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Molière: Don Juan

Cambridge University Press, 1995

(Anglie)

ignore certain dimensions. The truth is that Bergman has offered spectators his version of *Don Juan*, which is as it should be. His particular contribution to the stage tradition of Don Juan is to have explored the vertiginous depths of his emptiness and exposed his existential bankruptcy with painful acuity. Over the years he has developed that vision and in his latest, darkest version, brought his weary Don Juan to the point where his final end is not even a suicide but merely the formal acknowledgement of his inner deadness. 'If one can believe in God, there is no problem', says a character in Bergman's film *The Prison*. 'If one cannot, there is no solution.'

AN ABSURDIST 'DON JUAN' IN PRAGUE (JAN GROSSMAN, DIRECTOR)

Na zábradlí Theatre, Prague, 1989–1992

In former Czechoslovakia, *Don Juan* is associated above all with the name of Jan Grossman, one of the leading figures of the Czech stage from the 1960s until his death in 1993. His three productions of the play, first seen in Hradec Kralové in 1982 and later in Prague, were conceived during the period of so-called 'Normalisation', the official designation for the re-imposition of Communist control after the invasion by Warsaw Pact forces in August 1968. Against this background his absurdist and avowedly Camusian interpretation offered an astringent commentary on the existential difficulty of living in a manifestly abnormal society.

His production was the culmination of many years' reflection on the Don Juan theme and, more broadly, of the experiences of an artist-intellectual in Communist Czechoslovakia. It would not be excessive to say that Grossman, a critic and theorist by formation, was driven into the profession of director by the regime's hostility to his work.[76] As a young lecturer in the post-war years of freedom, he had emerged as a prominent spokesman for a group of left-wing poets before being expelled from the university after the putsch of 1948. Permitted to work in the provinces as critic and literary adviser, he published an important theoretical study of Alfréd Radok, the outstanding director of post-war Czech theatre, whose theatrical ideas would influence Grossman's own work when he began directing. During the 'thaw' (the relative easing of ideological control under Krushchov after 1956), he was able to return to Prague as editor at the Czech Writers' publishing house, before falling into official disfavour again. With other intellectual avenues becoming increasingly closed to him, he gravitated towards working full-time in the theatre in the late 1950s.

Grossman's entry into directing coincided with the start of a renaissance of Czech theatre. This was possibly because of, rather than despite, the material and political difficulties confronting artists under a controlled ideological regime. As one Czech critic observed:

> Good theatre needs a delimited space in which to thrive. Absolute freedom kills it as surely as absolute lack of freedom. The 1960s constituted such a space, in which a certain degree of freedom, albeit one whose continuation was constantly in doubt, allowed the development of the most powerful drama imaginable: the struggle between a creative intellectual force and a repressive political force.[77]

Jan Grossman was one of a number of influential figures who came into this environment, mostly from non-theatrical backgrounds, around 1960. Dedicated to avant-garde experiment, but driven above all by moral and political imperatives, they aimed to create an alternative to the official theatre and were openly opposed to the governing Communist ideology. It was their progressive artistic–political aspirations that led to the development of the so-called 'small theatre' movement which flourished in Prague between 1958 and 1968. One such venture was the Divadlo Na zábradlí (Theatre on the Balustrade), founded in 1958 as an experimental studio theatre by Ivan Vyskocil and Vladimír Vodicka (a psychologist and lawyer respectively). It was to this theatre that Grossman,

who by now had a small number of highly regarded productions to his credit, came as director in 1962.

The next six years were to be a golden age for the Na zábradlí Theatre. Grossman devoted himself to introducing Prague audiences to the European repertoire of absurdist writers and their precursors, with Czech premières of Jarry's *King Ubu*, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the short early plays of Ionesco, and Grossman's own adaptation of Kafka's *The Trial*. He also worked with the young Václav Havel whose early plays were all premièred at the Na zábradlí in the 1960s. As well as introducing an original repertoire, Grossman stamped the company with a distinctive production style. Inspired partly by Radok's principles and dubbed 'appellative theatre', its emerging hallmarks were a concentration on essentials and a sharp, precise delineation of meaning expressed by a limited number of concrete motifs – all features which would characterise the later production of *Don Juan*.

