

2201
Michael Chekhov

June 22, 1937

LIFE AND DEATH IN OUR ART
YOUTH AND AGE - LIFE AND DEATH
THEMES

Dr. Rudolf Steiner

LIFE AND DEATH IN OUR ART:

There is something we must begin to talk about: it is very interesting that there are some very important and big laws in nature and in art - the same laws sometimes. You know that everything on the earth, or almost everything, is continuously dying and continuously reviving. This is a very important thing. For instance, our bodies are dying during the day - our brain and all our organs are dying during the day, because to live means to die. We have our spirit for reviving these dying parts of our body, and, therefore, we need sleep to revive the parts of our body which are dying during the day.

The same is true in art. We are creating some living things in our particular art - our speech is life, our movements are life, our will impulses are life, but they are always dying and this is an important thing which not everyone in our profession knows. We must know this and we must know how to get the sleep to revive all these dying things. Let us take a concrete example: you will remember the last Golden Steed rehearsal - how we moved, how we spoke, what kind of will impulse we had. Perhaps you will see that the majority of these things were already corpses.

It is often not easy to distinguish what is living

M. Chekhov

June 22, 1937

and what has died, but it is important for us, because if we are satisfied with the corpse we will go down without noticing it. The sentences we have spoken, and the movements as well were corpses. For instance, it is a very fine thing - "It glistens in the sun like ice." Listen to it and decide whether it is a corpse or a living thing. Try to exercise the possibility of hearing what is living and what is dead. It will cause you pain to discover this, but it will bring you great joy also. We must learn to discriminate, and that is a very fine thing. Try to revive the life more and more.

As professional people we must deal with life and not with death. But death is overpowering our expression and with great power. It is everywhere and we must really be awakened to the difference. This is very difficult for modern people, because we are surrounded by death more than with life. Therefore, we become accustomed to accepting death for life, consequently our feeling for the two is extremely submerged.

It needs very careful exercising to awaken this thing, this feeling, but you must know that without this feeling all our good efforts will be lost. The death will, as it were, eat and swallow all our efforts, and we will think that we are producing life, but we will only produce new corpses, and nothing more. It is a very dangerous, and especially in our case, because when, for instance, a painter has painted something, it is there, but we have to produce our

art each time as a new thing. We must get so much life in ourselves each time we act, and not be satisfied with this death which is so alike to life. This understanding must be an alive, acute question for us, then we will be able to produce a real wonder.

YOUTH AND AGE - LIFE AND DEATH:

There are some exercises which we can do - they were given by Dr. Steiner for other aims, but we can definitely use them. He suggests that we pay attention alternately to two processes which are going on around us. For example, we must look at the child which is full of life, and when we have looked at it we have, as it were, to get some life from the child. Then we have to leave the child and look at a very old person, and then we must be brave enough to discover what this means. It means that ninety percent of death is already sitting in this person. Then we must take this invisible picture into us too. These two things - the life taken from the child, and the death taken from the old person - will find each other in our soul, and then we will gradually get the right feeling for life and death.

We must exercise this life and death not only with people but with animals, a young tree and an old tree, the moon and the sun. They will give you the same impression - sunrise and sunset, morning and evening, and all these things which are around us and which are speaking to us continuously

M. Chekhov

June 22, 1937

about life and death. Without these special exercises, whose purpose is to try to distinguish life and death, we will not be able to produce the intense life in our art, which we need so desperately, because we are always producing - our work is never finished.

In Russia we have acted the same play 700 times. Just imagine if we had not been able to produce new life each time - there would have been nothing but a series of corpses! Naturally we have produced corpses many times, but that was a very good experience because we learned that without finding new life, we would have fallen into a bottomless abyss.

In our school we must find the secret of how to master the life in our art, and it is possible. We must not forget the exercises with nature and living beings. We must train ourselves. There are less obvious things which have to do with life and death in a masked way. For instance, let us consider some posters which are showing something, and then take the real human thing, full of life, and you will see that such posters are killing the real thing. This is so dangerous for artists, because we have subconsciously taken so many of these things from the street, and they are there somewhere in us and we are unable to produce something with our own means because they have been killed. Then we are producing patterns instead of life. We must be aware of this and then these dead things will not be so dangerous for us.

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Criticism: The Fishing Scene:

This rehearsal brings up a very interesting point. You will remember that we sometimes try to find some themes running through the play. The play consists of several themes, which are woven into each other. I don't know whether it was consciously done by the director today or not, but there was a very interesting moment during the attempt to incorporate the theme which we call "Mother Gillard".

What is Mother Gillard? I have understood her part for the first time today. She is something which comes and then goes away - but until we saw this *mise en scène* today this was not clear. I was very touched by this moment, and the audience will get this same feeling that the theme is coming and going. In analyzing what was done I find that you have begun to speak of Mother Gillard as something mysterious. In having the group form above Felicity it gives a certain style and mood and atmosphere, so that when the real Mother Gillard appears from below this makes a very interesting composition on the soul of the spectator.

Therefore, we have to be very responsible for each *mise en scène*, each movement, and incorporating each theme. Knowing this perhaps you will be able to find some special movements with your hands and bodies going down, and in this way preparing the appearance of Mother Gillard from below.

When incorporating the themes of the play we must use all the means on the stage.