a huge impression on Chekhov during his first visit to the country. However, there were two opposing tendencies that conflicted in his soul with regard to the United States: he felt immense gratitude for the housing of him and his wife Ksenya after so long a pilgrimage around the globe and yet he dissented with the dominating tendency of naturalism in the American theatre and art in general. Having been educated as an actor in the atmosphere of 'ensemble' theatre, he did not concede well to the American 'star' system either. Driven away by fear of the fascist riots in Europe, Chekhov moved with his studio from Dartington to Ridgefield, Connecticut. There he created his own drama school and theatre based on theories and practices that contradicted the acting tendencies which dominated America at the time. In

1940, a touring company under the name of The Chekhov Theatre Players was established by the first graduates of Chekhov's Studio, who had begun their theatrical life with him at Dartington. Chekhov and his collaborator, George Zhdanov, staged plays for this company, which had its base in Ridgefield and performed both in different states of America and on Broadway. Among their productions were *The Possessed* (a dramatization of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel, *Demons*, adapted by Zhdanov), *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear* by William Shakespeare, and *The Cricket on the Hearth* by Charles Dickens.

As well as running his drama school in Ridgefield, Chekhov also taught professional actors in his studio in Manhattan, New York, between 1941 and 1942. Sadly, his theatre activities on the East Coast were broken off at the end of 1942, as the majority of his actors and students were called up for military service. Following his final theatrical undertakings in New York – the staging of *Sorochintsy Fair* by Modest Musorgsky in the New Opera and his participation in a few farewell performances of *An Evening of Anton Chekhov's One-Act Plays and Sketches* – Chekhov moved to Hollywood in January 1943.

From Chekhov's correspondence at that time, it is clear to see that he found acting in Hollywood movies to be a deeply unsatisfying and enforced necessity to earn a living. Chekhov participated in ten films there, with a break between 1948 and 1952 caused by the deep crisis in the Hollywood film industry. In the meantime, his main interests were connected to continuing work on his method, by teaching acting and writing a book on that teaching. Chekhov's intensive work on *To the Actor* (which he considered to be the main task of his life) and his pedagogically experimental work on staging *The Government Inspector* at the Laboratory Theatre were the fundamental reasons for him breaking off the writing of his serialized *Life and Encounters* for the Russian émigré journal. At first, *To the Actor* was published by Chekhov at his own expense in New York in 1946 in Russian, and it appeared in English only in 1953.

Along with several other Russian emigrant teachers of acting and former actors of the Moscow Art Theatre – including Richard Boleslavsky, Maria Ouspenskaya, Tamara Deykarkhanova, Andrey Zhilinsky and Vera Solovyova – Michael Chekhov left a notable heritage in American actor-training, where among others he taught Ingrid Bergman,

Yul Brynner, Gary Cooper, Jennifer Jones, Marilyn Monroe, Jack Palance, Gregory Peck and Anthony Quinn.

The autobiographies and this particular book

In addition to his other known writings about his method of acting, Chekhov's autobiographies are helpful in understanding from where, why and how this method appeared in his life and was developed by this great actor who devoted his entire working practice to this goal. Chekhov's observations and analyses of himself and his surroundings prove very interesting and valuable for clarifying his artistic views and ideals. Furthermore, his writing style appears extraordinarily honest and sincere, without seeming to manipulate his reader. In this sense, Chekhov's memoirs are as unique in the context of many other actors' memoirs as he himself was as an artist and a person.

It is rare for talented artists in the course of their creative activity to find time or need to recall the facts and events of their past: any such desire or opportunity tends to come at a later stage and age, often with the result that corrections are made in the writer's vision and perceptions, and in the capacity to relate to events of the past. To some extent, this is true of *Life and Encounters*, and this goes some way to explain the mistakes in the dates and in the sequence of events, and a certain randomness in the interpretation of facts in this, Chekhov's second autobiography. Chekhov wrote his first book, *The Path of the Actor*, at the age of thirty-six when he was at the height of his career as an actor and artistic director of one of the best theatre companies in Moscow. *The Path of the Actor* is consequently less of a recollection and more of a series of analyses of various processes in his life and development. It is perhaps for this reason that *The Path of the Actor* is so unique and valuable a book, and therefore constitutes the bulk of this present volume.

Finding himself at a crossroads in his life and art, Michael Chekhov felt the need to understand, to analyse and to know. He saw very clearly that the past was the basis and cause of his present and indeed his future. The distance between the author and the events of which he writes is not so great as to distort the real sense of them and to reduce the degree of 'live' interest, and yet great enough to enable him to

consider circumstances, people and himself objectively. He tries to encompass a picture of his own life 'which incorporates not only the past and the present, but also an ideal future'. That live, actual interest in his past explains Chekhov's rigour and even ruthlessness in his observation and estimation of himself, to the extent that he is sometimes prone to exaggerate his imperfections, both as a human being and as an artist.

Those psychological problems that Chekhov had in his youth, which are mainly based on a contradiction between one's imaginary picture of what life and people seem to be and ought to be and yet what they are in reality, are not uncommon in thousands of impressionable, sensitive young people who possess an intensive inner life. However, only very few of them are capable of such a degree of openness in analysing and discussing themselves as Chekhov demonstrates. An aptitude and ability for self-awareness are important features of Chekhov as a person and as an artist. That capacity allowed Chekhov to extract useful insights from his delusions and contradictions, not only for everyday life but also for his art itself. Again, disappointment in life and incomprehension that the real reason for that disappointment is not in life but in themselves is usual for young people of a particular age. Some of them seek solace in religion, some in a particular kind of professional work, and some in love. At the peak of his psychological crisis, Chekhov found all of these – religious solace, creative impulses for his artistic work, and love for people – in Anthroposophy.

Anthroposophy is the religious-philosophical teaching founded by Rudolf Steiner at the beginning of the twentieth century, and which focuses on the spiritual aspect of life and human nature. With the help of anthroposophical theories, Chekhov was able to understand the 'ideal' nature of theatrical art and to develop his own particular principles of a new acting technique. Of course, it is not necessary to be an anthroposophist to follow Chekhov's principles of acting: Chekhov himself, for instance, did not become a eurhythmist (eurhythmy is a performance 'discipline' within Anthroposophy) and he never tried to turn his students onto the path of Anthroposophy especially. Although Anthroposophy was very important to Chekhov, it was only one among a number of sources that influenced the burgeoning principles of his professional theatre system.

In this volume, the 'Russian period' represented by *The Path of the Actor* is excluded from *Life and Encounters*, the rest of which text is published in fragments covering much of his life and work in Western Europe. For political and ideological reasons, Michael Chekhov could not write in *The Path of the Actor* (edited in Soviet Russia) about his interest in Anthroposophy, which as discussed earlier influenced him so profoundly on a personal level and with regard to his thoughts and views on theatre; it was only after he emigrated from Russia that he could commit these thoughts to paper. It is for this reason, that the abridgement of *Life and Encounters* contained in this volume begins with some brief extracts from Chekhov's 'Russian period' focusing on his '"encounter" with Anthroposophy', along with some facts and circumstances surrounding the eve of his emigration that are also not reflected in *The Path of the Actor*.

It is of course a pity that current word limit has led the editors to exclude some wonderful portions of the text from Chekhov's original narration – certain 'encounters' so dear and significant for the writer, and certain observations and discourses so valuable for the reader. Hopefully one day *Life and Encounters* will be published in English in its entirety, as well as Chekhov's brilliant letters, which are full of humour and valuable thoughts and observations, and many other materials of and about him.

All dates before 1918 are given in Chekhov's text and in the notes according to the Julian ('old style') calendar, as this was the official state calendar in Russia before being replaced by the current Gregorian one in 1918.

It is hard for me as a native Russian to evaluate the literary qualities of the English translations of Michael Chekhov's prose, though in Russia his autobiographies are acknowledged as good literature deserving the continuance of his father Alexander's literary heritage as a writer and a journalist, and that of his famous uncle, Anton. Hopefully, English-speaking readers will enjoy this narrative by a great actor, a good writer and a charming, wise man of so unique and rich a destiny, a narrative that should be of interest not only to theatre professionals but also for a wide readership intrigued by life, art and culture.

PART 1

THE PATH OF THE ACTOR

It is hard to write one's autobiography at the age of thirty-six,* when life is far from over and when many of the forces which define one's soul are just beginning to develop and come into consciousness as germinal seeds of the future. But if one has a more or less clear consciousness of these burgeoning soul-qualities and a certain understanding of where they are leading – if, moreover, one has the will to develop in this direction – it is possible to sketch a picture of one's life which incorporates not only the past and the present, but also an ideal future. This ideal may never be fulfilled as precisely as one expects, indeed it probably won't, but then again it will be a true picture of what a soul undergoing self-examination is experiencing in the *present*.†

* * *

Five or six years ago, I experienced a burning shame! I couldn't bear myself as an actor, I couldn't reconcile myself with the theatre as it was at the time (and still is now). I was clearly aware that whatever exists in both the theatre and its actors emerges as ugliness and untruth.[1] I perceived the theatrical world as a vast, organized lie. Actors seemed to me to be the greatest criminals and deceivers. All theatrical life appeared to me as a sphere of huge dimensions, and at the very centre of this sphere a lie would flare up like a spark. The spark flared up at the very moment when the auditorium was full of people and the stage was full of actors. Between the stage and the auditorium a lie would flare up! At the same time, in the vast sphere of theatrical life, constant and tireless work was going on: books about the theatre, actors and directors, 'seekings and strivings', 'experiments', workshops, schools, lectures, reviewers, opinions, discussions, debates, arguments, raptures,

* i.e. 1927. (Editors' note.)

† All cursives in this text are Chekhov's originals. (Editors' note.)

Plate 1 (opposite) Michael Chekhov. 1920s

enchantments and disenchantments, arrogance, immense arrogance, and alongside it money, titles, adulations, fear, enormous buildings scattered throughout the country, theatre personnel – with some honourable people amongst them, some semi-honourable and some thoroughly dishonourable. All these live, move, agitate, shout (loudly!), and impetuously fly from various points on the periphery of the sphere to its centre, where they resolve themselves into a flare, a spark, a lie! I could distinguish all the details of this overall picture with the greatest clarity. I saw the untruth, but as yet I did not see the truth. I looked with revulsion at myself – a participant in this great farce – and with horror at the farce itself. There was no way out.[2]

Like a large tableau, there unfolded within me and before me what I had experienced in my childhood and what I allow myself to remember here. In the first class in secondary school, I displayed an inordinate zeal for learning. My weekly reports shone with top marks. I was delighted with my success and with myself. Finally I was entrusted with the task of giving my fellow classmates some coaching in French. I was carried away by teaching and stopped learning myself. Some time passed. My pupils were summoned to the blackboard; they made mistakes, but no one thought to blame me. But then I was called up myself in order to show a pupil of mine where his mistake lay in writing 'wous êtes'* on the blackboard. I came out and proudly wrote 'wu zet'! The teacher froze! Something happened in that moment which I found both incomprehensible and dreadful. My world collapsed around me. The truth about me was laid bare not only for the teacher and my classmates, but also for myself. 'Wu zet'! This is what my life in the theatre five or six years ago seemed to me to be like: I was burning with shame, but I didn't know how to write these two little words correctly. The peak of my despair represented a turning point for me both as an artist and as a human being. From this peak, I shall try to cast my eye *both backwards and forwards* and attempt to connect my *past with the future*.

* * *

* The correct present tense second person plural form of the French verb *être* (to be) is *vous êtes*. (Original Russian editors' note.)

'Mikhailo!' – that's what my father[3] called me – 'Mikhailo, go and weed the beds! All you do is play with toys! You little boy!'

But I really was very little and I had no idea why my father was reproaching me and why I couldn't play with toys.

'Drop everything – go and weed!'

I knew all too well what he meant by 'weed'! It meant sitting in a bent position between the flowerbeds for hours on end without straightening myself out, tormented by backache and weeping tears of helpless anger at my father for having interrupted my game and for the pain in

Plate 2 Michael Chekhov. 1900

my back and legs. My physical health in childhood was not particularly good and I was extremely sensitive to any bodily suffering. But I was afraid of my father and I didn't dare contradict him. He never hit me: anyway, it was not this that scared me about him. What terrified me was the power of his eyes and his loud voice. But for my father, fears and obstacles didn't exist. Indeed, everything yielded to him. His immense will and physical strength made a profound impression – and not only on me. I really believe that when he sat me down for several hours between the flowerbeds, he couldn't conceive that this might be a difficult task. He himself weeded for many hours without any visible fatigue.

But it wasn't only fear that I felt for my father: I also respected and even revered him. Despite my youth, he would often expound all manner of philosophical doctrines to me in a remarkably engaging and accessible way, comparing and criticizing them. I listened with delight to what he said. His erudition was truly remarkable: he was thoroughly at home not only with questions of philosophy, but also with medicine, natural history, physics, chemistry, mathematics and so forth; he knew several languages and at the age of fifty he apparently learnt Finnish in two or three months.

But he was too much of an eccentric, and this prevented him from using his knowledge and great energy for life coherently and in some definite direction or other. He was biologically incapable of putting up with anything ordinary, habitual or conventional. So, for example, he couldn't have just one pocket watch like everyone else, he had fourteen or fifteen of them; and the watches were not to be kept in the metal casings that ordinary watches have – no, the casings were removed from them and they were trimmed with thin pieces of board, carefully and skilfully jointed together. The clock on his wall was awful. It was made of corks, twigs, moss, wood lichens and similar things, with bottles full of water instead of weights, while on the floor next to it stood a magnificent old grandfather clock made of mahogany, which he apparently left untouched out of respect for its age.

My torment stemmed from the fact that I was drawn into almost all my father's new inventions as his closest collaborator. I was once ordered to stir old newspapers in a barrel with a big stick, gradually adding water to them and turning them into a viscous mush. The idea

was that this paper mush was spread out in a thick layer on the floor of his study and then, when it was dry, it was supposed to serve as a kind of linoleum. This was partly a way of saving money. He couldn't reconcile himself to the fact that people pay for things that they can do themselves and, what is more, they can do cheaply. The work of pummelling newspapers lasted for several days. Then the paper mush was spread on the floor and finally emblazoned with a bright red colour, and at some later stage the cracked and warped 'linoleum' was stripped and scraped off the floor again.

In the spells between inventions, I avidly played in a constant state of haste and agitation. I still have the desire to do the things that I like and that give me pleasure as quickly as possible. My games were limited not only by time, but also by space. The whole yard belonging to our dacha* (we lived out of town† the whole year round) was taken up by a kitchen garden and a henhouse. My father's hens were of the most diverse and unusual breeds and of such a delicate constitution that they could not endure the winter cold, and this caused my father a good deal of worry and agitation. His relationship with his hens was so complex and intimate that it was difficult to fathom. When the cock was not courting the particular hen that my father had designated for that purpose, then shouting and swearing would resound through the yard, the cock would rush away from my father appealing for help, the entire henhouse would fly into a state of agitation and my incensed father would withdraw into his study. But when the time came to load the incubator (the eggs were hatched artificially, of course), all the members of the household were stirred into action. The servants boiled the water, my brother[4] carried the water into the room with the incubator, I watched the thermometer and the lamp, while my father laid the eggs out on some netting, marking them with the date, the breed of the hen, etc. And when after three weeks the chicks hatched, my mother[5] and I had to go 'tiu-tiu-tiu' like a brood-hen, striking the table with our fingers right in front of the chicks, while my father invented all manner of devices which, by being lowered onto the backs of the

* Summer house. (Editors' note.)

† The Chekhovs lived in a region of St Petersburg. The private house that Alexander bought in 1900 no longer exists. (Editors' note.)

Plate 3 Natalya and Alexander Chekhov with Alexander's sons from his first marriage, Nikolay and Anton. *c.*1890

entire family of new-born chicks, were intended to simulate for them the downy belly of the brood-hen.

Several times a year I had a happy interlude when I could play as much as I wanted – this was when my father went away. In fact, my father never actually *went away*; he suddenly *disappeared* and a few days after his disappearance my mother would receive a letter or a short telegram from him, saying, 'I'm in the Crimea' or 'I'm in the Caucasus'. He loved travelling and he knew how to get about. He never took very much with him. He just threw a small camera bag over his shoulder, put a few items of clean underwear in it, took a stick in his hand and disappeared from the house.

My games were always passionate. Everything was exaggerated. If I built a house out of cards, it was not simply a house, but a colossal building occupying virtually the entire room, and my stilts would be of such a height that had I fallen off them, I most probably would not have gone unscathed. Playing fireman also took on grandiose and dangerous proportions. But at the same time I was not exactly renowned for my courage.

My father's disappearances were a source of great joy for me, but his returns home were sad. Sad – because he returned unwell. He suffered from heavy bouts of drinking, which exhausted him physically and morally. His disappearances were a tormenting struggle for him against these oncoming attacks. His colossal will-power held back the onset of the illness for a long time, but it always overcame him, and burning with shame and tormented on account of my mother and myself, he would quietly say with pain in his voice:

'Mother dearest, send for some beer.'

My mother never protested or tried to influence him; she knew and saw how he himself was in torment. And here destiny (and perhaps he himself too) played a trick on my father: he was the author of some books on the subject of 'Alcoholism and How to Fight It'. Professor O.* – a man well known in his day, who treated alcoholics by hypnosis – offered my father his services on many occasions.

'I wouldn't bother, old chap,' replied my father with an ironical smile, 'nothing will come of it.'

But O. insisted, and on one occasion my father agreed to try hypnosis. He and O. sat opposite one another, and – if my memory does not deceive me – O. quickly dozed off under my father's gaze.

One of the consequences of being with my father in the periods of his illness was that I too started drinking.

In the first days of his illness, my father would go around the haunts and night tea-rooms of the locality in which we lived, conversing with rogues, thieves and hooligans and distributing money to them. His popularity in their circle was considerable. They loved and respected him – and not only for his money, but also for the conversations that he had with them.

Whenever the local hooligans passed our dacha, they would often say to me or my mother:

'A good day to you! Don't worry, we won't touch you!'

And they never did.

There dwelt within my father a spirit of protest against the social conditions of the time. But he expressed this protest in a distinctively

* The psychiatrist Viktor Olderogge (1853–?) with whom Alexander Chekhov founded a clinic for alcoholics. (Editors' note.)

individual and rebellious way. For example, he would hold out his hand demonstratively to a policeman in the street so as to arouse a sense of indignation and resentment in the powerful people of this world, and he would go to see people of importance in a wholly inappropriate form of attire.

Whenever my father's illness seized hold of him, my inner life would take on a rather different character. On the one hand I suffered both for my father and my mother, and on the other hand I rejoiced at the attention which my father showed me during his illness. He told me many remarkable things and whatever he said would become irresistibly fascinating. He knew how to write and speak simply, powerfully, colourfully, intelligently, captivatingly, and when necessary, wittily. Anton Chekhov said of him:

'Alexander is far more able than I, but he will never do anything with his talents – his illness will ruin him.'

I would sit for hours beside my father, listening to what he was saying about the world of the stars, the movement and structure of the planets, the signs of the zodiac and so on. He introduced me to all manner of phenomena and laws of nature, illustrating them with the most unexpected and beautiful examples. We never touched on religious themes, for my father was an atheist and had a materialistic concept of the world. He inculcated in me a love of knowledge, but all my attempts at studying philosophical systems or particular sciences were never very systematic and were really no more than flashes of enthusiasm. I suffered – and still suffer – greatly from an inability to work systematically. Almost all my knowledge has been acquired quickly and passionately, but also superficially. Only since my disappointment in the theatre world and certain complications in my inner life have I begun (albeit belatedly) to understand for the first time the need for strict systematic work if you really want to master a subject. And as much as in the past I had valued in others what is usually called 'spontaneity', 'natural talent' and so forth, so now do I recoil from such 'talent' if it does not want to be cultivated through a path of persistent, unremitting work. In our time, when the pace of life can only be described as frantic, any spontaneity and talent that has no wish for the discipline of work is doomed to lag behind and ultimately to die.

As I sat with my father sometimes for whole nights, I not only listened to what he said, but I also watched him draw cartoons. I was amazed by his ability not only to create in a few strokes a resemblance to the original, but also to capture the person's inner character and casual mood. He drew himself both in a healthy and an ill state, he drew me, my mother and our friends. And ever after this, for the rest of my life, I retained a love of cartoons. For quite a while I devoted myself to them, and I think that this played a not insubstantial part in my development as an actor.

However, I had always had a well-developed sense of the ridiculous, a quality which I am pleased to say has still not died. Humour provides the kind of knowledge that is necessary for art and it brings a lightness into creative work. But when humour is directed towards oneself, it saves one from excessive self-love and ambition. One learns to value things in and outside oneself for their true worth irrespective

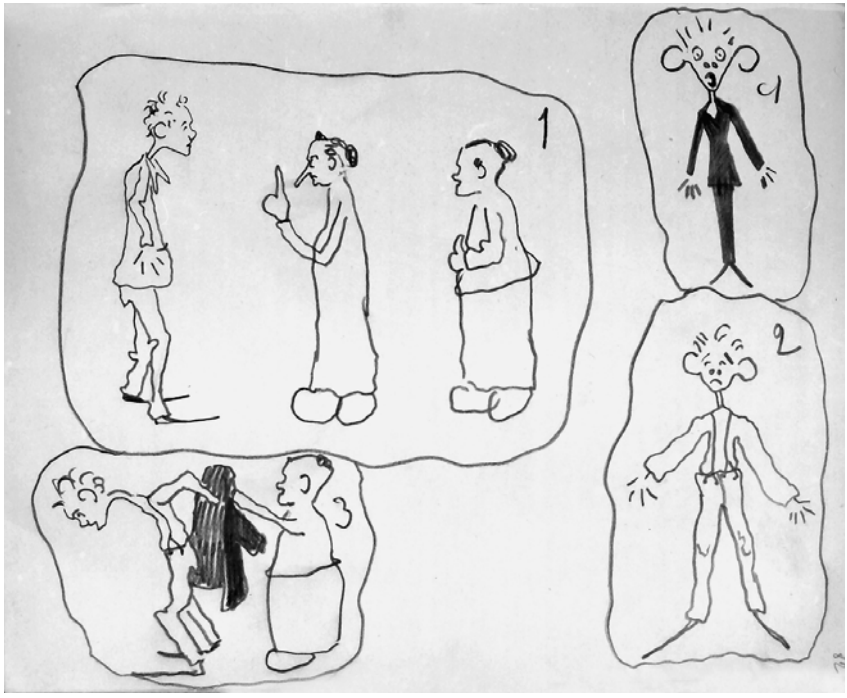

Plate 4 Caricature by Chekhov of his life in the family

of personal inclinations, sympathies and antipathies, and such an objectivity is utterly necessary for an artist. The power of humour lies in the fact that it also lifts a person above what he finds funny. And what is ridiculed becomes understood in an objective way so that it can easily be presented on the stage. An actor (and indeed an artist of any kind) who can *only* look at himself and at life *seriously* will hardly be able to be a good, or at any rate an interesting, artist. It is remarkable that people who can laugh immediately recognize one another, they understand one another from the first syllable and they often become friends. And of course, the *seriousness* in people who have a sense of humour is far *more serious* and deeper than the *constant seriousness* of people who do not know what humour is. The wonderful thing is that humour can be *learnt*. And in drama schools there should be a class where humour is taught.

But in addition to giving me a sense of humour, nature also endowed me with a ready tendency to laugh. This is hardly a virtue. It has long tormented me on the stage. I not only laughed myself, but I also infected my partners. Risibility on the stage is generally very widespread among actors, and it is hard to battle with it. Often it took only the slightest thing to send me into unrestrained peals of laughter. Sometimes an impression which had made me laugh would remain in my memory for several days, and I would return to it over and over again and have a good chuckle, adding some new details of my own invention. Not infrequently my hilarity would lead me into awkward situations. Once, while I was in conversation with a highly respectable lady about an important subject, I sensed that I was in danger of suddenly bursting into laughter. I dreaded this happening and I made an inner effort to prevent it, but it was too late. I suddenly exploded with mirth, laughing so vigorously that I could not utter a single word in explanation or justification of my behaviour. The lady was embarrassed and blushed, but continued presenting her case. I was almost in despair, but I went on laughing all the more. After a while my poor conversation partner, with tears in her eyes, asked me why I was laughing at her. I was unable to answer. At the time, one of my students was sitting in the next room (this was when I had my drama school).* My pupil rushed

* Chekhov's Studio was established in 1918 and existed until 1922, although in October 1921, Chekhov resigned as its director. (Original Russian editors' note.)

to my aid. Knowing my tendency to laugh uncontrollably, he tried to explain to the lady the actual cause of my behaviour, but his words came out in such a way as to make one think that I was not in my right mind. This made me laugh all the more. The lady jumped up and rushed to the door, but became entangled in the portière and struck her forehead on the door-post. Something quite incredible happened to me. I stopped even trying to restrain my desperate laughter. The lady left without having finished presenting her case, and I sat there jaded and dispirited and full of shame. Risibility on the stage insults the audience, and I was guilty of this on more than one occasion.

I often saw my father at a writing-desk. I saw how he first cut long strips of paper, then wrote on them with a small, neat hand. I saw him proof-reading and saw his articles printed in newspapers and journals. All this excited me and at one point I decided to become a writer. I cut myself a large quantity of long pieces of paper, I sat at a desk and began to write. I didn't have any particular themes in mind, but this did not worry me. I dipped my pen into the ink-well and immediately began: 'He was pacing around the room'. Then I stopped and started pacing around the room myself in search of the next phrase. Some time passed, and I understood with some consternation that I evidently lacked 'something significant' which could instantaneously turn me into a writer. After waiting a little and turning a few phrases over in my mind, I laid down my pen and sadly gathered up the paper which had been prepared for the great work. The shock of this failure was so great that for a long time I did not renew my aspirations towards authorship. But one day, after reading Dostoyevsky's* description of the life of one of his characters covering his childhood, youth and mature years, I felt that the secret of becoming an author had been revealed to me. I set to work at once. I started writing about an old woman – how she lived in her childhood, how she studied at school and how she was expelled from it, how she fell in and out of love, together with lots of other details about her life, and how finally she became an old woman. It turned out to be quite long and was written in the same small hand as my father's. I was triumphant and excited, and I felt happy. I asked my mother to listen to my long composition. She listened patiently

* Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–81), writer. (Editors' note.)

right to the end and told me that it was all right but perhaps not terribly interesting. I remember how my heart was wrung with pain! Why was Dostoyevsky interesting but I wasn't? Why? After all, he too was describing the childhood and the whole of the rest of the life of his hero! I could not resolve this question and again I gave up the idea of becoming a writer.

My initial attempts to 'perform' took their course – as always happens in such cases – within domestic surroundings. My mother and nanny were my constant audience, and they were also the characters whom I portrayed in all kinds of possible and impossible situations. My father was never particularly interested in my 'productions', although I often portrayed him too. The question of my becoming a future actor did not arise in our family for a long time. As for myself, when choosing my future profession in the way children usually do, I dreamed of being a fireman or a doctor and I never even thought about becoming an actor. The fireman's job probably attracted me because my father was an amateur fireman. Above his bed there was a special telephone for informing him of fires, and day or night he would often go out and fight them.

Gradually the circle of my audience widened. I put on 'performances' on the balcony, where I read stories by Gorbunov* and acted scenes from Dickens,† incorporating into them episodes of my own making and introducing a certain element of piquancy. My father had always called a spade a spade, and from childhood I had been used to using words of a certain kind without considering there to be anything reprehensible in uttering them. For a long time, I could not understand what others found so shocking about the difference between the two kinds of words. I was already an adult by the time I tried with enormous effort to wean myself off a vocabulary of illicit words. As a child, I saw no more in these words and the concepts associated with them than a funny shade of meaning which amused me. For quite a while, I could not understand why people blushed when they heard me use an expression which, in their opinion, was inadmissible, and I was sincerely convinced that they themselves were reading something into

* Ivan Gorbunov (1831–96), actor and writer. (Editors' note.)
† Charles Dickens (1812–70), British novelist. (Editors' note.)

the word that I had uttered which made them blush and be so horrified. Later in life, it seemed to me that this happens because everybody, especially women, are simply lewd.

My family performances on the balcony became more and more popular, and I finally succeeded in persuading one of the members of the local amateur dramatic circle to admit me to their club stage. I was absolutely delighted. I was usually given the roles of various vaudeville old men. It made no difference to me whether I was rehearsing or

Plate 5 Michael Chekhov. 1910s

performing for the public, because when I went out onto the club stage, I completely forgot about myself and my surroundings, and I gave myself up to that elemental feeling which has accompanied me as an underlying mood on the stage not only in my childhood years, but also in the later period of my life until the time when I experienced my inner crisis and my disillusionment with the theatre. Along with the loss of this feeling, I also lost my power to convince an audience, as well as my inner creative urge.

What I lost in the period of my inner crisis* was a *sense*, and even an *intuitive feeling*, of the whole.[6] It was because of this sense of the whole that it never occurred to me that a part in a play or a story or simply an impersonation of someone might not actually come off. Doubts of this kind were unknown to me. When I was about to play a part or, as happened in my childhood, throw out a more or less effective joke, I was strongly gripped by this feeling of the *whole that was to come*, and with full *confidence* in it, I began without the slightest hesitation to carry out whatever it was that was occupying my attention at the time. Out of this *whole*, the details emerged of their own accord and appeared objectively before me. I never invented the details and I was always merely an observer of what came to light out of the *sense of the whole*. This *future whole* (out of which all the details and particulars were born) was not exhausted or extinguished however long the process of coming to light lasted. I can only compare it with the seed of a plant, in which the entire future of the plant is contained in so wonderful a way.

How much suffering falls to the lot of those actors who underestimate the value of this amazing *feeling* which is fundamental for any creative work. All the details and particulars of the role are broken down into thousands of small pieces, and there would be chaotic disorder were they not bound together by a feeling of the *single whole*. How often it happens that actors who have this intuitive feeling of the future before they begin their work do not have sufficient courage to *trust* it and patiently wait for it. They concoct and force their characters, inventing peculiar features which they artificially weave into the text of the role and into contrived gestures and laboured mimicry. They

* i.e. 1917–18. (Editors' note.)

call this work. Yes, of course, it is work; it is difficult and tormenting – but unnecessary – whereas the actor's work is to a significant extent a matter of waiting and being silent 'without working'.[7] But this, to be sure, does not apply to the work of provincial actors, whose creative life is spent in conditions that are quite special, unique and infinitely difficult.[8]

This 'feeling of the whole' carried me like a mighty wave through all the difficulties and dangers of the actor's path. It accompanied me through drama school and beyond.[9] I cannot say that I studied the art of acting at drama school. No, I contemplated my wonderful teachers: Marya Savina, Vasily Dalmatov, Boris Glagolin, Vladimir Sladkopevtsev, Nikolay Arbatov[10] amongst others. I can hardly recall anything now of what they said regarding theoretical guidelines, but I remember *them*. I did not exactly learn from them; rather I studied *them*. This happened because the feeling that I have described gave me a *complete picture of them* in their unfathomable talent. My time at drama school was spent in a semi-conscious state. I contemplated and acted with great enthusiasm, but I didn't study anything. The theoretical subjects (the history of the arts, the history of the theatre, phonetics and so forth) were alien to me, and I got through the examinations only with 'prompts' and 'cribs'. The lessons in voice production irritated me and made me laugh.

My three years at drama school* swept past me like a dream. I was cheerful and brave only when I was performing something, but as I was almost constantly 'performing' something my basic mood was one of cheerfulness. I literally couldn't say a single word in a straightforward way. Sometimes entire days flowed by for me like an uninterrupted performance. Much later in my development and after I had joined the Moscow Art Theatre,† Konstantin Stanislavsky explained to me how bad and harmful it is for an actor to be continually 'putting on a show' for almost the whole day. And when, on Stanislavsky's advice, I began to struggle against the habit of 'performing', I felt how much energy I had been wasting in an unproductive way and how I could begin to

* i.e. 1907–10. (Editors' note.)

† Chekhov was enlisted as a member of the associate group of the Moscow Art Theatre on 16 June 1912. (Original Russian editors' note.)

strengthen and concentrate my forces by using them economically. Who does not know actors who even in ripe old age are still unable to overcome the habit of playing a part in everyday life? Over the years, these actors have almost lost their personality; through their 'role-playing' they have stifled hundreds of difficult questions in their lives, evading their resolution and thus holding back their own development as human beings. Such actors look at you in a not altogether normal way, and an ill-digested pain and melancholy (of which they are scarcely conscious) can always be discerned in them. Their souls are in a state of neglect, vague and abnormally young. Even now I am not entirely free from such 'role-playing in life', though at this time every such 'play-acting' – however brief – evokes in me a tormenting, almost physical pain. Just as it is harmful to be on the stage 'as if in real life', so likewise is it harmful to live one's life as if one were 'on the stage'.

The confidence and courage, which I experienced from being in a creative state through my constant jokes and tricks, often spread into real life. Thus, for example, I was firmly convinced that I had immense physical strength. I once threw myself upon one of my peers at school with the intention of overpowering and beating him in front of the eyes of some of the other boys. I was convinced I would succeed. My opponent was much taller than I and he did indeed have a certain physical strength, but my confidence, which had every right to exist in the realm of fantasy, was transformed in this situation into pitiful cockiness. I was beaten up. My opponent spun me round for a long time on the floor with my head down and then flung me like a discus into the corner of the room. With this, I learnt to distinguish between bravery on the stage and bravery in everyday life. It was the same with my voice. Here too my confidence went overboard. I strained it and subsequently understood that vocal strength on the stage and in life are different things which should not be confused.

* * *

From very early childhood and until the age of twenty-eight, I had one friend who never failed me – my mother. Being her only son (my father had two other sons from a previous marriage), I had her undivided love. I had no secrets from my mother. I brought her all my sorrows,

joys, successes and failures. She gave the same devoted and earnest attention to my childish 'performances' at home as she did to the serious work on my parts once I had become a professional actor. Not one of my roles was prepared without my mother's involvement. She hardly made any comments on my performance of this or that part. She just expressed her impression in her particular way, and I caught her meaning from the merest hint.

My inner life was so strongly connected with my mother that I had absolutely no need for her to give me any oral exhortations or rules of conduct. I effortlessly understood much of what my mother wanted

Plate 6 Natalya Chekhov

of me, and we hardly ever wasted any words on discussing everyday occurrences.

When I was thirteen or fourteen, I was exceedingly and disastrously prone to falling in love. I invariably fell in love when I met any girl for the first time, whatever she looked like. Her inner qualities were of no importance to me. However, I would always find some feature in her which gave me absolute delight. It might have been her eyebrows that I liked, or her smile, a particular movement, the fullness of her figure or her slenderness. I was even capable of falling in love because I liked her dress. I once fell in love with a very little girl because she played a children's song on the piano with just one finger. In a word, it was all the same to me what I fell in love with and how to justify my 'love'. The ultimate aim of my infatuations was always marriage. From the first meeting, I firmly resolved to get married, and once I had made this decision, I did not leave my future wife for a minute. But my engagements were usually broken off for one of two reasons: either I nominated myself several brides, which meant that the marriage was technically impossible, or I followed my future wife around to the extent that she felt so constrained by me in her every movement that, being unable to bear these deprivations of freedom, she hid from me. I suffered and was jealous of everyone and everything because of her. Once I fell in love with a girl who was older than me and was very unhappy in her home situation. She did not love her parents and was continually running away from home. At long last my love was reciprocated and it lasted for many days. I kissed her from virtually dawn till dusk and then I suddenly noticed that she had a snub nose. For a moment I was upset; but after some reflection I suddenly remembered that I too had a snub nose. I cheered up and proposed to her. She agreed, and I virtually fell into her lap from fear and despair. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to get married and what one is supposed to do after the wedding. I was just dimly aware that a marriage is for life! I was about to burst into tears of despair, but I took myself in hand, I stood up and said to her, 'I'll be back in a tick', whereupon I left the room and rushed to my mother. Quickly and as well as I could, I told her about my misfortune without hiding my despair. When she had heard my story, my mother went to my poor bride and said to her . . . Well, I don't know what she said to her, but the poor girl

Plate 7 Michael and Olga Chekhov. 1915

went home consumed with grief. The story of my marriage-that-didn't-take-place spread rapidly throughout the local area, and for a long time I was the laughing-stock of my friends. 'The bridegroom! There goes the bridegroom!' they shouted at me on the street. But I bore it all without a murmur; I was aware of my guilt and I felt thoroughly ashamed.

The only thing which cast a shadow over my relationship with my mother was that, despite my youth, I drank rather a lot. I started drinking while I was with my father during his illness. I sensed how difficult it was for my mother to see me drunk, and how this burden grew when my father was ill and we both sat up drinking for nights on end. Although I knew how my mother suffered because of this, I was unable to overcome my passion for drinking, and the infinite love that I felt for my mother became tinged with pain. As I could not give up my drinking, I tried, as it were, to make up for my fault by seeking out the things which I thought might be unpleasant for my mother and then getting rid of them. When I could not find any such things, I began to

invent them without realising that that was what I was doing. I formed pictures in my mind of *potential* troubles for my mother and took concrete measures against the invented dangers. I do not know whether this was caused by my guilty conscience vis-à-vis my mother or whether my boundless, almost abnormal, love for her was impelling me to think with dread of the dangers that might possibly arise, but my imagination painted ever more dreadful and disturbing pictures of *potential* catastrophic events. Over time, my imagination became ever more ingenious in this direction. My love for my mother was transformed into a constant pain and fear on her account. I devised dozens of varied scenarios which I had to act upon in order to protect my mother from these dangers. The sense of fear grew and became my predominant mood. This dread was applied not only to my mother; I began to fear all kinds of things which seemed to me to be dangerous, because if they were to happen, this might ultimately lead – by means of a long and complicated series of events – to a final event which might cause my mother to suffer. I confined myself to a circle of particular notions and I was unable – and unwilling – to leave this circle, even though remaining in it caused me a great deal of torment. The first signs that I was accumulating oppressive notions in my mind had already appeared in my childhood, and they reached their full development when I was twenty-four or twenty-five.* I fell ill with a nervous disorder.

The twin influences of my father and mother upon me were so different that it was as though I was living in two different families. The straightforwardness, simplicity and even coarseness of my father were balanced out for me by my mother's tenderness and kindness, and in a strange way both these influences lived within me simultaneously. I did not experience any disharmony between on the one hand being carefully protected from all harmful influences, and on the other hand being granted complete freedom of action. I went to school with a muff in my hands and an escort, while at the same time receiving from my father 'three roubles for . . .'.† I could return home late at night and not alone,‡ and I could be tenderly and platonically in love.

* i.e. *c.*1915–16. (Editors' note.)
† i.e. for a prostitute. (Editors' note.)
‡ i.e. with a woman. (Editors' note.)

I experienced the love of woman at an early age, but I never sank to coarse depravity. Many contradictions lived *within me*, but for a long time I was unable to reconcile them *outwardly*. My mother and father represented what was, for me, the most difficult and tormenting contradiction. I was frightened of this contradiction. It always seemed to me that something was about to happen between them which they themselves wouldn't be able to cope with. I literally followed their lives and was always in tense readiness to intervene into whatever had happened and whatever I awaited with an anguish unbeknown to anyone. There were no particular outward reasons for my unease, for my father was almost always kind to my mother and the arguments that they had were rare and very restrained.

Living within the contrasts and contradictions, the longing to reconcile these contradictions outwardly and to resolve them inwardly, and finally my youthful enthusiasm for Dostoyevsky – all this formed in me a certain special feeling for the life around me and for other people. I perceived the good and the evil, the right and the wrong, the beautiful and the ugly, the strong and the weak, the ill and the healthy, the great and the small, as particular *indivisible unities*. I did not demand of a good man that he perform only good deeds, and I was not surprised to see a piece of evil mimicry on a beautiful face; I did not expect truth for its own sake whatever the cost from a person whose words I was accustomed to trust, and somehow I understood him if he lied. Indeed, I was irritated by straightforward 'truthfulness', 'sincerity to the bitter end', boundless 'poetic melancholy' or 'contempt for life without the slightest ray of hope'. I did not trust *straightforward and simple* mentalities, and I sensed that a complacent egotism lay concealed behind them. An offensive feeling welled up in me when I saw such an egotist wearing the mask of a straightforward 'optimist', 'pessimist', 'romantic', 'sage', 'artless' person, etc.; I saw that these are various forms of one and the same sentimental egotism that puts on a mask in the hope of deceiving and bewitching the weak-witted. And those who believed them and found joy in communing with 'masks' were to me just as repugnant as the 'masks' themselves. Neither the one nor the other knew what a feeling of *true humanity* was. They did not know that to be truly human means to be able to reconcile opposites. But all this lived within me as an instinct and was not formulated into any

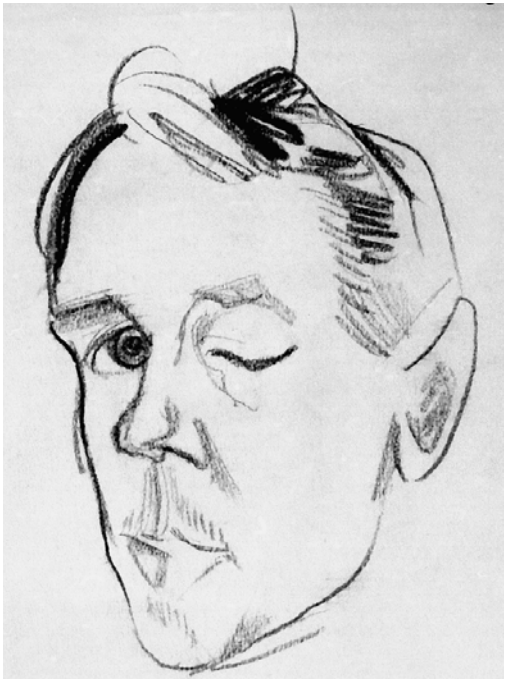

Plate 8
Self-portrait by Chekhov

clear thoughts. And subsequently, when I came to be working on my roles, I was unable to imagine the character I was representing as a primitive 'mask'. Either I saw him as a more or less complex being, or I did not see him at all.

Nowadays, however, when I chance to meet such a 'mask' in real life I understand that it is no more than a fleeting condition of a person's evolving consciousness, and it does not cause me to suffer as much as it did in my youth. I have learnt to understand that getting annoyed with people, feeling hatred for them and becoming involved in irreconcilable battles with them is usually the result of a false picture of the immutability of human character. Even now I often recognize in myself that feeling which I experienced when I was six or seven years old and sent out to play wrapped in a hood,* and accidentally catching

* Chekhov uses the word 'bashlyk' – which is a kind of hood with long 'wings' which might be swathed around one's neck. (Editors' note.)

sight of myself in a mirror, I became indignant at seeing myself wrapped up in this hood. I am aware of similar feelings even now, but they do not have as much power over me as they did in my childhood. Everything that lived within me as fear, confidence, love, passion, tenderness, coarseness, humour, a gloomy disposition of the soul, etc., was imbued with an intensity which seethed within me. The passion of my nature did not merely intensify all these qualities, it combined them into fantastic patterns and forms. And now when I look back on all this, I understand that because of my passion I have literally speeded up my life; that is, I have lived out everything that was in me much more quickly than I might have done had I not had such a passionate nature. True, I headed rapidly towards an inner crisis, even towards a nervous breakdown, but now that the acuteness of this dangerous moment is past, I feel grateful to my destiny for the swift, albeit tormenting, resolution of the question of my life.

* * *

Once when I was wandering round the night tea-rooms in St Petersburg, I dropped into a 'cellar' which enjoyed a notorious reputation. It was furnished very cleanly and elegantly. As I entered it, I saw a large company of revellers. It was stuffy and noisy, and there was a haze in the air. From time to time a penetrating whistle could be heard. It struck me that this company of people had something special about them. I looked more closely at them. The faces of the revellers were indeed not exactly the usual kind you might find in a 'night haunt'. They were intelligent, pleasant-looking and well-dressed people with clever – though drunken and weary – faces. They all seemed to be connected to one another by some kind of common centre, around which their strange figures were grouped. In their poses and gestures a conceited, garish pride and an accentuated independence could be discerned. It was evident that these people were not so much enjoying a spree as putting on an act in some particular style. Their unruliness was unnatural and was restrained by a hunger to merge with the style to which they were apparently aspiring. A penetrating whistle came from the centre of their group and several plates flew up towards the ceiling. The plates flew in a beautiful way and it was obvious that they were

released by a skilful hand. The 'stylized' people caught them with a cry and on their faces there was an obsequiousness, although they were trying to maintain their sense of independence and freedom.

I started searching for a clue and I began to look for the centre around which they were gathered. At that centre there sat a man with a drunken, swollen face and clots of blood near his ear. Wet locks of hair were sticking to his forehead. The expression on his face was uncanny. Through his laughter one could see malice and contempt. The whistling came from him. As he threw a plate, he seemingly had no thought that it might fall on the head of one of those surrounding him. Sometimes a plate did not fly upwards, but straight at the face of one of his comrades. The entire company evoked a weird and painful impression. I recognized the central figure to be Alexander Kuprin.* But what a difference there was between him and the surrounding company! I do not know what Kuprin was experiencing and what had caused his face to be distorted with pain and malice, but I knew that for him this was something serious, deep and genuine. And yet the entire company of those who crowded around him was a vulgar and ugly caricature of 'the melancholy and drunk soul'. They took pleasure in their peculiar closeness to Kuprin, purchasing it at the price of falsehood and buffoonery.

I must have been looking too attentively at this whole company and taking in the atmosphere around them too fully, because I suddenly began to feel unbearably miserable and frightened. I ran out of the 'cellar' and along Mikhailovsky Street towards the Nevsky Prospect. It was misty on the street and it was beginning to get light.

'What a pure and beautiful soul you are!' I suddenly heard someone say close by.

I turned and saw one of those 'masks' who are after 'straightforward' psychologies. The words of the 'mask' made a deep impression on me. I have never sunk so far as to regard myself sincerely as 'a pure soul'. But in the moment when my perception became more acute, I experienced with particular clarity and profundity the whole lie of 'straightforward and simple' psychologies. I understood how far I was from having true purity of heart, how difficult it is to attain and how

* Alexander Kuprin (1870–1938), writer. (Editors' note.)

'masks' are capable of trivializing the best goals and aspirations of the human heart.

* * *

When I finished drama school, I joined the Suvorin Theatre, where I stayed for a year and a half. Boris Glagolin took a great interest in me and in the first year I was given the part of Tsar Fyodor along with a number of other roles.[11] The first time my father took any notice of me as an actor was following a performance of *Tsar Fyodor*. After the play, he praised and even kissed me.

For me, the playing of Tsar Fyodor was associated with another experience: it was the first time I learnt about theatrical intrigues. After the second performance of *Tsar Fyodor*, a huge laurel wreath festooned with ribbons was presented on stage at the final curtain. The wreath

Plate 9
Michael Chekhov in the role of Tsar Fyodor in *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich* by Alexey Konstantinovich Tolstoy. St Petersburg. Suvorin Theatre. 1911

was intended for me, but it took some time for me to understand this and I drew away from the usher who was holding it out to me. Everyone was applauding in the auditorium. I glanced at the inscription on the ribbon and I saw that the wreath really was for me. At the same moment I felt a pain in my left hand. The actress D.,* who played Tsarina Irina, fiercely squeezed my hand and whispered in a terrible voice:

'You – you presented yourself with a wreath!'

She bowed to the audience while painfully squeezing my hand. I was totally taken aback. I tried there and then on the stage to explain to her that I knew nothing about the wreath, but she whispered in a malicious voice:

'Look at him! A fine wreath he's presented himself with!'

The curtain was closed, and D. – shaking with malice and pointing at me – shouted about my disgraceful behaviour with the wreath. The actors listened to her in silence while I stood, like someone on trial, in the centre of a group of actors with a huge wreath in my hands.

The principal director of the theatre at that time was Arbatov.[12] His capacity for work was staggering. He not only put on plays in the theatre, taught in the school and worked for nights on end at home, but he also managed to carry out various complicated and responsible tasks on the side. One of these tasks of his was the creation of a cycle of historical plays.† Nicholas II wanted to familiarize himself with this cycle, and a whole series of performances was organized in Tsarskoe Selo.‡ One of the rooms in the palace was turned into a stage on which the plays were performed. I remember how a considerable amount of time was spent on teaching us, the presenters of the cycle, how to behave at the palace. There were so many of these rules that it was completely impossible to remember them. We were intimidated, confused and very anxious. All the rules and exhortations that we received from a general who had come especially for this purpose were forgotten

* Chekhov is referring to the actress, Klavdia Destomb. (Original Russian editors' note.)