The invasion in 1968 and subsequent departure of Grossman and Havel brought an end to this exciting period, and with it Grossman's involvement at the centre of Czech theatrical life. After spending a number of years directing abroad, he was permitted to work only in provincial theatres or in the controlled environment of Party-run theatres in the Prague suburbs. It was not until early in 1989, a few months before the 'Velvet Revolution', that the increasingly disillusioned and pessimistic director was able to return to the Na zábradlí. His opening production, enthusiastically acclaimed as a triumphant come-back, was the revival of *Don Juan* first staged in the relative obscurity of Hradec Kralove.

Illustrating the dictum that theatre is often more profoundly political when it avoids direct political comment, the production was oppositional in a social and political sense, but it achieved this in a complex and often ambiguous way. The interpretation was especially unusual in the tragic portrayal of the central character. Whereas most Eastern European productions have directed their critical charge at Don Juan himself, Grossman's used him as an agent of attack on the spectators' consciousness. Like Camus' Don Juan and Caligula, he is penetrated with an awareness of the absurd. He knows there is no meaning in a world without God, and that death is the only reality. Devoid of illusions, there remains only the possibility of distraction. In an echo of the Camusian ethic of quantity – the multiplication of experience which motivates Don Juan's sexual profligacy – Grossman makes him declare: 'Change is everything – all the rest is boredom, sleep, dying.' For a while, Don Juan finds distraction in his encounters with other characters on whom he turns a wearily sceptical eye. Each of these in their way is caricatured as a mask: Elvire's mask of the wronged wife concealing the spite of a rejected lover, the peasants' acquisitive materialism, the absurd pomposity of an anachronistic nobility, and so on. But Don Juan readily penetrates their masks, and each encounter only reinforces his contempt for their inauthentic lives. Alone among the characters, he is interested only in the truth. Quoting Camus, Grossman said: 'Don Juan has chosen: he does not want to be anything. He just wants one thing: to see clearly.'[8] Although his piercing vision can inevitably lead only to hopeless resignation, he nevertheless attains a kind of dignity in his lucidity as he waits for death.

The production was preceded by extensive re-modelling of the text. As a dramaturg Grossman's purpose was not to interpret Molière (he confided only semi-jokingly that he was attracted to this play because he disliked Molière)[9] but to take the play as a starting point for a script which suited his purposes. The action was substantially re-shaped. There was no Statue, no *deus ex machina*; the characters and their motivation were re-defined; the social environment was modernised, aristocratic titles were eliminated and the language was simplified; speeches, and even whole scenes, were cut and re-ordered, and fragments of other texts were inserted – François Villon especially, though there were also echoes of Brecht, Camus and the absurdists. The result was a terse, elliptical text and a more compact drama, with a running time of under two hours including interval. It amounted virtually to a new version of the play, precisely

fashioned to the director's personal vision and the social climate in which it was created.

One structural change which greatly affected the sense of the production was the elimination of the topographical variety and episodic time-frame which characterise the original play. In Molière's version three exterior locations, where we witness Don Juan's escapades in the world at large, are followed by a closing of the net in the last two acts. That structure, resembling a dramatic journey, creates an illusion of freedom initially, though we see at the end that Don Juan's 'liberty' was a self-deception and that the entire action is a journey towards an appointed end. Grossman's characters, in contrast, existed throughout in a closed space, in undifferentiated time, with the end – Don Juan's death – symbolically represented on the stage from the beginning. The motif of a journey was replaced by a Beckettian waiting, in a world of decay and stagnation, for a Statue that never comes.

