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Problems for the high school actor

Greydon Pierce Milam
University of the Pacific

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PROBLEMS FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL ACTOR 2

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Speech
College of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Greydon Pierce Milson
June 1956

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CHAPTER I

NATURE OF THE STUDY

"Problems for the High School Actor" has been prepared so that the teacher and the student have been given a certain degree of flexibility in its use. The order of presentation of the various problems, the amount of time spent on any one item, and the focusing of the major amount of emphasis may vary from class to class and from year to year as the interests, needs, and skills of the enrollee vary. The most educationally worthwhile method can be used to meet these varying situations.

This study has been developed so as to make possible further study of the problems herein presented. The resources unit that has been included will be found most helpful. It should be a stimulus for a continued analysis of the great plays.

It would be well to consider the objectives involved in "Problems for the High School Actor."

1. To enable the student to realize the communicative possibilities of bodily action and facial expression.
2. To enable the student to realize the possibilities of emotional expression through the voice.
3. To help the student acquire grace of movement.

4. To help the student develop a pleasing, expressive voice.
5. To make the student aware of the world and the people around him as a source of characterization.
6. To develop powers of observation in the student so that he may find in the world around him the inspiration and materials of characterization.
7. To enable the student to acquire memorization techniques.
8. To give the student practice in memorizing and characterization.
9. To give the students practice in working with others in dramatic scenes.
10. To develop the student's sense of responsibility in self-organized, self-directed scenes.
11. To develop the ability to sacrifice personal ambitions to the welfare of the group.
12. To give the student a knowledge of stage directions and acting techniques.
13. To develop a critical sense in the student in evaluating his own and other's work.
14. To give poise and confidence to the student.

The over-all plan in "Problems for the High School Actor" has been to give the student a chance to act. It has long been the belief of the investigator that the average, serious-minded high school actor can best learn how to act by working on excerpts from the world's great dramatic literature. When the actor is told exactly what is expected of him in playing his role, he will most appreciably grow,

and he soon senses the importance of a well-motivated characterization, and sometime he will have the techniques so ingrained, he can attack the more complicated problems in acting with sincerity and understanding.

CHAPTER II

A WORD TO THE HIGH SCHOOL DRAMA TEACHER

Modern education recognizes the importance of extra-curricular activities. It readily concedes that the educative process should embrace a well-rounded program.

It further concedes no other course in the senior high school offers greater opportunity for self-directed, creative activity than does the course in dramatics. But modern education must take a realistic view of the entire high school program. The growing high school population with the resultant overcrowded classrooms makes it imperative. The highly conceived role the high school drama teacher should play is all but lost, since he is so sorely needed to teach the required subjects. He finds himself teaching four or five English classes. Then, with what is left of him, he may take cognizance of each high school actor's innate abilities, and through a study of drama and the acting of plays, free his personality, provide physical and emotional discipline, enrich his experiences, and enlarge his social consciousness! But that is not all! He must also broaden the student's outlook so that he is finally able to take the world view, and by his fine living and teaching enable the student to see life steady and see it whole. All this must be done at the end of an

exhausting day teaching the required subjects.

How, then, can "Problems for the High School Actor" somewhat alleviate the load carried by the overburdened drama teacher? First, it will give the average, serious-minded student a chance to act. The excerpts presented in this study will require a minimum degree of direction from the teacher. They are self-explanatory and are so arranged the student will be able to proceed at his own rate. He will be engaged a major portion of the time in mastering the problems presented. This should help the drama teacher immeasurably, since it solves the ever-present question, "What do I do with the student when he is not performing?"

Secondly, the problems have been selected with considerable care, with the student's talents and interests kept constantly in mind. This will provide a spur to examine the field of dramatic literature for further illustrations of the problems presented in these excerpts.

Thirdly, the serious actor, by careful analysis of these plays, will gain a knowledge of the author and his purpose; he will broaden his experiences and understanding so that he can appreciate plays presenting problems of characterization, and, most important of all, by constant practice he will develop a beginning skill in bodily interpretation, the most indispensable and basic requirement to true and lasting success in the theatre.

CHAPTER III

A WORD TO THE HIGH SCHOOL ACTOR

Tell any man, woman or child that he should be on the stage and you'll find him quite as susceptible as a cat is to catnip. That is the universal susceptibility. . . . That is the unfailing compliment. . . . That is the flattering word.¹

Perhaps it is an exaggeration to say that a desire to be on the stage is a "universal susceptibility," but most people, at one time or another in their lives, have experienced the desire to be on the stage. For some it was only a passing fancy, like one day wanting to be a fireman, and the next wishing to be a garbage collector. Being "stage struck" was a feeling that was outgrown. But some school actors are sure the desire to be on the stage is a feeling that is there to stay. It is for them "Problems for the High School Actor" is meant. They are not content to sit back and let others do the acting. They wish an opportunity to express themselves more completely, and see in the theatre the most complete form of self-expression. They need to be told how and where to begin.

¹George Kelly, The Flattering Word, Act. 1.

David Belasco once said, "Everyone feels competent to act without training, yet acting is the most exact and exacting of the arts."² The truth in that statement is readily apparent. The serious high school actor senses in a vague sort of way that if he is to find any real satisfaction in the theatre, he must be ready and willing to train for it. He is not like the fellow who was asked if he could play the violin and who quickly quipped, "I really don't know. I haven't tried!"

Let us turn our attention to the high school actor who wishes to develop his latent talents in a systematic way. If he studies each problem carefully, and if he practices it until he has mastered it, he will have a much more useful and enjoyable life in his high school theatre.

²A. H. Quinn, Representative American Plays, p. 175.

CHAPTER IV

UNDERSTANDING THE PLAY AND ANALYZING THE PART

Studying the entire play first. A high school actor is sometimes guilty of a serious error when he attacks his role in a play. He begins by reading his own part, with a total disregard for the drama as a whole. Before an actor goes about the business of learning his own characterization he must first learn what the entire play is all about. This entails reading the play through several times. Read the entire play at least three times. The first reading of a drama will be purely for the story, for sheer enjoyment. The next reading should be for a detailed analysis of the play. The third reading should be to determine the theme and a more than superficial grasp of the plot. These three careful readings are absolutely essential to understanding each individual role in the drama. It may be argued that some plays are too superficial for this procedure. It is true many are trivial and can be fully understood with a cursory glance, but our concern is not with this type but rather with those that not only merit but demand our closest scrutiny.

Analyzing the character. Drama reveals the conflict of emotions and will in action; therefore, an

understanding of the nature of that conflict is of paramount importance. When analyzing a part in a play, the actor must determine for sure where he stands in relation to the conflict. He is allied with the protagonist or he opposes him. With few exceptions all characters are on one side or the other.

