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CULTURAL AND THEATRICAL TRENDS OF POST-WAR GREAT BRITAIN AND THE USSR

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Abstract

The main development trends in the theatrical field in the postwar years of the twentieth century in the USSR and Great Britain serve as the central research problems. The authors generally define societal attitudes, reflected in the theatrical scene. There was a revival in the field of art in the late fifties and in the sixties of the twentieth century. The processes had been occurring in the theaters of the USSR by the example of the Kaluga Regional Drama Theater and Britain, compared in this article, common features are revealed. The idea of change was the key to the generation of the sixties in the USSR. Intellectuals sought for life democratization. At the heart of the Sixties ideology laid the faith in the good purpose of history, in the possibility of social change, in the historical perspective. Basically, this was determined by the renaissance of social ideals, aspiring to the future. This was largely due to the social uplift that occurred under the influence of the great Victory in the War, the beginning of the space exploration era, the K.E. Tsiolkovsky ideas and ideals revival. Certain spiritual conditions for an intellectual-humanist upbringing, occurring in 1960s, are emphasized. The idea of two countries post-war theaters likeness is confirmed. Considerable attention is paid to the repertoire of the Kaluga Regional Dramatic Theater, and the space theme that was extremely relevant for that time. This article would be interested for specialists in the field of cultural studies, intercultural communications and theater studies.

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Keywords: Theatre, change, space theme, plays.



1. Introduction

The idea of change was the key to the generation of the sixties in the USSR. Intellectuals sought for life democratization. At the heart of the Sixties ideology laid the faith in the good purpose of history, in the possibility of social change, in the historical perspective (Bogdanov, 2017). Basically, this was determined by the renaissance of social ideals, aspiring to the future. This was largely due to the social uplift that occurred under the influence of the great Victory in the War, the beginning of the space exploration era, the K.E. Tsiolkovsky ideas and ideals revival (as cited in Lytkin, 2012). Historian Sokolov (2007) notes that there were some spiritual conditions for the intellectual-humanist upbringing in the 1960s. There were many educated young people, in particular, humanities who rejected pragmatic pragmatism and petty-bourgeois temptations, who preferred spiritual interests, reading books, attending theaters and exhibitions. An intelligence distinctive feature was the culture-centered life mode.

2. Problem Statement

There was an illusion of community, human solidarity, fraternity, especially among the intelligentsia, at that time. One of the main principles in art was the principle of truth. Ills of the day were reviewed in the theater and cinema. The identity of the individual was of particular importance. The generation of sixties believed that the human person is unique and has inner wealth and talent. (Bogdanov, 2017). This new era is reflected in the Kaluga Theater. In the late fifties, the troupe of the Kaluga Theater was renewed by almost one third. The theater had moved to a new building, were performances begun on December 1, 1958 (Bedlinsky, 1977).

3. Research Questions

The performance about V.I. Lenin – "Kremlin chimes" by N. Pogodin – was of landmark nature in the repertoire at that time. The director and the actor, who played the main role, were to show Lenin as the dreamer. This vision is consistent with the ideas of the sixties about "socialism with a human face", the significance of Lenin's personality was not questioned. Candidate of Philology Platoshkina (1958) noted the bright, optimistic mood of the play. When the English writer tells Lenin that Russia appears to him as a gloomy, frozen and dying country, the first sounds of the repaired Kremlin chimes are heard. The newly launched chiming clock playing the International symbolized the revival of the country. As Platoshkina (1958) mentioned in her review, Lenin's words were utterly modern and sounded with renewed vigor in the play: "We must dream ... We must. Do not be afraid of discord between dream and reality, if you seriously believe in your dream, look carefully into life and work hard, terribly hellishly working to fulfill your dream" (p. 83). Shakespeare's play "Winter's Tale" was presented at the end of the season of 1958-1959. It was a drama piece, where "merged reality and fantasy, the bitter truth of life and the bright romantic dream of the future" were (Krutov, 1961, p. 37). The first part shows the vices and delusions from which humanity must get rid of on its way to happiness. In the second part of the drama, the young prince Florizel chooses to marry a peasant girl Loss despite class estate prejudices. "After all, the sun shines equally over the palace and hut!" Says Loss (Lytkin, 2012). The production of *The Winter's Tale* revealed a tendency of the so-called personal style in the acting game, which appeared in the second half of the 1950s. Paulina,

