JACQUES COPEAU:
DRAMATIC CRITIC AND
REFORMER OF THE THEATRE

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: An analysis of the development of Jacques Copeau's principles of dramatic art, of their application to a renovation of French theatre and of their influence on succeeding theatrical figures
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Crit. Jacques Copeau, Critiques d'un autre temps.
N.R.F. Nouvelle Revue Française.
I. Introduction: Copeau's career

Jacques Copeau's career in the theatre from his days as dramatic critic, when many of his principles developed, through his years of practical reform as director of the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, to the propagation of his ideals by his former actors and students or by admirers has had such a profound influence on the art of the theatre that he can be ranked with Max Reinhardt in Germany, Adolphe Appia in Switzerland, Edward Gordon Craig in England and Constantin Stanislavsky in Russia as one of the outstanding leaders in early twentieth-century theatre. Of these men, whose experiments or theories achieved international acclaim and altered theatrical styles throughout Europe and abroad, the careers of the Russian and of the French actor-directors are in many ways similar, as Copeau himself pointed out in his preface to the French translation of Stanislavsky's autobiography, Ma Vie dans l'art. After a lengthy apprenticeship of fifteen years in the theatre, Stanislavsky finally became the leading artistic force in the Moscow Art Theatre, in which from 1898 to 1906 "il

lutte contre la routine, la théâtralité, le cabotinage, le mauvais goût et les mauvaises manières. Il soumet tous les éléments de la création à une volonté unique, ou du moins à l'autorité d'inspirations concertées. A mesure que son savoir s'accroît... il sent mieux la nécessité d'une réforme plus profonde et plus radicale. Mais, sous la pression des circonstances, il est contraint de l'ajourner.  

Having enriched and transformed the art of the theatre in his country during these years but not having reached its essence to his own satisfaction, Stanislavsky decided to devote himself to intense research and to experiments with a group of youthful collaborators away from the large city. Important changes in his conceptions of the theatre developed to add new life to his art: "Il n'accorde plus de crédit à la domination du metteur en scène sur l'interprète. Pas davantage aux prestiges de la décoration scénique. Il réclame un tréteau nu pour l'acteur souverain. Son unique souci, son recours, son espoir, il les place dans le développement futur de l'acteur, non pas en tant qu'instrument mais en tant que source créatrice de vie artistique, d'émotion vraie.... [Il] fait appel aux jeunes, à des élèves, à des figurants, pour sortir du théâtre, s'installer aux champs, former le noyau d'une communauté nouvelle, d'une confrérie d'acteurs, et tout recommencer. Mais les générations pré-révolutionnaires manquent

2Ibid., p. 10.
de discipline. Les studios qui se multiplient s'isolent les uns des autres. Ils passent trop vite de l'expérimentation à l'exploitation, et deviennent à eux-mêmes leur propre fin.\(^3\)
The conclusions Stanislavsky reached are those which Copeau, usually independant of any direct influence, considered fundamental, and the description of the evolution in Russian theatre after Stanislavsky's example applies equally well to developments in French theatre, as Copeau saw them in 1934. Although Copeau did not meet Stanislavsky until December, 1922, when the Moscow Art Theatre visited Paris, the sincerity and integrity of the efforts of the Russian were a constant inspiration and example for Copeau and his company.

Unlike Stanislavsky, Copeau did not spend his years of apprenticeship in an acting company before becoming director of a troupe. Born in Paris on February 4, 1879, Jacques Copeau was introduced early to the theatre as a spectator by his father and grandfather. As a student at the Lycée Condorcet, one of his plays, *Brouillard du matin*, was performed on March 27, 1897 at the Nouveau Théâtre by the Anciens Élèves de Condorcet and received high praise from the influential Francisque Sarcey. Nevertheless, a second play by Copeau was not produced until 1911, when his adaptation of *Les Frères Karamazov*, written in collaboration with a former classmate at Condorcet and

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 12.
then actor at the Comédie-Française, Jean Croué, was performed at Jacques Rouché's Théâtre des Arts, and his real importance as leader of a theatrical renovation did not begin until the founding of his Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in 1913.

In the intervening years, Copeau continued his studies, read very widely, worked on several other plays, travelled, married, managed after his father's death the iron-works owned by the family at Raucourt until its bankruptcy, and began contributing articles to literary magazines. Through one of these contributions, a prose-poem in praise of L'Immoraliste, Copeau came to know André Gide, and a firm friendship grew with time. Gide was instrumental in introducing Copeau to the literary milieu of the day and especially to Jean Schlumberger, Henri Ghéon, Jacques Riviére, André Suarès and Charles Péguy. Through André Schoeller and the painter Albert Besnard, Copeau was appointed in charge of one of the galleries at Georges Petit's Galerie d'Art Moderne in 1905. This position more or less assured the daily subsistence of Copeau and his family, while leaving his evenings free to attend the theatre and write his accounts of the productions he saw there.

Copeau's critical reviews of his contemporary theatre began appearing as early as 1902 in La Revue d'Art Dramatique and continued with greater regularity in L'Ermitage (1904-1906), Le Théâtre (1905-1914), Le Figaro Illustré (1906), in journals with a limited circulation such as Les Essais or
Antée, and on occasion in *Le Petit Journal* and *Le Gaulois*. The realm of influence of Copeau's dramatic criticisms was greatly increased in 1907, when Jacques Rouché appointed him to succeed Léon Blum as critic of *La Grande Revue*, to which he contributed until 1910, and the *Nouvelle Revue Française* provided the final important regular outlet for Copeau's reflections on the theatre of his day from 1909 to 1913.

In his souvenirs on the five years he spent at the *Galerie d'Art Moderne*⁴, Copeau reveals that his gallery became a meeting-place for some of the leading literary figures of his day, including Gide, Rouché, Léon Daudet, Henry Vandeputte (of *Antée*), Edouard Ducoté (of *L'Ermitage*), Schlumberger, Michel Arnauld, Ghéon, André Ruyters and Eugène Montfort, and that much of the organization of the *N.R.F.* was discussed there. Copeau's connection with this journal was to be the most important stage in his early development before the opening of his theatre. After the quarrel surrounding the first issue of November 15, 1908 and the subsequent departure of Montfort, Copeau became director of the review and led it through the opening years to a position of prominence in the French literary world.

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The connections Copeau developed with this group of dedicated men and with the readers of the review served him well in succeeding years in several important respects, and he gratefully acknowledged his debt to them: "mon caractère et mes idées se sont formés. Avec eux j'ai fait l'apprentissage d'une vie consacrée à la tâche de chaque jour. J'ai pris les moeurs de l'indépendance et du courage intellectuel.... Nous étions les plus unis et les plus libres que j'aie vus.... 
J'ai souvent pensé que si, aux débuts d'une vie difficile, j'ai pu ne point céder sous le poids de besognes dégradantes, ne pas laisser se dévoyer ma vocation... c'est à mes amis que je le dois. J'ai eu cette chance de pouvoir toujours porter très haut mon regard, d'être toujours encouragé, blâmé, relancé par des voix sincères, rigoureuses et pleines d'autorité." Copeau tried to imbue his theatre with the same spirit of dedication, of openness to differing trends and of friendship as he had witnessed among the collaborators of the N.R.F.
The men who helped Copeau organize his theatre were for the most part drawn from the milieu of the review and the first contemporary plays performed by the company were written by leaders of the N.R.F. During his years as dramatic critic for the journal, Copeau was able to continue his in-depth analyses.

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of current theatre and thus to familiarize a group of readers with his ideals. To this audience and in the pages of this review, Copeau could then make his initial appeal for support of his new project. During the first season of the Vieux-Colombier, the N.R.F. continued to encourage the theatre with highly laudatory reviews, which contrasted with the reception given by the critics of many other French newspapers or periodicals.

Thus, Jacques Copeau's decision to set about the renovation of the theatre was the culmination of his activity as dramatic critic. As an observer of the theatre, he had developed over the years a clear conception of its ills and certain definite principles for reform, which were to become the basis of his effort as theatre director. At the height of his success, Copeau gathered what he considered to be the most important and the most representative of his reviews into a collection, Critiques d'un autre temps, which will be examined in the second chapter of this essay to indicate what principles Copeau advocated and what caused his indignation leading finally to his decision to open his own theatre in 1913.

In order to avoid the contamination of the commercial theatre district, Copeau and his associates chose to take over a small left-bank theatre, the Athénée-Saint-Germain. Even this theatre was too elaborate for the spirit in which Copeau

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wished his troupe to work, and he therefore assigned Francis Jourdain to transform it to give an atmosphere of increased sobriety. Meanwhile Copeau set about choosing actors who would respond to his ideal and took them to his country retreat, where they rehearsed daily for two months before returning to Paris to open on October 22, 1913.

The impact of the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier with its hard-working, unified troupe and its high ideals was by no means immediate, but its influence on succeeding generations has been profound despite its relatively short existence (five and a half seasons in Paris and two in New York). Despite brief successes during the first season, it was not until the final production in May 1914, Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, that the reputation of the new theatre was firmly established. Its highly promising future was interrupted, however, by the declaration of war and the consequent dispersal of the troupe.

After his discharge from the armed services for medical reasons, Copeau did not remain inactive, but his activity was reflective and consisted of meditations on the experience of a single season of direct intervention, of correspondence with his troupe to keep alive the spirit of the Vieux-Colombier and to discuss further innovations, and of visits to leading theoreticians on the theatre or gymnastics (to Craig in Florence and to Appia and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze in Switzerland) which confirmed some of Copeau's ideas and opened new vistas for
future experimentation. When he returned from these visits, he made a first groping attempt at realizing one of the fundamental elements of his program for reform, the establishment of a theatre school.

To combat the propaganda effort of Germany in the United States, the French government decided to send Copeau in 1917 to lecture in America on French culture. While there, Otto Kahn encouraged him to try to reassemble his troupe and bring it to New York to replace the inept company of Lucien Bonheur, "dont on a pu écrire, dans le New York Times, qu'elle était la meilleure réclame imaginable en faveur du théâtre allemand"7, whose repertory had consisted largely of Boulevard plays with adultery or the eternal triangle as the main themes. It was hoped that the broader and more serious repertory of the Vieux-Colombier would correct the impression created by the Deutsches Theater in New York of the superiority of German over French culture. With a company consisting partly of actors of the original troupe and of a number of new elements, Copeau presented in 1917-18 a program similar to that of his first season in Paris, mixing French and foreign classics with more contemporary works in a rolling repertory. Critical reaction was favourable but soon became apathetic.

while public support diminished in the face of the difficulty of foreign-language theatre and unaccustomed repertory. A propaganda mission without a public would have been a failure, and Copeau therefore compromised in his choice of plays during the second season (1918-19), even to the point of presenting plays of which he disapproved in an effort to attract a larger audience. Of plays performed by the company for the first time in New York, only a very small minority remained in the repertory of the Vieux-Colombier on its return to Paris after the war.  

