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SPECIFICS OF A.EFROS'S STAGE INTERPRETATION OF A.P. CHEKHOV'S PLAY THE CHERRY ORCHARD AT THE TAGANKA THEATRE

The article is a study of A. Efros's production at the Taganka Theatre of A. Chekhov's play The Cherry Orchard. Analyzed was A. Efros's vision of the A. Chekhov's comedy and his directorial finds. A. Efros made "Cherry Orchard" as a historical performance, as a tragedy, a nostalgic tragedy about the inevitable loss of culture and humanity. All director's plans are reflected in scenography, musical design, light decision, composition of the performance and, finally, in the actor's embodiment of the Czech characters, creating in the end a great performance.

Key words: the Taganka Theatre, A. Efros, A. Chekhov, The Chery Orchard.

The topicality of the theme lies in the fact that the problem of interpretation of classical drama is one of the key problems in the theatrical art. More and more importance is attached to the special nature of Chekhov's plays whose specifics have been the subject of study for more than a century. Particular attention is paid to the last play by A. Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard. A. Efros offered his vision of the comedy, starting a new reading of this work known to everybody.

An important role for the reconstruction of the performance was in the audio recording of 1975, as well as the video materials I found with some scenes from the play. Useful for my scientific article were interviews with A. Demidova, V. Vysotsky and V. Zolotukhin, found on the Internet. And directly A. Chekhov's play The Cherry Orchard with his letters, which set out the author's vision of the play.

Purpose of study: to reconstruct A. Efros's production of The Cherry Orchard at the Taganka Theatre and find out its specifics.

The new production of The Cherry Orchard at the Taganka Theatre shook the entire theatre world. The combination of such incompatible concepts as Chekhov, Taganka and Efros alone was intriguing and promised a grand theatrical event, if not a sensation. For the Taganka's actors, the experience of working with the director from another "camp" was very interesting, according to the actors themselves. A. Efros thought that the interaction of various theatrical schools was developing theatrical art. As a result, there appeared a great production.

In 1975, Yu. Lyubimov, the chief director of the Taganka theatre, left his theatre for a long time in order to stage a Luigi Nono opera at La Scala. It was the first time he was going to be absent from his theatre for a long time. For the theatre not to be idle without work, Yu. Lyubimov offered A. Efros to make any production of his own choice at the Taganka. Despite the fact that at that time A. Efros had a lot of work to do, he agreed and chose A.P. Chekhov's play The Cherry Orchard.

Targeted to the present, A. Efros staged The Cherry Orchard as a historical production, as a tragedy, a nostalgic tragedy about the fatal destruction of culture and humanity. His orchard was the embodiment of a beautiful culture dying before the eyes of the viewer. The idea of the death of a "cherry orchard", i.e. the destruction of the spiritual, the poetic in Russian culture, could not sound as a comedy for the director.

The Cherry Orchard was not the director's first attempt to touch Chekhov's plays. After his productions Three Sisters and The Seagull were thrashed by critics and forbidden by the authorities, Efros staged The Cherry Orchard as a historical performance, even putting it within a strict

chronological framework suggested to him by two ideological antagonists, Firs of the “old regime” and Petya Trofimov, the “burry stormy petrel”.

Thanks to the clearly marked historical coordinates, everyone can find their own selves in the play’s characters who seem to have agreed not to pay attention to the time which, as it were, stopped for them. All the characters of the play are dreamers. You can be sorry for them and at the same time not sorry, because, despite their sad fate, they are too light-hearted. The Time put them on the scales and weighed and found them too light. The Time – this is what A. Efros stressed in his production, the interference of the Time in private human destinies. But even such a tragic thought was presented by him in a grotesque way. It is there that the terrible backwardness of the characters begins, together with their permanency and immutability, and the power of old habits over them - a kind of addiction [1]. All the characters return to their usual things: Gayev to his billiards, Trofimov to his sermons, Firs, despite the approaching end, continues to fuss over his masters, while Ranevskaya, deeply moved by the beauty of the cherry orchard, as if it were her home and a family relic, does not even try to save it.

The theme of *The Cherry Orchard* at the Taganka Theatre is not the theme of a farewell to the outgoing nobility’s culture, but the theme of illness and death. Before the end – that is the real theme of the production. The inhabitants of the “cherry orchard” are doomed, their illness is incurable, but they all pretend that nothing terrible happens, laugh, sing, dance, do conjuring tricks and wait for salvation, from somewhere, to the very end.