To represent this imaginary world, Ivo Žídek designed a stage embodying an image of death and a near-terminal state of suspended time (plate 17). Almost filling the small stage was the fractured, peeling shell of a crumbling tomb, a towering hollow pyramid set on a raised platform. Neither realistic nor wholly abstract, but concrete and symbolic, the stage presented spectators with a constant image of death and decay. It also served as an acting machine, with all the action taking place on, in, or around the tomb-like structure. Entrances had to be made through the narrow passages beside the tomb, or by clambering over the pedestal and down steps or a ramp to the stage floor, or through a broken hole leading down to the hollow space beneath the tomb. Don Juan and Sganarelle had mastered the space completely, the former languidly circling its contours or reclining on its flat surfaces with his eyes closed, the latter manipulating the space acrobatically. It thus came to be seen as 'their' world. But for their pursuers it was a series of pitfalls and traps into which they were lured by the protagonists, or an obstacle to be negotiated with difficulty, and even an unmasking device in the way that it made it hard for them to maintain their dignified posture.

Plate 17 A scene from Jan Grossman's *Don Juan* (Prague, 1989). Jiří Bartoška (Don Juan), Jana Preissová (Elvíre), Ondřej Pavelka (Sganarelle).

Along with the elimination of the varied scenic locations there were also textual changes which served to focus the action on Don Juan's experience. At the end of the first act, for example, after Elvire's exit, Molière switches directly to Pierrot and Charlotte, creating the impression that the peasants inhabit an autonomous world into which Don Juan will later intrude. In Grossman's version, however, a short dialogue linked the scenes. Sganarelle, in an approving comment on Don Juan's adroit dismissal of Elvire, said 'Curtain. Applause'. Don Juan replied: 'And the beginning of a new scene. How shall we do it...?' and went on to announce his plan to separate Charlotte from Pierrot. Only then did the peasant characters appear, re-inforcing the sense that all the characters existed only through Don Juan's critical gaze.

In the 1989 production the title role was played by Jiří Bartoška, a star performer who excels in young male leads on stage and television. His remarkable Don Juan, broodingly handsome with his face set in a cold mask of boredom and contempt, was one of the memorable creations of recent Czech theatre. It was Bartoška who gave the production its pervasive atmosphere of overwhelming, almost intolerable, weariness. Grossman dressed him in black leather trousers and jacket and a black leather cloak, a theatricalist costume but suggestive of the nihilism of a lost generation of disaffected youth. Sganarelle wore black leather trousers like his master, but a yellow satin blouse denoted a less introverted character. Ondřej Pavelka played him not as a buffoon but as a servant eager to please. Although seemingly confident at first, his hollow eyes gave him a haunted look which increased as the action proceeded.

The play was in two parts, the first modelled quite closely on the action of the first three acts in Molière's play. But the extent of Grossman's re-working of the text was already evident in the opening scene. Instead of a put-upon valet who complains to a fellow servant about the scandalous conduct of his master, one saw a self-possessed Sganarelle who was totally identified with Don Juan. The tone of his narration of Don Juan's recent adventures was changed to

one of admiration, with all its famous criticisms of his master removed. He listened knowingly to Gusman's description of Don Juan's behaviour, broke in to supplement it with evident approval, and concluded the account of his latest conquest with a triumphant 'It was terrific', before despatching Gusman with a shove. The second scene, between master and servant, confirmed that the polarity in this production was not between Don Juan and Sganarelle but between the couple and the rest of the world. The speeches where Sganarelle reproaches Don Juan were removed, whilst the latter's monologues were given as dialogue in which the characters appeared to be reinforcing a shared view of the world. The scornful dismissal of sexual fidelity, for example, was spoken by Sganarelle on Don Juan's behalf. But if the ambivalence that we see in Molière's Sganarelle was replaced by total complicity with his master, their relationship was far from being one of equal companions. In Sganarelle Grossman depicted another form of false existence, the inauthenticity of the weak who cleave to the point of view of the stronger. As Don Juan's alter ego, Sganarelle seemed to mirror his every thought, but in a purely reactive way. It was the behaviour of a pragmatist who survives at the expense of his own identity.