Disappointed though he was by the experience in New York and by the necessity of compromising his high ideals, Copeau nonetheless reopened his theatre in February, 1920, determined to continue the renovation of French theatrical standards. Experiments with stage construction, begun in 1913-14 and continued at the Garrick Theatre in New York, led to a new concept of a solid cement stage with a fixed decor on which during the next four and a half seasons, the Vieux-Colombier presented a

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program of classics, recent plays, new creations and revivals. The theatre's fame continued to grow nationally and internationally to such an extent that Copeau planned to form a second troupe to tour the French provinces and carry the message of the Vieux-Colombier outside France during the theatre season rather than merely during the summer. Despite successes in Paris, the balance sheet of the theatre usually showed a deficit, since the Vieux-Colombier could only accommodate a relatively small audience. Propositions to move to larger quarters were turned down, since the search for financial success constituted in Copeau's mind a serious danger to the spirit of research which should animate little theatres.

In this spirit Copeau was finally able to form officially in October, 1921 the adjunct to the theatre, from which he felt renovation would emanate—the Ecole du Vieux-Colombier, to train young people, children if possible, in all aspects of true dramatic art. As Copeau devoted himself more and more to this aspect of his program, the company, on which the reputation of the Vieux-Colombier was based, became increasingly hostile, in part justifiably as Copeau admitted in his Souvenirs du Vieux-Colombier. In the face of dissension, personal fatigue, 

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9 For the repertory of the Vieux-Colombier in Paris and in New York, see Appendix.

financial difficulties (although by no means insurmountable),
the failure of his play, *La Maison Natale*, created in December,
1923, and the continual sapping of his creative energies, he
decided to suspend the activity of his theatre in May, 1924 and
to retire to the country with a group of young students from
the school to train them there and to reflect in peace on his
art, as Stanislavsky had done.

This period of Copeau's activity was, like those in
Paris or in New York, not altogether serene or satisfactory.
The religious doubts which tormented him until his re-found
faith in Catholicism in 1925 separated him from the exuberant
youth about him. The beginnings of the illness which eventu-
ally killed him added further strain to the accumulated fatigue
of previous years, while financial difficulties continued to
plague him and soon forced him to reduce the number of students
he could support. Those students who remained received a thor-
ough training in their craft and invaluable contact with a
form of popular theatre in their performances in a group known
as *Les Copiaus* in the French provinces or on tour in Holland,
Belgium, Switzerland, Italy or England. To supplement the
limited revenue of these performances, Copeau would travel far
and wide to lecture or to give play-readings, to perform or
direct in Paris or elsewhere (including a presentation of his
adaptation of *Les Frères Karamazov* in an English version which
he directed for the Theatre Guild in New York in January, 1927).
In 1928, a campaign was launched by a number of eminent Frenchmen to place Copeau at the head of the Comédie-Française. The prospect of success fluctuated from great expectations, during which time Copeau separated himself from the Copiaus (June, 1929), to eventual failure. From then on, his career is a variegated one with few secure and lasting appointments and many brief engagements to direct a single play for a number of theatres, which Copeau accepted in order to survive rather than because of the artistic promise of the play or the troupe. Two appointments consecrated the esteem in which Copeau and his teachings were held in and outside of France: first as professor at the Belgian National Conservatory (October, 1932-September, 1933) and then in 1936 as director at the Comédie-Française under Edouard Bourdet, who also engaged Louis Jouvet, Charles Dullin and Gaston Baty as directors. When Bourdet was injured in 1940, Copeau was appointed temporary administrator, a post he was obliged to relinquish ten months later when he refused to compromise with the occupying Germans. During his brief administration, he was responsible for adding to the repertory

Copeau directed at the Comédie-Française:

December 7, 1936  Molière  Le Misanthrope
May 24, 1937  Racine  Bajazet
November 22, 1937  Mauriac  Asmodée
November 21, 1938  R. Martin du Gard  Le Testament du Père Leleu

For the development of Copeau's artistic ideas, two experiences are capital during these years, his open-air productions at the Florence May festivals in 1933 (*Le Mistère de Santa Uliva* in the cloister of Santa Croce) and in 1935 (*Rino Alessi's Savonarola in the Piazza della Signoria*). The necessity of blending the natural decor with the demands of the play was an exhilarating task for both Copeau and his assistant, André Barsacq. Less important was his production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* in the Boboli gardens in 1938. For his financial security, Copeau continued to give lectures and dramatic readings of high quality, was dramatic critic for the *Nouvelles Littéraires* from November, 1933 until June, 1934, appeared in a number of films and on occasion directed plays at a variety of Paris theatres with only limited success.12

12Henri Duvernois, *Jeanne* (Théâtre des Nouveautés, November 9, 1932); Igor Stravinsky, *Perséphone* (ballet, Opéra, April 30, 1934); Shakespeare (ad. Jules Delacre), *As You Like It* (Théâtre de l'Atelier, October 11, 1934); Shakespeare (ad. Jean Sarment), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Théâtre de la Madeleine, March 7, 1936); Paul Raynal, *Napoléon Unique* (Théâtre de la
After leaving the Comédie-Française in 1941, Copeau lived in virtual retirement at his country-home in Pernand-Vergelesses, reflecting, writing on the theatre,\textsuperscript{13} adapting or creating,\textsuperscript{14} with only a single production, an outdoor presentation of his adaptation of a medieval mystery play, \textit{Le Miracle du Pain Doré}, in July, 1943 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the founding of the Hôtel-Dieu de Beaune, where Copeau died six years later on October 20, 1949, leaving a legion of theatre personnel his debtors.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Le Théâtre populaire}. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1941.

\textsuperscript{14}A last play, \textit{Le Petit Pauvre} (François d'Assise), was completed in 1942 and published four years later ([Paris]: Gallimard, [1946]) but not performed until after Copeau's death, in the summer of 1950 in the cloister of San Miniato in Florence under the direction of Orazio Costa, who produced the play as a homage to the master of the modern stage.
II. Copeau the critic

The conditions in the French theatre, against which Jacques Copeau reacted first as dramatic critic and then as theatre director, are difficult to imagine from the modern perspective, as Béatrix Dussane described in her *Notes de théâtre*: "La génération théâtrale actuelle risque d'être ingrate pour Copeau, justement parce qu'elle est nourrie de ce qui est sorti de lui, et que, pratiquement, rien ne subsiste de ce qu'il a combattu."¹ The theatre which Copeau observed as critic and which has largely disappeared consisted of three main tendencies: the naturalism of certain independent theatres in the wake of André Antoine's reforms at the *Théâtre Libre*, the conservative, declamatory style of the *Comédie-Française* whose productions suffered also from an accumulation of traditions often contrary to the original spirit of the play, and the commercialism of Boulevard theatre with its emphasis on a star performer and its overuse of stage tricks and formulas. In the face of these trends, none of which entirely satisfied him, Copeau began to plead in his articles for a different type of theatre, "because I felt there was one thing which was perhaps the worst thing that was done in connection with the theatre, worse than the

¹N. p.: Lardanchet, 1951, p. 72.
work of the theatrical people—that kind of leniency, that kind of facility with which the public and the critics accepted it, and I started to say the truth about the theatre."²

For Copeau, then, the dramatic critic was at least partly responsible for the well-being or the deterioration of the theatre. In accepting uncritically the mediocrity of Boulevard theatre, the critic led astray public taste and in fact created a vicious circle: "the complacence of the critics towards inferior productions and the indifference with which they hailed works of distinction"³ led to the success of unworthy plays. Not only was the public misled to consider highly an undeserving work, but the author was duped as to his own talent and as to what constituted the standard of excellence. What was needed was "un honnête homme éclairé qui sans relâche dénonce la faiblesse et le désordre, démasque le mensonge, rallie les égarés à de plus pures, à de moins éphémères ambitions, en leur proposant les grands exemples et les parfaits modèles."⁴ The lack of

²Jacques Copeau, To the Play House. Cleveland: midwinter 1918–19, p. 4.


an outstanding contemporary dramatist was insufficient reason to lower critical standards. The ideal critic for Copeau should be "sincère, grave, profond, se sachant investi, à l'égal du poète, d'une fonction créatrice, digne de collaborer au même oeuvre que lui et de porter, comme lui, la responsabilité de la culture." Instead of that, France had critics of the calibre of Léon Blum whose judgment was often clouded by external considerations such as politeness or friendship. Indulgence of this type should be replaced by "une sincérité continue" and even by a "sévérité monotone, systématique," if that would help correct existing deficiencies.

A much more suitable dramatic critic Copeau found outside of France in William Archer, whose Play-Making, a Manual of Craftsmanship he reviewed in the N.R.F. of October 1, 1912. Here was a creative critic, "apté à saisir... les qualités et les faiblesses d'une production dramatique, à dégager de ses observations des principes vivants et féconds, à surprendre les erreurs des écrivains de théâtre, à leur désigner la bonne voie." Archer made no compromise with mediocrity, but instead tried to educate the author (and by extension, the public) by a minute analysis of even technical details. His points of reference were the great examples of the past and his goal was

5 Ibid., pp. 8-9 (Crit., p. 212).
a continuing improvement in modern drama.

Such were the principles which guided Copeau's own critical reviews, since he did not despair of the theatre's future. Disinterested, ambitious men were preparing a revival even in 1905, but they remained in the background in the face of so much commercialism. Meanwhile Copeau saw his role as one of collaboration in preparing public and artists for the creation of a valid theatre: "De tout notre zèle, de toute notre foi, et modestement, efforçons-nous à la préparer [une renaissance], à la motiver. Une critique, impitoyable aux turpitudes quotidiennes, compétente, sincère, audacieuse, artiste elle-même, pourrait seconder les artistes. Elles tiendrait en contact avec la tradition, elle saurait, positive en ses négations mêmes, dégager pour eux de chaque système incomplet les vérités assimilables, elle désignerait les grands exemples, elle élargirait, enfin, par l'analyse, les possibilités de la création." The reviews which Copeau published as *Critiques d'un autre temps* therefore maintain a certain validity beyond the criticism of a particular author or play, as Pierre Bost recognized: "M. Jacques Copeau a vu, et montre, derrière les œuvres, quelque chose qui dépasse le comédien, l'auteur et le drame lui-même, et qui est

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proprement l'art dramatique." In another review of the collection, Edmond Sée indicated that Copeau had realized his ambition as critic when he spoke of him as "un critique d'une magnifique indépendance, [qui a] redonné à cette profession tant décriée... un lustre, une valeur...".

In these "essais étonnants de sûreté et de profondeur", Copeau concentrated on the weaknesses of the drama itself more than on the presentation. He was especially harsh in his treatment of the pièce à thèse, which set out to prove a point, usually to the detriment of psychological characterization or of the dramatic element. Among other serious defects Copeau noted in the plays of contemporary dramatists were an unnecessarily complicated plot structure which seemed to serve only to show the virtuosity of the author's imagination rather than to correspond to an inner dramatic necessity, a reliance on conventional formulas and the inclusion of non-essential scenes or characters.

