

## World Classics in Kazakh Theater at Early Stage of Development

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### ABSTRACT

The research work deals with the practices and specific features of Kazakh theater, especially with the specifics of the director's decisions on performances based on European and Russian classical drama. The authors determine that the experienced directors from Russia were invited in order to influence the professional development of Kazakh novice actors. Furthermore, based on the views of theater critics, the study reveals the positive and negative aspects in the development of Kazakh theater. The authors have focused on different versions of performances of Shakespeare in Kazakh theatre, particularly "Othello". The practical value is that the research findings can be a basis of future investigations on the Kazakh theater development and the influence of Russian culture on this process.

### KEYWORDS

Theater development, Kazakh theater, world classics interpretation, Russian drama, performances of Shakespeare

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## Introduction

The growth of national consciousness in the Kazakhstan in the context of globalization has intensified the artists' interest in the historical past (Kabyl, 2016). Thus, the genre of historical drama has taken the main place in the repertory of Kazakh theatres (Kundakbayuly, 2001; Nurpeis, 2014; Mayemirov, Khalykov & Nurpeis, 2015).

Nowadays the repertoire of theaters is largely determined by world classics (Khalykov, 2015). Moreover, on the one hand, filmmakers are looking for ideas and images that correlate with the realities of our time (Greenwood, 2016). On the other hand, features of the Kazakh theatre formation, as well as the originality of the national style of acting and directing, are related to the folklore (Kundakbaev, 2006).

But in summary, the stages of formation and development of Kazakh theater have been largely influenced by Russian theater (Mayemirov, 2015; Jennings, 2009). This was expressed, first of all, in the work of Russian directors

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working in Kazakh theatre, secondly, in performances of the world dramatic works, translated from Russian into Kazakh (Nursultan & Yerkebay, 2015).

### Literature review

It is pertinent to point out that the productions of the late XX - early XXI centuries reflected the search for new forms, a variety of director's interpretation, in which the metaphorical and poetic folklore allow to reach the level of imaginative parable language (Shapauov, Negimov & Zhusipov, 2013).

The preparations for organization of Kazakh theater have begun in Kyzylorda since October 1925 (Kundakbaev, 1987). Art historians argued that at stage of its formation Kazakh theater worked with foreign classics (Kundykov, 1969; Lvov, 1954). Thus, the productions of world classical works were presented to Kazakh audience already in the third theatric season (History of Kazakh theatre, 1975).

Can note that in the 30-40-ies of the last century, the invited well-known Russian producers such as M. Sokolov, M. Nasonov, Yu. Rutkowski and I. Borev contributed much to the professional development of Kazakh theater (History of Kazakh theatre, 1975; Kundakbaev, 2006). They brought in the formation of Kazakh performing arts, comprehensive development of culture and actors' professional skills. They taught Kazakh actors to work using studio method and encouraged them to gain deep theoretical knowledge (Kundakbaev, 1987).

B. Nurpeis (2014) observed that in order to explore the existing methodology of Russian school of acting special studios were organized. At the initial phase of history of Kazakh art they served as a big theatrical schools and as a basis for the actors. Understanding of the essence of stage action, plasticalpicture, power of the word etc. brought Kazakh actors to the new level (History of Kazakh theatre, 1975). As a result, many of the previously produced performances have changed. As theatre B. Kundakbaev (1997) noted, productions of V. Kirshon "Bread", N. Pogodin "My friend", "Aristocracy", "A man with a gun", K. Trenev "LyubovYarovaya" became worthy indicators of success in assimilation of complex drama works by Kazakh theatre.

Scholars also argue that these performances reflected relevant issues of a new developing society at that time (Kundakbayuly, 2001; Bogatenkova, 1987). While working on the plays, failures of the theater in production of world classical works such as "Marriage", "The Miserly Knight," "The Stone Guest", "Hamlet", have been taken into account (Kundakbaev, 1987).