one of the leading characters, desperately opposed injustice and tyranny, get tough with the courage to the opposite sex (Krutov, 1961). In the early 60s, the theater presented the audience another Shakespearean production – “Anthony and Cleopatra”. The newspaper “Sovetskaya Lithuania”, assessing this performance, shown on tour in Vilnius, wrote: It seems that as an epigraph to the performance one could take the well-known words of A.S. Pushkin about the inherent dramatist free and wide characters image. It is hard not to admire Antony when artist A.I. Tyurin introduces the viewer. He is a darling of fortune, and sometimes it seems to him that the gods chose him as their favorite forever. But the heroic colors of the image gradually fade away in front of the face of the tragic. The director and the theater have broken from a tradition of imagining Cleopatra ... Cleopatra performed by N. Bedlinskaya is already an experienced woman, but forever young in her feelings and desires. The performance differs slender ensemble (Bedlinsky, 1977). The theater reverted to the Shakespearean repertoire, the tragedy Othello. The main director of the theater, V. Kaplin, sought to give a clear embodiment of the ideological and moral concept of Shakespeare’s social tragedy in the late 60s. The upbringing performance’s influence is associated with a convincing, visible statement of genuine humanity and with the denunciation of proprietary morality: greed, amoralism, despicable betrayal (Verizhnikova, 1959, 1970).

Kaluga theater team was one of the first to convey the space theme, important for the 60s, via dramatic art. At the end of 1960, viewers were looking forward to the staging of the first play about K.E. Tsiolkovsky. Dramatic material was created by Bedlinsky (1977), who studied the life and work of the scientist. It was necessary to reveal the image of a scientist for most of his life – fifty years. Despite different approaches and positions, different worldviews and world perception, all known and obscure thinkers and geniuses, scholars and theologians who lived in different historical eras in different countries, unite some great beginning that allows them all, from Descartes, Aristotle and the Buddha Shakyamuni to K.E. Tsiolkovsky, V.I. Vernadsky and P. Teilhard de Chardin should be considered like-minded people and representatives of a powerful cultural and philosophical tradition that pervades historical eras and the fates of different peoples and individuals. This is the “cosmism” trajectory, namely, such a person’s self-perception and his place in the world, when the role of mankind in general and of an individual person in particular is considered depending on the laws governing the development of the cosmos, the universe in general. In other words, cosmism is the understanding that the destinies of mankind and man are inseparably linked with the destinies of the Earth, which, in turn, is part of the universe. Man and humanity, the Earth and the universe – these concepts, seemingly infinitely far from each other, are considered to be interconnected and interdependent cosmism. The subtlest forces of interactions penetrate the cosmos, linking all living, inanimate, rational matter into a single living organism. The theory of cosmism, i.e. cosmic version of the concept of unity, is filled with the deepest moral potential, a huge heuristic charge. After all, the whole can be cognized via the part. For us it seems particularly important and interesting that the idea of cosmism as a clear conceptual form acquired in Russia, becoming the basis for the commencement of practical work in this direction. We mean the “cosmic philosophy” of K.E. Tsiolkovsky and his theory of interplanetary travel (as cited in Lytkin, 2012). The premiere of the performance “Meet the Stars” was held on October 14, 1961. As remembered by theater artist Kurchik (1976), “the theater and the actor were able to show the birth of thought, the ideas of Tsiolkovsky. I remember the scenes when Konstantin Eduardovich listens in deep thoughtfulness to the distant, only to him the clear voices of the

stars” (p. 22). The performance was in the repertoire of the theater for three years; in 1963 it was broadcasted on Central Television. (Kurchik, 1976). The author of the play *Bedlinsky* (1977) considered the fire to be a symbolic scene in the play, when the scientist’s house, all his drawings and manuscripts burned.