In the play Macbeth by William Shakespeare the drunken porter performs a unique function. He is a comedy character thrust into the midst of an unrelentingly grim play. The mood of the play is perfectly stated in the opening scene. In Act 1, Scene 2, the three witches scream out through the thunder and lightning,

When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and filthy air.¹

With the exception of the scene in which the drunken Porter appears, Act 11, Scene 3, this mood of malevolence is sustained.

Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devel-porter it no further. . . . Anon, anon! . . . I pray you remember the porter.²

¹Shakespeare, Macbeth 1, 1.

²Shakespeare, Macbeth.

Nevertheless, the drunken Porter tending hell-gate brings us a temporary and welcome relief. The listener is afforded an opportunity to laugh for a few brief moments before continuing with the terrible tragedy. It is clear, then, this "comic relief" presents a contrasting mood rather than a contrasting action.

Perhaps the part in the play, like the drunken Porter's, is a variation from the main theme, or the dominant mood. Perhaps it is part of a sub-plot that scarcely touches on the main plot. On the other hand, it could easily be the warp and woof of the material part. Which is it? Does it advance the plot? If so, does it accomplish this by word, dialogue, or both?

The actor should carefully analyze each scene he is in, since each one presents new situations, demanding new moods, tempos, and attitudes on his part if he is to portray them faithfully. Sometimes a character's mood will change completely between his entrance and exit. The actor must be aware of these possibilities, and if there are mood changes, he must be able to say definitely what brought them about.

The high school actor, by asking himself some searching questions about his mood and attitudes, will slowly but surely begin to "feel" himself into his part. But he must be sure he settles these questions in his own probing

mind before he proceeds with the memorization of his own part.

Memorizing the actions. A word of caution must be given about memorization. Do not start by memorizing speeches, memorize actions first. Now, there will be some who say that is putting the cart before the horse--that instead of words growing out of actions, actions grow out of words. Probably there is much to be said in defense of that position. In his advice to the players, Act iii, Scene 2, Hamlet cautions those around him,

Suit, the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature.³

After three hundred and fifty years of theatrical admonitions from thousands of playwrights and players, this still remains the surest advice to give the high school aspirant. He will always carry it and always want it with him in his heart's mind and his mind's heart. He will also find none better. An appropriate word will follow an appropriate gesture.

So, the high school actor is ready for his first problem: To memorize a set of actions and then some words

³Shakespeare, Hamlet, iii, 2, 56-78.

to fit them. In the presentation of this problem and all those to follow, the investigator shall become personal and call the beginning actor "You."

CHAPTER V

PROBLEM: WHAT TO DO WITH THE HANDS. SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE USE OF THE HANDKERCHIEF¹

High school actor, what better way can we start you with your problems than with the melancholy Jaques' speech in As You Like It? In the opening line, he states, "All the world's a stage." How altogether fitting from an actor's point of view!

First of all, consider Jaques' character; try to remember what kind of person he is. He is a pessimist, the type of person who always looks to see if the egg is bad, one who looks on the dark side of all things. He has a sour outlook, especially on life itself. This lugubrious tone penetrates not only voice but action as well.

Observe the manner in which we are going to analyze this excerpt, since it will be the basis for all the analyses that are to follow: As you have probably observed from your reading of Shakespeare, the actor was not given very many stage directions, nor was he told in much detail the hand props he was to use in interpreting the part. Shakespeare probably thought the actor could determine these

¹Shakespeare, As You Like It, 11, 7, 139-66.

facts from the inferences in the lines themselves. For example, Shakespeare did not say Jaques carried a handkerchief, but we are sure he would not mind if we suggested you use one in this famous speech. Since there are seven stages in the life of Man, you are going to use that handkerchief in seven distinctive and appropriate positions.

Now get this: Learn those seven different positions of the handkerchief before you even think of learning your lines. The stage directions are easy for you to follow, since they are set apart from the script in the column on the right. Rehearse them over and over until you are sure you have mastered them. If you have long-suffering friends, practice on them. When they can easily follow your pantomime, you are prepared to learn the words.

Now that you are ready to learn the words, your next problem is to determine how to fit the words and actions together. Will the action precede the words, will it follow the words, or will words and actions be done simultaneously? There is only one way to answer this question to your complete satisfaction, and that is--experiment! Try each way separately, many times. Then, and only then, will you be sure you have arrived at the right way for you.

Briefly, your approach to this first problem and to all the problems that follow will be the same.

1. Establish the character.
 2. Establish the action.
 3. Memorize the lines.
 4. Combine the words and the action.
 5. Experiment:
-

AS YOU LIKE IT

All the world's a stage,
 And all the men and women
 Merely players; They have
 Their exits and their
 entrances; And one man
 in his time plays many parts,
 his acts being Seven ages.
 At first the infant, mewling
 and puking in the nurse's
 arms. And then the whining
 schoolboy, with his satchel,
 and shining morning face,
 Creeping like shail unwill-
 ingly to school. And then
 the lover, sighing like
 funace, with a woeful ballad
 made to his mistress' eye-
 brow. Then the soldier,
 full of strange oaths, and
 bearded like the pard,
 Jealous in honor, sudden

He yawns into his folded
 handkerchief.

He unfolds handkerchief,
 wipes his lips and then his
 brow.

he waves the handkerchief--
 first to the right--then to
 the left.

hanky in hand, he traces an
 imaginary "7".

He cradles it in his arms--
 pretends to wipe the infant's
 mouth.

--tying a knot in one end,

He tosses it over his shoulder
 like a knapsack.

--untying the knot.

--gathering the four corners
 together--shaping them into
 a flower--sniffing delicately

Arms extended, cups it in
 his hands like a delicate
 rose.

He ties it around his neck in
 cowboy fashion.

and quick in the quarrel,
seeking the bubble reputa-
tion even in the cannon's

mouth. And then the justice,

in fair round belly, with good

capon lined, with eyes severe
and beard of formal cut,
Tucks it in his vest like a
napkin.

full of wise saws and modern
instances; and so he plays
his part. The sixth age

--nodding his head gravely,
draws hanky over face and
then well back over head--
then wipes food particles
from mouth.

shifts into the lean and
slipper'd pantaloon. With

He tucks it in his belt at
his right side.

spectacles on nose and

pouch on side; his youthful

hose, well saved, a world

--puts hanky to lips too late
to suppress an inadvertent
"burp."

too wide for his shrunk

shank; and his big manly

--folds hanky as a fan to cool
himself on this hot day.

voice, turning again to-

ward childish treble, pipes,

and whistles in his sound.

Last scene of all, that ends

this strange eventful his-

tory, is second childishness

He wipes his lips and eyes
with a trembling hand

and mere oblivion, sans

teeth, sans eyes, sans taste,
sans everything.

