

THE DEATH OF MEYERHOLD

"...tragedy with a smile on the lips..."

B y M a r k J a c k s o n

Draft 5.0

Includes revisions made after the 2005 Studio Theater production

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The Death of Meyerhold

The world premiere of The Death of Meyerhold was presented by The Shotgun Players on December 11, 2003, at the Live Oak Theater in Berkeley, CA.

Cast of Characters – 9M, 2W, 1 Girl

W1 – Actress, Old Woman, Wife, Imperial Bourgeoisie, Maria Babanova, Stella Adler, Dresser.

W2 – Razonova, Woman, Imperial Bourgeoisie, Zinaida Raikh, Phoebe Brand.

G1 – American Girl, Granddaughter, Imperial Bourgeoisie, Muscovite, Paper Boy.

M1 – Meyerhold, Lee Strasberg.

M2 – Stanislavski, First Secret Police Man, Lunacharsky, Muscovite, Critic #4.

M3 – Chekhov, Second Secret Police Man, White Guard Sniper, Kugel, Mother, Muscovite, Critic #1, NKVD 1.

M4 – Danchenko, Husband, Third White Guard, Mayakovsky, Waiter, Baker, Critic #5, NKVD 4.

M5 – Jackson, First Secretive Man, Bolshevik Soldier, First White Guard, Garin, Clifford Odets, Critic #2, Yury.

M6 – Artistic Director, Second Secretive Man, Bolshevik Soldier, Second White Guard, Ilinsky, Harold Clurman, Critic #3, NKVD 3.

M7 – Kosheverov, Actor, Third Man, Imperial Bourgeoisie, Second Prisoner, a student, Sanford Meisner, Gladkov.

M8 – Counter Revolutionary, Actor Playing Sorin, Suspicious Man, Imperial Bourgeoisie, Abrosimov, Tereshkovich, Shostakovich, Malcontent.

M9 – Yakov, Train Conductor, Shady Man, Bolshevik Soldier, First Prisoner, Bebutin, Samoilov, Elia Kazan, NKVD 2.

Notes

All TITLES are to be projected on a screen above the set.

A slash in the dialogue (/) indicates that the next actor should start their line, creating overlapping speech.

Regarding the Prologue, the ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S lines may be adjusted to accurately reflect the speech pattern of the Artistic Director of the producing organization. This character could also be the Dramaturg or some other member of the theater.

Preshow

TITLE: "The Death of Meyerhold"

Joyful, catchy, and heroic Soviet era music plays over the loudspeakers.

Prologue

TITLE: "The Death of Meyerhold"

The immediate present. Two chairs in a spotlight DSC of the set, itself a useful construction of stairs, platforms, and curtains. Prop tables, furniture, and racks of costumes off SL and SR – visible, but unobtrusive. The ARTISTIC DIRECTOR of the producing organization and MARK JACKSON enter and sit as the preshow music concludes. Over the course of their dialogue we gradually become aware of the presence of a ten-year-old AMERICAN GIRL upstage, who sits watching television in 1953. Eventually the presence of numerous other less discernable people can also be felt, listening from the shadows of the space.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

So. Evening everybody. Thanks for coming. I assume you know who we are since you're *here*. But just in case, so you know who's who, I'm _____ , Artistic Director of _____ , and this is Mark Jackson, writer and director of *The Death of Meyerhold*. Which, for anyone who *might* have wandered in off the street: plays through _____ on this very stage.

JACKSON

Yes.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

So why don't we start with the big picture and narrow it down from there.

JACKSON

Okay.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

So who is this Meyerhold guy?

JACKSON

Well, this Meyerhold guy was a Russian theater actor and then director during the first forty years of the twentieth century, which was of course a very interesting time to live in Russia.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

How so?

JACKSON

(laughs) Well, by 1900, sentiments against life under the Tsar had already been smoldering for decades; major strikes and protests by workers were *all* ending in bloodshed. A revolutionary group made up of two factions, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, was illegally established under the umbrella name of the Social Democratic Party. And in February 1917 the Tsar finally abdicated and the Social Democratic Party took over. Then: power struggles within the Party ended with the Bolshevik faction, led by Vladimir Lenin, seizing control in October 1917 – and so a Civil War broke out, World War One was winding down, and then when Lenin died in 1924 Stalin took over and kept the ball rolling in his way.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Yowza.

