

‘The Merry Wives of Moscow’ Komisarjevsky, Shakespeare and Russophobia in the British Theatre

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Theodore Komisarjevsky was a prominent figure in the inter-war British theatre until his migration to North America in 1936. While recent studies have foregrounded the various artistic factors that influenced his work and his eventual departure, little attention has been placed on the sociopolitical issues. Most notably, there has been no serious consideration of the impact that his nationality had on the opportunities that were available to him. This article examines Komisarjevsky’s work in relation to the growing nationalistic and Russophobic attitudes in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s. It focuses particularly on his series of productions at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, and shows the subsequent critical outrage to be rooted in a desire to protect Shakespeare and, by extension, Britain as a whole from the ‘interference’ of a Russian director. Dr Philippa Burt is a lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Performance at Goldsmiths, University of London. She has previously published articles on Harley Granville Barker and Joan Littlewood, and is the recent recipient of a Harry Ransom Research Fellowship in the Humanities at the University of Texas at Austin.

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In the spring of 1946, Theodore Komisarjevsky attended a performance of *Uncle Vanya* staged by the Old Vic Theatre Company during its month-long season at the New Century Theatre in New York.¹ Having lived and worked in Britain for seventeen years before his migration to North America in 1936, the Russian director saw it as a welcome opportunity to reconnect with old friends and colleagues and to see for himself the positive impact his work had had on the British theatre. In both instances he was left disappointed. Not only were his telegraphed best wishes and offers of a meeting ignored by key members of the acting company, but he was also depressed by the work he saw. While critics on both sides of the Atlantic heralded the triumvirate of Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson and John Burrell as the golden age of the Old Vic, Komisarjevsky found that the production, and the season as a whole, lacked substance and was an example of ‘obvious “loan-propaganda”’.² Most damaging to his ego was the noticeable absence of the ideas and approaches he had

fought for throughout the 1920s and 1930s. He complained to his friend Phillida

Sewell:

I think now that I have been overestimating myself as an artist while in England. They have been treating me as a curiosity, and not as a necessary element in the English Theatre. The Vic production of *Uncle Vanya* demonstrated that they haven't learnt anything from me and didn't think it was worthwhile to learn. Well, the Lord bless their simplicity.³

He concluded with much resentment that his efforts in Britain had been a waste of time.

There was, of course, much that Komisarjevsky achieved during his time in the country. Included in the forty-nine productions he staged between 1919 and 1939 (fifty-six when one includes revivals and transfers) were his series of Chekhov productions, the critical acclaim of which helped to popularize Chekhov and secure for Komisarjevsky a position in the field of theatre in Britain. Likewise, his work at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre between 1932 and 1939 breathed new life into the Stratford-upon-Avon venue and innovated the staging of Shakespeare's plays.

He also promoted the notion of ensemble playing through these and other productions, creating a climate that encouraged greater teamwork between actors. The actor Stephen Haggard observed that under Komisarjevsky 'a new team spirit has become apparent, a new faith... It is the faith that the whole is greater than the part, and it is in direct contradiction to the last two centuries of English theatrical tradition.'⁴ While Haggard may have exaggerated slightly, Komisarjevsky was an influential figure for a number of prominent British actors and directors, most notably Peggy Ashcroft, to whom he was married briefly, and John Gielgud. Both interiorized Komisarjevsky's exaltation of ensemble practice and pursued the ideal of an ensemble

company, as exemplified by Gielgud's 1938 Queen's Theatre season and Ashcroft's role as a founding member of the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1960.⁵

Yet, at the root of Komisarjevsky's bitter pessimism was the fact that the influence he exerted over the field was only ever indirect and impermanent. His original intention was to open a studio to train young actors and to form from it a permanent ensemble company able to promote his method of production and thus ensure that it, as well as his name, became established practice in Britain. His failure to realise these plans meant that the dissemination of his ideas was severely restricted, confined to the actors with whom he worked, and was reliant, in the main, on word of mouth. As a result, he left very little in the way of a definite or tangible legacy of work when he migrated to North America. Indeed, evidence of Komisarjevsky's time in Britain is largely limited to theatre reviews, anecdotal reminiscences in actors' autobiographies, and his own handful of publications.⁶

Jonathan Pitches has recently questioned why Komisarjevsky's plans for a training studio and ensemble company failed to bear fruit, and thus why he failed to secure a long-lasting legacy in Britain.⁷ He offers four interconnected reasons that are pertinent and no doubt familiar to anyone who has studied twentieth-century British theatre closely. First, Komisarjevsky lacked the necessary capital to sustain either a studio or a company, and the absence of a system of State subsidy or sufficient sociopolitical connections on Komisarjevsky's part meant that he was unable to secure such support. Second, the very notion of ensemble theatre was unfamiliar and looked on askance by a field that continued to be dominated by the inherently individualistic 'star' system and the tradition of the actor manager. By way of proof,

one need only consider Harley Granville Barker, whose promotion of ensemble playing in the first two decades of the 1900s faced hostile resistance from sections of the theatre establishment, as I have argued previously.⁸ Third, Komisarjevsky was unwilling (or unable) to play the necessary diplomatic role in order to negotiate longer-term projects or engagements and, rather, was openly critical of the commercialism of the British stage. Finally, he lacked what Pitches calls a ‘permanent partner or collaborator who was *inside* the culture he sought to influence’ and who was sufficiently powerful to sow the seeds of this influence.⁹

However, although Pitches is correct to argue that the above were certainly key factors, the rather narrow scope of his enquiry fails to examine wider sociocultural and political factors. The most glaring omission is a serious consideration of the problem posed by Komisarjevsky’s nationality, which is the central focus of this article. In 1920s and 1930s Britain, the public attitude towards foreign nationals was dominated by insularism and suspicion, a hangover from the Victorian veneration of ‘splendid isolation’ coupled with the growing nationalism in the lead up to World War Two. These isolationist attitudes were ingrained in the theatre climate, where, as one of the only foreign directors attempting to secure a permanent position in Britain at the time, Komisarjevsky was treated as an exotic novelty. Even his name isolated him and, finding it hard to pronounce, friends and colleagues shortened it to the more manageable ‘Komis’. The feeling of separation that he experienced was further exacerbated by the fact that he was a Russian living in a society that was largely Russophobic, as will become clear below.

Through a close examination of the public and private discourse surrounding Komisarjevsky and his work in Britain, this article argues that the director's nationality was a decisive factor in his reception and the opportunities made available to him. Nowhere is this more clear than in the outrage that met his Shakespeare productions, which are the particular focus of this article. It asserts that the tendency to define Komisarjevsky by his nationality forced him into the perpetual role of interpreter or cultural middleman, to borrow Alexei Bartoshevich's phrase, 'explaining the content of his own culture in his own personal language.'¹⁰ The routine reinforcement of Komisarjevsky's distinction from the British theatre was the necessary consequence of this role, where his position was always on the outside looking in and never fully part of the theatre culture itself. While Bartoshevich stresses the advantages of such a position, I consider here the negative impact it had on Komisarjevsky's work and the limitations it placed on his movements. In this sense, this article goes further than stating simply that Komisarjevsky did not have a permanent collaborator on the inside. Rather, it reveals the extent to which his treatment as an alien in Britain excluded him from certain areas of the theatre field, limited his efficacy in this field and thus prevented him from establishing a long-lasting legacy.