He folds his handkerchief and
yawns into it.

We trust you have had fun with this first project, and that you really mastered the speech. Most high school students learn a role in a play superficially, sometimes learning their part the week of the show. If you are in this category, get out of it fast and permanently.

The technique you learned in the use of the handkerchief to supply action for a static speech will serve you well in your serious analysis of any character role. Shakespeare is not the only playwright using a minimum of stage and actor directions. You will find other playwrights who leave actions up to the actor's ingenuity, just as did Shakespeare. Why? Ah, that touches on the heart of the matter. An actor who must search for the movements a character uses, who must decide the "hand props" employed, will, perforce, learn right motivation as well as right lines.

Perhaps, as you reflect on it, you will say the handkerchief device in Jaques' speech was too artificial. Perhaps it was. Perhaps you will decide you could use some other object. To indicate the various stages of man with even more dramatic results, perhaps you could. Go ahead and try something else besides a handkerchief. Experiment!

But, you see, using the handkerchief accomplished the purpose for which it was meant. You might have already

suspected its real purpose. It gave you something to do with your hands. One of your most difficult problems as a beginning actor is what to do with your hands. You probably often feel awkward when you try to use them on the stage. Be honest with yourself for a moment. If you're a boy, don't you frequently stick your hands in your pockets for want of a better plan to put them?

If you're a girl, aren't you often guilty of clasping them behind your back? Of course, you are! All actors are plagued with the hand problem. Right now you are overly-conscious of being watched. You need to do something, to hold something that will take your attention from yourself and focus it on that something. In problem one you had a handkerchief to serve as the something. The whole objective in the exercise was to get you to overcome your timidity, to relieve the bodily tension, and to develop a free use of your body in interpretation.

One last word on the use of the hands before you are presented with the next problem. The best advice you can be given on what to do about your hands is to suggest you watch people closely. Observe them when they don't know you're observing them. Most people are very free in their movements, when they are not being observed. Try to remember this advice and use it. If your role in a play calls for old-age characterization, observe someone in real life that fits the type.

CHAPTER VI

PROBLEM: SYNCHRONIZING HAND AND STAGE CROSSES. SPECIAL
EMPHASIS ON SPEAKING TO SEVERAL INDIVIDUALS¹

We are now ready for the second problem, also an excerpt from one of the great plays, Cyrano de Bergerac. You will remember Cyrano has an abnormally large nose, and he is very sensitive about it. Anyone who even mentions the word "nose" in Cyrano's presence has signed his own death warrant. Valvert, a fop, has just pettishly remarked to Cyrano, "Your nose is rather large." Cyrano controls his rage momentarily and says in reply, "Ah, no, young sir, you are too simple. . . You might have said a great many things. Why waste your opportunity?" Then in the famous nose speech tells Valvert what he might have said.

¹Rostand, Cyrano de Bergerac, Act 1.

CYRANO DE BERGERAC

CYRANO

Ah, no, young sir!
You are too simple. Why
you might have said--Ah,
a great many things! Mon
dieu, why waste your oppor-
tunity? For example thus:--

clucks his tongue--wags his
finger and sad-eyedly shakes
his head

he becomes pensive--with
finger poised on chin

Aggressive: I, sir, if that
nose were mine, I'd have it
amputated--on the spot!

with feet widespread and arms
akimbo

Friendly: How do you drink
with such a nose? You
ought to have a cup made
specially.

sweet little old lady, be-
wildered, but helpful

Descriptive: 'Tis a rock--
a crage--a cape--A cape?
say rather, a peninsula!

Now he writes notes searching
for the apt word

Inquisitive: What is that
receptacle--A razor case
or a portfolio?

a blunt, plain-spoken man
who says what he thinks

Kindly: Ah, do you love the
little birds so much that
when they come and sing to
you you give them this to
perch on?

this little old lady is also
helpful, but too nearsighted
and naive for her own good

Insolent: Sir, when you
smoke the neighbors must
suppose your chimney is on
fire.

this one also calls a spade
a spade. He needs one--used
on him.

Cautious: Take care--A
weight like that might make
you topheavy.

who else but Caspar Milk-
toast?

Thoughtful: Somebody fetch
me my parasol--those delicate
colors fade so in the sun!

filled with pills he has many
pockets for his many ailments.

Pedantic: Does not Aristophanes mention a mythologic monster called Hippocamp-elphantocamelos? Surely we have here the original!

the absent-minded professor--
always the scholar

after this word he re-releases
his breath with a terrific
gasp

Familiar: Well, old torch-light! Hang your hat over that chandelier--it hurts my eyes.

--this one's familiarity grows
with his liquor, and tonight
he's excessively drunk.

Eloquent: When it blows, the typhoon howls. And the clouds darken.

the orator orates.

Dramatic: When it bleeds--
The Red Sea!

the old school actor declaims
with gesture.

Enterprising: What a sign
for some performer!

eyes narrowing--wheezes--
washing hands.

Simple: When do they unveil
the monument?

a naive little girl--hands
behind back.

Rustic: Hey? What? Call
that a nose? Na! I be no
fool like what you think I
be. That there's a blue
cucumber!

an old farmer--hand cupped
behind ear--shouts when he
talks.

These, my dear sir, are
things you might have said
had you some tinge of
letters, or of wit to color
your discourse. But wit,--
not so, you never had an atom--
and of letters, you need but
three to write you down--an
Ass.

Cyrano dips his finger in
the glass of red wine Valvert
is holding and traces the
three letters on his forehead.

The nose speech affords the actor an excellent opportunity to run a whole gamut of characterizations. Each one presented is almost a caricature of a part, like something lifted out of Dickens. Therefore, you do not need to be afraid of overplaying the scene or of exaggerated movements. During your first few experiments it will be best if you do. Later, you can modify any tendency you might have for "hamming it up." Right now your chief concern is getting yourself to relax, in making your bodily movements free and easy. Walk all over the stage in portraying these various characterizations. Present each one to a different person on the stage. After all, this scene takes place in a theatre. The people are gathered there to see a play. Cyrano will let them see a play, all right, but not the one they think; he will entertain them himself. If you do let Cyrano move about freely in this scene, it will assist you greatly in freeing your bodily movements. (We are trying to take you from the larger stage movements to an eventual proficiency in the subtler ones, but at this point in your acting career probably one of your biggest problems is deciding how and where to move.) Experiment, experiment, and soon you will lose yourself in the part of Cyrano.

