

Michael Chekhov

March 4, 1938

CHARACTERIZATION  
STYLE

CHARACTERIZATION:

When we are doing our "rehearsals for future rehearsals," I think the aim of this work is to get certain suggestions from the rehearsal and elaborate them at home. Otherwise we will come unprepared, and each rehearsal will just be a repetition of the one before. We have our note books in which to write everything down.

Today I want you to start another work which concerns the play. We shall try to do so on the basis of all those hints which I give you about both plays. We shall try to explore the characterizations for the parts quite easily and only just touching them. We shall do this partially as studio exercise, and partially as actors.

On the basis of the character in your imagination only, take the mother's part in Mr. Shdanoff's play from the point of view of what kind of characterization it is. Imagine her as a character entering the church, not coming out of the church. How she will enter the church, inwardly as well as outwardly, before the service, and after the service. Don't break the work of your imagination when the technical work is being done.

Each part and every part is a character part for the real artist. In this sense we must look upon our own characters - not only look to see what is especially charac-

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teristic, but what character has everything. If the mother says, "Nicholas," it is already material. What characteristic is in this "Nicholas"? Each person could say, "Nicholas". This is not characteristic. This is wrong. The problem must be turned quite opposite.

You must look on everything from the point of view of characterization - this is the art. Everything can be done characteristically. Therefore, by asking you to walk in the church, and out of the church, everybody could do it. But looking at it from the point of view of characterization, this is the art we are trying to get. Try to realize more and more consciously what her invisible body is like, not yet the center but the body, how it is built, and try to incorporate your physical body into this imaginary one. Now, add some sentences out of these characters, and speak as if you are greeting with, "Good morning."

Now, it is the moment when Nicholas enters the room - his first entrance. He must enter the room first on the basis of imagination, even without invisible body. Will you add to this the invisible body. Do it very actively, and try to be led by this invisible body.

Now, add the sentence, "This is my wife," and try to speak it out of your invisible body and the character which you imagine, and which you experience as invisible body. Now, look at his arms and hands and find a characteristic position

for them.

Scene:

After the spy announces the girl has been killed, and Liza says, "Who has been killed?" Without invisible body, consciously imagine.

You have acted "what" but the task is "how." Who is she, and how does she speak. You must pay attention more to the characterization.

Scene:

Nicholas is sitting on the bench and the spy is enthusiastic and he speaks the sentence to Nicholas, which is very characteristic for this part: "Don't you know how powerful one man can be?"

Imagine the character at the moment when Nicholas enters the room and the beggar girl is sitting there like a frightened rabbit, and when she sees him she jumps up and says, "Nicholas!"

Through putting questions to our character we will find the way to develop the character. For instance, invisible body, center, and what kind of will is flowing through, will and invisible being, and streams of feeling, and how are the arms and hands at this and that moment, and attempts to incorporate. This is the way to every characterization, and if you are asking, for instance, about the most inner charac-

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ter, i.e., what kind of will, this person has, spontaneous or not spontaneous will, we are asking about the very inner part of the soul, that means we are asking about outer means as well. We are already elaborating our body.

Body qualities - what position has he for his hand. We cannot get the answer without penetrating into the psychology. Therefore, we do different approaches which express the inner and outer life at the same time. Now it is half rehearsal and, therefore, it is studio work, and I ask you to sit here and work with them on the stage.

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STYLE:

Spanish Evening:

Imagine the following scene from Henry's play: The wife, sacristan, maid and barber. After they have celebrated and are in a romantic mood, (nothing of real passion because the style of the play is the "butterfly" love), imagine in this style that the showman is standing on the street below and this love scene is on the second floor. Now, imagine the love scene has reached its climax, and at this moment we hear a whistle. This is the sign the showman gives the lovers that Pancraccio is coming back. Will you please try to incorporate this scene of passionate love - tigers in the form of butterflies - eating, singing, dancing. This time I want you very much to

imagine the style of the play in each part of your body.

Different conditions - kissing, dancing, eating, drinking, all together with group feeling. After the warning whistle they must try to find a place to hide the sacristan and the barber.

Henry will give sentences which can be used quite freely. Each sentence must have some point and be given to the audience. Be more and more conscious of your distribution. Elaborate the kissing, the embracing, dancing, drinking. Each word must be like a climax. "What a night! What food!" It must be like sparks sent out from the stage. From chaos to cosmos. It is now much more instructive and you will find yourselves more and more easy, with more and more details and rhythm. We have to do it again and again to find this order, to establish it.

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STYLE:

Our Phantoms:

Change your inner life as quickly as possible. I will give you small tasks out of the play in the style. Imagine first in the style, and try to produce it only for style. The style is the form, beautiful, clear form, filled with different powers. The form which does not break, but it must be quite clear and definite. Imagine the moment when Liza enters

the room of Nicholas and says to him, "Nicholas, I hate you." As an exercise, imagine this in the style.

We need this form filled with certain activity so that tremendous running forward may be there - tempo. The whole play must be like a storm. Therefore, add to it this storm surging forward, and it will be the right style. This is volcanic fire which is very deep - we don't see it but it is there - chaos and inner fire. The tempo must be much quicker because of this kind of style.

Scene:

The convict suggests to Nicholas that perhaps he could get rid of the beggar girl, Nicholas's wife. Then the spy says: "Your meeting with the idealist is not your private life." Perhaps Nicholas agrees subconsciously to kill her. Then he gets still more furious with the spy and the spy says, "Finish with that, but we need the money for our propaganda - could you lend me the money?" In this dialogue it is clear for both of them that the money will be used for paying the convict to kill the girl. For Nicholas it is enough justification - as if he gives this money for business. He knows at this moment that the money he has given will be used to kill the girl. The devil in Nicholas breaks the form and in doing so he becomes almost mad. Rhythmical - from the human being to the animal.

Son - Fine  
Spy - Spoiled  
Convict - Animal

This is only the scheme but the scheme must be understood before the words and real actions.

Nicholas is sitting on the bench, with a feeling that the solution of all questions that torture him is somehow nearer. He has not got the solution but he has got the idea in which direction it could be found. Imagine in the style. The spy is always around him but the difference in this case is the following one: The spy is always trying to possess him, but this time, for the first time, with quite the opposite gesture. The spy, having suffered so much from the strange figure of Nicholas, understands that this is simply a weak, intelligent man who is busy with his own problems instead of having the big wide political scope, and for the first time we see how the spy despises him. What the spy says kills Nicholas morally: "In all senses, in the social-political - I have created you in my imagination and now I strip you of everything. I know that with one foot you are already in this old man's spiritual organization, and I know that you will probably try to organize this power against us, but you must know that there is no power in the whole world to conquer us. I am going away, only to prepare a new attack which will be much more powerful than your preparations

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here."

I want you now to produce the following gesture:  
How the spy leaves his idol by scolding, despising and threat-  
ening him, and in the style of the play I want you to speak  
to him like that. The gesture is one of long, long departing  
(threatening) in the style - stormy performance - urgently  
stormy.