

Marina Litavrina

Russian Emigrant Theatre in Europe



Born on November 20, 1955 in Russia. Associated Professor at the Russian Academy of Theatre Art in Moscow. Graduated from the same Institution in 1980, Ph.D. (1985), History and Theory of Theatre. Lectured on: History of Russian Theatre XVIII-XX centuries. Special courses: Chekhov and the World Theatre, Russian Emigrant Theatre 1918-1940. Main publications in the last 5 years: "Moscow Art Theatre: 1930 and other years", in literary magazine *MOSKVA*, 1988, n. 10 (Moscow Art Theatre in the epoch of Stalin). "Capital Punishment, or Drama because of an Island", in *Teatralnaya zhizn* (Theatre Life magazine) 1989, nn. 16, 17 (Theatre and Soviet censorship). "Love under Party Control" (gender problems and Russian stage of the 1920s), in: *Teatralnaya zhizn* 1989, n. 23. "American Gardens of Alla Nazimova" (Russian star in Hollywood), in: *Slavyanovedenye* (Revue des Etudes Slaves) 1993, n. 4. "The Mythologeme of Theatre in Russian History" (dramatic chronicle "The Path of Nemesis" by N. N. Evreinov), in: *UNESCO Bulletin*, International Association for Slavonic Cultural Studies, 1994, n. 27 (Theatricality in Life and Art). — Address: Profsoyuznaya ul. 8-2, App. 460, 117292 Moscow, Russia.

I arrived in Berlin on the 4th of October 1993, the day the White House in Moscow was stormed and nobody was sure how events would end. I was not sure whether I would reach the promised land of Wissenschaftskolleg. Besides, I was invited here as a researcher working on a project "Russian emigrant theatre in Europe 1919-1939". These two facts perhaps, put together, created a specific mood — not so-called Russian melancholy, but something more modern, not familiar yet, and that's why the acclimatization period took a longer time.

First of all, I understood that my subject is rather new even for colleagues and librarians. Catalogues of theatre and art libraries were silent and at first it looked like there had never been the phenomena of Russian artistic Berlin, as described by Nabokov, Bely and Ehrenburg. There were no traces of the five Russian theatres on Ku'damm and Professor Micha-

ela Böhmg's book *Das Russische Theater in Berlin* was a fairy tale. What was proven and where to go for it?

Then I referred to the help of "Great Silent" — Russian emigrant actors of the 1920s played in the films of Murnau, Wien and other German directors. So I started with the archives of the *Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek*, where I watched nine films starring Russian actors and worked with the film reviews. But even this main film archive in Berlin lacked some German films of the 20s and 30s, and I found them in the *Bundesarchiv* (Film-archive). I should mention that the staffs of both institutions were highly professional and helpful. Some of the films were theatre productions put on film with the participation of former Moscow Art Theatre actors. This fact is not widely known in Russia.

At the same time, I started working in the *Walter-Unruh-Archiv* of the *Institut für Theaterwissenschaft* (Free University), where I found materials on Russian cabaret theatres in Berlin, reminiscences of directors, rare photographs. Some other materials of the emigrant branch of Moscow Art Theatre (the so-called Prague group) were found in the archive of the *Akademie der Künste*.

At the same time I was preparing my colloquium on Russian-Soviet theatre of the 1920s, which was held on the 25th of January. I also showed the documentary film I brought with me to some colleagues working on Russian theatre (Frau Bauermeister, Herr Maß, Frau Dalugge).

Meanwhile I continued my work on a book about the Russian-American film star Alla Nazimova, managed to find colleagues working in this theme in America and got many articles, references, and reviews through interlibrary loan. At the same time, getting some other materials was more difficult than I expected.