From his earliest reviews onward, Copeau did not hesi-

11 Marcel Doisy, Jacques Copeau ou l'absolu dans l'art. [Paris]: Le Cercle du Livre, [1954], p. 35.
tate to illustrate these weaknesses in the works of even the most popular dramatists. In a penetrating article which appeared in L'Ermitage in March, 1904, Copeau destroyed the myth which had supported the success of Paul Hervieu, generally accepted previously as a modern tragedian writing in a classical style, in whose plays the tragic conclusion was determined by the personality of the characters, as it had been by destiny in antiquity. "Avec une sûreté critique qui stupéfie autant que l'accent de maturité de son style, Jacques Copeau, discernant tout ce que la manière d'Hervieu avait de factice, osait, dès ses premiers pas d'essayiste, dénoncer sa réputation usurpée de 'tragique moderne'"\(^{12}\), by showing that the overriding influence in the development of any Hervieu play is not the personality of the characters or destiny but the idea which the author seeks to demonstrate. The play then suffers from a lack of life, and the dénouement appears arbitrary, since its only reason for being is to conclude logically the author's thesis.

Copeau also objected to the distinction between a tragedy of situation and a tragedy of character, since the situation is intimately connected with the character of the protagonist, and "le tragique de situation où la situation vaut seule, il relève du mélodrame."\(^{13}\) This is where Hervieu's talent

\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 33.

really lies—in excellent melodramas, which never attain true tragic stature however. His characters represent certain ideas and necessitate lengthy self-analyses to present these to the audience. A character's feelings are also determined a priori and do not develop in the course of the play. For example, Hervieu's heroines analyse their sentiments, but the audience never witnesses them, since "elles n'ont d'autre raison d'être que le débat auquel elles s'identifient." 14 In short, Hervieu's pretensions to tragedy, his "faculté de discerner la matière tragique diffuse dans la vie moderne, le choix pessimiste de l'observation, l'horreur des situations, la gravité disputeuse et moralisante, la rigueur méthodique imitant l'ordre classique" 15 are destroyed by his melodramatic sensitivity and by a style "qui n'est pas seulement incorrect, mais anti-humain, anti-naturel par son emphase laborieuse et banale, conventionnelle jusque dans la trivialité.... Il sonne faux.... Et le dialogue, coupé d'interjections factices, de contre-façons cornéliennes, obéit à un rythme préconçu, à une cadence théâtrale que le savoir-faire a substitués aux mystérieux mouvements naturels.... C'est ainsi que la forme de M. Paul Hervieu accuse ce manque de sympathie et de sincérité, faute desquelles il n'est pas d'art dramatique." 16

14 Ibid., p. 168 (Crit., p. 73).
15 Ibid., p. 170 (Crit., pp. 74-75).
16 Ibid., pp. 170-171 (Crit., p. 75).
In this early essay, the pedagogical role of the conscientious critic is clear, and the severe judgment of the works of an eminent dramatist of the time announces Copeau's uncompromising attitude towards works of limited dramatic quality during his years as director of the Vieux-Colombier. His opposition to the pièce à thèse is categorical, since the characters become mere pawns to support the author's argument, and Copeau already demands of an author what he will require of all collaborators in dramatic creation—sincerity.

When Copeau reviewed for *L'Ermitage* in February, 1906 a performance of Hervieu's *Le Réveil* at the Comédie-Française, he ascertained growing reserves on the part of several critics who more and more frequently supported his opinion of two years earlier that Hervieu's plays were melodramatic more than tragic. Copeau summarized the criticisms of his previous article: "Pour lui [Hervieu], tout le drame est dans la situation. Pour nous, il résside tout entier dans les caractères,—ou plutôt nous ne pouvons consentir à séparer ceci de cela. Encore moins admettrons-nous que la situation, dans un drame, ne soit pas l'expression même des caractères, le point extrême de leur développement logique, mais que, dépouillée de toute valeur psychologique, elle résulte d'un pur arrangement matériel."17 He then condemned the complicated intrigue which other critics also

recognized as excessive in a play about a love affair and concluded that "Hervieu cherche dans les détours de l'intrigue ce qu'un véritable créateur dramatique rencontre naturellement dans la peinture des caractères." In addition, he rejected the exaggerated language of the play as unnatural and artificial. Copeau's efforts at his own theatre will be in the opposite direction, towards simplicity and the elimination of non-essentials.

The plays of the skillful and prestigious Henry Bataille showed a similar tendency towards complicated plot structures but with a different purpose than in Hervieu's plays, as Copeau pointed out in his detailed analysis of Le Scandale (La Grande Revue, April 25, 1909). He explained the weaknesses of Bataille's characterization and the close parallel of the second act with Ibsen's A Doll's House, up to the point where Bataille's quest for ingenuity destroys the natural development of the situation for the sake of surprise: "Capable de régner sur la sensibilité du spectateur par la vérité et l'émotion, il s'est fait un jeu d'aguicher sa curiosité, de la suspendre et de la surprendre en l'engageant sur de fausses pistes, en disposant des péripéties selon moins de nécessité que de capricieuse fantaisie, en retenant plus d'une fois le drame sur la pente naturelle où il s'engageait." When new and surprising com-

18 Ibid., p. 80.

19 Jacques Copeau, "Le Scandale à la Renaissance", Crit., p. 100.
plications arise between acts, the evolution appears discontinuous. The decision by the wronged husband to banish his adulterous wife calls to Copeau's mind certain parallels with an Elizabethan play by Thomas Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, but Bataille's treatment of the theme seems a parody of the tragic grandeur of Heywood's play, since the husband's anger is detoured at the last moment in another surprise effect, which Copeau could not accept as legitimate. A number of nonessential anecdotes delay the reconciliation in the last scene, the best of the play, but even in this scene, Bataille could not resist playing on the heartstrings of his audience with a final easily-evoked emotion. Copeau concluded that Bataille's conception of dramatic art was "ambitieuse, abondante et presque débordante, conception insuffisamment châtiée et qui souvent s'égare, sur le fait de la création, faute d'une plus sévère discipline.... Je pense que toutes ses aspirations sont bonnes et fécondes, mais qu'il lui manque de s'être formulé une esthétique moins flottante." For Copeau, such discipline was a pre-requisite for any dramatic creation of quality and became a distinguishing characteristic of his troupe.

This article ended with a contrast of the dramas of Hervieu and Bataille. Hervieu's elliptical constructions dominated by the idea he wished to demonstrate led him to oratorical characters not true to life, while Bataille's supple and ex-
pandable poetical dramas tried to encompass life in all its complexities and accidents, even to the point of exaggerating the element of chance, but always seeking to arrive at the truth amidst the transitory appearances. Bataille's more plastic, more easily influenced conception was preferable, but even better would be a position between these two extremes, "un art dramatique à la fois complexe et rigoureux, sensible et noble, moins serf de la raison et moins courtisan de la vie, qui s'alimenteraient de véritable culture classique." Copeau's conclusion is most significant for his later program: "La forme classique, même si parfois elle blesse notre fantaisie, si elle irrite notre sentiment nouveau de la vie et les tendances de notre invention, doit demeurer, malgré tout, l'immuable modèle auquel il convient que nous conformions nos pensées. Car elle est ce que nous possédons de plus beau, de plus solide, de plus évident." He later maintained that his campaign to restore the theatre was more reactionary than revolutionary, since his inspiration was always in the masterpieces of the past, whether of antiquity, of Elizabethan England or of French classical tragedy and comedy. These were to constitute the backbone of the repertory of the Vieux-Colombier, not only for their inherent perfection and timelessness, but also as models for aspiring dramatists.

21 Ibid., p. 108.
22 Ibid., p. 108.
Representative of the worst effects of commercial theatre, "where the idea itself of the theatre, the love and the craving for beauty, was quite pushed aside"\(^\text{23}\), was the production of Edmond Rostand's *Chantecler* which Copeau reviewed in *La Grande Revue* of February 25, 1910. The theatre had become a market-place for speculators who launched extensive publicity campaigns "disputant sur le choix d'un plumage ou la proportion d'un décor, et croyant décider du sort des lettres françaises."\(^\text{24}\)

With *Chantecler*, the result was an artistic disaster: "les premières représentations douteuses, les lâchages sournois, la trahison d'un interprète qui, d'un clin d'œil, insinue qu'il n'est point dupe de son rôle,... la comédie des critiques tâchant à ne se compromettre ni vis-à-vis de l'auteur ni vis-à-vis du public."\(^\text{25}\) In addition, the scenic representation did not correspond to the spirit of the play in Copeau's opinion: "Le réalisme des costumes et des accessoires s'accordait mal avec le fantastique de la conception et cette libre fantaisie qu'on pouvait attendre du poète."\(^\text{26}\)

Copeau never denied the importance of the reforms instituted at Antoine's *Théâtre Libre*, but restriction to a single school of thought, in this case realism, brought new

\(^{23}\)Jacques Copeau, *To the Play House*, p. 5.

\(^{24}\)Jacques Copeau, "*Chantecler* et le cas Rostand", *Crit.*, p.156.

\(^{25}\)Ibid., p. 157.

\(^{26}\)Ibid., p. 162.
excesses. Insistance on realism in stage decor and accessories did not always correspond to the spirit of the play, as in the case of Chantecler, or in the production of Bataille's Le Scandale, where Copeau found that "l'intention poétique rencontre, au théâtre, une réalisation vulgaire: des bruits de coulisse, le carton du décor et des accessoires. C'est, sous couleur de réalité, faire appel à ce que la convention a de plus gênant; c'est insister sans discrétion sur ce que l'art du vrai dramaturge devrait nous faire oublier: l'imitation matérielle." 27

By minimizing the importance of realistic props at the Vieux-Colombier, Copeau was able later to give full force to the "intention poétique" of a play. Insistance on realism in subject matter often meant the choice of scandalous themes, such as in Le Foyer by Octave Mirbeau and Thadée Natanson, who repeatedly and often gratuitously ridiculed one of the characters of their play, a senator and member of the French academy, but who maintained they could not change the occupation of their character without destroying the play (La Grande Revue, December 25, 1908).