The Émigré as Outsider

Komisarjevsky arrived in London in September 1919 as one of a number of émigrés who travelled to Britain in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Before his migration, he benefitted from the social, cultural and symbolic capital he inherited from his parents, Fyodor Komissarzhevsky and Princess Mariya Kurtsevich, and his half-sister, Vera Komissarzhevskaya.¹¹ This capital gave him access to both the upper

echelons of pre-revolution society and the leading circles of the Russian cultural scene. A case in point was his involvement with his sister's Dramatic Theatre of Vera Komissarzhevskaya, where he worked as assistant director to Vsevolod Meyerhold and as co-director with Nikolai Evreinov after Meyerhold's dismissal in 1907. He moved to Moscow following Komissarzhevskaya's death in February 1910, where he directed at the Nezlobin Dramatic Theatre, the Imperial Maly Theatre and Sergey Zimin's Private Opera House. He also founded the Free School of Scenic Art and worked closely with its students for four years before presenting their work to the public as the Vera Komissarzhevskaya Memorial Theatre.

Komisarjevsky held cosmopolitan attitudes towards continental Europe and had a particularly strong affinity with Italy, where he lived during his early childhood. He was fluent in several languages, made numerous trips to Europe during his adolescence and paid close attention to developments in the French, German and Italian theatres.¹² It was, therefore, with surprise and shock that he encountered what he saw to be a deep-seated Anglocentrism in the British theatre. Bartoshevich and Victor Borovsky cite numerous articles and letters written by Komisarjevsky to friends and colleagues in Russia in which he lambasted repeatedly the dominant xenophobic attitudes. In 1922, for example, he bemoaned the British people's ignorance of anything that happened outside their country's borders, telling readers of *Teatr*, the Russian-language periodical based in Berlin: 'Everything foreign is considered beyond the compass of English life. It is not theirs, so it is alien.'¹³ He expanded on the problem in a second letter to the same publication, complaining that British actors and directors 'looked at Russian plays first of all for what was specifically national, and diligently reproduced every possible feature of Russian

everyday'. As a result, the 'universal humanity of Tolstoy, Chekhov or Gorky, the ideological and emotional content of their plays, everything was buried under caricature'.¹⁴

He was similarly appalled by the traditionalist attitudes in Britain, particularly with regard to Shakespeare productions. Komisarjevsky found such work to be outmoded and steeped in Victorian conservatism, showing little sign of the innovations taking place on the continent: 'Shakespeare is performed and staged here in the way [Russians] do it in the backwaters of Chukhloma'.¹⁵ A key problem was the theatre establishment's prioritisation of 'star' actors and commercially viable productions over artistic quality, which Komisarjevsky rejected publicly and accused of turning Shakespeare's plays into museum pieces that showed no signs of life onstage:

Look at 'Hamlet'! Nobody here seems to realise that 'Hamlet' is a *play*. They've all forgotten the story because they are so hypnotised by the personality of the actor who is playing Hamlet. But the story is there – a wonderful story. The producer could make that story come to life. Why doesn't anybody try?¹⁶

However, he also understood that this conservatism coupled with the Anglocentrism made it almost impossible for a foreign director to challenge the established method of production. Shakespeare was believed to be distinctly British and, therefore, the exclusive property of British actors and directors. Komisarjevsky accused the British theatre of rejecting

all continental stagings of Shakespeare with orgulous contempt. Shakespeare is an Englishman. Shakespeare productions are an English tradition [...] If an Englishman breaks with this tradition he may be forgiven. But a foreigner – never!¹⁷

The experience of other foreign directors working in Britain at the time corroborated this claim of an innate bias. Michel Saint-Denis, who moved to London in 1935, was

aware that his French nationality made him an anomaly in the field of theatre in Britain, telling students in 1958: 'I am an authentic foreigner... I speak in broken English. I am not proud of it.'¹⁸ Like Komisarjevsky, he believed that this anomalous position counted against him and his Shakespeare productions, arguing that the tradition of staging Shakespeare in Britain 'is so bound up with the roots of English life and art that it is difficult for a foreigner to succeed with him. This difficulty is real and deep.'¹⁹ It is clear that both men were made to feel alienated in the field and shut off from Shakespeare.

Of course, feelings of alienation are common amongst émigrés, who are caught between their home and their host countries, belonging to neither. The result is what Laurence Senelick calls the 'identity crisis that accompanies cultural transplantation'.²⁰ Yet the situation was particularly difficult for émigrés entering Britain in the immediate aftermath of World War One. The intense jingoism of the war period coupled with the subsequent political, social and economic crises fostered a climate that was hostile to, and suspicious of, anyone deemed to be an outsider. This atmosphere of suspicion was legitimated by recent legislative changes that spelled the end of the earlier 'pro-alien' traditions of asylum in Britain.

Anti-alienism in Post-war Britain

The passing of the Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act 1919, which empowered immigration officers to deport or deny entry to any so-called 'enemy aliens', was the most recent in a series of parliamentary acts that testified to the growing xenophobia in Britain and the desire to place ever tighter controls on immigration. This growth of anti-alienism has been well documented. Colin Holmes, for example, demonstrates

how Britain's tradition of providing sanctuary to European refugees had steadily eroded since the end of the nineteenth century, calling into question the country's reputation as the most tolerant in the 'civilised' world.²¹ Both he and David Cesarani cite the influx of Eastern-European Jews fleeing the pogroms of Tsarist Russia in the 1880s and early 1900s as the watershed moment in both popular opinion and public policy.²² Britain was suffering from a 'profound identity crisis' at this time, facing industrial decline, a stagnating economy and growing challenges to its supremacy in the world.²³ At the same time, the recent Boer Wars and the accompanying political isolation had fuelled the general fear of 'the foreign'. The 'intrusion' of thousands of immigrants was thus seen as a threat that 'allegedly accentuated poverty and hence class conflict, while simultaneously diluting the Anglo-Saxon people who formed the kernel of the nation and the empire.'²⁴ It also offered an opportunity to externalise Britain's problems and to create an enemy against which to articulate British values and a unified British way of life.

The Aliens Act 1905, which set the precedent for government regulation of immigration in Britain, and the Aliens Restriction Act 1914 legitimated the notion that the 'alien' presence was a threat to be contained. The latter was rushed through Parliament on 5 August 1914, less than twenty-four hours after Britain declared war on Germany. It effectively subsumed the earlier Act, intensifying the restrictions and punishments placed on immigrants in a manner that reflected the xenophobic attitudes and suspicions that dominated popular culture and society.²⁵ The passing of the first British Nationality Law in the same year sought to define Britishness and distinguish it from 'alien' culture and law.²⁶

The 1919 Aliens Act – passed the year of Komisarjevsky’s arrival – entrenched the provisions of the 1914 Act, extending the emergency powers it granted into peacetime and providing a source of retribution against former ‘enemy aliens’. As well as strengthening the government’s control over who entered the country, it encouraged greater surveillance of immigrants, enabled the government to expel without appeal any immigrant suspected of encouraging sedition or promoting industrial unrest, and excluded immigrants from employment in key British institutions and services.²⁷

At the root of this legislation and the public discourse that surrounded it was an attempt to associate immigration with degradation and a desire to defend Britain by limiting the immigrant’s active involvement in society. Walter Long, the Unionist MP and Secretary of State for the Colonies, declared in 1918:

We must be masters in our own house. Our laws must be altered as to make certain that if persecuted people took refuge here they would respect our hospitality, accept our conditions and laws, and not mix themselves up in any movement for the alteration of our laws or anything connected with this country. They must live here as guests and behave themselves as such.²⁸

Such sentiments were echoed by the right-wing press, which played a central role in stoking up suspicion and fear amongst the British public. *The Evening Standard* published a plethora of stories throughout 1919 that depicted the country as under threat from ‘aliens’ who were ‘doing their utmost to destroy England’.²⁹ Likewise, the anti-alien rhetoric of such patriotic groups as the populist British Brothers’ League and the Primrose League, which counted Stanley Baldwin among its members, gained prominence.³⁰

This suspicion was neither confined to ‘enemy aliens’ nor to the war period, but shaped the British perception of immigration throughout the 1920s and 1930s and, indeed, well into the twenty-first century. For, as Cesarani explains,

anti-alien discourse by definition had no boundary: it comprehended everything that was ‘Other’ to Britain and Englishness. Military conflict heightened the intensity of its expression and gave it legitimacy; but, like the genie, it could not be popped back into the bottle on the cessation of hostilities.³¹

Baldwin’s Conservative Party won the 1924 General Election amidst the Zinoviev letter controversy with a strong anti-alien line, promising a re-examination of the regulations of alien entry into the country.³² Soon after his appointment as Home Secretary, William Joynson-Hicks, another prominent member of the Primrose League, announced ‘a crusade against “aliens”’ and accused his opponents of wanting to see ‘England flooded with the whole of the alien refuse from every country in the world.’³³

Komisarjevsky, then, entered a sociopolitical climate that was increasingly fixated on the concept of ‘Britishness’ and underpinned by an ideology that aimed ‘to exclude outsiders regarded as not having the correct credential to become British.’³⁴ His problems were exacerbated by the fact that he was a Russian émigré in a country that was gripped by fear of the ‘Red Peril’ in the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the failed Allied intervention into the subsequent civil war on the side of the White Army. The mainstream British press reported closely on Lenin’s reign of terror in 1918, filling newspapers with warnings of the growing ‘Bolshevik menace’.³⁵ *The Times* demonized the Bolsheviks repeatedly, printing detailed accounts of the ‘Bolshevist blood lust’ in quick succession.³⁶ Similarly, *The Manchester Guardian* interviewed men returning to Britain from Russia, all of whom

‘spoke with great bitterness of the Government, and nearly all were still under the shadow of a fear’.³⁷

It is possible to discern similar anti-alien and Russophobic sentiments in the British theatre of the time. Despite a growing interest in Russian culture amongst the upper echelons of British society since the 1880s, a depiction of Bolsheviks as ‘touchstones of depravity’ was the common trope in plays staged after 1917.³⁸ Steve Nicholson examines such plays at length, including *The Bolshevik Peril* (1919), which shows an evil Russian Bolshevik’s failed attempts to destroy a Lancashire working-class community, *The Silver Lining* (1921), and Barry Jackson’s production of *Yellow Sands*.³⁹ The latter ran for over six hundred consecutive performances at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in 1926, making it the second most commercially successful production of the mid 1920s. These plays, like the newspaper articles noted above, were used as propaganda to discredit communism and to present it as inimical to British values or the British way of life.

Neither a ‘Freak’ nor a ‘Revolutionary’

The perceived Bolshevik threat and the fear of ‘enemy aliens’ seeking to overturn the status quo no doubt informed how Komisarjevsky was introduced to the British public. In his first interview with *The Manchester Guardian*, for example, he was cast as an outspoken opponent of Lenin and a ‘fugitive from Russia and the Bolshevik regime’, who fled the country with his wife and ‘escaped with nothing but their lives.’⁴⁰ Although this was a considerable exaggeration, it served the purpose of positioning him as one of a number of Russian artists ‘driven into exile as a result of the Red Terror’.⁴¹ He described in detail the social and economic hardships faced by

Muscovites after 1917 and, in particular, the climate of fear created by the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation (Cheka). ‘The country was full of Cheka spies,’ Komisarjevsky explained,

and these spies were ready to condemn the most innocent actions as a crime against the Revolution, the inevitable punishment for which was death. At night, people listened to every sound that broke the silence in the street outside, dreading to hear the rumble of a motor-van, as it was in these vehicles that officials of the Cheka arrived to arrest the citizens.⁴²

By confirming the suspicions voiced in the national press, he distanced himself from the Bolshevik regime, thus signalling that he was a ‘friendly alien’ who posed no threat to the British way of life. Indeed, *The Times* assured readers that Komisarjevsky was ‘not a “freak” nor a violent revolutionary.’⁴³

Yet, despite positioning himself clearly on the side of the British, his nationality quickly became the defining feature of his work as a director and distinguished him from the field. The adjectives ‘Russian’ or ‘foreign’ became the standard prefix for any noun used in interviews, reviews and analyses of his productions. Actors, colleagues and journalists referred repeatedly to his ‘old Russian touch’ and called him a ‘Russian magician’ or, as Bartoshevich notes, ‘Lenin without the beard’.⁴⁴ He was similarly heralded as the saviour from the east for those who were frustrated with the current standard of British theatre, giving Komisarjevsky an air of the exotic and reiterating his position as an outsider.⁴⁵ The fact that both his friends and critics used this lexicon demonstrates the extent to which a preoccupation with national identity was entrenched in the British theatre.

Komisarjevsky certainly benefitted from this distinction during his early years in Britain. There was a growing awareness of the Russian theatre and the work of Stanislavsky over the course of the 1910s, prompting numerous failed attempts to bring the Moscow Art Theatre to London.⁴⁶ As the first Russian director to work in the British theatre, Komisarjevsky was able to capitalise on this growing interest, and he quickly became the exclusive authority on the Russian theatre. He was cast repeatedly as an interpreter or mediator between the two, where critics praised his ability to translate the celebrated and elusive ‘Russian soul’ for British audiences.⁴⁷ This helped to establish him in Britain, and gave him a certain amount of prestige.

The success of Komisarjevsky’s Chekhov productions at the Barnes Theatre in 1926 was seen by many to be the conclusive proof of his supposed skills in translation.⁴⁸

Only a handful of Chekhov productions were staged in Britain prior to Komisarjevsky’s Barnes season, the majority of which were artistic and critical failures.⁴⁹ A central cause for complaint amongst the critics was that Chekhov presented a distinctly Russian world that was, therefore, incomprehensible to British audiences. In its criticism of the Stage Society’s *The Cherry Orchard* in 1911, for example, *The Daily Telegraph* complained that Chekhov’s presentation of ‘an atmosphere, a social life, a set of characters, so different from those which we habitually meet, was, and must be, a shock to a well-regulated and conventional English mind.’⁵⁰ Komisarjevsky’s success, by contrast, was attributed to the fact that he was Russian and able to decipher the plays that appeared illogical to British eyes and ears. In his review of *Three Sisters*, Ivor Brown praised Komisarjevsky’s ‘Russian hands’ that successfully ‘stirs the sparks in [the actors’] English bodies and

translates them in fullness to the Russian world of fitful moods, swift ecstasies, and menacing life weariness.’⁵¹

It has already been well documented that while critics believed Komisarjevsky presented an authentic ‘taste’ of Russia, he modified and adapted Chekhov’s text to present heavily Anglicised versions of the plays that appealed to the expectations and tastes of a British audience.⁵² Nevertheless, it helped to corroborate the dominant narrative that presented Russian and British culture as alien to each other, and it afforded Komisarjevsky a role and thus a foothold in the British theatre. The problems arose, however, when he attempted to transcend this rather restricted role and turn his hand to Shakespeare.

