VODKA NOT FUCKING TELEVISION

By Maksym Kurochkin
Translated by John J. Hanlon

Dryer MFA Studio
October 21–24

NEW RUSSIAN DRAMA
VOICES IN A SHIFTING AGE
www.newrussiandrama.org

Conversations After the Play

Please join us for a series of post-performance conversations about the play and contemporary Russian society. Discussions will begin shortly after the performance and last for approximately thirty minutes.

October 21st with Yury Urnov, Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence and director of the original Moscow production of *Vodka, Fucking, and Television*.

October 22nd with Mark McElreath and Gala Duckworth from TU's Department of Mass Communications and Communication Studies. Specialist in Russian media, they are directing TU's study abroad program that goes to St. Petersburg, Russia, May 23rd to June 2nd.

October 23rd with John J. Hanlon, translator of *Vodka, Fucking and Television*.

Towson University Department of Theatre Arts MFA Program presents

Vodka, Fucking, and Television

By Maksym Kurochkin

Translated by John J. Hanlon

Director	Stephen Nunns
Set Design	Andrea Crnkovic
Costume Design	Rebecca Eastman
Lighting Design	Justin Van Hassel
Video Design	Jessica Hutchinson
Hero	Nick Bateman
Vodka	Jenette Isaacson
Fucking	Andrea Crnkovic
Television	Susan Stroupe
Stage Manager	Heather Peacock
Technical Director	Justin Van Hassel
Production Manager for Towson University's Russia Season	Cat Hagner
Dramaturg for Towson University's Russia Season	Robyn Quick
Running Crew	Sarah Lloyd, Shannon McPhee
Dramaturgy Team	Qituwra Anderson, April Baldwin, Eric Boelsche,Rachel Blank, Matt Bohle, Abby Grimsley, Lauren Guy, Rachel Harrell, Katrina Kosiorek, Kate Lilley, Dana Woodson.
Special thanks to	Jay Herzog, Daniel Ettinger, Tony Rosas, Cheryl Partridge, Jesse Herche, John Freedman, Philip Arnoult, and Yury Urnov.

New Russian Drama in the United States

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 in performance. We're delighted to have you join us for tonight's workshop presentation of Maksym Kurochkin's Vodka, Fucking and Television, which is the first production in our 2009 – 2010 Russian season. We hope to share some insights into the experiences of our contemporaries in Russia and to make you curious to learn more about them. 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 . . .

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.

Vodka, F***ing, and Television

By Maksym Kurochkin
Translated by John J. Hanlon
Directed by Stephen Nunns
In the Dryer Theatre

October 21st and 22nd at 7:30 pm
October 23rd and 24th at 8:00 pm

The Polar Truth

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

November 12th at 7:30 pm
November 13th and 14th at 8:00 pm

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 7:30 pm

Tanya-Tanya

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

December 4th and 5th at 8:00 pm
December 6th at 2:00 pm
December 9th and 10th at 7:30 pm
December 11th and 12th at 8:00 pm

I Am the Machine Gunner

By Yury Klavdiev
Produced by Generous Theatre Company
At Towson University

Friday, December 4th at 6:00 pm
Saturday, December 5th at 3:00 pm
Sunday, December 6th at 12:00 pm
http://www.generouscompany.org/machinegunner/

The Schooling of Bento Bonchev

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

February 3rd and 4th at 7:30 pm
February 5th and 6th at 8:00 pm

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 7:30 pm
April 23rd at 8:00 pm
April 24th at 2:00 pm and 8:00 pm
April 25th at 2:00 pm
April 26th and 27th at 7:30 pm

Frozen in Time

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

April 30th 8:00 pm
May 1st 8:00 pm
May 2nd 2:00 pm
May 5th and 6th 7:30 pm
May 7th and 8th 8:00 pm

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

About the Playwright

Theatrical performance is the ultimate manifestation of total influence and consequently the last sanctuary of spontaneous experience, in a society of infinite choices that scream at us, theatre is a single, softly spoken sentence, authentic and full of truth.

