CHAPTER 1

THE SCENE

Edvard Radzinskii wrote his first play *India, My Dream* [Индия, мечта моя] in 1956, which was staged in the Moscow Theatre of Young Spectators in 1960. This was a play about Gerasim Lebedev, who at the end of the eighteenth century travelled to India and organised the first European-style professional theatre in Calcutta. Radzinskii’s first play did not enjoy much success, and was removed after a few performances. Success came to him in 1964 with a play *104 Pages about Love* [104 Страницы про любовь], which made him a celebrity.

Between 1969 and 1980 Radzinskii wrote three ‘historico-political’ plays. They were published initially as separate plays, but were later grouped in a trilogy with a title, *Theatre of the Times* ... [Театр Времен ...], and published in a collection of plays called *Theatre* [Театр]. Since 1956 he has written more than twenty plays and published three collections of prose, including novels, short stories and biographies. Although his non-dramatic works are quite popular, it is through drama that he has established himself as one of the foremost Russian writers.

Radzinskii’s twenty plays thus straddle three decades in the life of post-Stalinist Soviet Union, which includes the ‘thaw’ of the Khrushchev period, the ‘stagnation’ of the Brezhnev era, and ‘perestroika’ of the Gorbachev years. Hence, before undertaking a detailed reading of individual plays of the trilogy, it will be useful to examine the cultural landscape in which these plays were written, read and staged. It needs to be stressed that the chapter does not aim to trace even briefly the cultural history of the last thirty years. This is a major task in itself, and, keeping in view the vast amount of published material already available on this topic, seems unnecessary. However, the significance of situating the trilogy within the cultural discourses of contemporary Soviet society demands that some major developments in the cultural scene in the sixties and the seventies should be highlighted. It is recognised that such an attempt will always lead to an account that will be sketchy and suffer from generalisations. Hence, instead of producing a chronological summary of the period, the focus will be on a few major events.

One of these events was the Twenty-Second Party Congress in October 1961, which adopted the new party program and a new moral code for party-members and other Soviet citizens. This was perhaps the beginning of the final ‘thaw’ in the recurring sequence of ‘thaws’ and ‘freezes’ which were the main feature of destalinisation during
Krushchev’s rule. This new moral code arguably strengthened the discourse about the ‘positive hero’ in Soviet arts and literature. The Twenty-Fourth Party Congress and the Decree on Art and Literary Criticism issued in 1972 saw the re-emergence of the hegemony of socialist realism in Soviet cultural discourse. The decree and the utopia of scientific-technical revolution created by the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress revived the genre of ‘production plays’ in Soviet drama and theatre. These plays provided new ‘positive heroes’, and were used to establish new criteria for distinguishing ‘good’ and ‘bad’ plays.

Radzinskiy’s three plays were written in this cultural environment, and they were also related, in a complicated way, to his other plays of the period. Hence, the chapter will examine the place of the trilogy within Radzinskiy’s drama as a whole. It will discuss the critical response of theatre critics and officials to these plays and examine Radzinskiy’s reaction to that criticism.

The ‘Thaw’

The ‘Thaw’ is a popular metaphor used by historians in writing the story of Soviet politics and culture in the Khrushchev years between 1953 and 1964. Like all metaphors, it does not completely represent the object it wants to describe. The difference of opinion with regard to this period amongst historians is so pronounced that some even doubt the existence of a real ‘thaw’. However, most historians agree that, in spite of several ‘freezes’ which interrupted the ‘thaws’, this period did see a sustained process of destalinisation.

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1 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). In this important study of the Soviet novel, Katerina Clark discusses the Khrushchev years in detail. According to her, and this is generally accepted by most historians of Soviet politics and culture, the Khrushchev years were marked by three ‘thaws’: The first happened in 1954, following the September 1953 plenum of the Central Committee; the second occurred in 1956, following the Twentieth Party Congress; and the third came in 1962, in the wake of the Twenty-Second Party Congress (Katerina Clark, p. 211). It might be more accurate to put the beginning of the third ‘thaw’ at the end of 1961 when the Twenty-Second Party Congress took place.

2 In addition to the book by Katerina Clark, there is a huge amount of published literature about this period. There are some very detailed works which, based on one theatre season, try to trace the ups and downs in the progress of the ‘thaw’. For a general account of this period, the author of this thesis found two texts particularly useful. They are: Michael Heller and Aleksandr Nekrich, *Utopia in Power: A History of the USSR from 1917 to the Present*, trans. Phyllis B. Carlos (London: Hutchinson, 1986); and Boris Kagarlitskiy, *The Thinking Reed: Intellectuals and the Soviet State from 1917 to the Present*, trans. Brian Pearce (London: Verso, 1988). Aleksandr Gershkovich describes a meeting between the party leaders and the intelligentsia which took place in 1962. In the meeting Khrushchev declared:

Do you think that there will be complete freedom under communism? Communism is an orderly, organised society. There will be automation and cybernetics. But there will also be people invested with trust, who will direct who does what (Gershkovich, p. 54)

These types of meeting were quite common during this period. They are good examples of the ‘freezes’. Through them the Party warned the intelligentsia that it will not tolerate any erosion of its control over cultural practice. Aleksandr Gershkovich, *The Theatre of Yuri Lyubimov: Art and Politics at the Taganka Theatre in Moscow*, trans. Michael Yurieff (New York: Paragon House, 1989).
The period of the ‘thaw’ is discussed here because the process of destalinisation heralded by Khrushchev brought important changes in the cultural landscape of the Soviet Union. This section does not aim to map these complex changes, but will focus briefly on two aspects of this period: the changes in the Soviet theatre and the adoption of a new party program and new party rules at the Twenty-Second Party Congress.

The period of the ‘thaw’ became a catalyst for several important changes in almost every sphere of Soviet theatre, including theatre-organisation, repertoire and ideology. The centralised system of administration, which had developed toward the end of the thirties and which had permanent theatre-troupes [стационарные театры] at its base, was found wanting.\(^3\) It was made flexible, first of all by allowing the emergence of ‘theatre-studios’ centred around young actors and directors.\(^4\) In 1956, Oleg Efremov started his theatre-studio in Moscow, which later became the well-known Sovremennik Theatre. The Sovremennik Theatre was inspired by the liberalisation which followed the Twentieth Party Congress, and the troupe of this theatre used to call itself ‘the children of 1956’. In the same year the Bolshoi Drama Theatre in Leningrad was handed over to G. Tvostonogov. Yuri Lyubimov’s move to Theatre of Drama and Comedy at Taganka which took place in 1964, the year Khrushchev was removed from power, can also be indirectly attributed the spirit of the ‘thaw’.\(^5\) Equally important in this regard was the renaming of N. Okhlopkov’s Moscow Drama Theatre as the Mayakovskii Drama Theatre in 1954. This change can be attributed partially to the revival of interests in Mayakovskii’s satirical plays, including The Bath-House [Ванна], produced in 1953 in the Moscow Satire Theatre.

On the ideological front, the theory of no-conflict [теория безконфликтности] met strong criticism and was replaced by critical realism which aimed to represent real-life conflicts honestly. The method of socialist realism drew criticism and formalist aesthetics also came under fire. The new Sovremennik Theatre issued statements in which it

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promised to adhere to an honest representation of reality, and to fight against formalistic practices. Critical realism became a common phrase. The theatre-repertoire saw the addition of new plays in which party activists, idealised workers and other positive heroes were replaced by ordinary citizens grappling with their personal problems.

As was mentioned earlier ‘thaws’ were interrupted by ‘freezes’. Experts on Soviet history see the beginning of the last ‘thaw’ in the Twenty-Second Party Congress that was held in October 1961, following which Stalin’s body was removed from the mausoleum. However, a new party program and new party rules were also adopted at the same Congress, which, it can be argued, contributed to the emergence of neo-Stalinist tendencies. The party and the state declared firmly that the main task was to create material conditions for the building of communism, in which arts and literature were once again asked to play a leading role. Socialist realism was reinvoked as the principal method of cultural practice.

The program very clearly reaffirmed that the creation of a new human being, the Homo Sovieticus, was the cherished goal. The Twenty-Second Party Congress approved a new moral code of behaviour for the ‘builder of communism’. This moral-code had twelve principles, the first and foremost of which was dedication to the cause of building communism and love for the ‘socialist fatherland.’

The adoption of a new moral code had significant implications for creative activity in the fields of arts and literature. Artists and writers were asked to create positive heroes guided by the moral code adopted by the party. Literary and art critics were also told to

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7 The discourse about the new Soviet subject had emerged in the first years of the October Revolution and had found full support of Lenin in a speech Tasks of the Youth Organisations [Задачи Совзова Молодежи] delivered at the Third All-Russian Congress of The Communist Union of The Youth of Russia held in Moscow in 1920. The Twenty-Second Party Congress not only repeated this but reinforced it by adopting new party rules.