The Russian ‘Invasion’ at Stratford

Komisarjevsky’s first professional Shakespeare production was *The Merchant of Venice*, which was the first in his series of productions at the newly reopened Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon between 1932 and 1939.⁵³ In *The Merchant of Venice*, as in all his productions, he shocked audiences and critics alike with his iconoclastic design and his insistence on ensemble playing. However, what unsettled commentators most was his nationality, which was the focus of discourse on the productions. It was one thing for a director to revolutionise Shakespeare playing in Stratford – his home country that had, until recently, been dominated by the conservatism and idolatry of Victorian actor-manager Frank Benson – but that this director was foreign was something much more problematic. Critics attributed all of Komisarjevsky’s failures to the fact that he was Russian and, therefore, alien to the tradition of the British theatre. Indeed, they apparently ignored

the fact that he had lived and worked in the country for nineteen years and became a naturalized British subject in 1932, the year that he began working at Stratford. A suspicion spread through certain sections of the British theatre that this so-called inherently Russian director would 'Russianize' Shakespeare, and, as Richard Mennen argues, his presence in Stratford was 'tantamount to an invasion.'⁵⁴

The suspicion that Komisarjevsky would disrupt the long-standing tradition was, of course, well founded. He admitted openly that he wanted to revolutionise Shakespeare playing in the country: 'The business of digging artistic corpses out of cemeteries doesn't interest me, and from my point of view has no value, as far as the *living* theatre is concerned.'⁵⁵ In particular, he sought to challenge the convention of editing or rewriting Shakespeare's texts to create a central 'star' character and the tendency to stage the plays as spectacles of stage illusion punctuated by drawn-out and over-declamatory speeches. Yet, in a decade marked by the growth of nationalism and continuing anti-alienism, Shakespeare was clung to ever tightly as a symbol of the golden age of Britain and its empire. The Prince of Wales reminded the assembled crowd at the ceremonial opening of the rebuilt Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1932 that 'Shakespeare was above all an Englishman.'⁵⁶ To attack the conventions of Shakespeare playing was to attack the very foundations of the British identity.

These conventions were products of the Victorian actor-manager tradition of Henry Irving, Herbert Beerbohm Tree and Benson that continued to dominate the British theatre into the 1930s, leaving little room for innovation. The few directors who attempted to break with this tradition – including Harley Granville Barker, Barry

Jackson, Terence Gray, and Harcourt Williams – were positioned on the periphery of the field, while productions in the mainstream theatre were full of ‘cut-and-dried conventional methods of staging Shakespeare, so that it was absolutely inconceivable for them to have... a new look.’⁵⁷ Komisarjevsky’s production of *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, was the first new interpretation of the play since Irving’s 1879 production.⁵⁸

In no place were the traditions more ingrained than in Stratford-upon-Avon and the annual Shakespeare Festival at the Memorial Theatre. Benson dominated the Festival between 1886 and 1919, and, even after this retirement, his legacy continued to overshadow the Stratford theatre, which became ‘a depository for the dry bones of the Bensonian convention.’⁵⁹ Indeed, it was in a bid to break away from his stranglehold on Stratford and the associated accusations of archaism and provincialism that William Bridges-Adams, his successor as Festival director, invited Komisarjevsky to be a guest director. He confessed that he ‘knew you would bring an un-English genius to bear on two plays in which English producers were beginning to go stale’, revealing his own proclivity for defining Komisarjevsky by his nationality, albeit for positive ends.⁶⁰

Mennen has already outlined in detail Komisarjevsky’s various innovations at Stratford.⁶¹ However, it is useful to cite one or two examples here to demonstrate the extent to which he challenged the long-standing conventions. In his desire to create synthesised and unified performances, he restored lines and scenes usually omitted from the traditional ‘star’-centred productions so as to place greater emphasis on characters usually treated as secondary and unimportant. Thus, such characters as

Gobbo and Portia were brought to the foreground in his production of *The Merchant of Venice* to encourage even playing. By the same token, he overturned the tradition of playing Shylock as the sympathetic, tragic hero, as established by Irving, although this was also rooted in Komisarjevsky's own growing anti-Semitism and fascist sympathies.⁶² He also rejected the lavish, heavily decorative and naturalistic sets, replacing them with simpler, eclectic designs that incorporated different playing levels and emphasised the theatricality of the plays.⁶³ In *Macbeth*, he designed non-realistic settings, including walls covered with aluminium, and dressed his actors in costumes of no specific period in order to 'free' the play from history and to reinforce its continued relevance.⁶⁴

While a number of the critics celebrated Komisarjevsky's break with tradition, praising him for having 'evoked the best and most spontaneous from almost every [company] member', there was a wealth of negative attention, which centred largely on his nationality.⁶⁵ As Chekhov was taken to be distinctly Russian, so Shakespeare was seen as distinctly British and, therefore, incomprehensible to foreign directors. The critic from *The Referee*, for example, argued that it was inconceivable that Komisarjevsky, as a Russian, could appreciate the intricacies of Shakespeare's language: 'Clearly a Russian can no more understand Shakespeare than an Englishman can understand Tchekhov [sic]'.⁶⁶ Such comments created a binary that placed Shakespeare and England on one side, and Chekhov, Russia and Komisarjevsky on the other. The latter's Stratford productions challenged this binary, where 'the very presence of a Russian director in English theatre's holy of holies remained a puzzling phenomenon throughout those years.'⁶⁷

It is easy to identify the latent anti-alienism in the contention that Shakespeare was off limits to foreign directors. Casting doubt over Komisarjevsky's ability to comprehend Shakespeare was a thinly veiled accusation that he did not have the correct credentials to be 'truly' British, regardless of his status as a naturalised citizen. This contention was similarly informed by the belief that the British way of life and key British institutions – in this instance, Shakespeare and the Memorial Theatre – had to be defended from the interference of foreign individuals like Komisarjevsky, who should know their place.

Many saw the engagement of a Russian director at Stratford at a time of growing fear and suspicion of the Soviet Union and communism as a national insult. *The Daily Express* complained: 'It is typically English that we should have to employ a Russian to interpret *our* national dramatist', insinuating that the so-called interference of foreigners was becoming endemic in the country.⁶⁸ Even those critics who wrote largely positive reviews of his work retained an element of cultural superiority. Thus, *The Manchester Guardian* commended Bridges-Adams's 'courage' in engaging Komisarjevsky, before reasoning that 'even if it has taken a foreigner to bring [Shakespeare] to us, that foreigner is one who has chosen England for his home'.⁶⁹ This final comment implied that his work was only acceptable given his status as a naturalised British subject.