Copeau vigorously combatted the conventionalism of another descendant of Antoine's theatre, Eugène Brieux. In his Simone, performed at the Comédie-Française, Brieux did eliminate the didactic note, an improvement over his earlier plays,

27 Jacques Copeau, "Le Scandale à la Renaissance", Crit., p. 94.
but he failed to replace it with anything like psychological development in the characters or with a portrayal of feelings or manners. The play lacked sincerity, because the motives behind the crime on which the drama hinged were never explained: "Le drame, c'est-à-dire la peinture directe, authentique et sincere des personnages, de leurs rapports et de leurs conflits, M. Brieux l'évite chaque fois qu'il le rencontre. Entre le moyen naturel, logique, riche de puissance dramatique,--et le 'truc' le plus vide, le plus usé, son choix n'est jamais douteux. C'est le virtuose des 'à côté'... ... C'est... qu'en toute occasion, M. Brieux substitue à l'analyse véridique des sentiments et de leurs mobiles, d'ingénieux 'raccourcis' et de puissants 'effets'. Cela s'appelle 'du théâtre...".28 For many, such skill in dramatic tricks was the mark of a talented dramatist, but Copeau always opposed such a conception, since "tous ces procédés matériels, ces grossières précautions, ces trucs gratuits, c'est le faux métier, le mauvais métier, le plus répandu quoi qu'on en dise, celui que les amateurs apprennent avec aisance, appliquent avec excès. Non seulement, il ne forme pas l'auteur dramatique, mais il le déforme. Il correspond à l'ensemble des recettes et des formules qui permettent aux médiocres de se répéter interlassablement, de produire sans inspiration. Il est inutilisable pour un talent libre et original.

Ce n'est certes pas d'entre les 'hommes de théâtre' que sortira le grand auteur dramatique de notre temps, s'il doit naître. 29

To encourage a writer to strive to become a future great dramatist, Copeau praised those qualities which showed promise, as in his reviews of Henry Bataille in whom he saw the author of a new type of drama, if he would correct certain extravagances. Emile Fabre failed to live up to the promise of his earlier dramas with Timon d'Athènes (La Grande Revue, April 17, 1907), yet Copeau praised "sa probité, son équilibre, l'ampleur de ses tentatives, ... la puissance de sa technique mûrie sous la discipline de Becque et dans le culte des grands maîtres, Balzac ou Shakespeare." 30 In Copeau's view, these were cardinal virtues in a good dramatist, who should be like Fabre "également éloigné de la gaudriole et ... de l'avocasserie, de l'intrigue brillante et de la thèse facile." 31 Fabre maintained a high ideal of the theatre and wished like Copeau to restore its dignity.

For the talent of Henri Becque and Henrik Ibsen, Copeau had unlimited praise. In a review of Becque's La Parisienne, 


30 Jacques Copeau, "Timon d'Athènes, au Théâtre Antoine", Crit., p. 17.

31 Ibid., p. 17.
he admired the classical restrictions the dramatist had imposed on himself (in contrast to Bataille's undisciplined manner). Nothing was included which was not pertinent to the drama: "Toute allusion symbolique, tout signe matériel, tout accessoire refusés. Les rencontres fortuites, les accidents, les chocs pathétiques, comme aussi les idées, l'éloquence, la sentimentalité, les intentions morales, les agréments de style et la plaisanterie de société, sont également bannis."  

Becque's conception of drama corresponded to Copeau's: "Plusieurs intrigues pour une même pièce, écrivait Becque, une quantité de fils, sinon de ficelles, réunis ensemble, c'est pauvreté et non richesse dramatique; c'est tout bonnement l'observation insuffisante et remplacée par le fait divers."  

Ibsen's careful revision of succeeding versions of his texts was also in the interest of greater simplicity and clarity: "simplification du mécanisme, élimination des figures accessoires, perfectionnement des caractères."  

In these reviews of the leading playwrights of the first decade of the twentieth century, the particular case often demonstrated a common ill. In articles of a more general nature,

32 Jacques Copeau, "Reprise de La Parisienne, à la Comédie-Française", Crit., p. 12.

33 Ibid., p. 13.

Copeau analysed such aspects as "Le Métier au théâtre" or the "Lieux communs" surrounding the theatre. In the former article, (N.R.F., May 1, 1909), he stressed that true dramatic excellence could only be reached by a playwright who combined a knowledge of the stage and its demands (métier) and high dramatic and literary ideals (art), for "le métier, sans l'art, qui est sa raison d'être, c'est une mécanique fonctionnant à vide. L'art privé du métier, qui lui assure force et durée, c'est un fantôme insaisissable." Unfortunately the opinion of Dumas fils that a man of no merit as thinker, moralist, philosopher or writer could become a successful dramatist had become generally accepted and discouraged serious authors from writing for the stage, since "l'artiste qui s'y fourvoie se heurte partout à l'inculture, à la légèreté, à la bassesse du caractère, à de formidables intérêts. Et c'est avec dégoût qu'il cède la place aux 'gens de métier'" , a class which included authors, actors, directors, critics and the public. Copeau's efforts at the Vieux-Colombier were directed at endowing actor, author and public with a sound general culture, at educating author and actor in all aspects of their trade which they were to treat seriously, at eliminating the quest for financial success at all costs and at creating unity in a spirit of comradeship in the service of the text.

36 Ibid., pp. 183-184.
In the same article, Copeau criticized the tendency to bow to so-called public taste and to use formulas rather than personal inspiration. In effect, "les prétendus secrets du métier et ses règles, c'est, en dernière analyse, l'ensemble des habitudes du public imposées à des amuseurs"\(^{37}\) and the author became a servant to the actor, as "commercial exploitation of this degraded art created the star system with plays written to measure for stereotyped characters... bringing forth... a garish style of hamming, the mannerisms of les monstres sacrés."\(^{38}\)

In Copeau's theatre, such practice was to change.

This opposition to commercial theatre was a constant feature of Copeau's criticism and of his program for reform. In the article "Lieux communs" (L'Ermitage, February 15, 1905), he designated this type of theatre as "agitation théâtrale" in contrast to a real "mouvement dramatique" whose motives would be emulation of the great models and whose goal would be "la réalisation parfaite des formes synthétiques de la vie."\(^{39}\)

Even such a movement would be unsatisfactory, if movement meant the particularism of a single school of thought, since a playwright should be first and foremost a dramatist, rather than a naturalist or a symbolist: "Pour moi, rien ne me choque comme l'exal-

\(^{37}\)Ibid., p. 164.

\(^{38}\)Frederic O'Brady, "Jacques Copeau or Honesty in Make-believe", American Society Legion of Honor Magazine, 39 (1968), 36-37.

tation d'un genre, l'affectation d'une manière qui a priori et systématiquement exclut de l'art dramatique tel ou tel aspect de la vérité humaine, telle ambition de la beauté. Théâtre poétique, théâtre réaliste, pièce psychologique, pièce d'idées, comédie de moeurs, comédie de caractères? Autant de classifications inventées selon l'indigence dominante des écoles et des tempéraments. La spécialisation n'est que l'échec et non pas la visée de notre esprit.... Poète dramatique: titre parfait qu'il faut rêver. Mais théâtre poétique: cette locution est vide de sens. Il y a: le drame, image synthétique de l'humanité. Que tous les moyens d'expression y collaborent....

Already in 1905 the critic is expressing one of the basic principles of the reformer--the acceptance at his theatre of plays of any tendency, provided the play exhibits an undeniable dramatic quality. Specialization in one style of play or of an actor in a stereotyped role was never a feature of the Vieux-Colombier.

Implicit in the preceding quote is the supremacy of the text over other interests in the theatre, not the case at the time, when directors and actors approached each new play with one question in mind, "Will it make money?" An author with pretentions to serious art was either forced to capitulate to such commercialism or abandon the theatre. Actors imposed their will on the playwright: "Leurs caprices et leur despoti-

40 Ibid., pp. 225-226.
que ignorance régentent la scène. Une œuvre, entre leurs mains, devient méconnaissable. Ils modifient le texte, ajoutent ou retranchent, à leur gré, des répliques, refont des scènes entières, transforment un dénouement. On les considère comme les collaborateurs des écrivains, dont ils sont les bourreaux. 41

When Copeau opened his theatre, he conceived of it as a haven for the serious artist, where "originalité, sincérité, vérité, style, et la tenue de la conscience" would be restored to him, instead of being denied him in an atmosphere where he is "prisonnier des conventions, des préjugés, d'une formule abstraite, ... esclave du plus grand nombre, aux amusements duquel il pourvoit, exilé du beau, condamné à truquer éternellement les mêmes intrigues, à maquiller les mêmes pantins, à refaire la même pièce, au goût du jour." 42

41 Ibid., pp. 226-227.
42 Ibid., p. 227.
III. Copeau the reformer

The reforms Jacques Copeau introduced at the Vieux-Colombier so radically altered the standards in French theatre that Albert Camus has written that "dans l'histoire du théâtre français, il y a deux périodes: avant Copeau et après Copeau... [le] seul maître qui puisse être reconnu en même temps par les auteurs, les comédiens et les animateurs."¹ Until the founding of the Vieux-Colombier attempts at renovation in the twentieth century were sporadic, short-lived and usually concerned with specific aspects of the stage. They included Camille Sainte-Croix' Théâtre Shakespeare, Jacques Rouché's Théâtre des Arts (elaborate, symbolic decoration) and Antoine's matinees for new dramatists at the Odéon, among others. Copeau felt such reforming movements as these or as those of Antoine, Paul Fort or Lugné-Poe at the end of the nineteenth-century had failed because of a loss of the original ideal in favour of success or because of a lack of preparation, of strong leadership, of a well-defined program, or of self-abnegation.²

¹Albert Camus, "Copeau, seul maître" in Cahier Jacques Copeau. [Paris, 1959], p. [16].
²Jacques Copeau, "The True Spirit of the Art of the Stage", Vanity Fair, April, 1917, p. 49.
With high hopes and high ideals and prepared for a long struggle, Copeau defined his aims and set about realizing them in a spirit of disinterested devotion, until the pressures of everyday exploitation, fatigue and a desire to devote himself wholly to the training of young actors led him to close his theatre. At that moment he described with no false modesty the results of ten years of experiment and innovation, failure and success of his theatre: "sous la pression incessante des nécessités matérielles et sans un instant de vrai repos, j'ai créé une scène, organisé une maison, formé une compagnie, réuni un public, groupé des auteurs, fondé une école, élaboré des principes et des méthodes de travail, retrouvé un style scénique, renouvelé l'interprétation des vieux classiques, enfin inauguré un mouvement dont on veut bien aujourd'hui reconnaître la trace dans diverses entreprises nouvelles, et jusque sur les scènes officielles." An outline of Copeau's main ideas and reforms with respect to the various aspects of the theatrical experience, as suggested by his evaluation of his early accomplishments: the text and the repertory, the stage and its accessories, the organization of a viable theatre, the troupe, the public, the author, the formation of the actor, and the role of the director, shows that he did not underestimate his contribution to the restoration of the dignity of the theatre.

for his own and succeeding generations.

