

THE SPIRIT OF CARLO GOZZI IN THE
RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONARY THEATRE

by

KERRY LEA HAUGER, B.F.A.

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INTRODUCTION

Theatrical directors often refer to the plays of Count Carlo Gozzi, a Venetian aristocrat of the eighteenth century, as a source in the interpretation of Commedia dell'Arte. Gozzi wrote these fairy tales in an attempt to preserve Commedia dell'Arte as a national Italian dramatic form. The Commedia was essentially scriptless and relied upon stock characters and improvisation following the basic outline of a scenario. Although Gozzi wrote a substantial text for his plays, he knew that the talents of the Commedia dell'Arte troupe would use the text as a foundation from which to begin their improvisation. For a few years, Gozzi brought a new life to the fading Commedia dell'Arte.

Vsevolod Meyerhold, Theodore Komissarshevsky, and Eugene Vakhtangov, three Russian directors of the Revolutionary period, directed plays by Gozzi. The Russian theatre of this period was in the midst of many changes and breaks with tradition. The Moscow Art Theatre upheld the basic, essentially realistic tradition that Stanislavsky established. On the other hand, the radical, innovative theatre was represented by Meyerhold who defied everything for which realism stood, who called such realism "the expression of the nineteenth century bourgeoisie--untheatrical and unimaginative,"¹ and

¹Norris Houghton, Moscow Rehearsals (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1936), p. 10.

demanded a return to the age-old concepts on which the *Commedia dell'Arte*, the Oriental theatre, and the Greek theatre had been founded. Komissarshevsky and Vakhtangov fell between the two extremes; they acknowledged the greatness of both Stanislavsky and Meyerhold, and sought to combine the best features of each in a new synthesis of outward form and truth.²

Komissarshevsky wrote:

While working in the theatre in Russia during the Revolution, one felt its importance for the life of the Nation, and this gave the enthusiasm to work and the strength to endure the prevailing hardships and difficulties.

To remain at the head of a theatre . . . meant not only managing the theatre and producing plays, but fighting hard for one's ideas and for the existence of everyone working in the theatre.³

Fighting for the existence of the theatre, the three directors found an inspiration in the plays of Carlo Gozzi. They moved the Russian theatre in a new direction, away from the sordid Naturalism of the past and into a joyful expression of life.

²Ibid.

³Theodore Komissarshevsky, Myself and the Theatre (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1930), p. 7.

CHAPTER I

THE FIABE OF COUNT CARLO GOZZI

Gozzi's Life

Carlo Gozzi was born 13 December 1720, in Venice, the sixth of eleven children. His parents, Jacopo Antonio Gozzi and Angela Tiepolo Gozzi, were from two of the oldest aristocratic families in Venice.¹ While young, Carlo received an education in public schools. As the family's fortune diminished, however, the children were left to educate themselves. Carlo read incessantly and wrote many poems; indeed, he wrote his first sonnet at the age of nine. By the time he was twenty years old, he had written numerous verses, essays, four long poems, and a treatise on philosophy.

In 1740, Carlo volunteered for the military forces of Griolamo Querini, the Provveditore Generale for Dalmatia and Albania along the west coast of the Balkan Peninsula. During his stay in that area, he performed as a member of a nonprofessional impromptu theatre company of male actors, playing the part of the soubrette.² His talent for comedy often excused him from military duties.

After three years, he returned to Venice; and upon the death

¹ Carlo Gozzi, Memoirs, 2 Vol., trans. John Addington Symonds (London: John C. Nimmo, 1890), 1:186.

² Ibid., 1:249.

of his father in 1745, Carlo took over the administration of the family estate. He never married but continued writing poems and satires. In 1761, he wrote his first play, The Love of Three Oranges. It was hailed as a success, and Gozzi quickly wrote nine additional fairy tales, or fiabe: The Raven, 1761; The King Stag, Turandot, and The Woman Snake, 1762; The Lucky Beggars and The Blue Monster, 1764; and The Pretty Green Bird and Zeim, King of Genii, 1765.³ After writing the ten fiabe, Gozzi turned to the translation and adaptation of a total of twenty-three Spanish plays. In 1781, Gozzi became ill, ceased to write for the stage, and concentrated upon writing his Memoirs, finishing them on 18 March, 1798. He spent the rest of his life in obscurity and died on 4 April 1806, at the age of 86. He was buried in the church of San Cassiano in Venice.⁴

Gozzi's Inspiration

Gozzi's Venice of the mid-eighteenth century was divided into two sets of people with differing philosophies. J. A. Symonds, translator of Gozzi's Memoirs, terms these people "Liberals" and "Conservatives." The Conservatives held on to the precepts of the established aristocracy, forms of government, national religion, and traditional

³Hedwig Hoffmann Rusack, Gozzi in Germany (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966), p. 5. These data are based on information found in the "ragionamenti" which precede the fiabe in the original Italian editions not accessible in this country.

⁴John Addington Symonds, Sequel to Memoirs, by Carlo Gozzi, 2:337.

customs. Among these traditional customs was the *Commedia dell'Arte*, looked upon as a national dramatic art form. The Liberals were interested in French philosophies and fashions, new ideas of government based on the rights of man in opposition to the ruling class of the Venetian state, and a new French dramatic form: a high type of comedy of manners depicting the fashions and customs of the day.

Pietro Chiari and Carlo Goldoni represented the "Liberals" in literature. They opposed the *Commedia dell'Arte* because it had degenerated from a mirthful satire of contemporary manners into buffoonery.

Goldoni wrote:

The comic theatre of Italy . . . became a disgusting object for general abhorrence. You saw nothing on stage but indecent harlequinades, dirty and scandalous intrigue, foul jests, immodest loves. Plots were badly constructed, and worse carried out in action. . . . Everyone was wearied with the insipidities and conventionalities of art upon the wane.⁵

Goldoni's plays, influenced by the French comédie larmoyante, or pathetic comedy,⁶ concerned middle class sentimentalities and sensibilities. In his plays, written dialogues replaced improvisation, and the masks, or stock characters, were reduced in importance. A realistic flavor and social purpose were evident.

The primary opposition to this dramatic form came not from within the theatre but from the Accademia de Granelleschi, an organization of Venetian aristocrats and literary scholars. Gozzi belonged to this

⁵John Addington Symonds, Introduction to Memoirs by Carlo Gozzi, 1:72.

⁶*Ibid.*, 1:27.

organization that strove to cultivate a proper, classical style in Italian literature. Goldoni's realism was considered by the Granelleschi as a "perversion of taste by low domestic arguments and clumsy realism which had nothing real but its vulgarity."⁷

The Granelleschi had no achievements of their own to show, but they delighted in attacking Goldoni and Chiari, whose "pompous bombastic pseudoerudite drama provoked just criticism from the accademician classicists."⁸ Chiari was "an unworthy priest who could pen a profane comedy after celebrating mass,"⁹ and Goldoni was "an impertinent scribbler who dared observe the degradations and represent the folly of the aristocracy."¹⁰ Calling Goldoni a scrittore da fagna, or "sewer author," Gozzi wrote:

He often portrays true nobility as a mirror of wickedness, whereas true rabble is made into living virtue and responsibility in a number of his comedies. I suspect (perhaps over-maliciously) that he did this in order to win the favor of the lower classes which are forever rebelling against the necessary yoke of submission. . . .¹¹

It was hard for Gozzi to present his own views without attacking another's work. In his Memoirs, he wrote:

In the first place, I resented the ruin of Italian poetry given over to the dogs and utterly corrupted by a band of blustering fanatics during the period which we are doomed to live in. . . .

⁷ Ibid., 1:88.

⁸ Rusack, p. 3.

⁹ Joseph Spencer Kennard, Goldoni and the Venice of His Time (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), p. 191.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Heinz Riedt, Carlo Goldoni, trans. Ursule Molinaro (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1974), p. 38.

