

Goodbye Cruel World



by Robert Ross Parker

freely adapted from Nikolai Erdman's *The Suicide*

Theatre Pro Rata
March 11-26, 2017
Performing at The Crane Theater
2303 Kennedy St NE, Minneapolis

The play

Robert Ross Parker adapted and directed *Goodbye Cruel World* for a production at the Roundtable Ensemble in New York in 2010. The story follows Semyon Semyonovich Podsekalnikov, an out-of-work man being supported by his wife, whose offhand remark about shooting himself leads to a series of ever more absurd moments as friends and neighbors attempt to persuade him to sacrifice himself for various causes.

Nikolai Erdman and *The Suicide*

Nikolai Erdman's *The Suicide* provides the source for this adaptation. Erdman (1900-1970), a Soviet poet, dramatist, and screenwriter is remembered primarily for his work with Vsevolod Meyerhold in the 1920s. His plays, especially *The Suicide* (1928), link the satirical drama of Nikolai Gogol to the post-World War II Theatre of the Absurd. After a successful production of his first major play, *The Mandate*, Erdman and Meyerhold moved on to *The Suicide*. But Soviet authorities thwarted attempts to stage the play, despite support from notables such as Stanislavsky and Gorky. While permission to stage the play was granted at one point, this was revoked on the eve of the premiere.

Erdman moved on to work in the cinema, but when his satirical fables were recited to Stalin, he was arrested and deported to Siberia. He fought in a special unit open to disenfranchised citizens during World War II. He was still shut out of theatrical circles after the war and returned to apolitical script writing, mostly children's films. He was invited to join a newly founded theater in 1964, and collaborated on several new productions. He died in 1970. *The Suicide*, banned until the Perestroika era, was finally produced in 1990.

More info: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai_Erdman

Robert Ross Parker

Robert is the co-artistic director of the Obie winning Vampire Cowboys with Qui Nguyen. For Vampire Cowboys he has directed *Vampire Cowboy Trilogy*, *A Beginner's Guide to Deicide*, *Living Dead in Denmark*, *Men of Steel*, *Fight Girl/Battle World*, *Soul*

Samurai, *Alice in Slasherland*, and *The Inexplicable Redemption of Agent G*. For the VC Saturday Night Saloon series he wrote *Jimmy Starshooter Must Get Laid*, and *Radio Monster Theatre: The Further Adventures of Henry and Victor*. Other recent directing credits include *How to be a New Yorker* (CRC productions) *She Kills Monsters* (The Flea) *Goodbye Cruel World* (also adapter, Roundtable Ensemble) *Hamlet{solo}* (Edinburgh Fringe and Solo Nova at PS 122), and numerous projects for Ensemble Studio Theatre where he is a member. As an actor, Robert played the title role in The Flying Machine's *Frankenstein* at Soho Rep, and on tour, and played the March Hare in their production of *Alice in Wonderland*. He is the former editor of *The Dramatist*, the Journal of the Dramatists Guild of America. MFA Ohio University.

Website: <http://robertrossparker.com>

Some discoveries from stage manager Clara Costello:

A student at the Mining Academy in Leningrad shot herself in 1926, driven to suicide by her husband's cruelty. Comrade Davidson is the only name I can find for her. The Bolsheviks used her death as proof that private life was counterrevolutionary, and fuel to push their collectivist agenda. I haven't found anything written that connects Davidson as an inspiration for *The Suicide*, but the timing fits, so it's a possibility.

