

Michael Chekhov

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(Miss Boner gave a lecture on the
Commedia dell'Arte)

DIMENSIONS OF THE PLAY
RHYTHMICAL DEVICES
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RHYTHMICAL ACCENTS

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DIMENSIONS OF THE PLAY:

The Golden Steed:

The dimensions of a fairy tale are bigger than the dimensions of an ordinary play. We must start our fairy tale with a feeling of tragedy which is as deep as a Greek tragedy - this is the fairy tale atmosphere.

It is not possible to find a more simple approach to the crowd. What the crowd has done up until now has not been enough - the sentences must be spoken as deeply as possible. As tragic as possible at the beginning - the end is entirely opposite. Each movement at the beginning is nothing but an expression of this tragic state - each movement is tragic - the sigh is the deepest tragic sound. Although we are not actually crying, we must feel the psychology which must be after a long time of crying - hopeless crying.

With all this in your feelings, try to imagine the Princess - try to find a real dynamic contact with the image of the Princess. As Antin has to send out his fiery center,

so each person in the crowd has to find the same feeling of sending out his center toward the princess. This will be the artistic dynamic for the crowd.

The qualities which must be expressed at the very beginning of the play are not only earthy and heavy, but they must have the feeling of the most strong, hard metal - the extreme expression of hardness, coldness, and everything of that nature because of the end, which is entirely opposite. During the play, the crowd must melt the metal so that at the end we get only light and nothing more - light and warmth. Imagine from steel to light and warmth - that is the way.

If this way is really accomplished, then the crowd will be as expressive as Antin himself, and the brothers and all the other persons in the play. The crowd in this play is one of the most important figures or elements. It is as heroic as Antin is a hero, therefore, each character in the crowd is as important as Antin and all the other persons.

The very first feeling of the crowd is a slight awakening, the first faint desire to be awakened. The next feeling is that of longing for the Princess. Then comes the first series of words - these words must be produced as words which are spoken immediately after the crying - like the first words children speak after crying. These we must produce until the first moment when the Guard's voice is heard. The voice of the Guard answers the children's tragedy. After the

children have heard the voice - this is the first ray of hope for them - before the voice, not the slightest idea of hope should be shown. Then, as in life, the moment there is hope the evil power is there. Hopelessness does not know this evil power - hope and happiness always encounter this counter-action of the power of evil. For example, when Peter speaks as the Second Man, he must feel that this first appearance of evil is evil justified because of the hope heard around him.

The next soliloquy of the Guard is a little bit nearer, and is the awakening of the two powers of hope and evil - the evil wants to oppress the growing hope.

From the very beginning when all these themes are so soft and delicate, there is already a fight between them. We must bear in mind that evil and good in this play must be fighting, in each figure, in each speech, each emotion - everything must be shown as a fight. This is a most important technical moment in the play. At the same time, we see that this scene is the first division of good and evil - still muted - when we feel that the crowd is divided into two parts.

The next moment - the appearance of the Copper Steed on the mountain brings the first moment of wonder. Each Steed brings wonder, and this wonder always makes the crowd one. The Steeds are able to unite the crowd. Between the appearance of the Steeds the crowd will always be divided. Each time the Steeds appear, they bring new qualities to the

crowd, and the crowd is united. The quality with the first Steed is passion, which was not there before and will not be repeated. The passion in this case is combined with the longing for the Princess. The passion is colored by a spiritual longing. Try to imagine this real passion colored with spiritual longing.

At the moment when the crowd is united in this passionate but spiritual atmosphere, a fiery sword is flung down from Lucifer, which again divides the crowd. The first idea of division is given by the fiery sword of Lucifer, and that is why the crowd is a little bit lost. From where does this sword come? They do not know where the sword has come from and that is why we have a legato movement without any clear idea of what has happened. Lucifer comes with great cunning and subtlety. A human being is not able to understand at once the being of Lucifer; and, therefore, he is able to penetrate into each human being before they are aware of it. We must show this by Lucifer's first movement with the sword. When Ariman appears, he is much more obvious; and, therefore, the two brothers are much easier for the crowd to understand, to realize, and to deny or accept. The power of these two evil spirits is much stronger than Lucifer.