I have to give at this point a short summary of my work in Paris libraries (April 15 through May 30, 1994). I had already asked about the possibility of making a trip to Paris for my research work on Russian emigrant theatre before coming to Berlin (because I already had a proven that many materials can be found only there) and was very glad to receive support for my aspirations from the administration of the Wissenschaftskolleg. I was happy to get the invitation of the *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme*, which provided me with accommodation at *Maison Suger* for fifteen days. The staff of Maison Suger was helpful and provided residents with all necessary facilities. I also profitably consulted with Mme Sonya Colpart, *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme*, who works with Russian researchers.

The main place for my work was the *Bibliothèque d'Arsenal, Département des Arts du Spectacle* of the National Library. The famous Collection Rondell there contains archives of Russian émigré metteurs en scene, such as N. N. Evreinov (I studied mostly his unpublished works written in

exile), a big collection of references, and articles from the French, German, English, Italian, Spanish, and Czech press on Russian emigrant companies of 1920-1940.

Another library — that of the *Institut des Langues Orientales* — contains materials in the Russian language and emigrant periodicals, such as *Volya Rossii* and *Perezvony*, which cannot be found in Russian archives due to the Soviet system of censorship that existed before 1989. Of great help for my project was a visit to the head of the faculty of Russian Language, Literature and Culture, M. Gérard Abensour, whose works I already knew very well (they are mainly devoted to Russian 20th century theatre and N. N. Evreinov). Also I had a meeting very fruitful for communication and the exchange in research work with Professor Béatrice Picon-Vallin (CNRS), who is a well-known theatre historian working on Meyerhold, Russian Jewish Theatre, and the modern Russian stage.

Another library of the IRENISE (former *Institut des Études Slaves*) possesses complete collections of Russian magazines issued in exile for many years, such as *Annales contemporaines (Sovremennyye Zapisky)* and the final numbers of 1935-1936 of the magazine *Le Théâtre et la Vie (Teatr i zhizn)*, which was the main periodical of the Russian theatre milieu in Berlin and Paris (Berlin's issues, which can be found in the *Bibliothek der Künste*, cover only 1922 — 25 and may not be photocopied). But I could find the complete collection of this periodical only in the *Bibliothèque Russe Tourgenév*. As the library founded by the famous Russian writer and considered to be one of the best holdings of Russian émigré periodicals (some of them are unique), it was worth spending hours simply rewriting the materials (photocopying is not allowed). I also made a trip to *Saint Geneviève du Bois*, the Russian Cemetery, where many actors, directors and writers from the first wave of emigration are buried, and I took pictures of the tombs of these outstanding people. I did as well some topography research in order to create a map of Russian theatre in Paris and to identify the buildings (theatres, cafés, assembly halls) where performances by Russian emigrant actors were given and took pictures of these places. Back in Berlin, I wrote an article about Russian theatre in Paris which has now been adopted for publication by the Department of the History of Russian Culture, Russian Academy of Sciences, in a special issue devoted to the exile Russian culture between the two World Wars. My research on Russian theatre in Paris also drew the interest of the *Institut für Theaterwissenschaft* in Bern, and I was invited to give a talk at the congress of theatre historians in Switzerland, November 1994.

In May, after my visit to Paris, I prepared an article for a conference "Barocco and Avant-garde" at the Institute of Slavonic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. Though the conference was held in my absence, I

was also asked to prepare material for a collective monography on the subject (to be issued in 1995).

At the beginning of June, I attended the conference "Russian emigrants in Germany" in the city of Constance. There I was able to meet many colleagues whose works I knew before, among them Professor Michaela Böhmig, the main specialist in the field of "Russian Theatre in Berlin", with whom I had very fruitful contacts. In June I also managed to visit several private archives and to get acquainted with the people who knew Russian Berlin very well. They are rare, nowadays there are few remaining eye-witnesses of the events of the 1920s. First of all, Vera Lourier, a Russian emigrant poetess, who personally knew the main figures of Russian literary and artistic emigration. I also became acquainted with Dr. Waltraud Werner, who curates the archive of Russian emigrant painter Massutin, a close friend of the famous actor Michael Chekhov. These letters of Michael Chekhov to and from Berlin are hardly known, only partly published and of course were of great interest. The archive also contains photographs of Russian emigrant actors, which are also of great importance for my research.