In the second place, I resented the decadence of our Italian language and usurpations of sheer ignorance upon its purity. . . . In the third place, I resented the extinction of all sense for proportion and propriety in style, that sense which prompts us to treat matters sublime, familiar, and facetious upon various planes and in different keys of feeling.¹²

Gozzi's first published satirical attack on Goldoni and Chiari was a pamphlet titled The Tartane of Influxes for the Leap Year 1756. The satire was not disguised, and it pointed out Goldoni and Chiari by name. In response to the Tartane, Goldoni wrote: "He who speaks evil without any reason shown, he who does not prove his assumptions and his arguments, acts like the dog who barks against the moon."¹³

Gozzi's second attack was in The Comic Theatre at the Inn of the Pilgrim, Rough-Handled by the Granelleschi. Gozzi depicted Goldoni as a four-headed monster, with a different type of drama spewing from each mouth.¹⁴ The four-faced monster represented Goldoni's four types of writing: first, the scenarios to which Goldoni had added some written parts; second, sentimental comedies; third, Venetian plays of gondoliers and common folk; and fourth, semi-tragic oriental pieces. Though acknowledging the variety, Gozzi considered it all plebeian realistic comedy imbued with a shallow morality.¹⁵ In response to the attack, Goldoni pointed to the big crowds which attended

¹²Gozzi, 2:91-92.

¹³Symonds, Introduction to Memoirs, p. 102.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁵Allardyce Nicoll, The World of Harlequin (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), p. 212.

his plays and challenged Gozzi to do better. Motivated by pride and hatred, Gozzi accepted the challenge and wrote the first of his fiabe, The Love of Three Oranges.¹⁶

Gozzi's Plays

Gozzi wrote the fiabe for a Commedia dell'Arte troupe headed by a man named Antonio Sacchi, famous for his portrayal of the Truffaldino mask. Though a talented company, they had fallen into disfavor until Gozzi provided them with his new material. Gozzi wrote his plays around the five principal masks which headed Sacchi's troupe: the cunning, roguish Brighella; shrewd, doddering Pantalone; the soubrette Smeraldina; stammering Tartaglia; and the clown Truffaldino. Gozzi made these characters important parts of his plot rather than making them mere accidental comedians.

In the spring of 1762, following the success of The Love of Three Oranges, The Raven, The King Stag, and Turandot, the Venetian audience proclaimed Gozzi as the winner in the literary quarrel. Chiari retired, and Goldoni departed for Paris, both men withdrawing their talents from the Venetian stage. Gozzi wrote only ten fiabe, suggesting in his preface to The Pretty Green Bird:

I wished to cut short the series of my dramatic pieces, from which I derived no profit, and the burden of producing which was beginning to weigh heavily upon me. Besides, it seemed to me that I had fully achieved the end I had proposed to

¹⁶Symonds, Introduction to Memoirs, p. 103.

myself from the outset, in the indulgence of the purest capricious and poetical punctilia.¹⁷

Although he succeeded at his task, Gozzi filled his plays with the things which he had attacked in Goldoni's. He substituted extensive written dialogue for improvised speech, and his plays better resembled those of the debased troupes at Parisian fairs than those of the early Italian theatre.¹⁸ Furthermore, he denied the fact that the success of his work rested on the merits of the acting company, thus contradicting his own pretenses of relying upon the improvisational art of the actor.¹⁹

For several years, Gozzi's plays dominated the Venetian theatres due to the novelty of the fairy tales and the parodies on the plays of Chiari and Goldoni contained within the fiabe. It was not long, however, before the novelty wore off, the literary quarrel was forgotten, and Goldoni's comedies were restored to favor. It would appear that Gozzi had the makings of a "here today, gone tomorrow" dramatist, since he relied heavily upon the contemporary attitudes of his audience. There must be an additional value in Gozzi's work to justify the revival that succeeded in the Russian Revolutionary theatre. This additional value has been regarded by some critics as Romanticism.

¹⁷Punctilio was the predecessor of the word, fiabe. Symonds, Introduction to Memoirs, 1:111.

¹⁸Nicoll, p. 213.

¹⁹Ibid.

Gozzi and Romanticism

Some French and German critics consider Gozzi a romantic playwright with a genius for a particular genre of dramatic art that he exploited in his fiabe.²⁰ He expressed himself in the romantic manner--a manner of spontaneity, contrast, and disregard for past rules and models. Symonds suggested: "In the fiabe we observe the curious literary phenomenon of what at first sight appears to be spontaneous romantic art, but what is really the result of satirical and didactic intention."²¹ Although Gozzi did not intentionally include these elements of Romanticism, they are inherent within his plays. The Romantic movement took place between 1800 and 1850, after Gozzi's initial productions. If Gozzi is to be classified as a Romanticist, it would be well to compare his works with the essential elements of Romanticism.

The first element was the growing distrust of reason as the principle tool for achieving man's highest goals; a trust in natural instinct served as a guide to right feeling and action.²² Some of Gozzi's leading characters, such as Prince Calaf in Turandot and Angela in The King Stag, are inspired by their natural instincts. Calaf chooses to try for the hand of Princess Turandot despite the opposition of his reasoning mind. Angela disbelieves her eyes and trusts

²⁰Symonds, Introduction to Memoirs, 1:108.

²¹Ibid., 1:111

²²Oscar G. Brockett, The Theatre, 2d ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1969), p. 222.

her instincts instead. Gozzi's natural instinct was motivated by hatred, pride, and jealousy. If he had listened to reason, he probably would not have attempted to write. Modern audiences, though missing the satire, find delight in the childlike fantasy of the plays. "Reason" is forgotten, and the audience can happily indulge their instinct and imagination in the fairy tale.

Second, doubt existed about the rightness of the existing social and political order, leading to the rise of the middle class.²³ This idea is contrary to Gozzi's conservative attitude that the aristocracy must rule and more along the lines of Goldoni's beliefs. Gozzi's plays, however, often concerned nobility reduced to poverty by wicked imposters usurping the throne. In the end, the rightful ruler, who is fair and just, is restored to his power.

Third, the notion that truth is to be defined in terms of "norms" was replaced by the conviction that truth can only be discovered in the infinite variety of creation. Rather than eliminate details to arrive at a norm, one must seek to encompass the infinite variety of being.²⁴ This variety could best be expressed in contrasts: real and fantastic, love and hate, dark and light, sublime and grotesque. In particular, grotesque has an infinite variety of characteristics. Gozzi used it as a means of exaggerated parody, but it also assumes all the absurdities, infirmities, blemishes, passions, vices, and crimes

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 223.

of mankind.²⁵

Fourth, all creation has a common origin; therefore, a thorough and careful study of any part may lead to a glimpse of the whole.²⁶ Gozzi's use of the grotesque inspired the audience's imagination. Victor Hugo wrote: "What we call the ugly, on the contrary, is a detail of a great whole which eludes us, and which is in harmony, not with man but with all creation. That is why it constantly presents itself to us in new but incomplete aspects."²⁷

Fifth, truth is infinite and beyond total comprehension or adequate expression.²⁸ Truth in art is neither natural nor logical. Theatre may be a mirror of nature, but it is not nature. "We must admit . . . that the domains of art and nature are entirely distinct."²⁹ Within his fairy tale setting, Gozzi defied nature and logic, insinuating that truth is infinite and cannot be confined to nature.

Sixth, a special, indefinable quality is necessary to produce good drama.³⁰ The term "genius" is used to include all the elements of greatness. A genius can make his own rules and laws. A genius is

²⁵Victor Hugo, "Preface to Cromwell," European Theories of the Drama, by Barrett H. Clark (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1947), p. 360.

²⁶Symonds, Introduction to Memoirs, p. 48.

²⁷Hugo, p. 360.

²⁸Brockett, p. 223.

²⁹Hugo, p. 369.

³⁰Brockett, p. 223.

different from other men, and consequently is at times in conflict with his society; for the true artist is driven to express truth regardless of the consequences.³¹ Gozzi began to write the fiabe with the simple object of answering Goldoni's challenge in the most humorous way he could devise. He chose his vehicle of nursery tales in order to provoke his antagonists further and to support his point that Venice would laugh or cry over child-like silliness when handled by a master--namely himself. The plays are "monsters begotten by accident, which the creative originality of a highly gifted intellect turned to excellent accord."³² Gozzi's "genius" insured that his plays held an appeal which could last beyond his lifetime.