Moreover, at early stage of Kazakh theater development it was difficult to translate plays from foreign languages into the Kazakh language, preserving the style and poetics of the authors (History of Kazakh theatre, 1978; Nursultan, & Yerkebay, 2015). It also influenced the quality of acting (Kabdieva, 2000; Kundakbaev, 2006).

### *Aim of the study*

The purpose of the study is to analyze the features of interpretations of the world classics in Kazakh theater at early stage of development.

### *Research questions*

How did the Russian theatrical tradition influence the theater development in Kazakhstan?

## Methods

The research methodology included the method of comparative analysis of art historians' studies; comparative-historical method and method of comprehensive assessment of theatrical performances.

## Data, Analysis, and Results

One of the first works of the Kazakh theater was the tragedy of the great English playwright William Shakespeare "Hamlet", which was staged by director Z. Shanin on 3 March, 1927. It was translated into the Kazakh language by the writer M. Dauletbayev. The troupe of young theater tried to show the classics at a decent level, but not everything was successful, like its previous performances based on the works of the great Russian poet A. Pushkin "The Stone Guest" and "The Miserly Knight". The reason for this was that the theater troupe was not ready for staging of such plays at professional level. In addition, there were notable weaknesses in translation of the work (Kundakbaev, 1997).

In 1928, N. Gogol's comedy "Marriage" directed by S. Kozhamkulov and K. Dzhandarbekov was presented to the audience. Here the inexperience of the theater group was felt. For this reason, these performances haven't existed for a long time. However, the "Marriage", which appeared on the scene in late 1929, directed by M. Sokolov, was more successful than the previous production. This play brought not only creative success to the team, but also professional confidence (Bopezhanova, 2002).

8 years later, in November 1936, the theater returned back to the creativity of N. Gogol and staged "The Government Inspector". The play was also notable due to the interpretation of the director I. Borov, who has substantially changed the content and essence of the play, and presented a version which was different from the original. There were lots of dancing and pantomime in the play, and attention was paid mostly to the external picture that radically changed the content of the play and the issues raised in it. Perhaps, because of this reason, the play failed (Lvov, 1954).

Russian directors from Russia were invited to perform these works. Thus, B. Kundakbaev (1997) observed that creative work of M. Auezov in the development of Kazakh dramaturgy and theatre has never been limited by national frames. The scholar emphasized M. Auezov not only urged Kazakh theater figures to explore Russian theater and drama, to learn the "system" of K. Stanislavsky, but supervised this process (Kundakbaev, 1997).

Russian director M. Sokolov was the first who was invited with the purpose to fulfill these responsibilities, and in 1929 he arrived to Almaty to work with Russian troupe (History of Kazakh theatre, 1978).

In the 30-40-ies of XX century theater troupes became more confident and continued attempts to reproduce plays of foreign classics on stage. Appointment of M. Sokolovsky as a director of Kazakh Academic Theater had a great impact on this fact. During these years, Kazakh actors have mastered the works of French playwright Jean-Baptiste Moliere's "Scapin trickery", W. Shakespeare's "Othello," A. Ostrovsky's "It's Not All Shrovetide for the Cat ", K. Goldoni "Servant of Two Masters", O. de Balzac's "Eugenie Grandet". Each of these works took an honorary place on Kazakh scene in the late 30s and early 40s of

the last century and made an invaluable contribution to the development of Kazakh theater (Mayemirov, 2015).

The audience warmly welcomed the play "The Government Inspector", which was produced in 1940. And "Othello" takes a special place in the repertoire of the theater. M. Sokolovsky, who previously staged "The Government Inspector", has reproduced it in the updated form. Despite the fact that the text of the play, which was translated by Kazakh writer M. Auezov, was ready in 1936, the preparation lasted for two years, and the premiere took place only in 1939 (Sokolovsky, 1939; Kundakbaev, 1997).

However, the theatre has used all possibilities for production of "Othello". Great importance was even paid to the smallest details. The stage was decorated by young artists headed by K. Kozhykov, and costumes were prepared by the chief artist E. Charnomsky. The music for the play was composed by composers A. Zimmer and B. Yerzakovich. Playwright M. Auezov helped the actors to correctly convey the characters' images, thereby greatly facilitated the task of the director (Nurtazin, 2013).

