

Michael Chekhov

(Afternoon) August 26, 1940

CHARACTERIZATION
 TEMPO
 ATMOSPHERE

The Cricket on the Hearth:

TEMPO:

Let us consider this as a first rehearsal in tempo. If we touch a certain scene and do not rehearse it again for a long time, it must not be forgotten. It must be absolutely fresh and fulfilled as though we have been continually working on it.

CHARACTERIZATION:

Dot (Mary La): Will you try to get two qualities throughout the whole part. First of all, a feeling of ease - try to get it to an extreme degree. Dot is like a mischievous butterfly. The second quality must be as much feeling of form as possible in speech, in movement, in psychological events in yourself and others. You are obliged to be careful with the psychological form around you and in you. Now only when you act. Then it is difficult to plunge into it and catch it. The real feeling of form requires that you are following other psychological forms as well as your own.

Dot (Margaret): You must not drop your acting before you have really finished. Sometimes you think you have acted and you have not. It is lack of audience feeling. Sometimes you lose the audience and act for yourself. You must always act for the audience. If you get this feeling, you will always know whether the audience is with you or not.

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Caleb (Blair): You were absolutely excellent in these two performances. You have it! If it disappears, we will cry all together, and then find it again. You have found something which is the real artist in you - be absolutely brave and sure that you have got it. What is it? You have lost the wrong activity you were using to persuade your audience. You have touched upon a very fine point in your psychology. You must believe in yourself. Do not criticize yourself. I will tell you when you are wrong. Do not give away this self-assurance. But there is one technical difficulty - you swallow your words. That is the only mistake. When you lose the words, the audience cannot follow even if you are on an absolutely right artistic level.

Tackelton (Sam): I have always felt that Sam was a good actor, but he is simply a swine! I cannot stand him in rehearsal because he is such a dull, stupid boy. You deny the Method entirely - you despise it - you think I am a fool, but you are a fool! Please try to accept the Method because it is already accepted in you. It sits in you - you speak differently when you have the Method inside you - it is there. Call it your own Method, but show me some kind of approach to your part, then the whole thing will be all right.

Fillie (Mary Lou): You are very charming, but very lazy and skittish. When I touch upon your character, you act marvelously. Use only the best part of your character during the rehearsal.

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If you are angry, then you are of no use during the rehearsal or when acting. If you have other things going on in your soul, you are also not very useful. Now, try to work and use only the best part of your character. You are a charming girl and a charming actress, but when you are angry, I cannot direct you because I see the screen of your angry mood before you. There is not very much to do with the part if you will discard these personal disturbances. You are very flexible and have a very fine feeling for the part. In spite of your difficulties with this part or with yourself, you have done very fine work, but you can do more.

Mae (Beatrice): When you fall into an abyss, as it were, and lose your words and your radiation, it is wrong. When you are absolutely present with your speech and your radiation, you develop and change and grow. You are not able to make clichés, but you must overcome this fear or self-consciousness or shyness, or fear of not being consistently good.

Bertha (Tanny): You are growing in your part, and you are going forward, but you must work upon the Method. There is sometimes a little spark of sentimentality.

Tackelton (Hurd): Again the same difficulty - there are two characters in you: one is right and the other wrong. The wrong one tries always to do outward things for the audience in a bad sense. You begin to discard the psychology and imitate yourself when you are good. You try to imitate something

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which was good. When you stop the many movements with your hands, it brings you back into your inner life.

Mrs. Fielding (Deirdre): Try to find the different objectives and make them absolutely clear for the audience. You have them inside, but it is not enough. You must find such expressions that they will be absolutely clear, inwardly and outwardly. The more obviously you change your objective, the more your character will become absolutely clear. It lies in the objective more than anything else.

Tackelton (Sam): You made great progress. You brought your atmosphere with you - this dark, mysterious atmosphere. Try to elaborate the whole part from the point of view of atmospheres.

Peerybingle (John): You are too noble in your movements, too intolligent. He is a peasant from the earth, with a love of the earth.

ATMOSPHERE:

Now let us take all the atmospheres we have set and prepare only atmospheres in all three scenes. Really prepare them with inner tempo and new activity. Create the atmosphere psychologically and be sure that every moment you are on the stage you are absolutely in harmony with these atmospheres. Then you will experience a tremendous pleasure.

Mrs. Fielding (Deirdre): The lady is very old, so extremely old that her voice is coming from the other world. She is

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no longer here. The impression must be of the past and not the future - she does not exist at all. Try to act in half-tone - old voice.

The play must be full of atmospheres from the beginning to the end to make it humanly warm. In comedies, the event is the most important thing, and the character in the event. In this play, the events and the characters are important but plus atmosphere. Your task is: 1. The atmospheres. 2. Imagine your own part as if consisting of unusual events.