RHYTHMICAL DEVICES:

After Lucifer's first blow, the division in the crowd

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begins to be clearer and clearer, and the moment of the distribution of bread is nothing but the repetition of the first appearance of evil, but more real, more concrete among more awakened people. This kind of repetition is a rhythmical device, it is very important and very expressive, and sometimes we repeat this division and coming together again. This is absolutely a rhythmical breathing. We must imagine these things like rhythmical breathing.

THEMES IN THE PLAY:

In the scene of the distribution of the bread, the bread is not only the real thing by which people live on the earth, but it is a very important symbol throughout the world. It is a symbol of life and power. In this fairy tale we are able to find two kinds of bread - the White Old Man and his bread, and the Guard and bread. You will see that the Guard's bread shows the evil kind of power which used the power of life, while the White Old Man shows the good use of power. The crowd must show that by eating the bread they become more powerful. This idea will find its own expression. The bread is eaten by the crowd not only for pleasure - we must show that life comes into the eating crowd, but this life appears as evil life. Such a rhythmical gesture we must produce which will convey this. The good people will not eat the bread. The eating of bread is again expressed in the White Old Man and Antin scene. The good group is lifeless and, therefore,

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breadless because of the disaster which has befallen the Steed. The evil group is dominant at this moment.

The King represents destiny. He is a power which is beyond everyone, and he sends impulses of life. He has a double mission in sending the bread and also arranging the contest. He is a divine being. It is important to speak of the King with the feeling that he is a divine being. This makes the Guard an important figure, but he can also be funny. He must feel as if he is time - not symbolic time, but the real time which is shown by the beating of the drum, etc. This feeling of time, which is very important for us as human beings, and is always present with us - this time we must incorporate in the Guard's figure. Majestic and important, and then as he comes nearer, he becomes a strange, funny figure - this is Time. It does not mean that the audience will be able to feel that this is Time - that is not important. Directors make a great mistake when they have the idea that everything they have to produce must be understood. It must not have to be understood, it must be felt and nothing more. This figure of Time will be felt without the critics feeling that this is Lucifer or this is Time, etc. It is your business to make things deeper and more profound and to understand why they are profound, but for the audience only the result is important. Their feelings will be profound without their knowing why, but we must know why.

The theme of hope. The first moment of hope was

when the first faint sounds of the Guard's voice came to the people, and this theme of hope gets an accent and grows with Antin's appearance. Antin represents increased hope for the crowd, and during the whole play whenever Antin is on the stage the good group increases its hope, until the moment when Antin faints.

Why is this moment so light, without any feeling of disaster? Because the crowd feels that it has almost reached its hope. Only one more step need be taken, and the ideal will be accomplished. Therefore, this theme of hope grows through Antin's appearance each time, and the last and highest point in the development of this theme of hope is when hope begins to be reality. When hope becomes realized, the first sound of heroism comes into the play. Heroism is always a fact and never a hope. We can speak about it only by facts and never by hope.

This heroism transforms the atmosphere of the Golden Steed. The beginning of this atmosphere is in the very beginning of the play in the voice of the Guard - this is the first hope, and the second hope is when Antin first appears. The third hope is Antin's second appearance, and the fourth hope is the flower in the Golden Steed.

For the evil group the structure is the same. When hope appears, the evil group develops and continues the theme which the First Man starts. When the Copper Rider disappears,

the division is again to be seen. When the brothers appear, their mission is to make the crowd more earthy, more skeptical - therefore, the laughter in the play is very good. The first laughter is satirical, the second laughter is good laughter at the appearance of the Nobleman. Perhaps we will find laughter which will grow out of the last heroic moment. It is a very difficult moment, and perhaps we cannot reach it. Perhaps the structure of the play will not allow it.

All the lines and themes which we have found in the very beginning of the play remain the same, but they are developed as in a musical composition.