For Kazakh actors it was difficult to understand the deep meaning of Shakespeare's works, as they were insufficiently familiar with his works. Therefore M. Auezov has done a great job and explained the significance and meaning of intricate words of the great playwright. He took part in all rehearsals of the play and made great efforts to explain the meaning of Shakespeare's words to every actor. Kazakh writer has also actively participated in role distribution. However, the director has decided to prepare two casts. The main roles in the first cast were given to the first actors of the theater Y. Umurzakov (Othello), S. Kozhamkulov (Iago), K. Kuanyshbayev (Brabantio). Young actress N. Ipmagambetova who has recently graduated from GITIS, played the role of a beautiful Desdemona. And K. Badyrov played (Othello), K. Karmysov (Iago), A. Abdullina (Desdemona) in the second cast (Kundakbaev, 1997).

The first cast of the troupe showed up on stage on the appointed day - 23 April, and the second cast only on 11th of May. The audience received them in different ways. As they had their own approach to creative search, their acting of roles was different. As a result, two different productions were done by one director and in the same scenery. The second cast which included the young actors, decided not to repeat the work of more experienced colleagues. Moreover, they had enough time. They were stimulated by creative mood and creative impulse. This was appreciated by critics and the audience. As a result, according to general opinion, the second cast presented more interesting play to the audience (History of Kazakh theatre, 1978).

N.I. Lvov (1957), the scholar in theatre studies, considered that due to the fact that the troupe has prepared this performance in two casts, as well as real creative competition, the performance appeared to be interesting and attractive. Here he notes that second cast, consisting mainly of young actors, was overplaying. Nevertheless, a number of critics do not agree with these conclusions. They draw attention to the fact that performance was prepared in a very short period of time. Thus, most of preparatory work has been done in a hurry. As a result, in artistic view, the basic idea of the tragedy failed. In addition, the desire of M. Sokolovsky to decorate the scene with large-scale construction has not been realized. Also, the researchers point out that

production of "Othello" in two casts, and in two different directions was unsuccessful (History of Kazakh theatre, 1975). In this regard, the researcher of theater K. Kundykov (1969) called the theatric production in two casts a big fundamental mistake. This resulted in division of the theater group into two. It should be noted that in 1964 M. Auezov Kazakh Academic Drama Theatre again produced the tragedy "Othello". Director - A. Madievsky.

The work on this performance raised the level of Kazakh performing arts. The director's artistic solution is to reveal the struggle between good and evil, love and hate, by describing the tragedy of love between Othello and Desdemona. First of all, the producer intended to expose the internal contradiction of the Renaissance epoch to the first place. Thereby, M. Sokolovsky wanted to show that Othello was far from immorality and treachery, and his death was caused by contradictions that occurred during the Renaissance epoch. From this point of view, two groups outlined by the director, were close to his main idea (History of Kazakh theatre, 1978).

However, we can confidently say that staging of Shakespeare's other work - "The Taming of the Shrew" was most successful. This is one of the most popular comedies of the great playwright. Almost all of Shakespeare's comedies were written in the first half of his creative work - in the period 1592-1600. During this period he wrote such comedies as "The Comedy of Errors", "Much Ado About Nothing", "Twelfth Night", "The Two Gentlemen of Verona", "Love's Labor's Lost", "A Midsummer Night's Dream", "The Merchant of Venice", "As You Like It", "Merry Wives of Windsor", "All's well that ends well" (History of Kazakh theatre, 1975).

In Shakespeare's time, comedy made people laugh and always ended with achievement of the goal, the dream of the character. All happy moments were always interspersed with sad ones. However, in these plays, the playwright when describing funny scenes, did not forget to pay much attention to the characters and their behavior. Therefore, all works of Shakespeare in this genre, first of all, are the "comedies of characters". Shakespeare's comedies usually distinguish in rapidly developing events, and plausible dialogues. However, the playwright raises important social issues in his works, and in the process of the events, tries to somehow solve them. His comedies appeal that all people have right to a happy life. Also there are moments where social criticism is obvious. But, in general, his comedies are always optimistic.