Seventh, the great artist must search for forms adequate to the expression of great truth. Unities, physical requirements of the stage, and old subject matter can be ignored.³³ The artist should never limit himself to old rules or models.³⁴ Gozzi chose the fairy tale as a radical new dramatic form. This form demanded magic effects and illusions which proposed difficulties for the stage's limitations. Men change into beasts and back again before the audience's eyes. Gozzi left such transformation problems to the actors and did not concern himself with the mechanics of staging. He wrote as his artistic instinct demanded.

³¹Ibid.

³²Symonds, Introduction to Memoirs, 1:48.

³³Brockett, p. 224.

³⁴Hugo, p. 367.

Many Romanticists refused to classify themselves as such. Gozzi probably would have fought the French and German critics who placed him in this category. Although Gozzi's plays do not entirely fulfill all the requirements of Romanticism, a certain romantic spirit is evident throughout the plays. Benedetto Croce wrote:

Romanticism requests of art a spontaneous, unrestrained outpouring of the passions--love and hate, anguish and joy, despair and elation. It readily contents itself with, and takes pleasure in, ethereal and indeterminate images, an uneven style and one making allusions to vague suggestions, indefinite phrases, striking and hazy outlines.³⁵

Croce's definition provides the best connection between Gozzi and Romanticism. He was a passionate man, and the passion flows through his writings. The success and appeal of the fiabe rely upon the emotional fire inherent in the works.

Gozzi's Venice was caught in the conflict of old traditions and radical innovations. The fiabe provided a diversion and escape from the troubled times. Russia, during the Revolutionary period, was similarly beset with conflicting ideas. The Russian theatre found a worthwhile joy and excitement in the romantic, improvisational spirit of Carlo Gozzi.

³⁵Benedetto Croce, Guide to Aesthetics, trans. Patrick Romanell (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), pp. 23-24.

CHAPTER II

GOZZI AND MEYERHOLD

Russian Theatre, though a long-established institution, did not emerge in importance until the founding of the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898 by Vladimir Nemirovich-Dantchenko and Konstantin Stanislavsky. Before forming his own company in 1902, Vsevolod Meyerhold was one of the original members of the Moscow Art Theatre. This theatre became known as an advocate of Naturalism. When Stanislavsky became discontent with Naturalism's limitations and turned to dramatic experiments of a nonrealistic nature, he chose Meyerhold to direct them.

Stanislavsky and Meyerhold had differing opinions of goals to strive for in the theatre. Eugene Vakhtangov said:

For Meyerhold, a performance is theatrical when the spectator does not forget for a second that he is in a theatre, and is conscious all the time of the actor as a craftsman who plays a role. Stanislavsky demands the opposite: that the spectator become oblivious to the fact that he is in a theatre and that he be immersed¹ in the atmosphere in which the protagonist of a play exists.

In 1906, Meyerhold directed for Vera Komissarshevkaya, Theodore Komissarshevsky's sister, beginning his experiments in the director's art. His early experiments dealt with various approaches: "Condition-
alism," which conditions all the objects and agents of a representation

¹Oscar G. Brockett and Robert R. Finlay, Century of Innovation Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 251.

and interpretation into one activity or spirit; "Anti-decoration," or the dematerialization of the stage in order to express mystery; "Statuesqueness," or the removal of the actor from a flat background; and "Spectacle," inspired by the ancient Greek theatre.² Vera Komis-sarчевskaya complained that Meyerhold was trying to turn the theatre into a laboratory, suggesting that he simply passed from one experiment to another.³

In 1910, Meyerhold began experiments in masks, pantomime, and the Commedia dell'Arte. Nikolai Gorchakov claims: "The Commedia dell'Arte was Meyerhold's means of revolting against himself. He would always reject mercilessly whatever he had done earlier."⁴ This rejection was due to his constant search for a better form of theatrical expression.

Meyerhold conceives of the theatre not as a mere reshaping of life. To him it is an expression of an evolutionary creative power which urges the possessor to reject old forms in order that he may attain the essential one. . . . Meyerhold has always sought to place the imagination in authority over the theatre and audience. . . . If we examine his development we shall find that it wholly rests upon a search for a unifying symbol to communicate the highest form of dramatic expression.⁵

The French symbolists led Meyerhold to his belief that the actor

²Huntly Carter, The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia (London: Chapman and Dodd, Ltd., 1924), pp. 55-64.

³Ibid., p. 62.

⁴Nikolai Gorchakov, Theatre in Soviet Russia, trans. Edgar Lehrman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 69.

⁵Carter, p. 52.

should become a visible symbol of poetic thought on the stage.⁶

Meyerhold's task was to find the appropriate medium of expression for this symbol of poetic ideas. He turned for inspiration to the conventionalization of the *Commedia dell'Arte*.⁷ In turning to the *Commedia*, Meyerhold explained:

We do not try to recreate earlier forms of theatre. . . . This is the difference between reproducing the past and freely rebuilding a new theatre based on study of the past and selection from it. . . . The actor of the new theatre must establish an entire canon of technical devices such as he will discover by studying principles of acting in truly theatrical eras of the past.⁸

Meyerhold's interest in Carlo Gozzi and the Italian Comedy revived the interest throughout Russia.

It would be almost impossible to list all the Soviet productions that used the principles of the Italian improvisational comedy which Meyerhold had revived. . . . Count Carlo Gozzi gave it [the *Commedia dell'Arte*] its exact literary form in the 18th century, when he resurrected the art that had started to decline. Meyerhold accomplished a second renaissance of the *Commedia dell'Arte*.⁹

Meyerhold took Gozzi as his exemplar since it was he who had revived the declining dramatic form in the 18th century with fairy tale plays, combining the conventions of the literary and the improvised

⁶Houghton, pp. 86,87.

⁷Ibid., p. 87.

⁸Ysevolod Meyerhold, quoted in Marjorie L. Hoover, Meyerhold: The Art of Conscious Theatre (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974), p. 84.

⁹Gorchakov, p. 67.

theatres.¹⁰ Meyerhold used the Commedia dell'Arte as "a weapon against the Moscow Art Theatre and the literary junk that had conquered the stage in his own time."¹¹

In the Commedia tradition, Meyerhold discovered a principle for opposing the Moscow Art Theatre school of thought. Stanislavsky did not believe in the fixed emploi, or an actor playing one character type throughout his career, and he fought against stock character parts. Stanislavsky believed that an actor could act in different capacities insofar as he could reach the core of a character by the effort of "inner penetration and authenticity of emotions."¹² Meyerhold denied the possibility and validity of such a transfiguration and defended the emploi and stock characters as the foundation of "conventional" theatre.¹³ In place of Naturalism's "morbid human curiosity," Meyerhold wanted a symbolic expression of life.¹⁴ In place of Naturalism's attempt to reproduce reality of detail, Meyerhold wanted to "point the irony of a situation"¹⁵ and impose his own point of view.

¹⁰Edward Braun, ed. Meyerhold on Theatre (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), p. 116.

¹¹Gorchakov, p. 67.

¹²Marc Slonim, Russian Theatre (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 222.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Helen Krich Chinoy, "The Emergence of the Director," Directors on Directing, ed. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, rev. ed. (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963), p. 53.

¹⁵Ibid.

In *Commedia dell'Arte* and other historical forms of theatre, the actor, with his gestures, facial expression, and movement, was the major vehicle for the realization of theatre. For that reason, the *Commedia* interested Meyerhold not only as a weapon against Naturalism or the problem play, but also as a way of achieving total performance for the actor. The *Commedia* involves the actor's whole physical self as an instrument and provides a greater involvement for the audience.¹⁶

The *Commedia dell'Arte* that Meyerhold rejuvenated had many strata.¹⁷ The first stratum was the crude theatre of masks and of marketplace comedians, whose art originated with the Roman mimes.¹⁸ A second was the *Commedia* depicted in Jacques Callot's engravings,¹⁹ which were grotesque and malicious.²⁰ The third stratum consisted of Goldoni's comedies, enobled by realism, psychology, and details pertaining to the way of life. Meyerhold considered this stratum but decided not to use it in his work.²¹ Fourth, Meyerhold used the stratum

¹⁶ Hoover, p. 77.

