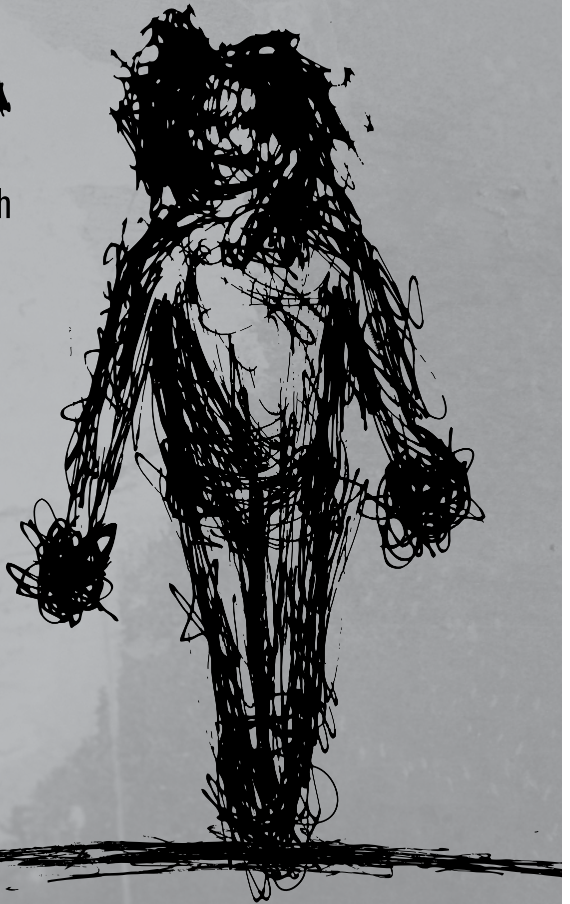
the natasha plays

i won and natasha's dream



By Yaroslava Pulinovich

Translated by John Freedman

In the Dreyer MFA Studio
May 3rd, 4th, and 5th At 7:00pm

Towson University's Department of Theatre Arts will present an entire season of contemporary Russian drama in 09–10, developed in collaboration with The Center for International Theatre Development, Philip Arnoult, director.

www.newrussiandrama.org

NEW RUSSIAN DRAMA
VOICES IN A SHIFTING AGE

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Towson University MFA Program in Theatre Arts, in association with the Center for International Theatre Development, presents

The Natasha Plays

I Won

and

Natasha's Dream

By Yaroslava Pulinovich
Translated by John Freedman

Director	Stephen Nunns

Cast

Natasha Vernikova (*I Won*)	Sarah Lloyd
Natasha Banina (*Natasha's Dream*)	Julia M. Smith

Production Staff

Production Design	Andrea Crnkovic and Eric Nightengale
Lighting Design	Justin Van Hassel and Eric Nightengale
Costume Design	Rebecca Eastman
Portrait Photography	Karen Houppert
Stage Manager	Stacey Blanc
Technical Director	Justin Van Hassel
Properties	Stacie Blanc
Production Management for the Towson University Russia Season	Cat Hagner
Dramaturg for the Towson University Russia Season	Robyn Quick
Running crew	Andrea Crnkovic
Dramaturgy Team	Qituwra Anderson, April Baldwin, Abby Grimsley, Lauren Guy, Rachel Harrell, and Kate Lilley

The director would like to thank: Katie Stike; Beau Peregino; Cat Hagner; Andrea Crnkovic; Jay Herzog; Robyn Quick; Tony Rosas; Rebecca Eastman; Justin Van Hassel; Eric Nightengale; Stacey Blanc; Joseph Ritsch; Karen Houppert; Zack (Petya) Nunns; John Freedman; Maksym Kurochkin; and Philip Arnoult and the Center for International Theatre Development.

And, of course, Sarah and Julia.

The New Russian Drama Season

By the end of the 1990s, young people who were raised in the Soviet Union and discovering themselves as adults amidst the promise and chaos of a society undergoing a similar process of discovery, started bringing their unique generational perspectives to the stage. In a wave of writing that was soon dubbed "new drama," playwrights created work that blends frank discussions of contemporary social issues with bold experiments in theatrical style. For much of the twentieth century, such writing was not seen on stage in Russia. Dramatic texts were censored and only theatrical production could hint at a potential critical spirit or individual sentiment beneath the approved language. Thus the new drama rang out a startling and inspiring note to fellow Russians. The playwrights have been greeted by their peers as the heroes of a new era who are following in long line of Russian literary figures by bringing new artistic vision to the 21st century in much the same way that authors like Anton Chekhov spoke to the dawn of the 20th century. Throughout the first decade of the 21st century, playwrights like Maksym Kurochkin, Yury Klavdiev, Olga Mukhina and Vyacheslav Durnenkov, have continued to create diverse and compelling visions of life in this shifting age.

For students and audiences in the United States, those visions offer an exciting experience of a life that is at once familiar and unknown. The search to find one's true path amidst a deluge of conflicting influences, the struggle to create a new community when the one we were promised unexpectedly and cruelly dissolves, the longing for a love that continually eludes our grasp – these narratives will resonate for us in the sardonic wit of Kurochkin, the vibrant imagery of Klavdiev, the lyrical poetry of Mukhina and the idiosyncratic characters of Durnenkov. Yet the plays also take us into everyday experiences of people whose lives most of us have not had the opportunity to encounter. Given the historic tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States, as well as the environment of misunderstanding that still permeates our country's relationship with Russia, insights we might gain about this culture from the plays seem particularly timely and necessary.