† This evidently refers to the evenings dedicated to the history of Russian theatre, which were organized by Nikolay Arbatov with students of the Suvorin Drama School in 1907. (Original Russian editors' note.)

‡ Tsarskoe Selo near St Petersburg was the summer residence of the Russian Tsar. (Editors' note.)

right at the moment when they were most necessary: that is, when the Tsar himself appeared in order to converse with us after the performance. One young actress who was making a curtsy sat on the keys of the piano; an actor who had not heard a question which had been addressed to him by one of the members of the Royal family impetuously came out with the cry, 'What did you say?', thus breaking the silence reigning in the room; while I responded to the Tsar's question, 'How do you stick on your nose?' by quickly taking it off and almost shouting, 'Just like this, Your Majesty!' An awkward moment ensued, but the Tsar did not get angry, and he asked me if I wanted to join the Imperial Theatre. I couldn't answer properly, and afterwards my colleagues frequently rebuked me for this. Nicholas stretched out his hand to me in a white glove and I shook it, staining it with the sticky resin which I had removed from my nose.

For me, the hours that I spent on stage were like balm to my soul. For a time, I forgot my oppressive thoughts and I immersed myself in a state of creativity which wholly took hold of me. On one occasion, my over-sensitive nervous condition led to an unexpected result. This was on a tour which the Suvorin Theatre was making. As a performance in one of the towns was drawing to a close, a rumour spread among the actors that a building next to the theatre was on fire. I was playing the part of a Chinaman. When I had finished my part, I left the stage and saw that the building opposite the theatre was indeed ablaze. I grew frightened and took to my heels along the street in the direction of the station. I was running in my Chinaman's costume and make-up, with my pigtail dangling behind me. The theatre wardrobe master had me in hot pursuit.

'Mr Chekhov,' he shouted, 'let me at least have the trousers!'

I did not stop and went on running. At last, the wardrobe master began to catch up with me. Then I suddenly stopped, took off my wide Chinaman's trousers and, leaving them where they fell, I carried on running.

The actors knew certain of my weaknesses and would often make jokes at my expense. However, their jokes were almost always innocent.

Boris Glagolin's mastery as an actor and director made a profound impression on me. When I saw him in the role of Khlestakov, I experienced a kind of revelation. It became clear to me that Glagolin played Khlestakov *not like everyone else*, although I had actually never seen

anyone else in this role before Glagolin. This feeling of 'not like everyone else' arose in me without having any comparisons and analogies, but directly from Glagolin's acting. The unusual *freedom* and originality of his creativity in this role astonished me, and I was not wrong: no one played Khlestakov in the *way* Glagolin did. When I subsequently came to play this part, I recognized in myself Glagolin's influence. When Stanislavsky produced *The Government Inspector*, he led me in a direction which had something in common with the impression that Glagolin had made on me as Khlestakov.[13]

Through his productions, Nikolay Arbatov taught me to value the subtlety and clarity of stage work. Under his influence, I began to sense for the first time how important it is to have clear *form* on the stage. True, all his productions were conceived exclusively on a naturalistic and everyday level; that is, on a level that did not allow any style (and without style there is no art). However, such questions did not really bother me then, and in Arbatov's productions I saw their form. Arbatov loved and understood *form*. Sometimes he invited me to his home, and I was able to observe how skilfully and subtly he created the beautiful models for his set designs. The whole interior of his study was a combination of harmonious forms. The form of the lamp and the form of the table were in strict harmony, the bookcases, the furniture, the books themselves – everything was harmonious in its form and colour. He would spend nights in delicate, skilful work, searching out forms for his set models, his cards for jotting down weekly tasks, his drawings for cloth bindings, etc.

What a shame it is that the majority of Russian actors still love and value form so little. True, it is not easy for them to search for it. They lack the special preparation needed for this. As for drama schools, the teaching there was – and still is – done without any plan or system. The teachers may be fine actors, but they are bad theoreticians where questions of the psychology of the actor's creativity are concerned. They do not take the trouble to give a young actor methods which could help him to learn consciously how to make use of his creativity. The students usually *imitate* their teachers, but they do not receive from them *fundamental knowledge*.

Why does the so-called Stanislavsky's system have such an irresistible power? Because it gives a young actor hope that he can actually

master the principal powers of his own creative soul: those powers which are the summation of all the details of the creative process. Actors who are altogether unfamiliar with the question of *form and style* either try to make use of old, outlived forms or they carry on without any form at all, thus throwing out raw material from the stage in the guise of passions and emotional outbursts, describing these performances as being full of 'temperament'.* An actor gradually learns to love dilettantism, taking it for freedom. But how pernicious this 'freedom' is for him! It leads to licentiousness not only on the stage, but also in life. I remember how this 'freedom' manifested itself in certain actors even in a theatre as disciplined as the Suvorin Theatre. They hacked at objects in the dressing-rooms with the swords they used as props, they rolled big costume-baskets down the stairs with elderly and ill-respected extras sitting on them (once, after such a prank, one of the extras was taken to hospital), they went out of their way to devise petty jokes at their colleagues' expense. And all this was done without talent, without brilliance, without humour, without dexterity, solely out of a feeling of 'freedom'.

In time, it will become clear to an actor how deeply his life and profession are connected. He will understand that it is impossible to be a cultured actor while remaining an uncultured person. How often does one hear from actors: 'Why should I *know* about form, style and so forth? If I am talented, my talent will lead me to the right style and proper form. Theoretical knowledge can only kill all spontaneity in me'. But there are two kinds of knowledge, and an actor who talks like this has in mind only the dry, intellectual kind of *knowledge*. And here he is right. The true, living knowledge (which the actor lacks) is of quite another kind.

I shall explain this difference by means of an example.† Take the Gothic style. A Gothic cathedral. You see its forms, you study them, you memorize your visual impression of them and you become so

* 'Temperament' in Russian theatre and everyday language denotes the capacity and tendency of an actor (or a person) to react and express themselves emotionally. (Editors' note.)

† The following thought about the two styles is not my own and is cited here only as an elucidating example. Moreover, I read it a long time ago and I do not remember its exact wording. (Chekhov's note.)

familiar with them that you cannot confuse them with any other forms. Take a Greek temple, and in exactly the same detailed way study and memorize its forms. You will be able to distinguish these two styles from one another and from any other styles. At this point you can stop and say: 'I know about the style of Greek and Gothic church architecture'. But such knowledge is dead and intellectual. An actor may rightly say: 'I don't need it'. But one can go further in studying these two styles. Is it possible to imagine a Gothic cathedral empty, not full of people praying? No. It is only complete in its architecture, in its style, when you see in it a crowd of people praying with their hands together in a gesture of prayer. Then you *will experience a striving upwards*, which proceeds from the inner recesses of the Gothic cathedral. In contrast, you will understand a Greek temple better if you imagine it empty. According to the Greek, God is dwelling within it. Even though not a single human being may be in it, it will nevertheless be a perfect work of Greek architecture. This is another way of understanding style.

The power of such an understanding is that it ceases to be intellectual; instead it awakens in the artist's soul creative forces, which are able to educate him in such a way that he himself will no longer be satisfied with his creativity as long as it manifests itself in him without any sense of style and form. The actor-artist will understand that style is the most precious thing that he brings into his work, that it is something which ultimately makes being a creative artist worthwhile. He will understand that naturalism is not art, for the artist cannot bring anything from himself into a naturalistic 'work of art', that his task in such a case is limited to his ability to copy 'nature' more or less exactly and, at best, to bring into a new configuration whatever existed and exists aside him and outside him. He will understand that to engage in naturalistic art is to be no more than a photographer of 'nature'. And a naturalism-dominated future in the theatre is a dismal prospect. Remaining within the bounds of narrow themes and objectives, naturalism will be compelled to seek out ever more fiery combinations of facts, combinations that are capable of having a greater effect on the *nerves* of an audience than would have been the case either yesterday or the day before yesterday. It will reach a point where it has to give its audience a series of 'powerful sensations' capable of arousing shock within them through a chain of pathological effects. Scenes will appear

on the stage of terrible forms of death, physical torments, bloody murders, soul-shattering catastrophes, pathological psychological disorders, instances of madness, animal-like cries, screams and gunshots. All this will be the peak of achievement for naturalistic 'art', but it will also be its end.

The legacy that naturalism will leave behind will be a coarsened and nervously disordered audience that has lost its artistic taste, and much time will be needed in order *to restore it to health*.

* * *

My employment at the Suvorin Theatre forced my parents to move to the city for the winter. My father's illness became worse, the intervals between his bouts of illness became shorter, and the attacks themselves lasted for longer and longer. Once I was told that my father was to live apart from my mother and me. I did not know the true cause of this circumstance. A new feeling appeared in my soul – I began to have a guess at what solitude and old age meant. When my mother and I went to visit my father, I tried to guess what my father was feeling. It was clear that both my father and mother had made some sort of sacrifice for my sake and that both of them were suffering. But I stayed with my mother while my father remained alone. I began to sense my father's presence in a new way. Whereas previously I had been accustomed to respect my father and regard him with reverence, I now noticed that a feeling of pity for him was emerging in my soul. This feeling hurt me, but I could not banish it from my heart. I felt awkward when I came to see my father and I greeted him as one does an acquaintance; I did not know what to say, what to do or what to ask him about. It began to seem to me that it was as if my father was half dead. My secret and complex inner life became even more burdensome, while outwardly I was becoming increasingly coarse. I began to drink more and I often performed while drunk. Once, when I had begun a play in a state of inebriation, I was unable to finish it and I came to my senses alone in the dressing-room – ill and thoroughly jaded. How and when the play finished I did not know.

My relations with women were becoming coarser and more primitive. And the worse I behaved, the stronger and the more painfully I

loved my mother and pitied my father. But whatever I did – as before – I did not hide anything from my mother.

A further characteristic began to show itself within me – a contempt for others. It hardened me, and that eased my relationship with the outside world. I found it easy to relate to a person whom I despised – but then, as a kind of counterweight to this, I attached myself to certain people with a particular intensity. For me, people were divided into the few whom I loved and all the rest whom I despised. My materialistic attitude of mind was strongly conducive to this. Any ethical feelings came up against my materialistic views and then fell away redundant. My physical health was getting worse and worse, and I began to develop pulmonary tuberculosis.

* * *

Once, at the time when the Moscow Art Theatre was on tour,* I was sent on a visit to Olga Knipper-Chekhov,† who was my relative. I was not good at behaving appropriately in the society of outstanding people and so I asked to be released from this heavy duty. My requests led to nothing, and I set off for the visit. I was given some smart clothes and I turned up at Knipper-Chekhov's residence. She received me affectionately and made it appear that she did not notice my awkwardness. (Apparently I caught my foot on a carpet and knocked a delicate, elegant table with my elbow.) The conversation was broken from time to time by agonizing silences, and I looked with melancholy at her squinty and playfully cunning eye. At length she asked me:

'Why don't you want to transfer to our theatre?'

I was amazed at her question.

'I would not dare to even dream of it,' I replied sincerely and for once without embarrassment. Knipper-Chekhov laughed and said:

'I shall have a word with Stanislavsky about you, come here tomorrow.'

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* This is the tour of the Moscow Art Theatre to St Petersburg which began on 26 March 1912. (Original Russian editors' note.)

† Olga Knipper-Chekhov (1868–1959), actress of the MAT and Anton Chekhov's wife. (Editors' note.)

I ran from Knipper-Chekhov in a state of ecstasy. The following day I called on her again. I was received by Alexander Vishnevsky.* He kissed me and said:

'You know that your father used to beat me up?'

'What for?' I asked, not understanding what he was talking about.

Alexander Vishnevsky related how he was at school with my father and that, being in the same class, they had had fights with one another. Vishnevsky gave me a preliminary test by suggesting that I do some scenes from *Tsar Fyodor*. The following day I had to appear at the theatre before Stanislavsky himself. I was dressed even more smartly than the day before. My collar was so tight that I could hardly breathe. Stanislavsky met me at the theatre in person. When I saw his majestic figure and grey hair, I forgot all about my thoughts and feelings.

'We are very pleased to have Anton Pavlovich's[14] nephew in the theatre,' said Stanislavsky, holding out his hand.

A single word was ringing relentlessly in my mind: 'Stanislavsky, Stanislavsky'. He was infinitely charming and tender. At his invitation, I went into one of the foyers in the theatre and sat beside him on a red sofa. He posed a series of questions to me, which I answered mechanically, almost without understanding their meaning.

'Now do something from *Tsar Fyodor* for me,' said Stanislavsky after a while.

I suddenly wanted to run away. There was a snapping sound, my collar broke and its edges bit into my cheek. I froze – or rather, died! Another minute passed – and I felt I couldn't care less. I read Stanislavsky a portion from *Tsar Fyodor* and Marmeladov's† monologue. Stanislavsky said a few affectionate words to me and announced that I was admitted to the Art Theatre. He told me to go to Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko‡ in order to sort out all the questions concerning my joining the Art Theatre.

During these days of solemnity for me, Stanislavsky invited me to dinner. I appeared at his hotel and there I found Olga Knipper-Chekhov,

* Alexander Vishnevsky (1861–1943), actor of the MAT. (Editors' note.)

† Character from Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. (Editors' note.)

‡ Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (1858–1943), writer, director and co-founder of the Moscow Art Theatre with Konstantin Stanislavsky. (Editors' note.)

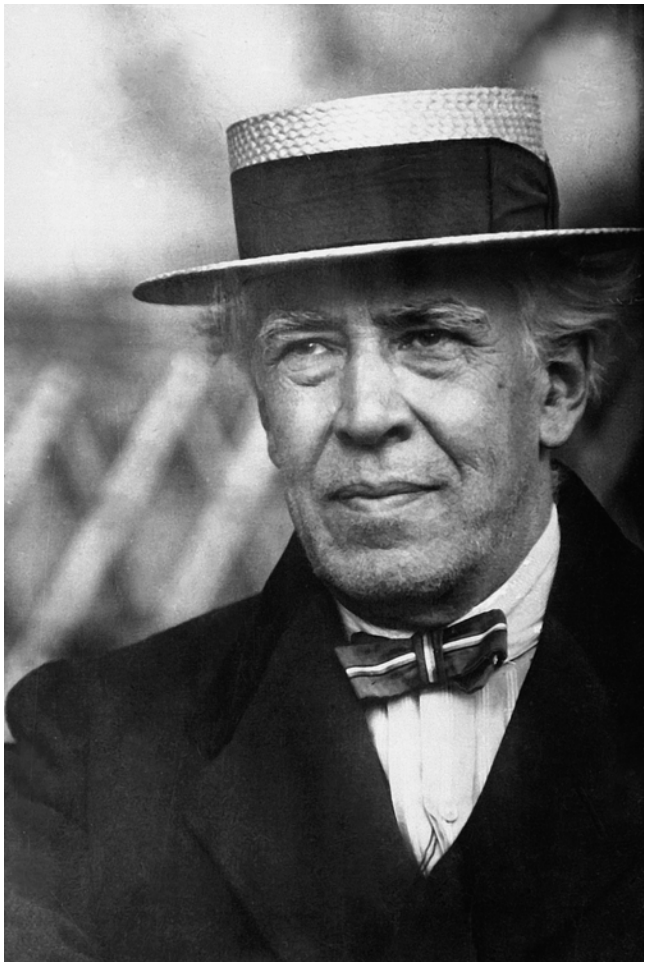

Plate 10 Konstantin Stanislavsky

Marya Lilina and Vasily Kachalov.* I felt extremely embarrassed. But when I saw that beside each place setting there were knives and forks of a special kind such as I had never seen before, I felt utterly miserable. Even the joy that my ambition had sowed within me was completely

* Along with being Stanislavsky's wife, Lilina (1866–1943) was an actress at the MAT, where Kachalov (1875–1948) was also an actor. (Editors' note.)

extinguished. At dinner I did some very hard thinking, trying to work out how and with what implements I should eat the courses served.

At the theatre, I was immediately enrolled in the associate group. This was a transitional stage between being a member of the company and a fully-fledged actor in the troupe.[15] Boris Sushkevich, Evgeny Vakhtangov, Vladimir Gotovtsev, Grigory Khmara and Alexey Diky[16] were in this group at the time.

My first roles were as a non-speaking actor and a ragamuffin in the riot scene in *Hamlet*.* I had never experienced such emotion as I did when performing these parts. As the ragamuffin, I struck an iron door with my dummy axe in such an inspired way that the audience would have thought that the whole performance depended on me. Stanislavsky followed my development as an actor and he spent quite some time with me, making me familiar with the rudiments of his system. He soon gave me the part of Mishka in *The Provincial Woman*,† working with me on this role himself.

In the year of my joining the theatre, Molière's *The Imaginary Invalid* was staged. Together with my new colleagues, I took part in an interlude featuring one of the doctors. Our task was to be funny and we were given complete freedom in our search for ways to make the audience laugh. This task enthralled everyone. We were very resourceful in coming up with funny modes of speech, funny intonations and so on. Our whole dressing-room and many of the actors from the other dressing-rooms set up a sweepstake, betting twenty kopeks on which one of us on that day could elicit most laughs from the audience. All means available were put to use. Finally I devised the idea of a stammering doctor. The actors who put twenty kopeks on me won. For the next performance, the highest stakes were put on me. I spoke my words with a stammer. Diky was the next to speak. Suddenly we heard some unintelligible and incomprehensible sounds. Diky had brought together virtually everything that had been thought up so far by way of comic devices, and in an extraordinary, temperamental and rapid manner he spoke his words interspersed with coughs, sneezes and stammerings.

* This production was co-directed by Konstantin Stanislavsky and Edward Gordon Craig in 1911. (Editors' note.)

† Play by Ivan Turgenev. (Editors' note.)

He broke the record, making not only the audience laugh, but also the rest of us as we stood with him on the stage. However, after Diky's unexpected performance, we were forbidden from developing our parts any further in this direction. Stanislavsky feared one further step, as it would have been anticipated with nothing less than with great anxiety.

During this same year,* Stanislavsky began his pedagogical experiments with the younger personalities in the theatre. As a result of these experiments, the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre subsequently emerged. Vakhtangov had the task of working with us on Stanislavsky's system.[17] When he saw that I was among his students, Vakhtangov said:

'I won't work with this Suvorin Theatre actor.'

I was hurt, though not for long as Vakhtangov did start working with me too. The lessons were given by Konstantin Stanislavsky himself, Leopold Sulerzhitsky[18] and Evgeny Vakhtangov. The exercises and studies had an improvisatory quality. We also worked on dramatized stories. At this same time, Boleslavsky[19] (on his own initiative) embarked upon a production of *The Wreck of 'The Good Hope'*.[20] The piece was ready after several months. Stanislavsky took a look at our work, approved of it and suggested to us that we invite relatives and friends to show them what we had done.

'Take a rouble from each of them,' he said, 'and you'll recover your expenses.'

So that is what we did. It was our first independent performance before the public, at a time when the Studio as such did not formally exist.

The true founders of the Studio as a youth theatre, indeed as an *institution*, were largely Boris Sushkevich and Vladimir Gotovtsev. They understood and felt before anyone else that a serious theatrical project could be born out of Stanislavsky's exercises, and they put in a lot of work to enable the Studio to come into being. I remember how Gotovtsev, despite being ill with a high temperature, walked among the workers who were refitting the premises for the Studio and lovingly followed the progress of the work, giving instructions and entering into the details of building technique. Gotovtsev, a lawyer by training,

* i.e. 1912. (Editors' note.)

Plate 11 Michael Chekhov as Cobe and Anna Popova as Saart in *The Wreck of 'The Good Hope'* by Herman Heijermans. First Studio. 1913

suddenly turned himself into an architect and displayed a profound and unexpected understanding for questions of construction! This can only happen with a man who is inspired by a certain idea. Gotovtsev spared no efforts. At roughly the same time, he was working in the Society for Supporting the Setting-Up of Factory and Village Theatres. He put on plays there. The institution now known by the name of Polenov House is that very same institution whose origin owes much to Gotovtsev, and to some extent to Sushkevich. In addition, Gotovtsev

also did a lot of work among peasant communities, putting on plays and directing various workers' theatrical circles.[21]

I remember how attentively Sushkevich watched over our attempts to establish the Studio. Remaining somewhat on the sidelines, he weighed up and evaluated the process of events with a viewpoint and far-sightedness which were peculiar to him. Most of us had not even thought about the possibility of manifesting a theatre. But Sushkevich, having taken a certain decision, suddenly transformed and began to work actively. He, Sulerzhitsky, Gotovtsev, Boleslavsky and Vakhtangov set things into motion and we quickly felt that a new theatre was coming into being. For our part, we were helping the project which they were creating, guided by Stanislavsky himself. *The Wreck of 'The Good Hope'* was followed by Vakhtangov's work, *The Festival of Peace* (*Das Friedensfest*), *The Cricket on the Hearth*[22] directed by Sushkevich and a whole series of productions which formed the repertoire of a newly founded theatre – the Moscow Art Theatre Studio.

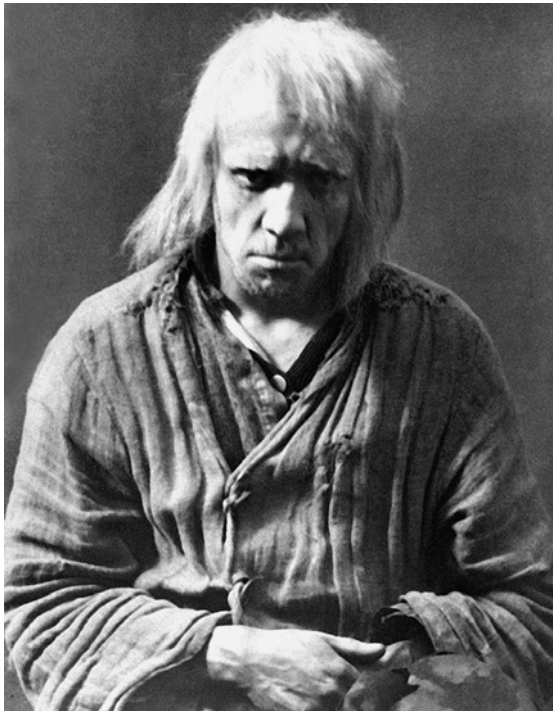

Plate 12
Michael Chekhov as Caleb in *The Cricket on the Hearth* by Charles Dickens. First Studio. 1914

The Studio literally came into being because of the ardent, passionate endeavours of us all. There was little by way of calculations or practical considerations; what was at work here was a common, youthful will and a virtual absence of doubt and hesitation. We submitted ourselves joyfully and unquestioningly to our older colleagues. They guided us intelligently and with inspiration. Sulerzhitsky was a man in whose presence it was impossible to think heartlessly or to pursue one's own interests. His moral and public authority was great, not only because he spoke beautifully and ardently about questions of the theatre and the life and work together within it, but chiefly because he *did* what he said. We *saw* his ardent soul and his acute, loving mind more than we *heard* them. Sulerzhitsky knew the secret of any leadership and management. He knew that if a person wants to lead others to a particular goal, it is above all necessary to discipline oneself and be strict with oneself. He knew that it is necessary to grant those who are being led complete freedom and then they will follow their leader. That is how Sulerzhitsky behaved with us. He also knew one further secret.

Plate 13 Leopold Sulerzhitsky

He understood with utter clarity that to lead means to serve those who are being led and not to demand service on their part. His artistic authority was as powerful as his moral authority. His artistic influence manifested itself in all the productions of the Studio, although he himself did not undertake independent productions in it.

My older colleagues often suggested that I take part in the building up and running of the life of the Studio, but I was hampered from doing so by my unbalanced character and the gloomy state of my soul. Pessimistic ideas and moods took hold of me to such an extent that I was unable to understand why on earth all that was being done around me with such love and care was necessary. But all the same I did participate in the life of the Studio, driven by the strength of that creative mood which at that time I had still not altogether lost. These two feelings – two forces – struggled for supremacy within me, and I remember how this duality of mine intrigued Vakhtangov. I remember the interest with which he would listen to the statements through which I would rudely and sharply express one or another aspect of my inner mood. Smiling intelligently and shaking his head, he would look at me without saying anything, and to this day I do not know what thoughts formed in his mind under the influence of my strange and at times unhealthy judgements. I developed an attachment to Vakhtangov, and I dare to suppose that his relationship towards me was also pretty warm and friendly.

Apart from our common theatrical work where he was my teacher, we would often spend hours – despite his busy life – in conversation and making jokes together. Our jokes always had a particular character. Usually Vakhtangov would invent some kind of trick and we would then spend hours elaborating it, becoming ever more refined in our adroitness and ease of its execution. The tricks were generally uncomplicated. For example, we had to portray someone who wants to drop a match into an empty bottle but misses the neck; he doesn't notice this and is amazed when he sees the match on the table and believes that the match has miraculously passed through the bottom of the bottle. We repeated this and similar tricks dozens of times, until we had reached a virtuoso level of execution. But it also happened that, having begun a game with a trick, Vakhtangov would get carried away with the image of the person whom he was portraying and this image

Plate 14
Evgeny Vakhtangov

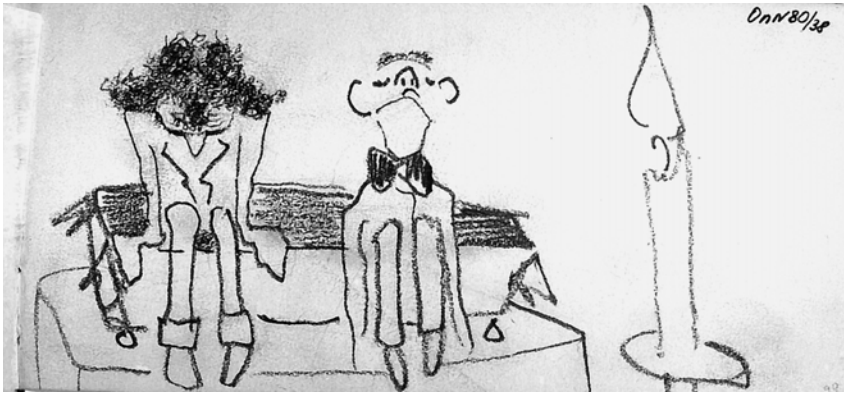

Plate 15 Caricature by Chekhov. Evgeny Vakhtangov and Michael Chekhov

would then become a fascinating and complex being. In such cases, I was usually merely an observer and I loved these inspired moments of Vakhtangov's. Games involving such tricks are extremely useful for an actor's development and they need to be included in the programmes of drama schools. A trick never works if it is done too labouredly. Lightness is a necessary condition for its execution.

* * *

Shortly after I was admitted to the Moscow Art Theatre, I received an invitation to take part in a film. I was immediately flattered and excited. On receiving my agreement in principle, the man who had invited me suddenly became inspired and started negotiating my fee. He vigorously threw both arms in the air and, advancing resolutely towards me, he quickly drove me into a corner of the room. There we came to a halt, and he began:

'Just think: what does the cinema give you? Fame! You become famous! Everyone knows you! And who does this? The cinema! Do you understand? What's more, you get thirteen roubles for it! Say yes, and we've got it all wrapped up!'

But for me it was 'all wrapped up' the moment the man had thrown his arms in the air and started advancing towards me. I consented. The man disappeared in a trice.

A film was being made to mark the three-hundredth anniversary of the House of Romanov.[23] Some of the shooting was to be done in one of the smaller towns in Russia. This involved two days of rail travel and two nights in the dreadful hotel rooms of this little town. It was winter and the temperature was well below freezing. When we arrived at the filming location, we were made up and dressed in a cold, shed-like building. The actors behaved in a free and easy way, they drank a lot, shouted and always played up to the leading actor. The leading actor was a grey-haired man with a swollen face and the stamp of genius: for example, he had a fear of steps and so he was led up and down stairs supported on both sides while he uttered feeble shrieks and covered his eyes with his hands.

On the first day, the filmmakers put me at the top of a high hill. The camera was sited below me at the foot of the hill. I was playing Tsar

Mikhail Fyodorovich.[24] When I appeared at the gates, I heard some despairing voices shouting up from below, from the camera:

'Abdicate! Get on with it! We've only got two metres left! Hurry up! Abdicate!'

I abdicated – as well as I could.

Immediately to my left I saw our leading actor. He was dressed like a priest, and he walked arm in arm with me, uttering some pretty unseemly words. The filming went on for quite a while and I was becoming more and more frozen. After the filming we had dinner, we had a lot to drink, the leading actor told jokes, and everyone except me was cheerful. I had a bad night in my dirty hotel, and as the filming resumed the following day, I felt miserable and wretched. The first thing that happened was that the police drove away some local inhabitants who, on seeing our unusual flowery costumes, had come to us with petitions in which they expressed their various needs. When the petitioners had been dispersed, the filming began. I was seated astride a horse and was told to ride slowly to a little wood nearby. That morning I had taken my galoshes with me to protect myself from the cold. When I was ordered to get on to the horse, I surreptitiously hid my galoshes under my costume, terrified that someone might take them off me. But fortunately nobody noticed my galoshes. When I heard the appropriate command, I set off slowly in the direction of the wood. Suddenly one of my galoshes slipped slowly from under my costume and fell onto the snow. I went numb. A minute later the second one followed the first. I waited for the uproar, the shouting and the reprimands. But to my surprise no one noticed my misfortune, and when the filming was over I retrieved both my galoshes. The filming was becoming something of an agony, and I was ready to run away from my benefactors and renounce both the fame that been promised me and the thirteen roubles.

In the evening, the producer held a celebratory dinner for the Chief of Police and other important personages of the town. The Chief of Police was a very good-looking, imposing man with a dashingly twirled moustache and medals on his chest. The dinner began with solemn speeches. The substance of the speeches was that the Chief of Police was the very person on whom any cinematic enterprise, any artistic and material success of the cinema throughout Russia depended, had

always depended and would continue to depend, and that Russian art in its entirety was in some way or other in the hands of the Chief of Police. The Chief of Police did not dispute his influence upon the whole of Russian art and, raising his glass, he thanked the producer *for everything* and he expressed his readiness for *the future* as well. In a word, the Chief of Police was far from being as clear and distinct in the way that he expressed his thoughts as the producer was. But in a strange and unexpected way the solemnity turned to *love*, and many people tearfully embraced one another. Photographs were handed around, and those present signed them without knowing why and for whom they were intended. The Chief of Police signed one on which was portrayed some kind of memorial.

Suddenly a small fellow of short stature with thin, reddish hair got up and with a loud, high voice greeted the Chief of Police, addressing him in a familiar way and making as if to ply him with kisses. The Chief of Police frowned and there was some embarrassment at the table, but the little red-haired fellow could no longer be stopped. He

Plate 16 Michael Chekhov as the waiter Skorokhodov in Yakov Protozanov's film, *A Man from the Restaurant*. 1927

was in ecstasy. Then he was led away from the table. When he had gone, arguing voices could be heard round the table – some were in favour of his removal, others against it. The expression on the Chief of Police's face was growing darker. The producer was embarrassed, and finally it became known that the little red-haired man was lying in the fishpond in the foyer of the hotel and was very drunk. This seemed to pacify everyone, but nevertheless the Chief of Police quickly made his departure.

The following day I was in Moscow. The filming wasn't yet finished, but I flatly refused to take any further part. Another actor was engaged in my stead, who like me was sat upon a horse and told to go to the nearby wood. The only difference was that he was filmed from behind in order not to show his face, which wasn't in the least bit like mine.

Such was my introduction to the cinema.[25]

* * *

When I joined the Moscow Art Theatre, I moved to Moscow alone without my parents. But of course my connection with home was not broken. Every day – and sometimes twice a day – I wrote to my mother from Moscow and just as often my mother wrote to me. My father was in the south. My mother wrote that he was returning via Moscow, and she asked me to meet him at the station and spend some time with him. He was travelling with his son.* When I entered the train carriage, I found him in a bad way. He was in the early stages of throat cancer, and he knew it. Even before his journey to the south – having just recovered from his usual illness† – he had had to go to the doctor as he was troubled by an unpleasant feeling in his throat. Without naming the illness, the doctor who examined my father suggested an operation. But my father demanded that the doctor tell him what the illness was. And as everyone always submitted to my father, likewise the doctor could not refuse him and so he told him that he had cancer of the throat. On returning home, my father told my mother about it and he immediately decided to go away to the south: he refused to have

* See Endnote 4 *TPOTA*.

† His usual 'illness' being alcoholism. (Editors' note.)

an operation. He counted on the favourable influence of the climate. This is what he said, but he was so well versed in medicine that he could not of course seriously base his hopes on the climate. He understood that it was a matter of time and that ultimately the illness was incurable. For the first time he left home without being alone. He was obviously struggling with anguish at the awareness of his approaching death. He started drinking again and this particular illness of his lasted for an unbroken period of several months, during which time the cancerous tumour continued to develop.

At the end of the first season in the Moscow Art Theatre, I returned home* and we all went to stay in our dacha out of town. My father was rapidly weakening, but he did not lose consciousness. He gave me a precise description of his impending death and it seemed as if he even determined the day on which he would die. We took turns to watch over him at night. He was beginning to be delirious.

'How vexing,' he said to me once, 'I have lived such a long life, and what am I seeing before I die? Trains full of geese! How painfully stupid!'

He had no fear of death. Even while he was suffering, choking from the effects of the tumour, I noticed traces of irritation on his face but I never saw any fear. His tortures were extreme. The tumour was gradually suffocating him. Although I was totally unable to help my father, I was nevertheless incapable of leaving him and I could not tear myself away from contemplating this picture of agonizing human suffering. It was the first time that I had viewed death so closely. I watched how my father took shorter and shorter breaths, how his mouth opened wide for air; I caught the moment when his eyes ceased to see. The agony lasted several hours, but in these hours for me – as for my father – time did not exist. Finally his brow turned yellow and the yellowness quickly spread over the whole of his face. He died.†

How wrongly we actors portray death on the stage! We pay too much attention to those physiological processes which, as it seems to us, give a true picture of death. But this is already wrong and inartistic

* i.e. April 1913. Chekhov was actually on tour in St Petersburg with the Moscow Art Theatre. (Original Russian editors' note.)

† Alexander Chekhov died on 17 May 1913. (Original Russian editors' note.)

by virtue of the fact that a naturalistic portrayal of the physical torments of a person before death cannot be art. We must not torture the audience by gasping for breath or writhing about in front of them in convulsions of agony. Apart from pain and revulsion, we do not arouse anything by such devices. And the more precisely we portray the physical torment of someone who is dying, the further we shall be from a picture of death as it should appear in art. Death on the stage should be shown as the slowing down and disappearance of a feeling of *time*. The actor who is playing death must at this juncture construct a rhythmical and metrical pattern to his role in such a way that the audience watching him feels the slowing down of time and imperceptibly arrives at the point where the slowed-down tempo seemingly stops for a second. This stopping will give the impression of death. At the same time, the audience must be freed from having to observe the coarse and inartistic ways of portraying the physiological processes of a dying person. Of course, a high degree of acting technique is necessary for such a task. The actor needs to learn not only to feel stage time, but also to master it. He must learn to master tempo. How often one sees *haste* on the stage, instead of tempo. And the more an actor *hurries* on the stage, the slower his acting appears to be.

The sense of stage space is also unfamiliar to the actor. He does not distinguish the right side from the left, he does not distinguish in all its fullness the proscenium and the back of the stage, the straight and curved lines in which he is walking. He has not yet learnt to ‘draw’ figures and lines with his body in the stage space. At the same time, actors love every now and then to make an ‘expansive and fine’ gesture of the hand. In such gestures, there lives at this time an instinctive sense of space. But why don’t they want to make an expansive, fine and expressive gesture with their whole body? A significant part of the blame here lies in the actor’s habit of mimicking. He tries more than anything to devote all his expressive powers to mimicry, thus killing the expressiveness of his body. In mimicry, the body becomes stiff and immobile. A body gesture turns into a gesture of the face, becoming shallow and at times pitiful. Not to mention the fact that an actor’s face simply cannot be visible to the entire auditorium; furthermore, it can never be as expressive as the body as a whole. An actor’s *eyes* are his means of maximum expressiveness, although they will only be truly

expressive when the whole of the actor's body, imbued with will, is drawing forms and lines in the stage space. If the body lives, the eyes will unavoidably be filled with meaning and expressiveness. When sharing an impression of a play, members of the audience will say: 'What eyes he or she had in this scene!', but they will not say 'What a mouth!' or 'What cheeks!' or 'What a chin!' The body in space and rhythms in time – these are the means of an actor's expressiveness.[26]

* * *

After my father's death, my mother and I moved to Moscow. I was twenty-one years old, and I was eligible for military service. My inner state at this time was already one of despondency. I would almost lose my sense of equilibrium* in the presence of a large number of people. This then developed into a fear of crowds. The days surrounding my summons were an unbearable torment for me. Added to which, the possibility of being called up oppressed me. Leopold Sulerzhitsky understood my inner state. On the day of my recruitment, he announced that he would accompany me to the recruiting station. I was astonished and amazed by his kindness. His presence had a calming effect on me and I did not have the courage to refuse his suggestion. However, I am certain that he would have come with me regardless and that I would not have been able to persuade him otherwise. Moral impulses were so strong in him that he submitted himself to them regardless of outer obstacles and of what would appear to be 'common sense'. Early in the morning I parted from Sulerzhitsky at the doors of an enormous building in which the examination of recruits was taking place. Crowds of anxious and already resentful people were gathering near the doors of the building and were slowly entering, crushing one another and swearing. Inside there was an endless number of dirty rooms, a cold stone floor, the shouts of soldiers directing us now here, now there, pushing and swearing. Each of us was craving someone who had been left at home. Hours passed in muddle-headed commotion. In groups, we were herded into a room and locked up for a long time and then let out and locked up again, seemingly without order or reason. I looked

* i.e. psychological balance, sense of spirit. (Editors' note.)

sadly at my peers and could not understand whether the soldiers who were giving us orders had a plan or a system and whether we were being reduced in number or not. Was the examination beginning anywhere? Through the windows, one could see pouring rain soaking the crowd of women both old and young, who were waiting for their brothers, husbands and sons. Finally, we were told to undress. We threw our clothes on the floor and we stood around naked for several more hours. Late in the evening, I was eventually examined. The doctors were utterly exhausted. They shouted at us, while sticking their fingers into us and momentarily piercing our backs and chests with tubes. I was scarcely able to stay on my feet and I dully awaited my sentence. Suddenly I heard: 'Three months!' A reprieve! My dream had been fulfilled! A reprieve! All the agonizing and complex pictures, which had been painted in my consciousness and which were built around my mother, faded and I felt that three more months of life had been given to me. I spent a further hour hunting for my clothes. By the time I went out into the street, it was completely dark. The rain was still pouring as before. My head was spinning with happiness. I broke into a run, greedily inhaling the fresh air.

'Misha!'* – I heard a voice, quiet and tender.

I turned round. Beside me stood Sulerzhitsky, soaked through from the pouring rain. I was dumbfounded. The whole day Sulerzhitsky had not left the recruiting station and had been waiting for me among the crowd of relatives weeping for their dear ones. But who was I to him, Sulerzhitsky? Brother? Son? I was only one of his pupils!!![27]

* * *

Like all truly kind people, Sulerzhitsky sometimes loved to appear angry, stern and even threatening. He acquired a thick book for the First Studio in which each of us could jot down his thoughts.[28] Once Sulerzhitsky himself inscribed in this book a series of remarkable thoughts about workers, about their hard life in modern conditions and (connected to this) about the need for us to have a considerate attitude towards the workers in our theatre. When I read this article, I was

* A diminutive form of Mikhail (Michael). (Editors' note.)

inspired by it, but alas I did not manage anything better than pouring out my inspiration in a series of cartoons with which I illustrated Sulerzhitsky's article. When I arrived at the Studio in the evening, I heard a thunderous cry. Sulerzhitsky was looking for the culprit who had drawn the illustrations and it seemed as if he was ready to tear him to pieces on the spot.

'This is an insult!' he shouted from a distance as he approached us. 'Who on earth dared to do this?!'

An incensed Sulerzhitsky appeared in the doorway looking for his victim.

'Who did this? Tell me now! Who?'

'It was I,' I replied in terror. There was a pause.

'So what?' said Sulerzhitsky suddenly, calmly and affectionately. 'So you've drawn them! Well, what of it? It's all right!'

Sulerzhitsky embraced me and was ready to comfort me, as if *he* was the guilty one and I was calling him to account. That was the extent of Sulerzhitsky's rancour.

Plate 17 Self-portrait by Chekhov. Inscription reads 'Mr Chekhov-Knipper as Stakhovich following Stanislavsky's system'. 'Knipper' was the maiden name of Chekhov's first wife, Olga: this double surname is a joke. Alexey Stakhovich was a rather mannered actor in the MAT

His artistic intuition and sense of truth were staggering. He did surprising things; for example, he would take the beginning of some story which he did not know, immerse himself in its images and then say how, in his opinion, the author must develop the story and how his characters will act in the course of it. His intuitive insights were infallible. When he led a rehearsal, he made the actors work for a long time on the first two or three phrases of the text. He could not rehearse the thing in its entirety if the very beginning (out of which he might proceed and organically develop all that was to follow) had not been found. He felt equally well both the comedy and tragedy of stage situations, and we learnt much from him in this respect.

Sulerzhitsky painted beautifully. Many of the props in our productions were done by him: I remember that once we sat with him late at night on the floor and painted an overcoat for the role of Caleb in *The Cricket on the Hearth*. The coat had to be old and dirty. Sulerzhitsky made some weak coffee and *painted dirt* onto the coat as it lay on the floor. Once he said to me:

'Misha, do you know what I want to paint?'

'What?' I asked.

'Those things that are not visible,' replied Sulerzhitsky, gravely and thoughtfully.

I did not understand what he was talking about, so Sulerzhitsky explained:

'When you are looking at an object, you see it clearly and distinctly. Objects lying close by are already difficult for you to see. And the further away they are, the worse you see the surrounding objects. They become virtually invisible. Where are the points at which you really cease to see? This is what I want to depict – how a person does not see the objects that surround him, how they gradually disappear from the field of his vision and from his consciousness.'

Apparently, Sulerzhitsky once made the attempt to paint *what was not visible.*

Sometimes he spent a long time with his head resting against the wall, his eyes closed, quietly singing a tune. While doing this he lightly drummed the rhythms and metrical patterns of the tune on the wall with his fingers and the palm of his hand. Without opening his eyes, he would go slowly over to another wall where the same process was repeated, and after a minute he went to a new place, and so on.

What was going on in his soul at this time?

Of course, we couldn't help noticing this peculiarity of his. And when Vakhtangov imitated his beloved Sulerzhitsky at evening parties, he would portray this particular trait. He did it in a very amusing way. But once, after Sulerzhitsky's death,* when we were remembering him and recounting our impressions of him to one another, Vakhtangov suddenly stood up and portrayed Sulerzhitsky leaning against the wall singing a tune with his eyes closed. The result was unexpected. Far from being amused, we suddenly felt Sulerzhitsky's closeness to us and many of us became frightened. Vakhtangov stopped imitating him and we went our separate ways in silence.

Sulerzhitsky suffered from an illness of the kidneys and was often pale when he came to rehearsals, his face swollen and he moved his legs with difficulty. But after a quarter of an hour he would change beyond recognition: he became inspired, the illness was forgotten, and he was running, showing us how one should act and laughing with us like a young man.

Once – this was while we were touring with the theatre – Sulerzhitsky announced to us members of the First Studio that after the performance today we must all gather in his hotel room, that he had something very important and serious to say to us. The whole day Sulerzhitsky had an air of concentration, and we were intrigued and even alarmed by the impending conversation. We could not guess what he had to say to us. In the evening, after the performance, we quickly took our make-up off and made our way to the hotel where Sulerzhitsky was staying. There by the door of his room, our colleagues who had not taken part in the evening's performance were already waiting. The door to Sulerzhitsky's room was shut. We waited for Sulerzhitsky to come out to us and let us in. But the door did not open. After waiting for quite a long time, we decided to knock. There was no answer, so we quietly opened the door. It was dark in the room. Evidently, Sulerzhitsky was not yet in. We quietly entered the room and switched on the light.

'Who's there?' a frightened cry suddenly rang out.

We turned and saw Sulerzhitsky. He was sitting in a state of undress on the bed, wrapping himself fearfully up in a blanket. He looked sleepy.

* i.e. 1916. (Editors' note.)

'Who's this? What do you want?' he shouted at us.

'We've come to see you, Leopold Antonovich.'*

'Why? What's happened?'

'You asked us to come.'

'When?' Sulerzhitsky rubbed his eyes and suddenly burst out laughing. 'My dears, I forgot! Really and truly, I forgot! Go home! Another time!'

As we went away, we could hear Leopold Antonovich roaring with laughter.

* * *

The theatre was making a tour of the southern towns of Russia.† Evgeny Vakhtangov and I had arranged to live together in one hotel room. I do not remember what was detaining me in Moscow, but I was due to arrive one day later at the town to which the theatre was going. On arriving at the strange town, I approached a cabbie with my luggage and told him the address of the hotel where our actors were staying.

'You're Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's nephew?' asked the cabbie suddenly and unexpectedly, bending towards me.

'I am!' I replied in amazement.

'Please!'

I was so astonished that I did not even try to guess what this incident signified. The cabbie did not take any money from me. At the door of the hotel, I was met by a porter.

'You're Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's nephew?'

'I am!'

'Please!'

I was led into a large room. Vakhtangov was sitting there laughing. His little game had worked brilliantly. I took up residence with Vakhtangov. Despite our friendly relationship, our life together proceeded not without certain complications. The blame for this rested with me. I had a great enthusiasm for Schopenhauer‡ at the time and I constantly had

* See Endnote 14 *TPOTA*.

† Chekhov is referring to the tour of the Moscow Art Theatre to Kiev in May 1914. (Original Russian editors' note.)

‡ Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), German philosopher. (Editors' note.)

an air of vacancy and gloom. It was written all over my face that I knew something that anyone who had not read Schopenhauer could not know. This evidently irritated Vakhtangov. He sensed the unnaturalness of my behaviour. For entire days, I lay on my bed with the volumes of Schopenhauer's works in my hands. Vakhtangov acquired two mandolins and taught me to read music. We played duets together, but my pessimism did not diminish and Vakhtangov had a difficult and tedious companion in me. But the difficulty of our relationship was further intensified when I bought a large, black dachshund from a ragamuffin in the street and for which I paid one rouble. The dachshund turned out to be ill and all my attention became focused upon it. My dachshund irritated Vakhtangov. It whined at home and at the theatre, where I would take it along with me.

So as a result of my strained relations with Vakhtangov, a game of a particular kind arose almost spontaneously between us. This was called the game of the 'trained monkey' and it revolved around our taking turns every morning to make coffee. The one making the coffee was the 'trained monkey'. He would get out of bed first and everything associated with preparing the coffee had to be done on all fours, whereas the one who wasn't the 'monkey' on this particular morning had the right to beat the monkey for everything that seemed to him to be worthy of chastisement. The monkey had to endure all the beatings without complaining and wait for the next morning when the other one became the monkey, at which point it was possible to take revenge for all the injuries that had been inflicted the day before. As may easily be guessed, our actor's temperaments became more and more fiery with every day that passed. Rugs rolled into tubes, chairs and so on were put to use. But we endured everything. None of our colleagues knew about this game of the 'trained monkey'. We cultivated our own ethics, which obliged us not only to endure, but also to keep silent. Our accumulated passions finally burst out in a minor catastrophe. I do not remember which of us was the 'trained monkey' on this occasion, but the 'monkey' rebelled and a cruel battle began. One of Vakhtangov's blows struck me on the face and broke a tooth. With the remaining fragment of tooth I literally ripped my tongue, but the battle did not stop, and after a few seconds I managed to get Vakhtangov's head under my arm and squeeze it firmly. Capitalizing on his powerless

situation, I decided to take a breather. By chance I glanced at my victim's face: Vakhtangov had turned black and was gasping for breath. I let him go. The battle was over and, with it, our 'enmity'. For a long time I was unable to eat, my mouth was swollen and Vakhtangov solicitously looked after me. Later, when I asked Vakhtangov why he did not tell me that when I was squeezing his head he was suffocating, he replied that to begin with he had not wanted to cry for mercy since up until that point neither of us had done so, but then he was unable to say anything because I had such a strong grip on his neck. Strange as it may seem, however difficult this may be to believe, our battles –

Plate 18
Caricature by Chekhov. Inscriptions read: 'Italian Greyhound Missuk' (Michael Chekhov), 'Fox Terrier Jenni' (Evgeny Vakhtangov), 'Lapdog Lidi' (Lydia Deykun). All the words which indicate dogs' breeds are humorously distorted

for all their roughness – were not really that rough! Apart from their sportive character, there was a good deal of merriment and youthful enthusiasm in them, which it is pleasant to recall now.