JACKSON

Right. So, rewind, back to the turn of the century, when the Tsar was still in power: Meyerhold was a young student and then actor in Stanislavski's company, the Moscow Art Theatre.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

And for anyone who didn't study theater in college, Stanislavski is the granddaddy of what we think of as modern, psychologically realistic, emotionally truthful: Acting.

JACKSON

Yes. And Meyerhold felt there was more to theater than just that. So he broke off and started doing his own thing, which was much more physically and musically based, much more theatrical. And the two of them in their separate theaters in Russia basically created what we think of as the modern theatre. In fact you could say that Stanislavski brought theater out of the 19th century, and Meyerhold carried it into the 20th. And that everything *since* then is really just a repackaged variation of what they essentially came up / with.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Right. ...Now, you're a director and writer who's often going back to the classics, but adapting them to a more contemporary American context. Why? What's up with that?

JACKSON

It's called stealing, actually. All my ideas are stolen. It's easier than comin' up with your own ideas. And of course I only steal from the best.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Of course.

JACKSON

But, really, you know, Shakespeare, for example, is the most produced playwright in America, so clearly there's something there that Americans respond to very deeply. And all the classic plays I've been drawn to deal with subjects that are meaningful in America now, which is why they still catch our attention I think. Somebody said – a *buto* artist – he said that “cultural exchange begins with misunderstanding.” I think that's very interesting. That impulse we have, that *need*, really, to understand. That we can see ourselves and our country in a play written a hundred or four hundred and fifty years ago is very

interesting, or in somebody's life who lived long ago in a very different time / and place.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Right, right. ...So, most people are probably more familiar with the name Stanislavski than with Meyerhold. But those who do know of both usually pit them against one another – Stanislavski is the wise benevolent sage and Meyerhold is the brilliant manipulative dictator. What's your handle on that?

JACKSON

Well, there's a lot more to Stanislavski than we've been shown, certainly in America. His portrait has actually been airbrushed quite a bit. But he and Meyerhold were essentially approaching the same thing, experimenting from *very* different angles, but heading in the same direction. We conveniently forget that, or just don't pay attention to it, because to actually deal with it would mean rethinking what we've all spent a lot of time and money learning, and, you know, who wants to do that! But the coming together of the two men toward the end of their lives is very telling, I think – that moment when two *very different* people could actually have a conversation with one another. How often does *that* happen in the world, on any level? We like to approach the world in a very Either/Or way: mind or body, Stanislavski or Meyerhold, Democrat or Republican. Everything must be very black or white even though we all know the grey area is mmmuch more interesting. More *difficult*. And more interesting. Which is not a coincidence!

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

That something difficult is more interesting than something that's more immediately comprehensible.

JACKSON

Exactly. Again it's that need to understand; it makes us feel more comfortable, but ironically we don't actually like taking the time to understand. It's too exhausting. So we make these plays and TV programs and we shape the news such that it's Easy to Understand, and so it actually becomes less true. Because the world is complicated. It's grotesque. And Meyerhold knew that.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Yeah it's always interesting how people with different agendas construct different versions of history. How does that sort of thing play out with Meyerhold?

JACKSON

Oh, well, when the Soviet Union collapsed everything got thrown in the air. Now we're trying to figure out: what *is* Russia exactly? What is "Russian," meaning what can we keep from our view of the Communist period, and what do we have to redefine? ...Most people probably aren't thinking about this actually. I think the Berlin Wall came down and, you know, "good, there, that's over. What's next? Oh Saddam, oh okay," and we moved on. But, in regard to Meyerhold, basically there are two camps. One says he didn't hold any political opinions and was just an opportunist. The other claims that he was actually very political and in fact had the same totalitarian impulse as Stalin. And the academics muse over the "rich complexity" of his art, and write articles about it, and the directors and actors read the articles and go off to some room and try to work out his techniques. But whatever the angle, there's still an overall tendency to want to figure out whether or not Meyerhold was, really, deep down, a Communist.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Was he at heart a kind of theatrical Stalinist, or was he just an independent artist in political times making the best of the / situation.