¹⁷ Gorchakov, p. 67.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Jacques Callot was born 1592 in Nancy, the capital of the independent Duchy of Lorraine. He moved to Florence and pursued the profession of engraver. During his stay in Florence, the *Commedia dell'Arte* was very popular and interested him. In 1621 and 1622, he produced a series of engravings depicting the *Commedia dell'Arte*, including one of his most popular series, the 24 etchings titled Balli de Sfesania, cited in Howard Daniel, ed. Callot's Etchings (New York: Dover Publications, 1974), p. xv.

²⁰ Gorchakov, p. 67.

²¹ Ibid.

of "tales for the theatre by Gozzi, enobled by poetics, magic, and fairy quality."²² The major stratum of Meyerhold's interpretation came from E. T. A. Hoffmann.²³ Hoffman's tales contained a masked and transformed mysticism, interplay between doubles, and phantasmagoria. In these tales, the real is closely connected with what lies beyond reality.²⁴ In general, the Hoffmannesque principle is strongest in Meyerhold's work.²⁵

An element which figured largely in Meyerhold's experiments was the "grotesque." Gozzi defined the grotesque as a manner of exaggerated parody.²⁶ The Bolshaya Entsiklopedia defines grotesque as:

The title of a genre of low comedy in literature, music and the plastic arts. Grotesque usually implies something hideous and strange, a humorous work which, with no apparent logic, combines the most dissimilar elements by ignoring their details and relying on its own originality, borrowing from every source anything which satisfies its joie de vivre and its capricious, mocking attitude to life.²⁷

Meyerhold said, "What is basic in the grotesque is that the audience is continually led from the plane that it has guessed to another that

²²Ibid.

²³Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann was also greatly influenced by Gozzi as is cited in Rusack, "Gozzi and Hoffmann," pp. 144-172. Hoffmann felt that the whimsical oddity of the Italian was closely akin to his own peculiar fantastic genius. Rusack, p. 144.

²⁴Gorchakov, p. 67.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 69.

²⁷Bolshaya Entsiklopedia, 1902, quoted in Braun, p. 137.

does not expect."²⁸

The grotesque is a deliberate exaggeration and reconstruction (distortion) of nature and the unification of objects that are not united by either nature or the customs of our daily life. The theatre, being a combination of natural, temporal, spatial, and numerical phenomena, is itself outside of nature. It finds that these phenomena invariably contradict our everyday experience and that the theatre itself is essentially an example of the grotesque. Arising from the grotesque of a ritual masquerade, the theatre inevitably is destroyed by any given attempt to remove the grotesque--the basis of its existence--from it.²⁹

Alexander Bakshy wrote:

Grotesque resolves itself into a perpetual play of contrasts: . . . sublimity and triviality, beauty and ugliness, joy and sorrow, courage and cowardice. . . . In the Commedia dell'Arte and the medieval stalls, the principle of the "show", together with its derivative forms of the mask and the grotesque, was most completely realized. It is not surprising for this reason, that the watchword of the new movement has become: "Back to the Booth and the Commedia dell'Arte."³⁰

Regarding the grotesque, Meyerhold proclaimed:

This is the style which reveals the most wonderful horizons to the creative artist. "I", my personal attitudes to life, precedes all else. Everything which I take as material for my art corresponds not to the truth of reality, but to the truth of my artistic whim.³¹

Putting his theories into practice, Meyerhold organized a studio designed to teach the principles of the movement and scenery

²⁸From a chat with Meyerhold, "Novye puti" printed in the magazine Rampa zhizn, 1911. Quoted in Gorchakov, p. 69.

²⁹Vsevolod Meyerhold, V. Bebutov, and Ivan Aksenov, Amplua Aktera (Moscow: GVYTM, 1922), p. 2. Quoted in Gorchakov, p. 69.

³⁰Alexander Bakshy, The Path of the Modern Russian Stage (London: Cecil Palmer and Hayward, 1916), p. 72.

³¹Braun, p. 137.

techniques of Italian improvised comedy in the winter of 1912-1913. Vladimir N. Solovev taught the course in Commedia dell'Arte.³² The lectures treated movements and gestures proper to the principal masks or stock characters of the Commedia; the "parade" of introduction of characters to the audience; stock situations such as "the night scene," "the city scene," and "the duel" with their geometric blocking; and finally the ploys of slapstick and acrobatics--the antics proper to the theatre.³³ As practice material for the course, "interludes" were used--a clowning or acrobatic entertainment customary between acts of a medieval play or Commedia. In the school, each day's work began with practice in "biomechanics" that gave Meyerhold's actors "the trained body, the well-functioning nervous system, correct reflexes, vivacity, and exactness of reaction, the control of one's body."³⁴

Referring to the playwright's problem in dealing with the Commedia dell'Arte, Meyerhold said:

Whenever one speaks of the restoration of the old theatre, one is told how tedious it is for contemporary dramatists to have to imitate the works of the past. . . . But if the modern dramatist chooses not to copy the traditions of the old theatre, if, for awhile he withdraws from the theatre which is seeking its inspiration in antiquity, it will be all the better for the contemporary stage. The actor . . . will soon want not only to act but to compose for himself as well. Then at last we shall see the rebirth of the theatre of improvisation. Should the dramatist wish to help the actor in

³²Hoover, p. 79.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Chinoy, p. 53.

this, . . . he will quickly find that he is faced with the intricate task of composing scenarios and writing prologues containing a schematic exposition of what the actors are about to perform. . . . Carlo Gozzi lost nothing at all by providing Sacchi's troupe with scenarios which left the actors free to compose their own improvised monologues and dialogues.

I am asked why isn't the scenario sufficient in itself? The prologue and the ensuing parade, together with the direct address to the audience at the final curtain . . . all force the spectator to recognize the actor's performance as pure playacting.³⁵

Meyerhold published a magazine, The Love of Three Oranges, in which he extensively discussed his theories of Commedia dell'Arte. In the first issue of this magazine, he published Gozzi's scenario of the same name as an example for playwrights.

Meyerhold's early experiments with masks, pantomime and Commedia dell'Arte were with the pantomimes: The Scarf of Columbine, Harlequin the Marriage Broker by Vladimir Solovyov; and Gozzi's The Love of Three Oranges.³⁶ They were staged according to traditional principles of Commedia dell'Arte which Meyerhold had studied. Rehearsals were conducted jointly by the author (if the author was alive) and the director. The author, in accordance with his aim of reviving the traditional theatre, would outline the mise en scene, moves, poses, and gestures as he had found them described in the scenarios of impro-

³⁵Braun, pp. 126-127.

³⁶The Love of Three Oranges was produced as a studio workshop at Tenishevskoe High School in Petrograd. Hoover, p. 10. When Sergeev Prokofiev left Russia in 1918, he took along, at Meyerhold's urging, the first issue of the magazine, The Love of Three Oranges. From the scenario, he derived his opera which opened in Chicago, 1921.

vised comedies.³⁷ The director would add new tricks in the style of these traditional devices, blending the traditional with the new to produce a coherent whole.³⁸ Improvisational techniques were of great importance: "One line may become the motivation for five minutes of cadenzas which the virtuosity of Meyerhold will have invented, before the theme--that is, the text of the play--is continued."³⁹ The Commedia dell'Arte was a realm in which the actor was enthroned. He created the plot of the comedy. He improvised on the text every evening according to his mood. He launched the lazzi--the jokes peculiar to the theatre--that he had devised according to his inspiration.⁴⁰

Although the actor commands the performance in Commedia dell'Arte, Meyerhold manipulated his actors in the rehearsals. The actor's objective was to be pliable in order to become the living embodiment of Meyerhold's ideas.⁴¹ "He wipes all expression from their faces, except the permanent stamp which their makeup gives them. They are empty, masked, automatons."⁴²

Meyerhold's study of Gozzi, Commedia dell'Arte, masks, and

³⁷Braun, p. 144.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Houghton, p. 106.