The desire to engage with these plays, and through them with the people and the culture that created them, gave birth to our New Russian Drama Project. Inspired by the work of Philip Arnoult's Center for International Theatre Development, which has been building bridges between theatre artists in the U.S. and Russia for over a decade, students and faculty in the Department of Theatre Arts have been learning about contemporary Russian theatre and its people for the last three years. Seven members of the theatre faculty visited Russia. We attended performances, we conversed with fellow artists, and, yes, we even drank a little vodka. Over that time we developed this project in collaboration with CITD and partners in Russia, Moscow Times Arts Editor John Freedman and director Yury Urnov. In order to help bring new Russian drama to audiences in the United States, we commissioned translations of new plays. We studied the work in classes and brought in guest artists from Russia – including Yury Urnov, who is here as a Fulbright scholar for the entire school year. In the spring, CITD will host a professional conference at the university.

Yet the plays, of course, are designed to live before an audience. We're delighted to have you join us for a performance we have called The Natasha Plays, after the name of the protagonist in both featured works, *I Won* and *Natasha's Dream*. The playwright, Yaroslava Pulinovich, is among the youngest voices bringing the experience of a new generation to the Russian stage. *Natasha's Dream* was first seen by Moscow audiences in full production less than three months ago. The companion piece, *I Won*, appears before an audience for the first time in tonight's workshop production featuring artists from our MFA program. We hope this encounter with contemporary plays from Russia will make you curious to learn more about the experiences of people in that country. The notes in this program, our website, and our post show discussions may help to start you on that journey. There's much to discover. . .

Robyn Quick
Associate Professor, Department of Theatre Arts
Russia Season Dramaturg

The New Russian Drama Season 2009–2010

Towson University's Department of Theatre Arts will present an entire season of contemporary Russian drama in 09–10, developed in collaboration with The Center for International Theatre Development, Philip Arnoult, director.

www.newrussiandrama.org For Reservations call 410-704-ARTS

Main Stage Productions

Tanya-Tanya

By Olga Mukhina
Adapted by Kate Moira Ryan
Directed by Yury Urnov
In the Studio Theatre

December 4th and 5th at 8pm
December 6th at 2pm
December 9th and 10th at 7:30pm
December 11th and 12th at 8pm

Martial Arts

By Yury Klavdiev
Translated by David M. White
with Yury Urnov
Directed by Yury Urnov
and Stephen Nunns
In the Marder Theatre

April 21st and 22nd at 7:30pm
April 23rd at 8pm
April 24th at 2pm and 8pm
April 25th at 2:pm
April 26th and 27th at 7:30pm

Frozen in Time

By Vyacheslav Durnenkov
Translated by John Freedman
Directed by Peter Wray
In the Main Stage Theatre

April 30th at 8pm
May 1st at 8pm
May 2nd at 2pm
May 5th and 6th at 7:30pm
May 7th and 8th at 8pm

Workshop Productions

Vodka, F***ing, and Television

By Maksym Kurochkin
Translated by John Hanlon
Directed by Stephen Nunns
In the Dreyer MFA Studioe

October 21st and 22nd at 7:30pm
October 23rd and 24th at 8pm

The Polar Truth

By Yury Klavdiev
Translated by John Freedman
Directed by Joseph Ritsch
In the Marder Theatre

November 12th at 7:30pm
November 13th and 14th at 8pm

The Natasha Plays: I Won and Natasha's Dream

By Yaroslava Pulinovich
Translated by John Freedman
Directed by Stephen Nunns
In the Dreyer MFA Studio

February 3rd and 4th at 7:30pm
May 3rd, 4th, and 5th At 7pm

Staged Readings

Playing Dead

By The Presnyakov Brothers
Translated by Juanita Rockwell
with Yury Urnov Directed by Yury Urnov
In the Main Stage Theatre

November 16th at 7:30pm

The Schooling of Bento Bonchev

By Maksym Kurochkin
Translated by John Freedman
Directed by Yury Urnov
In the Studio Theatre

February 3rd at 5 pm

Associated Productions

Workshop production of

I Am the Machine Gunner

By Yury Klavdiev
Translated by John Freedman
Produced by Generous Company
At Towson University

Friday, December 4th at 6pm
Saturday, December 5th at 3pm
Sunday, December 6th at Noon

www.generouscompany.org/machinegunner

Playing Dead

By the Presnyakov Brothers
Translated by Juanita Rockwell
with Yury Urnov Produced by Single Carrot Theatre

February 17th – March 14th

www.singlecarrot.com

Reading of Tanya-Tanya

By Olga Mukhina
Adapted by Kate Moira Ryan
Directed by Yury Urnov
Produced by New York Theatre Workshop

October 8th

A Conversation with the Translator

MFA student Cat Hagner speaks with John Freedman about the translation of The Natasha Plays. **John Freedman**, theater critic of The Moscow Times, has published nine books on Russian theater. His play translations have been performed in the United States, Australia and Canada. He is the Russia director of The New Russian Drama Project.