JACKSON

Yeah. Exactly. And either way, I think the important thing ultimately is Asking The Question, which is what made Meyerhold so irritating to Stalin. You see, something we really can't identify with today, particularly in America, is just how important artists were to Russia back then. Art was really seen as a functioning arm of society. And everyone knew Meyerhold's name. Everyone. He was a big celebrity. You could go to kiosks on the street and buy souvenir combs with Meyerhold's name written on them. So anything he did was extremely influential and the government watched him very closely. Meyerhold was making art that invited the audience to participate in the shaping of their life experience – economically, politically, their relationship to family, to co-workers, to the government. That's not an artist you want around when you're trying to

shape a nation's mindset. Now, the tragedy in *America* today is how we've so willingly traded our civil rights for good PR. It's this trend of not discussing serious issues without cutting to a joke, or, artificially imposing happy endings. We don't really want to educate people about how the system works. And we don't really want people to question it. So instead we celebrate Individuals. And that way you can say that some people are simply lucky and some people aren't, when the fact that 12% of the people own 78% of the country is really a question of design not luck. Meyerhold was using theater to ask his audience to think. So, you know, President Bush, for example, probably wouldn't like him anymore than Stalin did. ...I stole all these ideas from Mel Gordon and Peter Sellars, by the way.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

I knew it. You cheap bastard.

JACKSON

Or "adapted" them, rather.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

That's right. So, in the end, if he didn't like him very much, what did Stalin do with Meyerhold?

JACKSON

...He shot him.

Sound of a gunshot! Blackout.

TITLE: "Berlin. November 1989"

Followed by Ronald Reagan delivering his famous line, "Mister Gorbachev, tear down this wall." Then cheering that quickly smears into 1950's alien-invasion and Red-Scare movie soundtracks mixed with gunshots and McCarthy's voice asking "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?" followed by the answer "No sir I have not" as various PEOPLE escape from one place to another. The noise cuts into the short intro theme of a 1953 news program. The RUSSIAN PEOPLE all stop to listen.

TITLE: "Salinas, California, March 5, 1953. Eleven-year-old Joanie Caswell watches television at home."

ANCHOR MAN (VOICE OVER)

Joseph Stalin, Soviet Communist Party leader of the USSR since 1924, died of a stroke today in Moscow. The Stalinist era in Russia has come to an end.

The AMERICAN GIRL jumps up and down with joy and cartwheels off the stage to extremely grand tragic Russian music.

TITLE: "Moscow"

The RUSSIAN PEOPLE wipe tears of shock and sorrow. A COUNTER REVOLUTIONARY leaps forward triumphantly and runs up on the raised platform.

COUNTER REVOLUTIONARY

The murderer is dead! The murderer is dead! Let Russia live again! The murderer is dead!

The COUNTER REVOLUTIONARY is shot dead by an unknown source and falls into the PEOPLE. They catch him, continue to mourn for Stalin self-consciously, and drag him away. All of this as the scene changes to...

Act One, 1898-1917

Episode One – The Seagull

During the following, rehearsal furniture and whatnot are set for Act One of The Seagull. MEYERHOLD is up on the edge of a platform, perched like a young wolf, clocking CHEKHOV who is speaking with

ROZANOVA, the young actress who plays Nina. OTHERS, including NEMIROVICH-DANCHENKO, are bustling about during what appears to be a break.

CHEKHOV

I can hear the audience now.

TITLE: "Rehearsal for The Seagull at the Moscow Art Theatre. September, 1898."

CHEKHOV

"Did you notice darling how the vase of flowers fell over? And how the clock ticked? And the crickets? And the thunder? And the rain? And how the harness bells tinkled?" And not one word about my play!

ROZANOVA

But it's realistic.

CHEKHOV

Realistic! The stage is art, my dear Rozanova. What would happen if you took a Kramskoy painting, cut the nose out of one of the faces and substituted a real one? The nose would be "realistic," and the painting would be *ruined*. Stanislavski has ruined my play!

ROZANOVA

Careful. He'll hear you.

CHEKHOV

I will write a new play, and the stage directions will begin like this: "How wonderful, how quiet! No birds, no dogs, no cuckoos, no nightingale, no clock, no jingle of bells, no exploding corn cakes, not one damn *cricket* can be heard!"

ROZANOVA

Anton Pavlovich, you know he plans to bring on the entire household, including a woman with a crying child, at the end of the third act.

CHEKHOV

What? My god, why? It will be like playing pianissimo on the piano and having the lid come crashing down.

ROZANOVA

But in life it often happens that the pianissimo is interrupted by the forte.