Opposition to Komisarjevsky's presence at the Memorial Theatre came from every quarter, including the Theatre's Board of Governors and, in particular, its Chairman Archibald Flower, a direct descendant of Charles Flower, who founded the original Memorial Theatre in 1879. Bridges-Adams famously underwent a lengthy battle with

the Board in order to secure Komisarjevsky's engagement as a guest director, and he only succeeded after threatening to resign. However, even after he was engaged, the relations between Komisarjevsky and the Board retained an air of antagonism and condescension.⁷⁰ He also faced resistance in his early days at the Memorial Theatre from some of the actors with whom he worked, particularly those who had served for years under Benson such as Randle Ayrton. Ayrton was initially 'horrified by Komis's "antics"' and his insistence that he break with the Irving tradition of playing Shylock as the heroic lead, although he acquiesced and eventually saw the wisdom in the director's approach.⁷¹

Komisarjevsky was likewise subject to hostility from prominent actors external to the Memorial Theatre such as Oscar Asche, who felt the need to defend the long-established traditions of Shakespeare. In a letter to the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, titled significantly "'Natural" Shakespeare', Asche argued: 'Shakespeare's plays should be presented without freak scenery and costumes, the products of foreign minds.'⁷² He accused the Memorial Theatre of setting a bad example by engaging Komisarjevsky and turning its back on English artists: 'Surely there are English producers – and I would be only too honoured to make one of them – who could be invited as "guest producers"?'⁷³ Underpinning this question was the age-old suspicion of the immigrant usurping the Briton and stealing her or his job, while Asche repeated the presumption that a Russian director was unable to understand the essence of Shakespeare and stage his plays accordingly. The traditionalist audiences of Stratford echoed this sentiment. In one of a number of outraged letters to the local press, an angry audience member rejoiced 'that the Immortal Bard has passed and cannot see the mutilation of his work.'⁷⁴ In another, Komisarjevsky's *Macbeth* was

called a ‘monstrosity’ and ‘an insult to the “immortal memory” that Stratford has cherished for so long.’⁷⁵

The critics were equally as insistent on making direct connections between the failures of the work and Komisarjevsky’s ‘foreign ways’ and his supposedly alien status. Alan Parson’s reviews for the *Daily Mail* were laced with condescension, as he remarked how ‘vastly interesting [it is] to see how a foreign producer views a familiar Shakespeare classic’. He felt the need to remind Komisarjevsky of the importance of language in the plays repeatedly and always in a patronising manner: ‘some, perhaps old fashioned, people consider Shakespeare’s verse of more importance than any trivial tricks of production.’⁷⁶ The *Daily Express* similarly argued that his attempt to stage *The Merchant of Venice* ‘failed in miserable confusion’ and was unrecognizable from Shakespeare’s play: ‘All the company tried to make it Shakespeare, but Komisarjevsky made it Stratford’s crazy night.’⁷⁷

When reviewing the 1935 production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Scotsman* concluded that Komisarjevsky ‘superimposed a foreign element upon one of the most English of comedies’.⁷⁸ The *Carlisle Journal* concurred, noting: ‘Komisarjevski [sic] brought his own modern Russian ideas to this robust Elizabethan comedy’.⁷⁹ The critic for the *Yorkshire Post* was much more scathing, aligning himself with the ‘sober Shakespeare lovers’ and sympathising with the Memorial Theatre actors, who

were asked to carry out “business” and distort familiar characters in a manner that comes natural only to players such as those who people Russian Art Theatres. This production should be renamed “The Merry Wives of Moscow”.⁸⁰

The critic was, of course, correct in his assertion that Komisarjevsky was trying to bring Russian theatre practices to the Memorial Theatre, especially a renewed sense

of art in the theatre and the importance placed on ensemble work. However, for this critic and others, the introduction of such practices was something to be feared and resisted.

Failure in the West End

While Komisarjevsky's reception in Stratford had certainly been hostile, it was his production of *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1936 that received the most severe and aggressive criticism. The production originally opened at the King's Theatre in Glasgow on 5 October before transferring to the New Theatre in London nine days later. It was Komisarjevsky's only Shakespeare production in the West End, and its acting company included such stalwarts of the British theatre as Leon Quartermaine, who played Enobarbus, and future 'stars' like Donald Wolfit, who played Antony. Most controversial, at least as far as the critics were concerned, was the casting of Russian actor Eugenie Leontovich in the role of Cleopatra.⁸¹

The combination of a Russian director and a Russian actor in the lead role was anathema to the critics. Again, the common complaint was that neither possessed the required level of skill or understanding to do justice to Shakespeare's play. A particular point of contention was Leontovich's accent, with critics complaining vehemently of her inability to pronounce the verse 'properly'. *The Manchester Guardian* referred to the 'oddness' of Leontovich's performance and declared that 'her accent prevents her doing justice to the poetry.'⁸² Clive McManus was more sympathetic in his review for the *Daily Mail*, praising aspects of her work but stating simply that '[her] command of English is scarcely adequate for Shakespearean verse.'⁸³ Ivor Brown called the production a 'calamitous presentation' and announced

angrily that Komisarjevsky, ‘of whose talents when he is playing on his own ground there is no question’, had produced a ‘travesty of the great tragedies’, and his ‘slaughter of the matchless poetry which Shakespeare poured into *Antony and Cleopatra* is beyond excuse.’⁸⁴ While Leontovich had ‘charmed the London public as a Russian exile in *Tovarich*,’ she failed to grasp Shakespeare’s language and ‘crooned and whined this majestic stuff in a way that robbed it equally of music and of meaning.’ To conclude, Brown asked: ‘But why, oh why, must [Komisarjevsky] go on tackling Shakespeare?’⁸⁵

The Stage was largely positive when it reviewed the production’s opening in Glasgow, commending Komisarjevsky’s decision to divide the play into two acts and celebrating Leontovich’s ability to overcome her ‘handicap’ to give ‘a performance which is well impressed on the memory.’⁸⁶ However, it was much more condemnatory in London and contradicted the earlier review almost entirely. While it is true that the reviews would have been written by different critics, it also suggests an unwillingness to accept innovations of Shakespeare playing by foreign actors and directors in the commercial heart of the British theatre. Thus, in London, Komisarjevsky’s staging was judged to be confusing and puzzling, while the production as a whole was ‘darkened by the entrustment of the part of Cleopatra to a Russian lady whose command of English is so light that many of her remarks were entirely unintelligible.’⁸⁷ The critic again questioned the suitability of a Russian actor for a Shakespeare play, noting that

probably in a Tchegov [sic] play in its original language, [Leontovich] could give an agreeable performance in a Moscow theatre; but how she came to essay such a character as Cleopatra – one of the most exciting in every respect any actress can attempt – and play it in English is simply a mystery... one of the interesting things of the evening was the sudden quiet which fell upon the audience while

Leon Quartermaine was speaking. Here, at any rate we had noble verse worthily delivered. Further fine elocution came from George Hayes.⁸⁸

He encouraged audiences to judge Leontovich's performance against those of British actors and conclude, as he does, that only native speakers could really understand and appreciate Shakespeare.

By drawing comparisons between Komisarjevsky and Leontovich's success in Russian-language productions and their failure in Shakespeare, *The Stage's* London critic also reinforced explicitly the Chekhov-Shakespeare binary noted above. Indeed, it is significant to note that *Antony and Cleopatra* opened just four months after Komisarjevsky's acclaimed production of *The Seagull* in the same theatre. While James Agate called the latter a 'triumph' and 'endlessly beautiful',⁸⁹ he bemoaned Komisarjevsky's incomprehension of the significance of *Antony and Cleopatra* to 'the English ear and mind'.⁹⁰ Titling his review 'Anton and Cleopatrova. A tragedy by Komispeare', Agate proclaimed: 'I do not think that foreign producers, however, distinguished, should permit themselves to take such liberties.'