At last, I managed to have an interview with the German film star Vera Tschechowa, a granddaughter of the Russian emigrant actress and film star of German cinema of the 20s and 30s, Olga Tschechowa.

At the end of June, I had the opportunity to work at the *Archiv der Theaterpolizei, Brandenburgische Landesarchive* in Potsdam. Needless to say, access to such an archive was impossible before 1989, so few people knew about the files on Russian emigrant theatre to be found there. The Potsdam archive proved to be an important source of exact information (dates of birth of theatre people, addresses in Berlin, the location of Russian emigrant colonies and theatres, repertoire, etc.) for anyone trying to write a chronicle of theatre exile in Berlin. The correspondence between the Russian actors and directors and police authorities could also become a subject for separate study. In contrast to some other places, in the Potsdam archive it was possible to order photocopies of materials, and I hope to have them as evidence for my meditations on the experience of Russian artistic bohème in Berlin in the 1920s.

Throughout the whole year I was preparing an anthology of plays written by Russian dramatists in exile which are still unpublished in Russia. I hope it will be of great use to my students, whom I promised to prepare such a publication. This could be done only due to the great help of the library of the Wissenschaftskolleg and the opportunity to copy the materials for free.

The *Staatsbibliothek* was an important place of work for me as for everybody, mainly with the Russian language emigrant press of the 1920s

and the German press on the theatre of the same period. The *Osteuropa-Lesesaal* also has directories, catalogues of the Russian emigrant press throughout the world, which our Moscow libraries lack. Of great help was the opportunity to read current magazines of Slavonic studies issued in France, the USA and other countries. I also worked in the department of rare books and manuscripts.

Of course, one cannot manage the preparation of a book or any publications on theatre or cinema without visual materials. With the help of the photography archive of the *Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek*, I have managed to prepare a "gallery" of actors' portraits (laser copies). Having identified the exact places of former Russian theatres in Berlin, I took photos of the buildings that survived through the war and still exist. In Paris I also managed to buy some original programmes of the performances of Russian emigrant theatres, and here in Berlin, with the help of Frau Dr. Helga Haas from the *Institut für Theaterwissenschaft* (Free University), I copied the ads and programmes of Russian theatres in Berlin.

Of course, I tried at the same time to follow the theatre life in Berlin and also got to know with the researchers who are preparing the exhibition "Moscow-Berlin", which is to be held in 1995. I suppose that I have managed to see the best performances of the traditional *Theatertreffen 94* in Berlin and also visited some seminars on modern theatre in the Free University and the seminars on Russian exile cinema in "Arsenal".

I should mention that I received constant help from many members of the staff, first of all Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, Katharina Biegger, Christine von Klitzing, Theresa Köbele, Elissa Linke and many others. I cordially thank Professor Yehuda Elkana for his interest in my studies.

Throughout the academic year, I attended the seminar of Professor Robert Darnton on the history of ideas and the intellectual sphere. In this academic year I was the only Russian fellow and I had a specific subject of research. Studies on emigrant culture are a relatively new thing for Russian academic studies and are of acute interest in my country. As I could feel at the international conference on Russian emigrants in Germany held in Constance, they find a solid audience here in Germany too — a special programme has been launched. But many fellows who deal with the "genre humain" and general cultural studies helped me in my work here: Robert Darnton, François Hartog, Wolfgang Kemp, Thomas Gelzer, and others.

I also want to thank the Rector personally for his moral and material support of my studies and my journey to France. Long live Wissenschaftskolleg, with its family-like structure: the "parents" — the staff each year has to take care of and to look after 44 "children", new-born fellows.

Meanwhile, the names of "Altfellows" look down from the bookshelves like ancestors in family portraits.