CH: In addition to being the translator of the plays, you also brought the Natasha Plays to the attention to the director. What is your experience with Yaroslava Pulinovich's work?

JF: It's almost impossible for me to have had much of an experience with Pulinovich's work up to now. She is 22 and, for all intents and purposes, has just appeared on the scene. That is, she started making a mark at play festivals in Yekaterinburg when she was 17 or 18. And there was a stir when she came to the New Drama Festival in Moscow in 2008. I heard her name being mentioned around. One day I was walking down the street in central Moscow and I saw Yury Klavdiev coming my way with a young woman in tow. We hailed each other and he said, "Here, John, I want you to meet the newest genius among Russian playwrights. This is Yaroslava Pulinovich."

But it was really only late in 2009 that I had a genuine opportunity to engage, and be engaged by, Pulinovich's work. Her monologue *Natasha's Dream* opened in mid-November in a production at the Playwright and Director Center in Moscow and I was quite impressed. Earlier in the year I had learned that Noah Birksted-Breen was planning to include this play in his Russian Theater Festival at his Sputnik Theater in London. So these kinds of things sort of work on your mind.

I think it was just one or two days after I attended the Moscow opener of *Natasha's Dream* that Stephen Nunns wrote me and said that, for various reasons, we needed to add a new piece to our Russian season. Did I have any suggestions? Well, that was easy. I said, "I just saw a really interesting piece. Why don't we try it?" Then when I contacted Pulinovich for permission, she said, "I've got this mirror-image monologue that goes along with *Natasha's Dream*. I just published it. Maybe you'd like to look at it, too?"

So we did and we decided to do both. And there you have an exhaustive explanation of just about everything that connects me to Pulinovich and her work so far. I suspect the future holds plenty more encounters.

CH: In what ways does her work resonate with Russian audiences?

JF: For obvious reasons the answer to this cannot be expansive. There simply have not been many opportunities yet for audiences to respond to her. Pavel Rudnev, one of Russia's best critics and a member of the Russian board for the Towson Russian season, points to Pulinovich's light, optimistic outlook. "She fearlessly looks the world in the eyes and accepts its best and worst aspects with joy and enthusiasm,"* he wrote about her a year before her Moscow debut.

Pulinovich herself wrote to me at one point that these are two plays "about how not to bring up young people."

I would hazard to say that her two young heroines provide subtle but accurate portraits of many young women in Russia today. I find it interesting that in her diptych of monologues she took on two opposites - one a well-adjusted, well-off high school student; the other a kid from a failed family who now lives in an orphanage. The fact of the matter is that these vastly different young women in completely different

circumstances struggle with the same demons. For all their differences, these plays are the retelling of one and the same story. The girls' culture, their society, their peers all expect them to be cool, to be on top of things, to be in control, to be nonchalant about everything, especially about those things that are closest to their hearts, and, therefore, the most unnerving.

My point is this: I suspect many young Russian women today would recognize their own lives in these portraits. They would understand the obstacles and pressures that Pulinovich's two Natashas face. I think these small plays provide accurate pictures of a troubled society and of the vulnerable young people who are growing up in it. Let's wait a few years and we'll see how close I am to being right.

CH: How do you feel the monologues will resonate with an American audience?

JF: Well, how much does what I said about Russia fit the United States? What kinds of pressures are young people, young women, put under every day, every minute in the U.S.? I think you'll find that these things are universal. Yes, Pulinovich is writing specifically about Russians. In fact, she's writing about Russians from a provincial city, a place that, by definition, is a little backward, that probably suffers from a collective inferiority complex, that doesn't offer a whole lot of opportunities. But if you look closely, you will see that the meat of these works involves what is shared by all people - the longing for love, a fear of insecurity, a desire to justify one's own view of, and place in, the world.

These things sound banal when you list them in a sentence. But that's what artists are for. When a good artist takes them on, embroiders them in his or her own way with personal flourishes - then you reach that point when the usual becomes the uncommon, when the obvious becomes a revelation. Somehow I don't doubt that young Americans will see themselves in these plays every bit as much as a Russian audience would.

CH: Did the young age of the characters present an additional challenge to translating the plays?

JF: Are you implying that many decades have passed since I was the age of these characters? If so, you would be right. But do you realize that all of us continue to see ourselves as teenagers throughout our whole lives? Or, maybe, I should speak for myself. Whatever the case, as I have said already, these plays, in essence, are about things that every human being knows and has experienced. As a translator, I felt as though I slipped under the skin of the two young women fairly easily. By saying that I'm not providing a value judgment of my work, I am merely saying I felt entirely comfortable existing inside the heads and the worlds of the two Natashas. I have no mirrors in my study, so there was nothing to remind me that I was really stretching it to feel that way.

CH: Do male and female teenagers differ in their language choices in Russian?

JF: Yes, of course. I don't think that will come of much surprise to anyone. I would say this, however, that young Russian women have begun taking on some of the mannerisms, linguistic and behavioral, of their male counterparts. It's not that big a deal (not all that big, anyway) to hear young Russian women cussing, as Russians might say, "like shoemakers." I have a "friend" on Facebook, a young Russian woman, whose choice of words and topics would probably have been the exclusive domain of a young man 20 or so years ago, when she was born. These things are undergoing major changes right now.