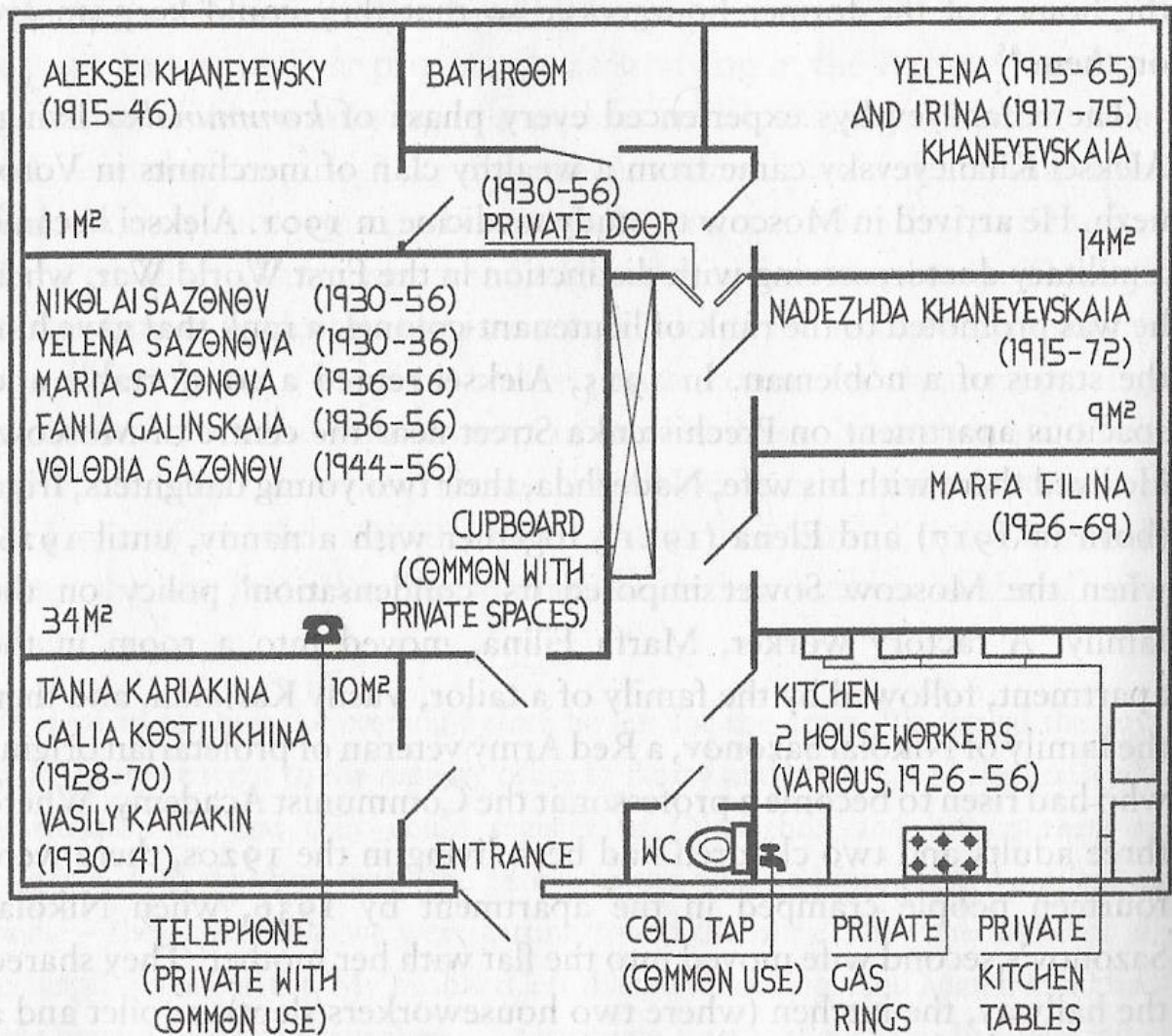
Kommunalka: the Russian communal apartments

In 1940, the average Moscovite had just over 4 square meters of living space, and the situation was even worse in industrial towns. In Magnitogorsk, a quarter of the population actually dug holes in the ground to live in rather than stay in the state provided housing.

More than 3/4 of the urban population lived communally from the mid 20s to the mid 50s. Kommunalka were introduced to address the housing crisis, but by 30s they had mainly become a way for the state to extend its powers of surveillance into private life.

Some passages and floor plans from Orlando Figes's 2007 book *The Whisperers*:

The confusion between public and private was a constant source of friction; using someone else's cooking ring, their utensils or supplies was enough to stoke a scandal. 'They were not malicious arguments,' recalls Minora Novikova. 'We were all poor, and nobody had anything worth stealing. But there was never enough room, everyone was tense in the kitchen, and petty squabbles were unavoidable. Imagine thirty women cooking at one time.'