Although our relationship was so intimate, it did not prevent me from regarding Vakhtangov as an older colleague and a teacher in the theatre. Vakhtangov was an expert on Stanislavsky's system. In his lessons, the system came to life and we began to understand its active power. Vakhtangov's pedagogical genius worked wonders in this capacity. And as he taught us, Vakhtangov himself developed with remarkable speed.

'You know,' he said to me not long before his death, 'I can now grasp any theatrical situation, any stage idea, as easily as taking a book off the shelf.'

And he did indeed give birth to his theatrical thoughts literally before our eyes. Aphorisms arose spontaneously in his speech when he spoke about the theatre either with us or with the pupils of his studio.*

His talent as a director became renowned through his productions. But this is only one side of his talent; the other side consisted of the way in which Vakhtangov's genius as a director manifested itself in his work with actors during the process of rehearsing the play.[29] The problem of creating a mutual relationship between director and actor is complicated and difficult: the director has to have the special *feeling of the actor* – and indeed Vakhtangov had this *feeling* to perfection. He himself spoke about it as a feeling that arises when a person is taken by the hand and led carefully and patiently to where he needs to be. Vakhtangov, as it were, invisibly put himself next to the actor and led him by the hand. The actor never felt any coercion from Vakhtangov, but neither could he get away from the concept that Vakhtangov had created as the director. In implementing Vakhtangov's instructions and concepts, the actor felt as if those ideas were his own. This remarkable capacity of Vakhtangov's rendered wholly unnecessary any question as to whether the deciding voice in the interpretation of a role belonged to the actor or the director. And we should be grateful that this question has still not been resolved 'theoretically', otherwise despotic directors and stubborn actors would have put any solution to it to ill use. Vakhtangov resolved the question practically. This solution

* i.e. the Third Studio. (See Endnote 37 *TPOTA*.) (Editors' note.)

lay in his own humanity, in his ability to enter the soul of another person and to speak in the language of that other person's soul. On the whole, it is largely possible to convince a person of something if one begins to speak to him in his own language, in the language of his soul. Vakhtangov had the capacity to do this. He was never sentimental with actors, and actors never hindered his intentions by their whims and obstinacy. In order to become a director of Vakhtangov's ilk, it is necessary to learn a certain humanity and a considerate attitude towards people in general. Here again, questions of art and questions of morality come together.

Evgeny Vakhtangov had a further quality indispensable to a director: he was able to *demonstrate* to the actor the basic pattern of his role. He did not portray the character in its entirety, he did not play the role instead of the actor himself; rather he *demonstrated*, *indeed played*, a sketch, an outline, a pattern of the role. It was in this way that when we were putting on Strindberg's *Erik XIV*, he himself showed me the

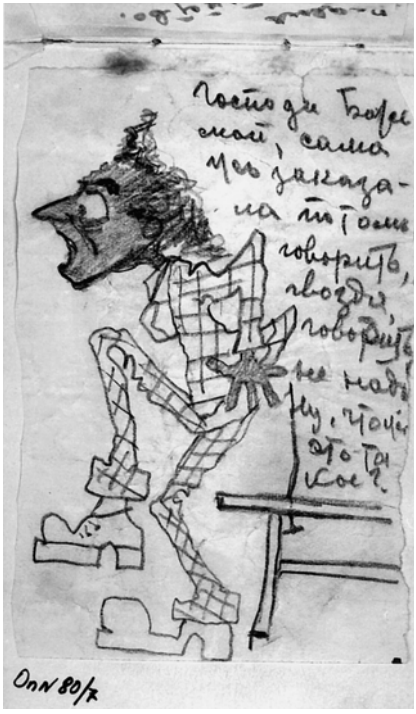

Plate 19 Caricature by Chekhov of Evgeny Vakhtangov at a rehearsal. Inscription reads: 'My God, she herself ordered [a nail] and then she says that there is no need for the nail! So what does that mean?'

pattern of the part of Erik over the course of a whole act of the play – and he did this in no more than a couple of minutes. After his *demonstration*, the whole act in all its details became clear to me, although Vakhtangov had not gone into these at all. He had simply given me the basic structure, the structure of the character's will, within which I could then position all the details and particulars of the role. The capacity to *demonstrate* was particularly well developed in him. A person who is merely *demonstrating* is experiencing an entirely different psychological state from when he is *actually performing*. The *demonstrator* has a certain confidence and lightness, and he is not burdened by the responsibility which rests on the one who is *doing* the job. Because of this, it is always easier to show than it is to *do* oneself and *demonstration* is almost always successful. Vakhtangov had the psychology of a *demonstrator* to perfection. Once, when playing billiards with me, he gave me an excellent example of this remarkable ability of his. We were both indifferent players and only rarely did we manage to pot our balls. But then Vakhtangov said:

'Now I'll *show* you how to play billiards!' – and by changing his psychological perspective, he potted three or four balls in succession with ease and mastery. Then he stopped the experiment and continued the game as before, with a very limited quota of success.

Because of this remarkable capacity in Vakhtangov, very little was said at his rehearsals. All the work consisted of demonstrating and illustrating characters and so forth. He understood very well that if an actor talks a lot about his role, it means that he is being lazy and delaying the moment of really getting on with the rehearsal. Actors and directors have to cultivate a special working language. They do not have the right to *have discussions* with one another in the course of the work. They must learn to embody their thoughts and feelings in images and exchange them with one another, thus replacing long, boring and pointlessly clever *conversations* about the part, the play or whatever. I firmly believe that the time is coming when actors will understand that the torments and agonies associated with their profession arise in the majority of cases from their *inartistic* methods of giving shape to works of *art*.[30]

Finally, Vakhtangov had a further remarkable quality: as he sat in the auditorium during rehearsals, he always imagined it to be full of

people. And everything that took place before him on the stage was interpreted for him through the eyes of the imaginary spectators who filled the hall. He put on a play *for the public*, which is why his productions were always so convincing and intelligible. He did not suffer from that director's illness so common in our day – which induces the director to put on plays exclusively *for himself*. Directors who suffer from this illness lack a feeling for the public and almost always approach their art in a purely intellectual way. They are suffering from a particular form of intellectual egoism.

I am fortunate that destiny allowed me to work with Vakhtangov for quite a long time. My memories of him as a master of the stage now give me a great deal of knowledge which furnishes me with insight into the true nature of the theatre.

* * *

My nervous tension, which I had hitherto so skilfully hidden from the world at large, finally developed to such a degree that via a whole series of actions it began to be outwardly perceptible. For example, I would suddenly ask one of my colleagues if he had not heard a particular noise that I myself could hear at that moment, and I could surmise from my colleague's face that not only could he not hear it, but he did not understand what I was asking him about. All too often I would go up to the window and anxiously look out onto the street. Or suddenly during a performance, I would feel the need to return home and so I would begin to speak my part so quickly that this attracted my fellow actors' attention. Once when I was walking along the street, I was seized by a particularly strong feeling of oppressive fear, and I looked around me in terror as I prepared to run. At this moment, I was met by Boris Sushkevich. He took me by the hand and with a gentle irony said loudly and clearly:

'What's up with you?'

After waiting a short while, he repeated equally loudly and clearly:

'Well, what's up?'

On hearing his clear, strong, calm voice and sensing in it the note of irony, I came to my senses and embarrassedly continued on my way. Only now do I understand how powerful a remedy *irony* is for people who are 'ill' in the way that I was at that time.

I recall that I once went to Professor Gannushkin* and brought along a friend of mine who, like me, was beginning to feel spasms of fear. I considered myself to be a specialist in these questions, and leaving the friend in Professor Gannushkin's waiting room, I went to see him on my own so that I could give him an account of my friend's illness. Professor Gannushkin listened attentively to me and very tactfully – though with deep irony – he uttered a few words about his invisible patient. Afterwards I communicated the professor's words very precisely to my friend and they had a miraculous effect on him. We were both highly embarrassed, as a result of which my friend was healed from his fears.

Anyway, my colleagues were already making conjectures about my inner state. I excelled in finding all manner of ways in which I tried to hide my anguish. It was at just this time that an orderly, materialistic view of the world was taking shape with particular clarity in my mind. I was already well versed in the ideas of historical materialism. I was familiar with the main propositions of Marx's teachings and had read Engels, Kautsky[31] and other writers. But the clarity of my world-view did not save me from inner suffering. The teachings of Darwin,† with which I was literally in love, gave me much suffering along with the joy. Alongside the strict regularity and wisdom of natural laws, I saw in Darwin's ideas a whole realm of life which was designated as *chance*. *Chance* followed me everywhere like a terrible nightmare. Even the orderly system of the ideas of historical materialism did not save me from *chance*. The wisdom of the world-order met up in my consciousness with *meaningless chance*. And the more I dived into the materialistic conception of the world, the more vividly and tormentingly did the abyss where chance reigned unfold itself before me.

I began to seek refuge in the teachings of moral philosophy. Nietzsche‡ aroused my will, but he could not of course bridge the abyss which spread out before me. Vladimir Solovyov§ seemed to me to be a *believer*, but devoid of real knowledge. I demanded from him proofs of the existence of the world beyond and of good, but he could not

* Piotr Gannushkin (1875–1933), psychiatrist. (Editors' note.)
† Charles Darwin (1809–82), British naturalist. (Editors' note.)
‡ Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), German philosopher. (Editors' note.)
§ Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900), Russian philosopher and poet. (Editors' note.)

give me these proofs. Subsequently, I understood that the proofs which I was demanding from him had to be proofs of a purely materialistic kind – proofs which, by their nature, cannot be *proofs* in the sphere to which the questions that were disturbing me at the time belonged.

I sought out *chances* everywhere. I tried to discern some kind of order in them and I looked for salvation in this. And of course I always managed to do this: it was clear to me that if I slipped on the street, fell and broke my leg, the whole process could easily be seen as a very complex chain of *orderly* events. But this order was not the one which I so agonizingly sought. Religious issues did not reassure me. I regarded them as a realm of sentiments, a realm of faith, and I stood aloof from them. Despite the disdain for other people which I assiduously cultivated in my soul and in which I found relief and relaxation – despite this disdain – I felt in the depths of my soul something akin to love or pity for those very people and beings whom I was trying most forcefully to despise.[32] But there was nothing I could do with this semblance of love hidden within my soul. My conscious mind did not allow me to love the descendants of apes who, like bubbles on water, appear in the world only in order to disappear without leaving behind them anything other than a being similar to themselves. It may be that this being is more perfect and intelligent than its ancestor, it may be that it can master chance, illness and death, and that it can suffocate itself through the mechanization of a monstrous civilization, it may be that delight in earthly joys attains the greatest possible intensity: all these things may indeed be so! – but I do not want to serve such a degrading, pleasure-seeking aim for the descendants of apes.

Thus I reasoned, surrendering myself to pessimistic moods and ideas well known to all. When I recalled that, according to science, the sun will sooner or later be extinguished and our world will become paralysed and die, I was seized by joy and a sense of peace; but when I read that, according to the same science, the sun will not be extinguished, that it will not be extinguished because the fragments of planets flying towards it are compensating for the loss of the sun's heat, a deep indignation welled up within me against the whole race of monkeys hungering for eternal voluptuousness.

Finally I began to search independently for a way out of my unbearable inner state. I wrote long essays on questions of morality, but these

essays were a collection of cruel and evil thoughts. At this period of my life,* I acted on the stage with loathing, mechanically, like an automaton; the feeling of *artistic wholeness* that I mentioned earlier had almost completely died within me. I lived mechanically both on and off the stage.[33] The horror of the absurdity of life and the spectre of *chance* tormented me. The whole of my attention was focused exclusively upon my mother. At this time, she was over sixty years old. She was often ill and I grew cold with terror at the thought that she might die. I could not imagine life without my mother. She was the only person who kept me in the land of the living. I firmly resolved that when she died, I would do so too. The thought of suicide slowly and persistently developed and intensified within me. I had already thought of a way of doing away with myself. Somehow or other, I had managed to acquire a Browning automatic pistol and I kept it loaded in my writing-desk. I had become incredibly coarse. Cynicism permeated my words and deeds.

As before, religious sentiments were far from me. But all the same I often found myself praying ardently for my mother. The conditions in which I lived were untidy and neglected. My mother was no longer able to see to the cleaning of our flat, while I myself did not pay any attention to my surroundings. Once during a performance of *The Flood*,† I went up to the window in the interval and saw a small crowd of people in the square. My nerves were stretched to an extreme degree, I broke down and after quickly getting dressed, I abandoned the play. The performance remained unfinished.[34]

At this point, a critical period of my nervous disorder began. For a whole year, I hardly left the house. I experienced the time of the October Revolution as one who was already ill, suffering from heart attacks.

My perceptions of my feelings had become sharpened to an extreme degree: it seemed to me, for example, that I could hear over any distance. I directed my sharpened hearing to various points in Moscow and heard street noises and the voices of a crowd. This brought me not a little torment, since in effect I was never alone and I never experienced the silence that I so hungered for. I didn't even stop listening

* i.e. 1917–18. (Editors' note.)
† A play by Henning Berger. (Editors' note.)

Plate 20
Michael Chekhov as Frazer in *The Flood* by Henning Berger. First Studio. 1915

while I slept. The grim, meaningless, monotonous days dragged on. I totally forgot about the theatre. I did not think that I would return to it again. All in all, my ideas about the future were vague and culminated in the thought of suicide. Sometimes Valentin Smyshlyaev* visited me, he would play chess with me or try to teach me to play the violin, but I proved to be a slow pupil. Sometimes I was aware that my nerves were strained and shattered, but the rest of the time it seemed to me that the people who were around me did not understand the horror and absurdity of human life, and they regarded me as ill only because I had the courage to see this absurdity and I did not flee from it into the beautiful deception of theoretical fabrications created by reason. This thought plunged me into a deep despondency. I could not see any way out. All that I retained in my consciousness from the dark thoughts with which I had become familiar from reading

* Valentin Smyshlyaev (1891–1936), actor. (Editors' note.)

philosophical and other writings – all these thoughts were gleaned by me in such a way that the picture of the world depicted therein was gloomy, heavy and utterly dark. In thinking of the 'world soul', it seemed to me that it had gone mad and that therefore our world would perish in torment. On the initiative of Konstantin Stanislavsky and the First Studio, a group of doctors was invited to give me a consultation.

'What do you read?' one of them asked me.

Among the authors whom I listed was Schopenhauer.

'But surely Schopenhauer did not even know physiology properly and none of his judgements have any particular value,' remarked the doctor.

On hearing such an opinion about my favourite philosopher, I became very upset and obstinately resolved henceforth to carry on studying his philosophy. The consultation amused me and I suddenly rather liked being ill. Despite my constant oppressive fear and other feelings, I began to look at myself with a certain objectivity. For a whole series of reasons, I did not manage to implement fully the cure prescribed by the doctors and I remained in virtually the same condition.

Now that I had decided to break with the theatre for ever, I began to think of a way of securing the means to further my existence. I had to choose an occupation which would enable me to remain at home, since I could not go out into the street. I decided to carve chessmen out of wood and sell them. One chess-set was made and sold for a hundred roubles. It was bought by someone who was very familiar with all the circumstances of my life. He bought it from me only in order to support me materially. With this, my new profession came to an end. The chessmen that had been bought from me were presented to Alexander Goldenveyser* and they still remain in his possession today. I began to think about the craft of bookbinding, but this occupation did not take root either, although I did learn how to bind books. And so I touched upon a series of crafts, all equally unsuccessfully.

I continued to drink, and under the influence of wine I penned various compositions on improbable themes. For example, I described very extensively and in great moment-by-moment detail the state of a person falling under the wheels of a tram. When I read what I had written,

* Alexander Goldenveyser (1875–1961), pianist and composer. (Editors' note.)

I saw with horror that it was like gibberish, there was absolutely no sense in it. Alcoholic drinks were then forbidden and I suffered unbelievably without alcohol. The question of securing the means to exist loomed all the more acutely. One of my friends suggested that I open a drama school and thus receive a steady income. This thought seemed to me to be unrealistic. But my friend's insistence finally forced me to make an announcement that I was receiving students in a school that I was newly opening. By examining the students who came for an interview, I chose the membership of my future school. The first lessons took place in my neglected and comfortless room. Smyshlyaev, too, was a teacher in my school, and we took it in turns to work with our students. The four years of existence of the Chekhov Studio, as the students called it, played a large part in my life.*, [35] During these years my health gradually began to be restored.

* * *

From my first encounter with my students, I felt a tenderness towards them. From its first steps, my ensuing pedagogical activity was given a true direction. That wonderful *intuitive feeling for the whole*, which I had almost lost in recent times, took hold of me again. The entire idea of the future school consisted of this whole; and over the course of the next four years, certain details arose out of this *whole* and formed what the students called the Chekhov Studio. There were also mistakes in the life of the Chekhov Studio, and big mistakes at that, but I am now grateful for these mistakes – they taught me and my students a lot.

I never prepared my lessons: when I arrived at the school I was gripped anew every time by the idea of the whole, and there and then I deduced *from this whole* which individual aspects were to be developed that day. I will never permit myself to say that I taught the system of Stanislavsky. That would be too bold an assertion. I taught what I *myself* experienced from working with Stanislavsky, what I learnt from Sulerzhitsky and Vakhtangov. The way that I understood and experienced what I had received from my teachers determined how I transmitted this to my students. Everything was refracted through my

* i.e. 1918–22. (Editors' note.)

individual perception and was coloured by my personal relationship to what I had perceived. I have to confess – with all sincerity – that I was never one of Stanislavsky's best pupils, but I must say with equal sincerity that I made much of what Stanislavsky gave us my own forever and I placed it at the foundation of my subsequent and, to some extent independent, experiments in the art of drama.[36]

In addition to being taught by me, my students also studied directly with Stanislavsky and Vakhtangov. True, Vakhtangov only gave my students two lectures in total, but in those two lectures he touched upon a whole series of absolutely essential questions: tragedy and vaudeville, solving stage problems and so on. My pupils' lessons with Stanislavsky lasted for a whole year; several schools (the Vakhtangov Studio, the Armenian Studio, the 'Habima' and the Chekhov Studio)[37] joined forces and worked with the Stanislavsky system, successively studying the actor's work both on himself and on his role. For the practical studying of the latter, Stanislavsky chose Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, with the intention of putting on this production with the united forces of the studios mentioned above. The work on the play had already begun, but then lessons ceased because of Stanislavsky's departure with the MAAT on a journey abroad (on tour).*

A distinctive feature of the programme of the lessons in our studio was the minimal quantity of 'technical' subjects: voice training, articulation, declamation, movement and the acrobatics that were so fashionable during those years – all these subjects were either completely absent from our schedule of lessons or they occupied a secondary place in it. My attitude to all these subjects was almost negative. It would be altogether wrong to say that we made little effort to work with all these 'technical' subjects. On the contrary: the Chekhov Studio played host to many of the best teachers of the time. We tried three or four different systems of voice training and made similar efforts with systems of articulation and so forth, but never without both myself personally and my students being left with a feeling of dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction was all the greater the more zealously we undertook to study voice training or articulation, movement or rhythm. This unresolved

* This is a reference to the MAAT tour of Western Europe and America between 1922 and 1924. (Original Russian editors' note.)

question was always very difficult, since at the same time as not finding satisfaction in any of the 'technical' subjects, I also felt with my whole soul the immense importance of 'technique' on the stage. Only later did persistent work and research in this direction enable me to gain an understanding of this dilemma and resolve it.

This is not the place to dwell at length on the question of word and gesture, which shall be addressed in another book of mine specifically devoted to all investigations into the actor's art.[38] But here, in brief, is how the question was resolved.

The approach to mastering the spoken word (through articulation, voice training, etc.) is wrong mainly because this approach leads the actor from anatomy and physiology (the apparatus of speech) to the living word. Whereas *the true path lies in the opposite direction*: from *living* language, from *living* speech, from the sounding of each of the letters and sound combinations to the so-called resonators, vocal chords, lungs, diaphragm. Articulation – from which the actor usually begins – is the last thing that he ought to be studying. No outward methods can teach the actor to speak truly artistically and expressively if he has not first penetrated into the deep and rich content of every individual letter, each syllable, if he does not first understand and feel the living soul of each letter as a sound. For instance, he will learn to pronounce the letter 'b' when he understands that its sound speaks of *closedness*, reticence, a defensiveness that protects himself from something, of delving into his own self. 'b' is a house, a temple, a sheath of some kind, etc. In 'l' there lives something different: in 'l', one can hear life, growth, sprouting, opening up, forces of movement, form and running water, and much, much more besides. And if an actor wants to get to know the life of all the letters, if he wants to unite himself with their soul-content, then he will find out how they need to be pronounced, he will lovingly ponder upon the form that his tongue and his lips must take when the letter is seeking to express its soul through them. Speech, *living speech*, must be the actor's mandatory teacher in the realm of the word. The actor must feel the difference between the vowels (which express the different inner states of a human being) and the consonants (which represent the outer world and outer events). (In the word *grom*,*

* Russian word for 'thunder'. (Translator's note.)

for example, 'grm' imitates the sound of thunder, while the 'o' expresses a person's shock, his longing to understand – to be conscious of – the elements.) The actor must deeply feel the musicality and the plasticity of speech.

The realm of movement in the art of the actor is just as complicated and just as little and dilettantishly developed – and here also an artistic approach is necessary, here also is a need to develop a quite particular attention from within oneself to one's body, to one's movements, there is a need to develop what might be described as an 'aesthetic conscience'. The actor must know that each of his movements not only has one or another kind of colouring, but also has a particular sound. All these and similar considerations, when thought out in detail and practically worked through, explained to me the sense of dissatisfaction which we experienced in the Chekhov Studio from working with the usual methods of speech and gesture.[39]

Along with the inner discipline which reigned in our school, we also lived in an atmosphere of freedom. But it is difficult to say where the realm of freedom ended and the realm of discipline began. We did not have a 'boss'. The respect for myself which I encountered on the part of my students was not 'the respect of subordinates'. To a certain extent, we were all friends. We did not have established measures of punishment for a misdemeanour, but a person was chosen from amongst us before whom the students would answer for their transgressions. They answered before this chosen individual as if before a father, and his position was called 'Father of the Studio'. How powerful this position was! The 'Father', while remaining our colleague, was at the same time also our conscience – not to mention the transformation wrought upon the person who had the task of being the 'Father of the Studio'. The vestiges of lofty enthusiasm which he experienced in this role remained with him for a long time after, if not for ever. The group that took it upon itself to care for the life and affairs of the school was constantly changing in its composition, resulting in the selection of those who were most capable for one or another kind of administrative activity. We did not have a *post* of administrator, inspector, caretaker, finance manager and so on. All these tasks were attended to in a special way. The group of individuals looking after the life of the school at any given time would summon one of their colleagues and say to him:

'These are the tasks that the school has to accomplish, this is where someone is needed, these are the urgent problems: *create* a post which could serve the needs of the school as they have been described to you.' And the member of the school who was allotted this assignment would *create* his new post. Of course, the newly created post was very much like the post of 'inspector', 'manager of the company', 'production manager' or 'finance manager', but this resemblance was only external. *The creator* of the new post – resembling, for example, that of 'finance manager' – was inflamed by his creativity, and his post became an inspired, living and interesting job. Our business meetings were lively, interesting, disciplined and precise. Boring organizational questions were never on our agenda. The meetings about economic questions were just as interesting as the lessons and rehearsals. We were never bothered by the existence of adopted and established rules and customs, such as those associated with the management of institutions of whatever kind. We were starting everything from scratch, and this inspired us and saved us from the boredom and apathy of 'business' professionals.

The creative life of the school was also supported by the fact that the students never made use of hired labour. Everything was attended to by the students themselves, everything including the cleaning of the floors. They did this with joy and there were often more hands at the ready than the circumstances demanded.

Valentin Smyshlyaev's work soon drew him away from teaching in my school and I was left on my own. Our lessons frequently lasted for many hours and time flew by imperceptibly. Among the first students who came to me were Vladimir Tatarinov,* who is now the director of the Second Moscow Art Academic Theatre, and Viktor Gromov,† who also now works in the MAAT 2 as an actor and is making his début as a director. They immediately came to my attention and not only justified the confidence placed in them, but contributed greatly to the intelligent running of the school and supported its creative atmosphere.

* Vladimir Tatarinov (1879–1966), actor and director. (Editors' note.)

† Viktor Gromov (1899–1975), actor and director, who later assisted Chekhov in his various theatre activities in Europe and wrote a book on him which was published in Russia in 1970. (Editors' note.)

Under their influence, I had to renounce certain habits which I had adopted in childhood. For example, they struggled with my inability to distinguish wit from something excessively 'piquant'. Tatarinov's penetrating mind often foresaw and forestalled errors in the way we conducted the life of the school, while Gromov, who had a sense of humour very close to mine in character, restored the healthy atmosphere of the school whenever its mood changed from being serious and friendly to being sentimental.

The entire first period of our work at the school was spent in doing all sorts of *études*.* The vast quantity of these *études* formed a kind of 'primer'. The students wanted to present it to Stanislavsky himself, since Stanislavsky's teaching was at that time based on *études*. These *études* would often grow into a long, complicated scene.† We would act it out several days in succession, using my entire apartment for this purpose and even going out into the yard and street. We liked to have space and we did not confine ourselves within it. At the time, I was not wholly conscious of what was going on in the souls of my students during our lessons. Now I understand this. I am quite sure that the students were experiencing that feeling of the *whole* which I have mentioned several times. It was summoned up by the whole tenor of the life of our school, it imbued all our studies and exercises, it united us into a community of friends. In a word, this feeling was what the students – without their being consciously aware of it – were learning in the first period of their time at the school.

Little by little, we approached the second period of our life and worked towards putting on public performances. Our evening presentations arose almost exclusively out of improvisation. They had a humorous character and were easy to perform. I often took part in them when one of the students needed to be replaced. These evenings were a joyous festival for us. Nothing troubled us when we were putting them on, whether it was the lack of space or the primitive nature of our technical devices. We all managed to squeeze into a tiny little room, which

* Exercises or improvisations forming the early work on a play or scene. (Editors' note.)

† The scene was an extended piece of improvisation: nothing was formally scripted. (Editors' note.)

served both as our only changing room and our prop store. Our saving grace was the vast amount of organization which we had developed especially for our evening presentations. While some of us were being made up for the next scene, others would be dressing them in the appropriate costumes, a third group would be removing from the stage the props that had just been used and a fourth group would be bringing on the new props. Throughout this process, each of us moved on a clearly defined path, noiselessly and without the slightest hurry. In this respect, we literally performed miracles. The sets were changed as quick as lightning, and with the same vertiginous speed the actors themselves were transformed. I shall never forget the feeling of happiness which I experienced during those hours.

I cannot endure theatre companies where so many people perform so many functions with bored and indifferent faces, and with a total absence of interest in their own work as well as that of their colleagues. The theatre will never find its true path if it is unwilling to free itself from the unnecessary complexity and the demoralizing indifference of hired workers. The theatre is conceivable only as an organism that is whole and alive in *all* its aspects. Such a theatre can and must arise in time. It will be created by people who will be capable of *serving* rather than *being servile*, of *working* rather than *earning a living*, of loving the living *organism* of the theatre rather than a dead *organization*. They will be people who understand that it is possible to create everywhere and always, and that a living creative organism cannot be shackled by the dead forms of rational technique.

Our school was free from all this. Those who belonged to it did not count the hours and were not shy of any effort. They knew from experience that the energy which they expended on a collective task would be returned to them from this same task with interest. They knew that the only effort which is lost irretrievably is that which is expended in a collective cause for one's personal gain. Almost all my students had an outside job and they would arrive at the school tired and exhausted, but the atmosphere of the school enlivened them and increased their capacity for work. Even in the years 1919 and 1920 when the country was experiencing famine, the students' capacity for work did not diminish. They derived their forces from the inspired atmosphere of the school. After a heavy working day, they ate without butter or salt

the millet gruel which one of them brought, and if a little flour had been obtained, their supper would be supplemented by a few unleavened cakes resembling bits of charred wood. Sawing firewood also formed part of the students' duties. Everyone worked as if with one mind; no one complained about the difficulties of life; gloomy moods did not exist: there was one life which everyone shared.

Artistic themes were likewise worked through by all members of the school together. A question might arise, for example, about the cultivation of a *feeling for truth*, and all the members of the school would immerse themselves in it. If the theme which emerged had to do with the actor's imagination, the life of the school would for a time be governed solely by the theme of imagination. Our evening performances were created in a similar way, and in a like manner we would start our work on a fairy tale – this would have been our first work, based strictly on those creative principles which occupied us all at that time. I am convinced that as an artistic form the *fairy tale* conceals within itself deep and immense possibilities for developing the gifts of young apprentice actors. It awakens the creative imagination, it raises the actor's consciousness above naturalism, it weaves tragedy and humour together in a wonderful way, it cultivates a feeling for artistic style, it demands a form that is clear and precise, and it does not allow that inner artistic falsehood which so easily invades the stage.*

By this time, the teaching faculty of the school had been supplemented from the ranks of the students themselves. Gromov and Tatarinov were now not only teachers at the Chekhov Studio, but also played a leading role in the life of the Moscow Proletkult. Tatarinov was the instructor of the Proletkult First Central Studio and a member of the board of the Teo-Proletkult, while Gromov led the Kursk Studio.[40] They brought our school's experience to the Proletkult, and the experience of the Proletkult to the Chekhov Studio. When the membership of the school was increased through the annual audition process, the students *created* a special kind of post which they called a 'nanny'. The 'nanny' bore responsibility for the artistic education of a certain number of

* Throughout his life, Chekhov liked and collected fairy tales from all nations; sometimes he composed fairy tales himself for the stage or adapted those of others. (Editors' note.)

young students. The pupils could turn to their 'nannies' (men could also be 'nannies') with all the questions that were bothering them. In difficult cases, the 'nannies' consulted each other and resolved the questions together.

The conditions of the life at the Chekhov Studio forced us to think about acquiring premises which would allow the work of the school to spread more widely and would satisfy those who were eager to apply as students. In the autumn, we usually auditioned about two hundred candidates and as a result suffered incredibly from a shortage of accommodation. We were to receive the title of a State Academic Studio from Narkompros,[41] who appointed the day for the school to be inspected. We had two weeks until this day – we had to show a whole play which, we hoped, would recommend us as a fully-fledged theatrical collective. From this perspective, our whole existing repertoire seemed to us to be unsatisfactory. We decided to take Lev Tolstoy's fairy tale, *The First Distiller* and *The Unfair Trial* by Nikolay Popov. I explained to the students that if they could give me two weeks of daily lessons and four nights for rehearsals, the performance would be ready. The students agreed to this, and at the appointed hour we mounted a performance in which all the scenery (seven scenes), costumes (around forty) and all the props had been made and painted by the students themselves in those two weeks of speedy and inspired work. Moreover, we managed to rehearse the scene-changes with the utmost precision, to the point where the most complicated scene-change was done in fifty seconds. The members of Narkompros, under the leadership of Anatoly Lunacharsky, were invited to the performance. The viewing of the performance took place in the premises of the Habima Studio. The performance was a success. Narkompros acknowledged our right to exist and gave us a title, as well as the rights which we had hitherto so lacked.[42]

As I look back now at the history of the Chekhov Studio, I see on the one hand those inspired impulses and those important undertakings in the realm of acting, of which I am only now fully conscious. But on the other hand, I see before me just as clearly all the great and small defects of the school, both in the artistic sphere and in its economic and organizational aspects. These lessons, this experience of the past, interwoven with everything that the subsequent years of my acting

career have brought with them, fill me with the confidence that I could now organize the school even more perfectly and effectively. The entire organism of the theatre, beginning from the most elementary technical questions and culminating in the most crucial artistic issues, everything ranging from the making of the simplest prop to the most complex work of the director, could have become the subject of study and artistic creativity in this new school.

* * *

Although I was stirred and excited by the life of the Chekhov Studio, pessimistic ideas and dark moods continued to be characteristic of me. One day I came across one of the books from the literature which was then in vogue about the Indian yogis. I read it carefully, but without any particular interest. However, in reading it, I did not detect in myself that inner protest which would previously have arisen in me on reading books with a similar content. My soul was so weighed down by the infinite heaviness of its perception of the world, that it no longer sought a way out nor did it hope for a different attitude to life. Now I no longer needed to defend my gloomy concept of the world. It had become firmly established to the point of being an absolute conviction. I did not fear serious objections and my perception of the philosophy of the yogis was fully objective, coloured neither by a hope for a new way of understanding the world nor by the slightest inner resistance. This impartiality of mine played a certain role. I began to think coldly and calmly about what lay at the foundation of Hindu philosophy. I succeeded in understanding that the keynote of yoga is the *creativity of life*. The creativity of life! This was the new keynote which gradually imbued my soul. I began carefully to look back over my past and consider the present. Did not the process of founding and leading the Chekhov Studio have something in it of the *creativity of life*? Had the First Studio not been created by Konstantin Stanislavsky, Leopold Sulerzhitsky and by us ourselves? But why had I hitherto understood by *creative work* only what was enacted on the stage? The realm of the creative process began to expand for me, but I was still very far from accepting life, from looking at it with new eyes. The questions of the meaning of life and the purpose of the creative process were as irresolvable as before. The meaninglessness of human suffering and

the *fortuitousness* of life still had decisive significance for me. And that which was gradually penetrating into the depths of my consciousness as the expanding concept of 'creativity' coexisted with all the system of thoughts which had been engendered by the whole of my life up until this point.

After a while, one more thought – one other feeling – began to take possession of me. This was a feeling of the possibility of working creatively within oneself, the creative process within one's own personality. I dimly divined the difference between people who create *outside of themselves* and those who are creative *within themselves*. I was unable at the time to understand this difference with the clarity with which it now appears before me. From experience, I only knew of one kind of creative work – that which took place outside oneself. It seemed to me that creativity was not subject to the human will and that its specific application depended exclusively upon one's so-called 'natural' predispositions. But together with the thought of *self-focused creativity*, there arose quite naturally within me a 'will-impulse', in a certain sense a 'will-urge', to master creative energy in order that I might apply it within myself and upon myself. But all these feelings were weak, fleeting and were very difficult to identify. My will was essentially asleep and I was inwardly as weak as anyone else who is passing through a stage of utterly draining pessimism. Nevertheless, in the depths of my soul an unaccountable joy would flare up every now and then. And this joy echoed those happy moments which were previously familiar to me as an actor and a participant in the life of the Chekhov Studio. But the more often these new, joyful feelings stirred within me, the more viciously did my pessimism take revenge on them. It brought the thoughts that were subject to it to a head, and with ever greater clarity it placed before my mind its unendurable questions about meaning and purpose, and it made me fearfully aware that the question of life cannot be resolved unless a law of *justice* is found, which alone can do battle with the cruelty and meaninglessness of *chance*. But I did not find justice anywhere, and my flashes of joy – unable to stand up for themselves against the power of rational thought – found no nourishment and were extinguished.

I also observed something new in myself. That animation of the soul, that capacity for oblivion which I experienced when I was in a state

of inebriation and because of which I did (of course) drink, had ceased to be what I had known it to be before. Something impeded me in my intoxication. What this was of course I did not know, nor did I want to know. I registered boredom in my drunken soul and inwardly winced. I felt cheated. Wine had formerly made me witty, cheerful, relaxed, astute, brave and so on, whereas now a touch of boredom was added to all this which spoilt the merriment, which spoilt the wit and perspicacity that had formerly given me a sense of peace and joy. How pained I would have been if someone had been able to tell me what in fact was going on within me! I was actually losing the joy of pessimism! I was growing out of it. I would have felt terribly offended if I had been told that pessimism is a particular form of joy, that the reason why the torments of pessimism are so lasting is that behind them is hidden a deep joy, and that people treasure these torments and love them. It was my good fortune that no one told me about this: it would have been too vexing and *joylessly* miserable to be aware that the idea of the meaninglessness of life to which one had grown accustomed and which one loved with one's whole soul, one's whole being, is that very same *meaning of life* by which one is living in a phase of pessimism. It is not right to take from pessimism the *meaning* of its *meaninglessness*. This is cruel, harsh and pointless. *It is necessary to show it another meaning and grant it the right to renounce its old meaning itself and voluntarily accept the new*. My soul was outgrowing its pessimism and was preparing itself to receive this new meaning. The deep sufferings of pessimism represent a path towards actually overcoming it, and the secret joy of pessimism is the suffering soul's protection from catastrophe, from suicide. A very small percentage of pessimists choose suicide. It is said that when Schopenhauer in old age finally received recognition for his pessimistic philosophy, he rejoiced that a man can become a hundred years old!

When the tormenting period of pessimism mercifully comes to an end and a person rises out of it and returns to life, the first thing that he begins to understand is the meaning of suffering. As I gradually overcame my torments, I began to grasp their meaning. The theoretical idea of the meaninglessness of suffering outside me was gradually transformed into a sensation of the *meaning of suffering within me*. I had immersed myself in suffering as one being and I emerged from it

as another. All the thoughts that had tormented me for several years were forgotten and replaced by new ones. These former thoughts were all without substance, without weight, without self-sufficient truth. They were a 'superstructure' of the soul's suffering and only this suffering itself was substantial, it alone bore fruit. How clear it is to me now that my past sufferings gave me strength and the right to many joys, to many insights into the realms of art and life. But only now do I understand this so clearly that I can objectively speak about myself. Only now.

At that time, when I was absorbed in the long and painful process of rising up out of pessimism, everything seemed otherwise. For example, I gradually became aware of the difference between *thoughts* and *moods*. Little by little, I surmised that my gloomy – but nevertheless still well-ordered – thoughts flowed in my head as a particular, and to a certain extent independent, life and that alongside it there existed a life which found expression in heavy moods, in bouts of fear and so forth – a life of shattered nerves. It is true to say that my melancholy thoughts shattered my nerves, and my shattered nerves engendered melancholy thoughts; but all the same, they flowed independently of one another and I was able to distinguish the life of my thoughts from that of my 'nerves'. It became clear to me that nerves can and need to be healed by the means available to science, but that with thoughts one needs to do something else. I understood that it is possible to have healthy, strong nerves and at the same time have erroneous thoughts in one's head.

In this sense, the unity of my psyche began to disintegrate and I gained a certain access to myself. It was suggested to me that I turn to Pavel Kapterev* and try to follow a course of hypnosis with him. I consented and put my nervous system at Kapterev's disposal. In five sessions, significant results were achieved. I started venturing into the street almost without fear. A new sense of lightness came over me. I could compare it with the feeling a person gets when a weight that he has been carrying for a long time and which he has managed to get used to is lifted from his shoulders. My nerves began to feel soothed. New thoughts gradually flowed towards me, and more and more often

* Pavel Kapterev (1876–1925), psychiatrist. (Editors' note.)

they brought a spark of joy to my soul. My will, too, was slowly awakening. The healthy substance of my soul, which had struggled so persistently with alien, external influences for all these years, had finally begun – in a way that was visible to me – to gain a victory over everything gloomy and oppressive which lay as a thick layer on the surface of my soul. My instinctive discontent with the theatre began to take on clearer outlines and translated itself into concrete thoughts. I started to clarify for myself the inner values, the hidden potential and paths of the theatre. My newly awakened will demanded that I take certain steps towards bringing renewal to the theatre. True, I suffered as before from a sense of the falsehood in theatre and from the complacent indifference of the theatrical world, but this suffering was balanced out by the possibility of theatre's renewal and rebirth. Again, I was gripped by the feeling for the *whole*, and in this whole lived the theatre of the future. As had always been the case, the *whole* seed began to grow, put down roots, sprout and send forth leaves. I worked on the question of the theatre in the widest sense of the word, and I gathered and made selections from the material that came towards me, until the *whole* had blossomed into a magnificent, beautiful flower.

But, I repeat, the process of my return to life unfolded slowly; my acquiring knowledge of the truths of dramatic art required a great deal of labour, and a mood of joy and vigour came to me only gradually, but to the point where an answer to the question of the meaning and purpose of life ripened and took shape within me. Many of my habitual moods became alien to me. I noticed, for example, that I had absolutely no need to treat others with disdain as I had previously done. Previously I would have failed to distinguish between the person and his actions, and I would have despised the person together with his behaviour. Now I began to separate the person from his actions and even from the transient features of his character, and I vented my anger upon *them*, leaving the *person* himself unscathed. It became easier for me to be with other people.

One evening I received a telephone call from the First Studio. I do not recall who it was who spoke to me, but I was asked if on such and such a date I wanted to appear in *The Flood*. The question caught me unawares. Without really managing to think through the suggestion, I said almost inadvertently, 'I will'. With this 'I will', I annulled

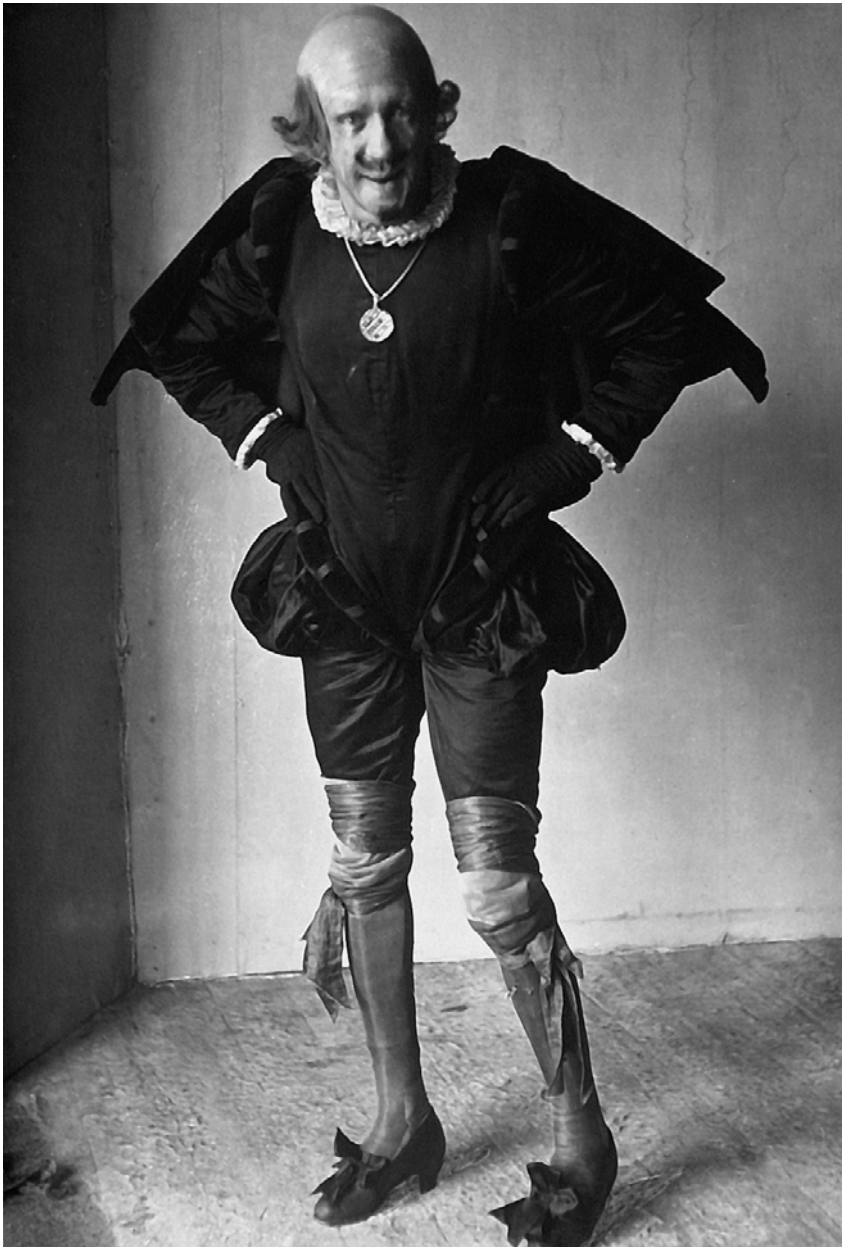

Plate 21 Michael Chekhov as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare. First Studio. 1920

in a trice a whole series of thoughts and intentions associated with the idea of leaving the theatre. I started acting again.[43] But my 'I will' did irreparable harm to the Chekhov Studio. I could only give less and less time to my students, and this gradually brought the Chekhov Studio to an end.[44]

* * *

Shortly before Sulerzhitsky's death, we noticed in him a certain anxiety and an excessive excitability, rapidly followed by a complete loss of energy. He became apathetic and indifferent to many things. It was as if he was immersed in certain thoughts and feelings which he did not want to impart to those around him. He once came to me in this condition very late in the evening. As I went out to meet him, I saw a strange figure before me. His shoulders were drooping, his sleeves were completely covering his hands, and his cap was pulled over his eyes. He looked at me in silence with a smile. In his whole appearance, there was an extraordinary kindness. I was surprised and delighted by Sulerzhitsky's visit. I suggested that he take off his coat, but he stood motionless. I took his coat, cap and soft mittens from him and led him into my room. I asked him if he wanted something to eat.

'I've got some vegetables. Do you want any, Leopold Antonovich?' (Sulerzhitsky did not eat meat.)

He barely understood my question and all of a sudden he inarticulately but joyfully began to relate something which I didn't understand, I merely managed to catch the joy which excited him as he told the story. Then he fell silent. After staying with me for about an hour, he left, still smiling radiantly and enigmatically. This was my last impression of Sulerzhitsky alive. I saw him again soon after, but in a coffin with an expression of seriousness and kindness on his face. He died on 17 (30) December 1916[45] in much pain.

After Sulerzhitsky's death, the whole burden of responsibility for the First Studio rested on the shoulders of Vakhtangov, Sushkevich, Gotovtsev and Khmara. But Vakhtangov managed to lead not only this Studio and his own one (now the Vakhtangov Theatre),* but also to

* See Endnote 37 *TPOTA*.

produce plays on the side. I no longer had the opportunity to meet him outside the theatre, and our friendship took on a different character. He would sometimes invite me to the rehearsals of his productions outside our studio and let me watch them so that I could give my advice. I attentively followed his artistic growth and decided to keep a record of everything that he gave to those around him in his amazing thoughts and sometimes in whole speeches. I could not accomplish this task alone because of my other duties – and I turned to certain individuals from the Third Studio with the suggestion that they write down the thoughts uttered by Vakhtangov at rehearsals.

Plate 22 Michael Chekhov as Khlestakov in *The Government Inspector* by Nikolay Gogol. MAAT. 1921

Plate 23
Michael Chekhov as Erik XIV in *Erik XIV* by August Strindberg. First Studio. 1921

I was having to prepare for two big roles at the same time: Erik XIV with Vakhtangov, and Khlestakov with Stanislavsky. My working day was divided into two parts – in the morning I rehearsed *The Government Inspector* in the Art Theatre, while in the afternoon I went to the First Studio and worked on *Erik XIV*.[46] Vakhtangov asked me every day how the rehearsals in the Moscow Art Theatre were going, and I had to tell him and even show him how my work on Khlestakov was proceeding. He often laughed and seemed pleased.

But then came the day for a non-public dress rehearsal for *Erik*.* Vakhtangov sat with a few of his colleagues in the auditorium. The curtain opened and the first act began. Vakhtangov did not make a single critical remark to me. The second and third acts also passed without comment. A rare event! I did not understand properly what was happening on the stage. This was the first rehearsal in costume

* The dress rehearsals for *Erik XIV* took place on 19, 21, 25 and 26 March 1921. (Original Russian editors' note.)

and make-up. Such rehearsals are usually called 'hellish'. What distinguishes them is that the actors lose all self-control, they expend vast amounts of unnecessary energy, they become agitated, nervous and they act badly. By the end of the rehearsal I wanted to know Vakhtangov's opinion, but curiously I could not elicit what it was. It was only after the next rehearsal that I was told that, by the end of the previous rehearsal, Vakhtangov had been sitting in the auditorium in a state of complete devastation. My acting had finished him off. It was so bad that Vakhtangov was beginning to think of cancelling *Erik*.

The decision was made to give me one more rehearsal. I managed it more successfully than the first, and the significance of Vakhtangov's mysterious silence and his murderous intentions was revealed to me. When the parts of *Erik* were being allotted in our artistic committee before work on the production had begun, Vakhtangov had covered my ears with his palms and said loudly, so that I could hear: 'I should like to have the opportunity to understudy Chekhov in the role of Erik.'