8 This ‘моральный кодекс строителя коммунизма’ included the following moral principles: преданность делу коммунизма, любовь к социалистической Родине, к странам социализма; добросовестный труд на благо общества: кто не работает, тот не ест; забота каждого о сохранении и умножении общественного достояния; высокое сознание общественного долга, непримиримость к нарушителям общественных интересов; коллективизм и товарищеская взаимопомощь: каждый за всех, и все за одного; гуманное отношение и взаимное уважение между людьми: человек человеку — друг, товарищ и брат; честность и правдивость, нравственная чистота, простота и скромность в общественной и личной жизни; взаимное уважение в семье, забота о воспитании детей; непримиримость к несправедливости, тунеядству, нечестности, карьеризму, стяжательству; дружба и братство всех народов СССР, непримиримость к национал-империализму, надеждам на улучшение жизненного уровня рабочего класса, солидарность с трудящимися всех стран, со всеми народами." The Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Resolutions and Decisions of Congresses, Conferences, and Plenums of the Central Committee [Коммунистическая Партия Советского Союза в резолюциях и решениях съездов, конференций и пленумов ЦК ], 8 (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1972), p. 288.
look for the positive hero in every work. The presence of an easily recognisable positive hero became the main criterion for judging the merit of a work of art. It was not sufficient to be critical of the negative phenomena in society and it was deemed essential that such criticism be accompanied by a positive example. Even a cursory survey of Soviet critical literature on art, drama, theatre and literature clearly shows an obsession with the problem of the ‘hero’, ‘the positive hero’, ‘the contemporary hero’.  

Following an established tradition, the resolutions and decisions of the Congress were published in newspapers, magazines and journals. Most of them reproduced them with short commentaries.

Brezhnev Strikes Back

Even before the removal of Khrushchev in 1964, neo-Stalinist attitudes in art and literature were gaining strength in the Communist Party, but after 1964 the changes became much more rapid. In September 1966 the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet amended the penal code to facilitate judicial reprisals against the dissidents. This was a reaction to the intensification of the dissident movement and an increase in the circulation of both ‘samizdat’ and ‘tamizdat’.

Like the previous section, this section will briefly focus only on two significant events of the Brezhnev era. One of them was the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress, held in 1971. The second was the publication of a decree on literary and art criticism in January

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10 For instance, the monthly journal Theatre [Театр], published in its November issue for 1961 excerpts from the draft-proposal of the new program of the CPSU. The same issue also published a short article by Firs Shishigin, the People’s Artist of the Russian Federation and a short letter by R. Plyat, the People’s Artist of the USSR. Both these pieces hail the publication of the proposed program of the CPSU. R. Plyat, as expected from a well-decorated Soviet artist, noted that all actors and workers including ‘him were given the task of acculturating in the people devotion to the cause of building communism, love for the socialist homeland and other socialist countries’ (Plyat, p. 5). Firs Shishigin, “The Most Important and Dear Task,” [“Самое важное и родное дело, ”] Teatr, No. 11 (1961), pp. 3-5 and R. Plyat, “This is Assigned to Me,” [“Это поручается мне, ”] Teatr, No. 11 (1961), p. 5.

11 For instance, in May 1967, Solzhenitsyn sent a letter to the Fourth Congress of The Union of Soviet Writers in which he opposed censorship. In February 1968 the famous Ginzburg-Galanskov trial began in Moscow. Both Aleksander Ginzburg and Yuri Galanskov were the founders of the two ‘samizdat’ magazines - Syntax and Phoenix. The two were sentenced to seven years in the labour camps. A few years earlier dissident writers Andrei Sinyavskii and Yuli Daniel were tried and sentenced to the same period of imprisonment in labour camps. In April 1968, the first issue of the dissident magazine The Chronicle of Current Events was published and in June of the same year Andrei Sakharov’s article Progress, Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom was published in ‘samizdat’. In 1969 Andrei Amalrik, a dissident writer and dramatist published in ‘samizdat’ his book Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984? and in October 1970, Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.
1972. These two events clearly indicate the strengthening of neo-Stalinist tendencies which controlled cultural practices in the Soviet Union under Brezhnev’s rule.

The Twenty-Fourth Party Congress passed the mandatory resolutions on art and literature which were not very different from similar resolutions passed earlier by other party congresses. However, this congress created a new term, a new metaphor, the Scientific-Technical Revolution, abbreviated in Russian as NTR [Научно-техническая революция]. The congress resolved that Soviet society had reached the stage of developed socialism and was at the threshold of a scientific-technical revolution which would push the Soviet society into communism. Within a few years the term NTR invaded every form of economic, political and cultural discourse. This term became the basis for explaining and justifying the re-emergence of ‘production plays’.

The resolutions of the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress reiterated that art and literature were to play a significant role in a socialist society which was ready to leap into communism. It was stressed that the Soviet people were interested in works of art and literature which truly reflected their Soviet reality and affirmed the ideals of communism. The Party was also aware of the danger from high-profile artists and writers joining the dissident movement, and hence wanted to appear sensitive to their special talent and needs. It wanted various party and state bodies and the so-called ‘creative unions’ to be considerate to the ‘creative intelligentsia’. It proposed that control over art and literature should be ‘combined with a sympathetic approach to its creators’.12

The Union of Soviet Writers, as expected, gave full approval and support to the resolutions of the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress. It met for its fifth congress in 1971, a few months after Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, and passed a resolution supporting the decisions of the party congress.13 The resolution ignores the dissident movement and fails to comment on the controversy surrounding Solzhenitsyn. However, repeated references to ‘the intense ideological struggle in the world arena’ indicate that the ghost of Solzhenitsyn was always present in the congress. Soviet playwright Afansii Salynskii presented a report on the state of Soviet drama and theatre at the congress which was published along with the resolution of Congress in Teatr.14

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12 The Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Resolutions and Decisions of Congresses, Conferences and Plenums of the Central Committee [Коммунистическая партия Советского Союза в резолюциях и решениях съездов, конференций и пленумов ЦК], 10 (Moscow: Politicheskaya Literatura, 1972), p. 359.


14 A. Salynskii, “The Stage - A Public Platform,” ["Сцена - общественная трибуна,”], Teatr, No. 10 (1971), pp. 9-12. A. Salynskii was the secretary of the executive council of the Union of Soviet Writers.
Although Salynskii makes the mandatory references to the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress, he nevertheless focuses on a number of problems faced by contemporary Soviet drama and theatre. He complains about the complicated procedure of approving and releasing new plays for production and notes that the practice of direct collaboration between dramatists and theatres ‘has been to a large extent undermined by the intervention of various state bodies.’ Salynskii also complains of the limited opportunities for publishing plays, and notes that the so-called ‘thick’ journals consider the publication of plays as unprofitable. According to him, a special almanac *Contemporary Drama* [Современная Драматургия], launched by the Ministry of Culture had been discontinued because of financial losses. He notes that a year before in the plenum of the board of the Union of Soviet Writers this problem was raised and discussed with some urgency, but the situation had not changed. Salynskii also draws attention to the development of non-Russian drama and theatre in the Soviet Union and suggests that the time was ripe to open a new theatre in Moscow, The Theatre of People’s Friendship [Театр Дружбы Народов], concentrating on non-Russian drama from other Soviet republics.

In his report Salynskii touches the problem of literary and theatre criticism. He criticises the theory of no-conflict and notes that the playwrights should be free to represent conflicts, but stresses that the representation should lead to the affirmation of positive aspects of Soviet society. The drama and theatre should portray positive heroes and look for them amongst Soviet people.

Following the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress, the Central Committee issued, on 21 January 1972, a special *Decree on Literary and Art Criticism* [Постановление ЦК КПСС о Литературно-Художественной Критике]. This was not the first time that the party had decided to issue a decree on such a non-political issue as literary criticism. In 1940 a similar decree entitled *Decree on Literary Criticism and Bibliography* [Постановление ЦК ВКП (б) о Литературной Критике и Библиографии] was issued by the Central Committee of the party. It is significant that in 1972 the party issued a number of other important decrees related to higher education, cinema and the National Pioneer Organisation.\(^\text{16}\)

The preamble to the 1972 decree states that it is inspired by the resolutions of the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress. The decree begins by commending the work being

\(^{15}\) Salynskii, p. 9.

\(^{16}\) For instance, in March it issued a *Decree of The Central Committee on the 50th Anniversary of The All-Soviet Pioneer Organisation* [Постановление ЦК КПСС о 50-летии Всесоюзной Пioneрской Организации имени В. И. Ленина]. This was followed by a *Decree of the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers of the USSR on the Steps to Further Improve Higher Education in the Country* [Постановление ЦК КПСС и Совета Министров СССР о Мерах по Дальнейшему Совершенствовании Высшего Образования в Стране], which was published in June. In July 1972 the party issued a *Decree Of The Central Committee on the Steps Aimed for Further Developing Soviet Cinematography* [Постановление ЦК КПСС о Мерах по Дальнейшему Развитию Советской Кинематографии].
carried out in art and literature, and notes with satisfaction that artists and writers are ‘demonstrating a genuine concern for developing socialist-realist art’. But in the following paragraph, the decree adopts a critical tone and suggests that, by and large, literary and art ‘criticism have failed to fulfill the demands arising from the increased role of art and culture in the building of communism’.