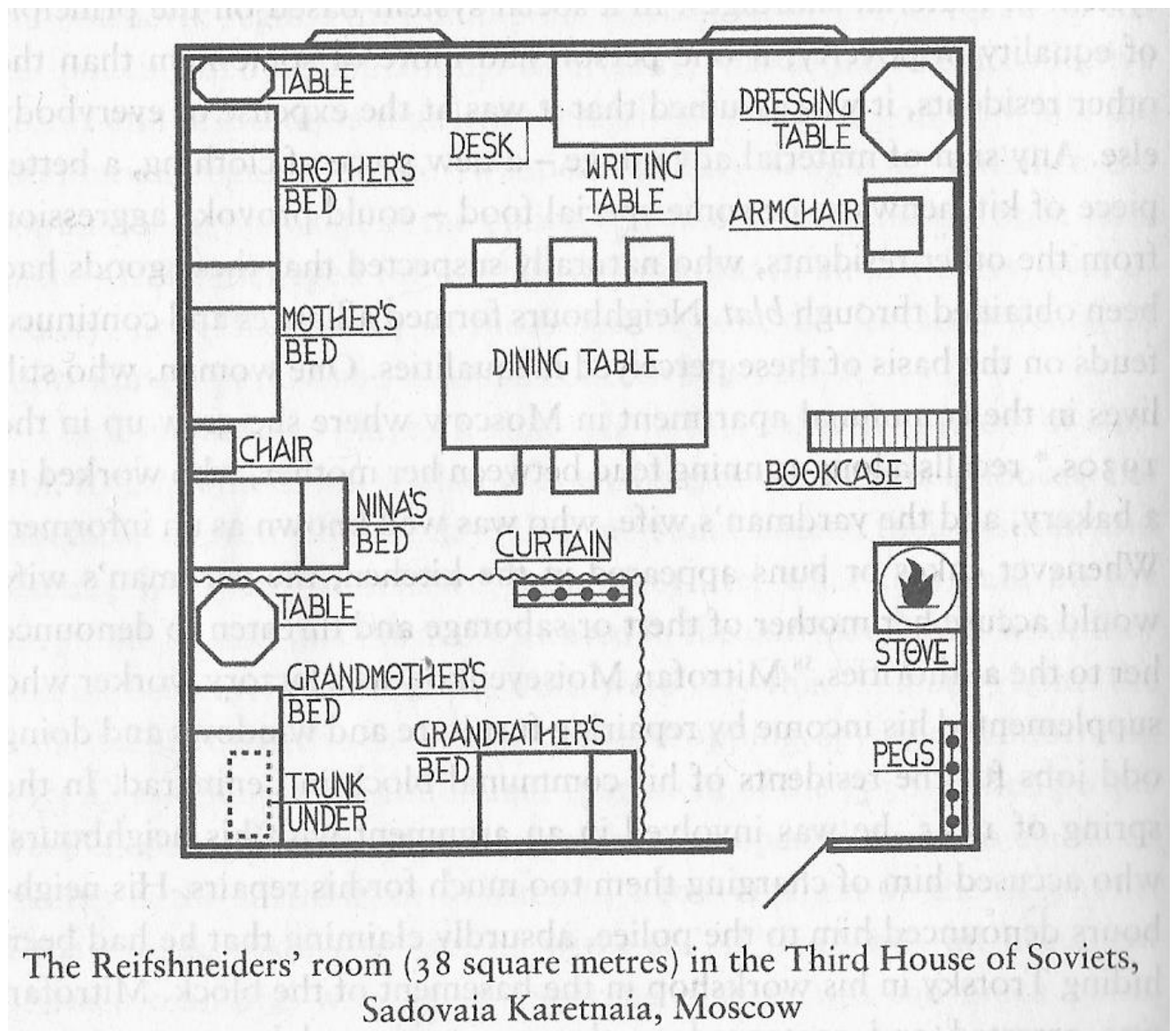


The Khaneyevsky household (communal apartment), Prechistenka (Kropotkin) Street, 33/19, Flat 25

[In our room] there were no private things or bits of furniture, no special shelf or chair or table that belonged to anyone as property.

Even my grandparents, who had their beds behind a curtain screen to give them some privacy, had nothing they could really call their own. My grandmother kept some special items in a trunk beneath her bed, but the table beside her bed, for example, was used by all of us.

—Ninel Reifschneider



An architect was exiled with his eight year old daughter in 1934, and they rented part of a room in a small town. The landlady allowed him to build a partition with a door in it to make the 7 square meter space their own. Young Julia called the space “Papa's Corner,” and said her years there were the happiest in her life.