Maxim Kurochkin
The Second Speed

Maksym Kurochkin (b. 1970) was hailed as a major new voice in Russian playwriting after the Moscow premiere of his play, Kitchen, in 2000. Since that time, his plays have been produced in Moscow at Teatr.doc, the Pushkin Theatre, the Et Cetera Theatre and the Playwright and Director Center. His plays have been translated into all the major European languages. He is the recipient of numerous prizes, including "Boldest Experiment of the Year" from the Moskovsky Komsomolets daily for Kitchen, and the "Russian Anti-Booker" award. His subsequent plays include Repress and Excite; Vodka, Fucking and Television; Steel Will; Tsurikov; Fighter Class Medea; The Schooling of Bento Bonchev; and Mooncrazed. Vodka, Fucking and Television and Repress and Excite were translated into English and published in the American theatre journal TheatreForum. Kurochkin has acted in films and he writes for Russian film and television. Originally from the Ukraine, Kurochkin now resides in Moscow with his wife and daughter.

John Freedman is among those who have hailed Kurochkin as an important contemporary voice. In his article "Maksym Kurochkin: A Writer for Paradoxical Times," Freedman points out that the writer "symbolized the paradoxes of his age" (86). He embodied these paradoxes in the early 1990s, when he chose a course of study at Kiev University that applied advanced principles of astroarchaeology to research on pre-Christian Slavic monuments. Similarly, his writing, which leads him to create a drastically different dramatic world with each new play, reflects a writer who Freedman sees as "ideal for the global age," and as "both a product and an explorer of" an extraordinary transitional time in Russian and Slavic history (86).

Freedman, John. "Maksym Kurochkin: A Writer for Paradoxical Times." *TheatreForum 32* (2008): 85–87. International Index to the Performing Arts. Web. 8 Oct. 2009.

A Conversation with the Translator

Dramaturg Robyn Quick speaks with John J. Hanlon about the translation of *Vodka, Fucking and Television*.

John J. Hanlon is an educator, actor, and translator. A graduate of the Yale School of Drama program in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism, Mr. Hanlon studied Russian Language and Literature at Swarthmore College and holds additional master's degrees in Liberal Studies and English & American Literature. Currently, he directs the theater program and teaches courses in literature and history at an independent school in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. He has translated three plays by Maksym Kurochkin – Fighter Class Medea, Vodka, Fucking, and Television, and Mooncrazed.

Q: What inspired you to study the Russian language and to work as a translator?

A: When I arrived at Swarthmore College, I was eager to begin studying a new foreign language, a language I could use. (My father insisted that I take Latin in high school.) This was 1986: the years of Gorbachev and glasnost'. Russia was opening up to the West for the first time in decades, and something about Soviet culture just felt very intriguing to me. At Swarthmore, the language program is intensive, so after a year and a half, we were being introduced to Russian literature by our émigré professors, who had led fascinating lives. Once I encountered that literature's deep philosophical themes and the sensitivity of Russian authors to the depths and complexities of the human soul, there was no turning back. And after I spent a fabulous semester abroad in Moscow, I switched my major to Russian language and literature.

However, fifteen years passed before I learned the art of play translation. At Yale, all students in the dramaturgy program are required to translate a play. Of course, we were also studying theater history and criticism, learning how to be literary managers and dramaturgs – at the time, I had no idea that translation would fascinate me like no other part of the dramaturg's portfolio. These days, it's the pleasure I get from combining my lifelong passion for the theater and my love of all things Russian that propels me from one project to the next.

Q: What do you see as some of the particular considerations one must make when translating a work for the stage?