The decree identifies a number of major shortcomings in literary and art criticism such as: superficial nature of critical articles and a lack of philosophical, aesthetic and theoretical rigour; the failure of magazines and journals to commission interesting articles from leading experts in Marxist and Leninist aesthetics; a lack of involvement in establishing revolutionary and humanist ideals of socialist-realist art, and inaction in the exposition and criticism of the reactionary content of bourgeois mass culture and various decadent forms of art; a lack of effective control by party committees, ministerial departments over media, publishing houses, television and radio; failure of administrative committees of creative unions to organise workshops and seminars on crucial problems in art and literature; and a slow restructuring of the councils on criticism.

The decree notes that the above mentioned problems are caused largely by a deficiency of properly qualified people in art and literary criticism, and makes some concrete suggestions to overcome this. The ministries of education are ordered to take concrete measures to improve the training of experts in the theory and history of art and literature. The creative unions are directed to show concern about the ideological and professional standards of art and literary criticism. The academy of sciences and various ministries of education are called on to ask academic and research institutes to encourage the study of theoretical and methodological problems of art and literary criticism. The decree suggests that a new literary-critical and bibliographical journal should be published.

The decree was published in almost all newspapers, magazines and journals and was discussed by the executive bodies of creative unions. The monthly journal Theatre in its May 1972 issue published the decree along with excerpts from the speech of V. M.


18 It is interesting in this regard to note that the 1940 decree abolished a special literary-critical journal, The Literary Critic [Литературная критика], and had directed monthly literary magazines such as Novyi Mir, Zhiznja, Zvezda and Literaturnyi Sovremennik to open independent monthly sections on criticism and bibliography. Similarly it asked daily newspapers such as Pravda, Izvestiya, Komsomol’skaya Pravda, Trud, and Krasnaya Zvezda to establish separate columns and features on criticism and bibliography.
Ozerov, made at a plenum of the board of the Union of Soviet Writers specially convened to discuss the decree.19

According to Ozerov, Soviet literature is full of socialist realist works, but the portrayal of the best representatives of Soviet society, such as workers, engineers, scientists is often ‘boring, dry and schematic’20 He calls on literary critics to be aware of the scientific-technical revolution and to stimulate discussion on their role in creating the new Soviet person.

Ozerov not only lists exemplary works of literature and literary criticism which honestly follow the method of socialist realism, but also cites works that fail to meet the required standard of excellence. For instance, he notes that The Short Literary Encyclopedia [Краткая Литературная Энциклопедия], in spite of its generally good standard, was marred by a number of serious errors; the entries on Decadence and Modernism did not expose the class and ideological origins of these movements. Similarly, some entries were clearly apologetic about Russian formalism and OPOYAZ, the Russian formalist and absurdist movement. According to Ozerov, such errors resulted from adopting subjective and tendentious approach to criticism, and from a failure to appreciate the intensity of the ongoing ideological struggle. Ozerov wants to make literary criticism objective, and this, he argues, can be achieved only by following the principles of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics and by giving due importance to the ideological platform of the party. He calls scientists and philosophers to develop objective principles and methods, which can be used by critics to evaluate a literary work objectively.

Dmitriev in his article discusses the status of drama and theatre criticism in the light of the 1972 decree, and claims that ‘the theatre studies as a separate discipline was established only after the October Revolution, when vulgar sociological tendencies and enthusiasm for formalist principles were overcome.’21 He underlines some significant contributions made by the Soviet school of theatre studies.22 Like Ozerov, he also

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21 Dmitriev, p. 7.

believes that a critic should aim to evaluate the work objectively, employing the principles of dialectical materialism and Marxist-Leninist philosophy.

Dmitriev’s article provides some information on the follow-up action taken after the publication of the 1972 decree, such as: the formation of a specialist group of theatre critics in the All Russian Society of Theatre Workers, and the setting up of a section of criticism in the Artistic Council for Dramatic Theatres in the USSR Ministry of Culture. Dmitriev also makes some concrete suggestions aimed to improve the state of theatre criticism, such as: the creation of a separate department of Soviet theatre in the Lunacharskii Institute of Theatrical Arts; setting up of a separate section in the same institute to study the history and theory of theatre criticism and to develop the methodology of teaching theatre criticism; and using major journals and magazines, and radio and television stations to train the students of the institute.

It should be noted that the 1972 decree highlighted the lack of a theoretical, philosophical and aesthetic basis in formulating ‘objective’ principles of art and literary criticism. As a response to this criticism, attempts were made within the academies and research institutions to create a theoretical and philosophical base of criticism.23 Because texts by Marx and Engels were fragmentary and incomplete with respect to any consistent theory of aesthetics, Lenin’s texts became the only valid alternative. Lenin’s philosophical texts such as Materialism and Empiriocriticism [Материализм и эмпириокритицизм] and The Philosophical Notebooks [Философские Тетради] were reinterpreted to construct Lenin’s theory of reflection.24


This section has discussed the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress and the response of the Union of Soviet Writers to the resolutions of the congress. All other creative unions reacted in a similar way. Throughout the seventies the pattern was repeated without any significant change. The All Russian Theatrical Society [Всероссийское Театральное Общество] celebrated its golden jubilee in December 1977, and used this occasion to show its full support of the policies of the party.

Thus, if the Twenty-Second Party Congress, by adopting a new moral code for the ‘builder of communism’, strengthened the cult of the ‘positive hero’, the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress put forward the utopia of the scientific-technical revolution. The 1972 decree on literary criticism re-established the hegemony of socialist realism on all forms of cultural practice. The decree and the discourse about the scientific-technical revolution became the stimulants for creating the ‘production play’, a genre which dominated Soviet drama and theatre for over a decade.

Drama and Theatre in the Sixties and the Seventies

The above discussion maps out the essential contours of the cultural landscape in the sixties and the seventies, within which Soviet dramatists had to write their plays and Soviet theatres had to stage them. The mechanism of control was such that the writing and performance of plays were firmly grounded in the existing literary and artistic paradigms and practices.

Most young playwrights were trained and groomed in the creative writing courses, master classes and workshops conducted at the Herzen Institute of Literature by Soviet writers such as Konstantin Simonov, Aleksei Arbuzov and Afanasi Salyanskii. Theatre schools attached to various theatres along with the State Institute of Theatrical Arts [GITIS] produced actors, directors, stage-crafts people and drama and theatre critics.

Horst Redeker ‘defends Lenin’s theory of reflection and the method of socialistic realism’ (Redeker, p. 4).

25 For instance, the Sixth Congress of the Union of Soviet writers took place in 1976, a few months after the Twenty-Fifth Party Congress. The monthly journal Teatr published another article by Afanasi Salyanskii. In comparison to his report to the Fifth Congress of Soviet Writers, this article is heavy with quotations from Brezhnev’s speech to the Twenty-Fifth Party Congress and is light in criticism of the establishment. A. Salyanskii, “Literature and the Problems of Developing Multinational Soviet Theatre,” [“Литература и проблемы развития многонационального Советского театра,”] Teatr, No. 9 (1976), pp. 3-14.

26 The Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet honoured this society by awarding a medal. M. Tsarev, the president of the executive committee of this society, published an article in Teatr. The article presents a short history of the society but the title clearly indicates the tone and the content of the article. M. Tsarev, “Always with the Party, Always with the People,” [“Всегда с партией, всегда с народом.”] Teatr, No. 3 (1978), pp. 3-9.

27 It has to be noted that the cultural situation was not uniform and homogeneous. There was a parallel growth of dissent, and show-trials of the dissidents were finding publicity through the underground press. In the sphere of drama and theatre, Yu. Lyubimov’s Taganka Theatre was the most visible site of dissent.
Overlooking each one of these organisations was the ‘panopticon’ tower occupied by the Party and State bureaucracies. There were some exceptions, but by and large, most writers avoided risks and followed models of writing approved by the authorities. Those who wanted to comment critically on the existing situation used subtexts and allegories.

Under these conditions it is not very hard to imagine that Soviet drama and theatre, in particular after the Stalinist purges of the thirties, present a picture of uniformity and conformity, with very little interest in experimentation with form, style and content. The short period of the ‘thaw’ brought some novelty but that was soon replaced by the same formula based writing. Russian drama in the sixties and the seventies is thus marked by a limited variety of themes, genres and styles. However, Anna Stepanova, a theatre critic, finds the seventies to be a ‘particularly fruitful decade.’ According to her, in the sixties most theatres preferred to stage adaptations of the classics of Russian literature, but in the seventies they began to stage contemporary Soviet plays. Describing the theatrical scene in the sixties and the seventies, she distinguishes three prominent thematic types: heroic (revolutionary) drama; psychological drama; and production drama. Boris Bugrov in his text book also follows the same classification and identifies the four thematic types of drama: historical-revolutionary drama [Историко-революционная драматургия]; plays about the Great Patriotic War [Пьесы о Великой Отечественной Войне]; everyday psychological drama [Бытовая психологическая драма]; and the production play.