⁴⁰Gorchakov, p. 70.

⁴¹Chinoy, p. 53.

⁴²Houghton, p. 96.

pantomime evolved into his study in biomechanics. The laws of biomechanics were based upon the art of the actor as the art of plastic forms in space. For this expression, the actor must possess (1) the innate capacity for reflex excitability which will enable him to interpret any character within the limits of his physical characteristics; and (2) a physical competence consisting of a true eye, a sense of balance, and an ability to know at any given moment the location of his center of gravity.⁴³ These principles enable an actor, like a dancer or skilled worker, to work as efficiently as possible.

Biomechanics replaced the emotional theory of acting which assumed ignorance of the mechanics of the human body and provided an educational science which trained the intellect of the actor and developed his body through sports. The actor fully controlled his mind and body, adding dignity to his calling.⁴⁴ While developing these ideas, Meyerhold continued to place the actor first as the principle means of dramatic communication. Biomechanics thus used the "gold reserve to be found in the traditions of the old comedian's art."⁴⁵

Meyerhold's experiments derived from his constant search to find the highest form of theatrical expression. His work with Gozzi and the Commedia dell'Arte was inspired by his desire to challenge the Naturalism of the Moscow Art Theatre and to rediscover the

⁴³Braun, p. 199.

⁴⁴Carter, p. 71.

⁴⁵Gorchakov, p. 204.

conventional theatre where the actor has the full responsibility in his total performance. Meyerhold introduced Carlo Gozzi and the Commedia dell'Arte to the Russian theatre, paving the way for Komissarshevsky and Vakhtangov to follow. Although he moved on to further experiments in theatre, he did not forsake his work with the Italian comedy. Gozzi's influence and inspiration remained a foundation for Meyerhold's innovations in theatre.

CHAPTER III

GOZZI AND KOMISSARSHEVSKY

Theodore Komissarshevsky, considered the most eclectic of Russian directors,¹ produced Gozzi's Turandot for the first time on the Russian stage in 1914. He did not turn to Gozzi in an experimental manner, but chose Turandot because it could satisfy his belief that the theatre was a vital human necessity.² He said the theatre was a place where "people have always gathered to share the joys and sorrows with others, and where they have found spiritual comfort and warmth of togetherness."³

Komissarshevsky was conscious of his own limitations and knew that he was not blessed with the vision and imaginative power of Stanislavsky.⁴ He pointed out, however, flaws in Stanislavsky's system and rejected the truth of the "fourth wall." He could not accept Stanislavsky's directing system for his own. Although critics occasionally considered him an expressionist, he denied the attribution:

Expressionism disregards objective reality altogether, even the reality of the actor, if by doing so the ideas

¹Brockett and Findlay, p. 259.

²Slonim, p. 225.

³Ibid., p. 226.

⁴Oliver M. Sayler, The Russian Theatre (New York: Brentano's Publishers, 1922), p. 253.

of the playwright or the producer can be more saliently demonstrated. . . . I think that a theatrical producer, or as you call him, a director, must produce a play in the idiom in which it is written. The producer's business is to interpret a play on the stage through the ensemble of actors and with the help of every means of expression which the stage possesses. A producer who alters a play in order to demonstrate some new theory or trick of production is just a nuisance in the theatre, no better than a selfish "star" actor.⁵

He was an enemy of rationalism, deeply affected by the religious currents of symbolism, and disagreed with the "inhuman formalism" of Meyerhold.⁶ For Komissarshevsky, the raison d'etre of any performance lay in the common emotional and spiritual experience of the audience. He claimed that this experience can be provoked only through live actors; hence, his opposition to marionettes and the "dematerialization of the actor."⁷ Like Meyerhold, he was interested in Commedia dell'Arte and in re-interpreting the classics. He disapproved, however, of Meyerhold's subordination of the actor to the visual elements, just as he did of Stanislavsky's emphasis on realistic detail. He believed the director should leave the actor as free as possible, assisting him in finding the proper line of action, while avoiding dictation of action.

Komissarshevsky's theatrical philosophy proved his eclecticism. He wrote: "The producer [director] first gets a broad conception of the production, of its form and style. Then he conceives--visualizes

⁵Komissarshevsky, pp. 108-109.

⁶Slonim, p. 225.

⁷Ibid.

and hears--each character, and then puts all of them into rhythmical movement."⁸ He took a dim view of experiments for their own sake and of a director's imposition of his own ideas upon a play.

Komissarshevsky's views worked well with his study of *Commedia dell'Arte* since the *Commedia* performers were an ensemble of actors not dependent upon a director.

It is the ensemble of the actors which makes a theatre and not the producer, and that in order for the latter to do his work properly, not considering the actors as mere clay in his hands, there must be a mutual sympathetic understanding between the actors and director.⁹

Komissarshevsky produced Princess Turandot in Nezlobin's Theatre in Moscow. Regarding the production, Komissarshevsky wrote:

In the production of Carlo Gozzi's Turandot, I successfully applied the principles of the *Commedia dell'Arte*: the interpreters of the comic characters improvised their parts, talked to the audience, sang, danced, produced acrobatic tricks, and played to use the latest term of Meyerhold, in the "bio-mechanical" manner.¹⁰

The element of psychology was inherent in all of Komissarshevsky's plays, and was evident in Turandot.¹¹ Komissarshevsky felt that a producer must not only know the so-called "technique of acting," but also possess a sense of psychology since the "inside" of an actor, with which the producer has to deal, is a very complicated and delicate

⁸Komissarshevsky, p. 166.

⁹Ibid., p. 160.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 93.

¹¹Slonim, p. 292.

instrument.¹² Komissarshevsky devoted considerable study to the actor's problems in working with Commedia dell'Arte. His solution varied little among different types of plays, but he relied upon the play itself to draw out the proper character. He wrote:

A good actor studies the character he finds in the play in order to imagine it and transform himself into it. While acting he lives the life of the character as imagined by himself and feels the words and actions of the character as his own.¹³

He considered the first essential of acting to be the imagination:

There are three kinds of imagination--the visual, the aural, and that in which both these are combined. The first creates images in space, the second in time, and the third in both. An actor, to use all his physical and psychic powers must possess the third kind of imagination. The other essentials for an actor are strong sensibility, vitality, intelligence, and the power of concentration and hard work.¹⁴

With such virtues at the actor's disposal, the genre of the play should make little difference. A good actor could handle the Commedia dell'Arte or any other style.

Komissarshevsky's production of Turandot was an attempt simply to try a new style of play which appealed to him. It neither arose from experimentation nor provoked new levels of such activity; it made no lasting impression upon the Russian theatre. Komissarshevsky directed Turandot with no other motive than to present a play he liked for the theatre he loved.

¹²Komissarshevsky, p. 161.

¹³Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 112.

CHAPTER IV

GOZZI AND VAKHTANGOV

The spirit of Gozzi's fairy tales came to life again during the severe years of devastation and hunger--the years of the Civil War, when the young Soviet Republic was defending the achievements of the Revolution against the White Russian Army and the Interventionists. People went about in rags, exhausted, dying of typhus by the thousands. Against this background, Eugene Vakhtangov's Turandot, with its light irony, appeared. It was an affirmation of human optimism in the face of starvation, suffering, and death.

