

M. Chekhov

(afternoon) January 27, 1938

Mr. Shdanoff's Play:

I want you to take this in the actor's spirit.

STYLE:

Drama. It must be clear cut and sharp, filled with the content so much that it seems it is going to burst. Have it through inner effort. I want you to get up with the knowledge that we have this sharp staccato form. Get up. Sit down. Repeat. Now repeat and be sharp but not staccato! Try to escape staccato. Now I want you to combine getting up in staccato and sitting down without staccato (but sharp enough not to be legato). Repeat.

Scene:

After church, at the mother's house with governor, bride and groom. The beggar girl is sitting with the mother. She says, "Mother," and the mother says, "Whose mother?" The girl answers, "John's mother." She is shivering and the mother puts her shawl around the girl. Then servant announces the unexpected arrival of the son. The characters are sitting in this long, heavy pause. The sun has gone down.

First cast: Try to be aware of this feeling of staccato and not staccato. We have to take something from our Method and keep it. Everybody wants to know what is happening. Be very active and do the work with them because you will do the same in different combinations. Will you please

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try to find this inner way. Try to develop more and more.

Criticism:

Still too timid - you must not exaggerate but embroider and elaborate, and it will grow.

The servant has been with the family many years and suspects the complications that will arise with the arrival of the son while the beggar girl is in the room.

There will now be a variation in the scene: Instead of the son arriving it will be the spy. He announces that he has not been invited, and seems very confident. This man is a born spy. His whole nature is penetrating and observant. On glancing at the table, for instance, he would be able to see everything on it. It will seem like eternity before there is reality in the entrance of this spy.

Second cast: The silence is artificial - it is not right. Try to get these psychological things truthfully and fully. Rehearse only the part where the spy comes in. You must find some ground; before you have something you do it mechanically. We need our imagination, our inspiration. Everybody is waiting for the son. Repeat.

Criticism:

On the grounds of the psychological gesture; when the son enters the gesture would be one towards him, helping him, while when the spy enters the gesture would be one of

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pushing him away. This is not Chekhov's play or Ibsen's play - it is strong and bursting. Now take with you into your private life all the things which you see are not right - write them down and prepare them for next time so that you will be aware of what is wrong.

Convict Scene: The son resents the spy and says, "Why are you following me and spying into my private life?" The stranger replies, "You have no private life." Here is shown the dynamic, machine-like character of the stranger, the spy.

Make the rehearsal pleasant because the time belongs to you. You have to seek and try everything.

New Scene - Late at night in son's room. The son is sitting in a chair. He is half asleep, half dreaming - a nightmare. The mother appears and does not know whether he is sleeping or not. He awakens suddenly. The mother tries to find the inner approach to him, in her effort to find out why he suffers so much. She asks him why he is up so late. Then there is a break, and the mother drops to her knees beseeching the son to tell her what it is in his life that makes him so unhappy. The son is inwardly like a piece of ice. This is the most unhappy moment of his life.

The servant enters and announces that "Mr. Peters wants to see you." This is the person who has been expected. The son shouts, "Do not let him enter." At this moment the spy

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enters and with him is a new character, an engineer. This man is consumed with a dreadful idea that at the moment he commits suicide he will become God. This is his one purpose in life, and he uses everybody and everything for his own ends. He is later used by an evil person, who makes him sign a letter saying that he has been responsible for the death of someone. The evil person actually does the murder, but because he has the signature of this deluded engineer, he goes free.

New Scene: It is the same night. After the mother has gone, the son goes out to see two persons - one is the idealist, and this is their first meeting since the quarrel at the mother's house on the first afternoon. The idealist and the strange engineer live together. They are both very poor and once belonged to the secret [political] organization. The idealist has waited for days in order to speak to the son, and the suspense for him has been terrible.

The engineer is in the room alone as the son enters. He asks the son if he has come to see the idealist, who will be back shortly. The idealist at this moment enters. The son and the idealist confront each other. The idealist says, "Why did you not come before?" The son answers with cynicism, "Were you sure that I would come?" The idealist answers, "Of course." They are burning with the need to speak with one another, and the idealist asks the strange engineer to leave

them alone. He leaves the room very slowly and deliberately, increasing the nervous tension on the part of the idealist. The son says "You struck me for..." Idealist answers, "Of course - you have meant so much in my life." Accumulate these impressions and they will be background when we start the play.

Another new scene: It is the same night. On the floor above the engineer and the idealist, lives the beggar girl. She lives there alone, and after this scene (and it is a long one) the son wants to see her, and asks the idealist to bring her down. She comes but does not know what he wants from her. She is rich in love and at the same time instinctively she is always afraid of the son because, being so pure, she feels that in this strange person there are really two beings - a devil and an angel. He is always struggling with different worlds. One, the social-political world; the other is something which he wants - which he feels is there. Is it God? He does not know. Is it human life in a certain right way? He is seeking for this truth, and when he meets this girl whom he has married, he begins to "hear" her being and he tries to get some solution to the question, "why shall I live?" "What is the meaning of life?" He "hears" the being of this girl, and hopes to get some answer without words. This is one of the moments when he begins to "hear" with his whole being. What will come into him from this girl. He suffers

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tremendously his whole life as a philosopher; as a clever man; as a man who is surrounded by thousands of questions. As he is with her the hope grows in him that he will be free.

They begin to talk to each other, and to tell fairy tales to each other. He hears her, and sees her, not with eyes and ears, but deeper and deeper like a distant sound of music - a singing person. Try to receive her as if you were receiving distant music. She is a tragic figure, and it will be explained in the play what her life background was.

Church scene: Contrast the mother walking down the church steps with dignity and assurance, and her abandonment in grief when asking her son to tell her of the troubles and difficulties in his life. Staccato - legato. In the Church scene there is only will - staccato, and in the scene with the son is feeling - legato. The mother's feeling at the last is that of a flower wilting - something that has no body.