The historical-revolutionary plays had a special ideological function. Their aim was to keep youth in touch with the revolutionary past and remind them of the sacrifices made by their forefathers during the Civil and the Great Patriotic Wars. These stories about revolution and wars were a ready-made store-house of positive heroes.

The sixties and the seventies saw a number of important anniversaries, such as the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution and the centenary of Lenin’s birth. During these anniversaries the party demanded from the writers plays based on historical and revolutionary themes. Some of these plays, such as Mikhail Shatrov’s Blue Horses on Red Grass [Синие Копи на Красной Траве], The Sixth July [Шестое Июля], The


29 Anna Stepanova, “Soviet Drama of the Past Decade,” Soviet Literature, No. 10 (1983), pp. 164-168. Anna Stepanova although does not mention the classification as such but discusses Soviet plays under the above mentioned three headings.

30 Boris Bugrov, Russian and Soviet Drama: The Sixties and the Seventies [Русская Советская драматургия: 1960 - 1970е годы] (Moscow: Vysaya Shkola, 1981), p. 286. Boris Bugrov’s book is written as a text-book for the students of the philology faculties of universities and is sanctioned by the Ministry of Higher and Secondary and Specialised Education. In this book the material has been arranged under the above mentioned chapter-headings. Bugrov does not specifically mentions in the title of his chapter the term ‘the production drama’ but in the chapter entitled ‘The Scientific-Technical Revolution and Drama [Научно-техническая революция и драматургия] he discusses all such plays which are regarded as belonging to the genre of production plays.
Bolsheviks [Болшевики] and Aleksandr Shtein’s *Between the Cloudbursts* [Между Ливнями], belonged to the tradition of Soviet Leniniana. Aleksandr Shtein also wrote a trilogy of plays on the theme of revolution. *Version* [Версия] - a play of this trilogy - represented Aleksandr Blok’s attitude towards the October Revolution. In 1965, Yuri Lyubimov produced in The Taganka Theatre a play based on John Reed’s book *Ten Days that Shook The World*.

A number of plays were written about the Second World War of which Mikhail Roshchin’s *The Train* [Звено] was the most successful. A number of theatres mounted productions based on the adaptation of well-known prose works such as the play based on Boris Vasiliev’s novel *The Dawns Are Peaceful Here* [А Зори Здесь Тихие], which was staged in Yuri Lyubimov’s Taganka Theatre. G. Tvostonogov’s Bolshoi Drama Theatre in Leningrad also produced a play based on Mikhail Sholokhov’s *And Quiet Flows the Don* [Тихий Дон].

The everyday-psychological drama included plays belonging to the genres of comedy, melodrama, and satire, but almost every one of them took readers and spectators into the families of ordinary Soviet citizens. They told stories of their everyday struggles, focused on their failures and successes, and highlighted their dreams and aspirations.\(^{31}\)

It needs to be stressed that it was perhaps easier to write on revolutionary themes than to write about contemporary Soviet life, because this involved commenting on the contemporary situation.\(^{32}\) The writers who wanted to be critical had to be sure that their criticism was limited to local and specific issues, without targeting the State and the Party. They had to be careful not to desecrate the holy ideal of building communism. The formula for writing such plays was soon worked out. This included rules such as: the negative should be balanced by the presence of positive role models; the negative protagonists should be shown to be evolving and changing, realising their shortcomings and attaining in the end politically, ideologically and morally correct positions; the positive should be the winner in every case, and the negative should be exposed clearly and cleverly; the positive should have the qualities needed for the ‘builder of communism’

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\(^{31}\) The plays by A. Arbuzov, V. Rozov, A. Vampilov and M. Roshchin were successfully produced in many theatres. Other notable playwrights were: V. Aksenov, S. Aleshin, I. Drutse, A. Galich, V. Lavrent’ev, V. Panova, A. Sofronov, A. Salyanskii, I. Shtok, A. Volodin, and L. Zorin.

\(^{32}\) A. Vampilov’s play *The Duck Hunting* was one of the plays of this type. It soon became a classic of the genre and Vampilov began to be compared with Chekhov. However, the play was quite critical of contemporary Soviet society, and it took time for many Soviet theatres to be able to stage it. Roman Viktoruk, the noted stage director, recalled in a speech in the House of Writers in April 1993, how in the mid seventies A. Vampilov and he were asked by the artistic director of the Gogol Theatre in Moscow to forget their plans of staging Vampilov’s, now very famous play *The Duck Hunting*, because it presented a negative portrayal of the ‘Soviet reality’. Edvard Radzinskii in a TV documentary film *A Theatrical Novel* [Театральний Роман] shown on Moscow TV in March 1993 recalls how his plays *104 Pages about Love* [104 Страниц Про Любовь] and *Making a Movie* [Снимается Кино] had problems with the censors.
and the negative should be either its opposite or should be represented by the ‘corrupt’ bourgeois west; local problems should be represented keeping in view the dominant social and historical tendencies of the period, which meant that a portrayal of real problems should keep in mind the central aim of achieving communism.\(^{33}\)

A. Arbuzov wrote several successful plays in this genre including *The Irkutsk Story* [*Иркутская История*], *My Poor Marat* [*Моя бедная Марат*] and *An Old-fashioned Comedy* [*Старомодная комедия*]. V. Rozov, M. Roshchin, A. Vampilov, and E. Radzinskii also wrote equally successful plays but some of them were disliked by the critics and officials of the party. The most common criticism of some of these plays was the absence of appropriate role models. Bugrov’s book illustrates this trend very clearly. It is noteworthy that this was a textbook meant to be used in universities, and hence both followed and encouraged the line of criticism approved by the establishment. In *The Irkutsk Story*, Bugrov found that the characters ‘were moving continually on the path of moral upliftment.’\(^{34}\) The play showed that ‘the moral strength of its main protagonist, the positive hero, can be created only by participation in the monolithic collective of workers.’\(^{35}\) A. Vampilov’s play *Duck Hunting* [*Утиная Охота*] was hailed as a brilliant play because ‘it thoroughly exposed the ugliness of egotistical consciousness and the moral and social dangers emanating from it.’\(^{36}\)

V. Rozov’s play *On the Wedding Day* [*В День Свадьбы*] was praised because ‘the moral strength of its main female protagonist was shown to be determined by the socialist ethics’, however the play was found wanting because ‘the social origins of psychological conflicts were subdued, and the spiritual drama of the protagonist was isolated from the sphere of real social relations of the epoch.’\(^{37}\)

Bugrov also criticises A. Volodin’s plays *The Elder Sister* [*Старшая Сестра*] and *The Appointment* [*Назначение*] and E. Radzinskii’s plays 104 Pages About Love [*104 Страниц Про Любовь*] and *Making a Movie* [*Снимается Кино*] because ‘the protagonists are cut off from the world of complex social relations, from the major problems of the epoch, and are lost in their personal and day-to-day conflicts’. Bugrov complains that these plays lack ‘positive heroes’ like Sergei in *The Irkutsk Story*, and ‘recreate the image of the “little man” lacking socially active position, and capable only of self pity.’\(^{38}\)

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33 Katerina Clark in her study of the Soviet novel presents a similar master plot of novels of the Stalin era.
38 Bugrov, 1981, p. 113. It should be mentioned that not only Bugrov, but almost all drama and theatre critics, followed a similar line. See, for example, V. Frolov, “Drama and the Fate of Hero,” [*Драма и судьба героя,*] in *Problems of Theatre* [*Voprosi Teatra*], ed. V. Frolov (Moscow: VTO,
The ‘production drama’, or as Irina Vishnevskaya calls it, the ‘business drama’ [Деловая пьеса] was perhaps the most popular form of Russian and Soviet drama in the seventies. These plays were promoted as true representations of the ‘epoch of the scientific-technical revolution’.

The party and the state had recognised that in order to achieve rapid economic progress it was essential that labour relations, and in particular, the attitude of the working class and that of an individual worker should undergo a qualitative change. They were looking for a new ‘positive hero’, a hero from the working class who could be the flag bearer. He should not only represent a prototype from the contemporary Soviet society, but should also operate as a prototype itself, becoming a role model for Soviet citizens. It is interesting that after more than fifty years of continuous social engineering the Party was still emphasising the need of a new Soviet person, the Homo Soveticus. True to its Marxian faith, the Party believed that only the proletariat and ‘labour collectives’ in factories, mines and collective farms were capable of achieving this.