The encounters with other characters which make up the remainder of the first two acts developed the theme of the mask, and with it the idea of inauthenticity. Like Don Juan, a man with a compulsive need to act out his life in front of others, these characters were all presented as actors playing a role, a point underlined by the stylised elements of period costumes they wore. But while for Don Juan acting is a catalyst to expose the truth (another Camusian idea) his adversaries were presented as the bearers of social masks which Don Juan rips off to lay bare the inner hypocrisy. The first meeting with Elvire resembled some ritual court dance where recent lovers exchange cold civilities. Jana Preissová's Elvire caricatured indignation and offended pride with a haughty stance and the precise steps and swirling movements of a bullfighter. The brightly-lit peasant scenes were also performed like a dance, but this time a stylised country dance. Pavel

Zedníček as Pierrot in the 1989 production, was an energetically physical clown playing lazzi for broad comic effects. (In the 1992 revival a different effect was created when the role, now played by Jan Hrušínský, was interpreted as a naive and gentle pastoral figure, more reminiscent of Watteau than *commedia dell'arte*. The result was not to make the comedy more sentimental, of which there was never a trace in Grossman's production, but to emphasise the tragedy of human manipulation). These episodes served as shafts of light penetrating the predominantly dark production, but without departing from Grossman's overall interpretation. The easily manipulated Pierrot, and Charlotte's slightly mechanical movements, with floppy limbs like a rag-doll and sudden peals of laughter, gave the impression of an absurd comedy of vanity and gullibility enacted by puppets. In all these encounters, Don Juan seemed to be trying to provoke a truly human response and finding none.

The third act was already markedly darker in tone than Molière's and was played on a dimly lit stage. It began with Sganarelle reciting two verses of Villon's astonishingly caustic 'Ballad of spiteful gossips'. During most of the philosophical exchange which follows (III.1) Don Juan remained broodingly laconic, until Sganarelle's reasoning led him to fall down. Whereupon, in place of the traditional statement of the obvious, Don Juan commented darkly: 'And to remain lying. First on the ground, then underneath it.' It was only now, at the end of their discussion, that he delivered the famous credo 'I believe that two and two make four', to which Grossman added an afterthought: 'But even doing this simple operation we are lost.' At the literal level the words referred to the fact that the characters had lost their way in the forest. But their symbolic meaning was clear enough to the audience. As one reviewer put it:

> From Jiří Bartoška's interpretation we can see very clearly that even this simple mathematical truth can be unbelievably manipulated. When even something as trivial as this cannot be believed, how can we take any other principles seriously?[66]

Compounding the ironic ambiguity, Don Juan pointed towards the approaching the Beggar and told Sganarelle: 'Try asking that fellow over there which way we should go.'

The ensuing incident where a bedraggled beggar, naked save for a loin-cloth, is the subject of experimental verification of Don Juan's scepticism, was pushed to the very limits of black comedy. Don Juan brandished a roll of banknotes in his face and, inviting him to foreswear his faith, he proceeded to set fire to the money. When the beggar, writhing in torment, his words choked, attempted to grasp the money, Don Juan first planted his foot on the man's wrist, then released it. The scene was executed with deliberate ambiguity, making it impossible to tell whether the man had succumbed or not. Less ambiguous, however, was Don Juan's parting shot, changed by Grossman from Molière's 'I give it to you for the love of humanity' into: 'You can take it, since God has abandoned you.'

Ambiguity pervaded the climax of the third act, where Molière's Don Juan meets the Statue. In Grossman's version there was no visible Statue, but its effect was felt through the gravitational pull of the ever-present tomb. At the climax of the first part, spectators entered the imaginary space of the tomb by means of amplified voices played through an echo chamber when first Sganarelle, then Don Juan himself, peered into its depths and invited the Statue to supper. What they saw in the tomb one could not tell. Probably nothing, because, unlike Molière's Don Juan who reacts with defiance to the sign from the Statue, the absence of any response from the tomb seemed to accentuate Don Juan's despair. Wrapping his cloak around him as if he suddenly felt cold, he said 'Let's go.' Here Grossman's version added the words 'Everything's boring now', recalling Don Juan's earlier statement that 'Change is everything – all the rest is boredom, sleep, dying.' With these words Grossman replaced Molière's image of an unrepentant sceptic with one of resignation, the bitter resignation of a man who has seen through the sham of moral retribution.