A: While I've never done "technical" translation work – of, say, a legal document or a user manual – I imagine that it feels a lot different than the work I do. Essentially, I create an original play in English that is a "shadow version" of the Russian play. What that means in terms of my process is that I spend a lot of time with the text - visualizing the scenes, hearing the characters speak, feeling the dramatic conflicts - before I write a single word in English. The language of the new play has to be able to stand on its own in an American theater. Oftentimes, that means forging dialogue that is analogous to what the characters are saying in Russian. It creates the same emotional dynamic in the scene as the Russian words do in that play. And, for me, that's the most crucial thing – getting the emotional dynamics right.

A Conversation with the Translator (cont.)

Q: You are now working on the translation of your fourth play by Maksym Kurochkin. What attracted to his work?

A: I was introduced to Maks by John Freedman, the theater critic for the Moscow Times. John is, undeniably, the central figure for bringing contemporary Russian playwrights to the attention of the English-speaking world. We had been corresponding for a couple of years, so he had a sense of what kind of theater I'm committed to. And it occurred to him that Fighter Class "Medea" was something I'd like. He was right. The Lark Play Development Center in New York brought me and Maks together for a workshop production of the play. Maks, who does have a little English, would sit in the back of the room and watch these great actors doing an American version of his play, and he told me he could feel that I had captured the essential qualities of his work. Plus, we just hit it off personally. The next summer, I spent a couple of weeks with Maks on his home turf in Kiev, and we're great friends now.

John Freedman has pointed out that with every new play, Maks seems to totally reinvent his dramaturgy. He conceives a fully realized yet imaginary world; that world has its own contours, its own rules, attitudes, emotional timbre. Whenever I get my hands on a new Kurochkin play, I'm buzzing with anticipation: What hath God wrought this time?! Still, there is something at the core of all of Maksym's plays that makes them inherently worthwhile, and that is the human heart. Typically, whether as a reader or a spectator, you're about three quarters of the way through this hilarious, thought-provoking, wild theatrical romp when you suddenly recognize that the play is not about female fighter pilots of some apocalyptic future, or Cyrano deBergerac, or a struggling Russian writer, or the captain who rescued people from the Titanic disaster – it's about YOU. And Maksym's ability to create ingenious works for the theater that hit you in the guts and take your breath away is what keeps me coming back to him. I don't work for anyone else.

Q: How would you characterize his use of language and what particular challenges or opportunities does that present for you as a translator?

A: It's funny: for most of the dialogue sections of his plays, it feels to me like ordinary Russian speech, like I'm hearing my Russian friends or people on the streets of Moscow talking. I prop his script up on my desk and follow the Russian dialogue with my eyes, and the English version just flows right into my keyboard. But his stage directions make me work more. (Maksym's plays always teach me new words. This one I'm working on now, for example, takes place entirely on a pirate ship, so I'm learning a lot of naval terms, the parts of a sea vessel and what not.) It's the visuals and action of his plays that usually contain the most surprises and revelations. ('Vodka' is an exception in that regard – the play doesn't have a single stage direction.) When, after working with my dictionary for a little while, I finally understand what he's calling for on the stage, I can feel my eyes popping wide open! And I want directors and literary managers who are reading the play to feel that sensation – the shock and the smile – in an immediate way, so I labor on those sections to make them flow naturally in English.

Q: The second word in the title of this play may intrigue or even surprise some audience members. How does that word resonate in the original Russian? Did you consider other English words in translation or did it see to you that there was only one clear choice?

That's a great question. Let me say first that there was only one clear choice – it's an exact translation, and there could really be no other word if you wanted to remain true to the spirit of the original. The term is extremely profane in Russian – or, at least it was for most of the twentieth century. Now, just as it's become more common to hear "F-bombs" in our culture, Russian speech in the wake of the collapse of the USSR has become infested with profanity. The whole play reflects this new linguistic reality. While I was working on it, I had to buy two Russian-English dictionaries dedicated exclusively to profanity! (Russian profanity – or maht – is very creative; it was challenging to find English equivalents that would match the expressivity of Maksym's original dialogue.)

