

Michael Chekhov

July 17, 1939

ADVENTURES OF SAMUEL PICKWICK, ESQ.Suggested Settings for the Play. . . . Designed by Woodman Thompson¹

There are two acts and six scenes, three scenes in each act. In general the feeling is that all the figures are most expressive - the costumes are a bit exaggerated because they are describing certain sides of the character. The impression given by old English inns is that they are somehow smaller than natural, a sort of miniature world of their own, there is the little garden, a little piece of street, etc. In the sets it would be good if we could keep the following three elements:

1. Nature - the sky, etc.
2. The Street.
3. The Inn, or a room in a house.

If we can show somehow the room and the inside of the house, and the sky and the street at the same time in a plastic [malleable, adaptable] way. The less space we have the better, so that the actors move with difficulty among the chairs, tables, etc. The streets must also be narrow and small. Everything is covered with dust - nothing is new.

Scene I. Pickwick's Flat in London:

Six or seven members of the Club are present. We require chairs, a table, and diminished surroundings.

Mrs. Bardell's room is also seen, and a staircase leading downstairs to an entrance hall from which we see people arriving and leaving. We don't need a street but if we could have a bit of sky it would be good.

M. Chekhov

July 17, 1939

Mr. Pickwick's room and Mrs. Bardell's room must have entrance doors, so that when the Pickwickians are leaving we must have a door in which Weller arrives. There must also be a door between Mr. Pickwick's room and Mrs. Bardell's. In Mrs. Bardell's room we don't need anything special - they are drinking tea and there is a little cupboard in the background which holds wine. One of the most important things is the staircase with twisted railings.

Scene I is absolutely humorous.

Scene II is also, humorous, and a little mysterious.

Scene III is a funny atmosphere of false, mysterious religion.

Scene IV is cold and evil.

Scene V is really serious and tragic.

Scene VI begins in a very sad atmosphere, and ends very happily.

Scene II: An Old Inn and a Street in Which There Is an Election

Crowd:

It is sunset at the beginning of the scene. All the love scenes take place when it is dark enough to light the candles. At the climax of the love scenes, the moon rises. After the love scenes are over and the scandal begins, a thunderstorm approaches which continues into the third scene. In the street we find all the little shops with funny election signs out. Two coaches arrive. When the street becomes empty we see the interior of the Inn, which consists of the following:

Interior:

1. a kitchen or entrance hall where the scenes between Sam and Mary take place.
2. A sitting room with fireplace.

M. Chekhov

July 17, 1939

3. A room in which one love scene takes place.
4. Miss Rachel's bedroom.
5. Mr. Pickwick's bedroom.
6. Staircase on which people meet, and hide, and spy on each other.
7. Another small room or corner of a room.
8. Three doors leading to rooms which we don't see.

Details:

1. A fireplace.
2. In all small rooms we need as many corner screens, etc. so that people can hide or disappear for a moment.
3. Table in kitchen or entrance hall.
4. Rachel's bedroom - bed with curtain, table, chair, etc.
5. Pickwick's bedroom - Sam prepares some things.

As it becomes dark and the moon rises there must be many sources of light - lamps, candles, etc., so that there is a moment when the servants light up the house for the guests, and another moment, after the guests have gone to bed, when they extinguish all the lights, and there are only candles in the hands of the amorous people.

Scene III: Interior of Another Inn:

It is night and there is a thunderstorm. Courtyard which we don't see, but we require an entrance door from it. Another door through which fourteen women can disappear. The interior of this Inn is more like a public-house. At one moment Jingle extinguishes the lights, and there is darkness inside and out.

Scene IV: Courtroom:

In addition to the Courtroom itself, we need a narrow room or passage, where a lot of clerks are sitting writing, working, and peeping through all the possible holes. An entrance hall or

M. Chekhov

July 17, 1939

door or staircase where two important persons arrive - the Judge and Fitzmarshall, and then Pickwick himself. Then a room for the solicitors. A corridor or room in which the public can express its opinions, while the court is adjourned. This should be rather hidden, because at the same time there is an important scene going on in another room, between the Judge and Fitzmarshall. A room in which the Judge changes his clothes. A room in which the Judge meets Pickwick, perhaps the same room.

In the Courtroom itself we need a place for the Judge, a place for each of the two solicitors, and a place for the plaintiff and the defendant. If possible, the jury should be hidden. It is daylight, and it would be good to see the sky and street if possible.

Scene V: The Prison:

This scene is to be shown in a very tragic, gloomy, and dark atmosphere. It is the only scene which is dramatic.

We need an entrance hall or a place in which visitors come to see the prisoners. The prisoners seem free to wander around - there is a small room in which they buy drinks, like a canteen. Another small room in which Pickwick sleeps - in addition to his bed, there is a table under which another prisoner sleeps. Cells or rooms in which we can distribute the other prisoners.

The impression must be that it is a big cage, in which everyone is going to die. The tragic soliloquy which opens the scene is given in full darkness. Staircases and corridors, where

M. Chekhov

July 17, 1939

people can be hidden very quickly. When Mrs. Eardell is led in, she does not know it is a prison until she passes through a door which is shut after her, and the key turned in the lock.

Scene VI: Wardle's Mansion House:

We see two rooms - a big kitchen in which Mr. Wardle usually celebrates Christmas with his servants, and which has an entrance from the street. A small adjoining room in which Mr. Snodgrass is hidden, and out of which he cannot escape because the only door leads into the kitchen. There is another door which Mr. Pickwick opens to admit Winkle and Arabella. There must be a place on the staircase where Pickwick meets Sam's father.

The scene begins in a very gloomy mood, because of Arabella's disappearance, but the more it goes on the more gay it becomes, and we end with the lighted Christmas tree. It must end with a good happy Christmas feeling in the Dickens sense.