In the scene of the Silver Rider the crowd is lifted up and loses its earthy feeling. The White Old Man shows Antin that this is a mistake. We must find a happy medium in the Golden Steed. In the Silver Steed moment, the crowd is united with new qualities which we have spoken about. There is now some slight indication of individuals in the crowd; it is no longer so much one thing. These individuals are lighted by some fire. The second sword of Lucifer is thrown down but with much more difficulty than the first. The first time the crowd did not understand who was working amongst them, but this time the crowd looks at Lucifer and then looks at the Rider, and they begin to realize who is working amongst them. Because Lucifer is weaker, the whole composition will show that all the themes we have touched are coming together in

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this moment - the theme of being more awakened, etc. - everything is as if in a knot here.

The more the crowd is awakened, the more the brothers work with energy and with more "squeaks." They try to cast a spell over the crowd and make them squeak as well. For instance, their inspiration is everything that is mechanical and technical on the earth. If you listen to a propeller on an airplane, at first you will find it too strong, and then you will find that you are becoming a slave to the sound. Or try to look at a locomotive which is running at great speed, and you will have the same experience. At first you will have a little fear, and then the nearer you come to it, you lose your will and become part of the locomotive and are able to throw yourself under it if necessary. You are living in its rhythms and sounds. This is the power of this kind of machine, through their attributes that take the individual and lead him where they want.

For the evil group it is important not only to laugh at the brothers and be interested in them but to become more and more slaves to them, with the psychology of a running locomotive. We must know this, but the audience will feel it without knowing - that is what we have to reach.

Another part of the crowd, the good group, has to express the first stage of meeting with this spirit - fear. One group shows the first stage - fear, another group shows the second stage - to be drawn toward, and the third stage

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may be shown in the crowd throwing themselves under the wheels. This is the same rhythmical device as working in canon. The crowd standing behind shows that the first stage, which is fear, is already passed; the second stage is to become slaves, to be entirely with the evil power, empty, without any will, slaves to obey the evil. With this rhythmical device, we can show not only the evil spirits, but the reactions to these spirits in some degree.

The last theme which is the most important for the crowd is that the more evil develops itself, it consumes itself. This is the hopelessness of evil in the world. The moment will come when it will eat itself. This theme is developed by the two brothers coming back to show that the crucial moment has happened. That is why we show them coming down backwards. It must be clear for the audience that we have really seen both sides of the brothers. Sometimes in the development of certain characters we must show some things on are not shown as a rule. For instance, the brothers are shown descending the mountain showing their bottoms to the audience. If we show such things with understanding, if we know why, then we have to show them without any hesitation, and they will become part of the development of the theme.

For the crowd this is a new theme. The moment when the evil power destroys itself is a very tense moment. We have to show such seriousness. We must show that the mystery

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of the hopelessness of evil is shown in this rather funny, comical situation - not necessarily in some mysterious form - it can be shown in a clown form. For instance, the highest mystery in clown form is that of Parsifal, in which Parsifal is really a fool.

The deeper the problem, the more strange and funny can be the expression of it. Therefore, it is so beautiful to see this great mystery of the annihilation of evil forces in such a clown form, and at the same time, all the crowd standing as if before a great mystery, with the most serious attention. This composition will give to the audience much more than if we produced it only in one color; that would be too primitive.

RHYTHMICAL ACCENTS:

This is an accent for the good group to find this new note - seriousness which is as deep as we are able to perform. For the evil group we must find how to manage other accents. Some people who are slavish to the evil group must be present here, too; therefore, the division of the two groups. The more this division is seen, the more strong will be the clash of the heroic mood. At once all the differences in the crowd disappear; it becomes one whole company composed of individual faces and movements and positions. Only this heroic note can unite the people. This we must radiate to the audience. The two evil figures of the brothers lying there on the ground

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will be only the remembrance of something which has happened - we will be with the hero.

These two themes will underline the scene. The whole history of evil, the whole history of the crowd, Antin, the White Old Man, Lucifer, the Guard, etc., will be in harmony; and the crowd will appear at the most important element of the play. Lucifer will disappear.