CHAPTER VII

PROBLEM: THE USE OF LARGE HAND AND BODY MOVEMENTS. SPECIAL
EMPHASIS ON THE USE OF THE CAPE AND HAT¹

This problem is also an excerpt from Cyrano de Bergerac, again presenting Cyrano in one of his more playful moods. Here the farcical element is used to a ludicrous extreme. Cyrano has placed himself outside Roxane's garden gate. He is waiting there to play a trick on an old enemy of his, De Guiche, a very proud and stuffy fellow. At this particular moment De Guiche is in a dreadful hurry; any delay at all would be ruinous. Cyrano is determined to stop him. But how? The plan Cyrano hits upon is truly the height of the ridiculous--pretending he has just fallen out of the moon.

In your first problem, Jaques' All the World's a Stage, you used a handkerchief. In the second excerpt you focused your attention on making broad stage movements, coupled with broadly comic characterizations. Now, on your third problem, you will again make broad movements but they will be furiously comical. You will also use a cape and a hat. These two pieces of apparel will be used

¹Rostand, Cyrano de Bergerac, Act iii.

to conceal your identity from De Guiche. Your actions will be played away from De Guiche, but well toward the audience. The audience would get several glimpses of your face as you gleefully, almost devilishly, cavort through your Moon man role.

In this speech Cyrano may assume various stage positions. As in the nose speech he should move about freely, but there is a distinct difference in the two roles. In the nose speech the stage movement is deliberate, with little change in tempo or rhythm. In the Moon speech the movements are sometimes slow and tenuous, at others, fast and almost staccato; sometimes graceful, and other times screamingly cumbersome.

You must decide these stage movements and establish them. Among other positions you take be sure to take the full front one. True, it is not in general use today, but it was used a great deal in the plays of the past, particularly at the end of the last century. Remember the old-fashioned melodrama where the black-hearted villain walked directly to the footlights and in his darkest malvolence said to the audience, "Curses, foiled again," and the audience all responded with appropriate hisses? This is the exaggerated style Cyrano employs in the full front position. Today a more realistic style of acting is in general use, but since the Moon speech is absolutely mad

anyway, we shall "let ourselves go."

A full back position is also slightly unorthodox, but we are going to use it. In this stage movement the back is turned entirely away from the audience, so that the face is entirely hidden.

There is also a profile position in which the actor turns his side to the audience and speaks across the stage.

Regardless of how many other positions you use, try at least these three. Once you are satisfied you have appropriate ones, rehearse them over and over until you have them absolutely mastered. Experiment, experiment, but once the role has been established allow yourself no deviations.

CYRANO DE BERGERAC

DE GUICHE

Here is the house--all darkness--Damn this mask!

As he is about to enter the house, Cyrano leaps from the balcony, still holding fast to the branch, which bends and swings him between De Guiche and the door; then he releases the branch and pretends to fall heavily as though from a height. He lands flatlong on the ground, where he lies motionless, as if stunned. De Guiche leaps back.

What is that?

When he lifts his eyes the branch has sprung back into place. He can see nothing but the sky; he does not understand.

Why . . . where did this man fall from?

He continues to look up--mouth distended.

CYRANO

--the moon!

Sits up and speaks with a strong accent.

DE GUICHE

You

. . . he cannot see the face

CYRANO

From the moon, the moon!
I fell out of the moon!

Cyrano points without looking

DE GUICHE

The fellow is mad.

-- to the audience --

CYRANO

Where am I?

dreamily

DE GUICHE

Why--

--is Cyrano dangerous?

CYRANO

What time is it? What place
is this? What day? What
season?

still dreamily--getting almost
gay

DE GUICHE

You--

--is he dangerous?

CYRANO

I am stunned!

slaps his head--

DE GUICHE

My dear sir--

--he is about to say he is
in a hurry

CYRANO

Like a bomb--a bomb--I
feel from the moon!

he grabs De Guiche by the arm
--pointing to Moon

DE GUICHE

Now, see here--

pushing his arm away

CYRANO

I say, the Moon!

rising to his feet, and speak-
ing in a terrible voice.

DE GUICHE

Very well--if you say so--
Raving made--

Recoils
Aside--to audience

CYRANO

I am not speaking meta-
phorically!

Advancing upon him

DE GUICHE

Pardon.

bows mockingly

CYRANO

A hundred years--an hour ago--
I really cannot say how long full front to audience
I fell--I was in yonder
shining sphere--

DE GUICHE

Quite so.
Please let me pass.

Shrugs--takes handkerchief
from sleeve.

CYRANO

Where am I? Tell the
truth--I can bear it. In
what quarter of the globe
have I descended like a
meteorite?

Interposes himself

DE GUICHE

Morbleu!

--lightly touches hanky to
right temple.

CYRANO

I could not choose my place
to fall--The earth spun
around so fast--Was it the
Earth, I wonder?--Or is this
another world? Another Moon?
Whither have I been drawn
by the dead weight of my
posterior?

--whimperingly--

--in mock terror--

DE GUICHE

Sir, I repeat--

--lightly to left temple

CYRANO

His face! My God--black!

With a sudden cry, which
causes De Guiche to recoil
again.

DE GUICHE

Oh--

Carries his hand to his mask.

CYRANO

Are you a native? Is this Africa? Terrified

DE GUICHE

--This mask! --slightly smiles

CYRANO

Are we in Venice? Genoa? Somewhat reassured

DE GUICHE

A lady is waiting for me. Tries to pass him

CYRANO

So this is Paris! Quite happy again

DE GUICHE

This fool becomes amusing. Smiling in spite of himself

CYRANO

Ah, Your smiling? --index finger lifted

DE GUICHE

I do. Kindly permit me-- --hanky back in sleeve

CYRANO

Dear old Paris--Well, well!--Excuse my appearance. I arrive by the last thunderbolt--a trifle singed as I came through the ether. These long journeys--You know! There are so few conveniences! My eyes are full of star-dust. On my spurs, some sort of fur . . . Planet's apparently . . . Look--on my doublet--That's a Comet's hair! Phoo!

Delighted
Wholly at his ease, smiles,
bows, arranges his dress

Plucks something from his sleeve.
He blows something from the back of his hand.

DE GUICHE

Monsieur--

Grows angry

CYRANO

Here's a tooth, stuck in my boot, from the Great Bear. Trying to get away, I tripped over the Scorpion and came down slap, into one scale of the Balances--the pointer marks my weight this moment . . . See? Be careful! If you struck me on the nose, it would drip milk!

As De Guiche is about to push past, thrusts his leg in the way

Pointing upward.
De Guiche makes a sudden movement. Cyrano catches his arm.

DE GUICHE

Milk?

arranges lace on sleeve

CYRANO

From the Milky Way!

throws out both arms wildly

DE GUICHE

Hell!

--stamps foot angrily

CYRANO

No, no--Heaven. Curious place up there--Did you know Sirius wore a night-cap? True! The little Bear is still too young to bite. My foot caught in the Lyre, and broke a string. Well--when I write my book, and tell the tale of my adventures--all these little stars. That shake out of my cloak--I must save those to use for asterisks!

