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Michael Chekhov

(Afternoon) November 12, 1937

ADVICE TO PLAYWRIGHTS  
PLAYS FOR CHILDREN  
THE PLAY AS CONFLICT

ADVICE TO PLAYWRIGHTS:

Each theatre like ours dreams of having its own playwrights. We have a certain Method for our actors and directors, and this Method requires that we find and educate playwrights who will accept our Method and who will write their plays in harmony with it. This is very important. We do not try to teach our young playwrights how to write their plays - this is out of our realm - but we have to suggest to them some things from our Method as a theatre method, so that they will understand our approach to the theatre.

PLAYS FOR CHILDREN:

I asked our playwrights to find a plot for a performance for children from seven to fourteen years. The scenarios which have been given me have been too complicated, too dark, and too tragic for such an audience. You must not feel that such a young audience would not be able to understand this - on the contrary, they are too able to penetrate into it. Such dark things are not the right food for children, who have too many dark things to penetrate into in everyday life. The fairy tale world must develop their imagination and expand them and not contract them - it must give them room to breathe.

Children are often contracted by their school education. Our task is quite the opposite: we must give the chil-

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dren the possibility to expand their abilities. This is a social work which we can do. Some of our fairy tales are contracted; therefore I want our playwrights to find some other plots which will give the children expansion. This is the first thing.

#### THE PLAY AS CONFLICT:

The second thing is the first piece of technical advice I will give to our playwrights from our theatre point of view. Many laws have been given about playwriting - we will not take any particular one, but will take them in general and try to adjust them to our theme. In order to perform the play on the stage, it is only possible if the play is, from beginning to end, a long conflict - a very active conflict - a fight.

The novelist may allow himself to write many pages describing his characters and their feelings, their past and future, but we, as actors, are not allowed to describe the characters: - we must show them - act them. We are not able to describe the feelings - we must act them. Otherwise, it would be a recitation and not a performance. The performance leads and finally resolves the conflict, whether it is a physical one or a psychological one - it must be a conflict.

The second point: If the whole play is a conflict, each scene must be an episode in the fight. If this is so, then each sentence, each word, each exclamation must be like

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a thrust. From this point of view our playwrights must look through their plays so that they will be sure that each scene is a fight and each episode is a thrust. If so, the play is "actable." If not, the actors are in a very difficult position - whether this is known on the present stage is another thing - but as an ideal group, we shall always be in great difficulty in having sentences which do nothing. We must do on the stage. Speaking in the language of our Method, we know that there is not a second on the stage that is without an objective. If the playwright gives his character the words, "I feel so unhappy," what shall the actor do as an objective? There is no objective. Of course, it could be that these words were the result of some great action or sub-action underneath, but we will take the example in its simplest form.

I want our playwrights to find their plots from the point of view of expanding the children's beings, and in every scene, sentence, dialogue, and soliloquy there must be conflict - clear conflict. This is my first advice to our playwrights. Later there will be other advice which they can take.

I believe many of our students would like to try to write a fairy tale play. Please do this, trying to follow the above advice. If you will give me more and more plots written for the theatre, I will be very happy, because no one knows but what it might become the future interest of some of you.

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Therefore, I address myself to everyone who wants to write, to find a plot and begin this work.