The changes in the second half were more radical. Acts four and

five of Molière's play were collapsed into a continuous sequence of twelve scenes with a running time of thirty-five minutes. It began with the usual succession of visitors: M. Dimanche, Don Louis, Elvire. But instead of bringing entreaties, warnings and an eleventh-hour chance of redemption, these encounters were written and staged to vindicate Don Juan's diagnosis by providing final confirmation of the moral vacuity of the world. A stiffly preposterous M. Dimanche, decked in an outlandish green and white striped Court costume, was played off with humourless cynicism by Don Juan. Don Louis delivered an abbreviated tirade on duty. It was recited unconvincingly as a hollow form of words which he no longer believes, and received by Don Juan in contemptuous silence. Elvire re-appeared, but not, in this version, to urge him to repentance. Beneath a penitential black cloak one saw a glimpse of brilliant red. The cloak slipped to the ground to disclose a revealing scarlet dress and a silver crucifix which she later brandished like a weapon. There followed a playback scene where the characters re-lived their first courtship against the sound of their own recorded voices, the first and only sensuous moment of the entire performance. Embracing her from behind, Don Juan seemed wearily to be trying to re-kindle his passion. Suddenly sensing its futility, he tore the crucifix from her neck and in a flurry of indignation Elvire was gone.

At this point the Statue should arrive. But there was no fourth visitor. At the climactic moment of Molière's fourth act there was now an absence. The programme again quotes Camus: 'Above all, I believe the Commander did not come that night, and that as midnight passed the unbeliever was forced to experience the terrible bitterness of those who are proved right.' For Grossman, as for Camus, the true tragedy of Don Juan is that the Commander, the embodiment of absolute morality, did not come, because it could not exist. Don Juan, Camus asserted, 'would willingly accept punishment. Those are the rules of the game. And his generosity lies precisely in his acceptance of the rules of the game. But he knows he is right and

ment.'[81] Since there is no truth, no morality and no punishment, all that remains for him is to consummate the futile comedy of, in Camus' words, 'a life penetrated through and through with the absurd'. Like Camus' hero, Bartoška's Don Juan now prepared himself for death, a death which is not hoped for but accepted with resignation. But while Camus envisaged Don Juan living out a protracted wait into old age in a state of continuing awareness of the absurd, Grossman's version now moved rapidly to its conclusion.

On Elvire's exit, Sganarelle entered carrying two flaming torches (a textual echo of Molière's play: '*Don Juan* – Take this torch; *Commander* – Those who are guided by the divine light have no need of torches'). On a darkened stage, Don Juan and Sganarelle performed a frenzied display with the torches, part-juggling, part-fight, to the accompaniment of the dramatic chanting of the first section of *Carmina Burana*. These chilling acrobatics supplied the necessary theatrical climax to fill the void of the absent Statue and signalled that the action was entering its final phase. As a commentary on the meetings with the three visitors, it expressed Don Juan's strange mixture of exasperation, desperation and manic elation. The father's second visit was reduced to the briefest minimum. Seeing him enter, Don Juan knelt in prayer clutching the crucifix left behind by Elvire (plate 18). The mere gesture of his son's hypocritical piety was sufficient to satisfy him – not because he is gullible but because he lives in a world where outward confirmity is all. No one need be fooled, provided the appearance of re-integration into the system has been satisfied. This lent a new and pungent topicality to the speech on hypocrisy which Don Juan now delivered in its entirety. In another significant textual addition, he concluded his tirade against hypocrisy with the words: 'These times are rotten, dear Sganarelle, and no other times will be forthcoming for some time.' This was not given as a justification of his own hypocrisy, as it sometimes is, but as a way of crystallising the reality of the situation. The scene where Elvire's brothers reappear and challenge Don Juan was

Plate 18 Vlastimil Bedrna (Luis) and Jiří Bartoška (Don Juan) in another scene from Grossman's 1989 production.

century censorship would not have permitted. Comically, the two brothers were stopped in their tracks by the word 'Oremus!' and adopted a position of prayer as if by conditioned reflex.