The message was clear: the ‘main task in the process of building communism was the formation of a new Soviet subject’. The writers were ‘to direct their attention to the worker, the representative of the most progressive class.’

A. Salynskii’s Mariya [Мария], published in 1969, is considered to be the first ‘production play’ of the Brezhnev era. In this play ‘the theme of heroic labour found its full voice’ and succeeded in creating the image of a person belonging to a developed socialist society.’ If A. Salynskii’s Mariya enjoyed only a moderate success, although it was remade into a successful telefilm, G. Bokarev’s The Steelmakers [Сталевары], and A. Gel’man’s Protocol of a Party Meeting [Протокол одного заседания] were instant successes. Both these plays were produced by Oleg Efremov in the Moscow Art Theatre

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40 In the resolutions of the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress, the Party calls to create public opinion directed against disruptions of labour discipline, money-grubbing, parasitism, plundering, bribery, alcoholism.


42 Bugrov cites the following quotation from A. Salynskii’s article “Contemporariness - The Soul of Drama,” ["Современность: душа драматургии,"] Problems of Literature [Voprosy Literatury], No. 3 (1971), p. 35: “A person fully reveals his nature, his moral potential in the sphere of creative labour only, hence, contemporary plays which remove their hero from this sphere, seem to be impoverished; they lose much of their contemporariness.” Good Soviet plays on contemporary themes are the plays about a working man, about conflicts between old views and new explorations.” (Bugrov, 1981, p. 163).
and were later remade into full-length feature films. I. Dvoretskii’s The Outsider [Человек со Стороны], published in 1972 was also very successful, and was soon recognised as a classic of this genre. These plays were widely reviewed in newspapers and magazines, and were debated in round-table discussions arranged by editorial boards of literary and theatre journals.

Most of these plays were set in factories, collective farms, construction sites and exploration parties. They depicted ‘people at work’ and social and moral conflicts arising at the work place. They tended to be extremely realistic and documentary in portraying physical and psychological environment of the work place. For instance, the set designs for Oleg Efremov’s production of G. Bokarev’s play The Steelmakers re-created on the stage big smelting furnaces. Stressing the documentary style of these plays, I. Vishnevskaya calls them ‘documentary plays’.

She, like many other critics, links the emergence of these plays with the earlier Soviet tradition of ‘production’ plays such as N. Pogodin’s The Tempo [Темп], А Poem about an Axe [Позма о топоре] and А Poem about My Friend [Позма о моем друге]. However, she finds the early production plays simple in theme and style; they were mainly concerned with and glorified the physical side of labour. In ‘production or business plays’ of the seventies the theme of scientific-technical revolution was central. The main concern was ‘to reduce the hard physical labour and move the mental and psychological aspects to the forefront.’ These plays ‘narrate about work and labour from the point of view of national interests: the interests of an individual unit, a construction site or a factory, become secondary.’ Yu. Matafonova thinks that in

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43 Some other plays of this genre are: A Gel’man’s The Reverse Connection [Обратная Связь]; We, the Undersigned [Мы, ниже подписавшиеся]; I. Dvoretskii’s Verandahs in a Forest [Веранды в лесу]; V. Chernikh’s The Day of Arrival - The Day of Departure [День приезда – день отъезда]; A Person at His Own Place [Человек на своем месте]; M. Shatrov’s The Weather for Tomorrow [Погода на завтра] and My Hopes [Мои надежды].


45 Vishnevskaya, p. 267.

46 Vishnevskaya, p. 268.
‘production plays’ of the early Soviet days, ‘the whole collective or the working class was portrayed as the hero’ whereas in the seventies’ individual workers, engineers, party workers or farmers became the heroes, the role models.\textsuperscript{47}

It seems that these plays were able to achieve their main aim of creating appropriate role models. The Soviet media was also playing its role in creating an impression that the ‘heroes’ of these plays were inspiring people, and that the message was reaching the audience. Leonid Korobkov’s article, which is a good illustration of this, describes an incident reported by the journalist Inga Kochanova. Kochanova was present at a meeting of factory workers when one of the workers finished his speech by declaring that he ‘would also follow the example set by Gubanov’ who was the hero of a popular feature film based on a ‘production play’.

Korobkov notes that A. Gel’man’s film The Prize [Премия], based on the play Protocol of a Party Meeting is so successful that ‘the film and its main conflict are debated passionately in many factories.\textsuperscript{48} He uses Kachanova’s story to suggest that ‘nowadays heroes of films, plays, and literary works have become reverse prototypes.’ The term ‘reverse prototype’, used by Korobkov is quite interesting. Art inspired by realism uses real life as a prototype. Its ‘heroes’ are modelled after real-life heroes. By becoming Korobkov’s ‘reverse prototype’, art, according to him, had begun to provide prototypes or role models for life.

The ‘production’ plays occupied a central position in Soviet cultural discourse in the seventies. They won most of the state prizes, and soon became standards for judging other plays. For instance, Bugrov found that ‘the protagonists in plays by Rozov, Volodin and Radzinskii were simple and boring compared to those in the production plays.’\textsuperscript{49} His recipe for a good play was simple: a good play should deal with problems which are of importance to every one and should do it ‘by portraying a person’s moral growth thorough his self-affirming labour.’\textsuperscript{50}

The success of production plays was the result of a number of inter-related factors. Firstly, they were produced by well-known theatres, such as The Moscow Art Theatre and The Sovremennik Theatre and used an ensemble of well-known actors. However, an important factor was associated with the stories narrated by them. The protagonists of

\textsuperscript{47} Matafanova, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{48} Korobkov, p. 91. It is interesting to note that Leonid Korobkov’s article has the title “The Patapow Effect” [Зфект Потапова’], Patapow is the name of the main protagonist in A. Gel’man’s play Protocol of a Party Meeting [Протокол одного заседания].
\textsuperscript{49} Bugrov, 1981, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{50} Bugrov, 1981, p. 162. Similar criteria of distinguishing good and bad plays can be found in the above cited articles by A. Solodovnikov, I. Kisilev, Boris Bugrov, Yu. Lukin, Alla Romanenko, Raisa Doktor, Anna Stepanova, and I. Vishnevskaya.
these stories were not represented as abstract human beings but real. They, like real people, were fallible and vulnerable, suggesting that even party members and local party committees were not beyond mistakes. In most plays the conflict was resolved when the erring individual realised his or her mistake and was reformed under the influence of the collective. When the local party committee was found wanting, the crisis was overcome by appealing to the central party officials and committees. The fact that these plays criticised local shortcomings and mistakes without questioning the overall party line won them the support of the establishment.

In addition to the three thematic types of plays outlined above, the repertoire of Soviet theatres was full of Russian and non-Russian Western classics. Chekhov and A. Ostrovskii were by far the most popular playwrights followed by Gogol, Pushkin, Tolstoi, and Dostoevskii. The selection of non-Russian Western classics was based mainly on ideological criteria.

In this theatrical landscape of thematic and stylistic uniformity, there was perhaps only a few theatres which tried to keep their artistic identity. The most important of these was Yu. Lyubimov’s Taganka Theatre of Drama and Comedy. A survey of its repertoire between 1964 and 1984, indicates an interesting mixture of plays adapted from prose and poetical works of Russian writers such as Pushkin, Lermontov, Voznesenskii, Mayakovskii, Aseev, Okudzhava, Tvardovskii, Svetlov, Essenin, and Vysotskii. Productions of dramas were few, and Brecht occupied a prominent position in the repertoire.

Radzinskii and His Plays

Radzinskii wrote his first play in 1956, a few years after Stalin’s death, and a few years after the beginning of the ‘thaw’. His most successful play was produced in 1964. Most of his plays were written when ‘production plays’ were in vogue and the cult of the positive hero was very strong.

Radzinskii published his historico-political or philosophical plays in a ten-year period between 1969 and 1980. These plays form a trilogy and include *Dialogues with Socrates* [Весёлы с Сократом], *Lumin, or Death of Jacques, Recorded in the Presence of the Master* [Лунин или смерть Жака записанная в присутствии хозяина] and *Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca* [Театр Времен Нерона и Сенеки]. During the same period he wrote a number of plays dealing with contemporary themes such as love, women, and family relationships. It is intriguing that whereas his overtly political plays were acclaimed by critics as masterpieces and were successful with the audience, most of his plays on contemporary themes, in spite of their popularity with the young audience, were criticised by literary critics and party officials.
The stage debut of Edward Radzinskii occurred in 1960 when his play *India, My Dream* (Индия, мечта моя) was produced in the Moscow Theatre of The Young Spectator. In a television documentary *A Theatrical Novel* (Театральный роман), Radzinskii recalls that the play was produced because of Krushchëv’s official visit to India. This visit put pressure on Soviet theatres to perform plays about India, and the Moscow theatre, which had held this play for more than four years, decided to stage it.

