

INTERPRETATION OF THEMES AND CHARACTERS IN "THE MOTHER"
CHEKHOV'S INTERPRETATION OF STEINER'S VIEWS ON
NIGHT AND ON THE MOVEMENT OF THE EARTH

The Mother
Dr. Rudolf Steiner

THE MOTHER AND THE NIGHT:

I asked you to think over the ideas which I gave you about this fairy tale. Try to rehearse the first scene about the Mother, what she is and what she represents. The Mother and the Death.

Imagine the Mother rocking the cradle. It starts with a song which she has been singing for days and nights. It is like a moan. She is so bound with this little being that when Death comes, she remains with the child, and then she falls asleep. It is absolutely hushed, the whole beginning. It is below



The group which acts the fairy tale must be especially united in the way they play for children. Try to distinguish between weakness and over-concentration for the Mother. She is not weak or tired, but almost gone from her own being into the child's being. She is almost absent from her own body. She sings very strongly, but very muted - under a veil, but strong. Her speech comes from the cradle - psychologically a very fine thing. The Death comes as a whole wave - it is a whole wave - a certain "I Am" - more of a riddle as he says.

"I am a stranger." He has thousands and thousands to take from the earth, and such images as the Mother has are all over the earth. It is one of the images, one of the sparks from the big personality which is the Death.

The moment of the meeting between the Night and the Mother. What is the night actually? And how does it affect human beings? In the night everything seems different to us than it does in the daylight - everything inside of us and outside of us. Not because it is dark, but psychologically it is different. You will see that everything becomes different, and the things which you have had in the day become somehow different. For instance, if you have had an interesting talk with someone during the day, and you try to recall it in the night, you will see that it is very different. You will never even be able to recall the event just as it was, if you recall it at night. Illness and pain are different at night - they are much stronger. Things which seem insignificant in the day become more significant at night. It is a different psychology. If you take a decision during the day, you can go on with it the next day; but if you take a decision in the night, the next day you will feel that you must reconsider it.

Dr. Steiner describes many interesting things in this connection. Many decisions which led to the war were taken at night. The psychology is not only different at night but it is very dangerous because of things which happen during the night, which are somehow unfriendly to the human being who does not sleep. If we are awakened after midnight,

we experience something which we should not experience. It is invisible and therefore all the psychological processes in the night are somehow negative. When we sleep, all the processes are going on, consciously or unconsciously, in a positive way. This is the disease of our time, that we cannot sleep at the right time or get up at the right time.

In our fairy tale the Night is something which the Mother meets as a being which is somehow not in harmony with her. The meeting should not have taken place, as it were. But as it happens, it must be a meeting which startles both of them. The Night also does not want to see human beings who do not sleep, so both are meeting and are asking who the other is and why they are walking around at that hour of night. It is not a meeting which they would have during the day. The Night meets a being who should not walk in this form over the earth, and this is the reason why she has to pay something. When we are awakened at night and we make some decision, whether important or not, we have actually always to pay - even if we pay with a headache. We have to pay something for this cosmic irregularity. In this case the Mother must pay with a song.

The Night meets the Mother with astonishment, and she keeps it for the whole time. When she gets her payment, then she will show the Mother something, but not before. The Mother sees the Night and is uncomfortable in her presence. There is a difference between the song to the Child and the song to the Night. The first song, when Death comes, is on the earth definitely, and the Mother sings to the Child just

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as simply and naturally as in life. With the Night, it is tearing her being out of her and giving it to the Night. It is what she has to pay - to give out everything. She has to give out her senses. She has to give out her right to speak, as it were.

The meeting with the Night is not quite on the earth, but it is not in the state where the human being should sleep. A different consciousness, a higher consciousness. And to be able to speak to the Night as the Mother does means not to be affected negatively. But to ask something, to speak with her, ("Where is the Child?"), one must have given up a certain kind of speaking which the person uses on the earth.

During the day we speak just what we like - and this is one of the biggest barriers which does not allow us to know other things. There is a certain rule - we must stop speaking certain things in a certain way - the lowest part of our voices, as it were. We must give it up, and then certain things will be seen by us. It is one of the things we have to pay if we want to get higher knowledge. This is why the Mother has to send out, so that at the end she is, as it were, spent. We must feel that the Mother has given up something and is without it. Through meditation she must get this kind of singing. Later she gives up her eyes and then her hair. Imagine how she would sing, and how the Night would take it out of her, take, take, take. After the song she can see the road as a friend.

All these things which are going on in the night may become friendly to us, either when we sleep normally or when we have [won] the right to become friendly with these other beings which are surrounding us in the night. In this case, the Mother pays with her voice for the right to be good friends with the Night. Maybe the Night will really become friendly. We shall see these two beings become more friendly. One pays and the other accepts. That is the structure.

The children must not know of these things, but we must have them as a background. We must know this strange world with our whole being -- this spiritual world. Then we can act before children. You must become silent somehow if you wish to know something higher. For instance, if you don't criticize your fellow beings - both inwardly and outwardly - that is one of the forms of silence. This type of criticism is going on so much around us. This must be silenced, and it will give us a certain knowledge which is higher.

The more the Mother gives of her earthly voice, the more awakened she becomes, until she is awakened but without voice. The gesture is:



She is coming from under the earth, above. The Night has unfriendly beings in her sphere and the light has friendly beings. But it is still necessary for the human being to pay if he wants to get higher, to give up not only the voice, but to become somehow silent and to give up the manner of saying things. A kind of sight - this is shown when the Mother meets the Dawn - the

most radiating thing - but this must be sacrificed to get another sight.