In 1943 during the Great Patriotic War Kazakh Drama Theatre staged the play "The Taming of the Shrew". The performance was prepared by well known theater professionals, teachers and directors O. Pyzhova and V. Bibikov. The production immediately won the hearts of viewers. It was a great achievement in assimilation of the world classical works by Kazakh theater. The performance demonstrated the effective joint work of Kazakh and Russian theatrical art. B. Kundakbaev (1987) wrote "Production of the play "The Taming of the Shrew" was the best example of assimilation of classical work by Kazakh stage". Russian producers were convinced that fully using the possibilities of Kazakh actors, their full creative potential can be revealed.

Can note that the production of "Taming of the Shrew" in 1937 in Moscow Central Theater of Red Army by director A.D. Popov, and in 1938 in M. Gorky Rostov Academic Drama Theatre by director Yu. Zavadsky, was a crucial point in further development of Shakespeare's comedies by Soviet theater. In these

productions the directors have truly put together two different introductions of Shakespeare's comedy and selected a realistic way of the performance of the play. They considered the work of the great playwright in terms of contemporary understanding and were able to convey the phenomenon and characters of Shakespeare's time in modern image. This brought a lot of difficulties in transformation of such comedy as "The Taming of the Shrew", where apparently there is an echo of the past (Kundakbaev, 2006).

So, O. Pyzhova and B. Bibikov decided immediately after that to produce the play on Kazakh stage and they were aware of this fact. However, they were not influenced by the previous two productions. Instead, they wanted to find a key to reveal the idea in Shakespeare's comedy. So, a new version of the play "The Taming of the Shrew" with a unique tint emerged on Kazakh stage. However, modern viewer might not clearly see the compositional link between initial phase and the main idea of the play.

Thus, the directors were well aware that, in this work, Shakespeare, first of all, tried to reveal the true image of aristocrats of that time, and they paid special importance to that particular part of the play. The well-known theater director N. Sats has also given such assessment to the performance. In the article published on 17, November, 1943, in the newspaper "Kazakhstanskaya Pravda", she wrote that "the performance "The Taming of the Shrew" at Kazakh Academic Drama Theatre is equivalent to a new page of the golden book of Soviet art". Reviewer properly noticed that "in the performance Petruchio tamed Katarina not to humiliate her, but rather to formulate her self-dignity. As a result, the proud, spoiled and flighty Katherine becomes a beloved wife, and faithful companion. Despite the fact that, in her obstinacy she loses to the spouse, she finally reaches the family happiness, based on a deep mutual respect. So, the storyline has been well revealed". As the author of the article notes, the performance is devoid of subtext and falsehood (History of Kazakh theatre, 1987).

## Discussion and Conclusion

We agree that the new version of the play "The Taming of the Shrew" was a simple and meaningful story in terms of essence and style. Actors in their native language, preserving inner flame, which is inherent only to the art of Kazakh people, in peculiar manner reminded wandering theater actors in ancient England (Nurpeis, 2014). The same idea was deeply outlined by N.I. Lvov (1954): "Directors following K. Stanislavsky's technique, did not impose contrived *mise en scenes* to the actors, they just explained to them the nature and essence of each image and then aroused their creative initiative in search for means of expression".

All of this suggests that undoubtedly, this performance has become a great success of Kazakh theatrical art (Sokolowsky, 1939). The secret of success of the play "The Taming of the Shrew" which was shown on Kazakh scene for over forty years, raised interest among researchers of the theatre. We consider that in those years, the main principle was the actors' improvisational feature. Thanks to this, the troupe was able to preserve the live image of the play. From this perspective, it was similar to a single and always developing organism. Actors' improvisation showed that each of them has deeply thinking and



searching for ways of image development. Due to this fact, every year the performance was continually updated and changed.