In those first Soviet years, a tremendous reconstruction took place in Russia. All art underwent drastic changes as the newborn society created new and different ideas. In accordance with this shifting scene, Vakhtangov fought the old theatre and its out-of-date forms, replacing them with new forms which were both brilliant and honest.¹ Vakhtangov never betrayed the realistic basis of the teachings of Stanislavsky's system and considered the following "laws" of the system as being immutable: (1) to concentrate on the stage, (2) to disperse one's muscular energy along one's muscles in a suitable

¹Ruben Simonov, Stanislavsky's Protege: Eugene Vakhtangov, trans. Miriam Goldina (New York: DBS Publications, Ltd., 1969), p. 150.

fashion, (3) to seek one's relationship to the milieu, (4) to move without worrying about emotions, (5) to motivate one's conduct on the stage, (6) to depend upon one's partner, (7) to reveal the subtext, (8) to create a biography and the conditions of the character's life, (9) to act not for one's own sake but for one's partner's, (10) to struggle against stereotypes.² Aside from these ideas, Vakhtangov constructively expressed new concepts which Stanislavsky often accepted.

Following the Revolution, the theatre experienced decline and a period of social stagnation. Vakhtangov led an irreconcilable fight with the pseudo-followers of Stanislavsky, the preachers of Naturalism. Vakhtangov strove for a new theatrical form that would express the life-truth in the theatre-truth.³ Stanislavsky stated: "In life, the truth is that which exists in reality, that of which man is sure. On the stage, we call truth that which does not appear in reality but which might and can happen."⁴ Opposing that statement, many theatre artists insisted that the exact copying of life is truth. That belief is "the kind of error that turns dramatic art to Naturalism and reduces it to a petty verisimilitude."⁵

Vakhtangov worked to destroy naturalism, moodiness, sentimentality, and pseudo-psychological significance to "discrown all the

²Gorchakov, p. 254.

³Simonov, p. 198.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

'howling of the wind' backstage and the 'cricket on the hearth' sounds that created an atmosphere of Philistine coziness."⁶ He saw the dangers awaiting the Moscow Art Theatre, the exaggeration of "inner technique" at the expense of the "outer technique."⁷ Vakhtangov feared that this exaggeration could possibly plunge the Art Theatre into the portrayal of isolated psychological and emotional experiences to the detriment of outward conciseness and clearness.⁸ Without such outward expression, Vakhtangov found it impossible to imagine the theatre.

Meyerhold was still considered the "man of the Revolutionary and Civil War period, an iconoclast and a restless destroyer of moldy tradition."⁹ Vakhtangov was considered the man of reconstruction, the temperate planner, the workman carefully estimating his materials. Where Meyerhold said, "We must show our scorn," Vakhtangov proclaimed, "We must show our attitude."¹⁰

Though very interested in the work of both Stanislavsky and Meyerhold, Vakhtangov was very much his own man and maintained his independence. Vakhtangov is regarded by Soviet theatre historians as ideally and potentially, though not in fact, the synthesizer of the

⁶Ibid., p. 199.

⁷P. A. Markov, The Soviet Theatre (London: Vicot Gollanz, Ltd., 1934), p. 88.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Mordecai Gorelik, New Theatres for Old (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1962), p. 347.

¹⁰Ibid.

two men's systems.¹¹ Vakhtangov wrote:

Stanislavsky brought naturalistic truth to the stage. He sought theatrical truth in the truth of life. Meyerhold, carried away by theatrical truth, removed the truthfulness of feelings, and truth there must be in both--the theatres of Meyerhold and Stanislavsky. . . . Meyerhold never felt the "today" but he did feel the "tomorrow." Stanislavsky never felt the "tomorrow" but always the "today." But one has to feel the today in the morrow, and the morrow in the present day.¹²

Vakhtangov's Turandot was "the happy mischief-making of free comedians who seemed to have just awakened from a boring hibernation within the serious theatre. They had been roused by the springtime atmosphere of freedom."¹³ This production resembled Meyerhold's The Magnificent Cuckold; however, Vakhtangov's childlike quality and warmth were alien to Meyerhold who was not familiar with gentle irony--irony without malice.¹⁴ Only Vakhtangov could capture such irony.

Vakhtangov said:

In this presentation, the performance must not enact the tale of a cruel princess named Turandot. . . . Who cares whether Turandot loves Calaf or not? What is most important is the contemporary attitude towards her, one's irony, and the smile provoked by the "tragic" contents of the tale.¹⁵

Vakhtangov believed that the petty problems, the self analysis, the rummaging in one's soul so typical of the theatres of the pre-

¹¹Hoover, p. 256.

¹²Chinoy and Cole, p. 187.

¹³Gorchakov, p. 225.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 253.

Revolutionary period, must be abolished.¹⁶ Vakhtangov's final note completing his diaries was the note which defined the meaning of his term "fantastic realism," the key word of his directing method.

The correct theatrical means, when discovered, gives to the author's work a true reality on the stage. One can study these means, but the form must be created, must be the product of the artist's great imagination--fantasy. This is why I call it "fantastic realism." It exists in every art.¹⁷

Vakhtangov spoke of the "artist's fantasy" and of his creative imagination, but not of those contrived "fantasticalities" that lead the artist away from truth.¹⁸ Vakhtangov's standpoint was that only after reaching the hidden, secret heart of human emotions, and only upon the firm foundation of these emotions, could a new and more beautiful theatrical structure be erected.¹⁹ Ruben Simonov, who played Truffaldino in Turandot, wrote that the actors were not supposed to imitate feelings, but learn to arouse them with much more intensity and with a lightning speed "without that psychotechnique of the intimate theatre."²⁰

Vakhtangov felt that the special style of the production should be the result of direct study of the author's personality, accounting for the peculiarities of his style and the unique quality of his themes. This concern for the author's personality was important in the selection of Gozzi's play. Originally, Vakhtangov was interested in Schiller's

¹⁶Simonov, p. 149.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Markov, p. 86.

²⁰Simonov, p. 161

adaptation of Gozzi's Princess Turandot. The play was cast, and rehearsals began; but before long, Vakhtangov became ill and was sent to a sanitarium. Upon his return, he was shown the preparatory work that had been done, but he did not accept it. Schiller's fairy tale did not meet with his demands. He did not abandon Turandot, however, and he soon conceived of a new production idea:

What if we take Carlo Gozzi's play as the basis for our presentation, instead of Schiller's? While the Schiller Turandot is a play which adheres to all the rules of drama, the Gozzi play is a fairy tale, a continuation of the folk-theatre tradition, the theatre of improvisation, born on the streets of Italy. . . . Is it possible to create the same fiery passion which inspired the actors who played on the streets of Italy before simple, unsophisticated audiences? We would have to put aside all devotion to detail, all concern about polish, and concentrate on big, spontaneous feelings. . . . Brilliant colors would predominate: zest a joy of living, humor. And what is of great significance, young actors would have to come in touch with the most important moment in creativity--toward which every actor strives in his work, and which is the best guide to creativity--the improvisational actor.

But all I'm talking to you about now will require enormous work by everyone in our theatre. The most complicated problems will face you actors, and you must be prepared to solve those problems. You will have to develop your inner technique to perfection, to express the subtlest feelings along with the most violent passions that his play could demand. . . . Actors will have to be trained to express their thoughts through sculpturally shaped phrases; to develop their sense of rhythm, of musicality; to handle props skillfully. If the Studio will undertake this complicated work with me, let us dare!²¹

Further comparing Gozzi and Schiller, Vakhtangov explained: "It's not in Schiller's line. . . . Schiller could never have imagined his play being performed in the open air, and Gozzi could. That's why it belongs

²¹Ibid., pp. 153 - 154.

more to Gozzi."²²

After the Revolution, a new audience came to the theatre: people seeking an art which would reflect all the glorification, all the exaltation of the Revolutionary events. Vakhtangov considered the worth of the Turandot production in his war-torn country:

What do our spectators want today? Something they see around them all the time? The inspiring fight to rebuild the country after the Civil War? Someone has yet to write about it. Today, the audience wants to see their future too. They're dreaming about it. But the playwrights haven't written anything about it either. We have fairy tales, however--dreams of what people will be when they overcome the evil forces. Let's dream about that in Turandot. Let's show in our fairy tale what people experience in their struggle against evil, for their future.²³

Vakhtangov found inspiration for the production in his belief that the Russians and the Italians had very much in common. He considered both nationalities to be inexhaustibly optimistic and possessing a great love of life. They prized their sense of humor and were open-hearted, frank, kind, and trusting by nature.²⁴ Vakhtangov enlisted the aid of an Italian maestro, Esposito, who had seen productions of the *Commedia dell'Arte*. In recalling the performances, he laughed until he cried, infecting the students with his mirth, gaiety, and love of life. Vakhtangov said:

You saw the way Esposito behaved, . . . you saw his spontaneity, his sincerity. This is the key to the complex character of the masks, and it is foreign to us who are used to working with the

²²Nikolai Gorchakov, The Vakhtangov School of Stage Art, trans. B. Ivanon-Mumjiev (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, n.d.), pp. 101-102.