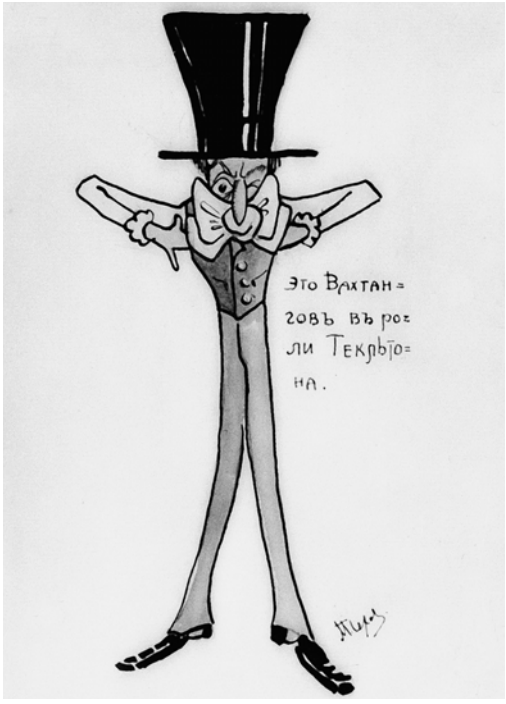

Plate 24
Caricature by Chekhov of Evgeny Vakhtangov in the role of Tackleton. Inscription reads: 'This is Vakhtangov in the role of Tackleton' along with Chekhov's autograph

He very much wanted to play this part, costumes were sewn for him; but his illness did not allow him to fulfil this wish.[47] He loved acting, but he hardly did any at all. His rehearsing was always more interesting than his performing. I recall one of the rehearsals for *The Cricket on the Hearth*, when Vakhtangov rehearsed the part of Tackleton with a kind of inspiration that I subsequently never witnessed in him in the course of a long series of performances. Perhaps at the time he was aware of himself as a director *demonstrating* how Tackleton ought to be played?[48]

Vakhtangov once called in on the MAAT for one of the performances of *The Government Inspector*. He wanted to see the second act from the wings. On this occasion, my acting made a particularly favourable impression on him. He went into the auditorium and sat through the performance to the end. He was very pleased with me, and I told him the reason for my success that day. It had to do with the fact that I had always had a passion for medicine. I loved and still love doctors – and surgeons in particular. One well-known Moscow surgeon with whom I have the pleasure of being acquainted heeded my entreaties and admitted me to one of his operations. A white coat was put on me and I was led into the operating theatre under the guise of a student. I was in a state of extreme excitement and I avidly followed all the preparations for the operation. The mood in the operating theatre filled me with trepidation. The patient was brought in, laid on a table and anaesthetized. I kept my eyes glued on the doctor. Eventually, he took a scalpel and with a bold, elegant stroke he cut open the patient's abdomen. Something happened to me at that moment. I felt a remarkable rush of creative energy. I had discovered a new aspect of art! The surgeon's art had seemingly been transfused into me and I began to palpitate with a flood of creative power. The tegumental tissues of the patient's abdomen had already been opened and I saw the beautiful, bluish intestines. Never had I thought they could be so beautiful! Living, bluish, elastic intestines! Spellbound, I followed the movements of the surgeon. He worked confidently and boldly in the open, abdominal cavity of his patient. Suddenly I noticed that the surgeon's face had changed. I froze. He snapped out a few terse words to the people surrounding him. They began to move in silence and a look of particular concentration appeared in their faces. It was clear that the operation

was becoming more complicated and dangerous. I was burning with love for the sleeping patient and for the great artist standing before me in his white surgical coat. I saw how with immense attentiveness he felt the pulse-beat in one of the patient's inner organs and then quickly thrust a curved needle at a millimetre's distance from the pulse. I stood there holding my breath. Another deathlike pause, and the needle was again plunged close to the pulsating blood vessel. With a deft movement, the ends of the thread were tied and the organ was prepared for amputation. A minute later the still warm – and, to me, unknown – organ of the human body was given into my hands and someone whispered some incomprehensible words in my ear by way of explaining what I held in my grasp. The patient's bloody abdominal cavity was cleaned and quickly sewn up. I was intoxicated, inspired, fascinated! What an art! What is the power of this art? Is it not that the surgeon is creating when he has before him the palpitating life of a human being? Is it not that his creativity can at times determine whether his patient will live or die? Where has he learnt such an immense power of concentration? Has he spent years exercising his capacity for concentration, just as we actors do? And from where does he derive the dexterity of his hands, the precision, the boldness and beauty of his movements? Has he studied the actor's art of movement? Whence, then, comes that dazzling capacity to focus inwardly upon those moments of creativity? From where? From the feeling for the *life* which is in his hands, in his power. *Life! Another person's life* – that is the source of his creative power. This *life* has taught him his movements, his concentration, his strength, dexterity, lightness and boldness![49]

Why is it that we, as actors and *creators*, train for years in dexterity, lightness and movement, and do not achieve in them even half of that power which shines in the creativity of him before whom life is beating? Because for us, for actors, everything about our art is dead, everything surrounds us like huge, cold lumps: scenery, costumes, make-up, wings, footlights, the auditorium with its boxes – the whole lot of it! But who has killed all this around us? We ourselves! We do not want to understand that it depends on us whether our theatrical world lives or dies around us.

Colours, for instance – can they not live? They can indeed! Look at the colour red: it shouts and rejoices, it awakens the will, it rings with

the sound 'rrrr'. The colour blue, on the other hand, is calm, it deepens one's consciousness, it engenders reverential feelings in one's soul. And yellow – it streams out in all directions, it knows no boundaries, it radiates out from the centre and does not allow an outline to be drawn around it; whereas green loves an outline or a boundary, and aspires to be confined. (A writing desk or card table is bound by its edges and is generally covered with a green cloth. This is pleasing to the eye. But just try covering a card table with a yellow cloth, thus confining the rays of the yellow by the edges. What will your eye see?) Colour lives, and the actor must know its life. He acts in front of a coloured background and does not know or feel what a strident disharmony lives in the auditorium when, for example, he acts a lyrical scene against a red background or philosophizes against a yellow one or portrays anger against a blue one. He puts on costumes without taking into account the character he is playing. He has no idea of how to dress for a part, and the costume-maker dresses him according to his taste, but not in accordance with the law of the harmony between colours and the inner experiences of the character.

And the forms on the stage? And their life? Again this is left to the mercy of the set designer. How often do we see on the stage sharp, broken lines serving as a background for scenes saturated with impulses from the will, and this has an ugly effect? The *will* demands round, curved and wavy forms, and only *thought* harmonizes with sharp corners and with straight or broken lines.

And what about the line of the human profile? Does the actor know what effect he has on the audience if he is in profile or *en face*? As he acts, he may for example be trying to show the audience the inner, moral qualities of his character, and yet he turns to the audience in profile. He thereby destroys the impression, for the profile speaks of the mind, it calls forth a feeling of pride in *thought*; whereas only by looking *en face* at his audience can he make those watching him disposed to want to know something about the moral aspect of the soul of the character he is portraying. And the light and the space – everything around the actor – wants to live, wants to sound in harmony with him. But the actor does not go to the trouble of enlivening his surroundings, he himself deprives himself of the joy of true creativity. He does not want to awaken his imagination, he prefers to live and work in the

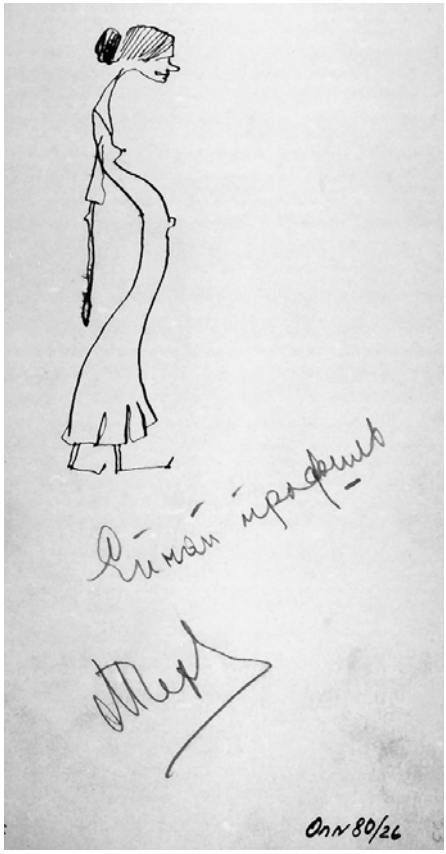

Plate 25 Caricature by Chekhov of Serafima Birman. Inscription reads: 'Sinai profile' along with Chekhov's autograph

dead, cold vault of his stage. And how do we actors relate to our audience? We do not feel a full auditorium in the way that it deserves to be felt. Often we even regard our fellow actors as mere accessories, which we need for our aims. We have killed off our surroundings and we die in them ourselves. But we must now resurrect them. This is the task of the future theatre. We shall raise ourselves – and with ourselves also the theatre – to a genuine creativity only when, like surgeons, we feel responsible for *the life of our* play*, the life of our* theatre.

The operation that I saw inspired me to an extraordinary degree, and I maintained my inspiration and animation during the entire performance. Vakhtangov sensed the particular state that I was in that evening and he stayed for the whole performance.

Plate 26
Michael Chekhov in the role of Khlestakov in *The Government Inspector* by Nikolay Gogol. MAAT. 1921. Drawing by Yuri Annenkov

Vakhtangov was already feeling poorly during the production of *Erik*. He even had to abandon it altogether for a time, and Sushkevich replaced him for a whole month.* Then he returned, but the illness afflicted him as before; he was suffering from stomach pains and often took morphine. I once accompanied him from the Third Studio. He was returning home before the end of the rehearsal. He walked slowly, bent with pain. However, he never complained about his physical torments. Even this time, as far as I remember, he urged me to go home rather than accompany him. But he was looking so wretched and was so uncertain on his feet that I walked with him right to his home.

'My dear Misha, I want so much to live!' he would say to me later. 'Look, there are the stones, the plants; I feel them in a new, special way, I want to see them, feel them, I want to live amongst them!'

* During the preparations for *Erik XIV*, Sushkevich mainly worked individually with the actors on their parts. (Editors' note.)

He evidently did not think about death. He simply *wanted to live*. With each day he changed more and more. His face grew yellow and a characteristic leanness quickly began to show on his neck around the ears and emphasized his shoulders. He went up to the mirror, looked at himself and did not see the signs of impending death.

'Look,' he said, 'see how strong I look. What muscles on my arms! And what strong legs! Don't you see?'

I suffered agonies at such moments.

'Give me your hand.' He took my hand and made me feel a large cancerous tumour in the region of the stomach. 'Can you feel the lump? It's a scar from the operation. These things happen. Don't they? It's true, isn't it?'

I agreed.

The Flood was on at the First Studio. Vakhtangov was playing Frazer. His acting was more than magnificent. All his fellow actors were full of admiration for him. But they were all thinking to themselves that this was Vakhtangov's last performance. And indeed it was – he never acted again.* Why did he act so magnificently? Because he was fighting for his *life*. Again it was *life*, the feeling for *life* that brought the creative state into being. Are we artists all only capable of really feeling *life* when it is in danger or when it is fading away? Is it really the case that we will not be able to find our way to a feeling for life while we are healthy and strong? Let *health* find expression in us rather than illness. After all, it is not so difficult to look at oneself as someone healthy and strong and say to oneself: 'I am *healthy*'.

A medical consultation was arranged for Vakhtangov. The professors examined Vakhtangov in my presence. After their deliberations, I joined them in the room and understood everything.

'How long do you give him?' I asked them.

'Four or five months,' was the reply.

Vakhtangov was waiting for me downstairs. I went down to him and for perhaps the first time I lied to him. He became happy and cheerful. Soon afterwards, he took to his bed and never got up again. His interest in the life of the First Studio increased enormously. He would ask

* The last performance of *The Flood* with Vakhtangov playing the part of Frazer was on 14 February 1922. (Original Russian editors' note.)

about everything that happened at the Studio and he became suspicious – it seemed to him that we were concealing something from him. Preparations were being made at the Studio at this time for its tour abroad. Vakhtangov did not think for a moment that he might not participate in this journey. He invited a photographer, got up from his bed and had pictures taken as he wanted to have the photographs necessary for an international passport. The photograph cruelly and nakedly reflected his impending death, but even now Vakhtangov did not understand this. The time of the journey was approaching and we members of the Studio had no idea what we should do with Vakhtangov. We did not feel we had the right to tell him the truth about his tragic situation and we could not find a way of convincing him that it would be impossible for him to go abroad. But the illness took a rapid course and Vakhtangov died on 29 May 1922. I was not present when he died.

* * *

My mother fell ill in difficult, hungry years. She lay in our cold, unheated flat, moaning quietly day and night. She needed skilful and complex care, and I had a job getting her into hospital. I went to visit her almost every day and I could see her gradually sinking. Her mind was becoming feeble and she would talk nonsense. I was not present when she died,* and it was with some difficulty that I found her in the morgue amongst all the corpses which lay on tables, on the floor, in bizarre poses, in each other's arms, with swollen faces and open eyes. A typhus epidemic was raging in Moscow and they couldn't manage to bury the dead. With unbelievable difficulty, I succeeded in organizing a semblance of a funeral. The cemetery was a terrible sight. People were being put into graves without coffins, wrapped in rags, sometimes tied up together in pairs and fastened with rope to a board.

From the moment my mother died, I seemed to lose the capacity to feel. In a certain sense it did not matter to me whether she had died or not. I could not take her death in and I was strangely calm. The idea of suicide did not enter my head. I experienced the loss of my

* Natalya Chekhov died in the spring of 1919. (Original Russian editors' note.)

mother in a dull, indifferent state. Her grave was soon lost, and now I do not know where she lies.

* * *

By the time of the theatre's tour abroad,* my artistic ideals had taken shape with sufficient clarity. My need to implement them had reached its peak. I began to talk with my colleagues about questions of art, and with many of them I was met with understanding and sympathy. We spoke at length and with fervour about the reorganization of the First Studio. With Vakhtangov's death, the Studio lost the artistic director who could have led it along new, living paths of discovery. This loss perturbed me. While Vakhtangov was still alive, Sushkevich and I had virtually agreed to lead the Studio in whatever direction Vakhtangov's talent would indicate. But his death did not allow us to fulfil the idea of clearly establishing the 'identity of the Studio'. I began to think of myself as the theatre's artistic director. Some of my colleagues supported me in my idea, while others looked upon me with a certain apprehension. And in their own way they were right. It wasn't so long ago that I had appeared before them as a gloomy, at times unbridled and impetuous person who uttered the most contradictory thoughts, a person who did not want to restrain his impulses, etc. Moreover, I was still continuing to drink at that time and I often inveighed against the theatre without giving reasons for what I said. All this evoked in my colleagues a certain lack of confidence in me. I was unable to explain to them that two independent souls lived within me, one of which was developing, becoming stronger and growing, while the other was fading, coming to the end of its days. But many of my colleagues did see both souls and they were beginning to pay attention to the voice of the one who bore within itself thoughts and impulses that were aimed at renewing and strengthening the theatre.

While we were abroad, I met Ivan Bersenev† and I quickly became intimate with him. Our long and frequent conversations led to my

* The first foreign tour of the First Studio to Latvia, Estonia, Germany and Czechoslovakia took place from June to September 1922. (Editors' note.)

† Ivan Bersenev (1889–1951), actor and director. (Editors' note.)

growing very fond of Bersenev. I was struck by his energy, his sharp mind – a mind that saw the life around him and interpreted it in a way that was far from banal. His administrative talent was the direct result of being able to perceive the inner essence of a fact. I had the good fortune to see Bersenev in that special way that an actor should really always watch the people around him. This way consists of mentally disregarding a certain part of a person's inner being and examining only the remaining part. For instance, I disregard the intellectual content of what a person is saying and listen not to *what* he is saying, but exclusively to *how* he is saying it. By doing this, the sincerity or insincerity of his speech immediately becomes apparent. Moreover, it becomes clear why he is saying these particular words, what is the purpose of his speech – the true purpose, which often does not coincide with the substance of the words he is uttering. A person may argue his thought very intelligently and *logically*, but if one disregards it, disregards the thought that he has expressed, then suddenly – for example – the deep *illogicality of his soul* at this time can be revealed.

Someone may, for instance, express certain thoughts which seem to me to be dishonest. I am ready to be outraged and even to call the person dishonest, but then I manage to disregard the intellectual substance of his thoughts and he appears as a person of the greatest honesty, a person who has honestly spoken dishonest words. But it also works the other way round. By disregarding honest thoughts, a dishonest soul is laid bare. Look closely at a person's gestures and gait, how expressively his will or lack of it speaks through them. Listen to the lack of conviction with which people speak convincing words. A person's word has meaning and sound. Listen to the meaning, and you will not know the person. Listen to the sound, and you will.[50]

Ivan Bersenev attracted my attention, and I suggested that he come to the First Studio and work there as an actor and administrator. It was clear to me that right now the theatre needed Bersenev. I was not mistaken in my choice. Bersenev did much for the life of the theatre. We spent many nights with Sushkevich, discussing the question of the reorganization of the Studio. We also had some intense arguments, but there were never any quarrels or petty, personal squabbles. We would gather in separate groups of two or three or all together to discuss the question of the further artistic and administrative life of the Studio.

Sushkevich approved of my idea of inviting Bersenev and on our return to Moscow, Bersenev became an active participant in our work.

I recall two night sessions.* I was endeavouring to portray to the participants of the Studio a picture of that new life which I was thinking about during all this time. I was proposing myself as the leader. Hundreds of questions were put to me, countless objections were made. I tried to answer as best I could, and I was worried by the thought that, if my colleagues did not want to adopt all my suggestions, I would have to leave the theatre altogether, for I could not conceive of a better theatre, better actors and better colleagues than those with whom I was working at the First Studio.

Our arguments – which were, to say the least, intense – lasted two nights. By the end of the second night, Gotovtsev stood up and turning to everyone, he said:

'What do we risk if we give Chekhov a chance to try to put his ideas into practice? Nothing! If his ideas are not viable, we can always abandon them!'

Both I and everyone else (it would seem) were all pleased with Gotovtsev's suggestion.

This was the right way forward. I announced that I would take the artistic direction into my hands for a year. It seemed to me that in the course of a year much could be done with regard to raising the level of the actors' theatrical technique, but my inexperience cruelly deceived me. For some years now, I have been working in the theatre and to this day I cannot say that I have managed to achieve very noticeable results in the realm of acting technique.[51] The artistic task that I have set myself will hardly find its complete fulfilment quickly, since the life of the theatre is complicated and requires a lot of work in realms that do not have a direct relation to the art of acting. The rapid growth of our theatre in recent years has demanded a particular effort on the part of the management. The theatre's annual budget has risen from one hundred thousand to almost four hundred thousand roubles, the theatre company has become significantly larger, as has the number of technical staff. I note with immense satisfaction that the efforts

* These meetings took place on 22 and 23 September 1922. (Original Russian editors' note.)

Plate 27 Michael Chekhov as Hamlet in *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. MAAT 2. 1924

expended by the management on the whole complex task of administration have yielded excellent results. (This has also been noted by the authorities, who have found the work of the management to be wholly satisfactory, and the theatre to be strengthened and mature in a financial and economic respect.)

The first thing that I decided to do in the plan that I had conceived was a production of *Hamlet*.* I had a difficult task in front of me:

* *Hamlet* was produced (performed) in 1924, although rehearsals began in 1923. (Editors' note.)

I did not have anyone to play Hamlet. I did not regard myself as altogether suitable for this role, but there was no other option. With great inner torment because of the plan that I was seeking to carry out, I resolved to play Hamlet myself.[52]

But my burden increased when I realized that my entire attention was directed towards the production as a whole, towards developing the rudiments of a new technique of acting, towards carrying out the appropriate exercises which would serve to develop this technique, and in no way towards the part of Hamlet or myself as an actor. All this greatly added to my inner torment.[53]

One of the first exercises in the rehearsals for *Hamlet* involved *balls*.[54] We would silently throw balls to one another, investing our movements with the artistic content of our roles. The text of the play was read to us slowly and loudly, and we embodied it by throwing balls to one another. With this we achieved the following aims: firstly, we freed ourselves from the need to speak the words before the inner artistic motivation for them had arisen. We thereby avoided the agonizing stage of pronouncing words with our lips alone and without any inner content, which always happens with actors who begin their work with premature word articulation. Secondly, we learnt to understand in a practical sense the deep connection of movement with the words on the one hand, and with the emotions on the other. We discerned a law whereby an actor who repeatedly carries out one and the same expressive movement driven by the will, a movement which has a particular relationship to one or another part of the role, gains as a result a corresponding emotion and an inner right to articulate the words relating to it. From movement we went to feeling and word.[55] Of course, all these and similar exercises were done in a manner that was far from perfect and without sufficient repetition. Added to which, we were continually distracted by theoretical discussions apropos the meaning and significance of one or other of the exercises. Be that as it may, the first attempt was made, and to my great delight I saw that the actors responded quite willingly to these new and unfamiliar methods of work.

But as the actor playing the part of Hamlet, I lagged far behind my colleagues. Even on the day of the first public dress rehearsal, as I stood in my dressing-room in my costume and make-up, I suffered that particular torment which is familiar to an actor when he feels that he

is not yet ready to appear before the public. If an actor prepares his role correctly, the whole process of preparation can be characterized as his gradual approach to the picture of his character as he sees it in his imagination, in his fantasy. The actor first builds up his character exclusively in his fantasy life, and then tries to imitate the character's inner and outer qualities.[56] This is how it was with me during my work on the part of Hamlet. I constructed a mental picture of Hamlet, I saw his outer and inner countenance, but I was unable to do the imitating, since my attention was drawn away by the general tasks of the production. Even now I can see the extraordinary features of my imagined Hamlet – the distinctive yellowish shade of his skin, the remarkable eyes and some beautifully arranged wrinkles on his face. How unlike this is the Hamlet which I play and how agonizing it is to be aware of this!

For this production of *Hamlet*, the first attempt was made at a collaboration between three directors (Smyshlyaev, Tatarinov and Cheban*). It proved to be a difficult task, but the idea nevertheless – once the attempt was made – seemed to me to be absolutely right and desirable.[57] In broad terms the idea is that the directors, who have one common task and who continually influence one another with their artistic conceptions and pictures, try to resolve their artistic differences and incompatibilities by comparing the pictures that they each have in their imaginations and letting those pictures freely influence one another. They await the results of this interplay between their various pictures and dreams. And if the directors really succeed in doing this in a pure, *impersonal*, sacrificial form, the result will be a new, beautiful, creative idea which satisfies all the directors and corresponds to each of their *individualities*. Such a result is always of greater value than the wishes expressed by each director individually. However, such a way of working is practicable only if the director is more interested in the *production* and its future, than in *himself* and his own future.

After the dress rehearsal of *Hamlet*, Konstantin Stanislavsky told me that, although there was much that he liked in my interpretation of the part of Hamlet, I was nevertheless, in his opinion, not a tragedian and that I should avoid purely tragic roles. Stanislavsky was, of course,

* Alexander Cheban (1886–1954), actor. (Editors' note.)

Plate 28 Scene from *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. MAAT 2. 1924

right – I do not have real 'tragic' gifts, but all the same I think that if I had managed to play Hamlet as he appears in my imagination, I would have been able to a certain extent – and perhaps in a distinctive form of my own – to convey Hamlet's tragic state.[58]

I felt much better in the part of Ableukhov in Andrey Bely's *Petersburg*.[59] Even though my attention – as had been the case with the work on Hamlet – was drawn away by tasks concerning the whole production, I nevertheless managed to find enough time for myself. All of us who took part in this performance sought an approach to the rhythm and metre in relation to movement and the spoken word. Our attempts were very imperfect as far as the audience was concerned, but we actors profited greatly from them, and I hope that the attempt to introduce the new technical devices which were only tentatively employed in the production of *Petersburg* will be developed in one of our subsequent undertakings.

The production of *The Case* followed a rather different path and the further development of acting technique was not among the tasks here.[60] But all the same I still tried – within the bounds of my own part – to

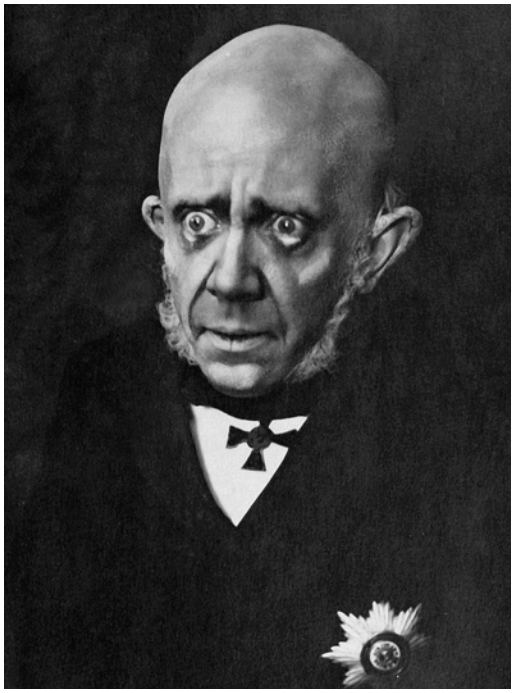

Plate 29
Michael Chekhov as Ableukhov in *Petersburg* by Andrey Bely.
MAAT 2. 1925

avail myself of theatre techniques which serve to make the work less burdensome and the performing easier. I endeavoured to work on the theme of *imitating* the mental picture of the character. I contemplated the picture of Muromsky which I had formed in my imagination and *imitated* it in the rehearsals. I did not *act* in the way that we actors generally do, but I *imitated* an imaginary character, which *itself* acted for me in my imagination.[61]

Although this was an imperfect attempt, it did however lead to my remaining to a certain extent aloof from Muromsky as I portray him on the stage, as if I am observing him, *his acting*, his *life*. And this standing aloof allows me to approach that state whereby the artist purifies and ennobles the characters that he plays, keeping them free from irrelevant features of his own personality.[62] When I set about contemplating the image of my Muromsky, I noticed to my astonishment that the only part of the entire picture that was clearly visible to me was his long, grey sidewhiskers. I could not as yet see to whom they

Plate 30
Michael Chekhov as Muromsky in *The Case* by Alexander Sukhovo-Kobylin. MAAT 2. 1927

belonged and I patiently waited for their owner to make his appearance. After a certain time, the nose and hair appeared, then the legs and gait. Finally the whole face presented itself, the arms, the positioning of the head, which gently rocked as he walked.

As I imitated all this at rehearsals, I suffered greatly from having to speak the words of the part since I was as yet unable to hear Muromsky speak as an image in my imagination. But time did not allow for me to wait, and I almost had to invent Muromsky's voice and manner of speech.[63] However, I derived a great deal of delight even from the little that I managed to achieve with this hasty production of *The Case*.

The production of *Hamlet* coincided with an important and significant moment in the life of the First Studio. The Studio had become the Second Moscow Art Academic Theatre and had moved into new premises on Teatralnaya Square* (Sverdlov Square).[64] The energy and

* Theatre Square. (Editors' note.)

Plate 31 Design by Nikolay Andreyev for the costume and make-up of Chekhov's Muromsky in *The Case* by Alexander Sukhovo-Kobylin. MAAT 2. 1927

tact of Ivan Bersenev played no small part in our theatre's acquiring its new premises. The studio's little auditorium with a capacity of 175 people was replaced by a hall which could accommodate 1,350. This enabled the theatre to fulfil its duty to society: the management of the theatre succeeded in bringing the attendance from organizations and institutions to 110,000 and students to 26,000 in a season!!*

* * *

My inner equilibrium was becoming stronger with every day. New thoughts poured into my mind. They gave me strength, engendering confidence in life and giving meaning to my ongoing participation in

* It was customary at that time to give special performances for workers, members of the trade unions, pupils, students and so on. (Editors' note.)

the theatre. I reviewed my previous knowledge, and without any difficulty I picked out the grains of truth and I discarded everything which had a harmful influence on my mind and which paralysed my will. For example, I read with pleasure in the work of a certain philosopher the anecdotal story of how a teacher, wishing to explain the Kant–Laplace* theory of the origin of our solar system to his students, rotated a small drop of oil in a glass of water. As a result of the rapid rotation, the drop of oil broke up and separated off from itself a series of little drops. By this means, the teacher gave his students a graphic picture of the origin of our solar system with its planets. The students understood their teacher's thought perfectly, but they were unable to surmise who was rotating the vast cosmic nebula in the dimensions of space in place of their teacher.

As yet, I was far from having mastered the new thoughts streaming towards me, but I understood the direction in which my future inner life would be going. The task that lay before me was one of re-education. I knew that my feelings were discordant, that my will was undisciplined and that my thoughts rambled chaotically in my head. I knew that it was up to me whether my inner life would remain as it had been before or whether it would change and submit to my 'I'. Despite the stubborn resistance of my natural character, I set about transforming the inner qualities of my soul. Religious feelings had already ceased to be as alien as they had been before. My physical health had begun to improve. My interest in science was renewed, though due to lack of time I was unable to devote myself to it. However, even before this I could not adequately make up for the deficiencies in my education.

When I was already an actor in the Art Theatre, I had solicited the help of a mathematics teacher, but our lessons soon came to end. The reason for this had to do with a mirror that hung in the room. During the lessons, my teacher did not take his eyes off his reflection in the mirror and this put me in a desperate situation. I looked at him and he at himself, and my calculations remained uncorrected.

* Here Chekhov refers to the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and the French mathematician, astronomer and physicist, Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749–1827). (Editors' note.)

My life gradually changed, and one day I noticed that not one of the people who had been present in my childhood and youth were still around. I recalled that when I was young, I would think with horror how terrible it would be to lose any of those who were close to me, and yet now I had lost *all* of them and with them a part of *myself* as I had been before.* True, there sometimes flare up in my memory recollections of early childhood and even babyhood, and I recognize in them features of my character as I have come to know them even now. For example, I remember myself sitting on Anton Chekhov's lap (I must have been about six or seven at the time). Anton Pavlovich was bending down towards me and tenderly asking me something, but I was embarrassed and I hid my face from him. I well remember this feeling of embarrassment. It is a familiar experience even now. It comes to me suddenly, without visible cause; I become shy and embarrassed without knowing why – just as it happened to me then when I was sitting on Anton Pavlovich's lap.

I also recall one other experience. This was in 1900. My mother woke me in the morning and wished me 'A Happy New Year and New Century'. Her words aroused within me a remarkable joy. I have no idea what I was so happy about, but my joy was to do with something great that – so it seemed to me – had happened somewhere in me, in space, in time, in the world. This joy is something that I can sense now too, though I now know what it has to do with. I know now that this joy is related to the creative forces in the world, to the harmony and rhythms of life, to the great justice that holds sway in the world, that justice which I sought so agonizingly in the period of my pessimism, to that 'order' which I lacked at the time.

But alongside the experiences which are as familiar to me today as they were in my childhood, I also have experiences which are opposite to my childhood experiences. For example: whatever I may have wanted as a child, whatever game I may have been playing, the most important thing to me was the result, the end, the effective conclusion. I did everything in a hurry, hastily, rushing excitedly towards the result that I had projected. I hardly took any pleasure from the *process* of a

* It is worth noting here that on 3 (16) June 1918 Chekhov married Ksenya Ziller – his second wife (1897–1970) – with whom he lived until his death. (Editors' note.)

game in my haste to get to the end of it. I can remember how long I tormented myself – became annoyed and agitated – when one day the idea entered my head that it would be possible to cut paper so finely that it would turn into water. I cut vast quantities of paper and utterly wore myself out in anticipation of the result. That was how it was in my childhood. Whereas when I work on something now, I almost always achieve the opposite mood. My whole interest is directed towards the process of the work itself, its results coming as something unexpected, and I allow them to exist objectively, as though they are separate from me. I do not regard them as my property or get attached to them as I did in my childhood. Through this new attitude to the *results* of my activity, I noticed two new features of my life. I noticed that the *results* of my various actions merged as if of their own accord into an orderly picture or mosaic, where each piece – in harmony with the others – presented the complete and meaningful image of one great picture. And I noticed something else as well: the oppressive boredom and emptiness which I had formerly experienced in those moments when the *results* were achieved – when, having striven so eagerly for them, I had them all to myself and did not know what to do with them – disappeared from the sphere of my inner life. I did not need these results and in fact they tormented me, deadening my soul and giving rise to boredom, melancholy and apathy.

Gradually my self-knowledge became stronger and I noticed that as a result the tendency to get tired – from which I had formerly suffered so much – diminished. I used to grow weary from the mass of outward impressions which I had allowed to work upon me in an uncontrolled way. I was literally torn asunder by impressions of a very diverse and discordant kind. The *feeling of composure* was unknown to me and I was unable to prevent irrelevant impressions from bombarding me. In reacting to everything that came towards me, I expended and wasted all my energy. As I went along the street, I was literally full of whatever I read on the signs, of the noise and clamour in the street, the faces and the casual conversations of the passers-by. I suffered from this sense of being torn apart, but I did not know how to overcome it. Only a certain degree of self-awareness saved me from the torment of my inner chaos. I still see the signs as I did before, I hear the street noise and so forth, but these impressions do not have a negative effect

upon my will and do not weary me any more. I began to admit far fewer impressions into my consciousness and I managed to develop the right attitude to these few impressions. Thus, for example, it pains me to see an inscription on a sign hanging above the door of a restaurant which says 'The Nook of Taste', or simply 'Restaurant Taste', or in Russian letters 'Lyurs'* with a picture of something looking like a cross between a lion and a tiger and so on. All this affects me, but it does not make me exhausted; for I can consciously relate both to 'Lyurs' and to its portrait on the sign, and I am able to laugh at the train of thought of the person who thought up the name 'Lyurs'.

I understood that an artist must *know how* to receive an impression.

This means knowing how to select impressions and find a relationship to them. But it does not mean that the artist can run away from oppressive, painful or even miserable impressions – no, he must be receptive to *every* impression and find a clear and conscious relationship to it. For example, I had the good fortune to experience a tremendous elevation of the spirit at the sight of the Roman ruins when I was at the Colosseum, in the Pantheon and among the remains of the Forum.† I was utterly astounded at the Roman catacombs, where I was amazed at the power of the human spirit. I fell in love with Venice as if with a girl; day and night I explored its labyrinthine network of narrow streets in a mood of ardent melancholy. My journey to Italy left me with many unforgettable impressions. But when I was back in Moscow, I was confronted with 'Lyurs'! What was I to do with it? Turn away in disdain? No! I had also to listen to what 'Lyurs' could say about the human soul. 'Lyurs' is just as much a testament to human life as the Colosseum or the Pantheon. If one can only avoid fearing the pain that 'Lyurs' may cause, it will have many remarkable things to say which the artist ought to know.

I cannot refrain from saying a few words about Italy, which combines in so wonderful a way the sublime and the childlike, grandiosity and humour, pride and naivety. Italy is full of contrasts and surprises. It can refine a person's artistic taste to the highest degree, but it can also

* L'ours is the French word for 'bear'. (Original Russian editors' note.)

† Chekhov's first journey to Italy took place in the summer of 1925. (Original Russian editors' note.)

manifest the sort of tastelessness which one does not forget in a hurry. I recall the gloomy prison on the shore of the Bay of Naples. The very sight of this prison makes a painful and forbidding impression. Its hopelessly thick walls are formed from massive stone blocks. And the brighter the sun, the purer and clearer the air over the bay, the merrier the songs, laughter and swearing of the Italians as they poke about the streets, the more dreadful its walls look. This prison is perhaps the only place in Naples which one would like to leave as soon as possible. But the wish to leave turns into a wish to run away and almost into a feeling of despair when you suddenly see that closely adjoining one of the prison walls is huddled a small cabaret. Singers appear on the stage, people in the audience are merrily eating, drinking, swallowing oysters and joking with the Italian girls who are serving them. There is singing not only on the stage, but also at the tables, on the street, near the cabaret – there is singing everywhere! The first thought that comes into one's head on seeing the sight is this: can't the prisoners hear these songs and merry laughter? On a wall near the stage hangs a large picture of a Madonna, adorned with flowers and ribbons and bathed in light. All this merges together into a single chaotic impression of which it is impossible to make any immediate sense.

There are also contrasts in the signs and names for various objects. For example, a bank bears the name 'Bank of the Holy Spirit'. There is a wine called 'The Tears of Christ' and a fillet steak by name of '*à la* St Peter'. In the shops they sell little statuettes portraying Christ with rosy cheeks and a doll-like face. In the church of San Pietro in Vincoli, there stands a figure of Moses by Michelangelo fenced around by grating and tourists approach it with trepidation; but when they leave the church, they can go straight into a little kiosk selling postcards and get tiny statuettes of Moses with an idiotic face and with arms and legs all out of proportion. At such kiosks, you can even get a three-inch Colosseum made out of some sort of whitish-yellow substance. This Colosseum is not only unlike the real one, but is obviously short of one wall.

I went into one of the little churches in Florence. After looking at its amazing frescos and enjoying the marvellous beauty of its antique style of architecture, I made for the door, where my way was barred by a little, bent old woman beckoning to me with a tender smile to go

back into the church. I followed her. She led me to a big sheet of glass like a shop window and solemnly turned on an electric switch on the wall. The glass case lit up and I saw a doll clothed in a white dress. It was a Madonna. I was horrified, but the old woman joyfully pointed at the image, evidently inviting me to examine the figure more closely. She pointed to her own breast and then again at the figure. Suddenly I saw that a small ladies' watch had been fastened to the Madonna's breast with a pin. I understood that this had been done out of respect for the Madonna and because it was thought to be beautiful. I was moved to tears with pity for the old woman. I quickly thanked her, paid her a few lira for her services and left. I did not take offence on behalf of the Madonna – no, the Madonna does not suffer from the fact that simple souls honour her as they are able: out of a pure heart, with love and faith. I was sorry for the old woman, I was sorry for the little child in the form of this bent, grey being who was hardly able to drag her legs along. This contrast for some reason reduced me to tears.

Similarly when I arrived on Capri, I encountered a religious procession. An image of the Madonna with her arms raised was being carried on a high litter. The procession moved to the accompaniment of singing, the rocks shook from the roar of fireworks, and the echo rang out between the rocks and merged into an unbearable, never-ending boom. My God, what a racket they made! I was ready to return to Naples there and then, but the steamer only set sail on the following day. For half the night I was driven mad by the fireworks. How do Italians manage to maintain religious feelings in their soul amid such a deafening roar? This will always be a riddle to me.

One day, on the steamer to Venice, I observed how some Italian workers were joking with one another. Laughing loudly, they pulled each other's caps off and made as if to throw them overboard. All the passengers quickly took part in their game. Everyone on deck was laughing and going into raptures at the same trick with the caps. But then the delight went too far and one of the caps actually did fly into the water. It grew quiet on deck and all eyes turned towards the owner of the cap. He leant over the side and for some time watched what was probably his only cap floating away. But then he sat down in his place again, his face lit up with a childlike smile and he exploded with laughter. Everyone on deck started laughing again. There was no trace

of resentment or distress. Losing a cap was far more fun than it might have seemed to an onlooker. But this was not the end of the game. The delight of the friends of the man, who was sitting without a cap, was manifested by them beginning to pull out handfuls of hair from the broad chest of their joyfully afflicted companion. Laughter became a cry of joy. The face of the man with neither cap nor hair continued to be a picture of delight! I must confess in all sincerity that this was beyond my understanding. You could say that the workers' game was also based on contrasts.

I had another impression as well. There was a piano on the deck of the steamer. Someone went up to it and gently and unskilfully struck a key with his finger and shyly looked round at his audience. No response. He struck the key once more and then again and again. Then he began to improvise, without bothering in the least about harmony. After a minute or so, he started singing and he hammered away any old how on the keys of the piano. A crowd gathered round him. Many of them, both men and women, were already singing. Meanwhile someone else had sat down at the piano, while the initiator of the merriment, with his broad-brimmed hat cocked on the back of his head, shook the black locks protruding from under it and directed the choir in their shouting, singing and dancing. Is this not Italy? Italy! It is the sun that is reflected in the souls of the swarthy Italians and the sun that sings and shouts and dances in them! When we northerners come to Italy, we put on dark glasses and say in our cold and feeble northern voices: 'Oh, what a sun!', whereas they, who are as swarthy, happy-go-lucky and merry as devils, bear this sun within themselves and delight in its rays, which do not reach down to them from the sky, but stream from them in their songs and laughter right up to the heavens! Italy is the school of joy, love and laughter, the school of a special mode of life experienced as a jolly dance. With my own eyes, I saw the driver of a big bus chasing an Italian girl for fun along the streets of Rome, pursuing her with his huge vehicle. I literally snatched the Italian girl from under the wheels of the bus, but my 'heroic deed' was regarded as being part of the game, and the driver and the girl went their separate ways roaring with laughter.

Italians will even swindle you in a light-hearted way. In restaurants one needs to check one's bill – amendments will have been allowed

for in the calculation. Just as the cabbie allows for a reduction in his fare, so does the waiter also reckon on a deduction from his bill! This is the way things go. Neither the waiter nor the diner takes any offence if the bill is made a bit smaller, and they take leave of each other in a spirit of contentment. Likewise, the cabbie will not necessarily give you change. For a long time he will not understand you when you start demanding change, but if he finally understands he will open up his waistcoat, point to his stomach and tell you simply

Plate 32 Ksenya and Michael Chekhov in St Mark's Square, Venice. 1925

and convincingly: '*Voglio mangiare maccheroni*!'* – and of course you refuse your change.

To be sure, these and similar impressions do not seem to me to be the most fundamental or important for Italy, but I have no doubt that they are characteristic of it. I even think that impressions associated exclusively with the beauty and the greatness of Italian art, the Roman ruins, the catacombs and so on, are not on their own enough to *feel* and *love* Italy as it is now. The customs, faces, voices and laughter of Italians – all these are another aspect of what we see in the churches, museums and in their natural surroundings. Italians love to show off their sights and give long explanations about them, but their explanations help one to understand their country far less than they themselves do once their politeness to foreigners has been stripped away and they are able to be themselves.

There can hardly be anyone who has had the good fortune to see Italy and has not felt the wish to describe his impressions. Italy *demands* that one speak, shout and write about it. I, too, am not free from such a wish, but nevertheless I feel I ought to restrain myself, not only because Italy has already been described by many talented people, but also because I am deeply convinced that Italy is really beyond description. Even the reproductions of Italian paintings and ruins become understandable and appreciated only when one has seen them with one's own eyes.

* * *

A certain inner equilibrium and peace gradually took possession of my whole life. Even my visits to the recruiting stations – which, once my reprieve had come to an end, took place at exactly every three months – were less unsettling than they had been before.† And the calmer and stronger I came to feel inwardly, so much the greater was the amazement with which I looked back at my previous behaviour. I could no longer understand it and I felt as though I were recalling not myself, but an entirely different person.

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* 'I want to eat macaroni!' (Italian.) (Original Russian editors' note.)

† In the spring of 1916, Chekhov was declared ineligible for military service. (Editors' note.)

When I was travelling by train to Moscow on one of my first days of being called up (I lived in the country), I found it intolerable to remain among the other passengers and while the train was in motion I jumped out of the carriage onto the permanent way. Now I find this act of mine incomprehensible. I have almost forgotten that nervous tension which impelled me at that time to leap from the carriage of a moving train. There is much that seems to me now to be strange and incomprehensible.

My predilection for wine also came to an end in a strange way. One morning, I awoke as a result of an unbearable sense of inner pain. A sudden and unexpected surge of unendurable melancholy came over me while I was still asleep, and I awoke trying to discover the reason for the agonies that I was experiencing. I had never experienced a pain of such magnitude and such agonies in my conscience. In a sense, their cause lay in my sufferings – it became clear to me that the reason behind them was my drinking. I was astonished by such an unexpected and – so it seemed – totally unpredictable experience. I stopped drinking solely because of the influence of the torment which I had experienced. My attempts to resort once again to wine did not come to anything, because from then on wine ceased to give me any satisfaction. All this happened of its own accord and seemingly without any effort on my part.

When my consciousness had become free from the abnormal influence of alcohol, I began to be far more successful in searching for theatrical truth. I was able to compare my appearances on stage when I was sober with when I was inebriated, and an important point became clear to me. An actor who gets drunk before appearing on stage loses – without being aware of it – the special quality of creative objectivity towards himself. He is not in a position to observe his acting objectively as an onlooker. He *does not know* how he is acting. He feels the excitement to which he has surrendered himself, but he is not free in this excitement, he is seized by it and he cannot take responsibility for the result of his 'creativity'. By contrast, the actor who is possessed of a normal state of mind must – while he is acting on stage – 'see' himself just as freely and objectively as his audience sees him. He himself must receive an impression from his acting just as he would if he were a spectator. The true creative state consists precisely of the

fact that the actor who is experiencing *inspiration* switches off his own self and allows that *inspiration* to work within him. His personality is surrendered to the power of his *inspiration* and he himself can admire the results of its effect on his own personality. Every artist, every actor who has experienced true inspiration, knows this. Such objectivity saves the actor's creative work from his own coarsely cerebral interventions.[65]

It is often said that creativity must stem from the depths of the artist's subconscious life, but this is possible only if the artist knows how to relate objectively to himself and does not allow his coarse thoughts and feelings to interfere with the work of his subconscious.

'In vain, artist, do you imagine that you are the creator of your own creations [. . .]'*

or

'Until Apollo calls the poet
To the holy sacrifice [. . .]'†

Thus do the poets speak about inspiration and about the objectivity of the artist with which it is associated. An actor who seeks his 'inspiration' in wine never experiences true inspiration. He dooms himself to a cruel self-deception.

My ability to relate objectively to myself can to a significant degree be attributed to a certain seemingly insignificant trait in my destiny. This comprises my capacity to be forever finding myself in ridiculous situations over trifling matters – and by laughing at myself, I learn to be objective towards myself. (The difference between me and Epikhodov‡ is that Epikhodov is unable to laugh at his 'misfortunes' and so he experiences his destiny as tragic.)

For example, there was an occasion when I had a complementary ticket for the cinema, and through a misunderstanding I was removed with a yell from the queue at the entrance.

Or when I am greeting or saying farewell to someone, I often do not receive an answer.

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* From a poem by Alexey Konstantinovich Tolstoy. (Editors' note.)

† From the poem 'Poet' by Alexander Pushkin. (Editors' note.)

‡ Epikhodov is a comic character from Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* whom Michael Chekhov performed at the Suvorin Theatre (1910) and at the MAT (1913). (Editors' note.)

Plate 33 Michael Chekhov as Epikhodov in *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov. MAT. 1914

Or when I am in conversation with people whom I do not know very well and I try, out of extreme courtesy, to find polite and pleasing expressions, I sometimes say 'thank you' instead of 'you're welcome', 'bless you' instead of 'hello', and 'sorry' instead of 'goodbye'.

I was once visiting Fyodor Shalyapin* and I was sitting there feeling self-conscious. We were drinking tea. I took a sip from my glass and before I had managed to swallow, I noticed that there was a silence at

* Fyodor Shalyapin (1873–1938), opera singer. (Editors' note.)

the table. As I was frightened of swallowing loudly, I kept the tea in my mouth. Everyone continued to sit in silence. I felt that I was blushing and that someone would now ask me about something in order to get me out of my embarrassing state. I decided to swallow the tea, but the swallowing action was not successful, and the tea dribbled slowly in a thin stream onto the tablecloth as if from a syringe.

If one could find the right attitude to all these and similar trifles, then they could be considerably significant.

* * *

The more serious my attitude to the theatre was and the more I worked theoretically on questions of the new acting technique, the more complex my relationship to the audience became. Previously I had felt the audience to be a single, undifferentiated being and I trembled before this being, whose approval I sought and whose reproach I feared. But little by little, other feelings also began to come to me from the auditorium. I began to perceive different elements in the audience. I was no longer indifferent to who was sitting in the auditorium. I began to feel the will of the spectators, their wishes, their moods.

An auditorium has a multitude of different hues and every evening endows it with new nuances. The mood in the auditorium can be good or malicious, frivolous or serious, inquisitive or indifferent, reverential or undisciplined. But in the overall mood in the auditorium, I could also distinguish a silent struggle taking place between individual groups. Previously, none of this would have entered my consciousness and I would act as my mood indicated. But with my new sensitivity to the audience, my acting also changed. I began to act in the way that the spectators of each particular day wanted. This tormented me, because I felt that I was losing my independence and being subordinated to an alien wish. This torment was all the greater, the more superficial and frivolous the mood in the audience. In order to placate them, I began to act more coarsely and simply, almost *explaining* my acting. But the will of the auditorium was at times so strong that I could not overcome it. Every performance (especially to begin with) was a difficult experience for me and I asked myself how I could get out of this difficult situation.

