

2128  
Michael Chekhov

5-5-5  
March 1, 1939

SPEECH  
CHARACTERIZATION

SPEECH:

One thing in your sketches made me sorry, and this is true of almost everyone - the speech. This is a dangerous point in our work. You must do something more to help your teacher because she does all she can. It is very dangerous for our plays, and I realize it now, but you will realize it too late. The audience will not understand you, and your whole talent will be in vain. You can be a genius, but without clear speech no one will understand you nor follow you. I must warn you very seriously about this because if you lose the time now, you will not be able to gain it in the last weeks before the performance. Take this problem seriously, otherwise you will be lost and the whole theatre with you because of this poor speech.

If the audience cannot follow the text, it will become angry, and will not accept you unless they can understand what you are speaking about. I have gone through all this danger as a young actor, and I know that if the audience cannot hear one sentence, you are lost for the whole part.

When watching the younger students perform their scenes, help them psychologically with your open heart. Help them so that they will not feel that they are being criticized by older students, but rather that they are being helped. Help them and understand them, because you have gone through the same torture yourselves.



M. Chokhov

March 1, 1939

CHARACTERIZATION:

Criticism of Scenes in Theatre:

You should take the objective, because at the moment you are too, too superficial. Do the whole part by means of the objective. Some entrances are too primitive - they are without bridges and transitions.

For Warner's characterization, the coughing is too much for such a simple characterization. It would be enough to show it two or three times. This is only the question of having the audience in mind. You must always have somewhere in the back of your mind to feel and anticipate somehow whether it is too much for the audience, or too little, etc.

For Frances - try to elaborate the old body more subtly and with more details. Now you are not so much old as bound - you cannot move freely. To have an old body so that you can do everything, your body must be permeated with this spirit of the old person, so that we feel that you can move as you wish. Learn how to be old on the stage in your body and your voice. If you have an old body, you must have an old voice - your whole body must be permeated.

Alonzo, you have a marvelous feeling of truth, which will always help you. Because of this you achieve the things you do. The developed feeling of truth leads to justification immediately. This is very important. When you work on the whole scene, I would recommend you to solve the problem of crescendo in the whole psychology. You have to have a starting



M. Chekhov

March 1, 1939

point definitely, and a finale so that you can distribute all your colors, powers, etc., between these two points which are very far apart. How will you solve this problem of crescendo? If you will take the whole part, and in this soliloquy especially, you will perhaps get the feeling which will help you. Although you have this element, it is not yet developed. He is a genius with his lies - it is not a simple person who lies - he makes lies brilliantly. Just as there are geniuses in thinking, in art, in science, and in religion when it concerns the will - genius does not mean that the person can do everything - no, they have a certain inclination - to be a genius in one thing does not mean to be a genius in everything - he is a genius when he lies. With this idea you will perhaps find more interesting colors. Find (1) the crescendo through the whole act. (2) Try to show us that this little nothing is a genius at the moment when he lies.

John, as the officer [in The Possessed]. If you should go on with this, I would suggest the following. This small scene gives the opportunity to develop certain gestures. You have to start with something different to what you will show at the end. It must not be so equal or even. In each part, and in each actor's work it is very good to find as much variety as possible. If the scene is a short one, it does not mean that the possibility is not given to develop the part and to show it richer and richer. If you were doing



M. Chekhov

March 1, 1939

this work again, it would be good to find as many different facets of the character as possible. Not only different facets, but to show this one psychological gesture with a definite beginning and transitions to the end, and a definite end.

John, as Stavrogin [In The Possessed]. He is very helpless - the whole life is like a disaster hanging over him. Try to imagine this scene as the preparation for the next one.

Warner, as Slim Mike [In The Possessed]. It is better, but I think it might be possible to use these words more - the more you use each word to show that you have so much to say and to convey to Stavrogin, and that the problem is so difficult - do you allow me to kill your wife? In this way perhaps you can get more by trying to make Stavrogin understand that there is more behind each word, each intonation. Behind all this there is more than Stavrogin thinks. It is possible to dig still deeper, and to show the person who tortures himself with the question, "How shall I convey?" Through your imagination you can get it.

Alan, in Spanish Evening. Everyone has serious soliloquies in this play. It is important, and I asked Henry to make the soliloquies really more than serious - tragic. This comedy is interpreted almost as a circus. Circus and tragedy are brothers. When this moment comes, it must be



M. Chekhov

March 1, 1939

tragic - it must not be drama, otherwise it is not in the style. It must be interpreted as tragedy. A serious soliloquy must be tragic. The style requires it, otherwise it will not merge together. It must be as strong in tragedy as it is in clown.