The dénouement was entirely of Grossman's invention. First, Elvire's brothers were despatched to a fittingly absurd and melodramatic death. Moving in to attack, Alonso lunged towards Sganarelle, was repulsed and, turning, fell into an embrace with Carlos in which each impaled the other. Under Don Juan's impassive gaze, Sganarelle, now filled with horror and fear, strove to conceal their bodies in the hollow base of the tomb, collected up their discarded weapons, then stood in helpless silence looking down at his master. Suddenly energised, Bartoška hurled himself towards the tomb (or at Sganarelle who stood in his path?), ran on to the blade which Sganarelle was still holding, and slumped to the ground. All these movements were rapid and confused, creating a calculated ambiguity which left the audience unsure whether they had witnessed a murder, a suicide or an accident. Clearly, Grossman's interpretation allowed no room for divine justice, nor even an immanent social justice. The staging allowed one to conclude, as one critic wrote, that Don Juan went to his death deliberately because 'he has seen too much, too clearly'.[illegible] However, Grossman's assistant, Aleš Kisil, spoke of 'the murder of Don Juan' and said: 'Sganarelle must get rid of him because he is the highest representative of a society which Sganarelle, in the name of his new utopian reality, must destroy.' And he added: 'Here Sganarelle's moral principles coincide with those of modern terrorists: it's not the murderer who is guilty but the murdered.'[illegible] The killing of Don Juan, Kisil implied, represents the behaviour of someone who knows he has sold himself and is afraid: in other words, another inauthentic action carried out with the hope of achieving re-integration in the social system.

The final message of the production, however, lay not so much in the manner of Don Juan's death but in the chilling parody of a curtain call which followed it. As Sganarelle turned to the audience, appealing for sympathy or understanding, the other characters

loomed into sight upstage and marched forward slowly and mechanically like statues to the sound of an unpleasant noise like crunching gravel. It was as if the Statue had been eliminated from the action only to appear at the end, multiplied ten-fold, to close ranks over Don Juan's corpse. The re-appearance of these characters supplied a concretisation of the social order which in Molière's text is evoked only verbally in Sganarelle's epilogue. The audience's last sight was of the phalanx of statues staring at them with dead eyes and challenging them to react.

'Theatre of the absurd', wrote Grossman in a study of Kafka's theatricality, 'is analytical and coldly diagnostic.'[84] These are terms which could be applied to his production of *Don Juan*, a production which was as economical with humour as it was uncompromising in its bleak vision of society. However, this description overlooks the rich satisfaction afforded by Grossman's theatricality and his extraordinary ability to create theatrical meaning through the deployment of a small number of carefully chosen elements. A typically precise lighting design employed sharp, predominantly white, lighting to introduce tonal contrasts to the darker moments. With similar precision the production employed recurrent musical motifs from Orff's *Carmina Burana* cantata: the urgently chittering strings section to announce Elvire's appearances, the lively dance movement to introduce the peasant scenes and the dramatic chanting of the plainsong accompanying Don Juan himself.

Rigorous textual analysis; a concrete stage space which is both metaphorical and dynamic; directing that is economical, sharp but richly suggestive; delineation of social masks by means of gesture and costume; striking musical motifs: these constituted Grossman's distinctive 'signature' in *Don Juan*. The result was a theatrical transcription of an idea which was simultaneously complex, ambiguous and precise, and it was primarily this that gave the production its intellectual and imaginative appeal. Despite the absence of specific temporal and social reference, however, the production never lapsed into the total abstraction that was a feature of earlier absurdist drama. There was no attempt to evoke the Sicily of the legend, nor seventeenth-century France nor indeed any recognisable time or place. The characters existed only in the fictitious world of the stage. Yet, somehow, the resulting picture retained the sense of a real situation which allowed spectators to relate it to their own experience.