I found the answer in a new technique of acting. I understood that members of the audience have the right to influence the actor during a performance and that the actor should not try to avoid this. The objectivity to which I have referred above is the very means by which to give the audience the possibility of influencing the actor and contributing its particular nuance to the performance. This is how it will always be for an actor if he is really inspired. A contact between audience and actor is established only when the actor loves the audience, *every audience*, and when he offers them his stage image *as it arises today*, letting this image of the character do everything that his inspiration – in which the will of the auditorium also lives – demands of it.

It is possible, for example, to avail oneself of the advice and suggestions of someone in whom one has confidence and whose opinion one values by surrendering oneself in this manner to his influence. For instance, I often make use of the suggestions of Alexander Cheban, without involving him personally. I mentally sit him down in the auditorium during performances or rehearsals and I let him influence me. As I do this, I feel how my acting changes, how it becomes ennobled and how distinct my gestures, words and entire sections of the part become. The artistic intuition, taste and skill of Cheban, whom I wholeheartedly trust as an artist, are beginning to work on me or, to be more precise, *within me*.

The actor who 'imagines that he is the creator of his own creations' alienates the audience and arouses a protest within it. Why does the poet say that Apollo calls him to a holy *sacrifice*? Why a sacrifice? Because *surrendering* oneself to inspiration and through that inspiration to the *audience itself and to the spirit of the time or epoch*, etc., amounts to offering a *sacrifice*.[66] An actor who loves his own arbitrariness, his personal will in art, does not know what kind of sacrifice is involved in creativity, and he will never be able to respond either to his epoch or the demands of his time.

How many people in our day speak about 'being in tune with the time'* and yet how little they understand what this 'being in tune' is![67] How often I am reproached for staging *Hamlet*, which has no relevance

* This literally translates as 'being in consonance with the times'. See Endnote 67 *TPOTA*. (Editors' note.)

to our time. But is it really *Hamlet*, or any other old classical play for that matter, that is at issue here? *Hamlet* conceals within it inexhaustible riches for our age and the point at issue is not the play itself, but rather *how and for whom* we perform *Hamlet*.

I remember one performance of *Hamlet*, when our audience consisted entirely of teachers who had gathered in Moscow from the whole of the RSFSR.* I recall how greedily the audience drank in everything that happened on the stage, and how much which was new and unique this audience brought to the performance. I am grateful to these teachers who visited us for the unspoken corrections and changes which they brought to the performance. The new acting technique of which I have been speaking is the key to being 'in tune with the times'. It is the new actor who works at deep level, the actor who *sacrificially* offers himself up to the audience, who is the key to the contemporaneity of every era. The greatness of the classics lies in their ability to go far beyond the limits of their time and to encompass the concerns of future ages; they will come to life and speak to us in our own language if, instead of stifling and decrying them, we put at their disposal a new technique, a new art and a new actor capable of presenting the classic in question in *the way that this age demands*.

The new actor must first learn – with the help of this new technique – to *sacrifice* his self-will, his personality, before he can recognize, understand and accept with his new consciousness the wishes of the new kind of spectator. Neither theoretical tracts nor the abstract effusions of the modern philosophers of the theatre will ever be able to gain access to an actor's mind. An actor will not be able to hear or understand those who do not know the mystery of the *present*. It is impossible to *persuade* an actor to live in the *present* unless one has shown him his – *the actor's* – path by which he can achieve this. The actor must hear the word that sounds out of the present time *not from the theoreticians of the theatre, but from the audience itself, from the living spectator – in the evening, during the performance*. But for this, he needs an organ with which he can hear this word of the present time, and this organ is the new acting technique which trains the actor to *sacrifice* himself within his art, rather than exercise his arbitrary self-will.

* The Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic. (Translator's note.)

My heart is wrung with pain for the theatre when I see how malicious 'theoreticians and experts of the *modern* theatre' summon the public to a cruel and remorseless fixing of the theatre! On the other hand, how one's heart rejoices to know that there aren't actually that many 'experts' and 'theoreticians' of the theatre and that the true experts, those who love and understand the theatre, do not and will not allow them to destroy the young shoots of a genuinely new theatre which is appearing. For this, we owe these experts and patient guardians of the theatre our deepest thanks!

It is clear to me that the most urgent task of the actor is to re-shape himself, his technique, his being as an actor. The theatre not only needs a new repertoire for its salvation, but a new kind of actor! I recall the joy that Moissi[68] gave me with his thoughts about the technique that is necessary for a real actor. I remember the love with which he explained to me how the diaphragm and the breathing apparatus need to be trained and how to use the vocal chords and so on. He would place his fingers on my stomach and as he did so he would let out a cry of delight, looking at me as though the cry came not from himself, but from me. I saw how he loves and values technique and what an immense significance he ascribes to it. He is absolutely right! And who needs technique if not the gifted, fiery and temperamental Russian actor? I was happy when I learnt that Konstantin Stanislavsky speaks very highly of Moissi and advises young actors to learn from him.

An actor has considerable responsibilities to the audience, but the audience also has certain responsibilities to the actor. I have often observed that a performance runs worse than it should have done with whatever particular audience it had on that specific day, simply because the audience (or, to be more precise, a certain part of it) was insufficiently attentive at the very start of the performance. The moment when the curtain opens is a moment which the actor always experiences in a particular way. This is the moment when the actor receives the first communication from the auditorium, and often this communication is the sad message that the audience is 'not ready'. Whether the actor is conscious of this or not, he loses something of his power when he receives an unfavourable communication from the auditorium. The audience can enhance the quality of the performance through its participation in it, but it can also lower it through an excessive calmness and

a passive awaiting of impressions. The audience must *want* to see a good performance, and it will see one if it *wills* to do so. A performance consists not only of the actors, but also of the audience. With what envy did I watch the audience at the International Chess Tournament in Moscow in 1925! In the presence of Lasker, Capablanca, Marshall and other great chess masters, the audience demonstrated what a power it conceals within itself, and what performances it could make possible if it would only offer Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Moskvin* and others the same attentiveness that it gave to Réti, Torre, Bogolyubov† and so on!

I should like to say a great deal about the relationship between the actor and the audience, but I shall leave further development of this theme to my other book, which will be particularly concerned with such questions regarding the theatre.‡

I have been speaking at length about this new technique of acting. But have I mastered this technique myself? No, not yet. This is the frontier at which I am now standing and from which I am casting my eye to my past and to my future. I am preparing myself to adopt this new technique in the future, I await it and I hunger for it. The few attempts that I have made to master it have demonstrated to me its immeasurable depth and value. I am looking forward with hope and faith. I have inwardly finished with everything that is old in the theatre, and it is agonizingly difficult for me to continue living amid these old ways and I battle against the obstacles that lie on the path to the new. Actually, I have not yet acted a single part as it ought to be acted, and if anyone were to ask me which of my roles I regard as the most successful, I would have to reply in all sincerity: the one that I have not yet played.

* * *

This English translation of *The Path of the Actor* is taken from the current Russian edition: *Mikhail Chekhov. Literaturnoe nasledie. V 2 tomakh*. Izdanie

* Ivan Moskvin (1874–1946), actor at the MAT/MAAT. (Editors' note.)

† Along with Lasker, Capablanca and Marshall, Réti, Torre and Bogolyubov were all chess players. (Editors' note.)

‡ See Endnote 38 *TPOTA*.

2-e. Moskva, 'Iskusstvo', 1995. T. 1. (*Michael Chekhov. Literary Heritage in 2 volumes*. 2nd edition. Moscow, 'Art', 1995. V. 1.) It was published (under some minor technical editorial revision) from the text of the First Edition: Chekhov, Mikh. Al. *Put' aktera*, [Leningrad] 'Academia' 1928. Commissioned as the 4th issue of the series 'Theatre Memoirs. (The Destiny of the Theatre and the Life of the Theatre as Portrayed by the Figures of the Stage)'.

Part 2

LIFE AND ENCOUNTERS

(in extracts)

10*

I still retained my interest in yogis, but once, when I was passing the window of the 'Writers' Bookshop', my eye alighted upon on a book entitled *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds, and its Attainment* by Rudolf Steiner.[1] I smiled and thought: 'If it were indeed possible to know *how* to attain this knowledge, surely it would have been attained long ago and there would be no point in the author publishing his book.' All the same, I bought the book with the intriguing title, read it and although I put it to one side, I did so without my initial irony.

The author's name meant nothing to me. On one occasion only had Stanislavsky mentioned Rudolf Steiner in passing (when he was inaccurately setting out Steiner's ideas on speech) and that was all I knew about him. Yoga led me gradually to the teachings of theosophy[2] and I got to know some of the members of the Theosophical Society. [. . .]† I made quite a thorough study of theosophical literature and was unsettled by its extreme orientalism. Although at the time I was still not familiar with the esoteric aspect of Christianity, it nevertheless seemed to me that theosophy underestimates the significance of Christ and the Mystery of Golgotha. Was India the final and highest stage in the spiritual development of mankind? Was Christ, like the Buddha, Zarathushtra and Hermes,[3] merely one of the Teachers? I began to search for answers to the many questions that interested me with regard to Christianity. [. . .]

I remembered Rudolf Steiner's book and read it again. This time it was the tone that the author used when speaking about the processes and Beings of the spiritual world which made a particular impression on me. There were no 'secrets', 'mysticism', or the desire to impress

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* Chekhov divided *Life and Encounters* into numbered sections, or mini-chapters.

† The suspension points throughout this text indicate where extracts from the author's original work have been edited out. (Editors' note.)

Plate 34 (opposite) Michael Chekhov as the mad beggar-villager Pashka in the German film *Troika* directed by Vladimir Strijevsky. 1930

in his descriptions of that world. The author's simple, lucid, scientific style made the facts that he presented simple and lucid too. Whatever was beyond the reach of sense perception was made accessible to reason.

I read the whole row of books by Steiner and this careful perusal provided answers to the questions that preoccupied me at the time.* I learned, for instance, that the spiritual world and its Beings are developing and changing in the same way as the physical world and its beings are. *History* is not just taking place on Earth. The spiritual world was different in Ancient Indian times from what it is today, and clinging to the old while timorously disregarding the new knowledge that is coming from the spiritual world is tantamount to condemning oneself to spiritual atavism. I also learned that a true science of the spirit has no need to negate materialism, since it confines itself to the sphere in which it *actually* belongs and does not claim to be *the universal and exclusively possible* world-view. [. . .]

Later on I became convinced by how practical the principles of Anthroposophy are, how firmly this science stands on the Earth, and how intimately it is connected with our culture. There is no room for unsubstantiated flights of fancy in Anthroposophy. Steiner says that nothing presented by the science of the spirit should be accepted mindlessly. The anthroposophist is supposed to *think* about what the researcher of the spiritual world presents him, not *believe* it. Authority has no part to play in Anthroposophy. Those desirous of developing their higher organs of perception can carry out the relevant exercises, and *each individual* is capable of experiencing for himself in the spiritual world what Anthroposophy describes. The world of the spirit is only a 'mystery' to a person who *does not wish* to exert himself sufficiently to gain access into it.

The first and fundamental exercise suggested by Steiner cultivates the ability to think logically, clearly and actively. Without having this at the outset, the aspiring clairvoyant may become prey to illusions and submerge himself not in the spiritual world, but in the realm of make-believe and self-deception.

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* Chekhov's serious research into Anthroposophy had actually begun in 1921 under the guidance of Andrey Bely. (Editors' note.)

However, the main and decisive realization for me was that Christ is central to everything that Steiner expounds. Anthroposophy opened itself to me as a modern form of Christianity. This 'encounter' with Anthroposophy was the happiest period in my life. [. . .]

15

[. . .] I organized training sessions with exercises for actors who wanted to perfect and develop their technique.* The entire company (with the exception of a few members) took part in them. [. . .]

Two of the actors from our company showed a particular, heightened interest in these new ideas for the theatre. They expressed their delight about the new approach to aesthetics and especially about the fact that spirituality had become concrete and practically applied in the way in which I had succeeded in embodying it through exercises and productions. They knew that the source of my spiritual knowledge, and particularly the method in which that knowledge was being applied in practice within an artistic setting, was Anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner's Eurythmy,[4] his teaching on speech, etc., but they kept silent about that for the time being and spoke enthusiastically about *my* new ideas. However, by some strange coincidence, they were the very actors who were absent most of the time from my classes. (I learned too late what they were actually doing during that time.)

Particularly at the beginning, our rehearsals took the form more of experiments than professional work in the usual sense of the word. With each new production, we had the opportunity of studying and devising new methods of acting and directing.† I stopped taking an interest in what was happening outside the theatre because I was so engrossed in my artistic work. I neglected my social duties, I didn't attend meetings of the Moscow City Council‡ and I used to read out my regular reports on the Council's activity from an 'aide-memoire'. My friends

* These training sessions were held in the MAAT 2. See Endnote 38 *TPOTA*. (Editors' note.)

† i.e. Chekhov is referring to the productions of *Hamlet*, *Petersburg*, etc. (Editors' note.)

‡ As a Director of the MAAT 2, Chekhov was a member of the Moscow City Council. (Editors' note.)

warned me repeatedly of the danger to which I was exposing both the theatre and myself by acting in this manner. My talks on art at plants and factories* were highly coloured by the spiritual element in my world-view, just as my activities in the theatre were. [. . .]

A letter addressed to me once arrived at the theatre from the Narkompros.† It said (in what were still friendly terms) that my activity as artistic director of the theatre was deemed not entirely satisfactory and that I should stop spreading the ideas of Rudolf Steiner among the actors of the theatre entrusted to me. A sheet of paper was attached to the letter with quotations from Steiner's books. They elucidated the ideas I had expressed during rehearsals and training sessions with the actors. The choice of quotations had been made carefully and intelligently. (It was the work of the two actors who had been so devoted to *my* ideas and who had often been absent from training sessions, hiding behind the door-curtains). They had written down the phrases that to their mind were suspect, and then they had found the relevant quotations in Steiner's works.[5] [. . .]

Circumstances were compelling me to renounce my views with ever increasing urgency. Resistance was becoming futile. My activity as an actor, director and head of the theatre gradually came to an end by itself. It was potentially dangerous even for members of our theatre to communicate with me.[6] Despite the fact that a resolution for my arrest was shortly to be approved by the GPU,[7] I nevertheless managed – due to particular circumstances[8] – to obtain an international passport and thus I was allowed to leave Russia legally.‡ However, I was still not certain that I would remain abroad forever. I sent a letter to the Narkompros from Berlin, setting out the terms on which I could envisage my return. I did not receive a reply, although I soon learned that my letter had been read, discussed and even approved.[9]

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* It was usual practice at the time to be mutual patrons of institutions both of culture and art (to bring enlightenment) and of plants and factories (to develop workman ideology). (Editors' note.)

† See Endnote 41 *TPOTA*.

‡ Michael and Ksenya Chekhov left for Berlin at the beginning of July 1928. For a long time after, the Chekhovs lived in Europe with their Soviet passports as the subjects of Soviet Russia. It was not until 1946 that Chekhov was granted American citizenship. (Editors' note.)

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Berlin.* In festive mood and armed with a small volume of *Hamlet* in German (I had already learned the lines of the first act and half of the soliloquy '*Sein oder nicht sein*'†) I went into the office of a well-known impresario and art lover who was doing 'good business'. He gave me a friendly reception and, showing me a seat, he almost embarrassed me with his overly blatant compliment:

'It's not every day that Chekhovs come to visit us from Russia,' he said.

I understood the short pause to be the prelude to an important, enjoyable conversation. I looked at him with the affection of a person who is voluntarily surrendering to the power of another. I could feel the solidly bound German edition pressing pleasantly against my side.

'Well,' said the famous impresario at last, 'we're going to do some good business with you!'

I made a slight bow and spread my arms out elegantly (as if to say, 'I'm completely at your service') and thereupon I realized that I had unconsciously imitated Stanislavsky in moments when he was aware of his greatness, but wanted to be unassuming and pleasing. 'Moissi came to Moscow with his Hamlet and here I am in Berlin,' I thought with satisfaction, 'it's like a return visit.'

'Can you dance?' the impresario suddenly asked me, and waiting a few seconds for a reply, he repeated his question, flapping his arms in the air for the sake of clarity.

'Me?'

'You.'

'What dances are there in *Hamlet*?' I wondered. 'There's fencing and mime. What an unpleasant mistake. He should have known that.'

'Why dancing?' I enquired with a smile.

'We'll begin with cabaret. I'll turn you into another Grock.‡ Can you play an instrument? Sing? Even just a little bit?'

'I beg your pardon,' I interrupted him, turning cold inside, 'I'm actually Hamlet. I came to play Hamlet.'

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* i.e. 1928. (Editors' note.)

† 'To be or not to be'. (German.) (Translator's note.)

‡ Grock – the famous Swiss clown. (Chekhov's note.) Original name: Charles Adrien Wettach (1880–1959). (Editors' note.)

'Hamlet's not important,' said the impresario dismissively, 'the public need something different. My terms are as follows: a contract for one year *with me*. A monthly salary of such and such. I have the right to sell you at my own discretion, including for films. *Abgemacht*?'*

I wasn't sure whether what happened next was a pause or whether I flopped somewhere. Like one of Dostoyevsky's characters, a multitude of thoughts passed through my mind in a second. In Russia, the Repertkom† and the GPU had fought with me for two years and had been unable to get rid of my *Hamlet*, but here without a struggle and with a single word someone destroys your dream, purpose and goal! What is the source of his strength? Is it money? Is this the capitalist system then? My entire life in the theatre stood before me with its struggles, its wealth of ideals and its faith in the public. For more than twenty years, Stanislavsky, Shalyapin and Steiner had been instilling the belief in the great mission of the theatre into me. In Moscow people had gone to see *Hamlet* with a sense of veneration; the Czechoslovak Government had invited me to their country on a permanent basis for the very purpose of creating Shakespearean theatre there, a theatre of exalted tragedy and comedy.[10]

'But, after all, not all audiences want cabaret,' I said aloud. 'It's *Hamlet* that many of them want.'

'Two dozen half-witted Shakespearean scholars! They'll be sitting in an empty auditorium with their heads buried in their books, checking whether you've spoken the lines correctly. There's no "business" in that. Believe me, my sweet friend,' and he touched my sleeve in a fatherly manner, 'I know the public better than you do!'

I stood up.

'Think it over,' he said.

'I will,' I replied and we parted.

The solid edition in my pocket was still reminding me of its presence.[11]

Two days later, I was back in the famous impresario's office. He had wired Reinhardt‡ about my arrival and he now showed me the

* 'Agreed?' (German.) (Translator's note.)

† Repertory Committee responsible for the censorship of Soviet theatre at that time. (Editors' note.)

‡ Max Reinhardt (1873–1943), German director and producer. (Editors' note.)

reply from Salzburg. (As with all Reinhardt's telegrams, its length rendered it more like a letter than a telegram.) Reinhardt 'was pleased I had arrived' and invited me to stay with him in Salzburg to discuss forthcoming work.

'My congratulations,' said the impresario, shaking my hand with laughter. 'My terms are as follows.'

He proceeded to set out his new terms on the basis of Reinhardt's invitation.

A second telegram from Salzburg informed me that Reinhardt had been urgently recalled to Berlin on business and that he hoped to meet me there.

A luxurious flat. Huge rooms reminiscent of a palace. Reinhardt came out to meet me and led me by the arm all the way to his large desk. He showed me a seat and sat down opposite. His large eyes, which were smiling, intelligent and penetrating, were fixed upon me. I was embarrassed.

'I know what role you want to play,' he said.

I had a secret dream. It was also a Shakespeare character. No one knew of it. Reinhardt named the character. I was totally embarrassed.*

After a few general remarks, Reinhardt enquired about Stanislavsky and his method of working. He lowered his eyes and shook his head sadly when he heard that, at the MAAT, plays rehearse for months on end and that there are only two or three new productions added to the repertoire each year.

'We Germans have a different method,' he said.

I do not know whether he pitied the Germans or us.

'*Eine wunderbare Rolle*!'† he exclaimed, suddenly coming out with his business proposal. His cunning, intriguing gaze said, 'You are delighted and waiting to hear what I will say next.' I involuntarily complied with his charming gaze and begged him enthusiastically to tell me about the role. His proposal was for me to play Skid in *Artisten*.‡ Skid – the clown! It was a tragicomic role. Vladimir

* Probably an allusion to the role of King Lear. (Original Russian editors' note.)

† 'A wonderful role!' (German.) (Translator's note.)

‡ *Artisten* (*Artists* – originally called *Burlesque*), a play by George Watters and Arthur Hopkins. (Editors' note.)

Sokolov* had played Skid very successfully in Berlin. Reinhardt wanted me to play it in Vienna. I was to leave for Vienna immediately to work with his assistant on improving my spoken German and learning clowning stunts before he himself arrived. But what was meant to happen with *Hamlet* then? As I was leaving, I asked Reinhardt why he no longer staged the classics.

'The time's not right,' he replied. 'It's not what audiences want right now. But the theatre will return to the classics.'

Reinhardt took me to the door, still watching my every movement with his penetrating gaze.

Vienna. Reinhardt's assistant, Doctor S.,† a short, middle-aged man of square build, gave me a polite, but dry and stern reception.

'*Herr Professor informierte mich, daß Sie ein berühmter russischer Schauspieler sind. Sehr angenehm*,'‡ he said and immediately began to correct my speech. He stood next to me and corrected my every word with such a loud, German, guttural voice that my head began to ache. Half an hour later, he didn't so much correct my speech as imperiously impose his intonation. I tried to protest but he said, '*Aber hören Sie mal, lieber Tschekhoff, das muß unbedingt so gesprochen werden*.'§

And he continued to shout his guttural sounds into me again. I began to hate him.

'*Aber lieber, lieber Herr Tschekhoff*,' Doctor S. said insistently, '*Sie verstehen ja nicht! Das ist doch kein Shakespeare! Kein* Hamlet!'¶ I was immediately on my guard.

Doctor S. suggested that I should listen and compare Shakespearean speech with the speech he was trying to drum into me.

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* Vladimir Sokolov (1889–1962), Russian actor-emigrant, who played Skid in Reinhardt's extremely popular production in the Deutsches Theater at that time. (Editors' note.)

† The identity of Doctor S. remains unconfirmed. (Editors' note.)

‡ 'The professor informed me that you are a famous Russian actor. Pleased to meet you.' (German.) (Translator's note.)

§ 'Listen here, my dear Chekhov, that must definitely be pronounced like this.' (German.) (Translator's note.)

¶ 'But dear, dear Mr Chekhov, you don't understand! It's not Shakespeare after all! It's not *Hamlet*!' (German.) (Translator's note.)

Flinging his arms upwards, he began to shout: '*O schmölze doch dies allzufeste Fleisch*!'* and his face reddened from all the shouting. When his straining reached its utmost pitch, he started to twist and turn which made his short, squarish figure even smaller. He rained blows upon his head with his hands and was suffocating from lack of air.

'Would it be better for me to go back?' I thought, as I tried not to listen to Doctor S., but remembering that I was abroad and that there was nowhere 'to go back' to, I dismissed the thought as being useless.

'*Das ist Shakespeare*,' said Doctor S., all wet and red in the face. '*Jetzt hören. Sieh mal zu*.'†

He then began to recite in a rapid and monotonous fashion the long German phrases of Skid one after another, raising his voice suddenly on the last word before a comma or lowering it before a full stop. His stubby forefinger rose and fell as he did so. Doctor S. tortured me for about four hours until he finally went home with a migraine.

The regular lessons in acrobatics commenced the next day and soon exhausted me physically too. I was agonized with embarrassment and muscle pain by having to jump over my own leg (which I was supposed to be holding in my hand). My desperation helped me to manage to jump onto a table without taking a run-up and to fly over objects 'like a fish'. I hoped that rehearsals would begin with Reinhardt's arrival and that my fate would take a turn for the better, but the company arrived without him and Doctor S. was put in charge of fitting me into the play. From the day the company arrived there were only eight days left to the première in the Theater an der Wien. Skid is the leading male role and appears in all four acts with many lines in each one of them. The foreign language, the intonation of Doctor S., the acrobatics and my terror at the approaching première hindered me in learning my lines. There was a young actress who had arrived with the company and who, like me, was also new to the cast of *Artisten*. Doctor S. began to coach her, which took the pressure off me somewhat. During rehearsals the actors, who were bored with their parts, rattled off their lines so fast that I found it hard to catch my cues.

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* 'O! that this too, too solid flesh would melt' (*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 2.) (German.) (Translator's note.)

† 'That is Shakespeare. Now listen. Watch this.' (German.) (Translator's note.)

Reinhardt arrived a few days before the opening night and the 'real rehearsals' began. They took place at night in his flat. Towards morning, when the nervous excitement started, the actors livened up and everything worked '*ausgezeichnet*'.* To my astonishment, Reinhardt was in no hurry and had not arranged the night rehearsals to achieve more in the few days that remained: no, they were planned for the purpose of eliciting the very excitement that made the rehearsal '*ausgezeichnet*'. Reinhardt often employed this method in his work. At six in the morning, when it was already quite light, the noisy crowd of actors spilled out into the streets of Vienna and roamed the city for a long time, sharing their impressions of the night. Doctor S. walked in the midst of them in a long and heavy overcoat which was as square as he was.

'Mut, Mut, lieber Herr . . . Herr . . .'†

'Tschekhoff,' I prompted him, trying to pronounce my surname with an accent.

'*Mut, lieber Herr Tschekhoff*,' said the actors to cheer me up. But I had already lost '*Mut*' ages ago. I could feel myself hurtling into a chasm and I was ashamed, sometimes getting angry and sometimes sinking into apathy.

How I envied the new actress! Not knowing her part and apparently having no clear picture of what she was playing, she kept on repeating the same sequence of theatre techniques, threading them like beads on a thin string. When the string broke, she would swirl her skirt sweetly, laugh out loud and chuck Doctor S. on the cheek.

'*Aber meine Herrschaften*,'‡ he said in embarrassment and began all the more painstakingly to coach her.

The dress rehearsal took place on the day before the opening night. We had costumes, make-up, lighting and the full stage set for the first time. Workers and two flushed and exasperated assistant directors ran around the stage, Doctor S. walked to and fro in a dignified manner, and half-made-up and half-costumed actors bustled about. I could hardly recognize them. It struck me that there seemed to be some new faces

* 'Excellently'. (German.) (Translator's note.)
† 'Courage, courage, dear Mr . . . Mr . . .' (German.) (Translator's note.)
‡ 'But, ladies and gentlemen'. (German.) (Editors' note.)

among them who had not taken part in the rehearsals up until now. Taking a closer look I noticed a whole crowd of new characters who were made-up and dressed just as we all were. They were real clowns and cabaret artistes whom Reinhardt had invited to create a circus atmosphere and amuse the audience. I recalled with longing and affection my faraway, beloved MAT and its atmosphere. There was Stanislavsky, walking about on tiptoe in the wings, the ever stern Nemirovich-Danchenko who was so kind and affectionate on dress rehearsal days, the actors with their trepidation and excitement, and the particular, unforgettable silence of that unique theatre.

Emitting cheerful shrieks and laughs, the acrobats, jugglers and clowns milled about, slid along the floor without changing their leg positions, fell flat on their backs or their faces, rolled themselves up into balls, tumbled in mid-air, tossed heavy objects with ease and failed to move light ones from the spot – all this they executed gracefully, comically and precisely.

'My God!' I thought to myself. 'What are my awkward jumps over my leg and my wretched fish-like flights going to look like in the middle of this brilliant troupe?'

However, I was so exhausted and depressed that I didn't have the energy to ask Reinhardt to cut my 'stunts'. A muddled, nervous rehearsal began. Reinhardt would appear now on stage, now in the wings, now in the auditorium. He was no less agitated and irritated than the rest of us, but he hid his state of excitement artfully beneath a cold and impassive exterior. He even moved more slowly than usual. The rehearsal was interrupted every few minutes. No one was bothered about the acting. The entire time was devoted to the lighting, the set, the costumes and the acts of the clowns and acrobats which had been inserted.

My first 'stunt' was the jump onto the table on the spot. I landed on the floor with a bang. My partner shrieked in shock, Reinhardt shouted in the auditorium, and my grazed knees and elbows smarted. Reinhardt, who only then noticed that the toes of my clown's boots were one and a half feet long, cut all my 'stunts'. The rehearsal finished at dawn. The première was that evening.

'Would it be better for me to get drunk?' I thought, but I couldn't summon up enough will power even for that.

I went on stage with a feeling of dull indifference. The circus folk and acrobats were a wild success. The first and second acts were over. The third act contains Skid the clown's main scene: he speaks a dramatic, tragicomic soliloquy.

I began. Skid's first few phrases sounded strange to me.

'They aren't guttural, they aren't German-sounding at all. They come from the heart. This must be the "*russische Stimme*",'* flashed through my mind. 'How simply he speaks, quite different from the rehearsal. This is probably because I'm not acting. I must make an effort. No, I'll wait a minute longer, I have no force left, the soliloquy is so long.'

Skid was speaking, and it suddenly seemed to me that I really understood for the first time the meaning of his words, his unrequited love for Bonny and his drama. My exhaustion and calmness had turned me into a spectator of my own acting.

'How right it is that his voice is so warm and intimate. Can that be why there is such an exciting, tense atmosphere? The audience are sitting up in their seats, they're listening carefully and the actors are listening, and Bonny too. During rehearsals she was only concerned about herself. How could I have failed to see how delightful she is! Of course Skid loves her!'

I watched Skid intently. Bonny began her sad song at the piano. I looked at Skid sitting down there on the floor and I was struck by it, as if I could 'see' his feelings, his pain and agitation. And his way of speaking struck me as odd too: he would suddenly change tempo and break up his phrases with pauses that were unexpected but so appropriate, or he would emphasize something illogically or make whimsical gestures.

'A professional clown,' I thought.

For the first time I saw that my fellow actors had a real, living interest in Skid's words and in the drama of his soul. I noticed with astonishment that I was beginning to anticipate what would happen next inside him. His longing grew. I began to feel sorry for him, and at that moment his eyes flooded with tears. I got a shock!

'That's sentimental, there's no need for tears, stop them!'

Skid choked back his tears and his eyes radiated strength instead. There was pain in it, a pain that was so tragic, close and familiar to the

* 'Russian voice'. (German.) (Translator's note.)

human heart. Skid stood up and walked around the stage with a strange gait, and all of a sudden he began to dance comically like a clown, just with his feet, and he was getting faster and faster. The passionate, precise, pointed words of the monologue whirled to the stalls, to the boxes, to the gallery.

'What is it? Where's it coming from? This isn't the way I rehearsed!'

My fellow actors stood up and pulled back to the walls of the pavilion.

'They didn't do that before either!'

Now I was able to conduct Skid's acting. My consciousness had split into two – at one and the same time, I was in the auditorium and standing beside myself and in each of my fellow actors on stage and I knew what all of them were feeling, wanting and expecting.

'Tears!' I suggested to the dancing Skid. 'Now you can cry!'

My tiredness had disappeared and there was only lightness, joy and happiness! The monologue was drawing to a close: what a pity, there was still so much left to express. Such complex, unexpected feelings were arising within me, and the clown's body had become so agile and pliable.

Then, all of a sudden, the whole of mine and Skid's being were filled with an awesome, almost unbearable force! It knew no limits, pervaded everything and could do anything! I felt terrified, and making an effort of will, I re-entered myself and with a sense of inertia uttered the two or three remaining sentences of the monologue.

That was the end of the act and the curtain fell. The audience, Reinhardt and even Doctor S. himself rewarded me generously for the torment that I had experienced in the previous few days. I was grateful and touched. I had now 'found the role', as it were, the torment was over and I started to play my clown with increasing satisfaction.[12]

For several years now, I had been endeavouring to set my theatrical experience in order, to systematize my observations and resolve a number of questions that were of interest to me. To this end, the experience I have just described was very instructive for me. At that time I was very preoccupied with the question of inspiration and how to gain access to it. I had already been close to solving it earlier, but now the correctness of my approach was confirmed by direct experience. (Earlier it had been familiar to me in a somewhat less pronounced form.)

Plate 35 Michael Chekhov as Skid in *Artisten* in the Theater an der Wien. 1928

In a gifted person there is a constant struggle taking place between his higher and lower Egos.* Each of them is seeking to gain the upper hand. The lower Ego, complete with its ambition, passions and egotistical agitation is the victor in everyday life. However, the other Ego is (or should be) the victor in the creative process. The lower Ego is inclined to deny the existence of the higher Ego completely and to attribute the latter's powers, capabilities and qualities *to itself*. By contrast, the higher Ego recognizes the existence of its double, but rejects its instincts of enslavement and possession. It wants to make the lower Ego the bearer of *its* ideas, feelings and forces. So long as the lower Ego says 'I', the higher Ego is condemned to silence, but it can free itself of the lower Ego, abandon it and (partially) disengage

* See Endnote 62 *TPOTA*.

from it, and then the lower Ego is silenced and recedes. A kind of division of consciousness occurs, with the higher Ego acting as the *source of inspiration* and the lower Ego as the bearer, the agent.

Interestingly, the higher Ego also becomes a bearer at such times. It is not closed off egotistically into itself, it is ready to acknowledge that the true source of creative ideas lies in even higher spheres. It observes and directs the lower Ego from outside, guiding it and *empathizing with* the imagined sufferings and joys of the character. This finds expression in the fact that although the actor on stage suffers, weeps, rejoices and laughs, at the same time he remains unaffected by these feelings *on a personal level*. Poor actors pride themselves on the fact that they sometimes succeed in having such 'feelings' on stage to the extent that they forget themselves completely! Such actors break the furniture, dislocate their fellow actors' arms and suffocate their lovers while on stage. Actresses who 'feel' this way often become hysterical off stage and are exhausted after the performance! However, actors who play with 'empathy' and a divided consciousness instead of using personal feelings, do not tire; on the contrary they feel a surge of new, health-giving and invigorating forces, which they receive from the higher Ego together with inspiration.

When I used to watch Shalyapin acting, for instance, I always 'suspected' that in his best moments on stage he lived in two different states of consciousness at once and acted without violating his own personal feelings. His son, Fyodor,* who is a friend of mine, confirmed my suspicions. He knew his father well as an artist, had many conversations with him and had a profound understanding of his father's inner world. This is what he said to me about him:

'My father was an intelligent actor,' and he added with a smile, 'intelligent and ingenious! Whatever exalted, creative state he was in, he never lost his self-control and he always observed his own acting "from the outside" as it were. "The thing is," he said to me, "in my case it is Don Quixote† who does the acting, and Shalyapin follows him and watches him act!" He always distinguished between himself and the

* Fyodor Fyodorovich Shalyapin (1905–92), film actor. (Editors' note.)

† Don Quixote in the opera *Don Quixote* by Jules Massenet was one of Shalyapin's favourite roles. (Editors' note.)

character he was acting on stage. "Who do you feel sorry for, your father or Don Quixote?" he asked my seven-year-old brother Borya,* who cried and kissed his father after a performance of *Don Quixote*.'

Fyodor also related to me his father's important words on the subject of '*being in empathy with the character*':

> 'As a member of the audience, I can weep because Don Quixote dies, but when I'm acting, I can *also* weep because he dies.' Elsewhere he said: 'In my case, it's not Susanin† who is weeping, it's me who weeps because I pity him. Particularly when he sings "Farewell, children". But sometimes you have to hold back the tears because they prevent you from singing. You have to have yourself under control.'

'Once when my father was still young,' Fyodor told me, 'he was at a performance of *Pagliacci*‡ somewhere in the provinces and was very surprised to see the singer who was performing Canio weeping real tears in the aria "Ridi, Pagliaccio". He even seemed to like it. But when my father went backstage between acts and saw the tenor still crying endlessly, he said: "You shouldn't 'feel' *such a way*! It isn't correct or professional. If you carry on like that you may well fall ill with consumption after two seasons!" When my father cried on stage, he cried out of empathy for the character and he never let himself get hysterical like Canio, for instance. He used to say, "I weep over my characters." But no one ever saw those tears. He hid them in embarrassment. It was his own intimate business and not for the public's gaze!'

I also found indications in Steiner's works on the division of consciousness experienced by great artists. It is well-known, for instance, that Goethe§ was able to continuously observe himself and all his feelings from the outside (even when he was in love!). It was only

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* Boris Shalyapin (1904–79), painter. 'Borya' is a diminutive form of 'Boris'. (Editors' note.)

† In the opera *Life for the Tsar* by Mikhail Glinka, Ivan Susanin is the main character who sacrifices his life to protect Russia from Polish invaders. (Editors' note.)

‡ Opera by Ruggiero Leoncavallo. (Editors' note.)

§ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), German writer, poet, playwright and philosopher. (Editors' note.)

Plate 36
Ksenya Chekhov and Fyodor Shalyapin at Sergey Rakhmaninov's villa, Klerfonten near Rambuie not far from Paris. 1931

Stanislavsky who didn't mention it explicitly, although he often referred to the 'subconscious' in the creative process, but this may perhaps be taken as an incomplete formulation on his part of the division of consciousness in the creative state.

Due to the fact that the exhaustion, indifference, desperation and acceptance of inevitable failure which I had experienced during the première of *Artisten* had involuntarily switched off my personality – along with its vanity, fear and nervousness – and thus partially released my higher Ego, the conditions had been created for inspiration to enter.*

In the case of great artists, the division of consciousness occurred by itself, but modern actors can learn this technique. (My thoughts on this topic are set out in detail in the book on the technique of acting.)† [. . .]

* It also seems that the fact Chekhov had to perform in a foreign language (an experience which was absolutely new to him) helped him to observe so clearly for the first time this division of his consciousness. (Editors' note.)

† See Endnote 38 *TPOTA*.

I was able to observe Reinhardt's work for two years.[13] He was the last representative of theatre in the 'by the grace of God' tradition. Objective knowledge of the laws of the stage and acting technique were alien to his inspired soul. His refined taste, fertile imagination and brilliant theatrical 'inventiveness' were instrumental in creating the practice and methods which were characteristic of Reinhardt. He always employed his methods, even though he himself did not understand the significance of them and was unable to pass them on to anybody else. You cannot pass on what you yourself do not understand, you cannot pass on the spontaneous force of talent – you can only pass on a *school*. However, Reinhardt did not create a school. He was able to *demonstrate* brilliantly to an actor, he could act out his role in front of him and speak his lines for him, but he couldn't provide the actor with the technical means necessary to achieve the desired results. [. . .]*

Thanks to his talent, his charming personality, his inner strength and his truly royal bearing, Reinhardt always created a majestic impression. No one would have thought for a moment that he was short in stature and not very handsome. Neither did I, until one circumstance forced me to 'see' him and worry.

A meeting between Reinhardt and Stanislavsky had been arranged and I was gravely concerned on account of my dear Max Reinhardt. Stanislavsky (the giant with the grey-haired head of a lion) and Reinhardt (who barely reached his shoulder) would be standing next to each other. Would the Professor be able to bear the comparison? Stanislavsky was on one of his visits to Berlin† and Reinhardt gave a dinner party in his honour. There were no more than ten guests. There was a festive, expectant atmosphere and many photographers. The table in Reinhardt's 'palace' was laid with exquisite taste. If I am not mistaken, this was the first meeting of the great directors.‡ My anxiety

* There is an extract omitted here in which Chekhov expands his understanding of Rudolf Steiner's teaching of the nature of sounds as 'gestures' themselves: these are given in a more concise form in *The Path of the Actor* (see pp. 79–80). (Editors' note.)

† This meeting took place between 10–14 October 1928. (Original Russian editors' note.)

‡ Stanislavsky's first meeting with Reinhardt was in 1923. (Original Russian editors' note.)

grew by the minute. I held both of them in great affection and did not want either of them to triumph over the other.

The small Reinhardt was sitting in a large armchair. Good Lord, how tiny he seemed to me at that moment! How I entreated him with my thoughts to stand up! How I wished that no one but I would notice that unbearably tall chair-back with its carved crown somewhere high above Reinhardt's head which turned him into a kind of old-fashioned portrait that was sliding down in its gilt frame. The huge, empty room overwhelmed my little darling even more, crucified as he was in the armchair. There was the sound of voices and footsteps in the neighbouring room. Stanislavsky had arrived. Reinhardt stood up (he was small, awfully small!) and slowly, very slowly (well done!) he went to the door. The servants drew back the heavy door-curtains and the figure of the grey-haired giant appeared. He stopped at the doors, screwing up his weak-sighted eyes and smiling, without as yet knowing at whom. There was a pause. But Reinhardt was still walking and walking. He kept one of his hands in his pocket. The people who were present were unable to endure the pause, and feeling uncertain, they smiled and bowed slightly. And Reinhardt was still walking up without increasing his pace. He was almost there. Suddenly, Stanislavsky spied him. He dashed towards him, shook his hand, and knowing very little German, he began to mutter some charming nonsense. Reinhardt's left hand slipped gracefully out of his pocket and hung elegantly by his side. His right hand suddenly stretched out, which probably forced Stanislavsky to make a step backwards or Reinhardt to pull himself back. There was now some distance between them. Reinhardt raised his head and looked up at Stanislavsky. But how did he do that? He did it in the way that a connoisseur looks at paintings by Raphael, Rembrandt and Leonardo[14] in an art gallery, without demeaning himself or losing his dignity; on the contrary, he calls forth the respect of the onlookers, who perhaps admire the 'connoisseur' no less than the painting.

My pounding heart counted several seconds of silence. Then the miracle happened in front of everybody's eyes: still keeping his distance, Reinhardt began to grow and grow until he had resumed the former majestic, regal figure of Max Reinhardt! The magician and enchanter had triumphed! (However could I have doubted you!) He led his guest through the hall and the more Stanislavsky fussed, the slower and calmer

Reinhardt moved. They were both superb: the one with his embarrassment and childlike openness and the other with the confident serenity of the connoisseur. Everyone understood the tone that was dictated by the meeting: *you had to be Reinhardt to know who Stanislavsky was*! Everybody was relieved and truly joyful.

The photographers fussed, the armchair (which was now so beautiful and unthreatening) was moved aside and the two giants stood side by side. And then there was a small *quid pro quo*. Reinhardt stretched out his hand and placed me next to him. He wanted the three of us to be photographed together, perhaps as a sign of courtesy towards Stanislavsky, to bestow honour upon *his* actor. The photographers, however, had their own ideas on this score. Exchanging hurried whispers, they shoved the armchair back, fussed around Stanislavsky and Reinhardt, smartly pushed me aside and clicked their cameras. After the tension that had preceded it, this episode triggered an attack of laughter in me, which I struggled virtually the whole evening to master. I'm afraid I laughed rather grossly when Reinhardt and Stanislavsky exchanged speeches, the one in German and the other in Russian, without understanding each other. When Stanislavsky replied to Reinhardt's speech, he was so embarrassed that even his Russian didn't sound Russian and it was difficult to grasp the meaning of what he was saying. Two of the guests spoke Russian and I kept looking for some sign of sympathy in their glances, but they stared stubbornly under the table.

There was a surprise planned for Stanislavsky at the end of the evening. A magnificent car was waiting for him in the drive of Reinhardt's 'palace'. It was Reinhardt's gift to his guest. I was probably being mischievous, but in the course of the evening I told Stanislavsky in a whisper what was awaiting him.[15] His face expressed alarm. However, not wanting to disappoint Reinhardt, he pretended not to know anything. The evening concluded and one of Reinhardt's Berlin theatre directors who spoke Russian led Stanislavsky downstairs. On seeing 'his' car, Stanislavsky was at a loss as to what to do and he wasn't certain whether he was already supposed to know about it or not. The chauffeur threw the door open and the director took off his hat and presented Stanislavsky with the car on behalf of Reinhardt. Stanislavsky threw up his hands, stepped back from the car and began to act a sequence of amazement, joy and gratitude. When the ceremony was over,

Stanislavsky got into the car, feeling weary and miserable. He asked me to drive to the hotel with him and said in a despondent and alarmed voice:

'My God, what am I going to do with it?!'

'With what?' I asked.

'Well, with this motor car? It's all very nice and touching, but what am I supposed to do with it? I can't take it with me. If I leave it here, it's somehow . . . I don't know. It's terrible, terrible. What did he do this for!'

When the car arrived at the hotel, Stanislavsky, with a lost expression on his face and his hands clasped to his chest, bowed several times to the chauffeur, said goodbye to me and disappeared into the hotel.

How charming Stanislavsky could be in moments of bewilderment or absent-mindedness! He would do and say the strangest things without ever noticing them himself. I once called on him in Berlin when he was expecting some count or other, whose visit could have compromised him with the Soviet authorities. When I entered, Stanislavsky had a bewildered look on his face.

'Sit down, Misha,' he said, looking at his watch and adding, 'one more fool will be here any moment now.'

I remember him once entertaining some eminent foreign guest at his house in Karetny Ryad in Moscow. He was also rather confused at the time. Stanislavsky sat the foreign guest down near the table at a place where he felt uncomfortable and too far away. Stanislavsky himself sat some distance apart from his guest and silently started to look him in the eyes with a vague smile. He bent forward about four times with his whole torso either to welcome his guest or make himself more comfortable in his chair. After the silence, he coughed and, looking in his guest's ear, he said:

'Perhaps you need a wee-wee?'

I often had the opportunity of meeting Stanislavsky in Berlin: he would read me extracts from the book he was writing at the time.*

Shortly afterwards, Meyerhold also arrived with the talented actress from his theatre, Zinaida Raikh.† I used to see them as well.[16] Meyerhold

* *An Actor Prepares*. (Chekhov's note.)

† Zinaida Raikh (1894–1939) was also Meyerhold's wife. (Editors' note.)

had often invited me to act in his theatre during my time in Moscow. I had always wanted to work on a role under his direction. This time he made a new proposal. Knowing my love of *Hamlet*, he told that he intended to stage the tragedy on his return to Moscow.[17] He started to tell me his plan for staging it, and seeing that I was listening so intently, he stopped, and looking askance at me slyly over his large nose, he said:

'I won't tell you, though. You'll steal it. Come to Moscow and we'll work together.'

I wasn't on such friendly terms with Zinaida Raikh. We often quarrelled, but Meyerhold pretended not to notice it. He wrote to me from Moscow inviting me to work in his theatre and guaranteeing me my artistic freedom, but I decided to remain abroad. That was the last straw for Zinaida Raikh. She wrote me a sharp and insulting letter in which she called me a 'traitor'. After that, Meyerhold stopped writing to me too.[18]

Plate 37 Michael Chekhov, Hans Schlettow and Olga Chekhov in the German film *Troika* directed by Vladimir Strijevsky. 1930

I was invited to work at the Moscow Maly Theatre* and at the MAAT. Kachalov visited us and said that one of the tenants of the house where he was living had died and that I could have one and a half rooms in return.

After saying goodbye to Stanislavsky and Meyerhold, I felt with sadness that I had become a German actor.[19]

17

The Habima Theatre came to Berlin on a short tour and to prepare several new productions.† I was pleased to see my old friends. The Habima wanted to add a Shakespeare play to their repertoire. They settled on *Twelfth Night* and proposed that I should stage it.[20] Work commenced and I immersed myself in the characteristic atmosphere of that theatre, which was already so familiar to me.

How amazing the Habima people are! They combine so many powerful, yet simultaneously contradictory elements: fanatical devotion and a cold, rational approach (to everything, even artistic work); inseparable friendship and unending disputes (not quarrels); complete openness to everything new in theatre and a reserve and pursuit of 'their own' aims, of which even they themselves had no clear picture. There was a general atmosphere of intense, resolute activity about them.

Twelfth Night is one of Shakespeare's plays where *ease* in the acting, the speaking of the lines and the psychology of the characters are prerequisites for conveying the essence of this romantic comedy. All the characters love or are in love, but none of them very deeply: there is no Romeo, Othello, Juliet or Desdemona among them. The Habima actors are heavy in body and soul. (Remember *The Dybbuk*.)‡ The

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* One of the oldest Russian drama theatres, formerly known as the Imperial Maly Theatre. (Editors' note.)

† The Habima company left Soviet Russia in 1926. From 1929 until their permanent settling in Tel Aviv, Berlin was the 'base' from where they embarked on tours to other countries. See Endnote 37 *TPOTA*. (Editors' note.)

‡ The production of S. An-sky's *The Dybbuk* directed by Vakhtangov in 1922 for the Habima company in Moscow is one of the most famous performances for both the director and the theatre company. (Editors' note.)