In any Vieux-Colombier production, the most important element was the text, for in Copeau's view, "le texte seul compte; il n'y a que le texte!" Clearly then, any play chosen to be performed would have to meet high standards. Copeau did not limit the scope of his theatre to any one style, school or theory of drama, but the text to be worthy had to have a definite dramatic quality, missing in many of the plays he had reviewed as critic, since other considerations had been given priority in them. His first source of good drama was among ancient and modern classics, whether French or foreign, not only for their possible success with the public, but more importantly as a reminder (and an encouragement to emulation) to aspiring dramatists of what constituted great dramatic art. Significantly, the greatest successes of the Vieux-Colombier came from this part of the repertory—Molière's plays, Mérimée's *Le Carrosse du Saint-Sacrement* and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. However, the repertory was also to include the best of recent drama as well as new creations after a severe process of selection. To accomplish this tripartite program, Copeau further established the principle of alternating shows, since this brought several advantages: the actors would be kept alert, preparing one play while performing another and not becoming sterile in the same role over a period

of months; the public would be offered a greater choice; the theatre's success as a whole would not be dependant on a single play; and finally, a newly-created play would not have to carry the whole burden of success over an extended period.

Stage decor, costumes and accessories were relegated to their proper place—service of the text and its interpretation. They were never constructed as an end in themselves. Copeau was quite emphatic in condemnation of too prominent scenery in his "Essai de rénovation dramatique". To interest oneself in the various theories of scenic decoration to the detriment of more essential elements of the dramatist's craft was to be sidetracked by a side-issue. He declared himself an enemy of all complicated machinery, no matter what school of thought advocated it to whatever end. He reviewed in this article the advances made by several leading contemporary European directors but could not agree with their too flagrant systematization, since this often deformed the author's intentions for the benefit of scenic effects. Such productions would most likely lead to what Copeau called "une production dramatique tout artificielle, grossière et presque barbare." Copeau's solution was simplicity in stage decor guided by two criteria: good sense and good taste. He concluded that "la réalisation décorative doit être étroitement surveillée, mesurée, et même au commen- 

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cement bannie." Only those props would be created which were called forth by the play itself, by "des nécessités dramatiques profondément ressenties." Countering foreseen objections that such a decision was dictated by the Vieux-Colombier's limited financial resources, Copeau maintained that on the contrary, even with greater means, stage settings and accessories at his theatre would remain just that—accessories, the perfect stage being, for him as for Stanislavsky, a bare platform, "un tréteau nu."

To realize more fully this ideal stage, Copeau began alterations to the existing stage of the Athénée-Saint-Germain during the company's first season, continued his experiments in close collaboration with Jouvet at the Garrick Theatre in New York and then changed even more substantially the stage of the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier on his return to Paris after the war. Paul Léautaud has described the novel concept and the effect of the resulting dispositif fixe and décor architectural:

"Le décor... est immuable.... Il consiste uniquement en un fond de scène comprenant une baie au milieu, et, de chaque côté, un

6 Jacques Copeau, "Une Renaissance dramatique est-elle possible?", Revue Générale, April 15, 1926, p. 418.
8 Jacques Copeau, "Un Essai de rénovation dramatique", p. 353 (Crit., p. 249).
escalier montant à ce qui peut être un étage supérieur. Les coulisses, de chaque côté, sont naturellement praticables. C'est merveilleux ce qu'on obtient avec cela. On obtient tout, c'est bien simple.... Jamais on n'a mieux montré qu'une oeuvre dramatique vraiment intéressante peut se suffire à elle-même, tirer toute sa valeur d'elle seule, créer par elle seule l'illusion du spectateur, sans rien de toutes les recherches, pour ne pas dire des excès de la mise en scène et des décors, qui, le plus souvent, ne font que lui nuire, en détournant l'attention du public."9 This highly practical stage put the emphasis in any production where it belonged: on the actor and the play.

Despite criticism and mocking epithets, Copeau did not lose faith in his simplified and uncluttered stage: "Je suis bien sûr d'ailleurs qu'après avoir beaucoup cherché, beaucoup adopté et beaucoup rejeté de formules dont la mode un instant aura pu s'enticher, on en reviendra à cette vérité ['La scène libre au gré des fictions' de Mallarmé] parce qu'elle est très simple, très sûre, très solide, fondamentale, à la fois naïve et solennelle, et qu'elle n'admet point de tricherie... le dispositif le plus simple de tous, symbole de la liberté la plus grande, et celui qui fait à l'imagination du poète l'appel le plus pressant et le plus pur."10

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10 Jacques Copeau, "Copeau parle", p. 11.
The creation of a fixed stage, readily adaptable nevertheless to any type of play (whether farce, tragedy, medieval mystery play or other) was perhaps the most striking of Copeau's innovations in theatre design, but his experiments and attention to all details led to other changes as well. The traditional gilt ornaments which adorned the Athénée-Saint-Germain were eliminated. The iron curtain raised at the beginning and lowered at the end of a performance was replaced by one of material, more easily manipulated and opening in the centre. Lighting was indirect and actual accessories on stage were reduced to a minimum. The post-war stage was constructed of cement to prevent reverberation caused by a wooden stage, or because the "softness of wood might spoil solidity in action and gesture." In any case, the effect was to emphasize any error on the actor's part and thus to urge him to a new level of perfection. Steps were added leading from the stage to the level of the audience, creating closer contact between public and actor (but reducing capacity by more than one-quarter, a considerable financial loss).

To place artistic over financial interests was characteristic of Copeau's principles for the organization of his theatre. Having witnessed as critic both the ill effects caused


by commercial theatre and the rapid demise of art theatres without financial stability and realizing that the influence exerted by a theatre depended on its survival, Copeau sought to institute a wise management of Vieux-Colombier funds: limited capital, low rent, reduced expenditures for decoration and costumes (created in a workshop connected with the theatre) and a permanent company hired for the year. At the same time, limited expenses meant tickets at a more reasonable price for the public (who also benefitted from the elimination of tipping), and Copeau proudly proclaimed that the Vieux-Colombier would be the least expensive of Paris theatres.

In Copeau's view, the situation of the theatre in Paris had not improved after the war. In an article on the reopening of his theatre, he reviewed the unhealthy atmosphere of 1913 when the theatre was in the control of merchants and ham-actors and concluded that "la situation du théâtre français est pire à la fin de 1919 qu'elle ne l'était en 1913-14." The efforts of the Vieux-Colombier company, interrupted by the war, were about to be renewed in the same spirit of economy and anti-mercantilism as in its first season. Copeau's reluctance to appeal for material aid and eagerness to proceed with the real purpose of his work comes through Roger Martin du Gard's account of the first of three lectures Copeau gave in connection with the re-

opening of his theatre. At all events Copeau was determined to maintain his independance from businessmen and financiers and to remain disinterested. Financial success was not his goal and was even consciously thwarted by him when it would have been attainable. In fact, success with the public constituted in his mind a serious danger for a small theatre, since it might influence the direction to abandon further experimentation in favour of a proven play. By the 1920's, the reputation of the Vieux-Colombier for high quality had attracted large audiences to the small theatre without, however, stabilizing the budget. Against the advice of some, Copeau refused to move to larger quarters, in order to continue his experiments unhindered by other considerations and in order not to betray the public he had formed. In addition, he refused to keep performing a popular play simply to fill the coffers. To realize his high ideals, Jacques Copeau "est prêt à tous les sacrifices personnels..., prêt à renoncer à sa profession de critique, de directeur de revue, à sa sécurité matérielle et à celle de sa famille.... Il ne sacrifiera jamais sa conscience d'artiste et préfèrera fermer le Vieux-Colombier plutôt que de le voir s'enliser dans les combinaisons habituelles." 


15 France Anders, Jacques Copeau et le Cartel des Quatre.
Such self-effacement and devotion to the common goal were expected from all those connected with the theatre, which had been "fondé sur un incroyable désintéressement." Authors such as Georges Duhamel, Léon-Paul Fargue and Roger Martin du Gard willingly accepted menial tasks; Gaston Gallimard consented to administer the theatre; and Martin du Gard's wife managed after the war the costume department in which Copeau's daughter, Marie-Hélène, worked. Actors engaged in the company were not allowed to accept roles in other productions without Copeau's permission, which was not always granted, even to the best-known of the company's actors, especially when the production in question belonged to the commercial theatre. He made his reasons clear in a letter to Valentine Tessier of August 16, 1920: "Je ne veux à aucun prix créer un précédent qui amènerait fatalement chez nous l'indiscipline et le désordre.... Nous formons et nous formerons de plus en plus une force invincible par notre cohésion."\(^{17}\)

The last such homogeneous company Copeau could find in France was the Théâtre Libre of Antoine. There too, the actors were united in a common ideal (as the actors of Stanislavsky's troupe were "religieusement disciplinés au service de sa


\(^{17}\) Quoted by Maurice Kurtz, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
Each company made a definite contribution to the dramatic art of its country, although in different ways. Actors of the Vieux-Colombier were to develop multiple talents, in contrast to the prevailing specialization, but each individual was to be subordinate to the group. Ideally there were to be no stars, no performers who would stand out so sharply that they would unbalance the overall conception or that the public would come to see them alone. An individual actor would not be able to impose his will on the director or on the author as in many Boulevard theatres, since all the actors were to be considered equal, "tous entraînés, éduqués et disciplinés dans un sens unique, sous l'unité absolue de la direction." 19 To promote such unity and to maintain contact with nature, Copeau felt the whole troupe should periodically leave the large city (as Stanislavsky had done) to rehearse in the country. Through this close contact with one another and with the director, through work done together and constantly perfected and through a common love of the theatre, the company grew in confidence.

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18 Jacques Copeau, preface to Stanislavsky's Ma vie dans l'art, p. 5.

and developed the sense of discipline ("une bienfaisante discipline"\textsuperscript{20}) and teamwork Copeau felt was necessary in a cohesive troupe, "humble servante du poète."\textsuperscript{21}

Strange as it may seem, discipline was also demanded of the public who attended the Vieux-Colombier. The spectators were to arrive on time or wait until the intermission to enter the auditorium of the theatre. Copeau asked them to return promptly to their seats after the intermission, as soon as the warning-bell started to ring, to remain seated until the curtain closed and not to turn their backs to the stage. Politeness and respect were to be mutual. The public he sought to reach originally was a select group of students, writers, artists, intellectuals and the cultured in general, drawn from the neighbourhood of the Quartier Latin, who were dissatisfied with commercialized theatres. He hoped such a public would encourage his undertaking not only by its presence or praise but also by an active participation or financial support.

This restricted public was not, however, Copeau's ultimate goal. Eventually he wanted to reach a much larger audience which would embrace all classes.\textsuperscript{22} In his second lecture con-

\textsuperscript{20}Michel Saint-Denis, "Mes Années au Vieux-Colombier", \textit{Europe}, April-May 1962, p. 64.

\textsuperscript{21}Henri Ghéon, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 110.