²³Cole and Chinoy, p. 60.

²⁴Gorchakov, Vakhtangov, p. 99.

given text of the author. Absorb and remember that fire, and charm, and the loving heart of the old Italian musician.²⁵

For the scenic design, Vakhtangov wanted to present China as the Italian playwrights imagined it. Though inspired by Vakhtangov's imagination, all of his co-workers could not easily keep pace with it. Nivinski, the scenic designer, protested: "What a task you're giving me--imagine China as seen through Italian eyes!"²⁶ Vakhtangov said: "Lightness, delicacy, grace, are the elements of the Italian comedy. . . . It would be nice if it [the scenery] were airy, bright colored, and transparent, like a balloon."²⁷ Vakhtangov suggested a platform in the middle of the stage with wings in full view of the audience. In that manner, the audience would be able to see the actors waiting for cues. In front of the audience, the "stage servants" or "zanies" changed the scenery to reveal the magic of the theatre to them. Vakhtangov said:

Let the audience not forget for even a second that it is in a theatre. Let it constantly realize that the actor is an expert playing a role. Let the theatre possess no "Mood" at all, for the theatre must have joy alone. Participation in the gay festival of art and in the skill of the theatre's artists is the source of the audience's gaiety.²⁸

Nivinski's set resulted in a cubistic arrangement of ramps, balconies, platforms, leaning walls, and brightly colored silk banners.

²⁵ Simonov, p. 159.

²⁶ Gorchakov, Vakhtangov, p. 102.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

²⁸ Gorchakov, Theatre in Soviet Family, p. 440.

The costumes consisted of evening wear over which the actors improvised Chinese and Italian accessories. Towels served as turbans and beards; draperies served as capes; and a tennis racket worked well as a sceptor. The four masks appeared in the traditional Commedia costumes, further emphasizing the joyful theatricality.

As the curtain opened on Turandot, Vakhtangov wanted to draw the audience immediately into the actor's creativity. He achieved this participation with a "parade." As the music began, the actors lined up on the stage as actors rather than characters.²⁹ He originally wanted to scatter his performers, dressed in their frock coats and evening gowns, throughout the auditorium with their friends. Suddenly, they would decide to go to the stage and would start playing "theatre pranks."³⁰ The purpose of the "parade" was to establish immediately the festive character of the performance and to bring the audience into its elated and unrestrained atmosphere.³¹ The play ended with a variant of the parade: "actors without make-up, holding each other's hands, and with only an inclination of their heads, leave the audience and slowly move behind the curtain."³²

Vakhtangov staged Turandot following the principles of writers who write fairy tales and the storytellers who tell them to the people.³³

²⁹Simonov, p. 166.

³⁰Gorchakov, Theatre in Soviet Russia, p. 254.

³¹Simonov, p. 167.

³²Ibid., p. 168.

³³Ibid., p. 192.

A fairy tale demands of the teller a complete faith in all the events of the tale. The moment the teller doubts his story, he is no longer convincing to his listeners. In creating this make-believe world, Vakhtangov wanted his actors to behave as though they were the members of a strolling company--actors as common people playing on the streets and in the squares.³⁴

Striving to achieve fuller participation of the audience, Vakhtangov intentionally widened the actor's "center of attention" during the rehearsals of Turandot. He moved the "fourth wall" over the footlights to the last row of the orchestra and gallery.³⁵ When the content of the play allowed, the action spread into the audience, and the auditorium was lit. This lighting effect indicated to the audience that a moment had arrived when a most important communication between it and the actors would take place.

In rehearsing Turandot, Vakhtangov required of everyone not involved in a specific scene to participate as spectators of Gozzi's time. "The spectator of those days loved the actor because he was his actor, an actor of the people. The spectator knew what this actor drank, what he ate, whom he loved, and whom he hated."³⁶ Vakhtangov said:

Let's make it a standing rule at our Turandot rehearsals that the people attending them are spectators and not the

³⁴Ibid., p. 193.

³⁵Ibid., p. 163.

³⁶Gorchakov, Vakhtangov, p. 114.

Studio pupils watching others rehearse. . . . If the actors perform well, the spectators encourage them, applaud them. If they perform badly, the spectators whistle, pelt them with orange peels, pass unsalutary remarks. . . .³⁷

The actors took special classes in voice placement, rhythm, movement, and development of musicality. As character traits, some of the masks altered their voices. Tartaglia stammered, and Pantalone mispronounced words with a sickly sweet inflection. Vakhtangov said that his parodying of speech defects was one of the features of the Italian comedy. "So in this case we are in keeping with the history of the Italian theatre. That's our gift to the historians."³⁸

The four principal masks, Pantalone, Brighella, Tartaglia, and Truffaldino, improvised freely, satirizing with ease current events of the day and plays in performance at other theatres. The performers ad libbed and cracked personal jokes at one another's expense, quickly establishing the jesting nature of the performance. The actors did not act the text but juggled words, melodies, and speech rhythms for their own satisfaction--or so it seemed.³⁹ The apparently spontaneous and haphazard improvisational attitude towards the text was actually the result of long and precise work by Vakhtangov with the actors. The actors interpreted their "tragic soliloquies" with ad libs and asides to the audience. They did not show their real emotions, but merely exhibited ironical ridicule relating to those emotions.⁴⁰

³⁷Ibid., p. 120.

³⁸Ibid., p. 141.

³⁹Gorchakov, Theatre in Soviet Russia, p. 254.

⁴⁰Ibid.

Stanislavsky demanded of the actor, even after playing his role a hundred times, that he play it as if he were playing it for the first time. Vakhtangov, following Stanislavsky's example, taught the participants to be in a creative improvisational state during the entire time they were performing. Vakhtangov said:

Stanislavsky discovered a number of laws for the theatre arts that are imbedded in the biological nature of creative acting. We are correct in admitting that these laws are generally obligatory.⁴¹

Stanislavsky's basic creative principles and problems that provided a foundation for Vakhtangov's direction of Turandot were: (1) the affirmation of the artistic credo of the theatre for the given collective, (2) the definition of the dramatic genre of the play and the means of expressiveness which most precisely met the demands of that given genre, and (3) the subordination of the performance to the demands of the times, of their social significance and their spiritual value.⁴² In other words, the performance must answer the artistic needs of the people and its new ideology. In the years of 1920 and 1921, during the rehearsals of Turandot, Stanislavsky was still at work completing his system. Vakhtangov never said a negative word or indicated any non-acceptance of the realistic teachings of Stanislavsky himself,⁴³ but he looked negatively upon the followers of Stanislavsky who misinterpreted his work.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Simonov, p. 192.

⁴³Ibid., p. 164.

Vakhtangov had a custom of showing his plays and the result of his work with various studio groups to Stanislavsky, Nemirovich-Dantchenko, the Moscow Art Theatre company, and his colleagues of the First Studio. He stressed that it established an organic link between his activity as director and instructor, with the teachings of Stanislavsky and the creative life of the Moscow Art Theatre. The preview dress rehearsal of Turandot was on 27 February 1922. Vakhtangov himself could not attend because he was deathly ill. All through the long, strenuous rehearsals, he had been fighting disease.