A Conversation with the Translator (cont)

A sign of this merging of the two voices, male and female, is contained in the first lines of *Natasha's Dream*. Natasha aggressively addresses the audience with a rather vulgar, shall we say, obscene suggestion. That isn't, to use an old-fashioned phrase, proper talk for a young lady. In her situation, however, she sees nothing wrong with it. She even feels compelled to set any doubters straight - "I'm not cussing," she says. "Those are regular words."

That said, however, the twain has not yet met between the languages spoken by young Russian women and young Russian men. These plays are not nearly as "rude" as they might be if they were written by males about males. You can feel the Natashas - and some of the other female characters - appropriating "male" language in an attempt to be tough or particularly expressive. But when left to their own devices, they are more likely than not to avoid violating certain linguistic taboos.

CH: How did you address the challenge of understanding the Russian teenage slang and finding the US equivalent?

JF: On one level you are posing a simple question about what I do and do not know. On another level, you are addressing a problem that has a very technical solution.

What I know, I know by force of having lived in Russia for over 20 years, by hearing people (young and old) speak next to me in the subway, in theaters, on park benches, on my own sofa in my living room, in the editorial offices of the newspaper where I work, on television, in movies. It's amazing what you acquire in situations like that. Your passive knowledge is exponentially greater than your active knowledge. So it isn't all that often that a playwright can throw a phrase at me that I haven't heard and haven't had an opportunity to think about. Not that it doesn't happen. But when it does - and here we come to the second aspect of your question - you simply go to the source. And that is what I did with Pulinovich. After achieving rough drafts of each play, I sent her emails, each containing about 20 requests for clarification. Many of them involved the characters' speech patterns and choices. Yaroslava provided excellent, explanatory answers and then I went to work looking for American English equivalents.

I had the luxury of being present with Stephen Nunns, Julia M. Smith and Sarah Lloyd at their first readings of the plays in December. I came in with questions about phrases I was unsure of and I asked them to weigh in. When we came to trouble spots, I asked the actors, "What would you say in this situation?" They had some very good ideas - very funny ones - and several of their responses went into the final texts. When you get to "purple nurple" in *Natasha's Dream*, for example, you can thank Julia for the laughs that's bound to get. Stephen and I cracked up at that one. It blew away all the competition for that phrase!

*Rudnev, Pavel. "New Drama No. 8. Natasha's Dream. Yaroslava Pulinovich." *Topos*. 29 May 2009. Web. 17 Jan. 2010.

About the Playwright

Yaroslava Pulinovich was born in Omsk, Russia, and lived there until she was eight years old. As the author herself puts it, “then my parents left for the far north and took me with them.” When she turned 16 she went to Yekaterinburg to study. By the time she was 18, she had won her first award as a playwright. Between 2007 and 2009, while studying playwriting under the famous writer and educator Nikolai Kolyada, Pulinovich published six plays in the journal *Ural*. Now 22, she has created something of a sensation on the Russian theatre scene with readings at events such as the New Drama Festival and productions at theatres including Moscow’s Playwright and Director Center and the Kiselev Young Spectator Theatre in Saratov. In the fall of 2008, she won the debut literary prize in playwriting. By 2009, she had received a commission from the Royal Shakespeare Company. The play she created for that theatre, *Beyond the Track*, was produced as part of their Russian Season in September 2009. Her other plays include *I Won’t Come Back* and a play written with Pavel Kazantsev, *Washers*, which won the Grand Prize at the Kolyada Play Festival in Yekaterinburg. Pulinovich and Kazantsev also collaborated on the screenplay for a comedy about youth in Russia, *How to Catch a Shoplifter*.

The first staged reading of *Natasha’s Dream* was presented at the Kiselev Young Spectator Theatre in February of 2009. Critic Oleg Loevsky noted that in this performance, “with the text by Yaroslava Pulinovich from Yekaterinburg and the work of the actress Olga Lysenko from Saratov and the director Dmitry Egorov from St. Petersburg the soul substance which is beyond our views on theatre and life was created. This is the reason for people to work in theatre” (Performances). In November 2009, Pulinovich received her Moscow premiere with a full production of *Natasha’s Dream* at the Playwright and Director Center. The play, as translated by Noah Birksted-Breen, director of London’s Sputnik theatre, is being presented in England at the Russian Theater Festival in February 2010. The production at Towson University, in a new translation by John Freedman, marks the first performance of *Natasha’s Dream* in the United States and the first presentation anywhere of its companion piece, *I Won*.

“Performances: *Natasha’s Dream*.” Saratov Academic Kiselev Youth Theatre. Web. 19 Jan. 2010.

Notes on the World of the Play

The Natasha Plays provide a glimpse into two very different experiences of youth in contemporary Russia. Each young woman's sense of herself in the world is shaped in large part by the environment in which she has been raised. The following essays provide further exploration of these contrasting visions of life in Russia.