Hebrew language* (which is unparalleled in its magical power, tragic feeling and beauty) is not very suited to Olivia's monologues on love. How could *Twelfth Night* be staged and performed under such circumstances? I posed this question to my friends at the very first rehearsal. They reacted noisily, all talking at once (in two languages, Russian and Hebrew), and waving their arms about, each in his own rhythm and tempo. Nimbly grasping the hands of their fellow actors in the air as they were talking, they quickly resolved the question and all turned towards me at the same time. One of them shouted menacingly: 'If we need ease, we need ease!' Another was trying to convince me in confidence not to agree to anything other than ease; while a third placed my buttonhole on his and said reproachfully: 'What does it mean?' (as if I had been trying to persuade them to be ponderous). Those standing close to me were shouting and those standing further away made signs with their hands and eyes to the effect that ease would be achieved! The noise turned into enthusiasm, they were all captivated by the new task, we exchanged kisses there and then, and after some further noisy exchanges, we sat down at a large table. Silence reigned, the intense silence of the Habima. The parts had been given out already (with the proviso that the director could frankly tell actors who did not meet expectations and replace them with someone else. That was the usual method at the Habima. They wanted the performances to be good and with that end in mind, they tolerated no compromises).

We began to work at acquiring a feeling of ease right from the first rehearsal. Every day part of the rehearsal time was devoted to special exercises. The Habima actors worked persistently, fanatically and weightily to acquire ease, but they got it! I have never seen such a capacity for work in any theatre anywhere. If miracles can happen by earthly means alone, then one happened before my very eyes. Meskin,† for instance, who was as heavy as a bronze cast with a voice so deep that you sometimes wanted to clear your throat when you heard him speak, flitted about as a light, rotund Sir Toby and littered the stage with Shakespeare's jokes and turns of phrase as if they had been written in his native language.

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* The Habima performed in Hebrew. (Editors' note.)

† Aron Meskin (1898–1974), actor in Habima. (Editors' note.)

When Barats* – who was small but corpulent and walked on his heels, wearing out even rubber heels – turned into Sir Andrew Aguecheek, he astonished everyone and forced them to discover for themselves: 'Just look at that, Barats is walking on tiptoe!' Laughter, mirth and exclamations could be heard! The Habima actors didn't recognize each other. One after another they raised their arms and brows and shoulders (one shoulder slightly higher than the other), shaking their heads in silence for a long, long time. Shakespeare's comedy grew by the day, revealing its humour and charm and transfiguring the actors.

The stage sets of the painter, Masyutin,† were light, funny and bright. The cast moved them about and changed them themselves while on stage, creating a hint of Olivia's palace or Sir Toby's merry tavern or the garden or the street.

Ernst Tokh‡ composed the songs with his characteristic talent and humour. He gave us a melody in 'polka' time as the *leitmotif* which had an inimitable infectious quality. Everyone would sing it, both in chorus and as a solo, at home, outdoors or backstage. Tokh's orchestration was so funny that the musicians repeatedly interrupted their rehearsals, and laughter could be heard coming from the orchestra.

At times, one or other of the cast would have his doubts as to whether I was taking too many liberties with Shakespeare. However, their doubts were quickly allayed: they weren't Shakespearean scholars, and it was easy to convince them that the author of *Twelfth Night* is the most modern playwright alive in our time and that his characters are living people just like you and me, who cannot stand inauthenticity or false pathos.

The Habima actors told me many interesting things about Palestine, theatre and audiences in Tel-Aviv and other towns of the Promised Land, the efforts and perseverance with which their country was being built up, the inevitable conflicts, the damage done by disagreement among the parties, their *true* (i.e. amicable) relations with the Arabs, and other topics of concern. It was sometimes strange for me to hear

* Abram Barats (1894–1952), actor in the Habima. (Editors' note.)
† Vasily Masyutin (1884–1955), painter and theatre designer. (Editors' note.)
‡ Ernst Tokh (Toch) (1887–1964), Austrian-born American composer. (Editors' note.)

about a country that I knew only from Old and New Testament stories. I felt just as uncomfortable hearing about political parties fighting each other in Bethlehem or Nazareth as I did seeing posters, notices and advertising on the walls of Venetian houses. On a number of occasions I attempted to direct our conversation to other topics, but I never succeeded. It was just at that time that I developed an interest in the esoteric aspect of the Bible stories, and once I hazarded a mention of the Elohim and Jehovah,* but I was confronted by such kind, uncomprehending looks that I hastily tried my best to hide the uninvited guests that I had all but introduced to the circle of my dear friends.

The rehearsals took place in a cheerful atmosphere and with the tension typical of the Habima. After work, things were relaxed: the Habima actors sang me their Kol Nidrei,† wedding and synagogue songs, and lastly the songs from *The Dybbuk*. I was thrilled to hear these modern Jews, whose songs conveyed so deeply and yet so completely unconsciously all the sufferings, hopes and meagre joys of their people. I listened to them and it seemed to me that someone had *summoned* them at that moment and was singing through them, speaking and weeping as if wanting to wake the singers, but they had long since fallen asleep nineteen and half centuries ago, and singing would wake them no more. The merrier the singing became, the more the tears came to my eyes and I couldn't hold them back at times. The actors laughed kindly at my tears without in the slightest understanding the reason for them. [. . .]

Once or twice, my German colleagues also visited the Habima's rehearsals. They were curious to see what '*diese Russen*'‡ were doing, seeing that they couldn't even finish rehearsing a single play, whereas they themselves could easily put on two or three plays in the same period of time. They were highly amused when I kept on repeating one and the same scene.

'What are you trying to achieve with them?' they enquired. 'After all, these darling Jews of yours§ know their lines perfectly.'

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* Different names for 'God' in the Old Testament tradition. (Editors' note.)

† First part of the Jewish Yom Kippur service. (Editors' note.)

‡ 'These Russians'. (German.) (Translator's note.)

§ The diminutive form of the Russian word for Jews is used here in the original to imply the speakers' scorn. (Editors' note.)

'A great deal,' I replied. (The Germans prepared themselves to laugh. One of them with ruddy cheeks and no eyebrows even started to clap like a child.) 'I'm trying to achieve style, truthfulness, lightness, humour, theatricality.' (The Habima folk were observing the laughing guests from a distance.)

'But my dear chap,' said one of the Germans, throwing his head back in military fashion, 'if you don't leave them alone, you'll kill the indi-vidu-ality in them!' (The Germans started to nod their heads.) 'Of course, that takes a long time! Oh, I get it. Like your famous Stanislavsky, you want to make them all alike!'

'But have you seen the MAAT?'

'No, but that's not important. Let's go and have a beer!'

As he was leaving, my colleague with the ruddy cheeks danced on one leg improvising a little ditty: 'We're Germans, you're Russians. Thank God it's not the other way round!'

The visit of the Habima Theatre to Europe was not only for artistic reasons, it also had another purpose. They had conceived the idea of building their own theatre in Tel-Aviv. They needed money and were hoping to raise it in Berlin. Soirées were organized in rich Jewish households, at which speeches were given and funds were raised on the spot. The production of *Twelfth Night* was meant to demonstrate to the circles sympathetic to Zionism the Habima Theatre's cultural importance for Palestine.

The première was a festive occasion. Invited guests filled the auditorium. Before curtain-up, I said some introductory words in German from a stage-level box. In the middle of Act One there was some noise and movement in the auditorium. A man in a dark purple attire walked up to the front row accompanied by a deferential entourage. He was wearing a cap of the same colour on his head. The tall figure, with the handsome, regular features and a white beard, evoked the image of a priest from the ancient mysteries. It was Rabindranath Tagore.*

The performance was a success. It had several showings in Berlin and then London.† Sean O'Casey‡ gave it a perceptive and positive

* Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Indian writer. (Editors' note.)

† In London, this production of *Twelfth Night* was presented for the first time in the Phoenix Theatre, 6–8 January 1931. (Editors' note.)

‡ Sean O'Casey (1880–1964), Irish dramatist and writer. (Editors' note.)

review. After spending some more time in Europe, the Habima Theatre left for Palestine,* where they apparently still occasionally amuse Tel-Aviv and the surrounding towns to this day with their light-hearted performances of Shakespeare's weighty jokes.

During that same period when I was acting on the German stage, I became once more obsessed with the idea of *Hamlet*. I visualized this tragedy as the first step towards bringing a new theatre into being. I started to go to the Rudolf Steiner School, where I worked on Eurythmy and artistic speech.[21] At the same time I organized rehearsals of *Hamlet* at my home with several Russian actors who happened to be in Berlin.[22] Shakespeare's tragedy had to be abridged and the sequence of scenes adapted so as to allow each of the small cast to appear several times in different roles. For example, I managed to stage the mousetrap scene in such a way that when King and Queen were watching the play, they would leave their thrones at certain moments unnoticed by the audience and act as the King and Queen in the pantomime. Then, they would appear again, sitting on their thrones in time for their cues.

In my heart of hearts I was aware that the idea of the 'new theatre' had not yet come of age within me, but the joy of idealistic elation got the better of common sense. In spite of what was blatantly obvious, I artificially maintained my belief in the 'ideal' audience that had grown tired of the old theatre with its dearth of creative imagination, great aims and social significance. My quixotic mood insidiously distorted and slightly exaggerated the shortcomings of modern theatre like a magic mirror. I was impervious to success on the German stage. I was indifferent (or so it seemed to me) to the interest that the German public and press showed in me. With increasing frequency I was forced to put on a tailcoat and attend banquets and parties. (I did so with a feeling of slight disillusionment.) My success with the young and charming actresses of the Berlin theatres was pleasantly exciting for me. However, I was suspicious of my good looks and once when I asked one of my 'admirers' what she saw in me, she replied with downcast eyes and a naive honesty:

'*Aber Sie sind doch ein gemachter Mann*.'†

* i.e. on 2 February 1931. (Editors' note.)

† 'But you are perfection incarnate!' (German.) (Editors' note.)

The 'chamber' performance of *Hamlet* was meant for a select audience, which was meant to be enthusiastic about it. The enthusiasm was meant to provide money, and the money – my new theatre. However, there wasn't the slightest interest in my *Hamlet*. But why was it that audiences were so enthusiastic and so generous with their applause when I portrayed some plain Russian emigrant,* but they had no desire to see the same actor in the role of Hamlet with its many layers of meaning? 'Don Quixote' within me was bewildered. He was ready to drive through the streets of Berlin in a circus van and perform Shakespeare tragedies at the crossroads and recite passionate and inflammatory speeches. His friends dissuaded him, however. I reminisced more and more frequently about Russian actors and audiences. A profound love of my native theatre began to grow within me. My thoughts turned to France and Paris.† There was a large Russian colony there, I thought, and they would support my initiatives and help create a new theatre. [. . .]

19

Disregarding the sensible advice of people who were close to me, I decided to leave Reinhardt and all the opportunities that were opening up for me on the German stage and move in all haste to Paris.‡

I could already see myself in the company of actors, painters and writers who, like myself, were engaged in passionate discussions about the idea of 'new theatre'. It was close to their hearts, they had waited a long time for it to be implemented, and now they would offer their talent, energy and knowledge for the new initiative. My Paris flat would become the centre of a seething cultural life. I was in a hurry. [. . .]

I do not like to recall the period of my life I spent in Paris. In its entirety it seems to me now to have been erratic, hasty and ridiculous. Carried away in my role of the 'idealist', I wanted to see the final

* i.e. in *Phaea* by Fritz von Unruh. See Endnote 13 *LAE*. (Editors' note.)

† Chekhov decided to move to Paris immediately after his failure to realize his hope of establishing a new Russian theatre in Prague (which was more preferable to him than Paris). See Endnote 10 *LAE*. (Editors' note.)

‡ Chekhov arrived in Paris on 15 October 1930. (Editors' note.)

results from the very first day onwards, and I rushed ahead, stumbling against the barriers of harsh reality. I began to implement my plans in Paris too hectically. Almost directly from the station, I set off to find a flat that certainly had to be expensive and certainly had to be in the centre of the city. By evening of the next day, I was unpacking my suitcases in a cheap flat on the outskirts. The flat was at street level and so every passer-by would unavoidably and unfailingly look in at the windows. It didn't matter! I could always move somewhere else.

As had been the case in Berlin, I surrounded myself with Russian actors without losing a single day.[23] They came to me full of hope and expectation, searching for theatre with substance and dreaming of meeting a leader. I fixed their wages and distributed advances.[24] They were delighted: there didn't seem to be any doubt in their minds that the enterprise had firm foundations.

I had come with the intention of showing my *Hamlet* to the Paris audiences, but I changed my mind suddenly and proceeded to rehearse *Don Quixote*.[25] At the same time, I began to search for a theatre. Stage sets were needed. I went to visit Masyutin the painter and took him an advance payment. The stage sets were of a complex design, with tricks and special features. I hired a theatre in the Champs Elysées.[26] Letterheads, seals, numerous postage stamps and special files for incoming and outgoing correspondence appeared on my desk. A secretary was put in charge of all that. I began to visit French theatres with her on a daily basis. My hopes were kindled with every performance I attended. 'Everything here is so superficial and frivolous,' I told myself, 'that there is no doubt that a new theatre is necessary. They themselves would recognize and appreciate the depth and power that are characteristic of our Russian theatre. That is just what they lack.' Jouvet* was the only one who had any fascination for me. Ease was his by rights; in his case, it did not degenerate into frivolity.

I had arrived with the idea of working in Russian émigré circles, but I took hardly any steps towards getting to know any of the prominent figures or familiarizing them with my intentions and plans.[27]

* Louis Jouvet (1887–1951), French actor and director of film and theatre. (Editors' note.)

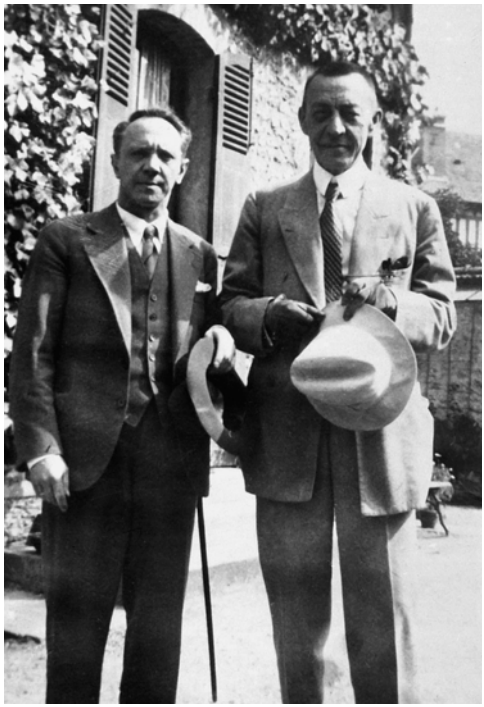

Plate 38 Michael Chekhov and Sergey Rakhmaninov at Rakhmaninov's villa, Klerfonten near Rambuie not far from Paris. 1931

I was, however, fortunate enough to give an involved and complicated, but extremely ardent speech in some Russian circle that scared my audience in no uncertain terms. I hurried instead of undertaking systematic preparatory work, I did a great deal of talking, I urged on those around me and attracted superfluous and useless people like a magnet.

Before long, two 'representatives of the Russian émigré community' appeared on the scene. They had taken the idea of creating a 'Russian theatre abroad' very much to heart. The stout, elderly lady with the childlike expression in her eyes was particularly active. She was full of admiration, faith and exclamations, she supported the 'sacred flame' within me, she raised her handkerchief to her eyes, kissed me and would then sit for ages in an armchair, smiling in her reveries. The man appeared at the same time as the lady. He was black-haired, with motionless, wide-open eyes and pointed shoulders, and he was restless and loud. He introduced himself as a friend of Chaplin.

'We'll put the screws on Charlie,' he said. 'Let the son-of-a-bitch do some work!'

He often picked up the telephone receiver to call someone, but that 'someone' was ('damn him') always away. He would suddenly pick up his hat and stick, and go off for a while 'on our business', from whence he would soon return and say, 'That's that!', then grab the receiver again and ask me for the hundredth time *what exactly* I, as an artist, needed. He begged me not to worry about anything but art, and leave all the rest to him. [. . .] He would rush around my flat from room to room, peering into every corner, halt absently for a minute somewhere in a doorway and prevent people from coming and going, he would tap the furniture and windowsills with his stick or suddenly start fumbling in his pockets with his gaze fixed on one point.

At the insistence of my secretary, newspaper people were soon invited to take interviews and write articles for publicity purposes. The newspaper articles attracted the attention of a group of young theatre amateurs. They came to me to offer their services. They had not seen me on stage, but 'revered' me from hearsay. One of the men expressed the desire to do secretarial work. My secretary had no objections, she had other matters on her mind: she gazed at me with a look that was too devoted and affectionate (or did it only seem so to me?). For this reason, I used to take her to a café. Out of decency I repeatedly tried to fall in love with her, but letting my gaze wander over her face, hair, neck and shoulders, I always found some trifling feature that dissatisfied me and prevented me from fulfilling my good intention. My feelings ignited only once: I was hasty and quickly took her by the hand, but my feelings suddenly subsided and I returned her hand to her, after squeezing it vaguely and inexpressively.

My new male secretary began by changing his look of veneration to one of concern; he would rub his hands and from time to time gracefully finger the envelopes, the letterheads and stamps. On the very next morning after beginning his employment, he woke me by knocking on my window.

'Our theatre's going to America! Get up! Congratulations!' I heard him say excitedly outside the window to the light tinkle of the glass in the windowpane against which he had pressed his face.

My secretary took me to meet a 'millionaire', who had just arrived from America. The fact that we had no repertoire did not as yet bother my secretary. On meeting us, the newly arrived American was perplexed; he listened indifferently to my secretary's introductory words about my talent and world renown, and then standing up, he stated coldly that he had no interest in the theatre. My secretary became incensed, made impertinent remarks to him and stormed out of the luxury hotel, leaving me upstairs in the room. Downstairs at the entrance he told me everything that had occurred upstairs and which I had witnessed only a few minutes previously. Apparently, 'this vile American' – upon hearing my secretary's calm and convincing words – 'had exploded and almost thrown us downstairs'.

My secretary, who was tired and upset, wanted to go to a café. I noticed a man sitting not far away from us, with a bored, inexpressive face and a large chin. He looked familiar, but I could not remember where and when I had seen him. Suddenly my heart started to throb. It was Grock. I fixed my gaze on the great clown. I had an immense admiration for him and was thrilled to see him in real life. Thereupon, my secretary suddenly showed his initiative. He ran over to Grock and said something to him as he pointed his finger at me. Grock jumped to his feet, and fastening his jacket as he walked, he came quickly towards me. He sat me down at his table respectfully and seemed to wait for me to begin the conversation. I was in despair, not knowing what my obliging secretary had told Grock about me. What sort of picture did he now have of me? My joy vanished. I blushed and couldn't find any words.

'Why have you come to Paris?' I asked him at last in a half-offended, half-reprimanding tone.

'I've come to see my film,' he replied politely, bowing slightly and awaiting further questions in silence. My secretary stood at a respectful distance with a happy smile on his face. How I hated him at that moment! I blushed more and more deeply, my ears were burning and my eyes could no longer blink. Gathering all my strength, I got up at last, bowed awkwardly and walked out of the café, leaving Grock mystified. My secretary walked beside me, looking happy and pleased with himself. He did not return to his 'office' work, but forced me to give him and his friends drama classes.

My female secretary resumed her duties. This time she had the idea of introducing me to French celebrity circles. Monsieur P.* (a famous French actor) was her first (and sole) victim. He was obliged to invite us to lunch. A small piece of boiled fish was brought to the exquisitely laid table. Our host listened in silence and cold indifference while my secretary spoke of me as if I were an exceptional genius. With that, our acquaintance ended.

Early next morning, I was taken to the house of an eminent representative of the French press. The representative met us with a pale, swollen face and beads of sweat on his forehead. He drank one glass of white wine after another, gradually coming to his senses after the drinking bout of the previous evening.

I declined any further acquaintances of this type and threw myself into rehearsing *Don Quixote*.[28] There were still no actors for many of the parts, but that was for . . . later, later . . . Masyutin's mock-up of the set design was ready. It was a miracle of inventiveness: a mobile wooden construction, which could be rearranged like a puzzle and which provided all seven sets. The sketches for the costumes were also ready. The estimate for the stage set exceeded my financial possibilities.[29] I counted my money and found that I had less than I had imagined (though until that moment I had not thought about money). Someone had the idea of taking the mock-up and the costume sketches to Rothschild.† The mock-up, the costumes and the conception of the play were all to his liking! We had triumphed. The next day we received a rejection from Rothschild.

A Society of Friends of the Theatre[30] was hastily created. A receipt book was ready and waiting for the expected donations. On the very first day, the Vysotsky family‡ donated 250 francs. That was the only revenue received. My financial situation became known and the stout lady, who had been so sympathetic to my endeavours, disappeared. Soon afterwards she sent me an 'anonymous' letter. It contained the

* The identity of 'Monsieur P.' remains unconfirmed. (Editors' note.)

† Here Chekhov is probably referring to the representative of the dynasty of bankers, the known philanthropist and patron of the arts, Baron Edmond James de Rothschild (1845–1934). (Editors' note.)

‡ A wealthy family of émigré tea traders living in Paris. (Editors' note.)

arresting sentence: 'Soviet citizen, your hands reek of blood'. 'Chaplin's friend' left me as well. When he was ordering the *Don Quixote* costumes from Varvara Korinskaya,* his finger pressed the bar on the telephone that disconnects the user from the telephone exchange. I then observed him as he shouted into the telephone, 'Varya,† drop everything, it's an urgent commission! It's for me!' He noticed my look, banged the receiver down on the telephone and said, 'It's all agreed! We've got the costumes!' and disappeared. My lady secretary also deserted me. The disillusioned actors turned up less and less frequently for rehearsals. They were being paid their wages. We searched in vain for a way out. Months passed. The inactivity and uncertainty regarding the future had a rather sobering effect on me.

Quite unexpectedly and suddenly, a small amount of money was placed at my disposal, thanks once again to the efforts of the Vysotsky family.‡ It wasn't enough for the costly *Don Quixote* production, so I decided to stage a pantomime on the theme of a Russian fairy tale. The fact that there would be no spoken language§ meant that performances would be suitable for French as well as Russian audiences. In the event of a success, there was the prospect of takings. Rehearsals began. There was a new face: a musician, an elegantly dressed young man with crafty little eyes.[31] He wanted to try his hand at conducting, so he gathered a group of cheap musicians together (it was clear to me from the very first rehearsals that they wouldn't ruin us) and started to rehearse their parts with them.

The pantomime was hastily thrown together. It was far from perfect, but all the same some of the artistic aims I had had in mind were achieved. They shouldn't have been lost on an attentive audience or theatre critic at any rate. Russian theatre abroad – as I imagined it – was meant to say something, even if modest, in its own, new words.

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* The owner of workshops which produced theatre costumes in Paris. (Editors' note.)

† Diminutive form of 'Varvara'. (Editors' note.)

‡ i.e. money from Georgette Boner, see pp. 18–9 *LAE* and Endnotes 29 and 30 *LAE*. (Editors' note.)

§ There was no specific speech in the production except for key words and phrases. There was however an explanation (scenario) of the action in a special 'programme'. (Editors' note.)

At a rehearsal he attended, Sergey Volkonsky[32] criticized some things, praised others, was unstinting with his advice and altogether friendly and nice. He wrote what turned out to be a scathing review after the first night.* I had rarely had occasion to read such merciless criticism.[33] It was on a par only with the reviews of Khodasevich,[34] who hounded my initiatives in Paris with a ruthlessness and passion. With the exception of two or three kind reviews (in the French press), the Russian newspapers rejected my 'innovations' indignantly and demanded 'real' theatre. To what end then had I actually spent my entire life at the Art Theatre and how could I have the audacity to 'search' when everything had already been found! The pantomime (and with it, my hopes of survival) suffered an outright and miserable failure.[35]

Incidentally, the failure of the first night was also aided by a row that had unexpectedly broken out amongst our orchestra. The young conductor had managed to set the musicians against him during rehearsals, and before the performance as an act of revenge they had torn a sheet out of each copy of the music. They played the overture, the curtain rose and the first act began. The audience sat up in their seats and listened, watched and waited with rapt attention. Two or three minutes passed and then the orchestra faltered. There was the sound of a violin squeaking piteously and a flute whistling, and then nothing. A moment later, amid tense silence, someone in the auditorium gave a chuckle. The conductor began to twitch and start, like a puppet on strings. He could be seen from the auditorium, the silence was shattered and the audience broke into laughter, catcalls and boos, and jokes directed at the musicians could be heard. Like every crowd, the audience reacted cruelly. The pallid conductor dashed out of the pit to the audience, but was scared off by the shouting and catcalls and promptly disappeared. The musicians searched noisily for their music. The actors froze in their *tableau vivant* poses. Some music was found and the performance resumed, only to be interrupted again shortly after. To the audience's delight, such *tableaux vivants* were repeated three or four times in the course of the first act. The missing sheets were found during the interval, but the performance had been ruined.[36]

* The opening night of *Palace Awakening* took place on 9 November 1931. (Editors' note.)

Having parted ways with the conductor and spent the last of the money on new musicians, I decided to give a second performance. But this time the auditorium was empty. In a fit of desperation and resentment, I went out onto the proscenium in make-up and costume* before curtain-up and addressed the dozen or so people who were scattered about the auditorium and said that we were not perturbed by the fact that so few people had come and that we were idealists in our approach to our work. I asked them to move closer to the stage and promised them that the actors would give a forceful and heartfelt performance to that evening's small audience. Several young people ran down noisily and vociferously from the gallery and took their places in the front row. The other members of the audiences remained in their seats. The actors disapproved of my speech and asked me not to repeat it because it was humiliating.

Performances of the pantomime soon ceased altogether.† I gathered the actors together, thanked them for their efforts and told them they could consider themselves free to go. Aware of the hopelessness of my situation, however (the theatre had been hired for the season and the payment had to be made in full), they adopted a comradely attitude towards me. They proposed that we should put on a hurried production of *The Flood*, which had been a success in Moscow. *The Flood* was staged and the Russian press reacted approvingly, taking the 'change in repertoire' to be a sign of artistic recovery. The Russian public started to come to our performances. Other plays of the same kind had to be staged hastily to sustain the interest of Russian audiences. We staged *Erik XIV*, an Anton Chekhov evening comprising several dramatizations of his short stories, and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, all from the repertoire of the MAAT 2.[37]

We decided to commission a reasonably decent stage set for the Shakespeare comedy. A French stage set workshop accepted our commission without any sketches: they already knew the kind of set the play required! The set arrived forty minutes before curtain-up. The efficient

* Chekhov was playing the role of Ivan-Tsarevich in *Palace Awakening*. (Editors' note.)

† Due to lack of takings, *Palace Awakening* was withdrawn from the repertoire after very few performances. (Editors' note.)

workers erected it in no time. In the centre of the stage was a fountain on wooden supports which occupied the whole space. A diminutive Cupid nailed to the top of a cardboard pillar was endeavouring to fill it with water. That was the entire set. The actors in make-up and costumes looked at the cheerful French workers in bewilderment. Everybody had a foreboding that something was wrong, but no one dared to ask why there was a fountain and what it was doing on our stage. There was no time for delay; however, the matter needed clarification. It turned out that there had been a mistake: the fountain was intended for another theatre, where our set for *Twelfth Night* had been delivered. We had received their Cupid. The audience was growing restless and demanding the start of the performance. The actors set about the fountain and broke it into pieces, together with Cupid and his pillar, and threw them off the stage. Three puny little trees painted on gauze were all that could be seen in the background. The curtain went up.

There followed a series of boring, poorly rehearsed 'real' plays. I was becoming more dispirited by the day. The Russian public in Paris was not large enough to sustain a permanent theatre. The future looked bleak. There was nowhere to go and I didn't have the energy to think about new initiatives.[38] The prospects for 'ideal theatre' in France were just as poor as they had been in Germany. The error of my quixotic idealism came home to me at last, but I also realized how relatively undemanding audiences were. The further a Russian actor is from the Russian border, the more miserable he feels. We had struggled to complete one season and we reluctantly began a second one.*

During that period, I met many distinguished Russians who had taken up residence in Paris at that time. Once, I even spoke to Pavel Milyukov[39] about my failures, but it was already too late to remedy what had been initiated in such a bumbling fashion.

My energy was superseded by apathy, and the range of my interests narrowed. Chess was the only thing that interested me now. I went to the Paris tournaments, took part in simultaneous chess displays with Alyokhin and Bernshtein,† visited Alyokhin at home and watched him

* See Endnote 30 *LAE*.

† Alexander Alyokhin (1892–1946) and Osip Bernshtein (1882–1962), chess players. (Editors' note.)

with delight when he played with Bernshtein in a cosy family setting. As a person, Alyokhin had long been of interest to me. I was struck by his nervousness. His fingers, for instance, always removed a piece lightly from the board, but were not always able to release it so easily: the chessman would fidget in his hand, not wanting to break away from it. He almost had to shake it off his fingers. When he and Bernshtein were discussing some chess manoeuvre or analysing a situation, I literally guffawed as I watched the pieces shooting about the board, almost without touching it (like ping-pong in miniature), and observed the two masters of the game both talking at once and falling silent at once when a problem had been resolved. It is interesting that Bernshtein almost always lost to Alyokhin in a tournament and Alyokhin used to lose without fail to Bernshtein in a friendly game in a domestic setting.

I also continued to give classes to the group of amateur actors headed by my 'male secretary'. I now devoted more attention to them. To my amazement, I began to notice that my theatrical experience, my grasp of acting technique and my teaching methods had matured, taken shape and became more exact. When had this happened? I had hardly given them a thought during this time. Someone had been working them out for me. The fact that my experience, the result of many years' work, had as it were formed into a system of itself in my conscious (or rather, my subconscious) mind prompted the thought that it must be correct and organically true in its foundations. I hadn't invented anything, inserted any intellectual suppositions or created artificial links between the various parts. The structure had arisen of itself. I became interested in the process that was taking place within me and began to observe it, protecting it strictly from interference from my rational brain. However, I didn't yet note anything down.

By then, I had been living for a long time in Montmartre. I had left my cheap flat for a cheap room in a dirty, noisy street that smelled of the market and butchers' shops. My aimless wanderings along the Paris boulevards at night led me once to the circus, where 'marathon dances' had been taking place day and night for almost a week. The Parisians were crazy about them. Eight or ten couples danced non-stop without breaks for sleep or rest. The ones who fainted were carried out of the arena. There were boards up over the entrance to the circus giving information on the course of the dancing. The circus was over-bursting.

The spectators deafened the orchestra with their roaring and raving. People threw money at the dancers in the arena. However, the main prize of 25,000 francs was for the person who 'died' last. I had arrived on the fourth or fifth day of the dancing. On the dance floor were three couples and one lady who had lost her partner. I was stunned by the bestial roaring of the crowd. I turned my attention to a red-headed woman whose half-naked body had turned green and a man who had a distorted expression on his face. Like everyone around me, I turned into an animal and wanted to see someone fall to the ground in front of my eyes. And the man soon fell with a bang onto the wooden floor of the arena, knocking his head and with his arm twisted in an ugly fashion behind his back. The crowd began to roar, whistle and whoop. People were swearing, fighting and snatching their own and other people's hats and throwing them at the dancers. New impatient crowds kept bursting in from the street and were shoved back out, they burst in again and were frozen to the spot for a moment as they avidly fixed their eyes on the half-dead figures of the dancers.

I came to my senses when I suddenly felt an acute, burning hatred. It wasn't directed towards them, but towards myself, my 'idea of the new theatre', my dream of the 'ideal audience', spectacles in general and that repugnant double of mine, whom I called Don Quixote. The beast that had been roused in me by the atmosphere of the nocturnal circus was searching for a victim. I wanted to destroy, annihilate and kill. And kill I did. The mortal blow fell on the knight with the barber's bowl on his head. Everything that had been alive within me previously – the insubstantial daydreams, the passion for a vacuous 'idealism', the self-delight – all disappeared, ended, died. I rushed out of the circus and re-emerged into the boulevards. My desolate soul was expectant, and 'something' began to rise up slowly from out of its depths. I couldn't say yet what it was, but I felt that it was something serious, something without which I could not return to life and face the new day. 'It' brought with it a feeling of calm and strength. I was beginning to realize that it was the *birth* of a way of perceiving the world within me. It wasn't just in my mind, it encompassed my entire being: my heart, will, arms, my whole body. What I had hitherto called Anthroposophy, what I had known and loved as a grandiose system of ideas concerning the world and the human being, was now becoming an

independent, living being within me. If only I wouldn't lose this *new unity* that I had never experienced hitherto, this calm and strong feeling of my 'Ego', this *human being* within me! If only I wouldn't have to submerge myself again in that alien, other person walking along the boulevard, whom I had hitherto taken to be myself, my 'Ego'.

It was the way my soul itself had almost been praying that minute, but it was weak and did not withstand its very first trial. A small, wizened old woman in a black, broad-brimmed straw hat that covered her face came up to me, or rather, suddenly appeared from behind me. She seemed like a bad dream to me. I even remembered one such childhood dream which is funny in waking life, but terrifying in the silence of the night: a small, round, one-legged table was slowly moving towards me, crossing the room diagonally. I walked and then ran away from it, but it kept moving and the gap between me and it was getting smaller and smaller. The old woman reminded me of that table. She said to me in a low, muffled voice:

> 'Your departure from Moscow was the reason for the arrest and exile of members of the Anthroposophical Society. If you have any decency, you will return immediately to Russia. Only your return can save the detainees.'

And the round, one-legged table began to move slowly away from me.

I passively watched her go, without a thought and with a feeling of guilt, anguish and pain. The great, new experience began to fade and vanished completely. Without looking round, the old woman walked on slowly for a long time, her black straw hat reflecting the light from each street lamp under which she passed.

I stood there for a while and then went to the nearest night bistro for some cheap, sour wine. Incidentally, only the first few glasses of it are unpleasant.[40]

20

What did I lose in Paris? My money[41] and excessive ambition. What did I gain? A certain ability to see myself in a critical light and a propensity to weigh up my actions; and as is often the case, my life changed both outwardly and inwardly at one and the same time. A successful

period began. An invitation came from Riga for me to tour in the role of Khlestakov. I read the letter from the director of the Russian Drama Theatre* and I couldn't believe it. Indeed, it was only when I was in the railway carriage (catching up with my own being, which had long since arrived in Riga and was impatiently awaiting its physical double there) that I believed what was happening and was filled with joy. I was met at the station in Riga by a delegation from the Russian Drama Theatre and the Latvian State Theatre led by their chief managers. There was a group of actors, reporters and photographers. I was as excited as a boy and almost succumbed to the sin of ambition once again.

Riga! I fell in love with the city for the second time! Many, many years previously, when our theatre was still the First Studio, I went abroad with the company on tour.† It was the first time I had left Russia. What does it mean to go abroad? I imagined pictures of Paris, Berlin, London, Rome, and I was even bold enough to think of New York, but Riga had not figured in my pictures, I did not think about Riga, I forgot about it. But there it was, Riga, the first revelation of the tempting secrets of a 'foreign country'. Having lived for so many years in extremely modest circumstances in Russia without the right to leave, having forgotten that restaurants, dinner jackets, balls and parties ever existed and being no longer accustomed to convivial idling, I was suddenly confronted with all this when I was 'abroad' in the clean, cosy and lively city of Riga. Riga at that time was trying its best to emulate Paris and I threw myself into that 'Paris' with an unrestrained thirst for life. [. . .]

This time, when the delegation met me at the station, I vividly remembered *that* Riga; but my situation as a guest actor and the rather solemn occasion forced me to assume a dignified air and hold my hat above my head while the photographers' cameras flashed. I noticed my old friend in the crowd, the fun-loving habitué of the night bars, who now welcomed me solidly with an official speech and who shook my hand until he was sure that his official appearance had been registered and would appear in next day's newspapers. On this visit, I went sightseeing,

* i.e. Alexander Grishin (1880–1959). (Editors' note.)

† The performances in Riga were the first leg of a long tour abroad undertaken by the First Studio in 1922. (Original Russian editors' note.)

visited the theatres and was introduced to persons who were prominent and respected in the city. After having seen 'old Prague', 'old Revel',* the hidden corners of Paris, the wonders of Venice and the Ponte Vecchio in Florence, I could now appreciate 'old Riga' all the more. I recall it with affection and I still have the feeling that I lived there at one time in the dark little room in the attic, loved someone and did some of my own modest and secret business there that pervaded my whole life at the time.

I can say without false modesty that Riga gave my Khlestakov a 'Moscow' reception. Even the rehearsals were conducted as they were in Moscow in my 'home' theatre, in an atmosphere of reverential silence, concentration and love. The actors made a real effort. I could sense that they were acting better than usual, although I had never seen any of them on stage before. The tickets were sold out for all the guest performances within two days. My spirits revived. I felt that I was an actor again, that no one here wanted 'pot-boilers', that everyone was expecting a good performance and that none of the literary fraternity was eagerly anticipating a failure. Riga is a theatre-loving city. The State Opera and Drama Theatres are of a high standard. Private theatres (for instance, the Smilgis Theatre†) experiment boldly and seek new ways of acting and staging. The critics don't limit themselves to phrases like 'the actor was appropriate casting', but scrupulously analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each new play. The younger generation search for a serious theatre and school of acting. They 'love art and not themselves in art', as Stanislavsky would have put it. Even the circus in Riga is one of the best.

The performances of *The Government Inspector* were marked by great enthusiasm. Two of them were particularly solemn not only for me, but for the whole company: Shalyapin was present at one performance, and Reinhardt at the other.‡ Shalyapin came to see me backstage during the interval and after the performance we had supper together in

* i.e. Tallinn. (Editors' note.)

† Eduardas Smilgis Theatre, Riga, Latvia. Eduardas Smilgis (1886–1951), Latvian actor and director. (Editors' note.)

‡ Reinhardt was at *The Government Inspector* on 17 April 1931 and Shalyapin on 23 April 1931. (Original Russian editors' notes.)

one of the restaurants I knew so well. He praised my acting, told me something about himself, and as was his wont he gave imitations of bad opera singers, which made me laugh until I wept. I concluded that his praise of me was sincere from what he said to his son about me:

'He does fine filigree work, the son-of-a-bitch.'

Reinhardt's remarks were no less flattering (although unfortunately without the 'son-of-a-bitch').

The guest appearances were over and I had to return to Paris, but there was nothing for me there. After experiencing the joy of theatre in Riga, I was no longer able to stoop to pot-boilers. However, my stay in Paris was not to be a long one. I received an offer of permanent work as a director and actor from the managers of the Latvian State Theatre and the Russian Drama Theatre. I left Paris without any regret and moved to Riga with my wife.[42]

Obviously, my first production on the Latvian stage was *Hamlet*,[43] and although it wasn't possible for it to be as thorough as the Moscow production had been in terms of execution and style, I still managed to retain the basic atmosphere of the play. My fellow actors acted in Latvian and I in Russian. It was a hindrance to no one, since the Russian language was widespread in Riga. (Although by then some of

Plate 39 Michael and Ksenya Chekhov with their treasured toys. 1930s

Plate 40 Michael Chekhov as Ivan the Terrible in *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* by Alexey Konstantinovich Tolstoy. Latvian State Theatre in Riga. 1932

the young people had started to pretend that they didn't understand Russian. This was due to the chauvinism that was soon to assume monstrous proportions.)

The second production on the Latvian stage was *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*.[44] It was running in parallel with *Hamlet*. I had dreamt of playing Ivan the Terrible for a long time, but I had not been permitted to do so in Moscow. (At the time, the Repertkom were afraid that I might 'vindicate the evil tsar' through my acting.)*

What a remarkable phenomenon the actor's soul is! If it is interested in a particular character, it works on it unconsciously and continuously, selflessly bringing its work to a conclusion. Right from the very first minute (and second, even!) that I began rehearsing *Ivan the Terrible*, I realized that the part was already completely worked out within me! This fact was all the more striking for me because I didn't even know

* Chekhov refers here to a 1927 production at the MAAT 2. (Editors' note.)

my lines by heart; but when I started speaking them, I heard a new voice that was unfamiliar to me, the voice of Ivan with its characteristic intonation and the peculiar speech rhythm that was typical of the character. I hadn't rehearsed this part in Moscow (it was Cheban who had performed this role masterfully), and I had only been involved in the staging of the play (as was the case, incidentally, with all the productions of our theatre*). The character of Ivan created by Cheban was so different from the one that unconsciously took shape within me that the thought of any possible influence from Cheban was out of the question. I placed myself with complete trust at the disposal of Ivan and merely watched as he embodied *himself* with every passing day and worked out the details of his own being and behaviour on the stage. By the end of the rehearsal period he was a wonderful combination of extreme cruelty and childlikeness. The Repertkom proved to be right: Ivan the Terrible succeeded in exonerating himself. He evoked the audience's pity. Stanislavsky had taught us: 'when you're acting an evil character, try and find what is good in him'. My Ivan found what was good within himself. The closer he approached death and the more terrifying he became outwardly, the more his soul pined and the more the audience wanted to help that doomed old man. His anger and fury turned into cries of horror in the face of his inevitable death. Through the character of Ivan, I viewed the whole play as a prolonged process of dying, as *The* Death *of Ivan the Terrible*. In the course of the performance, the cruel tsar turned into a defenceless human being, the old man became an infant. The way he died in the last scene was amazing: his physical body became transparent; his arms, legs and neck weakened, and only his eyes, like those of a frightened infant, were opened more widely.

Also, the passing of time on stage took on a strange dimension as his end was approaching. Not only could my fellow actors and I feel it, but the entire audience could as well: time started to slow down in the final two or three minutes before his death. It had nothing to do with the tempo of the acting; it was time itself, the *sense* of time, that slowed down to a complete standstill and stopped altogether for a moment, and everybody knew for certain that Ivan had died. Then, towards the

* i.e. the MAAT 2. (Editors' note.)

end of the act, time began to accelerate again. Later when I was analysing that stage effect, I realized two things. Firstly, the proper rhythmical (that is to say, musical) preparation of the effect, linked to the sense of time, is important; this can be achieved by methods of staging. Secondly (and this is the main thing), it is achieved by the radiating power of the actor's stage presence, which cannot be gauged by external means. Inspired by the dying Ivan, I did in actual fact radiate out into the audience both the slowing down of time and its complete standstill. During moments of inspiration (that is, the relinquishing of his own insignificant personality), the actor can, by radiating his stage presence, convey to the audience everything that he himself, the playwright and their joint creation – i.e. the character on stage – want to express.

However, my subconscious wasn't always as keen to help me in my artistic work as it was with the part of Ivan the Terrible. There were times when the connection to the subconscious was severed for long periods of time. At other times it would happen that this higher

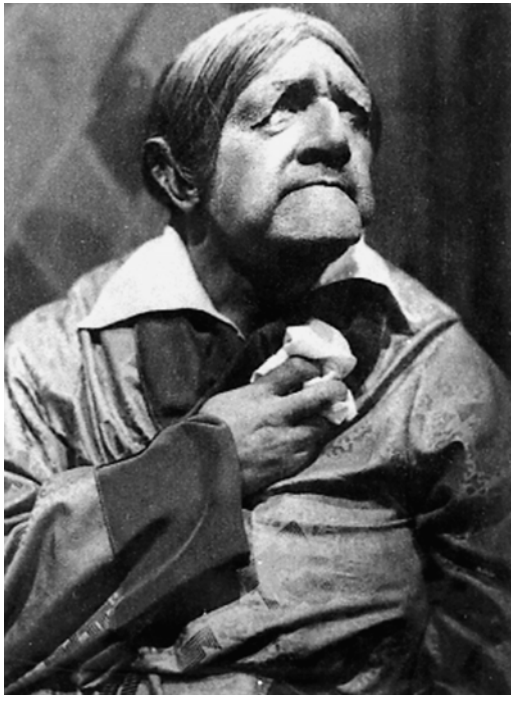

Plate 41
Michael Chekhov as Foma Opiskin in the dramatization of *The Village of Stepanchikovo* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Russian Drama Theatre in Riga. 1932

consciousness was only kindled at the dress rehearsal or the première.* [. . .] There were cases, however, where my subconscious remained stubbornly silent and the part didn't work. That was the case with Epikhodov at the MAT† and in *The Village of Stepanchikovo* at the Russian Drama Theatre in Riga.[45] In both cases, I had roles in which I had previously seen that genius of an actor, Moskvin, playing in his unsurpassable manner. His portrayals always made such an indelible impression on me and affected my imagination so deeply that I could never free myself of them and I copied them unwittingly. The copies turned out to be poor ones and didn't leave any room for any original artistic creativity.

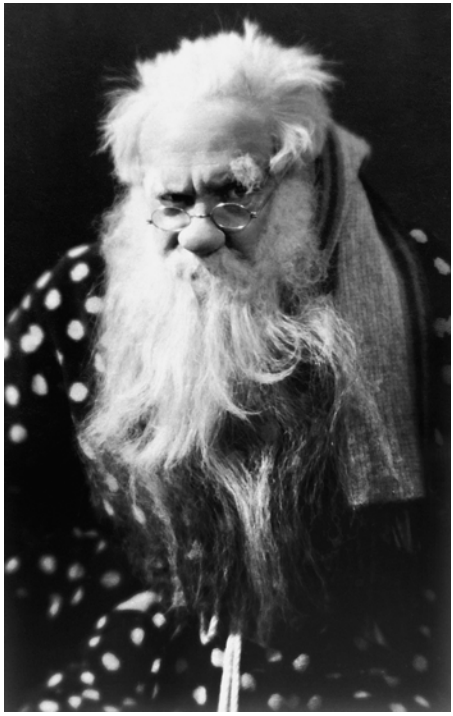

Plate 42 Michael Chekhov as Daddy in the dramatization of Anton Chekhov's story *The Bridegroom and Daddy*. Riga. 1932

* Here Chekhov refers to his parts of Frazer in *The Flood* and Erik in *Erik XIV* which he performed in the First Studio. (Editors' note.)

† Epikhodov is the character in Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* which Chekhov played in the 1913 production at the MAT instead of the original performer, Ivan Moskvin, who fell ill. (Editors' note.)

The Government Inspector and *The Flood** were running at the Russian Drama Theatre, and the unsuccessful *Village of Stepanchikovo* also ran for a short while. *Hamlet* and *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* were running at the Latvian State Theatre.[46]

[. . .] I led a full life as an actor. There didn't seem to be any free time, but that only appeared to be the case. I also found time to work in the theatre school organized by the Latvian Government,[47] which entrusted me with its leadership and teaching. Being a foreigner, I wasn't officially allowed to be the head of a state institution and so a former mayor, Mr A.,† a well-respected figure in Riga, was appointed director of the school. Stout and of a kindly disposition, he would always fall asleep in classes, which he only used to attend for the sake of appearances. The actual responsibility lay with me. [. . .]

During the period in which I was organizing the school in Riga, I received an invitation from Andrey Zhilinsky,‡ the director of the Lithuanian State Theatre in Kaunas.[48] Zhilinsky had been an actor in the MAAT and MAAT 2 and was accordingly an old friend and colleague. He invited me to work at his theatre as a director and lecturer for the company of the theatre, of which he was in charge. Strange to say, I found time for this work too.[49] Admittedly, I had to travel two or three times a week from Latvia to Lithuania and back, but nevertheless, having assistants at my disposal, I managed to discharge the responsibilities I had assumed.

So, Kaunas was not spared my *Hamlet* either. This time, however, I only participated as the director. Zhilinsky himself played Hamlet.[50] His Hamlet was an astonishing creation, whose being seemed to move and rush along *above* the events that were taking place in his surroundings. But at the same time, with his fiery, suffering heart, astute mind and penetrating glance he was completely here on the earth with the king, queen, Ophelia, Horatio and old Polonius. How did Zhilinsky

* Both of these were old productions of the Russian Drama Theatre with the previous casts into which Chekhov was fitted to play the characters of Khlestakov and Frazer respectively. (Editors' note.)

† The identity of Mr A. is unconfirmed. (Editors' note.)

‡ Andrey Zhilinsky (born Andrius Oleka-Zhilinskas) (1893–1948), actor and director. Lithuanian by birth, he moved in 1929 from Moscow to Kaunas, where he assumed Lithuanian citizenship. (Editors' note.)

Plate 43 Michael Chekhov with the participants of the Theatre Seminar in Riga. 1932

manage it? How did he achieve such an astounding effect? It is a mystery of his artistic soul. His outer appearance also captivated the public: handsome, regular features, a well-proportioned, tall figure and a deep voice that spoke right to the heart – all this was at the disposal of this remarkable actor. I enjoyed working with him. We spoke the same language since both of us had been pupils of Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko.

