

Michael Chekhov

July 1939

CHARACTERIZATION

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Stiggins in the Prison:Scene V:

When Stiggins sings, "Work, work, work all way," he pretends to be a little boy - a child. He is aameleon, constantly changing. He begins in this scene as a judge - a person who has the power to punish and lead people, very concrete and very strong. He finishes with this "Work, work, work," quality. As he disappears we hear from afar this bigot speaking. He starts as a man, as a leader and judge, and ends as an angel with wings, flying away.

Mrs. Weller is psychologically Stiggins' mother - when people laugh at him she feels real pain like a mother - she suffers for him - no one understands him but her. Danger is everywhere around him - he is like a hunted animal. Mrs. Weller is constantly on the watch to defend him - like a mother with an ugly child. If it is taken seriously, the humor will come.

In this scene Sam has one simple task - to find out where would be the best place to knock and kick Stiggins. Find out how he speaks with Mary, and then how he speaks with Stiggins, and this will give you the whole diapason of the part. This is the contrast on which everything is based. With Stiggins Sam is absolutely physically present, while with Mary he has the deepest psychological contact, but nothing physical. Psychologically he is with Mary, and physically with Stiggins.

Stiggins has the quality of tremendous suffering. ~~is~~

He seldom speaks in general - always implying something to someone.

Mrs. Weller has in her hands not only a child which she wants to protect but something which is somehow sacred, and which she would defend fanatically.

The Prison Scene:

The scene begins in the darkness, with a voice which is that of a human being in great despair. After this soliloquy we see the first signs of life - the figures of the prisoners are seen moving in an atmosphere of tragedy. The following voices are heard:

- 1. A voice which groans and cries (Sam).
- 2. A crying woman.
- 3. A groaning voice which goes on for years and years (Erika).
- 4. A sobbing voice (Biddy).
- 5. A praying voice in terrific tempo - a prayer which began some years ago as a concentrated prayer, but which has become more and more urgent and mechanical as the person has become mad (Blair).

These sounds grow to a crescendo in the following order:

- 1. Blair.
- 2. John.
- 3. Erika.
- 4. Biddy.

Erika begins after "coffin," Biddy after "judgment," Sam after "he is gone." John's voice must always be heard speaking the soliloquy. After Sam's cursing there must be a song - a rude, cynical, rather gay prisoner's song. The officer speaks during the song - an old man speaking with contempt and disparagement. Jingle sits leaning against the wall, in extreme despair.

Meeting between Pickwick and Jingle:

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Jingle has two lines - one of suffering and one of shame. He puts a mask over the shame and covers it by attempting to clown - a very slight and delicate veil of clowning. He tries by whistling, and winking, and joking to cover his suffering.

Pickwick loses himself in Jingle entirely, then he gradually comes to himself and becomes more and more strong and master of the situation. He has a strong inner power - when the catastrophe happens he is the first to take command. At the end he is like a conductor - each glance and movement of the figure is like a command. Somewhere in the chest is the quality of Pickwick - in this scene he has found his chest again, his presence of mind in this tragic situation. He sits with his eyes filling with tears but with quiet face.

Both Pickwick and Jingle try to pretend that nothing is going on. Jingle elaborates this quality of having a mask, a disguise to hide his suffering - instead of showing it in a primitive form, he does it in this disguised way. There will be one moment when he will drop this mask. When Pickwick's goodness overpowers him, and he no longer needs to be ashamed.

Sam, in general, is walking very freely through life without any fear, but he meets two things for the first time in his life - a girl such as Mary, a good, pure, gay, healthy, innocent girl, and then the real suffering of this scoundrel who has fallen to the lowest depths and begins to suffer. Like Pickwick, Sam loses himself in Jingle, but the difference is that Pickwick is a wise man and he finds himself again, but Sam is as if lost in Jingle's suffering. In this scene we see Sam when he has lost his quality

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of self assurance. This is one of the climaxes in the play.

Mrs. Bardell and Mr. Fogg in Prison:

Sam and Mr. Pickwick drop their business with Jingle as the others are heard approaching, and Mr. Pickwick goes away but Sam is drawn to the scene. He is not seen but he hears.

Imagine that Mrs. Bardell is surrounded from the beginning by a group of prisoners. She senses that she must be careful in this situation, she has a sort of "hunch," but it is more curiosity with a slight premonition of trouble, like a shadow. Fogg has the psychology of a snake charmer in this scene - to keep Mrs. Bardell and lead her with his eyes. Mrs. Cluppins is like a rat or a mouse - she has an instinct for this dangerous situation which she guesses immediately. She is like a mouse trying to escape, and is everywhere but with Mrs. Bardell.

The prisoners speak among themselves - one has compassion, another is indifferent. Some words pass between them. At first they are spread widely around the group, but they gradually draw nearer and nearer, and at the end Fogg and the two women are surrounded by them. Mrs. Bardell must develop three stages - fear, noise, and becoming petrified.

Prison Scene:

Jingle takes the beer given by Sam ravenously, and is almost in a fainting state when he finishes it. When he says "good fellow" about Pickwick he does not look at him, and forces back his tears. Pickwick from being very sad over Jingle during the early

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part of the scene, becomes his normal self and is even happy at the end - an echo of the birthday mood.

Although Samuel ridicules Stiggins with his demonstration of friendship between the prisoners and himself and with his free behaviour, he never touches Stiggins physically - the moment he touches him physically the tension is destroyed. The farther he is from Stiggins and the nearer to the prisoners, the better. He keeps a certain distance even from Mrs. Weller. Samuel will always find the right way, if he will recall the contrast which is given in the play between his connection with Mary and his connection with Stiggins - he has the psychology of a person sitting in a circus taking in everything, and enjoying himself more and more, so that at the end he is full of gaiety and pleasure.

Mrs. Cluppins becomes absolutely selfish and completely deserts Mrs. Bardell when they are locked in the prison - she has no thought for anyone but herself.