In A. Efros’s interpretation of *The Cherry Orchard*, Lopakhin is presented as a doctor who offers the inhabitants of the estate a treatment, a difficult one, but it is the only way to be saved, the last chance, without which it is impossible to escape from the situation which has arisen. However, nobody wants to listen to this doctor, and it seems that he himself already became infected with this common illness of the time, talking about little flowers and writhing in hysterics just like the owner of the estate herself. Every character of the play has his or her “twenty-two misfortunes”, each of them stumbles over his or her own past, just like Epikhodov stumbles over the gravestones, unable to forget the past and think about the future. Only Lopakhin cares for the present and not only his own present. He is a doctor whose diagnosis nobody wants to listen to, nobody wants to hear, hoping for the best and refusing to take medicine. In the play, the falling bucket sounds like a metronome which has already begun its countdown, forcing all these doomed people to give a start, but only for a moment, for in a moment it will be forgotten by all of them.

In Efros’s production, the psychological fragility was united with a sharp sense of form. The acting was convincing, though on the verge of alienation from the character, as if detaching and averting a calamity. There was an impression that the real life at the time of its destruction was losing its inner warmth.

At the first rehearsal at the Taganka Theatre, A. Efros spoke about the slow, equal rhythms that were established in modern theatres, about the need for getting rid of them, comparing the theatrical performance with improvisation in jazz music.

Working separately on each act, the director gave it a clear explanation. For example, working on Act One, he said that the characters of *The Cherry Orchard* are joking, drinking coffee, while the disease has already begun, but the inhabitants of the estate prefer not to pay attention to it, trying to fool themselves with the idea that everything will be fine. Distress and unconcern, illness and clowning - a combination of the incompatible. Each action of the characters is subjected to infantilism. A. Efros himself compared their behaviour with the behaviour of children who are playing on a mined field, and among them there goes an adult person warning them of danger. The children get scared, fall silent, but then start playing again and involve the adult person in their games. Act One is a whirlwind of senseless acts and words. The words on the stage are the screens behind which the real suffering is hidden. The director insisted that Act One should start very sharply, with the actors almost shouting some words to take the strain off. From the very beginning, the dynamics of actions and conflict situations should be present on stage.

The hardest thing for the actors was Act Two, where conversations are sometimes just absurd, as if they were those of clowns. A. Efros asked that Scene One of Act Two be played as a pure

clownery - nonsense, absurdity. Epikhodov, Dunyasha, Yasha, Charlotte - everyone is following their own theme, but it ends in nothing, because they all make a din without hearing each other. In Act Two, the disease has already been believed in and is being talked about. The meaningless, empty conversation is broken down by the sound of the “bursting” string and a sign of tragedy, as it were, - the entrance of a passerby in black. Creepy, tragic symbols begin to appear in the play, such as the symbol of the approaching retaliation.

A. Efros talked about Act Three in a very emotional and interesting way, because Act Three is the expectation of the results of the bidding, the expectation of the results of a hard transaction. Here the discrepancy between the behaviour and the situation reaches its climax - the characters try to hide their fear behind dancing, music and tricks, and after finding out the result of the transaction - death, they blame the doctor who in every way tried to prevent them from this end.

At all rehearsals, A. Efros walked around the stage together with the actors, almost pointing out the intonation and acting areas, working with the actors like with little children, explaining with a smile things that were not clear to them.

On 06 July 1975, A.P. Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard* opened at Moscow's Taganka Theatre. Despite the concerns of A. Efros, the performance came off well, although it was the beginning of a quarrel between the two directors, A. Efros and Yu Lyubimov.

The Cherry Orchard at the Taganka Theater is set on a white graveyard hill, among gray gravestones and white cherry trees. A. Efros, together with the stage designer V. Leventhal, offers a single installation for all the four acts. In the centre of the stage there is a hill with crosses and gravestones, which is an islet of the beautiful past, to which the characters are still clinging. From there the performance will begin, and there it will end.

Ranevskaya's words “All, all white! Oh, my Orchard! ...” [2; P. 620] defined the entire poetics, style and colour of the performance – the whole of it is acted in white colour slightly damaged by decay. The shadows of blossoming cherry trees fill the stage and the auditorium with their play highlighting the “islet” areas where there are still the preserved flowering cherry trees, old armchairs, children's chairs, gravestones and crosses shrouded by the ghost of the past.

In Efros's *The Cherry Orchard*, everything revolves around the orchard, as if in a children's play, where the characters dance in rounds around the orchard where all their life is concentrated: from children's toys and furniture to gravestones. The streaming muslin curtains add weight to the words “...morning, three degrees of frost, and the cherry trees are all in blossom”. The general picture is complemented with light white dresses resembling white shrouds - a symbol of death, which carry the viewer to a blossoming cherry orchard - a symbol of life. The circle is closed.

