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BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

Modestly Entertaining

PARIS.

WHILE there is no evening in the theatre as totally successful as last year's "Irma La Douce" or the previous season's "Requiem pur une Nonne," there are still many stimulating and modestly entertaining pieces to be found in the current Paris theatre. The biggest hits are Jean Anouilh's "L'Hurluberlu," reviewed last week, and a revival of Offenbach's "La Vie Parisienne." The latter is played with a wink by the Jean-Louis Barrault-Madeleine Renaud Company, and pumps a lot of low fun out of this nineteenth-century musical comedy about an elderly Swedish baron who comes to Paris for a gay time.

Two other successful shows are Felicien Marceau's "La Bonne Soupe," which Ruth Gordon will bring to Broadway this fall, and Albert Camus's adaptation of Dostoevsky's "Les Possédés." Both are really narratives rather than plays. In "La Bonne Soupe," the author has used the narration and flashback device in an unusual way. His narrator, a divorcée, is telling the story of her rise from prostitution to wealthy marriage not to the audience but to a croupier with whom she converses. And she is able to step out of this conversation occasionally to speak to the younger actress playing her in the flashbacks. Near the end of the play the older woman takes over in mid-scene from her former self and creates a lovely moment of old age saying a reluctant but irrevocable farewell to youth. While the play itself runs thin with its variations of the obvious jokes, it is partially saved by the degree to which the narrator keeps the present alive during the performing of the past.

In "Les Possédés" the narrator is more of an observer than he is an important participant in the story. While his relative neutrality makes possible a few detached ironic comments, it does not solve the play's real problem of bringing such a complex novel onto the stage. Indeed one feels that this sort of work might come off better in a film where audience attention can be immediately and economically drawn to whatever detail is most essential to the telling of the story. Yet Pierre Vaneck's performance as the possessed young man is extraordinarily compelling. And Dostoevsky's understanding of the vulnerability in the best of human

beings and the need for religious experience is potentially great theatre. What M. Camus needs now to do is to dispense with the literal presentation of the novel's dramatic highlights and concentrate more directly on revealing the central character's changing state of mind and soul.

If enthusiasm for the hits must be clouded with reservations, disappointment in the less successful plays is brightened with occasional and new and effective ideas. Eugene Ionesco's "Tueur Sans Gages" bears some resemblance to Kafka's "The Trial." Not only does it follow a conscientious citizen through a series of troubles that lead to his being killed like a dog, but it also uses the Kafka technique of allowing the character's anxiety to evoke the action. While M. Ionesco slows proceedings by drawing out each situation *ad absurdum*, he sometimes works up to delightful parodies such as his scene of two policemen complacently going through mechanical gestures to not relieve a traffic jam. But the best scene in "Tueur Sans Gages" is the final one, in which his protagonist, Berenger, suddenly faces the killer. Then, in possibly the longest soliloquy on record, Berenger suggests all the possible motives the killer might have and attempts to reason him out of them. But the killer is completely impervious to argument, and Berenger's arguments just make him laugh. It is the conscienceless laugh of death at one of the living, who is silly enough to assume that death must have the same conscience as he does.

Other Paris attractions include Roger Planchon's Brechtian production of Shakespeare's "Henry IV," which turns it into an antiwar play with two soldiers holding Hotspur down while Prince Hal cold-bloodedly stabs him to death; Josephine Baker's triumphant return to the stage in a musical extravaganza in which she demonstrates that professionalism and style can be more important onstage than mere youth; the Comédie-Française having its last fling at bedroom farces before the Malraux edict forces them back to a solely classical program; and, of course, the nudes who are least expensive and most nude at the Mayol, but lovelier and more suitable for family consumption as they decorate the superbly produced spectacle at the Lido.

—HENRY HEWES.



THE FINE ARTS

The Dial Collection

ANYONE who was interested in modern literature and art during the Twenties must be someone interested in *The Dial*, and anyone interested in *The Dial* can now recover part of its particular quality at the exhibition of The Dial Collection at the Worcester Art Museum. If he was in his twenties during the Twenties, he may also recover there, for a couple of hours, a gratifying part of his intellectual youth.

"Mon cher *Dial*," wrote Marcel Proust; "an actually unparalleled achievement," wrote E. E. Cummings; and hundreds of less famous others looked forward to opening its caramel-colored cover—every month from January, 1920, to July, 1929,—eager to find the latest words of Eliot, Cummings, Mann or Pound, of Sherwood Anderson, or Marianne Moore. It was a habit-forming intellectual stimulant, matched by no other literary periodical.