Deirdre. In Spanish Evening, Alan got this tragic seriousness in this small short soliloquy. It can be much more expressive. It must be short like a blow or like a gong. One short, strong thing. Otherwise the comedy will perish. If it is short and strong, it will underline the whole clown tricks. Try to elaborate it by means of getting the archetype. Find such pictures in your imagination, or taken from reality - choose many of them and live with them in your imagination, and then you will get this tragic note.

In the first part, Alan was in despair, so he must choose many pictures of despair until he will get the idea that he knows the archetype of despair. The second part of the soliloquy was "revealing." Again, find many things for this, then it will have depth. Without depth, these soliloquies will not make any effect, because we can see the comedy very clearly, and if the soliloquies are sincere, and deep, then they will serve the aim. Perhaps for the moment you can leave the character for the whole tragic part so that it may come clearer. This real serious, tragic thing must be absolutely humanly deep and sincere. About other parts - perhaps



M. Chokhov

March 1, 1939

you should try to find an older body. The feeling of ease you have, and you don't have to think of it any more - now think how to create an old body - a feeling of difficulty. Feeling of difficulty is marvelously expressive for an old body. For everyone in this comedy who must first act a very passive and lazy person, it must be acted actively - comedy requires this kind of aggressive activity.

Beatrice has shown a great development - it is good and right for this comedy, but two things you have to get. Two gestures - to open and to close - they must be much more definite. When they are definite, then you can make transitions as complicated as you like. At present, the temperament spoils your speech. To open and to close - in between do what you like.

Daphne, you make a little mistake by pretending to be younger than you are. Simply be as you are because you are young enough. Develop only one characteristic - to be open.

Deirdre, take the scene with Woodie and try rehearsing it alone, first taking definite grounds. You do your work consciously - you have always certain grounds. This is absolutely necessary. You must work consciously - to know the aim and by which means. Having this ability, you can allow yourself to do the following thing. It will help. Try to take the ground and not the style - forget that is comedy - take it absolutely seriously and do all this kissing business as



M. Chekhov

March 1, 1939

you would do it. Then stop. Take some exercises on the style of the comedy, and then do the same scene with the same sincerity on the basis of the style. Then stop, and do it again without the style, then repeat. Do it one time with style and then without. Always having grounds.

Suggestion to Alan - get the tragic archetype and in addition try to find the psychological gestures for sentences, or for a series of sentences, or for one syllable. Try then to get this gesture as big as you can, then still bigger and bigger - imaginary space and time. World-big in imaginary time and space. Then when you have rehearsed it for a long time, then gradually try to speak out of the gesture, then you will get the dimensions.

Deirdre was incomparably better than at Dartington - incomparably better. Call it necessity, or what you will, but it was much, much better.

Erica, go on with this work because you can get something from it which you have not yet got. You are a dramatic and tragic actress, but I would like you to go on with this work and develop other things. I will tell you what you need. You have a certain idea about this character, but it is not yet incorporated. Your tragic body does not allow you to do these things - it protests against these things. But you must develop it, because it will help you in tragedy. Try to justify all the things you do, whether it is voice, or body, or psychology. This will make you richer as an actress. Imagine and



M. Chekhov

March 1, 1939

incorporate everything so that it sits in your body, in your voice, and in your psychology. Work until it becomes you. Imagination and incorporation.

Jeanne, what you do I like, because it is in the style of the comedy. It can be more in the style of this comedy. What we lack is that we don't know who she is, what her character is. For instance, with Dairdre we know that she is a prostitute and a harlot, and I would suggest to her that she carry this through the whole play because it is a definite line, but with Jeanne we do not know. Beatrice we know - she is someone who is open and closed. What Jeanne's character is we do not know. Perhaps she will choose some animal, a cat, or a tiger, or whatever she likes. Then it must be more obvious that she is a cat - in comedy it is very good because in comedy we mostly express negative sides of the characters, therefore, it is funny when we see certain negative sides of our souls shown.

Peter, it was good; and I would suggest to you only that you get the right tempo. If you compress it, you will get more fire inevitably.

~~Terrence~~, this light character is much better than the heavier one which I tried to show you. This is much more in the style of comedy - your character is much more interesting.

Warner, it is very good in many scenes. First of



M. Chekhov

March 1, 1939

all, the feeling of truth is there. There is imagination and justification of all these things. I could give you a new suggestion to develop it in other ways.

From my point of view, this was a very important show today, and very speaking. I saw that the old students are developing very well in the right way, and I got many new suggestions, especially from Beatrice, Sam, Terry, and Peter. They were absolutely in the right style. Deirdre will get the style, if she uses the exercises which I have suggested to her. After Jeanne has found the animal, I would suggest that she get more and more into the style, which is not comedy - it is almost circus. Daphne and Mary Lou will find this style later on, but first the sincerity for them, and then will come the moment when the style will be there. Don't start with the style. For Alan everything will be right when he finds the right body, and a more profound ground for the soliloquy. Such a show as this today gives the director very much.