CHEKHOV

This is not life. It's a play. As an actress you should make yourself aware of this lest you be carted off in a straightjacket.

MEYERHOLD

Anton Pavlovich! If I may speak.

CHEKHOV

Please. Give me some hope.

MEYERHOLD

I think ... I feel... Your play-

STANISLAVSKI enters and suddenly EVERYBODY moves into place.

STANISLAVSKI

Forgive me, everyone.

DANCHENKO

Alright then, if we could return to the scene.

STANISLAVSKI

Yes, if we could take it from Treplev and his daisy. Sorin, as you were. Aaand Vsevolod. ...Vsevolod Emelievich.

MEYERHOLD

Oh. Yes. Sorry. From?

DANCHENKO

Your daisy.

MEYERHOLD

Daisy...

STANISLAVSKI

...Something you'd like to say?

MEYERHOLD

Me?

DANCHENKO

No, Meyerhold: the scene. Begin the scene.

MEYERHOLD

Right. (*looks to ACTOR PLAYING SORIN*)

ACTOR PLAYING SORIN

It's your line.

MEYERHOLD

(*annoyed smile*) Thank you.

STANISLAVSKI

Aaaaand commence!

MEYERHOLD begins his monologue, punctuated by the sounds of coughing and hammering made from YAKOV behind a curtain.

MEYERHOLD

"She loves me, she loves me not. She loves me, she loves me not. She loves me, she loves me not. You see? My own mother does not love me. Well, why should she? She wants to lead a glamorous life, dress like an eighteen-year-old girl, make love to that man. And then there's me, her son, that constant reminder she's no longer young. When I'm not here, she's thirty-two. When I am here, she's forty-five. This is why she hates me. Besides, I can't stand her kind of theater. She adores the *Theátuh*, thinks she's serving the cause of humanity. But if you ask me her kind of theater is tired, useless, it's all worn out. The curtain goes up, the lights come on, you're in a room with three walls, and there they stand: those servants of Art, showing us how people eat, drink, sit, walk, wear clothes! And then: they try to wring some nice easy little moral out of it, some little thing you wouldn't mind having around the house! You go, you sit down, and they give you the same shit/

DANCHENCKO

/Stuff, stuff, the line is "stuff!"

STANISLAVSKI

/ Vsevolod Emelievich!

MEYERHOLD

over and over and over! And it makes me utterly sick! I want to run screaming from it all and never look back!"

ACTOR PLAYING SORIN

“But we need the theater! How could we do without it!”

MEYERHOLD

“We *need*: New Forms! And if we can’t have them then we’re better off with no theater at all!”

STANISLAVSKI

Stop!

MEYERHOLD

“Stuff.” My apologies Anton Pavlovich.

CHEKHOV

I like your word better. It’s much more to the point.

DANCHENKO

It can’t be said on the stage.

STANISLAVSKI

He knows this, Vladimir. You must live the role, Vsevolod, not rewrite it. This text is poetry. You mustn’t alter it to your taste.

MEYERHOLD

I know this. It was a mistake.

STANISLAVKI

Yes, very well. Well done. I believe you when you speak these words. They leap from deep within you.

MEYERHOLD

Yes.

CHEKHOV

Konstantin Sergievich! May I ask a question?

STANISLAVSKI

Of course.

CHEKHOV

Why is Yakov still coughing and hammering while poor Vsevolod is trying to speak?

STANISLAVSKI

Why it’s your stage direction, Anton. “Sounds of coughing and hammering.”

CHEKHOV

But not through the entire act! Just at the beginning, that's all it needs.

STANISLAVSKI

I'm sorry, Anton, I didn't understand. Perhaps you could find a reason for Yakov to exit a few pages earlier.

CHEKHOV

Or perhaps he could shut up! I told you Vladimir: my play will be hissed off the stage – *again!* You've lured me back into hell!

DANCHENKO

Anton, I promise you, the Alexandrinsky held only eight rehearsals, their actors didn't understand you, their audience came expecting light comedy – how could it succeed? We love your play, we are devoted to it, we understand what you have written for us, don't we Konstantin?

STANISLAVSKI

Wwwell-

DANCHENKO

Yes, we do!

STANISLAVSKI

Yes, we do. Anton, perhaps the play will not provoke storms of applause, but, after seeing your play, society women across Russia will be wearing dresses and hairdos just like Arkadina's.