Rudolf Steiner tells us that the light which we know as the sunlight is only the surface of something which is behind this light. If we sacrifice our physical sight, then we see the real light, which is tremendous in comparison with this other light. We must sacrifice ourselves and shut our eyes on this physical light if we wish to be able to see other things. The gesture for the Mother is



something no longer on the earth. It is already a spiritual thing. The Mother is more and more active after she gives her voice; and she meets the Dawn with the feeling of ease - she is almost flying. She asks, "Where is my child?" She is becoming stronger and more awakened each time she gives up something. Dawn is absolutely radiant, to the fullest extent.

The next step: The Mother will try to get higher and higher. In our fairy tale we say that there are stages. One of the next stages is terrible fear and emptiness before reaching a new stage which is still higher. A stage of loneliness and fear. This will be when the Mother loses her sight.

Before the first step is taken in spiritual things, it seems that the first step is terribly happy. But then the stage will come when the person is very unhappy; and then he understands that he has given up everything by giving up his former kind of living, and has not yet reached the other shore.

not experienced the pleasure. This is the point where many people who are seeking for those other abilities are fainting spiritually. They cannot bear this terrible thing they have to start. And then they are allowed to go back because they are not yet ripe to step over. Then they must live on the earth, but two things will be pursuing them. One is good, because they will be much richer than other persons, and they will give blessing to others. On the other hand, they will always feel that they have to do something. They don't know what it is, but a certain restlessness will be there. Then they will make another effort to get through this difficult period.

But it is very primitively told by me. I propose to make it more like a picture; and this is right and true for our fairy tale.

This difficulty the Mother has from the moment of her blindness - through the Grave Woman's place - a desire to turn back - "Where am I?" - as if there was nothing under her feet. One has this feeling that there is no ground under him, although he stands on it. The person feels that there is no matter around him. It is an indescribable thing. The whole endlessness is there, although the things are there. No ground. The Mother comes to this groundlessness in the greenhouse, starting with the loss of her sight.

Remember that all these things I tell you are only to feed our imagination and give us certain foundations. But don't ^{stop} thinking of them, because this is the psychology of the

fairy tale. The psychology of the Mother is not actually so important as the big background which makes the Mother's psychology. Try to make these thoughts your thoughts; then we will really act the fairy tale in the right way. The other approach is to try to be strange on the stage, and the children don't need that. They need this background.

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THE DAWN:

Radiation from her. The Mother has the objective to get through all the obstacles - to go further on. That is her objective for the whole play. The Dawn is over the earth, touching everything. She cannot look directly at the Mother. They cannot look at each other. When the Mother loses her sight, the Dawn becomes like a mother to her. When she is blind, the Mother is without movement. Her bodily mission is accomplished.

THE GRAVE WOMAN:

When the Mother meets the Grave Woman, there are two parts for the Mother. One is when she is blind, she is absolutely restless because she cannot go on. In the first scene she meets the Night and she goes on because she can give her something. Then when she meets the Dawn, she can go on. But now is the first real, strong obstacle. Therefore, the whole objective to go on must be inside, and she is very restless.

The second part is very different, when she hears the beat of the heart of her child. She does not want to go on. She is absolutely with her child, and she wants to go on only to the child. It is the rhythmical repetition of the moment with the cradle; in a different way she wants to be with the child. In the first part it was protecting the child, and in this part she only wants to be with it. With Death it will be a struggle and a powerful fight - like a tigress. Then the light will come; and then the Mother will say, "Take the child." Acceptance. Four different stages.

The movement of the characters must be like moving sculpture. They are all peasants, although not naturalistic in costume. The landscape will be like a small countryside. The Night does not move, but sits with an umbrella. Very astonished... The Dawn is always on tiptoes. The Mother has very aggressive arms and hands. She does not stoop. The Grave Woman has one shoulder a little higher than the other, the head to one side; the feet, the hands, everything asymmetrical. Everyone must have the feeling of these things very strongly, so that the fairy tale will not become earth-like.

The background - which is above everyone. Above the Dawn is everything which is going to be rising: sunrise, youth, plant, child, morning. This quality is always together with a certain kind of astonishment. Everything is

spontaneous and for the first time. Sunrise. The light comes slowly, and finally it is blazing there - the first beginning of the sun. Everything moves at this moment.

On the earth all the insects begin to move, and the moon moves in the opposite direction to the sun. It becomes dark, as if big parts were moving from the sun. Everything begins to move and therefore the Mother must move all the time, as if something moves through her. This is full astonishment. For the Night it is absolute astonishment, but mysterious and strange, because she hides everything. The Dawn does not hide anything - she shows everything. Both are astonished, but in a different way.

Steiner explains that when the earth is moving on its axis, the earth is surrounded by spirits, and they are moving the stars and the planets and are in close connection to each other. It is a big, big event going on with living beings. The Night governs all these things, but they are hidden by her. She is watching all these spirits - whether they go right or not. The planets must go this way, and the earth that way. She is full of these things. And when the human being - a very insignificant one - comes, it is as if a child is interrupting her business. From her big dimension, she considers the Mother a small thing. The difference between her astonishment and that of the Dawn is that the Dawn gives up everything and makes the world bigger and more radiant.

"The Mother": The whole story is concerned with this marvelous idea about the destiny of human beings, and how stupid we are trying to interfere with destiny, which is drawn in big gestures somewhere. Terribly, humanly tragic. For Death, the more wise humor, the better - laughing from beyond. Not laughing because of humor, but because of the bigness of life.