Crossing his arms.

Confidentially.

Laughing
Proudly

CYRANO

As for instance--having
stripped myself bare as a
wax candle, adorn my form
with crystals vials filled
with morning dew, and so
be drawn aloft, as the sun
rises drinking the mist of
dawn!

With increasing volubility

--his hands start at his
sides and gradually raise
against his body until they
are high over his head.

DE GUICHE

Yes--that makes one.

Takes a step toward Cyrano

CYRANO

Or, sealing up the air in
a cedar chest, rarefy it
by means of mirrors, placed
in an icosahedron.

Draws back to lead him away
from the door; speaks faster
and faster

DE GUICHE

Two.

Takes another step

CYRANO

Again, I might construct a
rocket, in the form of a
huge locust, driven by
impulses of villainous salt-
petre from the rear, upward,
by leaps and bounds.

Still retreating

--he slaps his buttocks re-
peatedly, leaping high with
each slap

DE GUICHE

Three.

Interested in spite of him-
self, and counting on his
fingers

CYRANO

Or again, smoke having a
natural tendency to rise,
blow in a globe enough to
raise me.

Same business--hands as if
carrying a huge globe and
high on his toes

DE GUICHE

Four!

Same business, more and more astonished.

CYRANO

Or since Diana, as old fables tell, draws forth to fill her crescent horn, the marrow of bulls and goats-- to anoint myself therewith.

--as if pouring from a huge cornucopia over his head

DE GUICHE

Five!--

Hypnotized

DE GUICHE

That will do now--
I wish--

--again he tries to pass

CYRANO

Yes, yes--I know--

--again Cyrano restrains him

DE GUICHE

Sir--

--he puts his hand to his sword.

CYRANO

You desire to learn from my own lips the character of the Moon's surface--its inhabitants if any--

--Cyrano gently but firmly lifts the hand away

DE GUICHE

I desire no such thing! I-- loses patience and shouts

CYRANO

You wish to know by what mysterious means I reached the moon? Well--confidentially--it was a new invention of my own.

Rapidly

DE GUICHE

Drunk too--as well as mad!

Discouraged

CYRANO

I scorned the eagle of
Regiomontanus, and the
dove of Archytas!

--his hands make the shapes
of the birds

DE GUICHE

A learned lunatic!--

--really disgusted, but also
fascinated

CYRANO

I imitated no one. I
myself discovered not one
scheme merely, but six--
Six ways to violate the
virgin sky!

De Guiche has succeeded in
passing him, and moves toward
the door of Roxane's house.
Cyrano follows, ready to use
violence if necessary

DE GUICHE

Six?

looks around

Poor De Guiche! He has been delayed just long enough to bring his well-laid plans to naught, and Cyrano is ecstatic with joy. We are happy to see the stuffy De Guiche suffer frustration. Our sympathy is entirely with Cyrano.

But before we leave the Moon speech, let us consider it from a different standpoint, or rather, from a different point of view altogether. Suppose you now try to play the part of De Guiche. You are no longer the protagonist in the play, but now you are the antagonist, the fly in the ointment, so to speak. You, as a sincere actor, should be able to feel yourself into the part of De Guiche even though your personal sympathies may lie entirely with Cyrano. A good actor strives to acquire a sympathetic understanding of each character in the play, to realize what inner impulses cause him to feel and act as he does. Often this is not easy to do.

CHAPTER VIII

PROBLEM: DEVELOPING A SYMPATHY FOR THE CHARACTER. SPECIAL
EMPHASIS ON THE SMALL MUSCLE MOVEMENTS AND
THE MEMORY OF EMOTIONS¹

Richard Boleslavsky wrote a book called Acting: The First Six Lessons. It is written in highly entertaining and instructive dialogue form. The two in the dialogue are the director, called "I" and an aspiring young actress called "The Creature." In the following dialogue The Creature approaches the director in a very depressed mood. In her desperate hands she is clutching her script:

THE CREATURE

Suppose I don't find a similar feeling in my life's experience, what then?

I

Impossible! If you are a sensitive and normal human being, all life is open and familiar to you. But you will have to use your imagination. You can never tell where you will find the thing you are after.

THE CREATURE

All right, suppose I have to play a murderer. I have never murdered anybody. How shall I find it?

¹Boleslavsky, Acting: The First Six Lessons, p. 6.

I

Oh, why do actors always ask me about murder? The younger they are the more murders they want to act? All right, you have never murdered anybody. Have you ever camped?

THE CREATURE

Yes.

I

Ever sat in the woods at the edge of a lake after sundown?

THE CREATURE

Yes.

I

Were there any mosquitoes?

THE CREATURE

Yes.

I

Did they annoy you? Did you follow one among them with your eyes and ears and hate until the beast landed on your forearm? And did you slap your forearm cruelly without even thinking of the hurt to yourself--with only one wish--to kill?

THE CREATURE

Yes.

I

There you are. A good sensitive artist needs no more.

It is quite clear from this simple illustration what Boleslavsky has in mind. Each one of us has a set of experiences, memories of emotions, all sorts of things at our recall that are precious to our own. These are ours, and only ours, and with them we are qualified to do any role in the theatre we may be given.

Apply the thought in your interpretation of De Guiche. Think of the time you were in a tremendous hurry. You had only a limited amount of time to get some place, and you didn't want anything to stop you. But you were delayed. Remember how annoyed you were? Maybe in retrospect you can laugh, but the experience was anything but funny while you were going through it. Think about that experience right now, carefully. Now, do you see the great annoyance De Guiche must have felt as he was delayed by a man from the Moon?

Be sure to listen to Cyrano; cooperate with him in this scene. Remember, you must subordinate your actions to his. You can do this if you remember he has most of the lines but you have most of the responses. That means you will "freeze"--remain almost rigid when he is speaking--and he will "freeze" when you are responding. (There is a term in the theatre that is called "stealing the stage," and, unfortunately, there are some beginning high school actors who are, intentionally or unintentionally guilty of

this unpardonable fault. If you practice the "freeze" you will probably avoid it. Start with De Guiche in building up a right attitude.) Whatever you do in your characterization, you must promote rather than retard Cyrano's plan. Concentrate, concentrate, concentrate!

By now you should have developed a certain kind of sympathy for De Guiche, just as The Creature came around to a sympathy for her role of murderer in the play. You will find many, many times in your high school career that you are assigned characters that are outside your experiences and sympathies. It is well to remember what Boleslavsky has to advise in order for you to overcome your shortcomings and prejudices.