CHEKHOV

Do you hear this? Dresses and hairdos just like Arkadina's. Have I written a fashion catalogue?!

DANCHENKO

What Konstantin means is that a genuine production, properly prepared, with exquisite details and fresh qualities, liberated from routine, will be a triumph of art – I guarantee it!

CHEKHOV

How can it be a triumph of art if the actors can't be heard beneath his *constant racket*? Stanislavski is ruining my play!

STANISLAVSKI

Anton, your characters are real people. They must live in a real world.

CHEKHOV

They are not real people! They're characters! And the audience must be able to hear them! Coughing and hammering and crickets and thunder, these are not realistic! They're noise! Everything must be simple, do you understand? Like in life. Not life! *Like* in life. It's theater for god's sake!!!

MEYERHOLD

I understand you, Anton Pavlovich!

DANCHENKO

Be quiet Meyerhold.

MEYERHOLD

Why? Why? Are we actors to do nothing but act?

STANISLAVSKI

Vsevolod.

CHEKHOV shortly begins to cough.

MEYERHOLD

We want to be able to *think* while we act! We want to know *why* we are doing what we are doing! Why does this play matter? Why must the audience see it? What is happening in Russia? We must know these things! Only then can we convey his ideas! Only then will the audience understand what Anton Chekhov has written! With all due respect, Konstantin Sergievich, these realistic techniques you worked out years ago which you still employ regardless of whether a play is a mood play or a period piece – well I have no need to explain why this is simply wrong!

DANCHENKO

Meyerhold!

CHEKHOV's coughing has escalated. DANCHENKO goes to him. Everyone else stands frozen with fear while CHEKHOV coughs violently. Once the attack subsides...

DANCHENKO

Are you pleased?

ROZANOVA

Vsevolod, how could you?

DANCHENKO

You could have killed him.

MEYERHOLD

I'm sorry, I only wished to-

DANCHENKO

Be quiet. This isn't the Academy, young man. This is the Moscow Art Theatre.

DANCHENKO helps CHEKHOV stand and they exit.

MEYERHOLD

Forgive me.

STANISLAVSKI

For a moment I thought you were acting Treplev again.

MEYERHOLD

We do need new forms.

STANISLAVSKI

And patience. Am I right?

MEYERHOLD

Most likely. ...Shall we take the scene again?

STANISLAVSKI

No I don't think so. I've heard enough for today. And you are correct: actors should think.

MEYERHOLD

Konstantin Sergiev-

But the look in STANISLAVSKI'S eye stops MEYERHOLD. A tense pause. The OTHERS in the room all take a collective step back. STANISLAVSKI walks out after DANCHENKO and CHEKHOV. Pause. MEYERHOLD throws down his text.

Episode Two – In The Provinces

TITLE: “February 1902. Meyerhold quits the Moscow Art Theatre and sets out on his own to make theater in the provinces of Russia.”

Piano music of great momentum plays under the following onslaught of changing locations.

MEYERHOLD

“Anton Pavlovich. Our season opened today with your *Three Sisters*. Huge Success! Beloved author of melancholy moods! You alone give true delight!”

CHEKHOV

“Konstantin Sergievich. The Art Theatre was wrong not to make Meyerhold a shareholder in the company. Perhaps he has written you something of his success in the provinces. I am glad for him, for a life in art is not likely to continue so easily in Kherson. There’s no public for plays there; all they want is the next touring show. After all, Kherson is barely Russia, or even Europe!”

MEYERHOLD

“And soon we shall add *Ivanov*, *Uncle Vanya*, and *The Seagull* to our repertoire.”

ALEXANDER KOSHEVEROV

And then what?

MEYERHOLD

Alexander, don’t worry.

KOSHEVEROV

Kherson will think we are The Chekhov Theater. Who is our next author?

MEYERHOLD

Ibsen.

KOSHEVEROV

Ibsen. Ibsen! Ibsen, everyone, let’s go, Ibsen Ibsen!

As MEYERHOLD calls out titles, the ACTORS reconfigure to various Ibsen-esque stage pictures.

MEYERHOLD

Annnd *Enemy of the People!* Good! Annnd *A Doll's House!* Good! Annnd *Hedda Gabler!* No. No. No. Good! Annnd curtain up!

The ACTORS cycle through all three plays, then bow to applause.

KOSHEVEROV

Okay! What's next?