Parents' Protection and Children's Success

The early and middle 1990s were tumultuous years for citizens of the newly formed Russian Federation. A series of political coups, the collapse of the nation's economy and an increasingly powerful system of organized crime had devastating effects on the country. Life expectancy dropped, as did the birth rate, and some found it impossible to survive. Many of those who brought children into the world during this period were unable to provide for them, and the number of children who were homeless or relegated to state institutional care rose. But those parents who managed to provide a stable life for their young families were also marked by this drastically changing world. As the children born during this period now reach the later years of high school, social observers report new trends in parenting among people who started families in the early years of the Ru sian Federation and corresponding attitudes and behaviors among their offspring that distinguish many of these children, even from their slightly older peers born near the end of the Soviet Union.

In an article identifying the tendency of contemporary Russia parents to be "hyperprotective" of their children, reporter Fred Weir suggests the social, political and economic instability of the 1990s as a primary reason for this attitude. Media reports of crimes against children also seem to feed parents' fears for their children's safety. Marina Bityanova, head of the Tchka Psi psychological center in Moscow says that many contemporary Russian parents see the world as a potentially dangerous place for their children: "They have deep-seated fears, which they consider very well-grounded" (Weir). As a result, the children are not given much freedom and parents carefully monitor activities outside the home, such as walking to school, using public transportation or visiting their friends. According to Bityanova, "Possibly their surveillance is excessive, but this is the typical Russian reaction. Parents worry that their children may not be able to cope with all the uncertainties and dangers that are out there" (Weir). Weir notes that such attitudes seem particular to the country's middle class, "for whom a modicum of economic well-being is a new and fragile development."

The experiences that many parents of teenagers faced earlier in their lives may also play a significant factor in the way that they prepare their children for adulthood and in the values and life choices of those children. In 2006, the St. Petersburg Humanities University of Trade Unions and the Social Information Agency conducted a study of students in the 10th and 11th grades. These surveys found parents taking an increasingly active role in "the *process of the socialization of their children, and orienting them toward life strategies and values that are more stable and less dependent on social and political changes*" (8 – 9). One life strategy emphasized by many parents is the pursuit of a college

degree. The value of higher education for families can be seen, among other places, in the increasing numbers of parents who are willing to pay for tutors to help prepare their children for college. Nearly 40% of the young people in the survey were studying with tutors – a practice considered crucial to one's placement in college, even for the most academically gifted students. Such spending on education, once reserved for the elite, has now spread to a broader portion of society.

For their part, teenagers echo their parents' attitudes about their education. In recent years, the prestige of higher education has increased among young people, and they are willing to invest in the strategies necessary to ensure educational and career opportunities. As a result, they spend a great deal of their leisure time attending special courses and taking lessons from tutors (8 – 9). Unlike their parents, who generally selected a specialization in their education, today's teenagers have been encouraged to master a number of specialties, resulting in a broad-based education that prepares them to adapt to a changing world (10 – 11). By and large, their attention within this world seems to be focused on their personal goals and achievements, or, what scholar Aleksandr Zapesotskii calls "individually significant objectives," rather than "socially significant objectives" (17). Unlike previous generations of Russians, these teenages express little concern for social and political problems. Instead, as Zapesotskii puts it, "high social status has been shifted into the sphere of private accomplishments and success in the private sphere: family, career, financial stability, and friendly interaction" (16).

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Robyn Quick
Russia Season Dramaturg

Russian Orphanges

Throughout the play *Natasha's Dream*, by Yaroslava Pulinovich, evidence of overcrowding, abuse by staff members, and poor living conditions in Russian orphanages is unmistakable. Over the past decade, reports by human rights organizations and stories in the press have documented a series of problems in these institutions.

The precise number of besprizorniki, or homeless children, may be as high as two to five million, according to a State Committee for Statistics report. At least 800,000 of them are officially recognized by the government as orphans or "social orphans" – children with living parents who are not able to care for them due to circumstances such as illness or incarceration (Prisiazhnaia 23 – 4). Parents of children born with disabilities may also be convinced that the children should be sent to state institutions (Feifer).

According to media reports, many institutions are ill-equipped to deal with the numbers of children in their care. Some facilities can provide only one toilet for every twenty orphans (Lowry). Limited resources also lead to malnutrition among residents of some orphanages (DeLaine). The treatment of children may also be influenced by the ways in which they are classified. Children that have physical conditions such as cleft palate, speech impediment, cross eyes, or dislocated hips may be presumed to have mental defects as well. Once they are housed in orphanages, children deemed mentally impaired generally receive limited education and insufficient medical care for their needs. Those with physical disabilities that limit their mobility may be sent to "lying down" rooms, where they spend most of their time (Lowry).

While the living conditions in many orphanages may have seriously detrimental effects on the physical health and well being of their residents, the administration of those institutions marks the children's sense of self in the world. Sociologist Margarita Astoiants studied the effect of routine daily practices in orphanages on the attitudes and behavior of residents. According to Astoiants, children in these institutions have very limited contact with the outside world and minimal sense of privacy or individuality.

