

THE MOTHER

A Fairy Tale Play - by Michael Chekhov
(Based on a Theme by Hans Christian Anderson)

The fairy tale, "The Mother," is based on one of the most charming themes of Hans Christian Anderson, beloved by children.

It is night. A mother sits beside the cradle of her child, singing it songs. The child is dying. The Mother, having spent days and nights beside the child, grows tired and falls asleep while singing. There is a knock on the door; a stranger appears, a gentle, tender old man. He sits beside the Mother; she awakens and then falls asleep again. He takes the child tenderly, stops the clock on the wall, and leaves the room with the child.

The Mother awakens to find the child gone. She opens the window and prays to the night and the winds to help her to find the child. Night appears and tells her that she must sing all the songs which she sang to the child when it was alive. The Mother sings and Night shows her the way.

In the second scene, Death is seen carrying the child lovingly. The landscape is covered with snow. Dawn, a charming young girl, looks at Death with her big eyes. The light increases and falls on the snowy ground. From far away, the tired Mother approaches and asks Dawn which way Death went with the child; but Dawn tells her she cannot go there, because she cannot see with her earthly eyes the world in which Death and

the child are.

The Mother sacrifices her sight to the Dawn and receives directions where to find the child. Blind, she climbs up the ladder into the forest which Dawn has shown her, and finds at the top of the trees a greenhouse which is halfway between heaven and earth. There she meets an old woman who takes care of plants, large and small, which are the souls of people living on the earth.

The Mother asks the old woman to show her the plant of her child; and when the old woman does so with hesitation, the Mother hears the beating of the child's heart in the plant and sings to it as she used to do beside the cradle.

Death appears with the child, and the Mother wants to take it from him to carry it again to the earth. But Death shows her the vision of two destinies - one of grief and sorrow, and the other flourishing and happy - and tells the Mother that one of these two destinies would be that of her child. The Mother asks which one, but Death answers that he is only the Gardener of God and has no right to show more. He tells her she must choose whether she wishes him to give the child back to her or to carry it with him into happier regions. The Mother makes her decision and gives her child and the plant to Death again, and Death is transformed from the tender old man into a beautiful, angelic being. He rises to heaven while the Mother, resigned and relieved, returns to the earth.