Charles Morgan was among the most venomous in his handling of Komisarjevsky's production for *The Times*. He declared it to be incomprehensible and remarked condescendingly that the 'part of Cleopatra was written in English and in verse; Mme. Leontovich has neither.'⁹¹ He filled his review with cruel impersonations of her delivery of lines such as 'O, wither'd is the garland of war', which he claimed was delivered as: 'O weederdee de garlano devar'. He went one step further when reviewing the production for the *New York Times*, describing Leontovich as a

‘babbling Cleopatra’ and lambasting the conceit with which a Russian actor and a Russian director attempted to stage Shakespeare:

And if she was to attempt Cleopatra at all, would you not have supposed that she would choose a producer who might act, in some degree, as a corrective to her own faults? But no; the Russian must be produced by another Russian who, though his conversational English is at any rate fluent, has no equipment, even if he has the wish, to teach the speaking of verse. The result is an almost indescribable humiliation and disaster.⁹²

He declared the production to be a warning to theatre managers and audiences of the ‘danger of excessive hospitality’ and prayed for a cleansing of the theatre from foreign influence, echoing some of the more extreme anti-alien rhetoric:

We shall have no more attempts by actresses to play the great classical parts in broken, incomprehensible English. The theatre will be the healthier.... [This] experience will, it may be hoped, act as a purge of the theatre.⁹³

He proved to be, in part, correct in his prediction of a ‘purge’ of the British theatre:

Komisarjevsky’s *Antony and Cleopatra* closed after just four nights, and he soon left Britain for North America, where he hoped to create his much-longed for theatre studio and a home for himself.

A Bitter Conclusion

Komisarjevsky rejected publicly the inherent nationalism that underlined the claims that his Shakespeare was distinctly Russian and at odds with the British tradition. Shortly before his migration to North America, *Play Pictorial* invited him to write an article on Russian productions of Shakespeare, and he took the opportunity to propose a more cosmopolitan attitude that acknowledged the interdependence of all countries in the world:

I am afraid there aren’t any purely Russian methods of producing or acting, just as there aren’t any genuinely British ones... nationalism is a product of limited minds. A cultured person, remaining nationalistic

in spirit, is cosmopolitan in all other respects. Free education, whether scientific or artistic, modifies the national traits of individuals, brings all nations into closer mental relationship, and unites them in a family striving all together for the spiritual progress of the world.⁹⁴

To prove his point, Komisarjevsky highlighted how even those entrenched conventions of Shakespeare playing that were taken to be inherently British were influenced by foreign ideas and experiments:

In England, those productions of Shakespeare which, since Tree and Irving, are accepted as “legitimate” and “British”, show obvious signs of the influence of the nineteenth-century German historical productions, of the French *mise-en-scene*, of the Sardou-Sarah Bernhardt-Rostand School, of the methods of Max Reinhardt, etc. Even the truly English Elizabethan methods, as used on the English stage of to-day, are not truly English.⁹⁵

By highlighting the fundamental inaccuracy of any claim for a purely British Shakespeare, he criticised openly the assumed cultural superiority of British audiences and critics, and the tendency to reject innovations from supposed ‘outsiders’.

Komisarjevsky remained convinced that he had been the victim of a fixation on his nationality when in Britain and a refusal to see him as anything other than Russian and, therefore, alien. As he explained bitterly to Sewell in 1945, ‘I have been perpetually an alien in that Country, an alien physically and an alien spiritually in spite of the truly great work I have done for the *English Theatre*.’⁹⁶ It was with this same bitterness that he wrote the 1946 letter to her noted at the beginning of this article, in which he laid the blame for his lack of legacy squarely on the shoulders of the Anglocentric British theatre. ‘I am not revengeful,’ he told Sewell at the beginning of 1946, ‘but I still feel very bitter about those titled, as they call them vulgarly here, bums [...] I hope the Bolshevists will put them in a cage some day for the good of the English theatre and of England generally.’⁹⁷

Borovsky explains that Komisarjevsky's xenophobic treatment at the hands of the British theatre left him with a chronic morbid complex regarding his identity and a deep-seated resentment of the country. When Anthony Quayle invited him to return to Britain to stage *Julius Caesar* in 1949, Komisarjevsky explained that

during the seven or so years of my work at Stratford-upon-Avon... I've had plenty of time getting a little tired of the fact that my productions, in spite of their success with the British public, enhancing the reputation of the National British Memorial Theatre, had been constantly (to my mind quite senselessly too) labelled as 'foreign', 'Russian' and what not, by the majority of critics and other 'knowing' people. I do not want to feel the soreness of yore all over again.

You may call me a coward, but my dear Tony, at 67, even a rabid revolutionary would not relish being abused again.⁹⁸

While it may be tempting to write these comments off as the subjective and rather resentful recollections of an aging director, the evidence that I have presented here shows that there was some truth to Komisarjevsky's suspicions. While it is, of course, unwise to attribute the absence of a discernable legacy solely to the attitudes surrounding his nationality, they certainly played a role and must therefore be considered in the myriad of factors.

¹ In addition to *Uncle Vanya*, the company performed *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* and Sheridan's *The Critic*. The acting company was led by John Burrell and included Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson and Nicholas Hannen.

² Komisarjevsky letter to Sewell, 8 August 1946, MS Thr 531, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Komisarjevsky believed that the company struck a deal with the New York theatre press to ensure that they wrote positive reviews 'with the exception of two (as far as I know) critics; one of them resigned because the editor wouldn't print his bad notice, the other swallowed the same affront silently.'

³ Komisarjevsky letter to Sewell, 25 September 1946, MS Thr 531, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁴ Haggard cited in Christopher Hassall, *The Timeless Quest: Stephen Haggard* (London: Arthur Barker Ltd., 1948), p. 147.

⁵ The Queen's Theatre season was Gielgud's most successful attempt to establish an ensemble company of his own. He brought together a group of actors who were committed to work together as a unified ensemble for the whole season, including those who had already worked with Komisarjevsky such as Ashcroft, Leon Quartermaine, George Devine, Frederick

Lloyd and Alec Guinness. The company disbanded after just one season, due, largely, to Gielgud's work commitments. Peggy Ashcroft was the first actor to sign a three-year contract at Peter Hall's newly established Royal Shakespeare Company in 1960.

⁶ Komisarjevsky published three books during his time in Britain: *Myself and the Theatre* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1929); *Settings and Costumes of the Modern Stage* (London: The Studio Ltd, 1933); and *The Theatre and a Changing Civilisation* (London: Bodley Head, 1935). He also wrote a number of articles for such publications as *Play Pictorial*, *Drama*, *The Freeman*.

⁷ See, in particular, 'Star or Team? Komisarjevsky's Early Developments in Ensemble Playing in the United Kingdom' in John Britton, ed., *Encountering Ensemble* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013), pp. 94-110. Also see, 'A Tradition in Transition: Komisarjevsky's Seduction of the British theatre' in Jonathan Pitches, ed., *Russians in Britain: British Theatre and the Russian Tradition of Actor Training* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 13-37.

