

STYLE
THE ACTOR'S "AMPLUA"

Dostoyevsky
Crime and Punishment

STYLE:

The Possessed: Nightmare Scene:

In this scene the ground for the mother was the objective: "I want to rouse you, to shake you out of this condition - to cure you."

Criticism: Mrs. Elmhirst has found the right way for her character in this play, but she must never forget the dimension of the future theatre. The line of her character was absolutely right. The mistake of the others was that they have not imagined in the style of the play correctly. Whether they have acted well or not is a different question, but they were acting a different play. They have not acted in the style at the point where everything can break, only Mrs. Elmhirst did this, and she led the scene at this point.

From now on if you will imagine the scene in the style then you will find all the necessary nuances and colors and power in the direction in which you will discover the secret. You have imagined it in a wrong style and without any style. Secondly, it is very important for this "nightmare" scene that the audience must see two persons on the stage - one real, another imaginary. Today there was only one person in John's case and Hurd's case.

I would suggest that you try a very simple and rude and primitive means to show two different persons; show one

thing and then another; then you will accumulate around this primitive thing more and more colors. For instance, try to speak the words absolutely immovable, perhaps staring at one point, speaking as if someone wants to speak through you, a very cold person. Then the next moment is one of very hot movements, voice, whatever you like. Quite a different person comes and speaks through you and your are not here, you are only something through which the person speaks (demonstration by M. Chekhov). One is cold, the other is hot; one is movable the other is immovable. One speaks from his heart and chest, the other out of his brain and head.

Try to find these different things and when they will settle in you you will become more and more free. You must take the following tasks: 1. Imagine everything in the style of the play at the boundary; the breaking point. 2. Try to imagine two different persons giving them two absolutely different qualities - cold and hot - intellect and heart. 3. This scene must be saturated with the atmosphere which is nothing but a "nightmare" - a small room, a prison cell - iron bars, through which he can't free himself. It must always be done on the boundary, on the limit, on the breaking point of the style, but always through the idea of this prison, which is true of Dostoyevsky's works. In Crime and Punishment one of the characters says, "What do you think if the life after death will be nothing more than a small dark room with many spiders in it?" This is the atmosphere for

this room.

Suggestion to John: It is all right to use anger and hatred sometimes, but not the whole time through. These qualities are in your character of Stavrogin and should not be taken away, but they must not be used all the time. A certain kind of hot philosophy is more his way than simple hatred. Under no circumstances must he show anger with his mother because it makes him simply unsympathetic and untrue, because he is too great to offend his mother by being angry with her, or even showing anger in her presence. With Verkhovensky he can show his hatred to the fullest extent. Murd's character is more that of a thinker and perhaps that will be his way.

Repeat the Scene. Today we have started with the wrong thing, that is, out of style, so be quite conscious of the following things. From now on never repeat this mistake. In our work on this scene today we have begun with chaos, no form and only certain elemental power of hatred. Another person speaking through the character. That is right for this moment, but the next step must be without losing this elementary power, without losing this nightmare, this small room with the spiders; without losing this which is the first condition, you must find shape and form in all the movements, words, and psychological patterns. It is the thing which you must have forever. You must work on this first to find the form gradually - it will not come in today, or tomorrow, and if you try to

hurry it you will only extinguish your fire. Let this elementary power work in you as long as you need, but the aim must be to try to get shape and form into this scene. The second step you must take is to find the character of the person who speaks through you. It must be a definite person which the audience must see - Stavrogin's interpretation of Verkhovenski. We know Verkhovenski, now we want to see Stavrogin's conception of him. It is the phantom who pursues Stavrogin. The third and last task is to find the most artistic and interesting transitions between one person and another. The transitions from Stavrogin to Verkhovenski or Verkhovenski to Stavrogin are like magic. If you do not find these transitions you may lose your audience in one of them, but if you will lead the audience gradually from one person to another then you will always lead the audience. These three steps will lead you to the moment, when you will have this. This is the direction.

For the mother: The way is right for Mrs. Elmhirst and she has only to develop the same line which the style gives us; this wide ability to radiate and to fill the big theatre and audience.

THE ACTOR'S "AMPLUA":

For Deirdre: Something in her psychology makes her a sister rather than a mother. She is too young. She may bend her body but her soul is young. She speaks like a

sister and not a mother and this is the thing which is dangerous for this part. The only way to do it is to imagine the mother as much as you can, and to imagine her psychology, not even her body, because the psychology is the point which makes you so young. Try to imagine the mother's psychology in this scene. There is something in your soul which will never give in to old psychology; it is something in you. Don't even take the body - look at her psychology, perhaps you will awaken something in her for this part. It is something in connection with your "amplua." You are not old inside, but this does not mean that you cannot act old persons and character parts by making many efforts; but this particular part is a most difficult task for you to hide this youth which makes you a sister to Stavrogin. You must get the problem more psychologically than physically. It is something which sits in the kernel of your nature.