Typically, the children are educated at the institution where they reside. Therefore, they have little opportunity to interact with their peers or others outside the orphanage. Astoiants reports that exceptionally good behavior or a close relationship with a staff member may result in a desired excursion outside the facility. Others attempt to connect with the world outside by running away from the orphanage. Running away is considered a serious infraction by the staff. Punishment can range from a simple reprimand, for a first offense, to time spent in an isolation facility. Further attempts to escape might lead a child to have his or her head shaved or to be treated with tranquilizers. Those residents considered the most troublesome, like those with physical disabilities, might be judged to have mental deficiencies, which could result in a transfer to a more restrictive institution and a life-long label that inhibits future educational opportunities (34 – 6).

In contrast to the isolation that may serve as a punishment for infractions such as running away from the orphanage, residents typically have minimal opportunity for privacy. In the institution that Astoiants studied, children live in rooms shared by 4 – 6 children. The doors to shared toilet facilities are generally left open. Residents take baths

in groups once a week in a separate part of the institution (32 – 3). As a result of this lifestyle, they develop a sense of "social ownership" in which they come to believe that they have access to anything or anyone they encounter (25). At the same time, they crave any opportunity to express individuality or claim personal space. Female residents, in particular, try to show individuality in their clothing. Since the institution's budget does not provide for cosmetics and other items associated with personal decoration, such objects are highly regarded by the orphans. They will also treasure any personal item, such as a picture from their family of origin, because little in their life provides them with any sense of a life separate from the others in the institution (37 – 8). As Astoiants puts it, "A child living in a children's home does not have anything of his own, anything by which he might assert his existence in the world" (25).

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Tim Lorch
Senior, Theatre Arts

The Journey of Russian Orphans' Lives

Depending on age and severity of disabilities or birth defects, orphaned children in Russia are placed in state run institutions that provide them with a place to live and receive an education. But the overcrowded facilities and limitations of staff and resources may create conditions, which affect their development in social, behavioral, physical and mental skills. For many children, the journey through this institutional system begins in maternity hospitals, where young orphaned babies may be misdiagnosed with disabilities that mark them as "untouchables" within the Russian community. If abandoned by parents at the hospitals or given over to state care through institutions, these children, as well as those whose parents are unavailable or unable to raise them for other reasons, are placed in Baby Homes. Such facilities provide locations for orphaned babies to reside and be looked after from infancy to the age of four, where they are either adopted, reunited with their parents, or transferred to Children's Homes, or to "Internats" ("Baby" 20). These institutions provide care for orphaned children from the ages of 4 to 16 or 18 ("Baby" 22).

Children's Homes lack the capacity to house the increasing number of orphans and therefore, once orphans reach the age of 16 to 18 they are made to leave the orphanage and begin leading their own lives. The displaced orphans go out into the world having had no experience of how to live independently or interact properly with others. The education they receive in these schools is often not equivalent to what their peers outside the institution receive. Some of these young adult orphans resort to prostitution to survive. Those who become pregnant and cannot support a child, may be left with no option but to place the child in an orphanage, thus feeding the growing cycle of "social orphans," or orphans with a living parent in Russia. In addition to turning to prostitution for survival, young adult orphans also fall victim to alcohol and drug abuse, participate in criminal gangs, or commit suicide with very few living normal, healthy lives (Feifer). Statistics show that 40% of the orphans that leave Children Homes after coming "of age" become drug and alcohol addicts, another 40% become involved in criminal activities, 10% commit suicide and the last 10% struggle to live healthy and productive lives (Stables 1).

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The Drama of the New Russia

Russia in the first decade of the century has done little to change the world's perception that it is a riddle wrapped in a mystery.

After a period of comparative irrelevance in the 1990s, Russia once again is a major player in international politics. Its leadership and influence is felt in virtually every key issue facing the global community. It is a nation whose leaders have learned to talk "democracy and freedom" as skillfully as any.

This all happened, meanwhile, as Russian authorities closed down independent news outlets; looked the other way when prominent "dissenting" journalists and politicians were murdered; provided tacit support to nationalist thugs; and found ways to jail or silence business leaders and social activists who dared to disagree with government policy.

Will the real Russia please stand up?

In fact, one generation of Russians – or, more precisely, a group of playwrights from that generation – has already stepped forward. These individuals were teenagers or pre-teens when Mikhail Gorbachev sought to reform the Communist Party, and entered their 20s while Boris Yeltsin led Russia through awkward battles with poverty, corruption and infrastructural collapse. They attained personal and professional maturity in their 30s as Vladimir Putin established social stability and presided over the onset of affluence and a contingent spiritual stagnation. They continue to create as Dmitry Medvedev leads Russia through the global financial crisis and struggles with hidden dilemmas left over from all the previous eras put together.

These writers, of which we selected six to participate in the **New Russian Drama: Voices in a Shifting Age** project, were instrumental in raising the status of Russian drama to heights unheard of for decades. Each of their compelling voices stands alone, and their visions are unique. They are not members of any club or movement, but taken together, they offer striking examples of a nation struggling – often clumsily, often cruelly, but always sincerely – to renew itself. Moreover, they represent the diversity of contemporary Russian drama not only in style, but in geography and background.