⁸ Philippa Burt, 'Granville Barker's Ensemble as a Model of Fabian Theatre' *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (November 2012), pp. 307-24.

⁹ Pitches, 'Star or Team?', p. 108; original emphasis. Pitches is correct in his assessment that Komisarjevsky's friendship with Sewell did little to improve his position in the British theatre since she was relatively new to the scene herself. His acrimonious divorce from Ashcroft understandably left her unwilling to offer support, while Gielgud was busy establishing his own 'star' status, in spite of agreeing with the ensemble principle in general.

¹⁰ Alexei Bartoshevich, 'Theodore Komisarjevsky, Chekhov, and Shakespeare' in Laurence Senelick, ed., *Wandering Stars: Russian Émigré Theatre, 1905-1940* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), p. 107.

¹¹ As is well known, Komissarzhevsky senior, the famous opera tenor, was an influential mentor to Konstantin Stanislavsky and an integral member of his Moscow Society of Art and Literature. Vera Komissarzhevskaya was one of the most celebrated Russian actors at the turn of the twentieth century. Komisarjevsky met his half-sister for the first time in December 1902. For a detailed biography of the Komissarzhevsky family, see Victor Borovsky, *A Triptych from the Russian Theatre: An Artistic Biography of the Komissarzhevskys* (London: Hurst and Company, 2001).

¹² Theodore Komisarjevsky, *Myself and the Theatre*, pp. 1-2.

¹³ Komisarjevsky cited in Borovsky, *A Triptych from the Russian Theatre*, pp. 324-5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

¹⁵ Komisarjevsky cited in Bartoshevich, 'Komisarjevsky, Chekhov, and Shakespeare', p. 109.

¹⁶ Komisarjevsky in 'WOAD! Celebrities in Undress: XXVIII – Komisarjevsky', *The Sketch*, 6 October 1926.

¹⁷ Komisarjevsky cited in Bartoshevich, 'Theodore Komisarjevsky', p. 109.

¹⁸ Michel Saint-Denis, 'The French Theatre: Contradictions and Contributions', Lecture at Harvard University, 30 April 1958, MS Add 81238, Michel Saint-Denis Archive, British Library, London.

¹⁹ Michel Saint-Denis, 'The English Theatre in Gallic Eyes', trans. J. F. M. Stephens, Jr., *Texas Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Autumn 1961), p. 36.

²⁰ Senelick, *Wandering Stars*, p. xviii.

²¹ Colin Holmes 'Cosmopolitan London' in Anne J. Kershen, ed., *London: The Promise Land? The Migrant Experience in a Capital City* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1997), pp. 10-37. See also, *A Tolerant Country? Immigrants, Refugees and Minorities in Britain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991).

²² Holmes, 'Cosmopolitan London', pp. 16-7; David Cesarani, 'An Alien Concept? The Continuity of Anti-Alienism in British Society before 1940', *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (November 1992), p. 28. For quantitative data on the number of Eastern-European

émigrés residing in Britain at this time, see Andrew Godley, 'Leaving the East End: Regional Mobility among East European Jews in London, 1880-1914' in *London: The Promise Land?*, p. 56.

²³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 1994), p. 10.

²⁴ Cesarani, 'An Alien Concept?', p. 29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-4.

²⁶ Panikos Panayi, *An Immigration History of Britain: Multicultural Racism since 1800* (London and New York: Longman, 2010), p. 205.

²⁷ The Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act 1919, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1919/92/pdfs/ukpga_19190092_en.pdf [accessed 11 August 2016]. For a detailed discussion of the political motivations and repercussions of this Act, including examples of the excessive force used by British authorities in implementing it and the growth of xenophobic and, in particular, anti-Semitic violence, see David Cesarani, 'Anti-Alienism in England after the First World War', *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 1987), pp. 5-29.

²⁸ 'Mr Long for the Kaiser's Trial', *The Times*, 6 December 1918.

²⁹ 'Aliens Behind the Scenes', *Evening Standard*, 1 July 1919. See also, 'Alien Labour Restricted', *Evening Standard*, 10 July 1919; 'Keeping Germans Out', *Evening Standard*, 16 July 1919; 'Plotters Behind the Strikes', *Evening Standard*, 6 August 1919, among numerous other stories.

³⁰ Matthew Hendley, 'Anti-Alienism and the Primrose League: The Externalization of the Postwar Crisis, 1918-1932', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 243-4.

³¹ Cesarani, 'An Alien Concept?', pp. 36-7.

³² Susan Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918-1931* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 62.

³³ Joynson-Hicks cited in Cesarani, 'Anti-Alienism in England', p. 19. Such language is, unfortunately, only too familiar today, particularly in the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis and the increasingly inflammatory rhetoric surrounding the 2016 European Union Referendum in Britain. In July 2015, for example, then Prime Minister David Cameron was criticized for referring to refugees seeking entry into Britain as 'a swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean' (*The Independent*, 30 July 2015), while UKIP leader Nigel Farage's anti-migrant poster, released one week before the Referendum vote, was noted for its similarities to 1930s Nazi propaganda and reported to the police for inciting racial hatred (*The Guardian*, 16 June 2016). Following the vote to leave the EU, numerous media sources reported a rise in xenophobic and racist assaults. See, for example, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/post-brexit-racist-attacks-soar-hate-crimes-reported-to-police-increase-57_uk_57714594e4b08d2c5639adcb.

³⁴ Panayi, *An Immigration History*, p. 208.

³⁵ "'Red' Peril in Italy', *The Mirror*, 29 November 1919; "'Red' Peril That May Lead to New War', *The Mirror*, 16 January 1920; "'Red' Peril Occupies Paris Council', *The Mirror*, 17 January 1920. Also see, 'The Impossibility of Bolshevism' and 'Bolshevism Described by Bolsheviks. "An Apparatus for Oppression"', *Evening Standard*, 11 October 1919; 'Bolshevist England. What It Would Look Like', *Evening Standard*, 14 October 1919; "'Reds" Coming to England', *Evening Standard*, 5 January 1920.

³⁶ 'Toll of Bolshevist Atrocities. Torture and Murder', *The Times*, 27 February 1919; 'Russia Under the Bolsheviks – A Picture of Ruin', *The Times*, 4 April 1919; 'Bolshevist Blood Lust', *The Times*, 26 May 1919; 'A City Under the Soviets', *The Times*, 28 May 1919; 'The Red Peril. Advance in Central Asia', *The Times*, 9 January 1920. *The Times* also published an eight-page booklet titled 'The Horrors of Bolshevism' in November 1919.

³⁷ 'Return of Prisoners from Russia', *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1920.