The play was an outstanding success, and the actor, Simonov, described it in great detail. Simonov recorded that at the end of the first act:

Among those in the audience applauding most heartily we recognized the familiar figures of Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Dantchenko. They are applauding, their hands outstretched to us on the stage. . . . This is not the usual applause, out of politeness and condescending encouragement from teachers to students. This is the fiery applause of an audience enthralled and ecstatic, deeply moved by a great theatrical event.⁴⁴

The intermission was prolonged to give Stanislavsky time to drive to Vakhtangov's home and deathbed to congratulate him on an overwhelming success. Stanislavsky said, "This performance is a holiday for all the collective of the Moscow Art Theatre."⁴⁵ This approval meant a great deal to Vakhtangov. At the end of the performance, the audience did not want to leave the theatre. The actors were exuberant at hearing the repeated applause and seeing the joyous ex-

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 181, 182.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 191.

pressions on the spectators' faces.⁴⁶

Vakhtangov never saw a performance of Turandot. He died shortly after it opened. His spirit remained in the production, however, and the actors worked even harder in memory of their inspirational leader. Nemirovich-Dantchenko said at Vakhtangov's funeral:

Vakhtangov did not strive to divorce himself from the Moscow Art Theatre, though he did divorce himself from its bad traditions. What were these bad traditions? The Naturalism of which the Moscow Art Theatre wants to rid itself. . . . And it was of this drab, tedious Naturalism that Vakhtangov rid himself with such spontaneous finality.⁴⁷

Vakhtangov had succeeded in giving "a dazzling theatrical presentation full of the living feeling and passions of man."⁴⁸

Turandot enjoyed a triumphant success throughout the Soviet Union and also abroad in Berlin, Stockholm, Paris, and many other cities. Thirty-five years later, Simonov was asked why Turandot was not revived. He answered: "Because I do not know how Vakhtangov would have directed it in our day. . . . The aesthetic demands and tastes of the theatregoer have changed considerably during the last 35 years."⁴⁹

Turandot was the merriest presentation of the Soviet Theatre.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 190.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 199.

⁴⁸Christine Edwards, The Stanislavsky Heritage (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 125.

⁴⁹Simonov, p. 203.

⁵⁰Gorchakov, Theatre in Soviet Russia, p. 253.

The work resounded with the joy of life. It contained the light, pure, happy irony within Vakhtangov himself.⁵¹ Turandot removed all illusions of the theatre, along with everything serious and absolute. It had a gay and charming flavor that the theatre would inherit from Vakhtangov. Simonov summed up the success when he said: "Turandot had a great influence on the subsequent creative life of our theatre and I am not exaggerating when I say that it had a definite influence on the Soviet Theatre in its entirety."⁵²

Subsequent productions by the Vakhtangov Theatre⁵³ tried to realize certain scenic problems of style and realistic theatricality. A solution to these scenic problems was first attempted in Turandot. Further, Turandot initiated an acting style of sincerity, spontaneity, and improvisation.

Vakhtangov used Turandot as a vehicle to express his dedication to the art of the theatre as a "tribunal for the propagation of ideas vital to humanity."⁵³ He captured the romance and joy of theatre itself, inspiring theatre artists and play-goers throughout Russia. He expressed

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Simonov, p. 200.

⁵³Specifically, Merimee's comedies: The Theatre of Clara Gazul, Leo Gurich Sinichkin, and a series of one-act plays; Marchak's Fearing Sorrow One Escapes Happiness; Break-Up by B. Lavrenev; Intervention by L. Slavin; The Man with the Gun by N. Pogodin; and many others.

⁵⁴Simonov, p. 210.

Gozzi's irony and romanticism and presented the play as Gozzi's spirit demanded--as Gozzi might have produced it in the Russian theatre for a Russian audience.

CONCLUSION

The aftermath of Russia's Civil War demanded that the people re-evaluate their position and take a firm stand upon what they believed. Vsevolod Meyerhold, Theodore Komissarshevsky, and Eugene Vakhtangov considered the established Moscow Art Theatre inappropriate to the needs of the Russian people. In this period of devastation, hunger, and conflict, the last thing the audiences wanted to see in the theatre was "a slice of life." The carefree, fun-filled Commedia dell'Arte with its stock characters, improvisation, and informal actor-audience relationship, offered a total and welcome break from Naturalism.

In returning to the Commedia dell'Arte, the revival of Carlo Gozzi's fiabe was a logical choice for two reasons. First, eighteenth century Venice was troubled by conflicting ideas of a changing social and political order. Long established forms of government and religion were questioned, and Venice became aware of its place in the world. Against this background, Gozzi revolted against a realism inherent in French comedies, just as the Russian directors revolted against the Naturalism of the Moscow Art Theatre in their age. Second, Gozzi provided a link between the Commedia dell'Arte and the Modern theatre with the written text he provided. The text was easier for the modern directors to deal with, rather than a total improvisational performance; therefore, they turned to Gozzi in capturing the

Commedia dell'Arte.

Critics have classified the spirit within Gozzi's plays as Romanticism because of its emotional and passionate appeal. The fairy tales were unlike other plays of Gozzi's day and inspired the imagination of the audience. The high ideals of "good" prevailing over "evil," and deeds being justly rewarded, are consistent throughout the plays. Above all, there is a spirit of joy and excitement in the fiabe. This spirit particularly appealed to the later directors of the troubled period of the Russian Revolution.

Vsevolod Meyerhold admired Gozzi for rejuvenating the Commedia dell'Arte and, following his example, set out to revive it again. He opened a studio and established a magazine named after Gozzi's scenario, The Love of Three Oranges. The studio and magazine were originated for the explicit purpose of studying the Commedia dell'Arte. His students worked with improvisational methods, expressive movement which evolved into biomechanics, and playwrighting techniques of the Italian comedy. He devoted all of his energy to challenging the stagnating realism of the modern theatre, and discovered a vehicle for his attack with Gozzi's works and the Commedia dell'Arte production spirit.

In contrast to Meyerhold, Theodore Komissarshevsky did not produce Gozzi's Turandot in an effort to present new and radical theories of drama. He did not use Gozzi as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. He presented Turandot with no other motive than to entertain his audience and provide them with a worthwhile theatrical experience. Komissarshevsky proved that Gozzi's fiabe could stand alone

without further justification.

Eugene Vakhtangov discovered an idea in Turandot which appealed to him as an expression of the Revolutionary period. Within the theatre itself, people were torn between Stanislavsky's and Meyerhold's opposing schools of thought. Soviet Russia, struggling to reconstruct itself after the war, was deep in a depression of disease and poverty. Vakhtangov's Turandot, with its love of life and love of theatricality, provided a refreshing and revitalizing inspiration to everyone it contacted.

These three directors brought Gozzi out of the archives of theatre history and put him back on the stage. They presented Gozzi in their own terms, with different goals in mind, but all succeeded in influencing the Russian theatre. In their collective goal to break from or improve upon Stanislavsky's naturalistic teachings, they all turned to Gozzi.

Meyerhold's work with Gozzi occurred early in his career and provided him with a foundation for his later experiments. Komissarshevsky produced Gozzi in the middle of his career as he moved from one playwright to another with equal enthusiasm. Turandot was the final crown upon Vakhtangov's short career, but, more than any other of his productions, Turandot inspired his students to carry out their teacher's work after his death. Stanislavsky himself was greatly inspired by Vakhtangov's Turandot, and his later work reflected many of the ideas Vakhtangov had presented. Although Stanislavsky's teachings initially triggered Meyerhold's work with the *Commedia dell'Arte*, within a few short years, Stanislavsky also was inspired by the

spirit of Carlo Gozzi.¹

The theatre of the Russian Revolutionary period constitutes an important segment in theatre's development. Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Komissarshevsky, and Vakhtangov made important contributions to the art of the director. Stanislavsky's system provoked Meyerhold's biomechanics, Komissarshevsky's eclecticism, and Vakhtangov's fantastic realism. The unifying influence that existed within these major innovations and that affected modern theatre in its entirety was the spirit of a forgotten, impoverished, Venetian aristocrat, Carlo Gozzi.

¹Gorchakov, Vakhtangov, p. 199.

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