Real success came to him in 1964 after his play *104 Pages about Love* (104 страниц про любовь) was produced simultaneously in two prominent Soviet theatres: The Theatre of Lenin’s Komsomol in Moscow by A. Efros and The Bolshoi Theatre of Drama and Comedy in Leningrad by G. Tvosotonogov. Overnight Radzinskii became a celebrity.  

Marina Dement’jeva cites I. Vishnevskaya’s 1965 article about Radzinskii which began with the words, ‘One upon a time, Ermolova, Moskvin and the playwright Radzinskii woke up famous.’ This play was staged in one hundred and twenty theatres and was made into a film, an opera and a ballet. It was taken abroad and produced in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and West Germany. The play narrated a simple and tragic love story between an air hostess and a nuclear physicist. Soviet critics tend to attribute its success to the use of urban slang by its young protagonists. It seems, however, that the young audience readily identified with the main protagonists because their actions were guided by their own individual human impulses and not by the norms of behaviour approved by the Party. In spite of this unprecedented success the play had faced problems from the bureaucracy which wanted to ban it. According to Radzinskii, only a timely intervention by the then Minister of Culture, Elena Furtseva, saved the play.

This highly successful play was followed by a number of others dealing with contemporary themes. Making a Movie (снимается кино) like the successful *104 Pages about Love* (104 страниц про любовь) was also produced by A. Efros in the Lenin Komsomol Theatre and was quite successful. Most critics think that these were the most successful years of this theatre. Radzinskii became Efros’ favourite playwright. However, the officials in the Ministry of Culture were both puzzled and disturbed at the

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51 The Leningrad production had the title *Once Again about Love* (Еще раз про любовь).
53 In a documentary television film *A Theatrical Novel* (Театральный роман) Radzinskii recalls a meeting in the Ministry of Culture in the presence of the Minister, Elena Furtseva, where the bureaucrats claimed that the play’s leading female protagonist was a ‘negative’ character and behaved like a prostitute ready to sleep with her lover on the very first night of their meeting. She was encouraging promiscuity, which was dangerous because of the increasing number of abortions amongst young Soviet women.
54 These plays were: *You are, 22 Old Fellows!* (Вам 22, старши), *Monologue about a Woman* (Монолог о женщине), *The Seducer Kolabashchkin* (Обольститель Колабашкин), *Making a Movie* (снимается кино).
success because, in their opinion, the plays were ideologically weak and portrayed Soviet life contrary to the position approved by the Party. Soon Efros, in spite of a well publicised protest by the actors of the theatre, was sacked and moved to a small Moscow theatre, the Theatre on the Maloi Bronnoi.

Radzinskii and Efros were both criticised for the play Making a Movie. One of the critics drew attention to an article published by F. Burlatskii and L. Karpinskii in Komsomolskaya Pravda in which the two journalists had noted that for some plays, including Radzinskii's Making a Movie, it took a long time to obtain the necessary permission for their staging. Explaining this delay, Yu. Zubkov remarked that 'the work which was done by the officials in the Ministry of Culture on Radzinskii's Making a Movie and Leonid Zorin's Dion [Дион] before they were released for staging was aimed at making their ideological content more accurate and convincing'. He regretted that 'in spite of this work it was impossible to remove all the shortcomings because they were rooted in the very intentions and ideas of their authors.'

The criticism was not only directed at Radzinskii but attacked Efros' staging. According to N. Akimov, the scenography of Efros' production hampered a clear reading of the play, and enhanced its inherent confusion. The sets were abstract and did not clearly specify the place and the setting. Akimov did not spare even the audience, who contrary to his expectations were carried away by the performance.

In Making a Movie Nechaev, a film director, unwillingly agrees in the finale to delete certain scenes criticised by the officials in order to keep working on the movie. But he finds this compromise very difficult and begins to consider himself a slave who has learnt the art of making compromises:

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55 In the television film A Theatrical Novel Edvard Radzinskii suggests that this play was written after G. Tvostonogov, the artistic director of the Bolshoi Drama Theatre in Leningrad, was forced to remove a play from the repertoire. Radzinskii notes that the Russian word "ShimaetsI" has a double meaning: it means 'making' as well as 'removing/banning'.

56 Yu. Zubkov, "On the Place of Art in the Ranks of Labourers," ['О месте Искусства в рабочем строев.'] Teatral'nyaya Zhizn', No. 18 (1968), p. 5. The article in the Komsomolskaya Pravda discussed two more plays: V. Rozov's On the Wedding Day [В День Свадьбы], V. Tendryakov's Without a Cross [Без Креста]. Yu. Zubkov notes with satisfaction that 'Komsomolskaya Pravda' very soon realised its mistakes in publishing this article (Zubkov, p. 5).

57 N. Akimov, "I - An Invertebrate Realist," ['Я - закоренелый реалист.'] Teatral'nyaya Zhizn', No. 11 (1969), p. 9. Akimov, a People's Artist of the USSR makes his position very clear when in the title of his article calls himself an invertebrate realist. He does not like abstract sets in theatres and notes that 'as a teacher in the Theatre Institute he has stopped students to work on Brecht's plays because they contain a degree of abstraction which instigates students to forget about perspective, structures and the epoch'. The students simply 'take a red cube and after placing it in front of a dark background they feel that their job is over' (Akimov, p. 10). The article was based on Akimov's speech in the section of Theatre-artists of the Leningrad branch of the All Russian Theatrical Society. The position taken by Akimov is puzzling because, unlike people such as Yu. Zubkov, it was not expected of him to follow the line adopted by the party. He also had the reputation of a director whose productions were stylistically original and innovative.
If Nechaev was perceived by critics as passive and insufficiently ‘positive’, Kolabashchkin from Radzinskii’s play The Seducer Kolabashchkin [Обольститель Колабашкин] was branded absolutely negative. This play did not have a ‘positive’ hero, and Radzinskii’s play as well as Efros’s production in the Theatre on the Malyi Bronnoi received negative and, at times, hostile response from the critics. Discussing Efros’ rehearsals of this play, Radzinskii recalls that one theatre critic who was present at the rehearsal remarked that ‘the play is absurdist and absurdist theatre is beyond my comprehension’.58

In this play Kolabashchkin, a journalist in a science-fiction magazine and an unsuccessful writer, invents a vacuum-cleaner look-alike time machine MADAФ, A Time Machine Named after Doctor Faustus [Машина времени имени доктора Фауста], to help him write publishable stories and plays. According to Kolabashchkin, ‘he was not published although he wrote badly’:

Я стал писать. Но меня не печатали. Обычно люди говорят, что их не печатают, потому что они пишут слишком смело. Я — исключение. Меня не печатали, потому что я пишу плохо. Но я ничего не мог поделать.59

In Yu. Zubkov’s opinion neither ‘Radzinskii’s play nor Efros’ production could be viewed as satires; they were stupid and unjust parodies of our contemporary reality which encouraged scepticism, despondency, negation and lack of faith in the Party’s dream and ideology.’60 According to another critic, the play ‘invited spectators into a present and a past where there was no place for the good and the sublime, and where the only happy person, who could be worthy of being a role model was a barbarian who was infinitely satisfied with his fate, and was singing madly in his cave, and waiting for his beautiful lover, who was fat like a rhinoceros ....’61

Bugrov’s reading, to a large extent, reflects the opinion of the officials about Radzinskii’s plays on contemporary themes. According to him, Radzinskii’s plays were

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58 Dement’eva, p. 8.
popular amongst the youth because ‘in them Radzinskii was able to capture the most significant, although only partially, features of the contemporary youth’. His plays presented ‘a vivid portrayal of their everyday life and their slang’. But their main drawback was ‘the superficial treatment of major sociological problems including the relationship between individuals and society’. The protagonists of Radzinskii’s plays seemed to be ‘surrounded not by society but by a micro-world which was artificially constructed, and populated with abstract and unreal people.’

So, within the limits of dramatic and theatrical practices, in which the presence of a positive hero was the most essential element, Radzinskii’s play on contemporary themes became unwanted and even harmful. The play Seducer Kolabashchkin was removed from the repertoire. It was during this time that Radzinskii published his play Dialogues with Socrates [Весёлы с Сократом], the first play of the trilogy. The play was produced by A. Goncharov in the Mayakovskii Theatre in Moscow and became an instant success.

M. Dement’eva notes that Radzinskii’s shift from contemporary themes to so-called historical themes was puzzling. He was openly criticised for this change. Radzinskii was often asked to explain and justify such a radical shift in his writing career, but it is only in the interviews given after the beginning of perestroika that he has been able to provide an honest answer. According to him, in the seventies he realised that it was becoming very difficult for him to write on contemporary themes:

К сожалению, именно тогда (70-е годы) стало трудно говорить до конца о людях в современных одеждах. Пугали размышления, трагизм, страсти, пугали обобщения. Требовалось – неясное, невнятное бормотание. Весымысленныя, постоянныя оптимизм. И когда я понял, что высказываться в пьесах на современныя тему невозможно, я почувствовал себя великим изобретателем – я придумал, что буду писать про историю. Там можно будет все. Кроме того, там такие потрясающие соавторы...

