

Title: "What We Need Are New Forms": Chekhov and Meyerhold
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This paper seeks to account for Meyerhold's predominantly negative reappraisal of Chekhov's legacy in the period 1905-1912, a reappraisal that has been largely overlooked by the critics. The fate of the famous actor and director Vsevolod Meyerhold was sealed by his role of Treplev in the Moscow Art Theater production of *The Seagull* in 1898. Ever since, every Meyerhold scholar has tried to establish a parallel between his tragic death and that of his character. Although by 1905 Meyerhold stopped playing the role of Treplev, this clearly did not stop him from seeing life through the prism of a Treplev-Trigorin paradigm. Thus, in the 1930s, Meyerhold remarked to Aleksandr Gladkov that the founders of the Moscow Art Theater chose to follow not in Treplev's but in Trigorin's footsteps by faithfully reproducing the notorious "neck of a broken bottle glittering on a dam" in their early productions (Aleksandr Gladkov, *Meyerhold*, vol. 1 [Moscow: Soiuz teatral'nykh deiatel'ei, 1990], 150). "It would be wrong and premature to believe that [Meyerhold] filled Treplev with his painful search for 'new forms' that was akin to Treplev's," Gladkov writes in his famous recollections of Meyerhold. "The contrary would be more correct: it was Treplev's searching that shaped the young artist's sensibilities, and it was Treplev's discontent, inner turmoil, and searing, tragic dissatisfaction with himself that nourished what was soon to become Meyerhold's firm convictions" (Gladkov, 152).

It would be equally wrong to believe that Meyerhold's attitude toward Chekhov remained unchanged through the course of his turbulent career. It is true that in his younger years and toward the end of his life, Meyerhold repeatedly referred to Chekhov as his mentor, a kindred spirit and as a source of inspiration, but in the mid-1900s, when Meyerhold was searching for his own new forms, he adopted a clearly iconoclastic attitude toward his former guardian angel. In 1906, Meyerhold described the Chekhov Theater as the Theater of Mood and declared it completely impotent (Meyerhold, "Naturalisticheskii teatr Teatr nastroyeniia" [1906]). The future, according to Meyerhold, belonged to the so-called Stylized Theater. I believe that Meyerhold's discourse on the Stylized Theater was, in part, informed by Treplev's failure as a writer and a director, an experience that Meyerhold set out to rectify by transferring the main responsibility for the success of a performance from the author of the play and its director to the shoulders of the actors and the audience. The actors were expected to be completely liberated and show unbounded creativity, while the audience was expected to demonstrate remarkable imagination "in order to fill in those details suggested by the stage action" (Meyerhold, "Uslovnyi teatr" [1907]). Meyerhold's seemingly misguided rebellion against Chekhov and his alleged Theater of Mood might be seen as Treplev's belated rebellion against his creator. Meyerhold's Treplev perishes not because he is a bad writer, but because Chekhov failed to give Nina her complete liberation as an actress and denied Arkadina the creative imagination necessary to appreciate her son's innovative play.