\textsuperscript{22}"Je crois que notre art ne puise et ne donne sa vertu
nected with the reopening of the theatre, he emphasized that his theatre was not meant solely for intellectuals. The repertory was to present subjects simple enough to be understood easily. Without sacrificing quality, he hoped his productions would be, or at least could be, understood by all. He came to envisage in the theatrical production a rebirth of the elementary union and communion of men as typified in ancient religious festivals, whether Christian or pre-Christian. He was much impressed by the sincerity and spirit of rural audiences such as those who attended performances by the *Copiaus*. There he found that "nous jouons avec le public, et le public joue avec nous .... Cette attente préalable, cette rareté de l'émotion, cette préparation par l'attente, cette fraîcheur et cette sincérité dans la sympathie, je les trouve à un degré plus vif encore chez mes paysans français.... Ainsi notre art retrouve un peu de sa signification perdue [en célébrant leur terroir, leurs travaux, leurs costumes], il reprend sa place dans la cité, son rang dans la culture, sa dignité, sa force et sa noblesse, chaque fois qu'il se rapproche des conditions primitives qui, dans la Grèce antique, aux Grandes Dionysies, faisaient de la qu'au contact du plus grand nombre, et qu'il ne s'épanouit que sous une forme qui puisse se dire populaire." Jacques Copeau, *Souv.*, pp. 85-86.
This experience was all to the detriment of the professional public encountered in Paris, which had lost its sincerity through an overdose of theatre. Just as actors had to be trained, so too "l'imagination individuelle pour collaborer à la célébration dramatique a besoin d'une préparation, d'une initiation." Copeau was frank with the supporters of the Vieux-Colombier and sought to bring them to the same degree of honesty and sincerity as his troupe. His efforts through lectures, articles, poetical matinees, printed programs, publication of the principal plays of the repertory and the establishment of the Cahiers du Vieux-Colombier, were intended to form

23 Jacques Copeau, "Copeau parle", pp. 6-7.
24 Ibid., p. 6.
25 Although only two issues of the Cahiers were published, their purpose was vast and their intention clear: "On y trouvera l'histoire même du VIEUX-COLOMBIER, de son développement physique, moral, artistique; des études critiques sur la production française et étrangère; des réflexions sur la technique du drame; des aperçus sur l'histoire du théâtre, des essais sur l'architecture scénique, la décoration, la lumière, les costumes, sur l'art du metteur en scène et celui du comédien; des monographies, biographies et portraits, des souvenirs personnels, des documents graphiques, des textes inédits et des réimpressions de pièces....
a "public éclairé, ennemi du dénigrement, de l'incompréhension du scepticisme." Copeau was thus continuing to try to refine public taste, as he had attempted in his years as critic.

The sincere and honest effort the Vieux-Colombier made to present a play in the spirit the dramatist intended attracted a number of authors to try their hand at writing for the stage. The role of an author in the theatre was in Copeau's view primordial, for he was at the origin of the play and his conception of it took precedence over that of an actor or a director (who was to act as assistant to the poet, as an intermediary between his work and the public). To write an effective play, the author must be schooled in the ways of the stage. Ideally he should oversee the creation from start to finish as in the Greek theatre or as in the case of Shakespeare and Molière. Only out of necessity did one resort to a director, whose first task was to immerse himself in the spirit of the play in order to be able to recreate the author's intention.

By this serious attitude toward the creative artist, Jacques Ils seront un lien vivant entre le créateur et son public, un agent de cohésion au sein de ce public même." (from an announcement of the establishment of the Cahiers in the program of the Vieux-Colombier production of the Conte d'hiver in 1920).

*Henri Ghéon, op. cit., p. 110.*
Copeau sought to encourage those who could write effective dramas but who had turned to other fields because of the degeneration evident in the theatre. He recognized their disillusionment and offered in the Vieux-Colombier an outlet for those who had not compromised and who, "mieux défendus par la fermeté du caractère et le respect de leur art", had deserted "un théâtre qui ne les eût accueillis que pour les corrompre."\(^27\)

The modern authors performed at the Vieux-Colombier were in the first instance those with whom he had worked at the N.R.F. (Schlumberger, Chéon, Gide) or whose style Copeau admired but which found little response from existing theatres (Claudel). He did not hesitate to produce works by talented but unknown dramatists (Roger Martin du Gard, Charles Vildrac, René Benjamin) and was instrumental in bringing Jules Romains back to the theatre (a first play by Romains had been performed at the Odéon in one of Antoine's matinees for new dramatists nine years before the Vieux-Colombier presented his Cromedevre-le-Vieil). Copeau considered the revival of classical authors in their original style as a determining factor in inspiring a number of new dramatists: "Il me paraît certain que Romains n'eût point écrit son Le Trouhadec, Mazaud son Dardamelle, Régis et de Veynes leur Bastos, si le goût de Molière ne leur eût été remis dans la bouche, si la représentation de quelques

classiques ne leur eût fait sentir directement la relation qui existe entre un certain art de jouer et un certain art de composer."

For quality performances of plays of differing styles, Copeau needed qualified actors. Those he had watched as drama critic were not at all satisfactory: "insuffisances intellectuelles, morales, humaines, artifice et cabotinage, affectations de toutes sortes entraînant les pires déformations, phénomène de la 'vedette'... absence totale de l'esprit d'équipe." From this uninspiring starting-point, he tried "par tous les moyens, et en particulier par une sollicitude constante, d'élever le comédien à une certaine dignité, de lui donner une haute idée de sa fonction, de développer et d'enrichir sa conscience, de le tirer de la spécialisation à outrance qui le mécanise, de l'instruire par des conseils, des exemples, des préceptes, enfin de le mettre en possession d'une technique souple et sûre qui loin d'opprimer sa personnalité tendait à lui donner libre jeu." The actor's training was to take him from intellectual stagnation to a broader cultural background, from ham-acting

29 France Anders, op. cit., p. 65.
30 Jacques Copeau, "Une Renaissance dramatique est-elle possible?", p. 419.
to sincerity, from a star system to a unified company, from specialization to a greater spectrum of possible roles and from traditional techniques to liberating ones.

To train the actor to his standards, Copeau from the first season of the Vieux-Colombier intended to found an acting school connected with his theatre, as Stanislavsky had done. Both men looked resolutely toward an improved professional actor of the future. Copeau wanted as students only those unstained by the ways of traditional theatre. He would train them at no cost and would use them in the smaller roles in plays at his theatre. He was much impressed by his visit to Craig in Florence in 1915 and by the many workshops connected with Craig’s school at the Arena Goldoni. During the same trip, he attended sessions at Jaques-Dalcroze’s institute in Geneva and marvelled at the results of the rhythmic exercises performed in a community of joy. He returned to Paris convinced of the value "d'une éducation rythmique générale comme base de l'instruction professionnelle des comédiens."\(^{31}\)

The program of the Ecole du Vieux-Colombier\(^{32}\) showed evidence of the influence of these meetings in the variety of

\(^{31}\)Jacques Copeau, "Visites à Gordon Craig, Jaques-Dalcroze et Adolphe Appia (1915), R.H.T., XV (1963), 369.

\(^{32}\)For the text of the brochure announcing the opening of the school in 1921, see Maurice Kurtz, op. cit., pp. 107-110.
subjects to be taught. To assure the general culture of the actor, courses and lectures were to be given on earlier or foreign theatre styles and history, on Greek mythology and on poetic technique (by the school's director, Jules Romains). Technical training emphasized sincerity and spontaneity through a gradual development of a child's natural instinct to play: "D'abord nous lui faisions un corps obéissant. Puis on s'élevait progressivement de la gymnastique à la notion du rythme intérieur, à la musique, à la danse, au mime masqué, à la parole, aux formes dramatiques élémentaires, au jeu conscient, à l'invention scénique, à la poésie. L'instruction, uniforme pour tous à l'origine, devait se différencier à mesure qu'au sein de l'unité chorale s'accusaient les dispositions personnelles."

Each of these elements had its place in the training of an actor, since his work "ne se fait pas seulement avec la bouche, ni même avec la bouche et l'esprit, mais avec le corps aussi, et le coeur, avec toute la personne, toutes les facultés, avec tout l'être."

The goal was harmony through discipline, harmony in the individual and the troupe, and the formation of complete actors "auxquels rien de leur art ne soit étranger, aptes à toute exigence de leur métier, des comédiens qui soient en même temps, comme les Italiens du 16ème siècle, chanteurs, danseurs, musi-

33Jacques Copeau, Souv., pp. 92-93.
To form the complete and supple actor, Copeau looked then to the methods of the Commedia dell'Arte. In fact, he saw the point of departure for a real renewal of the theatre in a Comédie Nouvelle with modern fixed characters on the Italian model: "impossible de concevoir une forme plus directe, plus vigoureuse, plus populaire de la comédie. Impossible d'en concevoir une plus souple et plus féconde. Elle a sa convention bien établie. Elle est absolument libre. Elle peut répondre à tous les genres, traiter tous les sujets, prendre tous les tons." The present task "c'est de repeupler la scène, d'y faire monter les grandes figures du monde moderne, et celles-ci de les consacrer sous le masque et le costume qui leur donneront, avec l'autorité d'un style, une puissance renouvelée de persuasion dramatique et d'enseignement humain." This project was always dear to Copeau, who found a receptive audience in Martin du Kothurn, XV (1969), 78.

35 From Copeau's project for an actors' school, quoted by Denis Bablet, "Copeau et le théâtre théâtral", Maske und Kothurn, XV (1969), 78.

36 Jacques Copeau, Le Théâtre populaire, reprinted in Théâtre populaire, 36 (1959), 111.

Gard, Jouvet and the students at his school in Burgundy. In his correspondence with Jouvet during the First World War, Copeau outlined his views on these improvised sketches: "inventer une dizaine de personnages modernes, synthétiques, d'une grande extension, représentant des caractères, des travers, des passions, des ridicules moraux, sociaux, individuels d'aujourd'hui. Inventer leurs silhouettes, inventer leurs costumes, toujours identiques, modifiés seulement suivant les circonstances par un type accessoire. Ces dix personnages d'une comédie autonome qui comprend tous ces genres, depuis la pantomime jusqu'au drame, les confier à dix comédiens. Chaque comédiens a son personnage qui est sa propriété, qui devient lui-même, qu'il nourrit de lui-même.... Voilà la grande découverte (si simple!), la grande révolution ou plutôt le grand et majestueux retour à la plus vieille tradition." 38 The project itself was only partly realized in some of the performances of the Copiaus, but Copeau's interest in the forms of the Commedia dell’Arte was transmitted through the various elements and exercises adopted at his school to his students, many of whom continued to practise it in the companies they formed or to make it an integral part of their own teaching.

An important test of an actor's ability to conform to the discipline of a rigid dramatic form Copeau found in the

38 Quoted in Maurice Kurtz, op. cit., p. 68.
Japanese Noh. He considered that "cette forme est la plus stricte que nous connaissons et demande de l'interprète une formation technique exceptionnelle"\(^\text{39}\), and that it should therefore be part of an actor's training. His expectations were confirmed by the emotion he felt at the profound scenic harmony, moderation and style of a rehearsal by the students of the school in Paris of a Noh under the direction of Suzanne Bing.