It is interesting in this regard to note that the officials in the Ministry of Culture took a long time to approve even his play about Socrates. The play was blocked for about six years during which three different editors worked on it. Radzinskii recalls that one day an official told him:

И весьма ответственный сотрудник мне сказал: "Я конечно понимаю, о чем вы написали. И вы тоже понимаете. Но вы должны сознавать, что это – невозможно"...

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63 Radzinskii, in an interview in April 1993, told me that Yu. Lyubimov, the controversial theatre director of the Taganka Theatre was rehearsing this play and wanted to stage it in the Vakhtangov Theatre.
64 Dement’eva, p. 21.
In the end the play obtained the necessary permission. It happened not because the authorities had changed their mind or they had been coaxed and cajoled by the Mayakovskii Theatre which was rehearsing the play, but because of a mere coincidence. The last editor, according to Radzinskii, belonged to that category of Soviet bureaucrats who were utterly indifferent to their duties and for whom the main concern was to avoid trouble and scandal.

The play was successful with both critics and spectators. It was reviewed and discussed widely in the print and electronic media, and V. I. Tolstykhe, a well-known Soviet philosopher wrote a book about this play. It is fascinating to read how Soviet cultural discourse, dominated by the idea of the positive hero immediately appropriated Radzinskii’s Socrates for its own ideological purpose.

Radzinskii’s second play of the trilogy Lunin or the Death of Jacques Recorded in the Presence of the Master [Лунин или смерть Жака записанная в присутствии Хозяина] was finished in 1974 and published in Theatre in 1979. In the same year the play was produced by A. Dunaev in the Theatre on the Malyi Bronnoi. In between these two plays of the trilogy Radzinskii finished three plays and one screenplay on contemporary themes. These three plays were: Monologue about a Marriage [Монолог о браке], The Tourist Camp/A Landscape with a River and a Fort-wall [Турбаза/Леязж с рекой и крепостными стенами], and Monologue about a Woman [Монолог о женщине]. During the same period he wrote a farce called A Sequel to Don Juan [Продолжение Дон Жуана] which was produced in 1979 by A. Efros in the Theatre on the Malyi Bronnoi.

The play Monologue about a Marriage, was produced by V. Kuzenkov in the K. S. Stanislavskii Theatre in Moscow and received negative responses from most critics. The play was advertised as a musical comedy or ‘a funny play about divorces’. Theatre critics complained that it lacked positive role models and trivialised a very serious social problem. According to one critic, the protagonists reveal not only ‘their utter infantilism but also indifference and deafness’ to social problems. They are ‘morally so corrupt and so cut off from the society’ that they are irredeemable.’ This unsigned article cites another critic, according to whom, the play represents ‘a triumph of the negative.’

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65 Dement’eva, p. 22.
67 The article is unsigned, and it seems that it has been penned by the editor or by a party functionary.
The play *Monologue about a Woman* was produced by A. L’vov-Anokhin in the Moscow Art Theatre in 1970. It is set in a radio-studio and shows the enactment of a radio-play about a lonely woman-scientist. Boris Volgin complains against the mixing of genres, that of radio- and stage-plays, and stresses the absence of positive role models in the play. The main protagonist, according to Volgin, ‘lives in a vacuum artificially constructed in the play’, and is surrounded by morally worthless people. They lack character, ‘have no proper names’ and are identified either through third person pronouns or through some general professional attributes.69 ‘Where, in which research institute did Radzinskii and L’vov-Anokhin find such a strange bouquet of protagonists?’ asks Volgin. Where did they see such a collective of narrow-minded and morally shallow people uninspired by real scientific research?70 The play was also criticised by N. Leikin whose review is inspired by the 1972 *Decree on Literary and Art Criticism*. He laments that ‘many critics including himself, failed to criticise openly and directly the artistic shortcomings of the production of Radzinskii’s play in the Moscow Art Theatre.’71

It seems that by now the patience of the officials was running out. *The Tourist Camp*, in which Radzinskii was very critical of contemporary Soviet society, was seen by them as a challenge and was duly banned after its final rehearsals in the Mossovet Theatre in Moscow. In 1982, eight years after the banning, it was allowed to be published in a collection *Dialogues with Socrates*. It is interesting that although the play was published only in 1982, and was banned after its final rehearsal, *Ogonek* [Огонёк], a popular illustrated weekly, published a critical review of the play in 1974.72 The banning of *The


68 P. Kuz’menko’s review “The Lessons of Excessiveness” ["Уроки чрезмерности"] was published in a Moscow newspaper, *Moskovskii Komsomolets*.


70 Volgin, p. 305. This article represents a strong indictment of this play and of Radzinskii as a playwright. According to Volgin, Radzinskii was only interested in ‘exploring dramatic forms’. Volgin feels sorry that critics had ‘failed to show the required concern from the point of view of ideological principles in finding reasons behind Radzinskii’s estrangement from ideological and artistic principles and his movement towards formalist explorations’. In Volgin’s opinion ‘Radzinskii did not have any knowledge of the world of the youth and of the labour and peasant classes, and his own life-experience was very limited. Radzinskii, under the influence of the Western drama, was carried away by the exploration of fashionable dramatic forms, and constructs his protagonists for the sake of form’ (Volgin, p. 307).


72 The play was to be produced by A. Efros in the Mossovet Theatre in Moscow. It seems through this article the officials wanted to inform the theatre-going public about the ‘bad’ quality of the play and to justify their action. N. Tolchonova, “Fragments of Conversations or Meetings in a Tourist Camp:
Tourist Camp was a major blow to both Radzinskii and Efros threatening their artistic careers.73

The play Lunin... [Лунин...] carries an epigraph from Dostoevskii’s novel Notes from the Underground [Записки из подвала] in which the narrator voices his concern about not being able to be heard:

.... И раз навсегда объявляю: что если я пишу, как бы обращаясь к читателям, то единственно только для показу, потому что так мне легче писать... Тут форма, одна пустая форма, читателю же у меня никогда не будет... [73]

This epigraph thus seems to voice the danger Radzinskii as a writer felt at that time.

Lunin... proved to be a successful play and was produced in several theatres in the Soviet Union. Hailed by critics, academics, historians, and officials, its success was, to a large extent, related to the romantic image of its main protagonist, Mikhail Lunin. He was a hero who could be easily appropriated, recast and circulated as a ‘positive hero’.

It is noteworthy that pre-revolutionary Russian and Soviet historians have maintained a fascination with the Decembrist movement. The movement provides romantic images of rebels which can be interpreted and appropriated by Marxist-Leninist historians in such a way that they can become role models for the Soviet youth. In this regard it is interesting to note that the theatre program of the Moscow Theatre on The Malyi Bronnoi contains a biographical sketch of Mikhail Lunin written by N. Eidel’man, one of the foremost historians of the Decembrist period. N. Eidel’man also wrote Mikhail Lunin’s biography under a popular series, The Lives of Remarkable People [Жизнь Замечательных Людей].74 This series was founded by M. Gorki and its aim was to publish biographies of heroic people who could be employed as positive role models.

The third play of the trilogy, Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca [Театр Времен Нерона и Сенеки] was finished in 1980. A. Goncharov produced it in the

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73 In an interview recorded by me in April 1993, Radzinskii explained the tension created by the banning of this play. He recounted that soon after the play was banned, he was called by the officials in the Ministry of Culture, and was told in no uncertain terms that he would have to mend his ways. He was warned that unless this happened he would be declared a bad and useless writer [бракодель] after which it would become impossible for him to publish his works or get them staged.

74 N. Eidel’man, Lunin [Лунин] (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 1970). Eidel’man also published a biography of Pavel Pestel’, another prominent member of the Decembrist movement. Eidel’man was a member of the Artistic Council of the Theatre on the Maloi Bronnoi which approved this play for production. Another well-known Soviet playwright L. Zorin published a play The Decembrists [Декабристи] in 1967, but this play did not include Lunin as a protagonist.
Mayakovskii Theatre in Moscow in 1984, after it had already been staged in a number of provincial and republican theatres. Goncharov was perhaps following an unwritten rule according to which the established theatres in Moscow and Leningrad waited for provincial theatres to stage ‘risky’ plays. Even the officials in the Ministry of Culture sometimes employed this device to judge the reaction of audiences.

In this play Nero, the Roman tyrant, organises a trial of his mentor and philosopher Seneca. Most Soviet critics liked the play and read it as focusing on the role and responsibility of intellectuals under despotic rulers. Some tried to highlight the helplessness of intellectuals in such a situation, and explained conformism as the only means of survival. But most importantly, the play provided Soviet critics a chance to read the play outside their own historical experience. It seems that this approach played a role in saving the play from the wrath of the officials. It gave them a chance to say a lot by leaving something unsaid. For instance, most reviewers referred to several despotic rulers such as Genghis Khan, Hitler, Franco, Mussolini, and Pinochet, whilst leaving their ‘own’ despot unnamed. But, this discursive silence was so clear that it was not very difficult for many Soviet readers and spectators to recognise the masked reference.