Zhilinsky, himself a director of drama and opera,* acted with that particular 'grasp of the whole', which is not always attainable even by a gifted actor, unless he has experienced the trials and tribulations of being a director. Zhilinsky felt and acted the *whole* play as an entirety, and not just his own part. His being radiated the whole, distinctive 'world' of *Hamlet*. This kind of radiation cannot be measured or weighed, but its power is enormous and the audience is always unconsciously grateful to the actor for it.

Zhilinsky played Sir Toby in my next production (*Twelfth Night*) in Kaunas.[51] I watched him and tried to discover the slightest hint or scantest trace in his acting, figure and voice which would betray the fact that he had just played the Prince of Denmark. I found none. The knowing eyes had turned into the short-sighted eyes of a drunkard, there was a debauched ring to his voice, a mischievous swing to his movements and the well-proportioned figure of Hamlet had been transformed into the podgy, genial figure of Sir Toby, weighed down by his sizeable paunch. For me, the ability to transform oneself totally has always been the hallmark of talent and the divine spark within the actor. It is the characteristic of the Russian actor *par excellence*. The time will come, however, when the Western actor will realize how impoverished he has become on stage by portraying himself all his life. People may say, 'Well, what about Charlie Chaplin or Grock?' Yes, if you have their genius and you can create a similar fabulous character capable of conveying the infinite variety of human experience that they did, then play the same character all your life, and praise and honour will be yours and no one will condemn you.

* Within the structure of the Lithuanian State Theatre, there were drama, opera and ballet troupes of which Zhilinsky was an artistic director. (Editors' note.)

In my training with the actors,* I did exercises, *études* and improvisations. Most of them showed a genuine, real interest. At their request, I wrote them letters on acting from Latvia. They were the beginning of the notes that I later elaborated and revised to form my book on the actor's technique.[52] I shall always remember the two years I spent working at Zhilinsky's theatre with a feeling of joy and gratitude.[53]

Destiny was indeed favourable to me in that period of my life. I met Mstislav Dobuzhinsky† again after a long 'separation'. He was working with drama and opera at the Lithuanian State Theatre at the time. I had the opportunity of seeing him almost every day and, what is more, I worked with him on my productions.[54] I thought in my extreme naiveté that I *knew* Dobuzhinsky, the artist. Well, did I really? What a marvellous 'disappointment' I was to have! It was only then that I saw for the first time his 'City of the Future' pictures, which were frightening and similar to the visions of the Apocalypse. What did Dobuzhinsky do with *space* in those pictures? It isn't space as we know it, as we see it around us. It is greater, it is unreal, and has the quality of a legend, a prophecy, a fairy tale. I looked at the pictures, said 'Good God!' and 'I can't believe it!' and did not know what to say, while Dobuzhinksy just sat there in embarrassment. Was this really the same Dobuzhinsky who portrayed scenes of St Petersburg and Tambov with such delicate romanticism, with their footbridges, woodpiles by fences and pretzel signs outside the bakers' shops?

Dobuzhinsky was painting the scenery for his *Government Inspector*[55] in the workshops in the loft of the theatre. I observed him applying patches of colour with a long brush. Those patches remained a mystery to me when I saw them close up, but I was astonished when the big day came and the set was assembled on stage! I looked at the surface of the wall and the corner of Anton Skvoznik-Dmukhanovsky's‡ room. Those mysterious specks and patches were not only alive and vibrant, they also made one laugh! They imparted something of

* i.e. of the Lithuanian State Theatre. (Editors' note.)

† Mstislav Dobuzhinsky (1875–1957), Russian painter and theatre designer, whom Chekhov first met when they both worked for the MAT. (Editors' note.)

‡ Name of one of the principal characters in *The Government Inspector*. (Editors' note.)

Skvoznik-Dmukhanovsky's life, with the humour of Gogol added and a little grin from Dobuzhinsky to boot. There were no distortions to make you laugh, everything was natural and simple, but at the same time unnatural and complex. It was the same with the costumes, the stage lay-out and the lighting. And what about his sets for Dostoyevsky?[56] Could this really be the same person? No, it was better not to ask that question. [. . .]

There was one person in Riga [. . .] Yanis Karklin,* a theatre critic by profession and a man of unusual inner strength. Being an idealist, he loved his country in a non-chauvinistic fashion. He was upright, truthful and fearless, and he acted, as it were, as the conscience of his compatriots. All levels of society took notice of his opinions. He had his own, always original point of view on everything. It was as if he could *see* what was good and always unerringly pointed the way to it. He was a small, smiling man of approximately forty years of age, and was taciturn, modest and inconspicuous. If he turned up at meetings, his grey head could always be seen in the back rows. If he quietly nodded his head with a smile and his glasses gleaming, the meeting would vote 'in favour'; but if he sat there motionless the debates would continue. Yanis took our school under his unspoken patronage. [. . .] He once said to me:

'Mikhail, you should stage an opera for us.'

'Yanis, my friend, I'm afraid I wouldn't know how. I've never staged opera before.'

'It doesn't matter,' was his only reply.

Two days later, the chief manager (conductor) of the Opera† made a proposal that I should stage *Parsifal*‡ and offered me an unlimited period of time for the work and considerable resources. Performances in which I was involved continued in both theatres[57] and two scenes for the opera had already been staged when I had an unexpected heart attack and spent over a month in hospital.§ [. . .] I begged the professor

* Yanis Karklin, Latvian writer and theatre critic. (Editors' note.)

† Theodor Reyter (1884–1956), Latvian musician and conductor. (Editors' note.)

‡ Opera by Richard Wagner.

§ Chekhov fell ill in January 1934 when doctors diagnosed him with angina pectoris with which he suffered badly for the following year. (Editors' note.)

in charge of the clinic* to let me go for just a few hours a day to work on *Parsifal*, but he wouldn't hear of it and so I had to resort to cunning. My assistant† used to steal his way into the hospital at night. I would get up and sneak out into the corridor. By the dim, blue hospital light I would hastily set out my plan to him for the scene he was to work on the next day. In this way I managed to finish the production, even though I was weak and racked with pain. Before the final dress rehearsal, I demanded to be discharged from hospital and listened to the entire opera sitting in the auditorium, swallowing pills. The first night was a festive occasion.[58] The public began to gather long before the start, there were no latecomers and a reverential silence filled the auditorium. The singers and chorus sensed this festive atmosphere and gave a spirited performance from beginning to end. There was no applause between the acts, but after the final curtain the audience gave the artists an ovation and there was no end to the curtain calls. The audience was slow to leave the auditorium.

After leaving hospital, my life underwent a marked change. I was unable to act and was in no state to travel to Lithuania,‡ but nevertheless I still used to visit the school occasionally. I gave few classes, but tried not to miss the faculty and organizational meetings. One night when I was returning home from one of those meetings, I noticed that the streets were somehow particularly empty and quiet. There seemed to be a strange, tense atmosphere around me, which evoked distant, vague memories. A familiar feeling of disquiet took hold of me. I made an effort to recall what these memories were but I couldn't, and this intensified my inexplicable anxiety. Suddenly a lorry sped past me. There were people in it standing shoulder to shoulder in silence. Then there was a second lorry and a third. Then there was silence again. Then I remembered: Moscow, 1917! The next morning it became known that there had been a bloodless coup in Latvia, but one in favour

* Chekhov's doctor in Riga at that time was Professor Vasily Klimenko (1869–1941). (Editors' note.)

† Chekhov's assistant on *Parsifal* – as on many of Chekhov's theatre activities at that time – was Viktor Gromov. (Editors' note.)

‡ Due to political reasons, Chekhov's time with the Lithuanian Theatre was already over before his sickness. (See Endnotes 53 and 55 *LAE*.) (Editors' note.)

of the fascists. Ulmanis* had seized power and the merciless persecution of foreigners began. [. . .] I went into the country. My health had deteriorated and I had been ordered bed-rest. I did a good deal of reading, studied lecture cycles by Rudolf Steiner and continued to commit my thoughts on acting technique to paper.

So it was that my attention was gradually drawn to phenomena in which rhythm was manifest.[59] Lying in the garden on bright, sunny days, I observed the harmonious forms of the plants, I imagined the process of the rotation of the Earth and the planets, I searched for harmonious compositions in space and gradually came to the experience of the *movement, invisible to the external eye* that was present in all phenomena in the world. There even seemed to me to be such movement in motionless, solidified forms. It was movement that had created form and still maintained it. When I observed it, it was as if I were witnessing some creative process: whatever I looked at seemed to be in the process of coming into being before my very eyes. I called this invisible movement, this play of forces, 'gesture'.[60] Finally I began to notice that they weren't merely movements, but that they were filled with content: they manifested will and feelings that were of a diverse, profound and exciting nature. It seemed to me that through them I could penetrate into the very essence of phenomena.

By this stage, I no longer just spoke of 'gesture' (i.e. the form and direction of the movement), but also of its 'qualities' (ideas, feelings and will).[61] I started to search for 'gestures' not only in nature, but also in works of art, and I was struck by the clarity and power with which they presented themselves in the works of classical painting, architecture, sculpture and literature. The divine works of Shakespeare became my school, where I could study mighty, varied 'gestures' that were filled with beauty and power. When I then performed 'gestures' that I myself had created, they invariably called forth feelings and will-impulses inside me and gave rise to creative images.

I then felt a new appreciation for Rudolf Steiner's Eurythmy. Its gestures and forms embody the creative forces of man and nature. What

* Karlis Ulmanis (1877 – 1942), the most prominent politician in pre-World War II Latvia, served as prime minister in several governments between 1918 and 1940. (Editors' note.)

a wealth and diversity it contains! However, my 'gestures' and their compositions were random creations. I began to read the relevant literature in search of the laws that might govern them. This was a task that lasted for several years. The more I read, the more confused I became by the wealth of material. As ever, however, the clear and exact thoughts of Rudolf Steiner led me out of the maze yet again. I began to study anthroposophical writers. Their works on natural science, medicine, education, history, astronomy, etc., had many passages dealing with questions of composition and rhythm. The works on theology inspired by the spiritual scientific research of Rudolf Steiner were of particular value to me. By studying the rhythmical and compositional elements contained in the Bible, theologists had succeeded in uncovering the new layers of meaning enciphered within them. (I soon became engrossed in these wonderful works for their own sake, quite apart from my initial aim in reading them.) My 'gestures' and their compositions now rested on a firm, systematic foundation of regularity.

I then turned my thoughts to using 'gesture', which has such a powerful effect on the psyche in the art of theatre, and I realized that every play, every stage character, costume, set, *mise-en-scène*, speech (expressed through the gestures of Eurythmy) – in a word, everything that the audience sees and hears on the stage can be expressed as a living, evocative 'gesture' with its attendant 'qualities'. The combination of these can give harmony of composition to the performance and the acting, as well as enhancing the meaning of what is happening on stage. By the end of the summer, however, the philosophical system that had started to take shape in my mind as a result of all my reading and thinking was so complex that the idea of applying it to theatre art was out of the question. I myself, possibly, could use it for a production or for acting on stage, but how was I going to explain it to other people? Actors, and in particular good actors, shy away from all the discussions, systems and methods that theatre theoreticians are keen to impose on them. I, too, am frightened out of my wits by them; but lo and behold, to use Dostoyevsky's words, 'God had pulled a trick on me' and I myself had created a system that was probably unintelligible without a knowledge of natural science and astronomy! I felt miserable.

But then I found unexpected relief – in the form of a listener, a charming young girl, Mademoiselle Georgette Boner.[62] She was a friend

of my wife's and she had come from Paris to spend the summer with us. She was a special girl and a special listener. Firstly, she was a doctor of philosophy and the author of an analytical work on Schnitzler.* Secondly, she was gifted, witty and had a rich and lively imagination, in spite of her erudition. Thirdly, Georgette was just as simple and accommodating in ordinary life as she was complicated and stubborn in her philosophical transactions and conversations. It was to this nice and beautiful Georgette that I explained my complex theory of rhythm and composition and its application to theatre. My ideas were not too complicated for her, however. On the contrary, she elevated me to such philosophical heights with her questions, advice and arguments, or brought me to my wit's end with the latest psychological thought, that I became apprehensive lest my thoughts were altogether too naive.

Whenever I grew tired of talking, Georgette would read Pestalozzi's† biography out loud. She had the dream of seeing that character, with his inimitable charm and tragicomedy, on the screen. She was prepared to subsidize the film if I would play Pestalozzi myself. She would not agree to any other actor for the role, however hard I tried to persuade her. (By the way, Georgette was the guardian angel whom I had got to know in Paris through the Vysotskys. It was she who gave me the opportunity of staging the pantomime, which had come to such a sad ending for us both.)‡ Georgette would sometimes amuse me with the 'word game'. She was a linguist, but she did not know any Russian. I would say a Russian word and, after some thought, she would almost always guess its meaning correctly by 'extracting the root from the word'. She helped my wife to look after me, and she did so with the ease and skill of a nurse. She had the knack of finding positions for me to lie in that would alleviate my pain.

Meanwhile, more and more news came from Riga. [. . .] The Russian Drama Theatre was in danger. The actors were being sent out into the city squares to rehearse national processions, parades and tableaux. The

* Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931), Austrian playwright. Georgette Boner wrote her doctoral dissertation on the subject of 'Female Characters in the Dramaturgy of Arthur Schnitzler'. (Editors' note.)

† Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), Swiss educationalist. (Editors' note.)

‡ i.e. Boner subsidised Chekhov's production of *Palace Awakening* in Paris in 1931. (Editors' note.)

Plate 44 Michael Chekhov as Khlestakov in *The Government Inspector* by Nikolay Gogol. Tour in USA with the assembled Russian company. 1935

students of the school were ordered to rehearse fascist plays. I would have left Latvia long before that if my state of health had permitted it. This time I did have somewhere to go. I had received an offer from L., a Berlin impresario* to tour America with *The Government Inspector*. He was waiting for a definite reply from me, so that he could start forming a company. The assembly point was to be Paris.[63]

* Leonid Leonidov (1885–1983), theatre impresario. (Editors' note.)

Plate 45 Vera Grech as Anna Andreyevna, Michael Chekhov as Khlestakov, Marya Kryzhanovskaya as Marya Antonovna in *The Government Inspector* by Nikolay Gogol. Tour in USA with assembled Russian company. 1935

Hoping to convalesce a little longer, I delayed giving my final reply and would probably have continued to live in Latvia for some time still, had I not been suddenly denied the right of further residence in that country. It was decided at a family gathering, at which Georgette was present, to leave first for a resort for heart patients in Italy and only travel on to Paris after that. The move to Italy was so difficult for me that I was bedridden for a considerable time after my arrival there. L. was in a hurry, however, and so I decided to go at all costs, even though I was still quite ill.

During my stay in Italy, I continued work on my method, endeavouring to simplify it in whatever small way I could.

* * *

Plate 46 Michael Chekhov rehearsing *A Spanish Evening* at Dartington Hall, UK, with Beatrice Straight (left) and Deidre Hurst (centre). 1938. Photograph by Fritz Henle

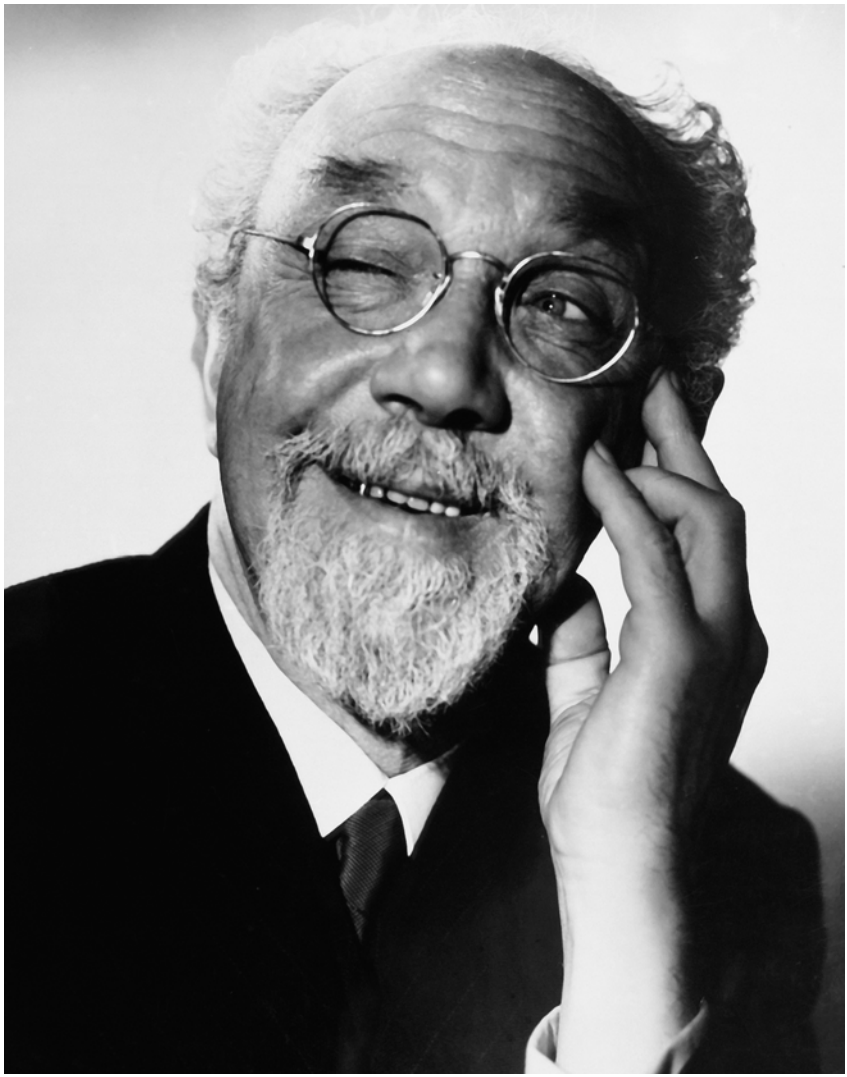

Plate 47 Michael Chekhov as Solomon Levi in the film *Abie's Irish Rose*, directed by Edward Sutherland. Hollywood. 1946. Paramount Pictures

Plate 48
Michael Chekhov as the impresario Max Poliakov in the film *The Spectre of the Rose*, directed by Ben Hecht. Hollywood. 1946. Republic

Plate 49
Michael Chekhov as Peter in the film *Cross My Heart!* directed by John Berry. Hollywood. 1946. Paramount Pictures

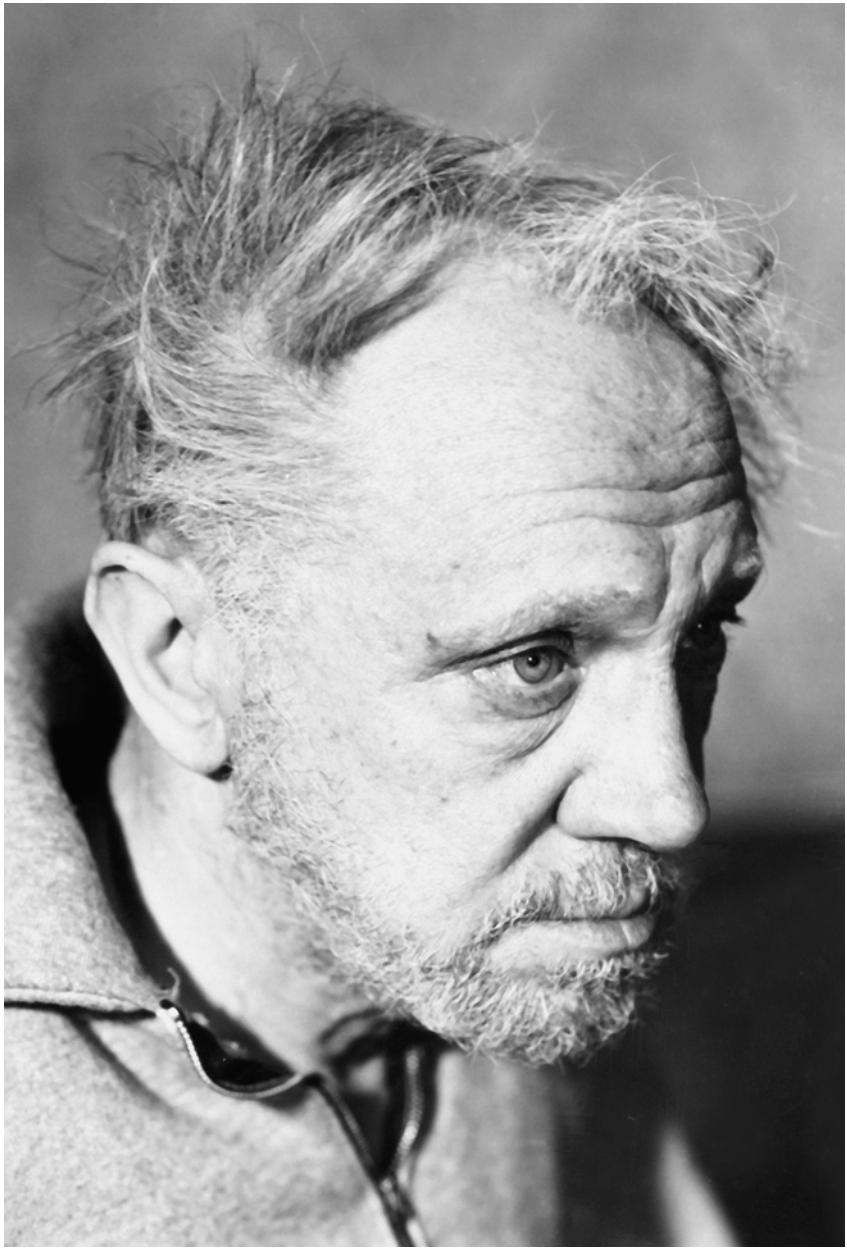

Plate 50 Michael Chekhov as Abelian in the film *Texas, Brooklyn and Heaven*, directed by William Castle. Hollywood. 1948. United Artists

This English translation of *Zhizn′ i vstrechi* (*Life and Encounters*) is based on a compilation of the original American publication in *Novy Zhurnal* ('The New Review') in 1944–5 (issues VII–XI) and the current Russian edition: *Mikhail Chekhov. Literaturnoe nasledie*. V 2 tomakh. Izdanie 2-e. Moskva, *Iskusstvo*, 1995. T. 1. (*Michael Chekhov. Literary Heritage in 2 volumes*. 2nd edition. Moscow, 'Art', 1995. Volume 1.) Although the Russian edition is based on the typescript as proof-read by the author (Michael Chekhov collection of the MAAT Museum), there are still some omissions. (Omissions resulting from Soviet censorship in the 1st edition of 1986 were retraced carelessly in the 2nd edition of 1995.) The memoirs are not complete. Chronologically, they cover Chekhov's life from his childhood years up to the first US tour in 1935 and contain many textual concurrences with *The Path of the Actor*.

AFTERWORD

Bella Merlin

So what can we, as twenty-first-century theatre practitioners, take from the compelling, intriguing and often deeply touching autobiographies of Michael Chekhov?

My first response is actually one of caution: there's no doubt he was a man of genius, and as with all geniuses there's an element of inspiration which will always remain ungraspable by the rest of us. Added to which he was a highly sensitive individual who responded very personally to the political and social upheaval of the first half of the twentieth century, which is hardly surprising! The fact that his driving mission to set up an 'ideal' theatre was repeatedly toppled by one global event after another – hounded out of Soviet Russia, troubled in Latvia and Lithuania, curtailed at Dartington Hall in England and Connecticut in the USA – is a kind of thwarting hard to imagine in our own entrepreneurial times. Yet while my initial reaction to the autobiographies may be one of caution – 'Well, he was in a category of his own, so how can we possibly emulate him?' – I'm also perfectly aware from my own work, as well as the expanding global network of centres and workshops studying Michael Chekhov, that assimilation of his ideas is unquestionably possible and holistically feasible. In this Afterword, I want to draw out a few biographical threads which endorse Chekhov's acting principles and illustrate how workable and organic they actually are.

Perhaps one of the most striking features of Michael Chekhov's autobiographies is the golden skein of humour and self-awareness which runs through so many of his poignant stories. Indeed his ability to blend

comedy and pathos with a quality of *ease* was frequently noted by his audiences and critics. We see this easy blending illustrated in tales such as his sticking the glue from his prosthetic nose onto the Tsar's glove, the galoshes escaping from beneath his costume as he embarks upon his first film role, and his mortification at writing 'wu zet' on the blackboard. This self-awareness reveals not only his creative objectivity and personal humility, but also his piercing insight into both the human psyche and an artistic temperament.

Taking the 'human psyche' angle first of all, I was actually rather astonished to read of Chekhov's penetrating understanding of his own 'joy of pessimism' and how '[i]t is not right to take from pessimism the *meaning of its meaninglessness*'. Not only is this incredibly insightful with regard to his personal psychology, but it also accesses something which can be immensely empowering in terms of creative choices: finding the positive in the negative is deliciously liberating for an actor, and the autobiographies are peppered with examples of Chekhov turning inner contradictions and contrasts to his artistic advantage. So for example, he seems to learn from the experience that he had as a boy when he found himself torn between *suffering* when his father was suffering and yet at the same time *enjoying* the attention that his drunken father gave him. This appreciation of opposites develops in later years into his distrust of 'straightforward and simple mentalities': 'being truly human means to reconcile opposites'. This notion is terrifically useful for an actor, as it legitimizes the existence of irregularities within a character, so that seeming contradictions don't need to be smoothed out in performance: the ingrained incongruity *is* the truth.

From the perspective of 'artistic temperament', Chekhov's appreciation of inner contradictions and contrasts is part of his piercing understanding of the sense of the '*whole*'. Right from the opening paragraph of *The Path of the Actor*, we are alerted to the importance of the 'whole' through Chekhov's desire to see the past, the present and the future as part of one design. Later in the book, he applies this sense of the 'whole' directly to the creation of character: his ability to see the 'whole' of a character as if he is observing it rather than inventing it is again creatively empowering – this time, because of its appeal to the actor's *imagination*.

There's no question that Chekhov's contribution to the imaginative processes of acting is vast, and throughout his autobiographies we see the adeptness and inventiveness of his own playful imagination. His attempts to move away from an actor being enchained by his or her own 'personality' led Chekhov to encourage actors to allow not only a character's *body*, but also its *voice* and *speech patterns* to form vividly inside their imaginations as they incarnate a role. Which leads us on to another huge contribution Chekhov made to actor-training.

As a performer and a teacher, I've personally found Chekhov's approach to *sound* extremely exciting: the idea of penetrating the deep and rich content of every individual letter and syllable, so that you can really *feel* the living quality of each sound has proved particularly useful in my own training of young student-actors. To break away from traditional diction and voice production to a technique which – right from the word 'go' – is psycho-physical, imaginative, and links the body and voice to text is effortlessly liberating for acolyte actors.

Chekhov's imaginative link to a character lies not only in the images that emerge in his head or the sensations that are conjured up by sound, but also in the actual props and costumes: he is one hundred per cent psycho-physical! As he describes his boyhood in *Life and Encounters*:

> I collected clothes from the whole house: father's jackets, nanny's skirts and coats, gentlemen's and ladies' hats, umbrellas, galoshes – everything I could find, and started to improvise without any pre-conceived plan or aim.

Chekhov's fascination with the imaginative potential of real-life objects certainly seems to have been what cemented his friendship with Evgeny Vakhtangov. He delightfully describes Vakhtangov playing a drunk in *Life and Encounters*:

> It was not only he, Vakhtangov portraying the drunk, who was funny, but the very objects he was acting with – the match, the cigarette, the galoshes, the coat – they were all very funny, they came to life in his hands and took on something approaching individuality. Even many days afterwards, the objects he had brought to life in this way were still suffused with his humour, you had to laugh when you saw them.

And this leads us to another vital component of Chekhov's acting principles.

The *sense of play* which percolates his creative relationship with Vakhtangov is invigorating even just to read on the page: their inherent need to experiment and improvise (if a little rough-and-tumble sometimes as the game of the 'trained monkey' indicates!) is intoxicating. And Chekhov seems to wholly understand the ingredients of successful improvisation: built into his descriptions of his games is another deep insight into human behaviour, this time with regard to the difference between *intuition* and *intelligence*. He illustrates this insight with a description of the night before his audition at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1912:

> I experienced the most varied emotions, acting incessantly without any subject or aim and improvising lines and characters. It was revealed to me in that wonderful night that the actor's soul, like that of any artist if it is free and happy, knows *everything* there is to know about the human being with all his 'subconscious' depths. [. . .] He only goes astray when the intellect interferes and violates the freedom that is inborn in the creative soul.

But it's not only his skill at creating imaginary characters that strikes the reader of Chekhov's autobiographies: his ability to 'paint' characters verbally is also notable. Very early on in *The Path of the Actor*, he suggests that his father's talent for capturing the essence of a personality through a pictorial cartoon was a huge influence on Chekhov's own acting. Through his autobiographies we experience the ease with which he can get to the heart of a character with very few words, like a charcoal sketch: we can see his father mashing up paper to make bright red linoleum, we can see Chekhov and his mother cheeping at the new born chicks as the two of them emulate the mother hen. In *Life and Encounters*, he strides through a series of 'spiritual leaders' with a lightness of touch which instantly conjures them up for the reader: there's one with dark glasses and long hair, who says, 'Imbibe God, imbibe Him like brandy, drop by drop, one sip at a time'; there's one who looks like a 'walrus'; there's a stout, attractive lady with an

'other-worldly' air; there's 'Uncle Misha' the medium, and finally there's an elderly lady who 'cried with her eyes closed in séances'. This ability to pinpoint a person's spirit gives us an immediate insight into how Chekhov incarnated a role, and subconsciously it encourages us as actors to seek a similar blend of observation, objectivity and sympathetic humour towards the characters we create.

Two final points strike me about the autobiographies: the first is Chekhov's relationship to Stanislavsky, and the second is his global perspective.

Although there's no question that Chekhov's personality, his life abroad and his spiritual outlook veered him away from Stanislavsky's formative 'system', we cannot ignore the passing of the creative baton from the merchant to Misha. Clearly Chekhov rejected Stanislavsky's early emphasis on 'emotion memory', which Chekhov saw as turning all the actor's energy inwards into his or her own private life, rather than *transforming* into the character and thereby discarding personal habits and clichés. Nonetheless, Chekhov states categorically in *The Path of the Actor*:

> I made much of what Stanislavsky gave us my own for ever and I placed it at the foundation of my subsequent, and to some extent independent, experiments in the art of drama.

Perhaps one of the most profound revelations arising from his 'experiments in the art of drama' and his mystical investigations is Chekhov's ability to take his thinking beyond the realm of acting processes into a sense of profound human responsibility, a responsibility which one senses he believed that all actors – if not all human beings – should share. As he declares rather portentously in *Life and Encounters*:

> What is there to prevent the modern human being from using the achievements of scientific thought for the purposes of conflict and destruction if the authority of materialistic science sanctions their use? In the not-too-distant future science will have the means at its disposal to destroy not only cities, but whole continents. No moral sermons or 'mystical' societies will save mankind from the disasters that lie ahead.

Taking Chekhov ‘as a whole’, the range of his ideas – from social affairs to his unique sense of inventiveness and his ability to create a tragic-comic style of performance, along with an insightful approach to actor-training – undoubtedly renders him an extraordinary twentieth-century practitioner. I would suggest that this combination of play, psycho-physicality, imagination, spirituality and social responsibility can readily inspire us to propel the application of those ideas far into the twenty-first century.

NOTES

PART 1: *THE PATH OF THE ACTOR*

1 In 1922 ('five or six years ago'), Chekhov proposed himself as the artistic director of the First Studio of the Moscow Art Academic Theatre (MAAT, previously known as the Moscow Art Theatre, MAT). By government edict, the MAT gained the status of 'academic' (i.e. Moscow Art Academic Theatre, MAAT) in 1919. (See Endnote 17 *TPOTA*.) (Note: the editors of this volume have unified Chekhov's references to the Studio by naming it the First Studio throughout this text.) At this time, Chekhov wanted to lead his colleagues in the search for a pioneering way forward for the theatre, as the 'instinctive discontent' with theatre in general which he had begun to feel much earlier in his career had started to transform itself into 'concrete thoughts' about a new technique of acting, along with his growing interest in the 'ideal' nature of theatre art. Around this time, Chekhov was blossoming as an actor and his popularity was increasing, following his 'eccentric' (or 'grotesque') portrayal of Khlestakov in *The Government Inspector*, written by Nikolay Gogol and directed by Konstantin Stanislavsky at the MAAT in 1921.

2 Chekhov's views on the systematic art of a 'new theatre' were first reflected in his answers to the questionnaire, 'On the Psychology of Acting' (1923). His first attempt to represent these views as a practical working method was realized in 1923–4 at the First Studio's production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, rehearsals for which were specifically focused on the development of a 'new technique of acting'. (See Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 65–75, 378–433; *Drama Review* 1983: 22–33.)

3 Michael Chekhov's father, Alexander Chekhov (1855–1913), was the eldest of five brothers and one sister, the famous writer Anton (1860–1904) being the middle sibling. Alexander, who was very well educated and a gifted all-rounder, graduated from Moscow University and worked primarily as a writer and journalist. His intimate relationship and permanent correspondence with his brother Anton continued until Anton's death in 1904. 'Mikhailo' is an ancient Slavonic form of the name 'Mikhail' (Michael).

4 Alexander Chekhov had two sons from his first marriage with Anna Khrushcheva-Sokolnikov (née Alexandrova) (1847–88); they were called Nikolay (born in 1884) and Anton (born in 1886) (named in honour of Alexander's younger brothers, the painter Nikolay and the playwright Anton). Nothing of great note is known of these two sons who vanished around 1921 during the period of the Civil War in Russia.

5 Michael Chekhov's mother, Natalya Chekhov (née Golden) (1855?–1919) was invited by Alexander Chekhov to look after his two sons when his first wife died. After a short time, Natalya became part of the family and Alexander married her.

6 It is worth noting that this *sense* or *feeling of the whole* gave rise to the main, integrating principles of Michael Chekhov's method of acting (such as atmosphere, rhythm, etc.) as he later developed them.

7 Chekhov called this 'passive' phase – which he considered to be a necessary stage in the process of creating a character and which unfurls within the actor's imagination – 'dreaming about the character' or 'actively expecting the character'.

8 Here Chekhov is referring to the miserable conditions experienced by provincial actors in old Russia, including an exhausting regime, performing a new play every night, and a generally low level of artistic accomplishment.

9 In August 1907, Chekhov entered the Suvorin Drama School in St Petersburg, where at the age of sixteen he was the youngest student. This school belonged to the Suvorin Theatre: the theatre was also known as the Petersburg Maly Theatre, though its official name was the Theatre of the Society for Literature and Art (the chairman of which was Alexey Suvorin). (Note: Although throughout *The Path of the Actor* Chekhov refers to the theatre by its various names, the editors of this volume have unified his usage referring to it everywhere as the 'Suvorin Theatre' for the clarity of the reader.) Chekhov graduated from the Suvorin Drama School in May 1910 with a diploma, wherein his specialization as an actor was described as: 'Innately very gifted, revealing particular success in comic and character roles' (Museum of the Moscow Art Academic Theatre, Michael Chekhov collection, 7254).

10 At that time, Glagolin (1879–1948) and Sladkopevtsev (1876–1957) worked as actors and Arbatov (1869–1926) as a director in the Suvorin Theatre. Savina (1854–1915) and Dalmatov (1852–1912) were actors at the Imperial Alexandrinsky Theatre. Both theatres were in St Petersburg.

11 In the autumn of 1910, Chekhov was admitted to the Suvorin Theatre (see Endnote 9 *TPOTA*), where he worked for two seasons until June 1912. On 22 October 1911, he first played the part of Tsar Fyodor in *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich* by Alexey Konstantinovich Tolstoy: this role was considered to be his best performance during this period. The play was extremely popular in Russian theatre at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries and the main part was one of the favourite among those actors who specialized in the 'actor-neurotic'. Among the many roles that Chekhov played in the Suvorin Theatre (a large number of which

were comic) were Epikhodov in *The Cherry Orchard* and Chebutykin in *Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov, and Osric in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. During the first season at the Suvorin Theatre, Chekhov appeared in more than 117 performances.

12 Nikolay Arbatov (born Arkhipov) (1869–1926) graduated from Moscow University, finished at drama school, collaborated with Stanislavsky in his amateur period at the Society of Art and Literature, and helped in the preparations for the first season of the MAT. From 1908 to 1915, he was a principal director at the Surovin Theatre.

13 Chekhov was able to see Boris Glagolin in the role of Khlestakov on the stage of the Suvorin Theatre in 1909. It is interesting to note that, for Chekhov, the legacy of Glagolin's originality in the role of Khlestakov lay primarily in both the freedom and the freshness of his creativity, which seemed to provoke in Chekhov's audience a similar sense of 'playing Khlestakov not like everyone else'.

14 Every Russian has a first name, a patronymic (i.e. a middle name deriving from the first name of the father) and then a family name (therefore, Anton Pavlovich – son of Pavel – Chekhov). It is usual to call someone by their first and patronymic (i.e. Anton Pavlovich) as a sign of respect.

15 Chekhov was enlisted as a member of the associate group of 'actors of the troupe' of the Moscow Art Theatre on 16 June 1912. 'Actors of the troupe' included some actors who were shareholders of the MAT, as this theatre was a private cooperative company. (The 'institution' of shareholding for the actors in the MAT was established in 1902.) From 16 June 1915, Chekhov's status was transferred to 'actor of the troupe', at which point he also became a shareholder.

16 All of these men were involved into the First Studio of the MAT. Sushkevich (1887–1946), Vakhtangov (1883–1922) and Diky (1889–1955) were actors first and later became well-known directors. Vladimir Gotovtsev (1885–1976) and Grigory Khmara (1883–1970) worked as actors.

17 The MAT Studio (as it was first known) was established by Stanislavsky in 1912 as a laboratory where he intended to examine new principles of acting with the young actors and to develop his 'system'. The Studio was headed by Stanislavsky himself, along with Leopold Sulerzhitsky (see Endnote 18 *TPOTA*). Very soon Vakhtangov, who was one of the other young participants, was also entrusted to teach Stanislavsky's system. The idea of preparing and regularly staging performances arose among the young participants who were hungry for the chance to do some real acting. After a few years – when other new studios attached to the MAT started to appear – they adopted a numeral identification to distinguish between them (First Studio, Second Studio, Third Studio, etc). (Note: in order to avoid any confusion, the editors of this volume have endeavoured to clarify in Chekhov's text to which particular 'MAT Studio' he is referring at any one time.) It is under these numeral names that they remain known in the history of Russian theatre (although historically the very first studio of the MAT operated in 1905 under the leadership of Vsevolod Meyerhold). After 1924, the First Studio became known as the MAAT 2 (i.e. the

Moscow Art Academic Theatre 2). It was closed in 1936 during Stalin's repressions.

18 Leopold Sulerzhitsky (1872–1916) tried many professions in his life (including writer, painter, director and sailor). He was intimate friends with Lev Tolstoy, some of whose views on ethics he shared. From 1900, Sulerzhitsky became closely associated with the MAT and from 1905, he started to assist Stanislavsky in directing some productions. Sulerzhitsky had great faith in Stanislavsky's system and helped to teach its principles; he believed in the ideal, moral purity which lay at the heart of human nature, and as the 'system' was concerned with the actor's subconscious, he supposed that acting might provide an opportunity for the ethical improvement of society. For the participants of the First Studio, Sulerzhitsky was not only a teacher, but also a sort of 'spiritual father'. He cultivated in the First Studio a quality of collectivism and a sense of family.

19 Richard Boleslavsky (born Srzednicki) (1887–1937) was a stage and motion-picture actor and director, who worked in both the MAT and the First Studio. After emigrating to Europe in 1920 and then on to America in 1922 (where in 1929 he established himself in Hollywood), Boleslavsky became a teacher and an ambassador for Stanislavsky's system. His book *Acting, the First Six Lessons* (first published in New York in 1933) was reprinted nine times in the States and thereafter in Europe.

20 *The Wreck of 'The Good Hope'*, written by Herman Heijermans and directed by Richard Boleslavsky, was presented for the first time at a private performance for the MAT company on 15 January 1913. Stanislavsky considered the production to be a 'resounding success' based around the previous work which had been undertaken collectively on his own 'system'; he noted a 'simplicity and depth in the acting' of a quality that was new and previously unknown in the MAT. The first public performance took place on 4 February 1913. Chekhov's performance in the role of the old fisherman Cobe was recognized as the best in the acting company, demonstrating 'genuine humour, a heart-warmingness free of sentimentality, and an already significant ability for stage inventiveness' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 446).

21 The Society for Supporting the Setting-Up of Factory and Village Theatres (established in 1911 with the participation of Vladimir Gotovtsev) and Polenov House (the House of Theatrical Enlightenment, founded in 1915 by the painter Vasily Polenov partly out of his own funds) were in fact different institutions, although they pursued similar aims. (Original Russian editors' note.)

22 *The Festival of Peace* opened on 15 November 1913. Chekhov played the old servant Fribe. Due to his brilliant acting, many reviews identified this small part as the main and certainly the best role in the production, and they noticed the ambivalent comic-tragic nature of Chekhov's performing (Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 451–2). *The Cricket on the Hearth* opened on 24 November 1914. This performance is known as the 'manifesto' of the First Studio – both in terms of ethics and aesthetics – because of its particular moral world-view and its artistic method. As the old toy-maker, Caleb

Plemmer, Chekhov was 'touching', 'exciting', and 'full of gentle humour and tender lyricism'. Chekhov himself was recognized as an 'unquestionable talent' and a 'great hope for the theatre' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 454–5).

23 The House of Romanov refers to the ancient Russian noble family of the Romanovs, who from 1613 were tsarist and from 1721 were an imperial dynasty which reigned till 1917. The film *The Three Centuries' Reign of the House of Romanov* appeared on the screen in February 1913.

24 Mikhail Fyodorovich, the first of the Romanov dynasty, was elected in 1613 at the age of sixteen to be the Tsar of Russia. For some time, he and his mother refused to take up this mission.

25 Chekhov's attitude towards film acting remained negative throughout his life, though he was obliged to appear in further movies, especially after his emigration both to Germany and America, where he spent the last period of his life acting and teaching in Hollywood. For Chekhov, it seemed unnatural to act without any live contact with an audience. (Details on this subject can be found in Chekhov's letters to various correspondents in Chekhov 1995, Volume 1.) The best known part that Chekhov played on film during his Russian period was the waiter Skorokhodov in Yakov Protozanov's *A Man from the Restaurant* (1927) based on the story by Ivan Shmelyov.

26 It is important to emphasize that in Chekhov's formulas (i.e. his basic principles of acting) of 'body in space' and 'rhythm in time', body and space as well as rhythm and time are not just combinations of odd components, they are expressions of his understanding of 'the whole', and as such they could just as easily be converted into the formulas of 'body as a space' and 'rhythm as a time'. What this means in essence is that theatre cannot master and express theatrical *space* without the means of the actors' *bodies*. Only through actors' movements and gestures can the idea of 'dead', 'empty' space be transformed into 'alive', 'artistic' space, while *rhythm* is the key to realizing the idea of *time* on the stage, providing the means by which to slow the sense of it down and speed it up.

27 Chekhov might not have known that Sulerzhitsky had been arrested and exiled to Kushka (the extreme south of the Russian Empire) for refusing to swear to the Russian Tsar when he himself was called up for military service in 1896.

28 The First Studio's book is kept in the Museum of the MAAT (KS 13771). Its pages are full of jottings by Leopold Sulerzhitsky, as well as notes, poems and drawings by Evgeny Vakhtangov, Michael Chekhov, Alexander Geirot and other students. (Original Russian editors' note.)

29 Although he began as one of the most talented and faithful of Stanislavsky's pupils – soon becoming a teacher and propagandist of his 'system' – by the end of his life Vakhtangov had become more and more interested in (on the one hand) freeing an actor from his own personality and (on the other hand) preventing him from being too inhibited by a role. In his famous last production of Carlo Gozzi's *Princess Turandot* at the Third Studio in 1922, Vakhtangov tried to turn the actors towards the principles of improvisation adopted by the Italian *commedia dell'arte* players, asking

them not only to *play* the character, but also to play *with* the character. When Vakhtangov started out as a young director, he worked along the lines of extreme psycho-naturalism; by the end of his life, he had moved towards a sense of genre and 'convention'. The last year of his diary contains many notes in which he expressed his great and growing interest in Vsevolod Meyerhold's directing, celebrating him (certainly as far as directing was concerned) as the greatest genius of the time.

30 It is worth noting that in his later work, Stanislavsky himself moved away from intensive Round the Table analysis and discussion of a text towards more psycho-physical and improvisatory aspects of rehearsal processes with his Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis. The extent to which the various experiments undertaken by the younger practitioners including Vakhtangov and Chekhov in the offshoots of the Moscow Art Theatre influenced their own teacher remains an area for much debate.

31 Karl Marx (1818–83), German economist, sociologist and political theorist; Friedrich Engels (1820–95), German socialist philosopher and sociologist; Karl Kautsky (1854–1938), Marxist theorist and one of the leaders of the German Social Democratic Party.

32 The majority of reviewers have noted the same duality in Chekhov's early characters (Cobe, Fribe, Caleb, Frazer and others) as was perceived by the audience. The portrayals were funny and miserable, and yet the more piteous (and even repulsive) they were in their lack of will and misfortune, the greater the sympathy they provoked in the spectators. This was due in part to the fact that Chekhov's love and pathos towards his characters was proportional to his ridicule of them: by concentrating intensely on the characters' comic aspects, he simultaneously expressed the characters' miserable features, and it was this paradox which provided the dual comic-tragic effect of Chekhov's acting for the audience.

33 Here Chekhov exaggerates his guilt and irresponsibility towards the theatre; this trough of despair characterized a period of about a year between 1917 and 1918 when he hardly made any stage appearances. Chekhov's moral and psychological state was intensified by various external events such as the October Revolution of 1917, his abandonment by his first wife, Olga Chekhov (née Knipper, the niece of Anton Chekhov's wife) and the suicide of his beloved cousin, Vladimir Chekhov (these two latter events took place in December 1917). It was in the autumn of 1917 during rehearsals for Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* (directed by Stanislavsky at the MAT) that Chekhov suffered the first major fracture in his creative processes as he prepared for the role of Treplev. Here for the first time he disagreed with Stanislavsky and openly contradicted him in his vision of the character and his method of working on it. The complicated combination of external events, inner psychological processes and contradictions in the professional sphere conspired in Chekhov's psychological 'fracture' (see Kirillov 1992: 276–7). This production of *The Seagull* was never finished. In December 1917, Stanislavsky berated Chekhov for his inertia in the theatre; Chekhov applied for an official leave of absence and was granted a six-month sabbatical from the MAT and the First Studio.

34 This event took place on 13 December 1917. Chekhov appeared in *The Flood* (which opened on 14 December 1915) in the role of the failing stock trader, Frazer (he and Vakhtangov – who directed the production – appeared in the role by turns). Chekhov was again hailed in this role as the best performer, affecting his spectators with his 'tragi-comic' acting. It was in playing Frazer that Chekhov first noted his conscious interest in *atmosphere* or 'acting within the atmosphere', which is one of the basic principles of his own method of acting (Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 176–86, 457; Chekhov 2002: 47–62). In her memoirs, Serafima Birman (a well-known actress of the First Studio) described Chekhov's Frazer as an example of his capacity to transform the quality of his acting from comic into tragic by simply transforming the rhythm and without changing any other expressive means (see Birman 1971: 103; Kirillov 2004: 514–5, 621).

35 In his studio, Chekhov taught students Stanislavsky's system as he himself had understood and mastered it. This early experience in teaching (which was quite new for Chekhov) led to his first theoretical writings – i.e. two articles published in 1919 in Moscow in different issues of the journal *Gorn* ('The Bugle'). Chekhov introduced the main principles of Stanislavsky's system (which Stanislavsky himself had not yet published), as he felt a need in his new role as a teacher of acting for a theoretical systematization and revision of the acting process. Initially, Chekhov intended to continue this ongoing publication to cover all the principles of the system one by one, but he broke the sequence at the point of 'fantasy' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 31–58; in extracts in *Drama Review* 1983: 47–51, 53–6). His teaching practice gave Chekhov the first opportunity to look at the principles of Stanislavsky's system and at the psychology of acting in general, not with the subjective actor's 'emotional' inner vision, but with the objective 'rational' vision of the teacher who can observe both process and result from the outside.

