

How strange! The ABC's of Marxism state that social and political upheavals must create new forms of art. The social upheaval has occurred, but we see exactly the reverse phenomenon: the new theater not only has not sprung like Pallas Athena from the head of Zeus, but the surge of new plays after the revolution has completely dried up. It's incomprehensible, but we must face the fact. Just now, for example, the results of the last Ostrovsky contest were published. A total of nineteen plays were submitted, of which not one was accorded even a mention. In times past this competition brought in several hundred dramas and comedies. True, the greater number of them (I fear to say—all) did not rise above the level of mediocre epigonism. And, true, these plays charted no new paths, shaped no new dramatic forms. But at least this sea of epigonistic, even pulp literature proved the existence of a whole corps of young playwrights, graphomaniacs perhaps, but sufficient to lay the foundation for a school of future innovators. Now even this graphomaniacal writing has subsided. Instead of finding new paths, we have begun to lose track of the old. In the area of dramatic form you can't even speak of discoveries. *Mystery-Bouffe* (*Misteria-buff*)² remained an isolated and most unsuccessful phenomenon.

But if the revolution has not (yet—we hope) given birth to a new repertoire, there are some plays in the old repertoire which can serve as a surrogate of the new theater. A number of plays which appeared in Russia during the last two decades broke the unshakable principles of our grandfathers' laws and cut right across the traditions of the theater festivals (*Rusalii*)³ in the programs of the theaters? Remizov's work, it should be noted, was recently republished by the Theatrical Section of the Peoples Commissariat of Education, so the book famine cannot be used as an excuse.

Remizov has written three big "pageants" (*deistva*).⁴ (I am leaving aside *Tsar Maksimilian*, which is not yet published.) Of these three plays, the first, *Demonic Pageant* (*Besovskoe deistvo*), is scenic through and through. It is a parody of ancient Russian legends; everything depends on the action, on motion, on a punning series of comic situations. The play certainly should be successful in performance. When reading it, you lose not only the whole second act, but also the bright scenes with masks, the scene of the seduction and others. Finally, the central figures of the demons Aratyr and Timelikh, who are buffoons and punsters, cannot fail to produce uninterrupted bursts of laughter. Their saucy curses, chosen with typical Remizovian precision and pronounced in the most "pious" and "sacred" places, will no doubt strike the "cultured" spectator as blas-

phemy, but with a public which is naive and hungry for *spectacles* this play will have a huge success. Its complete flop ten years ago, when it was first produced in the V. Komissarzhevskaya Theater, should not discourage producers. The flop is explained by the fact that the refined intelligentsia audience did not understand the consciously constructed parody. One need only approach the *Demonic Pageant* in the correct way, as a popular show booth (*balagan*),⁵ in order to win the enthusiasm of an audience of Red Army soldiers and workers.

The Tragedy of Judas, Prince of Iscariot (Tragediya o Iude printse Iskariotskom) and *The Pageant of Georgy the Bold (Deistvo o Georgii Khrabrom)* do not offer such scenic interest. They are made from the same material as the *Demonic Pageant*, but their approach is different. The *Demonic Pageant* is constructed as a parody, interlaced with purely comic show-booth numbers and insertions. It is enough to read the author's subtle, humorous footnotes to the last edition of the play to become convinced of this. The two other "pageants" are written in the same language and drawn from the same source, but they are profoundly serious. In *Judas*, Oriph and Ziph, playing roles analogous to the demons of *Demonic Pageant*, grow pale, lose their central position and become more like the traditional companions of the heroes. Yet even they now and then pepper their dialogues with curses, wink back and forth, tussle, play the show booth. *The Pageant of Georgy the Bold* finally gets rid of any crude buffoonery. As a result, the last two plays, especially *Georgy*, lose their scenic merits and cease to be pure "pageants." They should remain incomprehensible to the broad mass and, on the contrary, be accepted with condescension by the intelligentsia.

