

portfolio of photographs and facsimiles, many of which do not appear in Ferenc Bónis's *Béla Bartók: His Life in Pictures and Documents* (1972), greatly enhances the work.

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MEYERHOLD: THE ART OF CONSCIOUS THEATER. By *Marjorie L. Hoover*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974. xvii, 349 pp. Illus. \$22.50.

With this book, the third on Vsevolod Meyerhold published in English, the wraps have finally been taken off the mystery that has surrounded the controversial Russian stage director. But let me say at the outset that more work is still needed, for Marjorie Hoover's book, though by far the most complete on Meyerhold's work, is in no way a biography and almost disregards personal and political events. Of course this was the author's intention, and we may be grateful for her fine contribution—the first factual well-documented account.

Meyerhold is known to the theater world as one of the great innovators in nonrealistic productions, as a precursor of the grotesque and mime theater and of the theater of the absurd; and he was an opponent of Stanislavsky and his Method as well. But because Meyerhold's own writings were banned for some twenty years, beginning with his arrest in 1939, these evaluations have been based on slight information and only a few eyewitness accounts of his performances in the 1930s. With Marjorie Hoover's scholarly account and Peter Brook's stagings à la Meyerhold, we have an almost complete resuscitation of this fascinating chameleon-director who died in 1940 "in custody in a manner still unknown," a victim of the Stalin purges.

Whereas Edward Braun (*Meyerhold on Theatre*, 1969) has provided translations of many Meyerhold articles, and James M. Symons has written about Meyerhold's productions from 1920 to 1932 (*Meyerhold's Theatre of the Grotesque*, 1971), Hoover comes to grips with the full range of his artistic achievement expressed in his writings, teaching methods, and performances, and as experienced by contemporaries. In five chapters (some chronological, some thematic) she presents Meyerhold's "art of conscious theater." "The New Theater" (chapter 1) deals with Stanislavsky's and Meyerhold's attempts to perform the innovative plays of Chekhov and the Symbolists. Chapter 2 covers the period from 1908 to 1918. Some of the best material is in the next section entitled "The Meyerhold Method," in which his concepts of acting are thoroughly investigated, the puzzling term biomechanics is clarified, and his teaching system is explained. The longest chapter deals with Soviet productions. Play by play we are given Meyerhold's own ideas as found in his pertinent writings, as well as detailed descriptions of his work from the viewpoint of playwrights, actors, designers, composers, audience, and press. In the last chapter, "Meyerhold and Other Arts and Artists," the author's investigations of the Meyerhold-Brecht relationship are especially revealing. She is to be congratulated on the clarity of her presentation and thinking and for the richness of her supporting material—the list of productions, teaching curricula, biographical table, bibliography, and so forth. In addition, the more than 140 illustrations are superbly chosen and as well reproduced as is possible, given the Soviet originals. One can object to the two-column format, which was probably dictated by the designer.

The book was a nominee for the National Book Award in the Arts and Letters category.

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LE THÉÂTRE JUIF SOVIÉTIQUE PENDANT LES ANNÉES VINGT. By *Béatrice Picon-Vallin*. Théâtre Années Vingt series. Lausanne: La Cité-L'Age d'Homme, 1973. 203 pp. \$8.25, paper. Distributed by International Scholarly Book Services, Portland, Oregon.

The Jews are a multilingual people, not only in the sense of employing languages of different nations among whom they live, but also of communicating (in all but the strictly religious context) in different *Jewish* vernaculars. In this century alone, these languages have included Yiddish, Ladino, the Judeo-Tadzhik dialect of Bukhara and Samarkand, the Tat of the Mountain Jews in the Caucasus, as well as Hebrew which has reemerged from pages of the sacred scripture as a living language. Of the five, only Ladino is not represented in the USSR. Written literature and journalism were created in the Soviet Union in the other four languages, particularly in the early years of the regime. Subsequently, Hebrew was to be suppressed as organically linked to Judaism as a religion and to Zionism as a hostile political creed. The remaining three—Yiddish, Tat and Judeo-Tadzhik—continue to lead precarious existences.

Béatrice Picon-Vallin's monograph about the Soviet "Jewish" theater in the 1920s actually deals with two such theaters, the Yiddish and the Hebrew, and particularly with the best of each, the Yiddish GOSET (The State Jewish Theater) and the Hebrew Habima (The Stage). Formally, both were "born" in the USSR, although the original impetus in both cases antedated the advent of the Soviet regime. The roots of the Yiddish theater were nourished by the secularist and often socialist Yiddish literature that developed in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The Hebrew theater was a cultural dimension of the Zionist renaissance of Jewish nationalism. Both theaters benefited from the atmosphere of innovation and reform in Russia's theater at the turn of the century.

Under the Soviet regime, Habima was viewed with considerable suspicion as elitist (Hebrew was not spoken by the masses), while the Yiddish theater was encouraged. Yet it is the Hebrew Habima that now survives as the national theater of Israel—the entire theater "defected" in 1926 while on tour in the West. The other theater, GOSET, the central subject of Picon-Vallin's book, was destroyed by Stalin in the late 1940s, and its director, Solomon Mikhoels, was murdered in an automobile "accident." As a study of the Yiddish theater in the USSR, Picon-Vallin's book has no equals. Yiddish theater is presented against a rich background of the country's vibrant cultural life in the twenties, and its links with the Russian theater (particularly that of Meyerhold) impart a sense of perspective to the narrative. The artistic stature and the range of interests of the Moscow Yiddish theater were impressive. Suffice it to mention that its stage was decorated by artists like Chagall and Falk and that King Lear was Mikhoels's most memorable creation. Picon-Vallin's discussion of acting techniques, costumes, sets and the like is most informative, and there are some twenty pages of illustrations. A minor annoying feature is that Russian and Yiddish titles are given in French translation rather than transliteration in the footnotes. All in all, the book is a major contribution to the history of the Yiddish theater and a significant addition to the history of the Soviet theater.