

CLASSICS AND CONSOLERS

Mikhail Volokhov is a contradictory figure in the new wave of drama...

His texts and subject matter make us covet profanities, mire, masks cynically torn away. In 'The Great Consoler' the profanity is minimized and tempered, corresponding to the laws of 'impropriety': the gentleman is not the one who never curses, rather he appears not to notice when the lady curses...

The plot, as before, is onerous and ghastly, yet permeated with currents of compassion.

Igor Pekhovich, a graduate of the Shchukin School who studied under Yuri Lyubimov, fearlessly took on this play and created a performance for the Small Stage of the original Taganka Theatre (where 'Cerceau' was performed).

Above a sloping platform something resembling a window frame swings to and fro, suspended in the black void. Someone is still stubbornly trying to live in this gloomy, featureless space clearly unfit for human habitation. The three characters are all migrants in the Parisian underworld: the Russian prostitute Polya (Elena Laskavaya), the talented writer Tim (Sergey Afanasyev) that she has temporarily saved from suicide, and Lyora (Igor Muzhzhukhin), either her husband or her pimp, who directs their world and has more creative ideas than opportunities for their implementation. All three have nothing to do in Paris – the fashion for all that is 'Soviet' has waned and it's almost shameful to live on the earnings of Lyuska-Polya like the heroes of Bulgakov's 'On The Run'. Although life is not better, it has added piquancy: all three are gripped by a burning passion. But Polya has AIDS. In order to 'die in one day' Tim gets infected by her, while the unsuspecting Lyora... is infected by Tim. The finale is mutual suicide.

Unexpectedly this rather horrific plot is presented in a spirited, charming and plastic manner. The drama literally overwhelms the audience with its burning sincerity, unique character types, recklessness, irony, and the tragic loneliness of all concerned. And also by the genuinely 'Taganka' style of expression; a special, playful catchiness.

Willingness to enter this shared circle of sin and suffering becomes a paradoxical form of sympathy, in the author's terminology, 'consolation'. And everyone is given access to the artistic dimension.

Naturally the theme of nostalgia for a rejected but not forgotten homeland rings through the play, although this is concealed by irony and relayed as inveterate cynicism. Bulgakov's influence is also heard here. There is no hysteric, no neurasthenia. These faces reflect the light of suffering, heartache and sublime despair. At the very least, the hope of tortured souls for eternal peace.

With the amazing sincerity and organic ease of a mature thespian Sergey Afanasyev plays Tim, who bears a resemblance to Don Quixote with an obsession, not as a mystical messenger of death, but as a being of unique talent, seeing his role in other people's destinies as a supreme mission.

In general the heroes of Volokhov's play are not afraid of eternal questions. They just don't want to live in this dead end.

Alexander INYAKHIN, critic

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