

LACK OF EMOTION

By P.R.Berton

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(Three very high right-angled columns. CRAIG, MAETERLINCK and MEYERHOLD sitting each in front of one of the columns on a row of chairs facing the audience. CRAIG on the middle chair, looking at specific members of the audience with a slight ironic smile. MAETERLINCK completely absorbed in his thoughts looking straight ahead to nowhere. MEYERHOLD adjusting a grotesquely huge nose on his face. They keep these positions/gestures for a while.)

CRAIG

I agree. We don't need any actors.

(MEYERHOLD turns to CRAIG. CRAIG turns very slowly to MEYERHOLD. MEYERHOLD turns to the audience.)

CRAIG

Vsevolod. This is not supposed to be a comedy.

MEYERHOLD

I'm sorry. I can't go on. I need some movement.

MAETERLINCK

(Very slowly.)

What for?

(Long pause.)

MAETERLINCK

Don't you think...this is the real life? When nothing happens?

CRAIG

Well, Maurice, I would not say that we are doing *nothing*. Here, this evening, the greatest theatre theorists of all the times have joined to enable the audience the opportunity of a spiritual...

MEYERHOLD

I don't consider myself one of the greatest...

CRAIG

But I do. And you should be grateful for having been included in this high-qualitative...hum...Gesamtkunstwerk.

MEYERHOLD

(Standing up and practicing a biomechanical exercise.)

Thank you for the opportunity, Gordon, but instead of that I think it is more important to continue my studies about the importance of the body of the actor...

CRAIG

(Going up on his chair.)

No! We are so glad without them. Why do you have to remind us...

MEYERHOLD

If I admire your work that doesn't mean we agree in everything.

CRAIG

I and M...Maurice and I do not see the need of living actors.

MEYERHOLD

But I do. We were talking against the inspirational actor and not about the actor per se!

MAETERLINCK

Psst! I can hear steps.

CRAIG

That's impossible, Maurice. The stairs I designed for this limited theatre were too complex for their installation.

MAETERLINCK

I can feel it.

(Long pause.)

MEYERHOLD

You are another guy I really consider, Maurice, but you are talking seriously when you mention a character sitting on an armchair expressing his feelings to the audience without any visible action ?

MAETERLINCK

What matters is the inner life.

MEYERHOLD

But the spectators want to see this *inner life*.

MAETERLINCK

They don't come to the theater to see, but to feel.

CRAIG

Of course not!

MEYERHOLD

It seems I am not the only one that has unique opinions about teatrrrr.

CRAIG

(To MAETERLINCK, surprised.)

The spiritual awakening depends on the setting.

MAETERLINCK

No, the performance is a mere mean to reach the true world.

MEYERHOLD

What are you talking about? How can you despise the form, the only possible connection between the audience and the director's ideas?

MAETERLINCK

Whose ideas?

CRAIG

The director's. He is the most important artist.

MEYERHOLD

Gordon is right, although I think he should have more respect for playwrights. And for actors.

CRAIG

And you should improve your aesthetical taste when choosing the colors of your costume. This is an aggression against my gray and my brown palettes.

MEYERHOLD

You are myopic.

MAETERLINCK

Silence!

(MAETERLINCK advances to the proscenium. He looks at all his sides.)

MEYERHOLD

What now? What are you trying to express? Please, I need translation.

MAETERLINCK

Psst!

(DIDEROT enters from the backstage with a very large book.)

DIDEROT

Why have I not been invited?

MAETERLINCK

The intruder.

DIDEROT

You are all my disciples.

CRAIG

I beg your pardon?

DIDEROT

(Releases the book over CRAIG.)

Everyone here believes the emotional actor should be banned from the stage, right?

(The three other men agree with a head movement.)

DIDEROT

I was the first to say that.

(DIDEROT keeps smiling to the others.)

MEYERHOLD

I think...an entrance through the audience would have been more bombastic.

DIDEROT

(Looking around.)

Audience, which audience?

CRAIG

(Whispering to MEYERHOLD.)

He still believes in the fourth wall.

MAETERLINCK

(Interested in DIDEROT.)

Are you meaning metaphorically that the absence of the audience could mean...death?

(CRAIG gives an orgasmic cry.)

DIDEROT

(Looking at CRAIG.)

How could Voltaire consider British actors superior to ours?

CRAIG

(Giving the book back to DIDEROT.)

I am not an actor, you encyclopedist!

MEYERHOLD

(To DIDEROT.)

He does not believe in words.

DIDEROT

(To MEYERHOLD.)

Would you like to contribute to our grand oeuvre? I have heard you have quite interesting ideas about our métier. Mainly about the actor, who I consider so much.

MEYERHOLD

But I don't intend to teach any moral virtue to anyone.

DIDEROT

(Disappointed.)

Oh, no?

MAETERLINCK

It is not a matter of teaching. The mystery is already there, it's just a matter of connection.

CRAIG

But how to connect, that's the main issue, Maurice. You're a man of words, not of the stage. Leave it to us to solve it.

DIDEROT

My fight, for example, is against the stylized neoclassical theatre.

MEYERHOLD

And mine is exactly the opposite.

DIDEROT

(With some disdain.)

That is...?

CRAIG

Vsevolod and I, although the differences, seek for a theatre which lost the contact with its theatrical origins.

DIDEROT

(Surprised.)