Despite the sober, rigorous, mock and at the same time tragic interpretation of Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard* by A. Efros, all the characters on stage are illuminated with particularly bright, shadowless light and are unable to hide anywhere. All the time, both the characters of *The Cherry Orchard* and their lives are under the watchful eye of the audience who clearly understand that they are doomed. And what they so carefully hide from their own selves cannot be hidden from the viewer – which is why their fussy attempts to obscure themselves look so pitiful.

The wind blows the white curtains, as if it were about to tear them off and together with them to destroy all this shaky, ghostly, false world in which the characters of *The Cherry Orchard* are living their last days. The graveyard in the middle of the stage awaits these temporary tenants, whose time passes on, in order to accept them into its eternal rooms.

The destiny of Efros's *The Cherry Orchard* was not an easy one. At first, it became the cause of quarrel between the two great directors, then A. Efros himself acted as Lopakhin when he became the master of the Taganka Theatre instead of Yu. Lyubimov. In 1986, after the renewal, *The Cherry Orchard* production was awarded the first prize at the BITEF festival, and then, immediately after the death of Efros, the production was taken to Paris where it was a success and critically acclaimed. Admiring the acting of Alla Demidova, Michel Cournot called the actress “a gull from the Luxembourg Gardens”, while Antoine Vitez offered her work at Comédie-Française. Then Yu. Lyubimov came back to Moscow. The production was still on, but at that point the sorrow for A. Efros

was felt in it. When the sets of *The Cherry Orchard*, which had been taken off the repertoire, were taken outside the theatre, some passersby stopped to take pieces of Leventhal's work as souvenirs.

Summing up, it should be noted that the interaction of such incompatible, at first glance, schools of acting as the Lyubimov and the Efros ones, gave its positive results: a new, sharp, modern, ironic but equally touching and sensual interpretation of A.P. Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard*.

In his production, A. Efros managed to combine the opposite and mutually exclusive concepts, such as the finiteness of life - with the infiniteness of time, the possibility of changing the future - with the impossibility of accepting the present, the clear vision - with a blurred mind. All these concepts are reflected in stage sets, musical design, light solutions, composition of the performance and, finally, in the actors' embodiment of Chekhov's characters, creating in the end a great production. Despite the fact that Efros's *The Cherry Orchard* has since long ago been taken off the theatrical stage, it continues to inspire theatrical personalities to search for the new in such a well familiar play as A.P. Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*.

In addition to audio performances [3], video fragments and photographs from Efros's *The Cherry Orchard*, it would be interesting to revisit the whole of *The Cherry Orchard* production at the Taganka Theatre. This would allow us to take a closer look at the production and find the undertones that were hidden in the material I studied. The studies in this direction may continue. This may serve as a stepping stone for further searching for new director and actor interpretation of A. Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard*.

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ПРОБЛЕМА СТВОРЕННЯ ВОКАЛЬНО-СЦЕНІЧНОГО ОБРАЗУ АКТОРА В РЕЖИСЕРСЬКОМУ ТЕАТРІ

Досліджено феномен вокального мистецтва, як повноправний компонент драматичної дії. Аналіз праць театрознавців, музикознавців з проблематики вокально-виконавської творчості акторасвідчить про відсутність комплексного дослідження системи підготовки «актора, що співає», що обумовлює актуальність обраної теми. Виявлено, що специфіка вокальної творчості актора зачіпає проблеми, пов'язані з процесом розвитку драматичного мистецтва, починаючи з реформи, здійсненої К. Станіславським і Вл. Немировичем-Данченком.

Ключові слова: актор, спів, мистецтво, вокально-сценічний, образ, театр.

Вокальне мистецтво було і є однією з найважливіших сторін театрального мистецтва. Нероздільне існування співу і дії – ідеал античного театру. «Спів героя античної трагедія було і її думою і її тілом одночасно» - зазначає Н. Таршиш [1]. Зараз структура театральної постановки в корені змінилася, проте роль вокального мистецтва залишається незмінною. Український драматичний театр від часу свого виникнення, становлення та формування завжди тяжів до тісного поєднання музики та драматичного дійства. Саме в Україні гармонійне поєднання поетичного слова, музики й танцю зазнало найбільшого розвитку і стало однією з найхарактерніших ознак українського національного театру.

У світовому драматичному театрі початку третього тисячоліття вокальне мистецтво-повноправний компонент драматичної дії. Сучасні пошуки та експерименти в драматичному