We have already mentioned that the young Kazakh actors were able to the deeper reveal of the content of Shakespeare's tragedy. Their performance was evaluated by renowned expert on acting skills D.G. Livnev (2012): "Creation of the image which means transformation in theater of school of "feelings"- is the process of merging of actor's psychophysical material with role material, written by playwright and veiled by the director and the actor. This fusion emerges regardless of the technique which the actor uses - from the actor to the role or vice versa - as a result of transition of the actor to a new quality".

From this perspective, we can pick out the actor of the second cast K. Badyrov, who made a special effort to make his character as much similar to Othello as possible. He achieved this due to a long preparation for the role. According to the actor, from the very beginning, he inwardly prepared himself for a new image (Lvov, 1957). Having such emotional attitude to the role, K. Badyrov was able to penetrate deeper into the image of a diversified character. He showed Othello as a military leader and statesman, humanist, a man who was constantly fighting for the truth. He was able to present the image of the character as it was described by A. Pushkin: "Othello is not jealous by nature - on the contrary: he is trustfull" (History of Kazakh theatre, 1975).

Therefore, the stage director M. Sokolovsky in his article published in the newspaper "Kazakhstanskaya Pravda" on the eve of the premiere, has accepted the following: "In the first cast Y. Umurzakov, who is fast, energetic, strong-willed Othello, assuming a brave artistic comparison, echoes in his work with famous romantic actor E. Keane; and in the second cast K. Badyrov creates Othello's character in soft and lyrical tones which are close to Ostuzhev's. Bright and unexpected image of evil cynic Iago - under the guise of a simple man - was created by S. Kozhamkulov in the first cast; competing with him, K. Karmysov acted a clever slicker and flatterer in the second cast" (Kundakbaev, 1997).

Theater critic N.I. Lvov (1957) doesn't agree with this conclusion. He said that M. Sokolovsky made wrong evaluation of the performers of the first cast, and haven't noticed major shortcomings of their acting. According to his opinion, the actors of the older generation, who excellently acted everyday life of Kazakh people, could not find themselves in "Othello".

To sum up, we can say that Kazakh theater which gained confidence and stimulus from such successful production as "The Taming of the Shrew" in the years after World War II, paid special attention to the development of world classical works.

So, "Mistress of the Inn" by C. Goldoni (1947), as well as the play of James Gow and Arnold d'Yusson "Deep Roots" (1948) have been produced. In the fifties the theater's repertoire was enriched by such plays as "The Miser" by Jean-Baptiste Moliere (1952), "The Curious Case" by Carlo Goldoni (1954). In subsequent years, the following drama works have been produced: "Dog in the Manger" by Lope de Vega (1962), "The Forgotten Man" by Nazim Hikmet (1965), "Don Juan, or Love to geometry" by Max Frisch (1968), "The House of Bernarda Alba" by Garcia Lorca (1974), "Stepdaughter" by Luigi Pirandello (1975), "Richard III» by William Shakespeare (1976), "Today is a holiday" by Antonio Vallejo, "My Love Electra" by Laszlo Durko (1979), "Then - silence" by Vina Delmar (1981), "Farhad and Shirin" by Nazim Hikmet, "Mademoiselle Nitouche"

by Florimond Evreux. All these works have made an immeasurable contribution to the development and prosperity of Kazakh theater.

In conclusion, it should be noted, that since its formation, thanks to world's classics, Kazakh theater gained invaluable professional experience. It was not easy for young directors and actors. They faced many obstacles along the way.

On the one hand, one of the main problems was the fact, that it is difficult to translate plays from foreign languages into the Kazakh language, preserving the style and poetics of the author, and on the other hand, in director's interpretations, the atmosphere and national identity of the original and the country where the action took place, were lost.

### Implications and Recommendations

The paper describes the features of work of Kazakh theater troupes under the guidance of the Russian directors. The research doesn't exhaust the current scientific problem. Thus, the submissions may be useful for art historians for their future investigations on the Kazakh theater development and the influence of Russian culture on this process.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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