Although it is hard to believe, it seems that the officials of the Ministry of Culture were relieved that Radzinskii, at least outwardly, had left the ‘contemporary’ theme in favour of more benign historical stories and had become less provocative and more controllable. But Radzinskii did not stop writing plays on contemporary problems. He just ‘stopped giving these plays to theatres, keeping them hidden in his desk.’

In 1977, accepting an invitation of the editor of Literaturnaya Gazeta, Radzinskii published a long article based on letters received by the editor from a large number of single mothers and lonely young and middle aged women. For Radzinskii this theme was not new. It has constantly appeared in his plays ranging from his much acclaimed 104 Pages About Love to the later She in the Absence of Love and Death [Она в отсутствии любви и смерти], A Pleasant Woman With a Flower and Windows Facing North [Приятная женщина с цветком и окнами на север], We’ll Kill The Man? (“I Stand Outside a Restaurant: It Is Late to Get Married, It is Early to Die”) [Убьем мужчину? (Я стою у ресторана: замуж -- поздно, сдохнуть -- рано)], The Games of the Year 1981 [Спортивные игры 1981 г.] and Our Decameron [Наш Декамерон]. In his 1986 collection of plays Theatre, Radzinskii grouped some of these plays under a separate title of Theatre about Love... [Театр “про любовь”...]. These plays question the validity of claims by the State and the Party that Soviet families are stable and happy and are rich with high moral values. They shatter the myth about the high status of Soviet women within so-called

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75 Dement’eva, p. 23.
model Soviet families, based on love and equality, reinforcing the belief that the corrupt relationships which were so predominant in Soviet society were not merely replicated within individual families but, in some ways, were germinated, reared, groomed within the family and then transported outside.\textsuperscript{76}

Perhaps one of the most interesting plays, in this regard, is "Does Love Exist?", \textit{Ask the Firemen} ["Существует ли любовь?" спрашивают пожарные]. Produced in 1978 in the Mossovet Theatre, the main protagonist of this play is a dramatist who has gone through the same love-affair which Radzinskii portrayed in his play \textit{104 Pages about Love}. A film director, who is making a movie based on \textit{104 Pages about Love} decides to modify the finale of the play so that the female protagonist, the young and pretty air hostess does not die. The author, however, is opposed to this plan and hence is forced to explain to the film crew and the spectators, his decision to get rid of the pretty hostess in the finale of his play.

The play is interesting for its theme, but the most intriguing aspect is its narrative structure which is based on a clever mixing of Radzinskii’s old and new plays; the text of an earlier play is framed within a new text. This new text or play begins to question, open, reveal, and deconstruct his earlier play.

This play also reveals an important feature of Radzinskii’s dramatic style. Most of his plays unravel the very processes of writing and performing drama. In them drama as a genre becomes the main object of investigation and representation. In plays such as \textit{Making a Movie}, and "Does Love Exist?", \textit{Ask the Firemen} the focus is on cinema. The play \textit{Monologue about a Woman} is framed like a radio-play. \textit{The Tourist Camp} shows a film director who is making a movie, a historical costume drama, using the setting of the tourist camp.

In his 1986 collection, Radzinskii grouped three of his plays under an intriguing title \textit{Theatre in Theatre} [Театр в театре]. These plays are: \textit{Making a Movie}, \textit{A Pleasant Woman with A Flower and Windows Facing North}, and \textit{An Old Actress for the Role of Dostoevskii’s Wife} [Старая актриса на роль жены Достоевского].\textsuperscript{77} In these plays the theatre and theatricality become the objects of representation. This exploration of genres, their interpenetration, which is so common in Radzinskii’s plays, reaches it apogee in \textit{Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca}, the third play of the Theatre of the Times

\textsuperscript{76} A. Vampilov’s play \textit{The Eldest Son} [Страшный сын], \textit{Duck Hunting} [Утинная охота] and \textit{The Last Summer in Chulinsk} [Прошлым летом в Чулинских] portray disintegrating Soviet families. Similarly, Ludmila Petrushevskaya’s \textit{The Music Lessons} [Уроки музыки] is a vivid and stark representation of the crumbling family from a woman’s point of view.

\textsuperscript{77} A number of critics have indicated the possible influence of Pirandello on Radzinskii. In an interview recorded by me in April 1993, Radzinskii acknowledged this influence.
trilogy. This play, as it will be argued in subsequent chapter, foregrounds theatricality in the theatre and the world outside it.\textsuperscript{78}

**Concluding Remarks**

This thesis will look more closely at the *Theatre of the Times*... trilogy. The main aim of this chapter was to set the scene for a more detailed reading of these plays. Instead of providing a brief history of Soviet culture in the sixties and seventies, the chapter aimed to outline the basic contours of the cultural landscape within which these plays were written.

The contribution of the recurring ‘thaws’ and ‘freezes’ during Khrushchev’s rule was significant in destalinising the cultural discourse. The Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1961 adopted the new party program and a new moral code for the ‘builder’ of communism which contributed in strengthening the cult of the ‘positive hero’ in arts and literature. The Twenty-Fourth Party Congress, held in 1971, put forward the utopia of scientific-technical revolution as a necessary step for moving from the advanced stage of socialism to communism. However, the 1972 Decree on Art and Literary Criticism was the single most important event which re-established the hegemony of socialist-realism over every form of cultural practice. The utopia of scientific-technical revolution and the resurrection of socialist realism led to the re-emergence of ‘production’ plays in Soviet drama and theatre. The hero of these plays was the ‘builder’ of communism, who had to be based on the real-life prototypes but who had also to serve as a fitting role model for the rest of the people.

The chapter discussed changes in Soviet drama and theatre and described three dominant thematic types of plays of the period. It was argued that socialist realism and the notion of the ‘positive hero’ were the basic elements of artistic and literary paradigm, operative in the Soviet Union determining the criteria for distinguishing ‘good’ and ‘bad’ plays. Central to all criticism of Radzinskii’s plays on contemporary themes was the absence of ‘positive heroes’ in them. It is ironic that the historical-political plays of the trilogy escaped censoring because of the same reason. It was quite easy to appropriate the images of Socrates and Lunin and recast them as ‘positive heroes’.

The above discussion has also provided material to situate the trilogy within Radzinskii’s whole oeuvre. Although discussion of Radzinskii’s plays is presented in a chronological order, it does not necessarily mean that these plays demonstrate some sort of evolution. Radzinskii’s plays do show some common linkages in theme and style, but

\textsuperscript{78} Radzinskii’s play *Our Decameron*, published in 1987 also uses a ‘play within a play’ structure.
it does not mean that they warrant or guarantee such a conclusion that one play created conditions for the emergence of another play.

Within Radzinskii's theatre, while each play is, on one hand, complete and unified on its own, it is at the same time incomplete and unfinished by itself, so that it always needs some type of inter-textual dialogue with other texts. For instance, it is possible that a reading of Radzinskii's other plays might help to generate new meanings but it does not mean that this is a methodological necessity. Even within different plays of the trilogy, in spite of may cross-references, it is not necessary that a reading of the two other plays is essential to unravel meanings of the first.

Although it is true that such an inter-textual reading might be able to provide rewarding insights, such an approach might on the other hand also encourage attempts of locating unifying meanings, themes and styles, thereby imposing from outside thematic, semantic and stylistic closures on them. For instance, by grouping these three plays into a trilogy under a common title *Theatre of the Times*..., for that matter, by even calling them a trilogy, Radzinskii has on one hand opened windows to new meanings, but on the other hand, he has imposed constraints on our reading by suggesting that the plays are to be read as the representation of historical times. If this type of imposition enriches plays such as *Dialogues with Socrates* and *Lunin* ..., it clearly impoverishes the third play *Theatre of the Times of Nero and Seneca*, because in this play the theme of the theatre is as significant as the theme of historical time.

This chapter has also provided information about Radzinskii's writing career, in particular, his problems with theatre critics and officials from the Ministry of Culture. However, it does not mean that such details are essential in reading these plays, and that such information will necessarily provide new insights into the texts. In fact, the political nature of these plays is so clear that it does not require any special effort on the part of a critic. Therefore, any attempt of reading these plays only as commentaries on the Soviet system will impose limits on their multiple layers of meanings.

The following chapters will concentrate on the narrative structure of these plays and will use Bakhtin's concept of the forms of narrative time and the chronotopes. They will focus on the modes of organisation of the narrative and explore how their chronotopes assist in re-presenting various forms of time. This emphasis on the narrative structure results from the basic orientation of the research project, which is concerned not so much with specific meanings created by these narratives, but with the modes with which they are able to create these meanings.