
PSYCHODRAMA SECTION

ESCAPE ME NEVER

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As a very young man Moreno's play with children in the gardens of Vienna proved to be a seedbed from which his therapeutic methods developed. He wrote about these story games in Das Koenigreich der Kinder (The Kingdom of the Children) in 1908. It was not without pride that he described how, given the opportunities he provided, one child after another revealed true dramatic talent. Some went on in later life to distinguished careers in the theater.

Of these, perhaps the most talented and most widely acclaimed was the actress Elisabeth Bergner. An ornament to the stage in Max Reinhardt's theater in Berlin, in London with Charles Cochran, in films with Alexander Korda and her husband Paul Czinner, and on tours around the world, the films she made are considered cinema classics. Among her films was her greatest success, Escape Me Never. Its title could serve to describe her feelings toward Moreno.

Now Elisabeth Bergner has written her autobiography, Bewundert Viel und Viel Gescholten (Much Admired and Much Chided). With grace and felicity she discharges her debt to Moreno. By permission of her publishers—C. Bertelsmann Verlag of Munich—I have translated the following excerpts:

I am still ten, . . . my Papa . . . brings Moreno into my young life. . .
Certainly, certainly, I had the best father on earth.

Jacob Moreno, medical student at the University of Vienna, approximately twenty, but at most twenty three years old. To me he looked like a hundred because he had a beard. In those days only very old men wore beards. My father had a mustache. Moreno had a Christbeard, as I recognized much later. He was tall and slender, had grippingly beautiful blue eyes that always smiled, and dark hair. I believe he was wondrously beautiful. I still believe that today. Most fascinating was his smile. That was a mixture of mockery and kindness. It was loving and amused. It was indescribable. I still believe today that he was deliciously amused at our entire family.

Moreno, that was thus our new tutor. I believe my father knew his mother or something of that sort. But I know nothing more specific about how he suddenly came to us. He was just there. Now a new time chronology begins. It is the start of my spiritual birth. If I were to succeed in making clear what Moreno meant in my life and at this time of my life, then maybe this questionable undertaking of an autobiography would serve a purpose. I have read somewhere once: "History is a Mississippi of lies." I am often forcibly reminded of that while reading biographies, not to speak of autobiographies. And here I am not thinking at all of conscious or deliberate untruths. But what do we really know about ourselves? About our growing and becoming, about the influences—not merely conscious ones—to which we are exposed, which then awaken in us this or that, leading to certain consequences?

So, Moreno is our new tutor, God bless my Papa, about whom it would be perhaps more interesting to write a book than about myself.

It soon became clear that neither my sister nor my brother had any sense of what to do with Moreno, besides lessons. Nor he with them. He belongs to me, to me alone entirely. No, I belong to him! And how! He does not only do lessons with us. He goes also with us into the Augarten and the Prater. Until then, my small brother and I had gone only with the then current cook to the Prater. She took us mostly to the "Artists" in the "Wurschtprater". The Wurschtprater is that part of the Prater which is ideally suited for children, domestics and soldiers. It has a roller coaster and a train that runs through grottos and a tramway, sausages and an "artists' theater". We loved the Wurschtprater, my brother and I. Most especially the "artists". These were, after all, my first experiences with theater.

The "artists" was an open beer garden with an elevated stage and a curtain of red gold silk. There were acrobats, magicians, dancers, clowns and mimes to be seen. My brother preferred the magicians; the mimes bewitched me.

In the normal course of events, the cook would take us there and

“accidentally” meet a soldier she knew who would invite us to his table on which stood a glass of beer.

We were very satisfied and gazed with fascination at the stage without noticing that the cook and the soldier would appear only two or three hours later at the table. “Come, come, it is already quite late,” she would say then and we returned home again.