36 Chekhov is excessively modest both in estimating his success at mastering and understanding Stanislavsky's system and in reducing his radicalism and independence as far as his own approach to acting was concerned. As early as 1913, Stanislavsky himself had recognized Chekhov as his ideal pupil and the follower of his method who had 'mastered the system in general' and was 'well directed'. He noticed that Chekhov was 'very interesting', 'unquestionably talented and charming' and that he was 'one of the current hopes for the future' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 448–9). In a 1915 interview, Chekhov identified himself and other participants of the First Studio as 'the believers in the religion of Stanislavsky' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 456). Finally, a detailed comparison of Chekhov's articles of 1919 (see Endnote 35 *TPOTA*) with Stanislavsky's later writings on the same matter confirms their close affinity in general.

37 From 1913, Vakhtangov – aside from his other activities – was the artistic director of the newborn Students' Drama Studio (renamed in 1917 the Moscow Drama Studio Under the Directorship of Evgeny Vakhtangov). In 1920, this studio was included among the MAAT's studios under the name of the Third Studio of the MAAT, which was subsequently converted

in 1926 into the Vakhtangov Theatre. The Armenian Theatre Studio in Moscow (active intermittently between 1918 and 1941) was an educational institution designed to train professional actors for the theatres of Armenia. Stanislavsky, Vakhtangov and leading actors from the First and Third Studios of the MAAT also took part in the work of the Armenian Studio. 'Habima' was the Jewish theatre studio which worked in Moscow under the leadership of Vakhtangov from 1917. After 1926, the company toured Europe and America, and they were established in Tel Aviv in 1931 (although they had first arrived there in 1928). It is now known as the State Theatre of Israel.

38 While still in Russia, Chekhov formulated a general system of acting, including many very particular principles. During this time, he taught his method to the leading actors of the MAAT 2. (See 'Michael Chekhov's Lessons in the Council for Teaching of MAAT 2. 1926/1927': shorthand notes. In RGALI File 2046: list of items 1. N 275. While these materials remain unpublished in their entirety, see Kirillov 2004 for extensive quotation.) At this time, Chekhov began to think about writing a special book dedicated to his new technique of acting. He developed and examined these new principles in his own acting, as well as in the experimental laboratory studio work which he later undertook in Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, France, Britain and the USA. During his West European period (i.e. 1928–35 in Europe, 1935–8 in the UK, moving to the USA at the end of 1938), Chekhov continued to work on his book on acting. However, his first completed version (written in English in the USA) did not find a publisher. He then prepared another version in Russian under the title *O teknike aktera* (*On the Technique of Acting*), which he published in 1946 at his own expense in New York (republished in Chekhov 1995, Volume 2). In the Foreword, Chekhov wrote that 'the following book is a "prying" into the creative process' and that this '"prying" had already begun many years ago in Russia'. Chekhov's book on acting was published in English for the first time in its new version in 1953 in New York under the title *To the Actor* with the subtitle *On the Technique of Acting* (republished in Chekhov 2002).

39 In 1926 – a few years after the closing of his studio – Chekhov encountered Rudolf Steiner's lectures specifically devoted to sound, gesture, colour and Eurythmy; these lectures made a great impression on him. That said, ideas of Anthroposophy had already begun to influence his views on theatre some years earlier and his new 'ideals' in art had generally become clear as early as 1922 (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 100, 317–19; Chekhov 2000a: 85–142. See *Life and Encounters* for more extensive notes).

40 After the revolution of 1917, there was an enormous enthusiasm for creating amateur theatre groups in Russia. 'Proletkult' is the abbreviated name of the Proletarian Cultural-Enlightening Organization, which was founded in 1917 and which had local branches all over Soviet Russia till the beginning of 1930s. In defiance of various theoretic declarations on maintaining the purity of 'proletarian culture', the overall majority of the Proletkult amateur theatre studios were led by experienced theatre

professionals. 'Teo-Proletkult' was the executive organ of the theatre division of Proletkult. With regard to the 'Proletkult First Central Studio', Chekhov is probably blending the names of the Central Studio of Proletkult and the First Workman Theatre of Proletkult which operated in Moscow at that time. Among the seventeen district theatre studios of the Proletkult in Moscow was the Kursk Studio.

41 Narkompros was the Ministry of Enlightenment at that time, which governed all the institutions of education, culture and art, and had in its structure a theatre board: TEO of Narkompros. The head of Narkompros was Anatoly Lunacharsky.

42 The performance referred to here by Chekhov took place on 11 April 1921. After the performance the Studio received official status, and its title 'The Michael Chekhov Studio' was included in the network of state studios under Narkompros. (Original Russian editors' note.)

43 After the spell of absence caused by his illness, Chekhov acted for the first time on 12 October 1918 in a performance of *The Festival of Peace*, playing the part of Fribe. The first *new* character to be played by Chekhov after his period away from the stage was Bozhaze in a Russian version of the French vaudeville, *A Match Between Two Fires* which opened on 13 December 1918 at the theatre-cabaret '*Letuchaya mysh*' ('The Bat'). It was in this role that Chekhov first exhibited a decidedly new quality of 'eccentricity', or 'grotesqueness', in his acting.

44 In his letter to the participants in 1921, Chekhov put his departure from the Chekhov Studio down to being extremely busy (see Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 291–2). The real facts, however, suggest that the probable causes were deeper. Leading up to his departure, he had been simultaneously rehearsing the main roles in both *The Government Inspector* at the MAAT and *Erik XIV* at the First Studio, while also frequently visiting the Chekhov Studio and working hard with its participants. He made his decision to resign when *Erik XIV* was already running and on the day after the opening night of *The Government Inspector* in which he gave his 'eccentric' performance of Khlestakov. Shortly before that, it had become absolutely clear that the acting technique in the Chekhov Studio was based entirely on the principles of Stanislavsky's system. Never again in his life would Chekhov appeal to Stanislavsky's system in his teaching or theorizing, but only to his own approach to performance which was in many ways polemical to Stanislavsky's in its basic principles.

45 The date provided by Chekhov in brackets (30 December) refers to the Julian calender which existed prior to 1918; the first date (17 December) relates to the Gregorian calendar which was adopted after 1918 and currently exists in Russia (although the Russian Orthodox Church still utilises the Julian calendar). The 'new style' Gregorian calendar is always thirteen days ahead of the 'old' Julian date.

46 The opening night for *Erik XIV* took place on 29 March 1921. Vakhtangov's production, in which Chekhov acted the tragic role of Swedish king Erik XIV, was later identified as the first example of Russian 'expressionism' in the theatre. The opening night for *The Government*

Inspector took place on 8 October 1921. Chekhov generated a real furore as Khlestakov: according to Vsevolod Meyerhold, Chekhov revealed himself in this role of the astonishing eccentric to be the best Russian grotesque actor of the time. In his playing style, he embodied the metaphoric and phantasmagoric sense of Nikolay Gogol's poetics as they had never been seen on the stage before, and his entire performance had the appearance of a constant flow of inspired improvisation. Though Stanislavsky's overall production was basically traditional and psycho-naturalistic, Chekhov dominated the reviewers' and spectators' reception of the piece.

47 Other company members of *Erik XIV* witnessed how Vakhtangov had made an attempt to rehearse the part of Erik, but he could not continue because Chekhov's performance of the character had made such a profound impression upon him.

48 Vakhtangov's Tackleton was fundamentally different in his manner of acting from all the other performers in the production. It was a sharp, grotesque picture of a marionette-like man, who was mechanical in his movements and speech. Coming from Stanislavsky's pupil, follower and teacher of his system, this style of acting in 1914 was totally unexpected and revolutionary, and yet unconscious. It provoked in the First Studio the initial interest in and impulse towards a non-realistic, non-psychological means of acting, as well as a search for external forms of expression other than those of the inner and personal human psychology.

49 The famous Russian poet, Andrey Bely (1880–1934), who was a friend of Chekhov and left what may be the most soulful, deep descriptions and observations of him, wrote in one of his letters:

> This man amazes me: he learns uninterruptedly, and he learns and searches mainly outside of the theatre. But everything he finds, he immediately and with the involuntary self-interest (in the noble sense) drags into the theatre. [. . .] I have examined M[ikhail] A[lexandrovich] for a long time and I marvel at the great spiritual-moral intention, which acts within him [. . .] I would not be surprised if tomorrow, for example, he goes to university on realising the gaps in his knowledge of sociology, or – following some unexpected, but as ever deep inner reasons – he starts to pave a roadway. For me, he more than anybody else embodies the two-legged idea of the human crisis incarnated in a man.
>
> (Bely 1982: 239–40. Editors' translation)

50 The same dialectics of *what* and *how* (or form and content) were reflected in Chekhov's new views on theatre art and particularly in his teaching of his method in the MAAT 2 (i.e. the name by which the First Studio was known after 1924). It is incorrect to ask an imaginary character questions about 'what' (the character is doing, acting, speaking etc.), Chekhov forewarned the actors, 'ask him about "how".' 'What' is contained in 'how' and will appear from that 'how' itself, because artistic form always has a

profound content and its content becomes clear first of all from the overall artistic picture (see Kirillov 2004: 515).

51 Here again Chekhov is overwhelmingly modest and critical of himself. During the whole period of his directorship, the First Studio/MAAT 2 was considered to be one of the best, most interesting and popular theatres in Moscow, though there were undoubtedly some problems, of which the issue of professional stage directing was the most acute. Nevertheless Chekhov's leadership left a deep impression upon the MAAT 2's destiny and performance style. At the conference 'On the Artistic Method of the MAAT 2' in 1932 – almost four years after Chekhov's emigration – actors and directors of the theatre acknowledged the great significance of Chekhov (as well as Sulerzhitsky and Vakhtangov) in the formation of their original theatre company.

52 Chekhov's performance of Hamlet was recognized as being a great event by the overwhelming majority of colleagues, reviewers and spectators, although the direction of the production provoked criticism for its obvious eclecticism. Chekhov's individual performance was perceived as the main and unquestionable value of the piece, and it served to justify all the defects of the production as a whole. Chekhov interpreted the tragedy of Hamlet as being that of an idealistic, spiritual individual in the non-individualistic world of reality, leading to the inevitability of his death. Furthermore, Chekhov demonstrated a unique capacity to embody not only the character, but also the world around him; he achieved this by creating the scale of the tragic situation and provoking a sense of the *entire picture* through the specific reactions of his *individual character*. *Hamlet* opened on 20 November 1924. At the last public dress rehearsal on 17 November, Lunacharsky handed Chekhov a certificate conferring upon him the rank of Honoured Actor of the State Academic Theatres. Stanislavsky, who had a somewhat old-fashioned notion of 'the tragic actor', belonged to the tiny minority of those who did not rate Chekhov as Hamlet. Some over-materialistic reviews charged Chekhov's performance as being 'mystical'; this charge gradually increased to the extent that it was conferred upon all his theatrical activity, as well as his views on theatre in general.

53 In all the productions initiated by Chekhov during his time as the artistic director of the First Studio/MAAT 2, he took a major part in developing the general ethos and elaborating a new technique of acting, although he never included his name among the directors. Work on all these productions included experimental and pedagogical goals for the acting, which were almost more important for Chekhov than the actual productions themselves. ('Protocols' – i.e. shorthand records – of the rehearsals for *Hamlet* containing many of Chekhov's ideas and descriptions of his various exercises are published in Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 378–433.)

54 Further details about this method of training can be found at www.michaelchekhov.org.uk.

55 One of the deepest and most brilliant descriptions of Chekhov's Hamlet was left by Andrey Bely in which he states:

> Chekhov plays from the pause, not from the word. Other actors – from the word; a pause in them – psychological retouching: not the skeleton of acting. Chekhov stands at the centre of the circle of the role – silently appears. Remember how he sits turned away – in Hamlet; previously the first words of Hamlet were presented – from beginning to end; here – everything that will develop tenders as if from a seed – from this sitting. From the pause – to the word; but in the pause – a great power of the potential energy, which the next wink transforms into the kinetics of a gesture, where the whole body works like lightning; from the edge of this lightning, as from the discharge of energy – comes the word: the last of all expressions.
>
> (Bely 1928: 245. Editors' translation, retaining as far as possible the original rhythm and punctuation)

The linking of pause, gesture and word in Chekhov's acting as described here unites his method with that of Vsevolod Meyerhold, in particular with the principle of 'pre-acting' which Meyerhold examined in his production of *Teacher Bubus* by Alexey Faiko in 1925.

56 In Chekhov's method, imagining the character and making it clear in one's imagination (by consciously asking questions of the image of the character) is the first stage of rehearsing. The image of the character gives its answers not in verbal form, but *visually* by gradually demonstrating its different features, qualities and circumstances to the actor within his imagination. This stage of preparation should develop to such a degree of clarity that the actor finds that he simply *has* to embody the image of the character as he cannot keep it inside any longer. In effect, the image of the character 'dictates' itself 'objectively' to the actor. The main sense of Chekhov's method here is reflected in its name: the 'method of image imitating' or more precisely the 'method of image fantasising and imitating'. Working on the character to such a degree purely within the realm of the imagination frees the actor from the limitations of his own personality, and even from the limitations of the physical world in general, providing him with the 'ideal' and objective 'essence' of the character. Chekhov left amazing descriptions of his own work when he adopted this method for the character of Don Quixote: he wrote that Don Quixote consists entirely 'of a flame', that it is necessary to embody in this role a 'cosmic consciousness' and to 'crumble to pieces' at the end (Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 82–3, 99–111). Chekhov's work on the character of Don Quixote at the MAAT 2 was broken off by his emigration from Russia in 1928.

57 Chekhov's statement about the advantage of a few actors-directors directing collectively reveals his deep, and genuine, delusion. Even the most favourable reviews of the First Studio/MAAT 2 prove that the directing was the most vulnerable and problematic aspect of the Studio's practice. After Vakhtangov's death, there was no director-leader of a comparable

talent and professional ability in the First Studio/MAAT 2 who could support Chekhov's researches. The company simply had no alternative but for the actors to direct collectively. Of course in all such cases, Chekhov's dominant concern was not for the production of plays, but for the development of a new acting technique. Michael Chekhov was a genius when it came to directing his own parts, but he had neither significant talent nor profound professional skill in directing an entire production (lights, music, other actors, etc.). That said, he did serve as a director, especially after his emigration from Russia. Alexey Diky, who began his career as a director in the First Studio/MAAT 2 at that time, was radically opposed to Chekhov's activities and was finally obliged to leave the company: Chekhov did not participate in his productions. Later Boris Sushkevich became the most significant director of the MAAT 2.

58 See Endnote 52 *TPOTA*. In *Life and Encounters*, Chekhov quotes Stanislavsky as saying: 'You, Misha, are not a tragedian. A tragedian will spit – and everything trembles, but you spit and nothing happens' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 180). As often is the case in Chekhov's *Life and Encounters*, this quotation looks 'apocryphal', but in ironic and humorous form it expresses the difference between Chekhov's and Stanislavsky's understanding of 'tragic'.

59 Chekhov chose to have Andrey Bely's novel *Petersburg* (about the Russian revolution of 1905 – an experimental sample of Bely's search for 'rhythmical prose') dramatized by the author, because of his particular interest in the expressive possibilities of *rhythm* in stage art. Although the production (collectively directed and co-dramatized with Bely by Birman, Tatarinov and Cheban) was recognized as eclectic and weak, Chekhov's tragic-farcical performance in the role of the senator Ableukhov was again celebrated for its brilliant and mature eccentricity and grotesqueness. Chekhov revealed the tragedy of a human being in an incongruous, marionette-like figure, and once again he realized the paradoxical unity of sharp characterization on the one hand and extreme generalization on the other. Bely wrote to Chekhov after the play opened on 14 November 1925:

> I left the theatre absolutely devastated by the character of the senator; some great figure arose in front of me. [. . .] This senator, while appearing as a man in earthly aspect, also sits aside everything somewhere in the realm of archetype: like some cosmic figure.
>
> (Bely 1982: 235. Editors' translation)

Even those critics who accused Chekhov of mysticism could not hide their admiration for his 'perfect mastery' of this role in which there was 'no "psychology", no "literature", no empiricism of "feeling", but a real, scenic, proactive bio-montage, where the exact mechanics of the body as theatrical material are used to express a social mask' (see Kirillov 1992: 299–300).

60 In his work on *The Case* by Alexander Sukhovo-Kobylin, Chekhov was freed from any general or teaching tasks as this was an independent

production staged by Boris Sushkevich, the opening night of which took place on 6 February 1927. Chekhov played the old, poor landowner, Muromsky, who is robbed by the officials of the court, and again he gave a performance uniting the tragic with the comic and the farcical. Sharp contrasts, extreme characterization, a general theme of the 'small man' – a marionette and victim of external powers – once more characterized Chekhov's acting. Although this time the direction of the production was highly acclaimed even by as authoritative a spectator as Meyerhold, the size, sense and range of genres within Chekhov's performing were recognized on an even wider scale than was the production itself. In Sushkevich's satirical staging of the play, Chekhov gave an individual and superior 'performance', demonstrating his unique ability to embody the whole play by means of his individual acting skill. Pavel Markov, one of the best reviewers of the time, described how Chekhov played a whole register of genres in his performing of Muromsky, simply by transforming the rhythm of his acting in the same way as he had done with his performance of Frazer (Markov 1974–7, Volume 3: 392). Muromsky was the last new role to be taken on by Chekhov in his Russian period.

61 While teaching actors of the First Studio/MAAT 2, Chekhov insisted:

> Do not try to feel your own personal feelings. It is the character who has to feel, not the actor and the actor must only sacrifice himself to the character. [. . .] In imitating and depicting what my fantasy gives me, I don't have to try to appear *inside* the character, because then the actor ceases to be an artist and becomes a madman.
>
> (see Kirillov 2004: 506–7, 51)

62 While at the First Studio/MAAT 2, Chekhov dedicated a special lecture to the dialectics of 'personality' and 'individuality', which in his views correlated to the notions put forward in Anthroposophy of the 'lower ego' and the 'high ego' respectively. Both of these essences co-exist and constantly fight against each other within every human being. But although this process is unconscious for the ordinary person, the artist has to relate to it consciously, developing his sense of 'individuality' rather than 'personality'. Chekhov's belief was that the 'personal', which is inappropriate for the realm of art, is always egoistic and subjective; it might be effective as far as the audience is concerned, but that effect is not artistic. The 'individual' is non-egoistic and objective, and it coincides with the 'ideal' realm of images and art. Chekhov maintained that the idea of 'temperament' (see Footnote * p. 41 *TPOTA*) resides in the sphere of the 'personal', and he denounced the 'primal' nature of its influence, maintaining that with 'temperament' the actor achieves nothing on the stage except for agitating his audience's nerves. Here we find the roots of Chekhov's radical rejection of 'affective memory' (an important part of Stanislavsky's system). According to Chekhov, 'affective memory' turns the actor towards the realm of the 'personal' and locks him in this realm (see Kirillov 2004: 507, 511–13).

63 According to Chekhov, the process of developing an image within the imagination must be very gentle, gradual and unforced. Any questions and demands from the director can be transformed by the actor into questions for the image. In this way, the technical demands of the production can be fluidly linked to the actor's 'ideal' image of the character. As for Chekhov's manner of speaking in his performance of Muromsky, it was acknowledged to be original, impressive and absolutely in harmony with the character he represented physically.

64 On 5 June 1924, the First Studio acquired new premises and from 13 August it came to be called the MAAT 2. Many streets, squares and cities, which had been renamed after the revolution of 1917, regained their original names.

65 In Chekhov's opinion, his new technique 'is an organ of the actor's individuality and a path towards inspiration'. If notorious 'animal temperament' is a result of agitated *personality*, 'inspiration' belongs to the sphere of *individuality*. He goes on to say that:

> Inspiration is a gift which descends upon the artist from that light sphere of consciousness in which his individuality acts. [. . .] A moment of embodying an image [or character] is a moment of inspiration, which comes inevitably if the actor – by the way of creatively preparing himself according to this method – renders himself open to adopt it.

In other words, if as an actor you are properly prepared, the whole process in performance will continue within a state of inspiration, while remaining rooted in your ongoing connection to the 'ideal image' of your character (Kirillov 2004: 510, 512, 516).

66 It is worth noting that in this one sentence, Chekhov expands his sense of an actor's sensitivity from the tiny nuances arising each day in response to a particular audience to the much broader scale of the ever-changing social and cultural nuances of a particular era or epoch.

67 The catchphrase, 'To be in consonance with the Revolution', arose and became popular after 1917. The First Studio/MAAT 2 was often criticized for its disregard of the modern Soviet dramaturgy; this argument was actively used by Diky and his group of actors, who rebelled against Chekhov's leadership and who were backed up by certain critics. 'Conflict in MAAT 2' was widely commented upon in theatre society and in the press of 1926–7. Chekhov even offered his resignation to Narkompros, but he was supported by Lunacharsky, along with all the artistic leaders of the Soviet theatre and by the majority of the acting troupe. As a result, Diky and his group were obliged to leave the MAAT 2 in 1927.

68 The Albanian-born German actor Alexander Moissi (1879–1935) was touring in Moscow in 1924–5 and on two occasions he visited the MAAT 2 to see Chekhov in *Hamlet*. Ever since his first tour with the theatre of Max Reinhardt in 1912, Moissi had been extremely popular in Russia.

PART 2: *LIFE AND ENCOUNTERS*

1 Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), Austrian-born scientist, editor and founder of the religious-philosophical teaching of Anthroposophy which focuses on the spiritual aspect of life and human nature (see Endnote 2 *LAE*). The Russian translation of this particular book by Steiner was published for the first time in Kaluga in 1911 under an alternative title. It was first published under the title which is given here by Chekhov in Moscow in 1918, which means that it is possible Chekhov did not read this book before 1918.

2 Theosophy (from the Greek word 'theosophia' meaning divine wisdom) is a kind of religious philosophy based on the mystical premise that God must be experienced directly in order to be known. According to theosophy, a direct contact with the deeper spiritual reality of nature and humankind is possible through a state which transcends normal human consciousness (through intuition, meditation, etc.). Among the main sources of theosophy (which seem to have arisen between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries), there are different ancient Indian thoughts and the religious teachings of Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, occult tradition, etc. Anthroposophy on the other hand, which proceeded from theosophy, was essentially pioneered by Rudolf Steiner at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century. It is a spiritual philosophy reflecting and addressing basic, deeply spiritual questions of humanity, but is underpinned by a scientific perspective on the natural world. In essence, Steiner was seeking to synthesize the three prongs of arts, science and religion.

3 Buddha (560–480 BC) was born in the foothills of the Himalayas and at birth was called Siddhartha; it was soon predicted that he would become a Buddha (i.e. 'a perfectly enlightened soul for the salvation of mankind'). Zarathushtra (*c.*1700–*c.*1603 BC) was born in north-east ancient Iran and his name means 'yellow camel'; at the age of thirty, he envisioned God and became a prophet of revolutionary messages of religious purity and social justice; he is the prophet of Zoroastrianism. Hermes Trismegistus (Thrice Great Hermes) is the Greek name of the legendary Egyptian figure and founder of occultism, who lived some time before Moses; Hermes Trismegistus is central to the esoteric philosophy tradition of 'hermetism'; many researchers consider him to be an assimilation of the Egyptian god Thoth and the Greek god Hermes.

4 Eurythmy is a performance discipline in Anthroposophy in which the spoken word is expressed through movements involving the whole body. Eurythmy is essentially speech and music 'made visible'.

5 After leaving Russia, Chekhov wrote to Anatoly Lunacharsky from Berlin (see also Endnote 9 *LAE*), saying: 'I'm an artist – it is my social identity. My artistic ideals are known. As a person I have a great love for questions of religion. But it concerns only me personally.' He went on to say that with regard to his performing and teaching, 'I must say that the care I take not to be importunately "mystical" is beyond and more clever than that taken by newspaper critics' who had indeed accused him of

'mysticism'. Responding to those critics' accusations of particular 'mystical' elements in his art, Chekhov wrote that these elements concern 'not mysticism, but artistic taste' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 346–7).

6 In his letter sent from Berlin to the members of the MAAT 2, Chekhov wrote:

> During this most recent time, the collective will of the majority of the MAAT 2 company has finally found its particular setting, and I realise that this will does not coincide with the ideal and artistic goals which I had in my mind for the theatre as its leader [. . .] It is impossible for me to stay in the theatre just as an actor who merely plays a number of roles, because I got over my infatuation with individual roles long ago. Only the *idea of a new theatre in general, the idea of a new theatre art* can fascinate me and stimulate my creative work.
>
> (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 335–6)

7 GPU is an abbreviated name for the General Political Agency, the secret police service which was a forerunner of KGB. Chekhov refers here to a campaign against anthroposophists, which was part of a full-throttle, anti-religious campaign at that time.

8 An extract detailing Chekhov's description of these 'particular circumstances' was excluded from his memoirs when they were originally published in the USA in the 1940s, and it appeared for the first time in a separate publication in the literary almanac *Vozdushnye Puti* ('Aerial Ways') (New York, 1963). In the Russian edition, this extract was placed at the end of *Life and Encounters* (see Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 240–54).

9 In 1928, Chekhov sent several letters from Berlin to different institutions and individuals in Russia in which he 'set out the terms on which I could envisage my return'. In his letters to Lunacharsky and to the other theatre authorities, Chekhov wrote that he intended to stay abroad for one year and was ready to return afterwards if it would be possible for him to have the leadership of a theatre in Moscow which would be free of political conjuncture and could act primarily as an institution of art. In such a theatre he intended to stage plays from the international classical repertoire, adopting his new technique of acting. The authorities finally refused Chekhov's application, although – as he writes – he did not receive any reply (see Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 336–7, 340–8; Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 524–6). On 9 October 1928, in accordance with his own wishes, Chekhov was officially resigned as head of the MAAT 2.

10 The story of Chekhov's dealings with the Czechoslovak Government (which actually began in 1930 and continued into 1931) is set out in detail in his correspondence (see Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 366–83, 385–6, 390–4). Chekhov's request to the Czechoslovak Government about creating a new Russian theatre company in Prague to operate under his leadership was finally declined, though he himself received an offer of work on a permanent basis in one of the best Czechoslovakian theatres; however, he turned this offer down with thanks.

11 Chekhov related the episode described here to Meyerhold and it featured later in Yuri Olesha's play *List of Favours*, which was staged by Meyerhold in 1931. (Original Russian editors' note.)

12 The opening night of *Artisten* in the Theater an der Wien took place on 11 November 1928. Chekhov's début was received favourably by public and press alike, although the production as a whole – unlike the production in Berlin – was not a hit. Chekhov was celebrated as an excellent 'new German actor', though at the time he himself considered his appearance on the German stage as an enforced 'adventure and one of the funny episodes of my funny destiny'. He wrote to Andrey Bely about his forthcoming involvement in a new Reinhardt production, saying:

> As I determine it (in my opinion – shrewdly), I will again broadcast from the compresses [i.e. shout through the cotton wool], which means I will play a new German role [. . .] Of course it has nothing to do with art, but only fast, fast and fast again . . .
>
> (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 349, 351–2)

13 Chekhov played two more roles in Reinhardt's productions, the first of which was Jusik in *Jusik* (a dramatization of the novelette, *A Singer of His Own Sadness* by Osip Dymov) which opened at the Deutsches Theater Kammerspiele on 12 April 1929. This melodramatic play gave Chekhov no artistic satisfaction, although the production was recognized as one of the major events of the season. On 14 May 1930, *Phaea* by Fritz von Unruh opened at the Deutsches Theater; Chekhov played the role of a Russian emigrant prince, who falls on evil times. This character also failed to give Chekhov any artistic satisfaction, although the psycho-naturalistic production was another success. During this time, Chekhov wrote to different correspondents confessing that the only thing he observed in the theatre world around him was 'affliction and the convulsions of the dying theatre' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 355). 'The life of the theatre in the West, when taken as a whole, makes a hard impression on me. Nothing can be saved, everything has to be built afresh' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 371).

> I can no longer be an actor in the *previous sense* without the connection to the new theatre method, the new technique of acting. [. . .] My work with Reinhardt is only . . . *Existenzfrage*! ['a question of existence']. It is completely impossible to build a new theatre in Germany [. . .] It is only possible *to earn* here, not *to work*, *to create*.
>
> (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 378)

At the same time, Chekhov's interest in searching for a new theatre was growing: 'In spite of the absence of a real theatre, something is developing within me, "theoretically", so to speak' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 352). 'There is a *will* for creating a new theatre, which will come (not necessarily with my participation), and the ways towards it are KNOWN!!' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 355–6). 'The less of the real art I have, the more I like it and wait for it' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 360).

14 Raphael (born Raffaello Sanzi or Santi) (1483–1520), Italian painter and architect; Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), Dutch painter and engraver; Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Italian scientist, inventor and artist.
15 From Stanislavsky's correspondence, it is clear that it was not Michael Chekhov but the Russian impresario Leonid Leonidov who first warned Stanislavsky about this surprise a few days before his meeting with Reinhardt, and the news sent Stanislavsky into a panic (see Vinogradskaya 1976, Volume 4: 141).
16 In the summer and autumn of 1928, Meyerhold and Raikh were on holiday and having medical treatment in France; on their way to Moscow, they spent several days in Berlin. (Original Russian editors' note.)
17 Although Meyerhold researched and conceptualized *Hamlet* for a long time, planning to produce it on several occasions, he never in fact realized his staging of the play.
18 Chekhov's last surviving letters to Meyerhold and Raikh are dated 1934. (Original Russian editors' note.) Meyerhold repeatedly offered Chekhov work in his theatre; the last known documented offer was in 1934.
19 In addition to the theatre work undertaken during his 'German period', Chekhov also took part in movies: his former wife Olga Chekhov found this work for him. Olga (with whom Chekhov had a daughter also named Olga) had emigrated to Germany in 1921, where she made an extraordinary career for herself as a movie actress. During this period, Chekhov acted in three movies taking the role of Poliche in *A Fool for Love* (*Der Narr seiner Liebe*) (based on the play by Henry Bataille) directed by Olga Chekhov in 1929; the role of Jacques Bramard in *A Spectre of Happiness* (*Phantome des Glücks*) (based on a story by Alfred Machard) directed by Reinhold Schünzel in 1929; and the role of a mad, beggar-villager Pashka in *Troika* directed by Vladimir Strijevsky in 1930. In 1930 Chekhov wrote to Stanislavsky: 'I have taken part in the movies three times. But only for the money, of course' (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 371).
20 Rehearsals for *Twelfth Night* began in February 1930 and continued (intermittently due the Habima's touring schedule) until the opening night in the Theater am Nollendorfplatz on 15 September 1930. This production received excellent notices in the press and remained in the Habima's repertoire for many years.
21 According to Chekhov's friend and collaborator, Georgette Boner, this was a brief episode for Chekhov and he soon left the Steiner school (see Byckling 2000: 65, 470).
22 This group was rather motley and included former actors of the MAAT and the MAAT 2 as well as young participants who were taking their first steps into theatre. Chekhov's work with his 'home studio' took the form of exercises and training, similar to those he had led in the rehearsals of *Hamlet* in Moscow. Viktor Gromov came to Berlin from Moscow with his wife actress, Alexandra Davydova, especially to work with Chekhov. For George Zhdanov, who also joined this group, it was his first experience of working with Chekhov. Zhdanov went on to assist Chekhov in his theatre activities both in Britain and the USA.

23 Some participants of Chekhov's 'home studio' in Berlin, such as Gromov and Davydova, followed him to Paris where they joined his theatre group. However, the group included only a few professional actors: the majority were beginners and amateurs, and this was the main obstacle when it came to producing and presenting public performances.

24 Chekhov received a sum of money for setting up his theatre enterprise in Paris from his friend, the German anthroposophist and widow of poet Christian Morgenstern, Margaret Morgenstern, who admired his art and supported his idea of 'new theatre'.

25 Chekhov began to work on *Don Quixote* with his group, though the production was never finished. In February 1931, he organized a Society of Friends of Chekhov's Theatre (see Endnote 27 *LAE*); however the idea of a Russian theatre studio in Paris did not find the necessary support. At the same time as trying to support his Russian colleagues, Chekhov was obliged to earn money by solo performances and the hasty re-staging of productions from his previous Moscow repertoire. In April 1931 Chekhov embarked on a tour to Latvia where he performed the roles of Khlestakov and Frazer with the troupe of the Russian theatre company which worked there. In June 1931, with the participants of his group in Paris, he showed hastily staged productions of *Erik XIV*, *The Flood*, *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet* and *An Evening of Anton Chekhov's Stories* at the Atelier Theatre. Stanislavsky's son Igor Alekseyev saw that all these productions were the 'awful hackwork' which was totally unsatisfactory for Chekhov personally but was necessary to support his Russian colleagues financially: 'He is an excellent actor but a bad director and a worthless administrator' (see Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 534). For Chekhov himself, the material result of this Atelier season was even more debt. These performances made clear that the only real value (as noted by the reviewers) was Chekhov's individual acting which had nothing in common with the rest of the work. Chekhov declined various offers to transfer to the French stage or to return to Max Reinhardt's theatre, as he did not want to abandon his Russian group, for which he himself was the only hope and anchor.

26 The first theatre in which Chekhov's company performed in Paris was the Atelier Theatre in June 1931 (see Endnote 25 *LAE*). In the autumn of 1931, the Avenue Theatre on the Champs Elysées was hired. (Original Russian editors' note.)

27 The list of the Honourable Committee of the Society of Friends of Chekhov's Theatre included musician Sergey Rakhmaninov, his daughter princess Irina Volkonsky and Vasily Masyutin, as well as Firmin Gémier, Max Reinhardt and Margaret Morgenstern.

28 In August–September, Chekhov began preparatory work with his group for the second season in France. He rented a villa at Guitrancourt where they lived as a commune doing exercises under Chekhov's leadership. For the forthcoming season, Chekhov had the idea of staging two new productions: *Don Quixote* and a pantomime performance based on Russian fairy tales which were dramatized by Chekhov and Gromov. Chekhov had initially intended to stage both these plays just before he emigrated; now,

for the French production, the dramatization of the Russian fairy tales was revised as the pantomime *Palace Awakening* (‘*Le Château s’éveille*’).

29 At the beginning of that second season, Chekhov received financial support from Georgette Boner (the daughter of the Swiss millionaire, George Boner) who was working at that time in a French theatre and who met Chekhov in May 1931. Boner was attracted to Chekhov’s ideas for the theatre and she continued to collaborate further with him, remaining a good friend for the rest of his life. She wrote a book entitled, *Hommage an Michael Tschechow* (‘Homage to Michael Chekhov’).

30 Here Chekhov constantly confuses the events and details of his first and second seasons in France. (For details on the Society of Friends see Endnotes 25 and 27 *LAE*.) In October 1931 the ‘Theatre of Chekhov, Boner and Co.’ was legally established, and rehearsals of the pantomime *Palace Awakening* began in the Avenue Theatre.

31 Chekhov considered the rhythmical structure of the action to be the main means of expression in this production, for which the musician Vladimir de Bützow composed the music.

32 Prince Sergey Volkonsky (1860–1937), writer, critic, theorist of theatre art and former director of the Imperial Theatres was one of the best Russian specialists and teachers of the ‘rhythmical gymnastics’ of Emil Jaques-Dalcroze.

33 Chekhov was probably even more piqued by Volkonsky’s opinion of his [Chekhov’s] ‘experiment in rhythmical drama’ (‘*Essai d’un Drame rythme*’) (as *Palace Awakening* was described in the programme) because Volkonsky had a reputation for being a connoisseur of the expressive possibilities of rhythm. In turn, Volkonsky might have been so scathing, as he considered such an attempt – certainly positive in its general intentions, but realized so primitively and on such an amateur level – as compromising his beloved rhythmical art. Later, while in Kaunas in 1933, Chekhov himself wrote to Meyerhold about his ‘experimental’ production: ‘I organised a theatre in Paris, but I over-innovated to such extent that I over-frightened spectators of all kinds’ (Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 401).

34 Vladislav Khodasevich (1886–1939), Russian poet and critic, who wrote a series of essays about the performances of Chekhov’s theatre group in June 1931 at the Atelier Theatre. He recognized Chekhov’s great talent in acting, but was very critical of the productions as a whole and of Chekhov’s motley troupe.

35 The general reactions of reviewers and spectators were negative, particularly those of Russians who were especially sensitive to the failure of this Russian project abroad. Igor Alekseyev wrote to his parents: ‘This project failed even without crackle: the Russian press scolded it, the French press praised it moderately but with obvious irony . . .’ (Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 535).

36 Even if this incident in the orchestra really had taken place on the opening night (there are no other testaments of it anywhere else), it was not that which played the decisive part in the destiny of the performance but its inner contradictions and imperfections, as is made evident by analysing

the reviews of *Palace Awakening* in the press as well as the documented accounts of various witnesses.

37 Again Chekhov confuses his first and second seasons in France. This particular time they gave over fifteen performances of the *Anton Chekhov Evening* for which a few stories were dramatized anew. Michael Chekhov was especially acclaimed in the role of Deacon in *A Witch*. They also gave a few performances of *The Flood* with Chekhov as Frazer. On 15 December 1931, the winter season in Chekhov's Theatre closed.

38 In January 1932, Igor Alekseyev wrote to his father Stanislavsky about Chekhov:

> Of course his entire project was doomed to failure from the very beginning. This time his theatre could only exist for two months and led to huge losses [. . .] He is sad and anxious but not dejected, and he says that even at the age of eighty he will never be tired of starting anew [. . .] He does not expect anything from Paris any more [. . .] I'm very interested in the destiny of his theatre, because if one is to work abroad in theatre, then it should only be with him; all the rest is banality and feebleness. Chekhov remains talented and bold, even in his eccentricities and mistakes. There is a lot to be learned from him.
>
> (Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 536–7)

39 Pavel Milyukov (1859–1943), Russian political leader and historian, minister of foreign affairs in the Provisional Government in 1917; an uncompromising opponent of the communists, he settled in Paris in 1920.

40 It is hard to say categorically whether this meeting was real or imaginary due to Chekhov's probable moral torment, although most likely the latter. Many anthroposophists were indeed arrested at that time in Russia, though of course Chekhov was not responsible for this. In reality, neither his departure nor his return could have changed these events in any way as they were the result of the politics of the Soviet Government.

41 Chekhov spent a great deal of his own money in realizing his theatrical ventures in Paris. Furthermore, he later paid back some of Georgette Boner's investments (see Byckling 2000: 115).

42 Chekhov arrived in Riga on 28 February 1932. It took about two months of negotiations by correspondence between Chekhov and the Director of the Russian Drama Theatre in Riga to confirm everything, as Chekhov's terms also included visas and jobs for Gromov and Davydova who also moved to Latvia with the Chekhovs.

43 *Hamlet* was not Chekhov's first production in Riga, where he worked simultaneously both in the Latvian State Theatre and the Russian Drama Theatre. In the Latvian State Theatre, he staged first *Erik XIV* by August Strindberg (which opened on 8 March 1932) in which for a few performances he played the role of Erik (in Russian while the other actors performed in Latvian). Chekhov's second production in the Latvian State Theatre was *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* by Alexey Konstantinovich Tolstoy (see Endnote 44 *LAE*). *Hamlet* was in fact his third and final

production in this theatre (the production opened on 21 October 1932). Chekhov's Hamlet was an active, spiritual being, free from traditional reflectiveness: in his performance, Chekhov repeated the general concept and conflicts, along with many of the specifics of the 1924 production in the MAAT 2.

44 See Endnote 43 *LAE*. The opening night of *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* at the Latvian State Theatre took place on 23 April 1932. Chekhov's interpretation of Ivan the Terrible presented a combination of sharply contradictory features and evoked a complicated reaction in the audience of horror and empathy (see Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 539).

45 Chekhov first rehearsed the role of Foma Opiskin in the MAT's dramatization of Dostoyevsky's *The Village of Stepanchikovo* in 1916, but in the final distribution of roles, Ivan Moskvin was appointed to play the character. The opening night for Chekhov's production of *The Village of Stepanchikovo* in the Russian Drama Theatre in Riga (it was his last production in this theatre) was on 25 November 1932. Chekhov was hugely successful in the role of Opiskin which he performed as an acutely grotesque character.

46 Chekhov also staged *Twelfth Night* in the Russian Drama Theatre, taking the part of Malvolio (opening night 15 March 1932). He frequently appeared in the dramatization of Anton Chekhov's stories, and with this dramatization, he undertook solo tours to Estonia in November 1932 and Warsaw in April 1933.

47 The Theatre School of the Union of Latvian Actors was opened on 12 September 1932. Chekhov taught there with his assistant Gromov and some Latvian teachers. There was a special seminar led by Chekhov, as well as a programme for professional actors who wished to increase their professional skills. Chekhov taught in the Theatre School in Riga for two seasons until the spring of 1934, and he contributed enormously to the development of theatre pedagogy in Latvia, where the discipline was very young at the time. In the summer of 1933, Chekhov led an additional seminar session for professional actors in Sigulda.

48 Kaunas was the capital of Lithuania at that time. Chekhov visited Kaunas first to sign an agreement on 26 May 1932, during which visit he appeared in the dramatized stories of Anton Chekhov. He also performed Frazer (in Russian) as the guest actor in a production of *The Flood* at the Lithuanian State Theatre.

49 From Chekhov's letters to Boner at that time, it is obvious that he was unsatisfied with the generally low professional level of the Russian and Latvian actors with whom he had to work in Riga, along with the hasty and commercially orientated approach to new productions in the Latvian State Theatre. He had hopes that – with the support of Zhilinsky as a director of the theatre – his work in Lithuania might not be so rushed, but, instead, more scrupulous (see Byckling 2000). The fact that Zhilinsky himself and Zhilinsky's wife, Vera Solovyova (a former actress of the MAAT 2 and friend of Chekhov), were at his disposal as performers in Lithuania was also attractive to Chekhov as a director.

50 *Hamlet* opened at the Lithuanian State Theatre on 11 October 1932. Vera Solovyova played Gertrude, the role she had performed in the MAAT 2's 1924 production with Chekhov as Hamlet (Zhilinsky had played the First Actor). Solovyova specially learned her lines in Lithuanian for this appearance. Chekhov alternated rehearsals with training and exercises for mastering acting techniques, which he led in the Lithuanian theatre on a more or less regular basis. In this way, the process of preparing for *Hamlet* was reminiscent of the production at the MAAT 2.

51 Chekhov's production of *Twelfth Night* opened at the Lithuanian State Theatre on 14 March 1933. Zhilinsky not only acted in the production but also served as assistant director.

52 The core of the group with which Chekhov worked in Lithuania consisted of young actors supported by Zhilinsky who were in opposition to the rest of the troupe whose views on theatre were somewhat old-fashioned. This opposition arose to such a degree that some of the young actors left the Lithuanian State Theatre and established their own company, the Theatre of Youth, in the autumn of 1933. Zhilinsky and Solovyova followed them. Chekhov wrote them long letters from Riga on different aspects of theatre art and his own approach to acting (see Chekhov 1995, Volume 2: 128–39; see also Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 414–15). On the basis of these letters Chekhov began to work seriously and regularly in Riga on a book about the technique of acting, though the first versions of it did not satisfy its author and were radically revised by him several times. This actually became the early stage of Chekhov's work on a book later published in America, first in Russian and then in English, under the titles *On the Technique of Acting* and *To the Actor*.

53 From the very beginning of his work as the director of the Lithuanian State Theatre, Zhilinsky – who was very much involved in Russian theatre and who engaged Russian specialists to work in Lithuania – was blamed and attacked by the nationalists for the 'Russification' of Lithuanian culture. At that time the chauvinistic, anti-Russian mood was even stronger in Lithuania than it was in Latvia. This was also the reason for the attacks which had beset Chekhov since his first appearance in the Lithuanian State Theatre and which rendered it impossible for him to work there after September 1933.

54 Dobuzhinsky was the designer for Chekhov's productions of *Hamlet* and *The Government Inspector* in the Lithuanian State Theatre. They were also supposed to work together on the staging of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* in the Latvian State Opera; however, the opera was never produced (see Endnote 55 *LAE*). They later continued their theatre collaborations both at Dartington Hall (UK) and in the USA.

55 Chekhov's staging of *The Government Inspector* was his last for the Lithuanian State Theatre. The opening night for *The Government Inspector* took place on 26 September 1933. The production was based on a highly grotesque concept: unfortunately the realization of the concept was far from satisfactory at the première, though further performances were greatly improved. Some of the Lithuanian critics detected in Chekhov's grotesque

concept ‘communistic tendencies and propaganda’. These accusations reached Riga fast and spread there through the network of Latvian nationalists. The result of all this was that the production of *The Magic Flute* to be directed by Chekhov and Dobuzhinsky (who wrote of his support for Chekhov’s concept with *The Government Inspector* in an article which was published in Riga) was postponed and never revisited.

56 Dobuzhinsky designed the set for Chekhov’s production of *The Possessed* (a dramatization of Dostoyevsky’s novel *Demons*). Preparatory work on this production began in the Chekhov Theatre Studio in Dartington Hall (UK) in 1938 and continued after the company moved to the USA (opening at the Lyceum Theatre in New York on 24 October 1939). During his Russian period, Dobuzhinsky had designed sets for dramatizations of Dostoyevsky’s novels *Demons* (staged as *Nikolay Stavrogin*, 1913) and *The Village of Stepanchikovo* (1917) in the MAT.

57 Chekhov began his work on *Parsifal* in November 1933. By this time his activity in both drama theatres of Riga (Russian and Latvian) as well as in the Lithuanian State Theatre in Kaunas had practically come to an end.

58 The opening night of *Parsifal* was 14 March 1934. The production was greatly acclaimed and plans were made for Chekhov’s future work with the Latvian State Opera; these plans, however, were not realized.

59 Rhythm had always interested Chekhov and it had begun much earlier to be a subject of his theatre experiments and research. At this particular time, Chekhov’s interest in rhythm was boosted by a new impulse caused by his pedagogic goals – i.e. his writing of letters to the group of young Lithuanian actors on the art of acting and his need to explain his ideas clearly in theoretic form (see Chekhov 1995, Volume 1: 414–15).

60 It was Rudolf Steiner and his Eurythmy first of all (see Chekhov’s following text) which turned Chekhov to thinking generally about the ‘gesticulatory’ nature of the art of acting (including the inner gesture of any sound and how it defines its specificity). Later, Chekhov developed Steiner’s ideas and how they connect to professional theatre art, and he came to the conclusion that there are particular inner gestures which identify a particular psychological intention, impulse of the will, energy of the theatre space, etc. Gesture is one of the main, central and universal notions of Chekhov’s theatre system: for Chekhov, gesture is a common denominator on which various aspects of acting such as speech, movement, psychology, etc. can be integrated and unified into the ‘whole picture’. The section on Psychological Gesture is one of the most central, both in Chekhov’s acting method and in the written explanations of his theatre system (see Chekhov 2002: 63–76, 183–215).

61 In his Russian version of *On the Technique of Acting*, Chekhov refers to these qualities as ‘colours’. In this edition, the section on executing Psychological Gestures has the subtitle, ‘The Fourth Way of Rehearsing’ (the first way is connected with the ‘imagination’, the second with ‘atmosphere’, the third with performing actions with a particular ‘colour’ or ‘quality’, the fifth with ‘embodying’ the character and ‘characterisation’, and the sixth with ‘improvisation’).

62 During this time, Chekhov discussed the points and principles of his system and possible perspectives for his teaching in an ongoing correspondence with Georgette Boner. They had the idea of publishing Chekhov's exposition of his system in German, and Boner set to work editing and re-editing his texts, which he himself re-wrote and improved many times. To continue this collaborative work, Boner came to Latvia and lived with the Chekhovs for a long period in the summer of 1932. In the end Chekhov was dissatisfied with this German version and made no attempts to publish it (see Byckling 2000).

63 The American end of this tour was instigated by impresario, Sol Yurok. The whole group consisted of Russians, who were in part former MAT actors. Zhilinsky and Solovyova also joined this group and they stayed on in the USA at the end of the tour. After gathering in Paris in December 1934, the group gave their first few performances of *The Government Inspector* both there and in Brussels. They arrived in the USA on 14 February 1935 and gave performances in New York, Philadelphia and Boston. In addition to Khlestakov in *The Government Inspector*, Chekhov played Frazer in *The Flood*, took part in the Anton Chekhov Evening, and recited in concerts comprising soliloquies from Marmeladov (*Crime and Punishment*), Hamlet and Ivan the Terrible. In the USA, Chekhov received an offer to work on a permanent basis as a director and teacher of acting in the Group Theatre and an offer to establish a Theatre Studio in Dartington Hall (UK) under the patronage of Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst and Dorothy's daughter Beatrice Straight. Chekhov chose the latter – and he arrived in England on 12 October 1935.

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