CHAPTER IX

PROBLEM: PAYING ATTENTION TO THE SPEAKER. SPECIAL
EMPHASIS ON HOW TO SIT AND LISTEN ATTENTIVELY¹

We are in the living room of the Reverend Loring Rigley. A famous actor, Eugene Tesh, is visiting him and his wife. Rigley feels "the life of a Christian is not compatible with the life of an actor," and does little to disguise his feelings, even to his actor guest. But Tesh is equal to the occasion. He thinks he can break down the prejudices of people against the stage by flattering them into thinking they can act. He makes his technique work on the pompous pastor by telling him that he bears a remarkable resemblance to Edwin Booth, the famous actor. Right at the moment, however, Tesh is being forced to sit through the performance of one of the "flattered" local hopefuls. Lena is ready to recite Ring Out, Wild Bells. Lena's mother is standing beside the telephone, beaming with maternal pride. The pastor, properly softened by the flattering word, also beams. Mary, his wife, hardly beaming, is pleasantly amused at Tesh, whose invincible flattery has boomeranged. Tesh,

¹Kelly, The Flattering Word, Act 1.

having heard a few child wonders in his day, squirms in pained and strained anticipation of the coming ordeal.

There are many actors, and their names are legion, who get their own lines and their own actions down pat and who feel they have discharged their duties to themselves and the entire show. What they have failed to take into account is their responsibility to the other characters in the scene. Let's hope you do not fall into this category. If you do, get out of it in a hurry. After you have uttered your lines, it is absolutely imperative that you listen to what is said next, and next after that. Sooner or later you are going to get a part in a play where you are in a scene for five minutes or more and don't utter a word. What do you do all that time? You listen. How do you listen? Get this: Memorize everybody's part in your scenes. If you do, you'll be able to play any character in your scenes at a moment's notice. Some players like to trade off during the rehearsals. It's fun; it gives you the other person's point of view, and it really makes you pay attention. So at the risk of being repetitious, memorize everybody's part in your scene.

Paying attention does not necessarily mean bobbing your head up and down constantly, nor does it mean always rigid attention, what some directors call a freeze. Oftentimes it is little more than keeping your eyes on the

speaker. If you are really listening to the speaker you'll do the right thing. Get ready to pay attention.

Remember your problem in this excerpt: Pay attention to what Lena is saying. If you are playing the part of Tesh, you are thinking to yourself, "Dear Lord, will that child never end?" If you are Mary you are thinking, "It serves Gene good and right for being so smug." If you are the mother you are thinking, "Jest think what I might have done in the theatre if I hadn't got married. Why, I might have gone to the heights." And last, but certainly not to be forgotten, is Rigley:

I don't wish to be uncharitable, but figuratively speaking I hope Lena falls flat on her face. If Lena should forget this poem, I could continue it faultlessly. Yes, yes, it is one of my favorites.

Perhaps Tesh would see then that some of the finest speaking is done from the pulpit, rather than the stage.

Choose your character. Pay attention to Lena.

THE FLATTERING WORD

LENA

Ring out, wild bells, to
the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the
frosty light;
The year is dying in the
night;
Ring out, wild bells, and
let him die.

Holding the sides of her skirt
with both hands, and breaking
into a faint, flat voice.

MRS. ZOOKER

Louder, dear!

Tesh turns and looks at Mrs.
Zooker; so does Lena.

Louder.

LENA

Ring out the old, ring
in the new--
Ring, happy bells, across
the snow;
The year is going, let
him go;

Turning to resume, and
speaking a little louder.

Ring out the false, ring
in the true.

Here Lena makes a kind of
lunging gesture towards Tesh,
which causes him to start
slightly, and move quietly
to the other end of the
settee.

The telephone rings twice.

MRS. ZOOKER

Go right on, dear.

As Lena turns to her. To
Mary, and starting towards
the telephone at the left
of the hall door.
Picking up the phone.

I'll answer it!
Go right on, Lena!

LENA

I forget where I was now!

MRS. ZOOKER

Ring out the grief that
saps the mind.

LENA

Turning to Tesh, smiling.

Oh, sure!

Ring out the grief that saps
the mind.
For those that here we see
no more;

MRS. ZOOKER

Mr. Who?

Into the telephone.
Tesh turns to Mary, but she
is watching Mrs. Zooker.

LENA

Ring out the feud of rich
and poor,

MRS. ZOOKER

Magoon?

Into phone.
Rigley turns slowly and looks
at Mrs. Zooker

LENA

Ring in redress to all
mankind.

Lena and Mrs. Zooker speak-
ing at the same time.

(LENA

Ring out a slowly dying
cause,

(MRS. ZOOKER

Into phone.

Why there's nobody here
by that name that I know of. Tesh is in a still panic.

LENA

And ancient forms of paltry
strife;

(Lena and Mrs. Zooker speaking
at same time)

(LENA

Ring in the nobler modes of
life,

(MRS. ZOOKER

Well, just a minute and I'll
see!

LENA

With sweeter manners, purer
laws.

(Lena and Mrs. Zooker speaking
at same time)

(LENA

Ring out the care, the want,
the sin,

(MRS. ZOOKER

There's a woman here lookin'
for a man called Magoon!

Turning to Mr. Rigley.

(Lena and Rigley speaking at
same time)

(LENA

The faithless coldness of
the times;

(RIGLEY

She must have the wrong number.

MRS. ZOOKER

She must have.

LENA

Ring out, ring out, my
mournful rhymes,

(Lena and Mrs. Zooker speaking
at same time)

(LENA

But ring the fuller min-
strel in.

(MRS. ZOOKER

Why, Mr. Rigley sez you must Into phone.
have the wrong number.

LENA

Ring out false pride in
place of blood,

MRS. ZOOKER

This is Hillcrest, two Into phone.
four.

LENA

The civic slander and the
spite;

MRS. ZOOKER

You're welcome. Into phone.
She sets down the phone.

LENA

Ring in the love of truth
and right.

MRS. ZOOKER

Excuse me.

Tiptoeing back to her place
at Lena's right, and speaking
to Tesh and Mary as she goes.

LENA

Ring in the common love of
good.

Here she pauses, and, placing her hand to her mouth, turns and looks at her mother.

MRS. ZOOKER

Can't you remember the rest of it, dear?

LENA

No, I think that's all I remember just now; It's been so long since I done it.

Turning to Tesh.

RIGLEY

Extending his arm magnificently, and breaking into declamation, as he struts across in front of the table towards Tesh.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease,

(Rigley and Lena speaking at same time)

(RIGLEY

Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;

(LENA

Turning suddenly to her mother.

Oh, yes, I know what it is now!

MRS. ZOOKER

Shut up, dear!

RIGLEY

Becoming more dramatic as he proceeds.

Ring out the thousand wars of old;

He makes a gesture here that comes rather close to Tesh's head.

