



ISSN: 2158-7051

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL OF  
RUSSIAN STUDIES

ISSUE NO. 12 ( 2023/2 )

***SOVIET THEATRE DURING THE THAW***, By Ayse Dietrich\*, Published by: Methuen Drama. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, Written by Jesse Gardiner, Year of Publishing: 2022. Subject Area: Soviet Union, Theater, Thaw period, Book Type: Russian History and Culture. Total Number of Pages: 215. ISBN: 9781350150621, hardback, \$110,00.

This book is about Moscow's two main theater squares, their common features and the unification of traditional theater with alternative and divergent forms of performance, and the sites and spaces where these cultures meet and the outcomes that arise when standard norms and hierarchies are disrupted. The author examines Soviet theater during the disruptive Stalinist period, the persecution of the avant-garde and cultural figures, and re-emergence of avant-garde style, forms and techniques on the stage after Stalin's death in 1953 and during the Thaw period.

The book is composed of an introduction and six chapters. In the Introduction Gardiner talks about Moscow's main Theater Square where some of the most prestigious and distinguished academic theaters are located. She describes the second theater square, Triumfal'naia Square as the center of a counter-history of the less illustrious theatrical genres. The author also talks about the disruptive period of the Soviet theater and avant-garde during Stalin and the revival of avant-garde theater during the Thaw period (1953–1964) and how the disruptive process influenced, and was in turn influenced by, the broader societal processes of de-Stalinization.

In the first chapter, the author examines the Soviet theater during Stalin and the persecution of the avant-garde and cultural figures, the troubled fall of avant-garde directors such as Meyerhold and Tairov, the purging of writers and the closure of theaters. This chapter also discusses the development of the official method of socialist realism and asks what it meant for the theater in terms of playwriting, acting and stage setting.

In the second chapter, the author examines the turbulent years of the Thaw and explores the brief but influential term of Nikolai Akimov as artistic director of the Lensovet Theater in Leningrad from 1952 to 1955, his creative solutions in stage settings despite the Soviet bureaucratic system and

lawless police state, his breaking with the norms of Soviet theater established during Stalinism by combining a psychologically realist approach. She also explains how Akimov's three plays on the Russian state system *Shadows*, *The Case* and *The Government Inspector* changed the outlook of Soviet theater during the early stages of the Thaw.

In the third chapter, the author emphasizes the importance of the restaging of Mayakovsky's three major plays for the first time written specifically for Meyerhold's theater. She states that by restaging Mayakovsky and remembering Meyerhold, these productions eliminated many of the standard norms of the Soviet theater that were imposed during Stalin. She argues that directors such as Valentin Pluchek and Sergei Iutkevich redefined the framework of socialist realism by including wide range of styles.

In chapter four, the author concentrates on Vsevolod Vishnevskii's *An Optimistic Tragedy* staged at the Aleksandrinskii Theater in Leningrad and Nikolai Pogodin's *Aristocrats* staged at the Mayakovsky Theater in Moscow during the de-Stalinization period and states that by using a wide range of stylized patterns and techniques these prototypical socialist realist plays changed the narrow understanding of socialist realism of the Stalinist era.

In the fifth chapter the author focuses on the Moscow Art Theater (MAT) that was directly linked to the party, and the Sovremennik Theater-Studio in Moscow founded during the Thaw period that restored the values of integrity and authenticity produced by Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko and staged a new wave of plays written by the new vanguard of Soviet dramatists like Viktor Rozov, Anatolii Kuznetsov and Aleksandr Volodin who focused on themes of moral sincerity and integrity, rather than party ideology replacing socialist realism with *neorealism*, a new term borrowed from Italian cinema.

In chapter six, the author states describes the end of the Thaw period as "an uncertain period in which the party's approach to culture was inconsistent and contested, when relations between editors and writers, artistic councils and directors, theaters and audiences were complex, unpredictable", however, it was a transition period that brought the opportunity to present new plays as well as the works of dramatists that had been previously banned.

The book *Soviet Theatre during the Thaw* is a well-written book that provides important information about the Soviet theater during the transitional Thaw period and discusses the old and new methods and themes used by the directors and playwrights. It constitutes a valuable source for those interested in studying the Russian theater during Khrushchev.

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