The person ultimately responsible for the harmony of a performance was the director, but in contrast to Stanislavsky or Reinhardt who placed all authority in the director, Copeau considered him the author's assistant, sacrificing his own pretensions and ideas to the underlying intention of the text. To stage a play with sincerity, the director had to choose a play he could admire, serve it rather than defend it, identify with the author and then stage the play in the style in which it was written. He therefore had to be able to read and understand in depth the text in order to discover its inner universe of forms, colours, sounds and movements. The text was to be his inspiration, but it also limited his powers. Once he was imbued with the author's intent, with the rhythm of the drama, with the personality of each character and the relations of the characters among themselves, he alone was in command of the staging and had to be "capable de circonscrire l'aire dramatique, d'en

\(^{39}\text{Jacques Copeau, Souv., p. 99.}\)
délimiter l'espace et d'en susciter les volumes, de concevoir la décoration de la scène, d'y distribuer l'éclairage, de disposer le mobilier, d'imaginer l'apparence physique et le costume des acteurs, de régler l'évolution des masses, d'assigner à chaque chose sa place, à chaque individu le caractère de son action, enfin de retrouver dans un monde de fiction, les mouvements naturels et l'infinie variété de la vie.  

His imagination was free to use whatever scenic means were necessary but always in the service of the text. As far as the harmony of the ensemble was concerned, "le metteur en scène invente et fait régner entre les personnages ce lien secret et visible, cette sensibilité réciproque, cette mystérieuse correspondance des rapports, faute de quoi le drame, même interprété par d'excellents acteurs, perd la meilleure part de son expression."  

Much was thus demanded from the director, who had to be sincere, modest, mature, intelligent and eclectic. Like the actor he would need a thorough knowledge of theatrical traditions, techniques and history and a solid general culture, but he would also need to be able to lead his company, to exert his authority and to elicit the discipline necessary for a unified troupe, and to use effectively the technical resources of the stage such as

40 Jacques Copeau, "Une Renaissance dramatique est-elle possible?", pp. 419-420.

accessories, lighting and costumes, for a *mise en scène* defined simply as "le dessin d'une action dramatique" nevertheless consisted of a union of many elements: "l'ensemble des mouvements, des gestes et des attitudes, l'accord des physionomies, des voix et des silences, c'est la totalité du spectacle scénique, émanant d'une pensée unique, qui le conçoit, le règle et l'harmonise." ⁴²

Copeau's conception of the dramatic creation thus differed from that of his predecessors or contemporaries in the relative importance given to its various aspects and in his emphasis on a number of abstract virtues which recur throughout his reflections on an activity to which he devoted his life: sacrifice, disinterestedness, discipline, sincerity, integrity and unity. He never became so pretentious as to formalize his ideas as dogma. ⁴³ His goal was less esoteric and more human. In a speech given at Geneva in 1923, he compared his mission to that undertaken by the two men of the theatre he most admired, Molière and Stanislavsky: "relever la profession du comédien...

⁴²Ibid., p. 350 (Crit., p. 246).
⁴³Nor did Stanislavsky, according to Copeau who described *Ma Vie dans l'art* as "pas un recueil d'affirmations dogmatiques et de prophéties, mais la confession d'un parfait ouvrier", preface to *Ma Vie dans l'art*, p. 7.
du décri trop mérité par de faux artistes, la replacer au rang des plus nobles, rendre enfin au théâtre sa dignité de grand art et... sa mission religieuse qui est de relier entre eux les hommes de tout rang, de toute classe,... de toute nation."

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IV. Copeau's legacy

When André Barsacq was interviewed in connection with his revival of *Les Frères Karamazov* in 1945, he summarized the position of his contemporaries with respect to Jacques Copeau: "notre plus grand homme de théâtre et nous ne sommes tous que ses enfants et ses petits-enfants."¹ Some twenty years earlier, Jules Romains had noted in his preface to Berthold Mahn's *Souvenirs du Vieux-Colombier* that the end of the exploitation of the theatre itself did not signal the end of its influence and that "il s'est multiplié plutôt que dispersé"². Already in 1920, Copeau himself had noticed the spread of his techniques or ideals: "il est arrivé bien souvent que lorsque nous avions repris certaines pièces classiques abandonnées, les théâtres subventionnés les ont reprises à leur tour et ont tâché de les faire un peu à la manière dont nous les avions données++. Il faut croire que les bases sur lesquelles nous nous sommes établis sont assez saines, puisque nous voyons maintenant des organisations nouvelles... se créer à côté de nous... pour faire comme nous..."³

¹C. V., "On répète... *Les Frères Karamazov à l'Atelier*", *Arts*, December 14, 1945.
²Paris: Claude Aveline, 1926, p. IX.
Among the first to establish enterprises similar in spirit to the Vieux-Colombier were two members of the original company, Charles Dullin and Louis Jouvet. At the Théâtre de l'Atelier Dullin's greatest successes came from the classical works, whether French or foreign, but he also welcomed the works of new dramatists and revealed the talents of authors such as Armand Salacrou. His school (founded before his theatre, as Copeau would have liked to have done) trained many of the leading actors and directors of the French theatre, using techniques and principles similar to those of Copeau. His pupils included future actor-directors such as Jean-Louis Barrault, Jean Vilar and Raymond Rouleau and actors and actresses such as Marguerite Jamois, Madeleine Robinson, Alain Cuny, Jean Marais and Marcel Marceau. At the Comédie des Champs-Élysées Jouvet too respected the integrity of the written work and had the good fortune to discover the dramatic talents of Jean Giraudoux, with whom he worked in close and harmonious collaboration in presenting Giraudoux' plays until the author's death in 1944. This pair thus "accomplissait le voeu de Copeau, réalisait sa conception du poète mis à l'école de la scène, de l'artiste de théâtre à l'école de la poésie." The confidence Copeau had in Jouvet's ability and desire to continue the principles of the Vieux-Co-

4 Valentine Tessier, "De la Périchole à Alcmène", Europe, April-May 1962, p. 74.
lombier is evident in his decision to entrust Jouvet with the repertory, the bulk of the actors and the public of his theatre at its closing, despite personal differences which had led to their split in October, 1922.

From the Copiaus emerged a number of important theatre directors whose efforts expanded the principles of Copeau in several directions. As a group, the Copiaus, renamed the Compagnie des Quinze, played for several seasons in Paris and on tour, performing notably the works of André Obey, at different theatres including the Vieux-Colombier and the Atelier. The spectacles they presented often used techniques encouraged by Copeau in his teachings such as masks or improvisation in a cohesive troupe. After their dispersal Jean Dasté, Maurice Jacquemont and André Barsacq formed the Théâtre des Quatre Saisons, many of whose actors had been trained by Copeau, Dullin, Jouvet or Baty. The three founders each had some connection with the Vieux-Colombier, Copeau or his disciples, Dasté as Copeau's student in Paris and Burgundy, Jacquemont as student of Suzanne Bing and Jean Le Goff (both formerly of the Vieux-Colombier) and Barsacq as collaborator of Dullin at the Atelier, of the Compagnie des Quinze and of Copeau in Florence and in Paris. The company attempted to reach a large popular audience in the French provinces, in Paris, New York and Brazil, until Dullin

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5 For an account of the activities of these two troupes,
entrusted his Atelier to Barsacq in 1940. Dasté continued the
effort to carry the message of pure theatre to the provinces
after the Second World War at the Comédie de Saint-Etienne,
which with other dramatic centres (Comédie de l'Est, Comédie de
l'Ouest, Grenier de Toulouse, Comédie de Provence) sought to
realize an ideal of decentralized theatre foreseen by Copeau in
1920: "mon rêve serait que nous puissions tenter quelque chose
en province.... Ceux qui seraient en communion avec nous dans
les grandes villes de province pourraient nous indiquer ce qu'
il nous serait possible de faire dans des milieux que nous ne
connaissions pas,... car vous sentez l'intérêt qu'il y aurait
pour ces grandes villes à recevoir un théâtre de Paris qui re-
presenterait [sic] le mouvement nouveau dans l'art dramatique.
Il y aurait une possibilité d'organisation entre les sociétés
d'amateurs qui tâcheraient de faire de l'art de leurs provinces
et non pas d'imiter éternellement les mêmes clichés du boulevard
de Paris."6

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6Jacques Copeau, "Le Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, son
but, son esprit, ses réalisations", unpaged.
Léon Chancerel also spread the lesson of Jacques Copeau to new horizons. After nine years in Copeau's presence as archivist, student and actor and profoundly influenced by the Commedia dell'Arte, Chancerel grouped a number of talented youth in 1929 (including Olivier Hussenot, Maurice Jacquemont, Hubert Gignoux, Jean-Pierre Grenier and Jean Dasté) to attempt collective creation using fixed characters improvising on a scenario. He readily admitted his debt to Copeau: "C'est dans l'enseignement premier que j'ai personnellement reçu de M. Jacques Copeau qu'il faut aller chercher le premier germe de cet Art Dramatique Scout que j'ai tenté d'instituer."

His Comédiens Routiers carried Copeau's message throughout the French provinces and influenced many amateur groups, most particularly other scout organizations. The performances given by the Théâtre de l'Oncle Sébastien from 1933 to 1939 reached another audience—children, with plays of imagination and poetry. Copeau's own granddaughter continues this tradition with her company for children's theatre.

Dramatist, member of the N.R.F. and a convert to catholicism, Henri Ghéon formed another company influenced by his contact with Copeau, the Compagnons de Notre-Dame. From their example emanated the Compagnons de Jeux of Henri Brochet.