In my opinion, the real genius of this play is the visionary way in which it embodies that term (along with vodka and television), brings it to life, not only as a theatrical force but also as a force in our own lives, something that we can recognize (perhaps for the first time), reflect on, and, like the play's hero, make choices about.

Russia's Transitional Generation

We were children during the Seventies. Now we're dangling between two self-satisfied generations, like an absurd pair of camel nuts. We are nobodies, we're nothing. . . We're not entirely of this earth, although we'd like to be.

Hero, from *Vodka, Fucking and Television.*

A ten-year-old girl in Moscow was proud to have earned her red Pioneer scarf – the mark of a loyal young Soviet citizen. But the very next week, her mother informed her that she could no longer wear the scarf because the Pioneers, and the nation they were designed to support, no longer existed. Elsewhere in the city, a teenage boy riding down Tverskaya Street in the car of a family friend looked out the window to see a tank driving alongside their car – and stopping at the red light along with them. Both vehicles were on their way to Red Square along with thousands of fellow citizens. Across the nation that was once the Soviet Union, young people found the transition to adolescence and adulthood coinciding with a more dramatic transition for their country. Just as their parents and grandparents faced questions about who would lead their nation, what would become of their jobs and how they would feed their families if the expected salaries did not materialize, the next generation looked to an uncertain future in an uncertain era.

In the early 1990s, Russia's "Lost Generation," Soviet citizens born between 1968 and 1978, saw their world change beyond recognition in ways both liberating and disorienting. At first this generation embraced these drastic changes. Flooded with images of freedom and prosperity, they were optimistic about the social and economic reforms. Unfortunately, in its haste to build a new nation overnight, the Russian government fell into corruption and economic difficulties. A few short years later, the young Russians were showing signs of disillusionment and hopelessness. They expressed "bitterness about failing new economic policies and increasing poverty and crime" (Adelman xii). Enthusiasm was replaced with apathy.

Economic and political changes are the most obvious adjustments this generation encountered. Fifty percent of Russia was in poverty by 1992 (Poland 3). Work was not mandatory anymore, and although few could afford not to work, many found it difficult to find a job. When the communist machine was dismantled, the new leaders also removed the very social and economical structure that supported their country. Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first popularly elected president, was dedicated to radical and rapid change. In order to switch to capitalism, he first had to destroy communism. He released the price of common products from government control, privatizing them, adhering to an economic theory referred to as "Shock Therapy." Russia was not ready for this quick change and inflation caused prices to go up by 300% by the end of the first month. Before 1991, most of a family's weekly groceries could be bought for a few rubles (it was 27.6 rubles to a dollar in '91). In 1991, due to the abandonment of agricultural subsidies, there were long lines and no food. Once inflation and poverty took hold, there was plenty of food but no money with which to buy it (Radio Free Europe).

Our mothers placed us in the hands
Of a brief and glorious war.
We were dolefully entreated by Stalin.
Who is this we? It is I.
As bombs so hatefully screech,
As women torment us in dreams,
A century of women won't sacrifice us.
Who is this us? It is I.

Alexander Volodin
Translation John J. Hanlon

As economic changes crippled post-Soviet Russia, socio-cultural changes impacted the generation struggling to come into adulthood. Author Minaev recounts, "They said, forget about all the heroes, forget about the entire cultural heritage, forget about everything. We've changed the picture. Now survive" (Kishkovsky 1). An entire generation suddenly was expected to come into adulthood from a childhood based on cultural principles that were now rejected by their society. Everything that they were raised to believe was suddenly and completely wrong. Victor Pelevin, another best-selling author now in his 40s, believes they were the "generation that was programmed for life in one sociocultural paradigm but has found itself living in a quite different one" (Freidin 3). Hero's struggle with Vodka, Fucking and Television, is also his struggle to find a place and a meaning in this shifting age. As Deborah Adelman says in her book The Children of Perestroika, "Theirs is a generation caught between rejection of the old ways and a full embrace of the new" (1).