This edenic epoch ended abruptly when we, at one time, my brother and I, sitting all alone with a beer glass, witnessed a tense pantomime in which the eyes of a man were put out. I began to scream and weep. The other spectators and the artists were disturbed and vexed; they noticed suddenly that two children sat there alone, without an attending adult. The cook and the soldier were searched for and found and we left in haste. For a long time I was unable to stop crying and my brother consoled me. “Don’t be stupid, that was not real blood, that was only red dye that he had on his face and the cook spoke up, “If you don’t stop crying I won’t ever be able to take you to the ‘artists’ anymore”.

By the time we reached home I had stopped weeping and no one noticed anything that evening. But, during the night it started again. Screaming and crying I awakened and told my frightened parents about the put-out eyes and the bloody face and that was the end of the “artists” epoch. We were never again permitted to go there.

But this I have to establish here: I am deeply grateful for the memory of the “artists” and quite convinced that this “artist period” awakened in me a fascination for the theater. At least the fascination of being a theater goer. Although until this day I am unable to attend a performance of “Lear” without fleeing into the foyer for the scene of Gloucester’s blinding. Merely looking away is not good enough then, I have tried it. It is also possible that this “artists” experience showed my parents the need not to trust us to the cook any longer—and brought Moreno into the house.

Thus, with Moreno a new era begins. The ease and speed with which the schoolwork was accomplished was soon no longer the most important. I was given poems to learn. And not just “The Bell” and “The Hostage” and such things from the school reader, but the wildest, most beautiful “unknown” poems: “The moon is risen, the little golden stars are resplendent”; “Ride, ride, ride through the day, through the night, through the day”; “Many must surely die there where the heavy rudders of ships are streaking”; “Thus far too many things there are at which we smile with confidence, because our eyes do not see them.” Oh, it was a new world.

Or, when Moreno went with us to the Prater, we did not go to the “Wurschtl” but very deep, far away into the main avenue where the beautiful large meadows are.

“But you don’t need a skipping rope for skipping! Come, let’s give the skipping rope to a poor child who never had one!”

“But you don’t need a ball to play ball! Come, I’ll toss the sun to you, catch it!” “Ow, I burnt myself!” “Come, come, I’ll make a bandage for you till the sunburn has cooled.” \

And on the way to the Prater he would take along a few children whom we met on the street. And all the toys we owned were given away to the children. Then we all had to sit in the meadow and he would say, “So, now we will think up our own fairy tales! Once upon a time there was a king who had seven sons. What were their names? What became of them?” And every child had to create a name, a character and a fate. In between he would pose questions to help the story along.

Many children did not like this game at all and did not return. Others always came back and brought along still more children. I loved these games beyond description, my brother found them dull.

Then Moreno started to play theater with us and to rehearse plays. My first role was that of Toinette in “The Imaginary Invalid” by Moliere. All the children played along. I was as if thrown into the water and able to swim.

What I saw in Moreno is most clearly explained by relating how I once came home too late from ice skating and he was there an half hour before me. I was very frightened. “Doesn’t matter”, said the cook who opened the door to me, “he’s drinking coffee with your mother, just go on in!” I was as if turned to stone. Coffee? He drinks coffee, like the rest of us? Like an ordinary human being? But that was slander! He certainly was not an ordinary human being. She shoved me to the keyhole and I peeped through it and I saw: He drank coffee with my Mama. He laughed and bit off large pieces from a bun. In my speechless amazement I became aware then that I had perceived him quite differently. I was very disappointed. Not until later did I realize that there was something greater here. That an ordinary flesh-and-blood-person could nevertheless be so uncommon.

He remained thus for four years in my life. Indescribably important years, as I know today. In the twenties a new word became fashionable in our vocabulary, the word “abstract”. When I pondered over this word and its meaning, I recognized that this idea, “abstract” was, so to speak, my mother’s milk. My entire education by Moreno was, after all, the familiarization with and absorption of the “abstract”.

At one time he said in my presence to my parents, “She will become an actress”. “That’s all we need,” replied my Papa and they laughed. That was the first time I heard it, but I did not laugh. I have just never forgotten it, “She will become an actress”.

These four years were full of new learning and growing for me. For