The highly acclaimed revival in 1989 should have remained in repertory for a long run but circumstances determined otherwise. Following Grossman's return to the Na zábradlí, a rift had developed with actors who remained loyal to his predecessor Evald Schorm, the director who had kept the company together during the 1980s. In November 1991, when *Don Juan* was being performed on tour in Rezno, a number of actors abruptly quit the company. Rather than abandoning the production, Grossman's reaction was to recruit a new cast. It was a sign, perhaps, of the importance he attached to it as a personal and artistic statement. Accordingly, *Don Juan* opened again in July 1992 in an almost identical *mise en scène*. From the 1989 cast, only Jan Přeučil's Carlos and Ondřej Pavelka's outstanding Sganarelle remained. Don Juan was now played by Jan Novotný (who had created the role of Sganarelle in the 1982 production) and Elvire by Marie Málková, Grossman's wife. With one exception (Jan Hrušinský's Pierrot, mentioned above) the characters all retained their original conception. With the departure of its leading stars Jiří Bartoška and Jana Preissová, the production lost some strongly marked individual performances but gained a more even-grained ensemble quality.

But it was not only the company that had changed. Between 1989 and 1992 Czechoslovakia had undergone the most sweeping political changes since the Second World War. So too, of course, had the theatre. While audience figures declined generally, the expectations that spectators brought to the theatre, and the significance they attached to it, were no longer the same. How could a production which had spoken to spectators whose daily lives were governed by the monotonous deceptions of a 'normalised' society still hold the same meaning for post-revolutionary audiences? It seemed to me

that spectators in 1992 received the play in a more relaxed manner, but also that the performance elicited less laughter than formerly. This was evident, for example, in their reaction to Don Juan's speech about hypocrisy. Originally, the tirade was well understood by Czech audiences to be an analysis of the behaviour necessary for an individual to succeed in society, and as such had been greeted originally with laughter of recognition and derision. But this was no longer the case in 1992. By way of explanation, it would be better to let a Czech spectator speak:

> [In 1982] there was a subconscious need by spectators to laugh at the people who, without any tolerance, make decisions for other people. I am not one of those who laugh aloud; nevertheless, in this laughter I heard the need for a union which did not exist. It was also a demonstration of a basic and very useful weapon of the oppressed against the oppressor: derision. Everyone is afraid of it. But now the audience simply do not laugh as much as they did. On the other hand, we can feel the fear that these moral principles still prevail. If, some time ago, Don Juan's words could also have been interpreted as a kind of instruction on how to vegetate in a non-functioning society, now they are much more an attack on the conscience of everyone present, because everyone has a share in the former situation and – why not say so? – also guilt. Juan's monologue becomes a standard by which everyone measures their own guilt.[85]

Since the real purpose and ultimate justification of theatre is to provide a forum in which societies represent themselves, it is hardly suprising that what spectators saw in 1992 was the same production but with a subtly altered meaning. Grossman's *Don Juan* serves as a useful reminder that it is not directors alone, nor playwrights nor actors, who give a theatrical event its meaning; its significance is created in the encounter of artists with a public in a particular society at a particular moment.

CHAPTER 4

'DON JUAN' AT LARGE ON THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY STAGE

Meyerhold's 1910 production is a landmark for theatre historians, but another celebrated Russian *Don Juan*, still remembered with immense affection by those who watched it, was Anatoli Efros' much-revived production at the Malaya Bronnaya Theatre in the 1970s. Efros was considered the purest of Russian directors, the one who spoke most directly to the Russian soul. His *Don Juan* was a subtle, multi-layered piece of theatre combining a rich psychological and emotional texture with indirect political comment. From Bulgakov's *A Cabal of Hypocrites* (1929) to Lyubimov's politically radical production of *Tartuffe* (1968), Russian theatre developed a sustained tradition of using Molière to raise political questions in an oblique way. Efros implied that the Statue could symbolise the authorities that Don Juan defies and, by implication, the dangers that confront artists who dare to defy official ideology. (Efros himself was expelled from the Lenin Komsomol Theatre for 'ideological deficiencies' in 1967). At another level he treated the story more as a timeless parable or morality tale. His Don Juan was an exhausted, atrophied soul, a former idealist no doubt, but not a militant rationalist. According to Efros, 'Don Juan dies because he devours himself, so to speak. He can no longer live because he has nothing to live for... He's losing his mind from not being able to find something to believe in.'[1] The Commander was not a miraculous moving Statue, merely an ordinary man dressed in plain clothes who enters Don Juan's house and takes him by the hand. Don Juan seemed intuitively to recognise in this prosaic figure the invitation to death that he