

Michael Chekhov

June 6, 1938

PLAYWRIGHTS FOR THE  
FUTURE THEATRE  
COLLABORATION

Bernard Shaw

PLAYWRIGHTS FOR THE FUTURE THEATRE:

Reading of Spanish Evening play: We have one rule which is that we must never speak about our work, about our Method, about our plays, about our rehearsals, or about anything in our Studio; we must keep it all a professional secret. Not because there is a mystery, but because I know how much our work and future audience can be spoiled, by wrong ideas which can be spread about our Studio.

The Method is actually a simple one, but we require time to understand it. You know this from your own experience. Now imagine, from two or three letters or words what kind of an idea can the audience get about our Method? Only that we are crazy people; jumping over chairs and trying to find parts in the Method, and that we are as crazy as everything is at Dartington! The audience will be prejudiced and this will disturb our work. Even when writing home, I ask you to be careful and say that in our Studio there is a rule to keep professional secrets.

COLLABORATION:

This is a very good opportunity to mention again that in accordance with our Method, with the style of our future theatre, and with some ideas which I cherish in my

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mind and which I hope to fulfill in the future, one of the main lines is to find a new approach to the author's work, and to find such authors as will find a new approach to their work and to us. That means that we must find authors who are able to collaborate with us, with the actors, with the scene designers, with everybody, so that the moment when the author will say that his play is accomplished will not be before the curtain rises before the first audience. Such flexible, living, creative authors we need like air and water, whereas authors who finish their plays before they start the rehearsal are like stones hanging around our necks.

Bernard Shaw makes so many difficulties for the theatre because he has finished his play before the actors start to rehearse it. The real author for the future theatre must remain flexible, and must be a member of the creative work going on in the theatre. You must understand once and forever that there are two different things which authors are not able to understand - even Bernard Shaw is not able to understand - and that is that it is one thing to write a play for reading, but to write a play for creating a performance is an entirely different thing.

When Bernard Shaw, and authors like him, require that after the play has been written everything must be kept intact on the stage - for instance, in his script he writes that the character crosses to the right - nobody knows why,

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only that the author has said so - this is absolutely a knife in our profession.

We must be pioneers in this new way; we must also find such flexible authors who will be able to start with us this new line of collaboration, if the play is to be produced on the stage and not only printed. If it is only to be printed we can only read it, but if we have to produce it then it must be done in the theatre and the changes must be made up until the opening night. In this way it embraces both the theatre and the work of the author; the director collaborates with the author; and when the director produces he collaborates with the author.

When you see that our plays will be changed many times you must know that this is the process of creating, and not just that the playwright is paid to write a play; it is a creative process and our authors must know that no member of our Studio will think that there is something wrong with the play because it is changed. Our aim is to find something suitable for the future performance. We have been fortunate enough to find two pioneers who are starting this very difficult task of collaborating with the director.

What I have said about the collaboration with the author means that you have not only to hear the play read, but you must bear it in your imagination and try to live with it. Don't wait for the author to bring something now. Try to create in your imagination more and more atmosphere, and

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all the other things around the play so that the author will feel that we are going on actively with him. Don't fall into the old habit of passively accepting the words. The play concerns all of us and we must live actively in it. The actors must live in it creatively, to see that it is getting more and more harmonious, and more and more clever. This atmosphere will feed the actor, and the author and director as well. The actors must not be simply a group of passive people during this creative process. We must create together; this would be impossible in the usual theatre because there actors are simply playing the play as it is read. It does not mean that the actors must give suggestions to the playwright, but the atmosphere of the creative group is essential to him. It is the way to keep our Method alive, and not just theoretical. You must have the play in you; you must imagine again and again all the situations and the characters, and live with it.