Well, you see, Reverend Rigley did get his wish to finish the poem in the grand manner. Tesh, quick to see his chance for the coup de grace, recovers his composure, and assures Rigley if the pulpit hadn't gotten him the theatre would. Then Tesh moves in for the kill, his real purpose being to get Rigley and Mary to the play that night. He persuades the pastor to go to see for themselves that there is nothing in the play or in the theatre to endanger their salvation. Oddly enough, the name of the play they will see is The Open Mind.

All ends well in The Flattering Word. Mary is going to get to see a play, the first one since her marriage, and Rigley will have his mind opened, wide open, because he is going to see how mistaken he has been all his life. We had a hunch at the beginning of the play as to how it would end. We were not surprised.

Raymond Woodbury Spence once said in effect that the spectator does not gain pleasure through being surprised himself; in fact, he is so to speak in on everything. Rather, his pleasure comes in seeing surprises come to those on the stage, in witnessing the reactions of characters of a play to a given situation that he already knows about. Perhaps in the more serious type of drama many exceptions to this theory could be cited, but in the

lighter comedies, and certainly in The Flattering Word, we are in wholehearted agreement. We know at the beginning of the play the pastor will take to the "flattering word" as a cat does to catnip. Our enjoyment is complete when it happens.

CHAPTER X

PROBLEM: POINTING UP A CHARACTERIZATION. SPECIAL
EMPHASIS ON USING THE VAGUE STARING EYES
AND THE RESTLESS HANDS SIMULTANEOUSLY¹

Captain Keeney, a New England whalter, is dominated by an unconquerable pride. At the end of the two year period his crew have signed up for, he has only a small part of his quota of 'Ile. The crew are mutinous and the captain's wife is distraught from loneliness and anxiety. Only the prospect of her breakdown alters the captain's determination to push on for the 'Ile, and seeing her condition he consents to sail for home; but the infant whales are sighted and he reverses his decision. The woman breaks under the strain.

Remember in this scene Annie is just about to lose her mind. She has been in the cold and the ice for several months. She is beginning to think she'll never get back to civilization. As she speaks in the following excerpt, her eyes see her memories. David, at her side, is simply not there as far as she is concerned. Your problem is to decide what to do with your eyes and hands. In her hand

¹O'Neill, 'Ile, Act 1.

she holds a handkerchief. Make sure you have a handkerchief that can be torn to pieces. This vague, staring use of the eyes, plus the constant tearing and twisting of the handkerchief, should make a very telling scene.

'ILLE

ANNIE

David, if you've got a heart at all, you've got to turn back. She throws her arms around him and sobs.

DAVID

I can't, Annie. Harshly, looking away.

ANNIE

Why can't you? drying her eyes

DAVID

A woman wouldn't rightly understand my reason. still looking away

ANNIE

Because it's a stupid, stubborn reason. You're afraid the other captains will sneer at you because you came back without a full ship. bursting into fresh tears and talking wildly

DAVID

It ain't that, Annie. It ain't so much what anyone would say, but I've always done it--I've always come back with a full ship and it don't seem right not to now--Don't you see my meanin', Annie?--Annie! Best turn in now. she comes to with a start. Annie. . . . There's a good woman. . . . You ain't well.

ANNIE

Won't you please turn back, David? she begins to twist her handkerchief

DAVID

I can't, Annie--not yet
awhile. You don't see my impatiently
meanin'. I got to get the
'ile.

ANNIE

It'd be different if you needed
the money. You've got more she resists his attempt to
then plenty. lead her away

DAVID

It ain't the money I'm think-
in' of. Do you think I'm as he is amazed at her.
mean as that?

ANNIE

No--I don't know--I can't she stares into space scarce-
understand. Oh, I want to ly knowing what she is saying.
go home in the old house He is worried by her far-away
once more and see my own look.
kitchen again, and hear a
woman's voice talking to me
and be able to talk to her.
Two years! It seems so She wipes her brow with the
long ago. As if I'd been handkerchief.
dead and could never go back.

DAVID

Best go to bed, Annie. You He again tries to lead her.
ain't well.

ANNIE

I used to be lonely when you again she resists, she starts
were away. I used to think to speak to him sweetly
Homeport was a stupid, mono-
tonous place. Then, I used
to go down on the beach,
especially when it was windy,
and the breakers were rolling
in, and I'd dream of the fine
free life you must be leading.
I used to love the sea then. She laughs which is a half
sob. She pauses, then
continues with slow inten-
sity.

But now I never want to see
the sea again.

KENNEDY

'Tis no fit place to bring a woman, that's sure. I was a fool to bring ye. Thinking to humor her.

ANNIE

How long would it take us to reach home--if we started now? after a pause--passing her hand over her eyes with a gesture of pathetic weariness

DAVID

Bout two months, I reckon, Annie, with fair luck. frowning

ANNIE

That would be August, the latter part of August, wouldn't it, David? It was on the twenty-fifth of August we were married, wasn't it, David? counts on her fingers--then murmurs with a rapt smile.

DAVID

Don't you remember? tries to conceal the fact her memories have moved him.

ANNIE

My memory is leaving me--up herein the ice. It was so long ago--it's June now. The lilacs will all be in bloom in the front yard--and the climbing roses on the trellis to the side of the house--they're budding. --a pause--then she smiles dreamily she suddenly covers her face with her hands and commences to sob.

DAVID

Best go to bed, Annie. You're all worn out crying over what can't be helped.

ANNIE

You love me, don't you,
David?

Suddenly throwing her arms
around his neck and clinging
to him.

DAVID

You know you could have all
I got the power to give ye,
Annie.

ANNIE

Then, do this, this once, for
my sake, for God's sake--
take me home I'll go mad,
David, I know I will. If
you love me as you say,
take me home. For the love
of God, take me home.

She throws her arms around
him, weeping against his
shoulder.

DAVID

I'll do it, Annie--for your
sake if you say it's needful
fo you.

He holds her at arm's length
--his shoulders sag--he
becomes old.

ANNIE

God bless you for that, David. With wild joy, kissing him.

This scene occurs just before the curtain, three minutes, to be exact, and it is reasonable to assume David will direct his ship on a homeward course. Perhaps he would have, if Fate had not intervened at this very moment. The Second Mate comes in just then to announce excitedly, "the ice is breakin' up to the noth'rd, sir. There's a clear passage through the floe and clear water beyond, the lookout says." Keeney straightens himself like a man coming out of a trance. He leaves Annie shrieking, "David!" In the words of the author,

He turns abruptly and goes out. Mrs. Keeney does not appear to notice his departure. Her whole attention seems centered in the organ. She sits with half-closed eyes, her body swaying a little from side to side, to the rhythm of the organ. Her fingers move faster and faster, and she is playing wildly and discordantly as the curtain falls.