But in terms of literature, the last two plays are perhaps more interesting than the first. This is because we can trace Remizovian devices in them with surprising clarity. It would seem that *Judas* and *Georgy* are sewn together with obvious dark threads, and if you take these apart you leave nothing for analysis. The author himself encourages us in this view by graciously explaining how the works were made: the sources, the texts and aids from which he drew his material. He indicates all this. Remizov is a great expert on the nation's past, on all sorts of chants, legends and designs. And a good half of his stories are reworkings of these legends. But the "pageants" are weaved directly from them, as from patches. "For the writing of this tragedy, I made use of folk songs, chants, carols, lamentations and old traditions," says the author in his notes. The tragedy begins with a carol: "Ne zarya zareet . . ." ("Not the red sky reddens . . ."). Remizov provides the explanation: "Consult Potebnya." And other citations follow: This was taken from A. Veselovsky, this from Varentsov, this again from Potebnya, etc.

Such a compositional device is characteristic of the whole of Remizov's work. With good reason he wrote in the explanation of the title

of his book *Vesennee porosh'e*: "The word *porosh'e* signifies minutia and dust, *Vesennee porosh'e* will be spring dust: the petals here of fallen flowers and all sorts of little leaves and birch aments and the blossom of the oak and little twigs and the tendrils of grasses." And every story, every novella by Remizov may be called such a *porosh'e*. In the "pageants," you can see in special relief how these little twigs and tendrils of grasses intertwine into one harmonious and shapely whole.

Likewise, in the material of the "pageants," you can pick out all of Remizov's favorite devices: (1) ancient and local words, which here play the role of "trans-sense" locutions⁶ (it's interesting that this predilection for words incomprehensible to the reader is realized with a full awareness, intentionally—the author appends glossaries of present words for the unknown words and expressions in his works); (2) alternation of short, one-worded replies and enormous, many-lined periods; (3) piling up of epithets and predicates; (4) enjambements; (5) alliterations; (6) doublings; (7) finally, countless repetitions and refrains. In this respect, the torture of the tsarevich in the second act of *Georgy the Bold* is remarkable. The tsarevich is tortured off-stage, and on-stage the tsar, prophet, tsarevna, images of the blessed, guards and elders exchange remarks, accompanying them with the same refrains. Each has his own strictly determined leitmotif. The elders express doubt in Georgy's invulnerability, the tsar hastens with the execution, the prophet incants, the images of the blessed pray for the tsarevich, the guards report on the course of the execution (in the same words), and, finally, the tsarevna from time to time invariably cries out: "Stop the execution!"

A more detailed literary analysis of Remizov's festivals would be of great interest, but here, unfortunately, I must limit myself to these brief remarks. And, in conclusion, return to that with which I began—to the sincere hope that we may see *Demonic Pageant* on the stage of a people's theater in the near future.

translated by Gary Kern

NOTES

1. "Teatr Remizova," published in *The Life of Art (Zhizn' iskusstvo)*, No. 343, 15 Jan. 1920, 2.
2. Vladimir Mayakovsky's play of 1918, produced by Vsevolod Meyerhold on the first anniversary of the October Revolution.
3. The word *rusalii* is the name of the spring festivals held by the ancient Slavs in commemoration of the dead.

4. The obsolete word *deistvo*, from the root meaning "action," was the original term for a religious or mythological play. The three plays discussed below were collected in a volume entitled *Rusal'nyya deistva*, as volume 8 of Alexei Remizov's collected works (St. P., 1912). This volume is available in a photo-reprint by Wilhelm Fink Verlag (Munich, 1971).

5. Lunts here reveals a certain affinity with Meyerhold, who developed a theory of the show booth. See the article, "The Fairground Booth," which also discusses Remizov, in *Meyerhold on Theatre*, translated by Edward Braun (New York, 1969).

6. Lunts refers to the "trans-sense language" (*zaimnyi iazyk*) of the Futurists, suggesting that Remizov, in his ancient way, is modern.