

Michael Chekhov

July , 1930

ATMOSPHERE  
THE OBJECTIVE  
FEELING OF TRUTH  
PSYCHOLOGICAL GROUNDWORK

ATMOSPHERE:

The Fireside at the Inn:

Scene II:

The Wardle family enters, bringing in an atmosphere of gaiety and noise from the streets. There follows a joyful meeting and introductions. The daughters are very excited and with red cheeks, but the moment they see the Pickwickians they become modest and love begins at once - it develops cautiously while the sun sets, the lights are put on and the moon rises - an atmosphere of love and romance.

Between Wardle and Jingle there is suspicion immediately because Jingle is an actor. This is the first meeting between Mary and Sam and there is the first spark between them. Emily is a new born being, afraid of everything - she blushes and becomes pale at anything resembling love.

THE OBJECTIVE:

The general objective for everyone is, "I want to know everything about you." Each person means a great deal for the other person. This first meeting is like a knot from which all the love scenes and scandals develop. This is the moment when we can show the audience that these people have come together, and from this moment we have the right to develop the whole Pickwick story. We

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must justify all the things which we will develop later on. For instance, the girls must meet the young men with so much concern that we can believe that they will become lovers. If it is just a meeting without any deeper scenes, the scene will lose its importance.

Appreciate that you are meeting each other for the first time, and explore each other and gradually find one another. The first moment is one of groping for each other. From this psychological point you can develop many humorous things later. Take the moment of meeting, and look at it as if through a magnifying glass, so that it becomes a great moment - a tense moment in the play.

#### The Pickwickians in the Inn:

Their objective is to escape from the crowd of pursuers. In this situation Jingle is like a fish in water - wherever there is a quarrel he is at home. He understands whom to knock, whom to shout, etc. Imagine him as a creative spirit in this fight with the crowd - he knows how to manage and command the whole crowd.

The Pickwickians take the situation tragically. They retire in solitude, overcome. It is a very serious moment for them.

Sam is very much like a juggler physically - not too many movements - he does only the absolutely necessary things, whereas Jingle is a creative spirit. In quarrels, Sam brings order in such situations by his cleverness and skillfulness. Jingle is at one time a scoundrel and at the other a good-hearted, charming man.

#### FEELING OF TRUTH:

The motto for this scene, as for the whole play, must be

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the feeling of truth. We make the mistake of knowing too well what is going to happen, and this is wrong from the actor's point of view - you must always believe in things which may come unexpectedly - you must always be waiting for the unexpected and the unknown. If you will follow and trust this feeling of truth, you will become more and more free. For instance, when the Pickwickians are in the Inn after having been beaten, and the noise of Wardle's family is heard, it would have been natural and truthful to have noticed who was coming - and psychologically even more necessary because it might have been the crowd again.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL GROUNDWORK:

We must take all this preliminary work as the ground on which we must build. Without these main psychological springs - the meeting of these people who are going to become more involved, these people who are beaten, etc., - without this special background we can't develop the psychology which we need. The words are funny because they are Dicken's words, but our business is to show the funny actor's psychology which Dickens could not do, because he was not an actor. We will not spoil his words but will discover a new humor in them. He is so deep in his humor that he can always be discovered anew and no one can discover it better than actors.

But this means we must find the means we must find out the means to create a funny or tragic psychology. We must not rely upon the text, but we must rather rely upon the actor's soul and psychology. So elaborate certain groundwork psychology, then you

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will do the work much more sensibly. Then the words which will be added to this developed psychology will become sparkling.

Jingle must speak everything clearly and concretely. He must be absolutely concrete and material and from this will come the most charming spiritual quality for this character.

When the Pickwickians enter the Inn after the crowd has beaten them, they are still psychologically with the crowd until gradually, under Jingle's activity, they try to understand what he is speaking about until they come to the state where they are absorbed by Jingle - astonished by him. The time is actually short, but try to distribute their inner action.

Sam and Mary's love scene:

This love scene is quite different from the others in the sense that it is absolutely truthful in all the moments they are speaking together. Some of Dickens' characters speak absolutely openly without any sentiment, quite different from the pretensions of some of the others. This scene must not be taken in a rude way, but very simple and true.

Love scene Between Tupman and Rachel:

They speak this scene without looking at each other - avoiding each other's eyes, because when their eyes meet it is the last thing for them and from the effect of this moment they have to recover - they stop speaking, breathing, etc.

Love scene Between Tupman and Rachel - Second Moment:

This takes place in great secrecy - the house is full of

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people who must not know about this affair - it is a great disaster when Tuppy faints. In the first moment of the three love moments, it is as if Rachel pretends that Tupman is teaching her - in the second moment, she is very serious and "as-if" innocent - in the third moment, it is a catastrophe for her.

The feeling of truth in this play will help us to avoid the usual way of performing comedy. We must not anticipate how we will act. If you really visualize and imagine the situations, you will never believe the feeling of truth. Each comedy is original and each moment is unexpected. If you try to act too soon, you will lose the meaning before you have really understood it. Everything becomes the same because of this too-early acting. You should read the lines for the simple meaning of the words. When you act too early your conscience becomes stupid - red, white or black are all the same to you.

But in our Studio we are trying to go the human way in our rehearsals - to understand the meaning first. If you understand this properly your artistic nature will respond to it and accept it. On the basis of such work it will not take long for the actor to act. We must appreciate that our profession is a very serious one, but we must be able to take it jokingly - it is deep and profound psychologically, but it must be done jokingly.

Tupman is a person who is constantly humming a little tune to himself - he does not talk, he hums. From the moment when he swoons he progresses to a state wherein he is too gay. When he says "I bow to her wisdom," his activity changes and his objective

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is to do something immediately.

Jingle says everything verily clearly but so that none will understand him. When he speaks to Tupman he is as if speaking to an idiot. He is anxious to impress him with the seriousness of the whole situation, so he is "as-if" worried.

In the scene between Jingle and the Pickwickians Mr. Pickwick tries to keep Sam quiet and in order.

Second moment of love between Rachel & Tupmann:

When Rachel enters she is an old woman looking for a man. When she finds Tupman she brightens. Tupman becomes more aggressive after, "Fielding says." He contracts after Rachel slips out of his embrace. In the third love moment he is absolutely passionate.

The Fireside Scene:

Rachel's objective is to conquer everything and everybody around her except her brother. Jingle's objective is to find out what good he can get out of this situation.

Jingle's proposal scene:

Atmosphere of night and danger everywhere - conspiracy. Jingle uses a feeling of beauty to win Rachel - he kills her with his beauty. For Rachel everything Jingle does is holy.

Throughout this whole scene Jingle imagines and creates everything at the moment. He is the host - the life of the party - inspired. He does not speak anything, he creates everything. He astonishes himself. He feels exposed when Wardle recognizes him. The whole character can be elaborated and developed from this moment.

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In the scene with Rachel and Tupman, Jingle wants to inform them that they are in danger. Rachel's objective is: "I want to get rid of the whole world and save the whole situation." From the moment Joe is gone Rachel's gesture is to bow to Jingle in worship as her saviour. Jingle is flying in a higher world because of his power.

After Jingle has disclosed to Rachel that Tupman wants her money, he speaks to her with a gesture of pushing her down ruthlessly. The vagabond is awakened in him. He tries to touch her with his hands. Rachel's gesture is to sink down. After "watch 'em," Rachel's gesture is growing.