- ³⁸ Steve Nicholson, *British Theatre and the Red Peril: the Portrayal of Communism, 1917-1945* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), p. 5. For a detailed examination of the increased presence of Russian cultural forms and artists in the first half of the twentieth century, and its impact on literature, the visual arts, music and ballet in Britain, see Rebecca Beasley and Philip Ross Bullock, eds., *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940: From Melodrama to Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- ³⁹ Nicholson, *British Theatre and the Red Peril*, pp. 27-52.
- ⁴⁰ 'Russia and the British Drama. M. Comesarjevsky's [sic] Work', *The Manchester Guardian*, 14 January 1920.
- ⁴¹ 'Russian Dancers and Singers' *The Times*, 22 November 1919.
- ⁴² Komisarjevsky, *Myself and the Theatre*, p. 4.
- ⁴³ 'Russian Ballet at the Court', *The Times*, 21 February 1920.
- ⁴⁴ Bartoshevich, 'Theodore Komisarjevsky', p. 104.
- ⁴⁵ 'Russia and the British Drama', *The Manchester Guardian*, 14 January 1920.
- ⁴⁶ Aleksey Bartoshevich, 'The 'inevitability' of Chekhov: Anglo-Russian theatrical contacts in the 1910s' in Patrick Miles, ed., *Chekhov on the British Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 20-8.
- ⁴⁷ 'The Play and the Actor. A Russian Producer and his Theories', *The Observer*, 18 January 1920.
- ⁴⁸ At Barnes, Komisarjevsky staged *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* as part of Philip Ridgeway's 1926 season celebrating Russian writers. He also staged *Uncle Vanya* at the Court Theatre in November 1921 and *Ivanov* at the Duke of York's in December 1925, both of which were directed for the Stage Society, and *The Seagull* at the New Theatre in 1936.
- ⁴⁹ For a detailed overview of the critical response to Chekhov productions at this time, see Victor Emeljanow, *Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981).
- ⁵⁰ 'The Stage Society. "The Cherry Orchard"', *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 May 1911.
- ⁵¹ 'Chekhov Again', *The Manchester Guardian*, 18 February 1926.
- ⁵² See, for example, Victor Emeljanow, 'Komisarjevsky's *Three Sisters*: The Prompt Book', *Theatre Notebook*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (1987), pp. 56-66; Laurence Senelick, *The Chekhov Theatre: A Century of Plays in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 156-60.
- ⁵³ Komisarjevsky staged five plays at Stratford following *The Merchant of Venice: Macbeth* in 1933; *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in 1935; *King Lear* in 1936; *The Comedy of Errors* in 1938 and *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1939.
- ⁵⁴ Richard E. Mennen, 'Theodore Komisarjevsky's Production of "The Merchant of Venice"', *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (October 1979), p. 388.
- ⁵⁵ Theodore Komisarjevsky, "'Russian" Productions', *Play Pictorial*, Vol. 68, No. 407 (1936), p. 10; original emphasis.
- ⁵⁶ Tony Howard, 'Blood on the bright young things: Shakespeare in the 1930s' in Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale, eds., *British Theatre between the Wars, 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 145.
- ⁵⁷ Peggy Ashcroft cited in Borovsky, *A Triptych from the Russian Theatre*, p. 389. For a detailed analysis of the various developments in Shakespeare playing at this time, including Williams's experiments at the Old Vic Theatre, see Howard, 'Blood on the bright young things', pp. 135-61.
- ⁵⁸ Mennen, 'Theodore Komisarjevsky's Production', p. 387.
- ⁵⁹ *The Week-end Review*, 30 July 1932.
- ⁶⁰ Bridges-Adams cited in Borovsky, *A Triptych from the Russian Theatre*, p. 404.

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- ⁶¹ Richard E. Mennen, 'The Productions of Theodore Komisarjevsky at Stratford-upon-Avon, 1932-1939' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1971).
- ⁶² Howard, 'Blood on the bright young things', pp. 153-4. Despite claiming that he was 'neither a Jew nor an anti-Jew', Komisarjevsky's anti-Semitic attitudes are apparent in the introduction to his 1935 book *The Theatre and a Changing Civilisation*, in which he praised Hitler and Mussolini repeatedly and patronizingly rebuffed the 'sentimental concern' shown for the 'political murders of the last seventeen years.' Komisarjevsky, *The Theatre and a Changing Civilisation*, p. x.
- ⁶³ Mennen, 'Theodore Komisarjevsky's Production', pp. 389-90.
- ⁶⁴ Michael Mullin, 'Augures and Understood Relations: Theodore Komisarjevsky's "Macbeth"', *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (March 1974), p. 21.
- ⁶⁵ "'The Merchant of Venice'". Novel Production in Stratford Season. Mr Komisarjevsky's Diversions', *Birmingham Mail*, 26 July 1932.
- ⁶⁶ 'King Lear', *The Referee*, 20 February 1927.
- ⁶⁷ Borovsky, *A Triptych from the Russian Theatre*, p. 385.
- ⁶⁸ 'Talk of London', *The Daily Express*, 20 April 1933; emphasis added.
- ⁶⁹ "'The Merchant of Venice" Komisarjevsky's Production at Stratford', *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 July 1932.
- ⁷⁰ Borovsky, *A Triptych from the Russian Theatre*, p. 398.
- ⁷¹ Fabia Drake, *Blind Fortune* (London: William Kimber, 1978), p. 102.
- ⁷² Oscar, Asche "'Natural" Shakespeare', *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 12 May 1933.
- ⁷³ Ibid.
- ⁷⁴ J.G. Newey, 'Letters to the Editor – More Sorrow Than Anger', *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 5 May 1933.
- ⁷⁵ Chas. WM Johnson, 'Letters to the Editor – Komisarjevsky Criticised', *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 12 May 1933.
- ⁷⁶ 'Fancy Dress Shylock', *Daily Mail*, 26 July 1932.
- ⁷⁷ "'Crazy Night" at Stratford. Komisarjevsky Plays Pranks with Shakespeare', *Daily Express*, 26 July 1932.
- ⁷⁸ 'Stratford This Year. Komisarjevsky's "Merry Wives"', *The Scotsman*, 18 April 1935.
- ⁷⁹ "'The Merry Wives of Windsor" Shakespeare Memorial Theatre', *Carlisle Journal*, 11 July 1935.
- ⁸⁰ "'Merry Wives of Moscow" Komisarjevsky at Stratford', *Yorkshire Post*, 20 April 1935.
- ⁸¹ It is not clear whether Komisarjevsky engaged Leontovich himself. Borovsky cites his widow, Ernestine Stodelle, who believed the parts were already cast before Komisarjevsky was engaged as director.' Borovsky, *A Triptych from the Russian Theatre*, p. 422.
- ⁸² "'Antony and Cleopatra"', *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 October 1936.
- ⁸³ 'Shakespeare with Shifting Skies', *Daily Mail*, 15 October 1936.
- ⁸⁴ "'Antony and Cleopatra"', *The Observer*, 18 October 1936.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ "'Antony and Cleopatra"', *The Stage*, 8 October 1936.
- ⁸⁷ 'The New. "Antony and Cleopatra"', *The Stage*, 22 October 1936.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ "'The Seagull"', *The Sunday Times*, 24 May 1936.
- ⁹⁰ 'Anton and Cleopatra. A Tragedy by Komispeare', *The Sunday Times*, 18 October 1936.
- ⁹¹ 'New Theatre "Antony and Cleopatra"', *The Times*, 15 October 1936.
- ⁹² 'Cleopatra's Needle: Being a Sour Reflection on Madame Leontovich as Queen of Egypt', *New York Times*, 1 November 1936.
- ⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Komisarjevsky, ““Russian” Productions’, p. 10.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Komisarjevsky letter to Sewell, 2 October 1945, Ms Thr 531, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁹⁷ Komisarjevsky letter to Sewell, 12 February 1946, MS Thr 531, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 424-5.