

Michael Chekhov

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STYLE
 BRIDGES AND TRANSITIONS
 THE POINTS
 SETTINGS AND COSTUMES
 CHARACTERIZATIONS

Charles Dickens
 George Cruikshank

Suggestions for the style of Pickwick:
Adventures of Samuel Pickwick, Esq.

Today we will start our first rehearsal, which, according to our Method, is the reading of the lines in a quiet manner, without imposing any intonations, etc. on the actor, during which reading the actor tries to imagine his character.

We will start our work with our imaginations, but we may not stay very long with this, as we must go on quickly with the work. I shall, therefore, require you to work with great activity - I want you to find original interpretations by means of your imagination. There are no "blue" parts in this play. You must work in your imagination for hours and hours just as we work in rehearsals, then you will find indications which will enrich your characters.

STYLE:

What is the style? When I came to England, I was under the impression that all English people were reserved and closed, with hands in their pockets and nothing more, but it is a fairy tale just as the conception of the Russian bear is a fairy tale. It is, of course, true to a certain extent, but when I began studying Dickens, I saw people who were much

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wilder than Russians! When we think of Shakespeare's characters, we see that they are fire through and through; and when we consider the history of the English nation, we realize that they are among the greatest fighters.

It is extremely important for us to realize this when approaching the style of this play. These Pickwick people are full of temperament. They don't keep anything inside. They open themselves immediately in a lot of gestures, situations, and positions. If we tried to imagine them in the style of modern English people, we would never be able to play the play because there is nothing restrained in the characters or situations.

In one place Dickens described two gentlemen who are of restrained character, and this was quite an exceptional case for the Dickens world. He describes how they stood apart for a long time without moving, then how one walked with his eyes over to the other's foot, to his knee, to the buttons, up to the left side of the body to his eye - when he came to the eye, he said, "It seems to me you want to tell me something." A long pause, during which he walked down with his eyes, and then walked up the right side of the gentleman with his eyes, and when he reached the other eye, he received the answer.

[by George Cruikshank]

When you study the illustrations, you will see that the figures are expressing emotions - not one figure which

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does not express something.¹ We must act so that if the expression is to be shown from the stage, it must be shown with the whole body. This will help us to wear the costumes in the right manner.

One thing you must not take from the pictures is the grimaces - if you do, you will be led astray. Look upon the figures and costumes and expressions in general, but do not accept the grimaces.

BRIDGES AND TRANSITIONS:

Another thing which will be needed in this production will be bridges and transitions. This play cannot bear any lying or lack of feeling of truth - it must be elaborated so that each kiss that is given, for instance, must be a special, complicated kiss - not just a kiss as such. The reason that bridges and transitions are so necessary is in order to make everything seem psychologically complicated.

The world of Dickens has been compressed to such a point that he begins to look at things as if through a microscope, and he sees so many things in the inner life of his characters that they become more and more like bridges and transitions. When he is sentimental, he describes things only with big lines, but when he tries to describe things which are not sentimental, then he looks through a magnifying glass and sees such small things which are actually Dickens. He was a

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specialist in describing bridges and transitions. By imagining your character you must do it in a complicated way - perhaps we will perform it absolutely simply, but your simple acting must be the result of complicated work.

THE POINT:

If you look at the pictures many times, you will see that these people are living and moving in a very strange manner. Their life is not a continuously flowing one - they express bridges and transitions and then stop for a brief point - a slight moment of pause - a certain taste for starting and accomplishing things. They are like microbes under a microscope - moving, stopping, and making certain points. The style of the play is the finest elaborated psychology, with these small points - feeling of the whole.

SETTINGS AND COSTUMES:

The settings will be, as suggested in the engravings, a little out of perspective. They will include almost the whole house, the street, the sky, everything. We will find the charm of the lack of proportion in settings and perhaps in costumes, but we will not distort the human figure as is sometimes seen in the engravings. There will be a suggestion of dust over everything - it will not look like a new production with new costumes, although the colors will not disappear. It will be a charming old story. The audience must get

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the impression that it is a tasty dish which is set before them.

I have spoken about the style today because it is the frame in which you must imagine your characters and situations. Don't look at the pictures from an aesthetic or intellectual point of view but act them. Read the novel because you never know what may prove a revelation for you. Read those parts where the characters are acting and performing before your imagination. It is important to realize that the characters are true from a historical point of view, and we are not making a mistake in performing them in this way, in this style.