So do I!

MEYERHOLD

Sorry, my theater is formalist.

MAETERLINCK

I have a suggestion.

DIDEROT

(To MEYERHOLD.)

With how much success?

MEYERHOLD

I could not have had success in an authoritarian country in which the official aesthetics was a rough realism.

DIDEROT

Mon cher, I have had problems with the government too.

CRAIG

(To MAETERLINCK.)

I hope your suggestion will not favor words at the expense of images...

MAETERLINCK

Let's organize a kind of contest.

(CRAIG, DIDEROT and MEYERHOLD stare at MAETERLINCK.)

MAETERLINCK

One of you is going back to life again.

MEYERHOLD

This is not an original idea.

DIDEROT

Why are you not included in the contest?

MAETERLINCK

I am a playwright.

DIDEROT

Excuse moi, but so do I.

(MAETERLINCK thinks.)

MAETERLINCK

I am a symbolist.

CRAIG

So people classified me too. Remember the symbolic gesture?

MAETERLINCK

(Theatrically upset.)

Then because it was me who had the idea.

DIDEROT

You are a good actor.

MEYERHOLD

He seems more like a Flemish Stalinist dramatist.

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CRAIG

We don't need actors here. You arrived after the beginning of the performance.

DIDEROT

So what are we doing
(Pointing to the stage.)
here?

MEYERHOLD

Exactly! The problem is the stage, Denis! We should break this separation between the audience and the actors. Who chose this old-fashioned proscenium stage?

CRAIG

We are not actors. Am I going to repeat the same sentence the whole night? I thought you were interested in rhythmic patterns, Vsevolod.

MEYERHOLD

Sorry, uber-Gordonette.

MAETERLINCK

Monsieurs, let's go back to my idea?

CRAIG

Are you suggesting we are dead?

MAETERLINCK

(Taking a deep breath and sitting down.)
Death.

MEYERHOLD

Oh, no. His favorite theme.

MAETERLINCK

You make me feel so sorry with your theater, Vsevolod. A sum of disconnected movements. So many colors, so many mixed styles. So much.

CRAIG

(Whispering to MEYERHOLD.)
I told you about the colors before.

DIDEROT

What is the problem with the movement? How can someone imitate life without movements?

MAETERLINCK

You look at least two centuries old.

DIDEROT

You would never have existed without me.

CRAIG

Oh, come on, Monsieur Diderot, that is already too much. What is there in your writings that can be found in my theories? I dispense actors. You praise them. Non-illusionism is my rule number one. That's exactly what you are looking for. Theater will always be an imitation of something else, Denis. Didn't you realize that?

DIDEROT

(Humiliated.)

After many years, I did.

MAETERLINCK

(Comforting DIDEROT.)

No. Gordon is not right. The most common moments of everyday life can be represented on stage. And through those ones we can find the mystery of existence.

MEYERHOLD

So. You gave up the contest?

(MAETERLINCK closes his eyes and puts his fingers over his head.)

DIDEROT

Could anyone explain to me what is going on here? I am not very expert in twentieth century actors.

(Pointing to MAETERLINCK.)

Is this a kind of comedie larmoyante?

CRAIG

First of all he is not an actor...like us.

DIDEROT

But this is not a representation of everyday life. What social class is he portraying?

MEYERHOLD

(To the audience.)

You see? Can you tell me what kind of feeling is he expressing in the total absence of movement?

DIDEROT

Are you interested in feelings?

MEYERHOLD

Not at all. He is.

CRAIG

No, he is not. He is interested in the spiritual life.

DIDEROT

What the hell is that? We are in a concrete and mutable world. Let's talk about what we can see and not about something we do not have the slightest idea of. Theater is about our society! Can't you see that?

CRAIG

Good. Images. I love images. Huge columns. The light creating stripes. The power of the scenography.

MEYERHOLD

Denis, he has a strange theory about substituting actors for marionettes. Don't worry about that.

CRAIG

Give me the name of a good actor. Except me, of course.

MEYERHOLD

Duncan, the one you fucked.

MAETERLINCK

These overpassionate and uncivilized Russians.

DIDEROT

Don't say that. Catherine was very kind to me. And don't forget you are a Belgian.

CRAIG

Why do the French think they are superior to anyone else?

DIDEROT

Beckett exiled himself in the city of lights. And he wrote all his plays in French.

CRAIG

Fuck Beckett. He was a playwright.

MEYERHOLD

He wrote a curious play with a sole naked tree on stage. No bourgeois furniture, no vertical poles...

MAETERLINCK

But the death.

MEYERHOLD

Death? You mean god? Are we talking about the same play?

CRAIG

And the bastard portrayed the whole old continent through his characters. The British Lucky.

MEYERHOLD

The Russian Vladimir.

DIDEROT

The French Estragon.

MAETERLINCK

And the Italian Pozzo.

DIDEROT

You see. No Belgians.

(Silence.)

MAETERLINCK

Let's finish here. It's a good end after a silence pause.

DIDEROT

(To MEYERHOLD a little embarrassed.)

If you don't mind, it was not a good idea to have invited you to contribute to my encyclopedia...

CRAIG

I'm tired of this to be or not to be.

MEYERHOLD

A grotesque meeting.

DIDEROT

It's all an illusion.

(MAETERLINCK sits down and falls asleep. Lights dim.)

THE END