And played by actor Tyurin in such a way that all subsequent scenes in which a modest district teacher, an unrecognized scientist, have to overcome more and more new difficulties, scenes in which Tsiolkovsky, alone, inaudible by the people, retains both courage and calmness and spirit. “All these scenes are invariably perceived with a firm belief that such a person will never succumb to weakness, never bow his head to cruel trials, never change his vocation, his human duty to serve people. (Bedlinsky, 1977, p. 20)

The theater sought to reveal the inner image of the patriotic scientist, irreconcilable to inertia and routine, eager to bring as much benefit to the people as possible. One of the central scenes of the performance is Tsiolkovsky’s facing the future, which he constantly dreamed of and which he ingeniously foresaw. The main director of the theater, Krutov (1961), said that in the production he was not afraid to “throw the bridge from Tsiolkovsky’s dream to the wonderful achievements of our days – the spaceship flight” (p. 37).

Space theme was brought up again in the late 60’s. Directed by V.M. Kaplin, “Astronauts” was put on a play by K. Semenikhin and Y. Malashev. Pilot-cosmonaut German Titov said about the play: “Famous words of K.E. Tsiolkovsky about future routes to other planets – “Moscow – Venus. Kaluga – Mars ” – they sound from the Kaluga Theater stage to the audience applause ... I got to see this performance firsthand. I admit it excited me. First of all, it is pleased with the novelty, modernity of the topic. What we, the first cosmonauts most recently lived with, what our comrades now live in, is preparing for flights into space, recreated on stage, recreated truly and soulfully ... I like the romantic, impetuous and generously talented cosmonaut Alexei Gorelov, the main character of the play. ... The statement on the stage of a contemporary hero is, in my opinion, the greatest merit of the theater. Despite the novelty of the stage material, the abundance of “cosmic surroundings”, the main thing in the performance is man. And this applies not only to cosmonaut Gorelov, but also to his mother, his cosmonaut friends” (Bedlinsky, 1977). February 13, 1965 in the theater was presented statement “I’m going to the storm” based on the book of D. Granin. This is a significant work, both in terms of content and in the image of people in the world of science. The result was an extraordinary performance that included the features of a socio-psychological drama genre (Bedlinsky, 1977).

It is noteworthy that the post-war Western theater also had a pronounced socially directed bias. Many theater critics were convinced that theater, like no other art, is able to preserve for social life a sense of social unity – largely lost in public practice. And at the same time, the theater could cause public anxiety, provoke social criticism of current events. In Britain, authors who have not yet turned thirty turned to drama: John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, John Ardenne, Sheila Dileny. World War II overshadowed their childhood and early youth. Wesker commented on the “new wave” in the English drama: “In any case, we all somehow absorbed the same atmosphere: the war shaped our lives, then the hopes of 1945 followed the

common decline. We were a generation at the extreme point of this decline, desperately eager to find something, tired of pessimism and mediocrity". The English dramaturgy of the 1950s and 1960s is not only plays written by young authors. These are plays about young heroes. One of the British critics, Jimmy Porter, called the entire course of "disgruntled youth" "a product of the social revolution of the forties". The revival of English drama and theater wore a truly national character; there was a deep connection of new works with long-standing cultural traditions and traditions of social criticism, highlighting the pressing problems of contemporary social life. New original dramatic works appeared on radio and television; they were played in London, Coventry, Oxford and small provincial cities. An important feature of the English drama of the post-war decades was its active influence on the English (later all-European) theater. "Explosion", "uprising", "revolution" - these definitions can be attributed not only to plays, but also to performances, since they characterize the general process that took place in dramatic and scenic art.