Olga Mukhina grew up in Russia's Far North in a family of geologists but reflects Moscow's ultra urban sensibility. Vyacheslav Durnenkov and Yury Klavdiev grew up in working neighborhoods in the tough southern city of Togliatti, occasionally known as the "Russian Detroit." Klavdiev, incidentally, has relocated to St. Petersburg and is arguably now that cosmopolitan city's most progressive playwright. The Presnyakov brothers, both of them university professors, hail from Yekaterinburg in the Ural Mountains region, a genuine hotbed for gritty new dramatists. Maksym Kurochkin, educated as an ethnologist and historian, was born and grew up in Kiev, Ukraine. Yaroslava Pulinovich, the youngest of the batch at 22 years old, also hails from Yekaterinburg and is a former playwriting student of the famous Nikolai Kolyada.

All have been translated into the major languages of the world and produced throughout Europe and the New World.

Russian writers are not as overtly political as some of their counterparts in the United

The Drama of New Russia (cont)

States, but that does not mean they avoid issues of political and social significance. On the contrary, Klavdiev, Durnenkov and the Presnyakovs all deal in one way or another with the corrosion and breakdown of social norms, a painful process that inevitably leads to confusion, chaos and violence. The plays of Kurochkin and Mukhina, in vastly divergent ways, reflect the paralysis that plagues cultured people as the world changes and tosses ever new challenges at them. Pulinovich offers a uniquely personal vision of what it is like for young women, specifically, to grow up in a Russian provincial city in the early 21st century.

Anyone wanting to know where Russia stands today and where it might head in the future would be well advised to take note of what these and other Russian playwrights are saying. We live in an age when Russian newspapers and television are telling only part of their nation's story. In the arts, poets and prose writers have slipped into the background. The film industry has been in a state of flux and crisis for over two decades.

Not surprisingly, theater and drama have emerged as the most vital and responsive media of social discourse and communication. Thanks to Mukhina, Klavdiev, Durnenkov, Kurochkin, Pulinovich and the Presnyakovs, the mystery that is Russia has become a little less enigmatic.

John Freedman
Theater Critic, The Moscow Times

Translating Russia for America

I once met a man who could not understand why anyone would need more than one translation of *War and Peace*. "It's just words transposed into English," he said incredulously. "Once it's done it's done."

It is probable that everyone reading these notes – written, after all, for a university-based project in a prestigious theater program – recognizes that as a radically uninformed statement. What not everyone may realize, however, is the profound degree to which fuzzy thinking penetrates general opinions about translation. Respected producers and directors have told me, "Oh, we'll clean that clumsy translation up before we go into rehearsals."

I have also heard tell of ancient mariners saying, "We'll just plug that little hole," before heading out to stormy seas.

Translation is an art. In fact, a translator is a director, a playwright, an actor and an audience member all rolled into one. He or she constantly must hear the questions of the actor – "Can I say this?" – even as the spectator in the mind's eye is wondering, "What does this mean?" while the segment of the brain thinking about how to direct this slowly emerging text is pondering what gestures and intonations the chosen words will call into being. All of this while the original author's voice – with its unique rhythms, diction and melodies – must be singing in perfect pitch in the translator's head.

No one in the theater is more sensitive than actors and spectators. It is one of the reasons why we love them so. Metaphorically, each must be invited to embark on a journey lacking hazardous obstacles and treacherous turns *not planted there by the author*. If an actor speaks a word that sticks in his or her craw, it must be because the author willed it, not because the translator was lazy. Every time an audience member is distracted by questions or doubts *not envisioned by the author*, communication has broken down. And the translator is to blame.

A play making the transition from Russian into English is threatened by a myriad of potentially catastrophic misunderstandings. As languages, Russian and English are structured differently, and so provide vastly different cadences, stores of information and electric impulses. That is nothing, however, compared to the pitfalls involved in translating cultural phenomena. Did you know, for example, that the contemporary Russian word for "red" is the same one the language still employs for "beautiful" in fairy tales? "Red Square," in other words, has nothing to do with the place where the Red Army used to march. That gives the notion of "seeing red" a whole new sensation, doesn't it?

In other words, much in a translation must be interpreted as well. But it must be done inconspicuously and in a way that is organic to the original text. So, yes, you may add scholarship to the jobs a translator is called upon to do well.

English is another problem. The British have been good at sniffing out new plays in Russia, translating, publishing and staging them. But as George Bernard Shaw said so famously: "England and America are two countries divided by a common language." Indeed, many British translations done in the last decade look and sound as foreign to us as any Russian, German or French play might.

Translating Russia For America (cont)

The **New Russian Drama: Voices in a Shifting Age** project was established to bring the riches of contemporary Russian drama to America in the American idiom. We believe this is the only way that such major contemporary writers as Olga Mukhina, Maksym Kurochkin, Yury Klavdiev, Vyacheslav Durnenkov, Yaroslava Pulinovich and the Presnyakov brothers can fully be appreciated in the United States.

We also believe there is no one way to create a translation that will allow a play to speak clearly and breathe fully in a new language. As such, we experimented with various methods.

We engaged playwright Kate Moira Ryan to create a new American adaptation of Mukhina's *Tanya Tanya*. Playwrights Juanita Rockwell and David M. White worked closely with Russian director Yury Urnov to fashion American variants of the Presnyakovs' *Playing Dead* and Klavdiev's *Martial Arts*, respectively. John Hanlon, with Kurochkin's *Vodka, F***ing, and Television*, and I, with Durnenkov's *Frozen in Time*, Kurochkin's *The Schooling of Bento Bonchev*, Pulinovich's *Natasha's Dream* and *I Won*, and Klavdiev's *The Polar Truth*, took the traditional route of a lone translator rendering an author's text.