With a discrimination nearly equal to that with which he chose its poetry and prose, the chief editor, Scofield Thayer, also chose pictures to be reproduced at carefully calculated intervals in the text. To these many of us looked forward almost as eagerly, for it was not easy then to see the latest works of Lachaise, Chagall, or Picasso even in reproductions. In order to have a reserve of works on which to draw for his printed plates, Thayer gathered a collection of nearly 600 items: paintings, sculpture, drawings, and prints. The larger part was bought in Europe on one trip in 1923, and except for a few score American works, little was added after that year. The Dial Collection, then, preserves for us intact one discerning man's taste during a very few but very lively and historically rich years. About half of this collection constitutes the bulk of the exhibition at Worcester, and this has been augmented handsomely by a few loans of important works not ever owned by *The Dial*, but once reproduced in its pages.

What other collection of twentieth-century art could rival it in the America of the Twenties? Only those of John Quinn, Sam Lewisohn, the Arensbergs, and Katherine Dreier in New York; that of the not yet terrible-tempered Dr. Barnes near Philadelphia; and in Chicago those of Fred-eric Clay Bartlett, and Arthur Jerome Eddy (who had bought out the con-

tents of Kandinsky's studio in 1914!). There were also the holdings of dealers in New York, Stieglitz and Kellekian, and of the American Steins in Paris. In quantity only Quinn's collection was larger. In quality one cannot equate the Dial collection with the others—there are no usable aesthetic measuring instruments—but one can say that only Miss Dreier's and the Arensbergs's were more adventurous, thanks, perhaps, to the guidance of Marcel Duchamp.

Where did Scofield Thayer learn his way about in modern art before he began to buy it? Not in his classes at Harvard, though he occasionally made handsome acknowledgment of his debts to Santayana's course in aesthetics as did his colleagues Eliot and Seldes, nor in hours outside the classroom, where he picked up a taste for modern literature from his slightly older and more informed contemporaries. (One of Harvard's virtues has long been its stimulating extra-curricular intellectual climate.) He cannot have learned by looking at modern art in Cambridge or Boston—there was none—and he did not even see the Armory Show of 1913 because he left for two years at Oxford soon after graduating in 1912. However, he did know many of the liveliest younger writers in Europe and America, and some of the liveliest older ones, and, during the years after the war when painters and writers were so often so close, it was presumably first through his writer friends' sharp eyes that he was brought to see the work of the liveliest living painters, young and old.

The range of his choice of the advanced art of about 1900 to 1925 is so broad that one soon begins to notice what is lacking; that may be the most striking compliment to the collection's completeness. One misses Klee, Mondrian, Juan Gris and Cubist Picasso, or Braque. With thirty-five years of comfortable protective hindsight we now can see that the chief gap in Thayer's near-omniscience was his indifference to abstract art, but if we turn our hindsight on a little stronger we may recognize that this

was then no peculiarity of Thayer's alone, for just in those years around 1923 abstract art may well have appeared to be in a recession or even a final decline. The stimulating new movements were not abstract, and many of the old abstract heroes were painting what seemed to be apostasies. Only two pictures in the Dial exhibition are nonobjective—a weak O'Keeffe and an aggressive Cummings called "Sound"—and both would seem to have got in for reasons other than their abstractness. The Picassos are all Blue, Rose, or Neo-Classical, and the single Braque is of a big female nude.

Perhaps the most surprising richness is not to be found in the already famous French (four Bonnard, seven Matisse, nineteen Picassos, six Maillois, thirty-four Lautrec lithos) nor in the Americans (Demuth, Lachaise, Marin, Nadelman, etc., plus thirty-four Cummings drawings) but in the wide selection of Central and North

Europeans. Here is a Munch landscape—surely by many years the first to come into an American collection—accompanied by sixteen superlative Munch prints. Here are seven Chagalls (three of prime quality) and a diverse wealth of lesser works by Barlach, Corinth, Kokoschka, Lehmbruck, and Marc, then little known to America, and Klimt and Schiele, names scarcely to be heard here for another thirty years. There is also an engaging miscellany of works by forgotten or entirely unfamiliar Germanic and Scandinavian artists. At the same time the collection is blessedly free from what

we now hindsightedly count as the usual "mistakes" of the taste of the Twenties: only a very few Derains, Laurencins, and Vlamincks of the stereotyped sort.

Furthermore, although assembled by a literary man for illustration in a literary magazine, the pictures are not literary: their major qualities are strikingly and consistently pictorial. If he learned about modern art from writers, Mr. Thayer learned extraordinarily well. The exhibition, nevertheless, does have a literary quality, and this seems not only appropriate but also agreeable. We find portraits of Marianne Moore, Cummings, Thayer, and Henry McBride; we are reminded that Delaunay's "St. Severin" was reproduced facing the first page of the first appearance of "The Waste



"Madonna and Child"
by Ivan Mestrovic.