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Vodka

By Qituwra Anderson

"Vodka is our enemy, so we utterly consume it." This Russian proverb accurately depicts vodka's role in Russian culture. Vodka is their enemy. This is true in several ways. Vodka like many other hard liquors, has been scientifically proven to be quite the health hazard. It produces negative health effects, both short and long term, especially when consumed often, in haste, in large amounts, or some combination thereof. According to the CIA World Factbook, Russian women currently have an average life span of 73.14 years, while Russian men, who on average drink more than women, have a life expectancy of 59.33. Part of this significant gap in life expectancy between the genders has been linked to alcohol related illnesses and deaths.

The use and abuse of alcohol costs Russia's businesses millions in revenue each year. Drinking is a major contributor to absenteeism and poor job performance. How bad is it? "One Russian chemical plant reports that 3.5% of its workforce were confirmed alcoholics, 2.2% showed early signs of addiction, and a further 18.8% were alcohol 'abusers', with only 1.4% abstainers. Between 75% and 90% of absences from work were attributed to alcohol. It was suggested that loss of productivity associated with alcohol was the main reason for the failure to achieve the Soviet Union's 5-year plan in the early 1980s, with estimates that the loss of productivity due to alcohol was up to 20%" (McKee). Even former Russian President Boris Yeltsin, was known to slack off on the job as a result of his drunkenness. He has been filmed singing, dancing, and stumbling at political engagements. Political leaders past and present have attempted to cut down on the country's drinking problem. Among their ranks are Russia's current President, Dmitry Medvedev, who is attempting to reduce alcohol consumption by 25% by the year 2012, and former leader Michael Gorbachev who made sure the alcohol supply was cut down to ensure that consumption was lowered. However as a result of Gorbachev's efforts, fights amongst angry customers began to increase. Hero in Vodka, Fucking and Television seems similarly unable to bear the thought of life without the drink, as he proclaims, "I can't take this. I have to have a drink. I'm not going to write anything anyway. Goodbye Norway! Oh-oh-oh!! I feel vodka! Vodka is my enemy!" And yet, he still "utterly consumes it," as do most Russians, particularly, men, who, on average consume about a pint of vodka every other day, which is twice the amount of alcohol that the average American male consumes.

Why is vodka so popular in Russia? It originated there! Vodka has been part of Russian culture for over a thousand years. Russians drink vodka on special occasions as well as ordinary days. It is an important part of weddings, birthdays, social gatherings with friends, and is even used as a cure for illness. In the case of a social gathering with friends, a meal would also be served, and there would be a toast such as "May everything in your life be good." Favored food choices while consuming Stolichnaya or Russian Standard (two of Russia's popular vodka brands), among many others, include

pickled herring, marinated cucumber, hot soups, hot potatoes, and red caviar. A Russian giving up vodka, is giving up a substance that can be dangerous and unhealthy. But he or she would also be giving up an important and longstanding part of Russian culture and tradition. The first documented production of vodka was in the 9th century, but vodka was not produced in mass amounts until the early 1400s, when fruits or herbs were often added to the vodka because the distillation process had not been refined and in contained many impurities. "In the 14th century a British Ambassador to Moscow first described vodka as the Russian national drink" (Gin and Vodka Association). Although it is now prohibited to advertise alcohol, recent Russian television commercials for this national drink have depicted it in a somewhat different light than what we are used to in the United States. One ad depicts vodka as being able to combat the negative things in life; the blizzards, the cold, the wilderness, and loneliness. At the end of the commercial, the actor declares that vodka is his friend, saying "Vodka Kreskova. My Russian Comrade." Another commercial for a brand of vodka, Stolichnaya, highlights the drink as a symbol of Russia's strong sense of independence. It begins with the Slogan "Stoli Vodka; Born in the Heart of Russia." The commercial features Russian soldiers marching with Stolichnaya in their hands. Playing throughout the commercial is The Cossacks performed by the Red Army choir. Vodka seems to be as essential to Russians as friendship, independence, and patriotism.

