

profess admiration for American acting. They like its forthrightness. This surprised me — if stage rather than film acting was meant. For I found much of the acting in the Soviet theatre even simpler than ours and, what is more remarkable, less intense. What Soviet actors for the most part now seem to be after is clarity. This aim may also have a socio-psychological cause.

The American actor (under forty-five) today often goes through an agony of effort to give his acting emotional substance. In its extreme form this becomes a sweating sincerity. It would seem that the life the American actor leads and the world around him afford him little opportunity for any but casual or mechanical responses. Through his acting he seeks to compensate for a lack he feels in his environment and consequently in himself. The Soviet actor takes feeling for granted. It is always present; he does not need to strain himself to achieve it. The Russian player's concentration is bent on the most basic truth of physical action — of look, movement and relation to immediate circumstances. One is amazed by the quietness and repose of most Soviet acting. Only the comedies or highly stylized satires (as in Mayakovsky's *The Bug*) are boisterous and colorfully complex.

These impressions were strongly reinforced by the performance of a new play called *Before Supper* that I saw at the Central Children's Theatre. This large theatre in the center of town is devoted to plays for children performed by a company of seventy-three admirably trained adult actors. It has four directors and there are

twenty-five plays in its present repertory.

*Before Supper*, I was informed, is a play for children of high-school age and for grownups. What struck me here was the subdued realism of the acting, combined with themes typical of the public's present temper. One might describe the acting as *healthy*. Except for rare moments of agitation, no one raises his voice beyond a conversational tone, yet the dialogue is not only comfortably audible, but is rendered dramatically clear and interesting. Thoughts become visible without stress. The inner life of the character is externally realized without the aid of physical exertion or the heavy fumes of emotionalism. The acting is lucid rather than "deep," direct without being dry. In this limpid stream that flows with an almost classic ease, both children and their parents may behold their own ideal image. Here, rather than at the Moscow Art Theatre or at the Sovremenik (Contemporary) Theatre, its youthful offshoot (now playing Gibson's *Two for the Seesaw*), the latest fruits of Stanislavsky's teaching are to be studied.

As for the play's content, its emphasis is on the "new way of life." In the first act the theme is lightly limned in a comedy scene between two seventeen-year-olds. The boy has just received a letter from a French youth whom he has never met, but with whom he has begun a correspondence. The Russian boy answers the letter with one in French which someone has told him contains nine errors in grammar. His girl friend says: "You shouldn't have made those mistakes. It gives the Soviet Union a bad name abroad." "You're a Stalinist," the boy jokingly retorts.

In the second act a man of the older generation offhandedly remarks about a French ornament done in abstract style that he notices in the room: "See how far the Westerners have gone from realism." Then he proceeds to boast that he has never crossed the Soviet border and has never spoken a word of any foreign language. This leads to a bitter dispute related to the play's plot. In the crossfire of argument, the man cries out, "You wait. He'll come back." (It is understood that "he" stands for "Stalin.") To which the reply is, "He can't be brought back. He is nothing but ashes now."

At the end of this scene the quarrelsome man notices a dictaphone in the room — an instrument that the

seventeen-year-old boy of the family uses as a diary. The old man turns pale; he fears he has been spied on! He tries to destroy the machine. The boy grabs the dictaphone speaker, holds it up to the older man's mouth and shouts, "Continue! Keep talking!" implying that under the new regime one may speak without fear.

It would be easy to dismiss this as Boy Scout dramaturgy. I shall not do so. What we have here is a kind of morality play. The atmosphere of the theatre, from stage to auditorium, is clean.

Apart from the Children's Theatre itself, almost every other theatre presents matinees for children at 11 A.M. At these, a wonderfully eager and well-behaved audience of children from the ages of five to ten see many different kinds of plays. At the Moscow Art Theatre I saw Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird* (a Stanislavsky production dating back to 1908) and a Soviet play for children, *Three Fat Men*, about rebellion against a triumvirate of fat rulers dressed in gold; it was done with delightful pyrotechnical adroitness. But the Moscow Art Theatre's latest success is the staged version of the Bernard Shaw-Mrs. Patrick Campbell correspondence, *Dear Liar*. The Moscow Art's repertory also includes dramatizations of *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Anna Karenina* and such old standbys as Gorky's *Lower Depths* and Tolstoy's *The Fruits of Enlightenment*.

Another great new success is the Brecht-Weill *The Threepenny Opera* (Brecht is respected but not altogether favored here) at the Stanislavsky Theatre — which is not the same as the Moscow Art Theatre. This was the last show I attended in Moscow, and I shall speak of it in connection with my visit to Warsaw. The Polish theatre — quite different from the Soviet — is highly rated by Russian theatre professionals, some of whom believe that the greatest progress in their part of the world is being made in Prague and Warsaw.

## Tight Rope

We live in fragments  
like speech. Like the fits  
of wind, shivering against  
the window.

Pieces of meaning, pierced  
and strung together. The bright bead  
of the poem, the bright bead  
of your woman's laughter.

LeRoi Jones

The NATION

## PUBLICATIONS

### COLLECTORS! LIBRARIANS!

Our lovely colonial farm-house (1742) is also a book-store specializing in old and out-of-print works on the Social Sciences. Just off Route 17 between New Haven and Middletown. Browsers welcome, but if possible send a post-card or telephone beforehand. Catalogues issued; free search-service.

Keith and Helena Hutchison

Durham Book Service, Haddam Quarter Rd.  
Durham, Conn. Tel. Code 203 - DI 9-3130

FREE SEARCH SERVICE for those hard to find out-of-print books. HALL BOOKS, Dept. N., 14 Roosevelt St., Roseland, N. J.

FOR any out-of-print book you need, write: Cambridge Book Service, Box 18N, Cambridge 40, Mass. No Obligation!

## L'EXPRESS

the leading liberal paper in France today.  
Send 10c for your copy HOWARD PUBLICATIONS, 1475 Broadway, New York 36.

Copyright of Nation is the property of Nation Company, L. P. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.