

Meyerhold to Chekhov

May 8, 1904
(Lopatino)

Dear Anton Pavlovich:

... Next year my company will play in Tiflis. Come to see us, because we have grown in an artistic sense. We do *The Cherry Orchard* well. After I saw it at the Moscow Art Theatre, I wasn't ashamed of our production. I did not altogether like the performance in Moscow. In general.

I want to say this. When some author with his genius stirs a theatre to life, then he understands the secret of performing his plays, finds the key ... If the author begins to perfect his technique, gets to the top of his profession, the theatre only loses this key, because it is an association of creators and consequently more cumbersome. The Deutsches Theater in Berlin, for example, has lost the key to performing Hauptmann's plays; the great tragicomedy *Der rote Hahn, Schluck und Jau*, and *Der arme Heinrich* were failures. It seems to me that the Art Theatre was confused when it tackled your *Cherry Orchard*.

Your play is abstract, like a Tchaikovsky symphony. The stage director must above all feel it with his ear. In the third act, against the background of the stupid "stomping"—this "stomping" must be heard—Horror enters unnoticed by anyone.

"The cherry orchard is sold." They dance. "Sold." They dance. And so to the end. When one reads the play, the third act makes the same kind of impression as the ringing in the sick man's ears in your story *Typhus*. Some kind of itch. Gaiety in which sounds of death are heard. In this act there is something Maeterlinck-like, frightful. I only use this comparison because I'm incapable of saying it more precisely. You are incomparable in your great work. When one reads plays by foreign authors you appear particularly original. In drama the West should learn from you.

In the Moscow Art Theatre one did not get such an impression

from the third act. The background was not concentrated enough and at the same time not remote enough. In the forefront: the story with the billiard cue and the tricks. Separately. All this did not form a chain of "stomping." And in the meantime all the "dancing" people are unconcerned and do not sense the harm. The tempo of this act was too slow in the Art Theatre. They wanted to convey boredom. That's a mistake. One must picture unconcern. There's a difference. Unconcern is more active. Then the tragedy of the act becomes more concentrated.

Now to particulars: Lopakhin, the Servant, Duniasha, Varia, and Ania were badly acted.

Moskvin and Stanislavski were excellent [as Epikhodov and Gaev].

Firs is not at all like that.

A striking landscape from a decorative standpoint in the second act. . . .

Your warmly loving,
Vs. Meyerhold.

—*Translated by* NORA BEESON