This play can be easily interpreted as usual everyday life events, and it is enticing to do this as there is a certain truth in it because it is a true picture of the times. But, as actors, we have to find out in each small bit and scene what is there that is unusual about it. Why is it an outstanding event? If we are able to interpret the whole play without any exceptions, as an unusual moment in this usual life, plus atmospheres, we will get something as charming as only an old, precious thing can be charming. As in England, these things have atmospheres and are events. In a small town in England you will see what the walls and doors, what the cups and saucers are. If you have an artistic eye for it - they are all pieces of art, full of atmosphere.

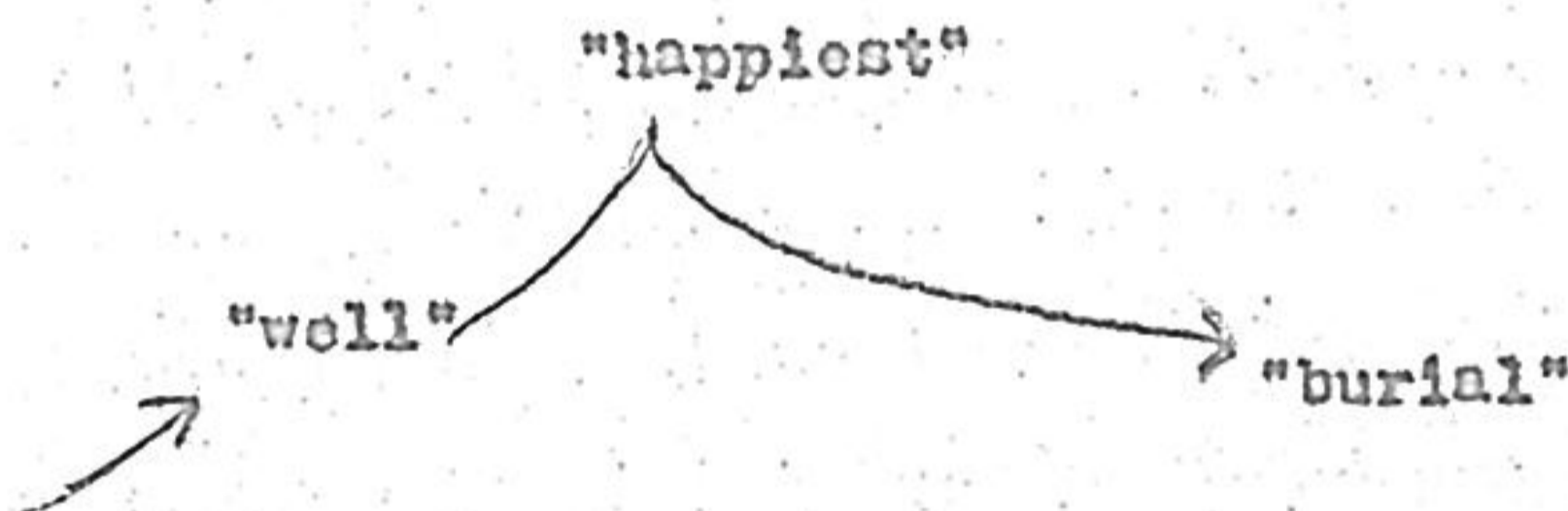
Atmosphere and outstanding events at the same time - this is the impression we must give to the audience. Outstanding events, inwardly speaking, surrounded by atmosphere.

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The whole play is a series of events enveloped by the atmospheres.

Everyone must act with each other - group feeling. In this scene take the suggestions from one another in this atmosphere of awkwardness. There is growing anger on the part of Mrs. Fielding which breaks out in little asides and comments. Be aware of the accents. Mrs. Fielding's protest mounts to the moment of "Well..." then a pause out of which she speaks quickly and angrily - mounting all the time.



After "happiest," which must be spoken like the tomb, she finishes and makes a transition to the last speech in which she asks for their sympathy and pity and love - drawing it out of them. They become small and depressed, while she expands in this moment of self-pity.

Mrs. Fielding must be more aggressive inwardly and more expressive outwardly. She must not let the excitement drop when she begins to speak. Every word she speaks leads her on to the next idea and the next sentence, which she builds up until "happiest." Then she can have a pause and change of objective and everything. She must not play alone

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or speak her part as if it had no relation to the rest of the scene. It must come out of the scene. She is old, very old, like an old clock.

The events must be natural and everyday, but heightened in this scene by the new element of Dot's exhilaration, and the fact that she knows something that no one else does. The whole situation is as before, except that this new element hangs in the air and confuses everyone. It is like an explosion in their midst. They don't know what is going to happen next. On the basis of their everyday actions and the life of the tea party, this other element can be shown.