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"Fucking" and Russian Society

by Abby Grimsley

Ludmila Ivanova, a member of the Committee of Soviet Women, famously stated on the Phil Donahue and Vladimir Pozner "Space Bridge" television program in 1986 that "there is no sex in the Soviet Union" (Lukanov). This statement is correct if one only takes into account what was happening on the surface of Russian society. Sex is a taboo subject; not one about which numerous people in Russia would talk openly. Yet in the decade and a half after the 1917 October Revolution - before Stalin came to full power - things were very different. Many Russian citizens considered talking about sex to be a part of everyday life (Carleton 7). There were still, of course, more conservative people who opposed this kind of conversation and wanted to keep sex in the private realm (8-9). Others, however, talked about sex with "no more reserve than of music, the theatre, the weather" (Hindus, qtd in Carleton 7). When Stalin came to full power in the late 1920s, his tendency to control the lives of the people living in Russia made it more difficult to talk frankly about sex. One way he did this was by abolishing sex education from schools, which ensured that the next generation was unable to have a well-informed discussion about the subject (Kon and Riordan). This culture of not talking freely about sex is still in effect in Russia today, even if the subject is perhaps more visible than before. In 2005, Moscow government officials started hanging posters all around the city that proclaim, "There's no such thing as safe sex" (Chopen). Their campaign advocated total abstinence before marriage. Although the posters may publicly acknowledge the existence of sex, the promotion of this simple message has not removed the taboo around other open discussions of sexuality in Russia.

By contrast, Maksym Kurochkin personifies sex as a character on stage so that everyone who experiences Vodka, Fucking, and Television is forced to acknowledge the existence of sex in a very public way. This openness in the portrayal of a taboo subject could lead one to believe that the character Fucking represents the private experience beneath the public silence on this topic. In a society that views sex as a private topic, however, how can one accurately determine the nature of private sexual experience in that culture? Many of the statistics that researchers are able to gather (when they can even find individuals willing to discuss the subject) can't be regarded as being completely accurate because they are based upon the way people describe their sexual activity. Discrepancies in these numbers suggest that men tend to exaggerate and women under report. For example, one Russian survey studied by Igor Kon found that the average number of lifetime partners reported for men was twelve to thirteen and the average for women was four (169). Mathematically speaking, these numbers are quite improbable. Even though the population of women in Russia may be higher than the population of men, it is unlikely that it is that much higher. Other statistics show not only a gap between the reported number of sexual encounters of men and women, but different expectations about their experience of sex. More often than not, the man controls what happens during the

course of intimate events than the woman (171). Married couples sometimes even feel uncomfortable talking about the sex that they are having together and the types of things that would make it better (172). Only a quarter of Russian women, for example, report always achieving orgasm during sex (Kon 166). These numbers are similar to those in the United States, where about thirty percent of women surveyed admit to always having an orgasm when they have sex (166). But, if a Russian wife tried to tell her husband where a particular erogenous zone was for her, he might get upset and want to know where she is getting this information (172). He might even suspect that she is seeing another man, and with good reason given the climbing rates of adultery in Russia (173-4). A little more than half of the men and about a quarter of women asked in one study in Russia have admitted to having an affair (174). These are just those who actually admitted to having an affair. The real numbers could be quite different.

Thus, Kurochkin's character Fucking stands in stark contrast to the role Russian women are generally expected to play during sex, if only because she is onstage and talking. Her openness and honesty about her power over Hero violates the traditional position of dominance he is expected to play in the sexual relationship. Through this character, the audience sees that Ludmila Ivanova was mistaken about sexual activity in Russia. The mere fact that an audience is seeing sex portrayed onstage creates an arena for discussion about that particular area of society.