MEYERHOLD

Gorky.

KOSHEVEROV

Gorky! Which?

MEYERHOLD

The Petty Bourgeois.

KOSHEVEROV

The Petty Bourgeois!

The ACTORS arrange themselves accordingly.

MEYERHOLD

No. More petty. More. Still more. I don't believe you!

ACTRESS

Sorry Stanislavski.

MEYERHOLD

That's not funny. Annnd curtain up!

Applause. Bows.

MEYERHOLD

Well done. I wonder if anybody noticed.

KOSHEVEROV

Whew! What's next?

MEYERHOLD

Tolstoy.

KOSHEVEROV

Tolstoy! Title?

MEYERHOLD

The Death of Ivan the Terrible.

KOSHEVEROV

The Death of Ivan the Terrible!

The ACTORS arrange themselves accordingly, leaving a conspicuous hole in the stage picture.

MEYERHOLD

Something's wrong.

KOSHEVEROV

(pointing to the conspicuous hole) You.

MEYERHOLD

No. *(Changes someone's head)* That's right. *(Enters the picture as Ivan)* Annd curtain up!

Applause. Bows. The ACTORS exhibit signs of fatigue.

MEYERHOLD

Don't be tired. Smile. You're actors.

The ACTORS groan; they've heard that line before.

MEYERHOLD

And curtain up!

The ACTORS snap into place and then cycle through all their plays in slow motion under the following.

MEYERHOLD

Anton Pavlovich. You are right: there is no audience for plays in Kherson. The critics are very complimentary but the number of avid theatergoers in this backwards nowhere fills one house at best. To keep food on our plates we must offer them something new each night. It is a furious pace, but: we Must Burn at Both Ends if we hope to succeed. For myself, I've accomplished little as director but to recycle the work of Stanislavski. At least I'm stealing from the best. And now Kherson's local color will suffer no surprises should they ever make a cultural expedition to Moscow. But as they don't seem to *like* surprises much: I trust they'll be grateful.

STANISLAVSKI

Anton Pavlovich. I *have* read of Meyerhold's success in Kherson. Hopefully he is content. I, meanwhile, am not. Give us a new play, Anton Pavlovich! Save us from my boredom.

DANCHENKO

Konstantin Sergievich. Regarding your request to Chekhov: I recognize your boredom in my own, but I am afraid it is not Chekhov who can help us in the end. As our recent *Julius Caesar* debacle suggests, when it comes to Naturalism one size does not fit all. Without bright, truly poetic images our theater is doomed to death. Chekhov's sweet lyrical people are no longer alive. We must look elsewhere. Have you considered Symbolism?

Applause. The ACTORS in Kherson collapse after their final bow.

TITLE: "September 1903"

MEYERHOLD

Anton Pavlovich. We begin our new season with a new name: The New Drama Association. We desperately need new forms. (*the ACTORS concur*) To that end, I will experiment with Symbolism – whether Kherson is interested or not.

Gunshot!

TITLE: "The illegally organized Russian Social Democratic Party splits into Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. The smaller Bolshevik faction is led by Vladimir Lenin."

The music is silent. The ACTORS all look off in the same direction. Gunshots continue in the distance. STANSLAVSKI closes his window. Silence.

MEYERHOLD

I feel our nation's plot thickening. Or perhaps it's just our patrons' skulls. I am disturbed by my comrades who don't want to rise above their narrow interests. I wish all those who give their lives to *theater* would become aware of their great mission; Russia has a fever and we must look to it. True, the new century has only just begun, but I do not see our reality, I do not know this century. I long to burn with the spirit of my time. Give me life or death, only not sleep.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR

All aboard!

TITLE: "February 1904"

Music again. The ACTORS now perform their repertoire in extreme slow motion, offering their first play in the symbolist vein before returning to their customary style.

MEYERHOLD

(an abrupt shift of tone) Meanwhile, our tour to the neighboring provinces reveals that a lack of taste and curiosity is not limited to Kherson. Symbolism seems to escape the provincial senses. I am growing weary of the potboilers and Art Theatre knock-offs we must churn out to satisfy the unimaginative local appetite. Your new play sounds brilliant, by the way. Does it have a title yet?

CHEKHOV

Konstantin Sergievich. Enclosed you will find the completed manuscript of my latest endeavor. I hope you enjoy it. And please, not so much noise this time; my