



# **Plays of Expectations: Intertextual Relations in Russian Twentieth-Century Drama (Donald W. Treadgold Studies on Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia)**

*Andrew Baruch Wachtel*

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Expectation is an integral part of the reading experience. As we read a text, we begin to classify it and compare it to others with which it seems to share a family resemblance. Drama is a particularly rich and rewarding field for studying the complex ways in which such expectations are created. Theatre audiences and readers of plays are encouraged in a variety of ways to guess at what might unfold on the stage and on the page, and much of the pleasure of the theatrical experience revolves around this guessing game. *Plays of Expectations* explores these expectations through the lens of twentieth-century Russian drama.

In the operas and plays considered here, dramatists tell stories that, for the most part, already existed in the cultural repertoire of the contemporary Russian audience. In each case the dramatists and their texts invite readers or audiences to compare a new version of a familiar story with previous versions. Scholar Andrew Wachtel presents each of these dramatic texts as a nexus of intertextual play, a space in which various incarnations of a storyline can interact to create a new synthesis, which itself can become a self-standing version of the story.

*Plays of Expectations* illuminates the sometimes coded or subconscious and sometimes open and deliberate “conversations” modernist Russian dramatists had with their antecedents, their rivals, their readers, and themselves. In the course of their creations, they quote, rearrange, dispute, deconstruct, and otherwise grapple with stories and assertions made by their antecedents and fellow artists. Russian audiences were capable of recognizing these references and links, thus sharing a similar horizon of expectations that would shape and dictate the reception of the work.

In a clear and engaging style, Wachtel explores this fantastic web of artistic and intellectual interconnectedness, a nexus that links generations of dramatists to one another and to their audience, bringing each into the work of unfolding a story.

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