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Television

by Rachel Harrell

During the Soviet era, television in Russia was controlled by the USSR State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting. This government organization developed policy for what could be presented on television and oversaw production of shows to meet the committee's goals. Soviet television rarely aired live events, with the exception of soccer games and other athletic competitions. Instead, viewers could watch a limited range of programs that had been carefully crafted to reflect the government's views of life in that country. As the character Television says of the fare available during Hero's youth: "I showed communist party proceedings, tractors and meetings with foreign delegations." Typical Soviet programs include:

> Vremia (Time). News from around the world, the Soviet Republics and Russia, with 5 minutes of sports, culture and weather presented at the end of this hour long program. Vremia aired at 9 pm every night.
>
> Ochevidnoe Neveroiatnoe (Incredible But True) An entertainment program dealing with amazing scientific issues.
>
> Eto bylo, bylo (And So It Was) A program showcasing the "golden oldies" of Soviet music.
>
> Spokoinoi nochi, malyshi (Good Night Little Ones) Puppets and cartoons teaching simple moral lessons to children.

By the time the character Hero in Vodka, Fucking and Television reached adulthood, television had changed dramatically. The end of the Soviet Union ushered in an era of comparative expressive freedom in which one could encounter a plurality of opinions on the air. Live television events showed many sides of political issues. For example, every day millions of Russians watched live broadcasts of debates in a many-party Duma (parliament). Partly as a result of this programming, politics became a new hobby for millions. Television now broadcast a range of Western programming, from Disney cartoons to talk-shows to music videos to game shows. The sudden appearance of advertising meant that local and national products could now be promoted on the air. Many television stations were now independent from the government and privately owned. Those private voices were to become important weapons in political battles. In 1996 independent channels played a crucial role in the reelection of President Boris Yeltsin. Some programs even criticized the actions of the Russian government in the Chechnyan war. This new era of television's potential role in political power struggles was marked as early as the coup of 1993, when anti—Yeltsin crowds tried to take control of Channel 1, one of the more influential of the early private stations. The varied range of programming in the 1990s included:

Vzgliad (Sight) A political talk show well know for explosive debates among guests.

Pole Choudes (Field of Miracles) A Russian version of the U.S. game show Wheel of Fortune.

Disney's Chip and Dale Rescue Rangers.

Sam Sebe Regisser (Director for Myself) A program that presents humorous home videos.

Given the wide range of new programming in post-Soviet television, as compared to the television of Hero's childhood, it may be no wonder that Kurochkin's character television offers the idyllic self description, "Television is a magical window onto the natural world, a source of knowledge, a reliable friend in times of sadness and depression." Hero has no patience for this lofty rhetoric, perhaps primarily because he has come to view his obsession with television as an unhealthy influence in his life. But his cynicism may also reflect ways that television programming continued to evolve in the post-Soviet world. By the time Kurochkin wrote this play, television had begun another major transformation in Russia. When Vladimir Putin became acting president at the turn of the new century, he began almost immediately to gain state control of the privately owned television stations. The owners of Channel One and NTV faced federal corruption charges and fled the country – leaving their stations behind, and eventually under government control. The diversity of political positions found on television in Yeltsin's era has now been eclipsed by rather unified support for Putin and his party "United Russia." Alongside this style of political programming that some in Russia see as reminiscent of the Soviet era, the Western programming that appeared after the fall of the Soviet Union continues to be shown on Russian television. Programs seen in the current era include:

Posledniy Geroy (Last Hero)- A Russian version of Survivor.

Lednikoviy (Ice Age)- An ice skating competition featuring skilled ice skaters paired with celebrities from other fields.

Dumushka (Ugly Girl)- The Russian version of Ugly Betty.

Pust Govoriat (Let them talk) A talk show about scandals and problems in the families of famous people.

The Drama of the New Russia

By John Freedman

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 preteens 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 five 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.

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 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.

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 and the Presnyakovs, the mystery that is Russia has become a little less enigmatic.

Translating Russia for America

By John Freedman

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.

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 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" 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.

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 art—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**.

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