7 Léon Chancerel, "Rénovation dramatique en profondeur sous le signe des deux colombes (1913-1935)", Etudes, CCXXIV (September 5, 1935), 645.
peau's methods were also adopted by such ephemeral troupes as Xavier de Courville's Petite Scène, Marcel Herrand's Rideau de Paris, Louis Ducreux' Rideau Gris and by Etienne Decroux' mime school. At the Sorbonne Gustave Cohen founded the Théosophiliens and by the mid-1930's Copeau's influence had permeated both professional and amateur theatre groups in France: "non seulement un nombre considérable de compagnies d'amateurs fut et reste pénétré de sa pensée, mais aussi des groupements de jeunesse, des communautés plus ou moins importantes numériquement, dans leur cérémonial et dans leurs divertissements ont subi cette influence, soit par le contact direct avec Jacques Copeau, soit par l'intermédiaire des maîtres qu'il a inspirés, formés ou déterminés, à quelque confession ou parti politique qu'ils appartenissent." 8

From the Copiaus two other directors emerged who were to acquire importance in international theatre circles. Aman Maistre joined with Jean Villard as cabaret entertainers in the thirties, calling themselves "Gilles et Julien". Maistre retained his stage name when he later directed the Théâtre des Nations in Paris and instigated the Festival de Paris, inviting experimental theatre groups from around the world to perform there. His experiences with Copeau, the Copiaus and the Compagnie des Quinze were instrumental in developing his interest in interna-

8 Ibid., p. 644.
tional theatre. From a similar source (the Vieux-Colombier, the Copiaus and the Compagnie des Quinze) another faithful follower of Jacques Copeau, Michel Saint-Denis, furthered the cause of art theatres and acting modelled on Copeau's principles beyond the boundaries of France and French dramatic schools. In 1935 he opened with Marcel Breuer the London Theatre Studio where he taught until the outbreak of war. After the war he established with George Devine and Glenn Byam Shaw the Old Vic Theatre Centre and developed its school and the Young Vic Company. After returning to France, he led one of the regional dramatic centres from 1953 to 1957, the Centre Dramatique de l'Est in Strasbourg. Later he became special consultant to the School of Dramatic Art of the Juilliard School of Music, artistic advisor to Canada's National School of Dramatic Art and artistic counsellor to the Comédie-Francaise.9

Even before his pupils spread his ideals abroad, Copeau had imitators in Europe. In Belgium, Jules Delacre modelled his Théâtre du Marais on the Vieux-Colombier while it was still in existence. According to Marcel Doisy, Copeau was also the inspiration for groups such as the Compagnons de Saint-Lambert in Belgium and the Compagnons de Saint-Laurent in Canada and influenced a renaissance in Dutch theatre.10 In Italy Giorgio


10Marcel Doisy, op. cit., p. 243.
Strehler and Paolo Grassi founded their repertory theatre and school, the Piccolo Teatro, in May 1947 on the principles of Copeau and Orazio Costa considered him the master of the modern stage.

In the United States, although the critic for The Nation looked upon the visit of the Vieux-Colombier as a refreshing inspiration and as a standard by which to compare American efforts and hoped that "the trained audience will hereafter demand that our theatres shall turn from the chase of the dollar to join the French pursuit of dramatic vitality, simplicity and truth,"\(^{11}\) the impact of Copeau's ideas was not immediate and was often indirect. Katz discovered that "no American of major importance to our stage admits to direct influence, while, on the other hand, we do have some evidence of imitation and influence on the part of such major figures as Lee Simonson and Robert Edmond Jones."\(^{12}\) Copeau's theories filtered into American theatre practice as a result of the writings of advocates such as Sheldon Cheney, Edith Isaacs and Kenneth Macgowan and are most evident in the use of simplified decor, permanent frame setting and symbolic scenery. Copeau's visit to New York to direct Les Frères Karamazov did act as a catalyst

\(^{11}\) M. M., "The Stimulus of the Vieux-Colombier", The Nation, CVIII (March 29, 1919), 482.

\(^{12}\) Albert Michael Katz, op. cit., pp. 360-361.
for Harold Clurman and Lee Strasberg in their decision to found the Group Theatre in 1931.

Although he began his career as actor and director with no practical experience of the stage, Jacques Copeau succeeded in imposing his lesson on serious theatre in France and in becoming an internationally significant figure in the theatre. In fact, without him, "il n'est pas sûr que toute une part du théâtre contemporain existerait. Les efforts de notre temps, même s'ils ne s'en réclament pas directement, ont été rendus possibles, par le succès du Vieux-Colombier et son succès moral fut immense, plus grand que son succès matériel."13 His contribution is manifold. By a sincere respect for the written text performed by anharmonious ensemble in a disinterested atmosphere, he encouraged aspiring dramatists to offer their works to the Vieux-Colombier or to one of the several theatres which soon appeared in the same spirit. The actor's profession was greatly improved in the public esteem by Copeau's insistence on actors working hard and seriously with a more complete knowledge of their art and a sense of devotion to their mission rather than pursuit of personal remuneration or glory. To this end he established his acting school whose principles have since been adopted by most such schools. His interest in foreign acting styles

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or forgotten traditions such as the Noh and the Commedia dell'Arte, brought forth a series of endeavours by students or admirers to integrate these methods into a new and refreshing type of theatre. By his productions and his translations of Shakespeare's plays, Copeau contributed to a better understanding of his works by Frenchmen and "établit un contact véritable entre les Français de sa génération et le Shakespeare des comédies, dont il sut faire accepter et apprécier non seulement l'atmosphère poétique et le comique, mais la forme même, si éloignée des unités classiques et de la stricte vraisemblance." In stage architecture and decor, Copeau experimented practically with ideas which had remained mainly theory with Craig or Appia and was an important factor in eliminating unnecessary stage machinery and cumbersome decoration. The director of a play took on an enlarged role as coordinator of an harmonious production, synthesizing the various elements to the service of the text.

14 See Gustave Attinger, L'Esprit de la Commedia dell'arte dans le théâtre français. Paris, Neuchatel: Librairie Théâtrale, Editions de La Baconnière, 1950, pp. 443-448 for the importance of Copeau's efforts in the transmission of the tradition of Italian comedy and the troupes influenced.

In his *Le Théâtre populaire*, Copeau himself described the changed atmosphere in the theatre since the advent of the Vieux-Colombier and its successors: "les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui sont infiniment plus libres dans leurs conceptions. Ils ont devant eux un champ incomparablement plus vaste, plus varié, plus élastique. Ils s'adressent à un public plus frais que le public parisien, et qui étant moins instruit est aussi moins borné. Ils échappent à la férule d'une critique routinière, pédante et sans flamme. Ils sont à peu près débarrassés du naturalisme... Ils bénéficient d'une libération technique qui n'a pas été un mince travail. Le lyrisme ne leur est pas interdit. Le développement mimique ne leur fait pas peur. Ils savent ce que c'est qu'un jeu, que d'établir un jeu entre eux, et même entre eux et le public. Ils ont repris contact avec les grands classiques.... Ils n'ignorent pas le théâtre d'Extrême-Orient. Ils se sont frottés à la Commedia dell'Arte. Ils ont toute confiance en l'acteur et ne cherchent plus à produire l'illusion par des changements de décors. Ils ont retrouvé la poésie."¹⁶

In a more general way, Raymond Rouleau summarized the theatre's debt to Copeau: "Tout le théâtre français lui doit la vie. Avant lui, c'était un art empêtré dans la facilité. À un moment où la scène avait perdu ses hautes vertus, il a entrepris de les lui rendre. Le goût de l'art véritable, l'intransigeance, la

¹⁶As reprinted in *Théâtre populaire*, pp. 100-101.
pureté, c'étaient des mots nouveaux. Il a restitué au théâtre ses lettres de noblesse, sa grandeur artistique, intellectuelle et morale. Nous en vivons maintenant, grâce à lui qui a été la conscience de ceux qui l'ont connu et de ceux qui l'ont suivi.\(^{17}\)

\(^{17}\)Quoted by Marcel Doisy, op. cit., p. 244.
Appendix: Repertory of the Vieux-Colombier

(+ indicates play first performed by the Vieux-Colombier; date after play indicates season of revival at the Vieux-Colombier)

1913-14

Heywood
Molière
Schlumberger
Musset
Molière
T. Bernard
Renard
Courteline
Adam de La Halle
anon.
Molière
Claudel
R. Martin du Gard
Becque
Copeau/Croué
Ghéon
Shakespeare

Une Fémme tuée par la douceur
L'Amour médecin (1917-18, 20-21)
+Les Fils Louverné
Barberine (1917-18)
L'Avaré (1917-18, 18-19, 21-22)
Daisy
Le Pain de ménage (1917-18, 20-21, 21-22, 22-23)
La Peur des coups
Le Jeu de Robin et de Marion
La Farce du savetier enragé
La Jalousie du Barbouillé (1917-18, 18-19, 20-21, 21-22)
+L'Echange
La Navette (1917-18, 21-22)
Les Frères Karamazov (1917-18, 18-19, 21-22)
+L'Eau de vie
La Nuit des rois (1917-18, 18-19, 20-21, 21-22, 22-23)

1917-18

Copeau
Molière
Mérimée
Curel
Marivaux
Villeroy
Renard
Mirbeau
Meilhac/Halévy
Courteline
Porto-Riche

+L'Impromptu du Vieux-Colombier
Les Fourberies de Scapin (1920, 20-21)
Le Carrosse du Saint-Sacrement (1920, 20-21, 22-23, 23-24)
La Nouvelle idole
La Surprise de l'amour (1920-21)
+La Traverse
Poil de carotte
Les Mauvais bergers
Petite marquise
La Paix chez soi
La Chance de Françoise
1918-19

Bernstein  Le Secret
Beaumarchais  Le Mariage de Figaro (1921-22, 22-23)
Brieux  Blanchette
Donnay  Georgette Lemeunier
France  Grainquebille
Clémenceau  La Voile du bonheur
Dumas fils  La Femme de Claude
Molière  Le Médecin malgré lui (1920-21, 21-22, 22-23)
Banville  Gringoire
Ibsen  Rosmersholm
Augier/Sandeau  Le Gendre de M. Poirier
Musset  Les Caprices de Marianne
T. Bernard  Le Fardeau de la liberté
Rostand  Romanesques
Courteline  Boubouroche
Hervieu  L'Enigme
Vigny  Chatterton
Corneille  Le Menteur (1922-23)
Erckmann-Chatrian  L'Ami Fritz
Maeterlinck  Pelléas et Mélisande
Mac Kaye  Washington
La Fontaine/Champmeslé  La Coupe enchantée (1920, 20-21, 21-22, 22-23)
Capus  La Veine
Molière  Le Misanthrope (1921-22, 22-23, 23-24)

1920

Shakespeare  Le Conte d'hiver
Vildrac  Le Paquebot Tenacity (1920-21, 21-22, 22-23, 23-24)
Duhamel  L'Oeuvre des athlètes
Romains  Cromedevre-le-Vieil (1921-22)
Viélot-Griffin  Phocas le jardinier (1920-21)
Mazaud  La Folle journée (1920-21, 22-23, 23-24)

1920-21

Chéon  Le Pauvre sous l'escalier
Schlumberger  La Mort de Sparte
Chekhov  Oncle Vania
Porché  La Dauphine
Musset  Un Caprice (1921-22, 22-23)
1921-22

France
Fallens
Tolstoy
Evreinov
Benjamin
Gide

Au petit bonheur
+La Fraude
L'Amour, livre d'or
La Mort joyeuse
+Les Plaisirs du hasard (1922-23)
+Saul

1922-23

Nigond
Benjamin
Variot
anon.
Vildrac
Molière
Gogol
Gozzi
Copeau
Mazaud
Régis/de Veynes

+Sophie Arnould
La Pie borgne (1923-24)
+La Belle de Hagenau
Maître Pierre Pathelin
+Michel Auclair
Sganarelle
Hyménée
La Princesse Turandot
+Prologue improvisé
+Dardamelle ou le cocu
+Estos le hardi (1923-24)

1923-24

Bost
Goldoni
Copeau
Benjamin

+L'Imbécile
La Locandiera
+La Maison natale
+Il faut que chacun soit à sa place
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