Cultural exchange between the USSR and Britain was held at the end of the 50s and the beginning of the 60s. In 1959, the tour of the Moscow Art Theater strongly impressed Londoners. The tours of the Moscow Art Theater contributed to the new discovery of Chekhov, which took place in England in those years. Chekhov's plays, especially *The Seagull* and *The Three Sisters*, were played simultaneously by several English theaters at this time. The changes that took place in English theatrical art were of great importance. It was the beginning of the democratization of drama, theatrical creativity and all theatrical activities. Democratization in the plays' new characters choice and the theaters' orientation to wider circles of spectators, in search of new forms and means of staging performances, acting, made the stage performance more accessible and more interesting to the public. In post-war England, a new theatrical phenomenon developed - the movement of repertory theaters in the English province. In Britain, as in the USSR, the war that served as the unifying start, showed how a nation can unite: a National Health Service emerged and a new concept appeared - a state with a developed social system. According to the critic Michael Billington, author of the book *State of the Nation: British Theater since 1945* ("State of the Nation: British Theater since 1945"), in the early postwar years idealism reigned in English society, faith in the possibility of a better society, and art subsidies part of this thinking. In Britain, Shakespeare plays have always been popular, but in the 1960s it was decided to expand the local dramatic repertoire, and playwrights and innovators Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco, who became a revelation for the English theater, also appeared, and a new platform was needed to master this material. The Minister of Finance allocated 1 million pounds for the future National Theater – in the conditions of the country's recovery after the war, when food stamps were not canceled. In 1960, thanks to director Peter Hall, the Royal Shakespeare Company and, three years later, the National Theater were established. The very first artistic director of the National was the famous actor Lawrence Olivier, one of the theater scenes is now named after him. Director Oleg Miroshnikov notes that the theater was created as an unusual creative platform that allowed actors to work as an ensemble, which is not typical of English theater life. This company also delivered many unknown plays and helped the theater to gain international status.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this article is to study theatrical traditions characteristic of post-war Europe. The study is conducted on the example of the comparison between theatrical life of Great Britain and of the

USSR. The main task is to identify some parallels and similar trends characteristic of European theatrical life, reflecting the most significant social and political trends in European communities' scientific life.

5. Research Methods

The comparative research method is widely used throughout the article. It allows analyzing the scientific literature and mass media (mainly in the 1960s) of Great Britain and the USSR; comparing the most important and socially significant trends in theatrical life, characteristic of the two countries of that period of time. The method of analysis adopted in this study is most widely used to study complex large-scale scientific problems. It allows investigating separate minor problems, so that, using scientific synthesis, we can combine the results obtained and draw general conclusions. Thus, having studied the most significant trends in the life of theaters in Great Britain and the USSR, we come to the conclusion that there are some general trends in their repertoire and their activities. The article applies the method of working with archival materials widely and justifiably. It is archival materials, especially the media. They give an opportunity to analyze the opinions of contemporaries and specialists about the theatrical life of that period. Therefore, the article contains many references to local mass media, namely, to the main daily Kaluga newspaper, *Znamya*.

6. Findings

The processes occurring in USSR theaters in general, on Kaluga Regional Drama Theater example, and British theatres were compared in this article, and also common features that characterize theatrical productions in these two countries were identified. The idea of change was the key to the generation of the sixties in the USSR. Intellectuals sought for life democratization. At the heart of the Sixties ideology laid the faith in the good purpose of history, in the possibility of social change, in the historical perspective. Basically, this was determined by the renaissance of social ideals, aspiring to the future. This was largely due to the social uplift that occurred under the influence of the great Victory in the War, the beginning of the space exploration era, the K.E. Tsiolkovsky ideas and ideals revival.

We came to the conclusion that some spiritual conditions for an intellectual-humanist upbringing occurred in 1960s. The idea of two countries post-war theaters likeness is confirmed. Considerable attention in the repertoire of the Kaluga Regional Dramatic Theater was devoted to space issues that were extremely relevant for that time.

7. Conclusion

In this article we reviewed the social trends, reflecting the theater stage in the late fifties and sixties of the twentieth century in the USSR and Britain. In both countries, there was a aspiration for life democratization, a desire to identify social problems, the idea of change and faith in a better future was promoted. In the Kaluga Theater, Shakespeare's repertoire was staged, while British audiences continued to discover Chekhov and the playwrights of the "new wave". In both countries, the theater of that time represented a community of like-minded people who were looking for questions on topical issues of modernity, both through classical and new dramatic material.

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