All of us, working with the writers and production teams, endeavored to help five unique Russian voices "speak American" without losing their native flavor, points of view or insights. Each production in this season-long project is confirmation of our belief that American theater will be richer when it embraces what a new generation of Russian playwrights is writing.

John Freedman
Theater Critic, The Moscow Times

Theatre Arts at Towson University

The guiding principle of the Department of Theatre Arts is that its energies and resources remain devoted to the development of its students as creative, cooperative and humanistically educated theatre practitioners and scholars.

The undergraduate program is designed to provide, in cooperation with other departments, a broad liberal education as well as rigorous professional training in which emphasis is placed on skills as well as knowledge. The faculty works with each student to create of an artistic point of view and a professional work ethic appropriate for the theatre, and other endeavors. The department offers the B.A. or B.S. in Theatre with tracks in Acting, Design and Production, and Theatre Studies. The various degree programs and areas of study within the department work cooperatively to give students a rich education in the diverse aspects of theatre as well as focused training that will help them cultivate their individual talents and potential.

The Towson MFA Program in Theatre Arts—now in its 15th year—is unlike any Masters program in the United States in that it trains the total theatre artist/scholar. Every year, a small group is hand-selected to embark on a rigorous three-year journey that nurtures each member's individual artistic vision.

The curriculum is designed for the artist who is not content working within a single discipline: It is for the actor who is also a playwright; the designer who is also playwright; the director who is also a puppeteer; the choreographer who is also a historian.

Students work with faculty and guest artists in a diverse range of disciplines, styles and techniques. In most cases, this informs the students' work, as they create projects both on their own and in collaboration with one another.

The program is open to all forms of experimentation; it is doggedly interdisciplinary; and it is designed for the kind of person who is a self-directed and self-producing artist, trying to work from his or her own aesthetic.

The Towson graduate theatre program has a long history of international engagement. Philip Arnoult, director of the Center for International Theatre Development (CITD), was a part of the team that originally created the program, and since that time students have participated in festivals and projects in Egypt, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, East Africa, and now Russia. Two MFA students went on for work internationally under the auspices of Fulbright Fellowships. Last summer, a group of MFA students did a Study Abroad Program organized by CITD to Wroclaw, Poland where they attended the Grotowski Institute's festival, "The World as a Place of Truth," a celebration of the life and work of the famous Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski. The students also participated a five-day workshop with the internationally acclaimed company, Teatr ZAR, which was held in the space in which Grotowski rehearsed and presented some of his most famous pieces, including The Constant Prince and Apocalipsis cum Figuris. This coming summer, thanks to CITD, students are slated to attend and participate in the 18th international Summer Varna Theatre Festival in Bulgaria. This summer, the MFA program's production of Natasha's Dream by Yaroslava Pulinovich, will be presented at the 18th international Summer Varna Theatre Festival in Bulgaria and the Istropolitana Project 2010 - 18th International Festival of Theatre Schools in Bratislava, Slovakia.

Student Opportunities for Further Study of Russia

Students may combine their interests in Russian theater with their career interests as professional communicators.

Students interested in the behind-the-scenes work of marketing and promoting the fine arts—and other careers in the communications field--may be interested in two new options from Towson University for earning academic credits studying this topic: global trends affecting professional communicators, with an emphasis on Russia and the USA.

Independent Study

Work to be completed in January mini-mester or spring 2010 semester…for three credits.

No foreign language requirement. Led by TU Prof. Mark McElreath and Adjunct Instructor Gala Duckworth, each student will conduct independent research, write and present a comparative analysis of global trends affecting professional communicators in the student's choice of careers in three countries:

1. Russia
2. USA
3. The country chosen by the student

Why Russia?

Russia is undergoing dramatic changes that significantly affect professional communicators. Both instructors have extensive experience in Russia.

Why USA?

Global standards for best practices in professional communication are being established in the USA, some assert. Students will be expected to gather evidence that supports and contradicts this assertion.

Why a third country of the student's choice?

Student can intellectually go on a trip to any country in the world and think through what it would be like to work there as a professional communicator. Analyzing data from three different countries allows a "triangulation" of insights that may provide a more realistic picture of global trends.

Study Abroad to St. Petersburg, Russia

Early Summer 2010, from May 23rd to June 2nd…for three credits.

Open to college students throughout Mid-Atlantic region. Russian educators and communication professionals will lead seminars, guided tours and excursions. Learn global best practices and how to market yourself as a professional communicator anywhere in the world. Russian language not required: all seminars and guided tours in English.

Cost: $4,750 includes tuition, health insurance, housing, roundtrip airfare, some meals and excursions. Rolling admission. Deposit required to secure space.

More information contact Prof. McElreath at **mmcelreath@towson.edu**; the TU Study Abroad Office at **410-7043-2451**; or go to **www.towson.edu/studyabroad**.

Center for International Theatre Development (CITD)

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