CHAPTER XI

PROBLEM: HOW TO ESTABLISH CONTRASTING COMEDY ROLES.

SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE USE OF THE LARGE

AND THE SMALL HANDKERCHIEF¹

The problem of heightening the characterization should be left on a lighter note. Let's turn our attention to an excerpt from Roughing It by Mark Twain. There is a chapter, "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral," that fits our purpose admirably.

First, let us try to understand the situation. Buck Fanshaw has been recently killed in a barroom brawl. His friend, Scotty Briggs, is quite broken up over the whole affair, and feels he should get the new parson "to jerk a little chin music over him and waltz him through handsome." So, with huge bandana in hand and blowing into it frequently and vigorously, he knocks on the parson's door to make his request known.

The parson, with spectacles on nose, and handkerchief at said, answers the knock. The wild west is hard on his "hay fever."

¹Twain, Roughing It, p. 225.

ROUGHING IT

SCOTTY

Are you the duck that runs the
gospel-mill next door?

--he blows vigorously be-
fore he speaks.

PARSON

Am I the--pardon me, I believe
I do not understand?

he looks over the glasses
he wears.

SCOTTY

(With a sigh and half-sob)
Why you see we are in a bit of
trouble, and the boys thought
maybe you would give us a lift,
if we'd tackle you--that is,
if I've got the rights of it
and you are the head clerk of
the Doxology--works next door.

--again he blows--but this
time he wads up his hanky
and puts it in his left
hip pocket.--then he speaks.

PARSON

I am the shepherd in charge of
the flock whose fold is next
door.

he removes his glasses and
holds them in his left hand.

SCOTTY

The which?

he closes his right eye.

PARSON

The spiritual adviser of the
little company of believers
whose sanctuary adjoins these
premises.

--he smiles indulgently at
this unlettered mining man.

SCOTTY

(scratching his head) You
rather hold over me, Pard. I
reckon I can't call that hand.
Ante and pass the buck.

--removing his hat in order
to scratch head.

PARSON

How? I beg pardon. What did I understand you to say?

--the smile fades. Is this man speaking English?

SCOTTY

Well, you've rather got the bulge on me. Or maybe we've both got the bulge, somehow. You don't smoke me and I don't smoke you. You see, one of the boys has passed in his checks, and we want to give him a good sendoff, and so the thing I'm on now is to roust out somebody to jerk a little chin-music for us and waltz him through handsome.

wags his head sadly. Start to replace hat--then remembers he is speaking to a parson.

--out comes the hanky. . . and the blows quickly follow.

PARSON

My friend, I seem to grow more and more bewildered. Your observations are wholly incomprehensible to me. Cannot you simplify them in some way? At first I thought perhaps I understood you, but I grope now. Would it not expedite matters if you restricted yourself to categorical statements of fact unencumbered with obstructing accumulations of metaphor and allegory?

--he takes a delicate hanky from his outside pocket and begins to wipe his glasses, not because they are dirty but because he doesn't know what else to do.

SCOTTY

I'll have to pass, I judge.

--shrugs shoulders, smiles sadly

PARSON

How?

--stops wiping glasses

SCOTTY

You've raised me out, Pard.

--sincerely

PARSON

I still fail to catch your meaning.

still stopped wiping.

SCOTTY

Why, that last lead of yours is too many for me--that's the idea. I can't neither trump nor follow suit.

--out comes the inevitable tobacco plug and the huge bite

SCOTTY

(both lost in thought. Scotty sorrowful but confident.) I've got it now, so's you can savvy. What we want is a gospel-sharp. See?

--he is looking at the floor because the parson is something of a distraction.

PARSON

A what?

--still frozen.

SCOTTY

Gospel-sharp. Parson.

--now he looks at the parson.

PARSON

Oh! Why did you not say so before? I am a clergyman--a parson.

--now he begins to rub his glasses happily and vigorously.

SCOTTY

Now you talk! You see my blind and straddle it like a man. Put it there! Now we're all right. Pard. Let's start fresh. Don't you mind my snuffling a little--becuz we're in a power of trouble. You see, one of the boys has gone up the flume.

--he starts to extend his hand but draws it back and looks at it--rubs it on his hip and then extends it. --the parson happily shakes it.

PARSON

Gone where?

--the parson stops dead.

SCOTTY

Up the flume--threwed up the sponge, you understand.

--how stupid can a parson be?

PARSON

Thrown up the sponge?

--puts his glasses on and looks right at Scotty.

SCOTTY

Yes--kicked the bucket--

PARSON

Ah,--has departed to that mysterious country from whose bourne no traveler returns.

--locks his hands in front of him with blessed assurance.

SCOTTY

Return! I reckon not. Why, Pard, he's dead.

--again the handkerchief and again the same blows.

This scene between Scotty and the Parson is one of the most hilarious Mark Twain has ever written. What makes it so funny? True, the fact that both men are speaking the same language without understanding each other in the least is part of it. But from the high school actor's standpoint the humor, in a great measure, derives from the situation. Both of them are using handkerchieves, but how differently! Consider how will they use them. Will they blow and then speak, or speak and then blow? Whatever you decide, let one do it one way and one the other. Try the whole scene again, before you leave it, and have fun with it.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION ON THE USE OF THE HANDS. WHAT TO DO AND WHAT NOT TO DO

It has been the intention of the investigator to get the high school actor to use his hands in these first few exercises. The handkerchief has been the most important stage prop suggested, since it brings the hands out in the open and gives something to use.

What to do with the hands is one of the most difficult problems confronting the inexperienced actor. They often seem awkward to him because he does not know what to do with them. The drama teacher's problem is to get him to use them, if not with a handkerchief, then with something else he is able to hold.

In this present day of the wide screen, Vista-vision, television, or whatever is the newest "vision," the average high school actor is apt to come to some false conclusions through the use of the "close-up" shots. He is inclined to copy the subtle use of gesture employed in these mediums, with the result that much of his acting will be lost in a high school auditorium. Therefore, the drama teacher needs to be aware of the constant need of enlarging the student's gestures.

CHAPTER XIII

PROBLEM: HOW TO USE THE TELEPHONE TO REINFORCE THE PLOT.

SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE PARALYTIC'S USE

OF THE EYES AND VOICE¹

Few stage props are used so frequently and so effectively as the telephone. One of the best uses of the telephone is in Two Crooks and a Lady by Eugene Pillot. Miller, one of the crooks, tells Lucille, the other crook, the plan he has in mind for getting the maid out of the house. He explains that it will all be done with a fake phone call, and he even tells her what the man on the other end of the line will say. A few minutes later the phone rings and the scene follows.

¹Pillot, Two Crooks and a Lady, Act 1.

TWO CROOKS AND A LADY

MILLER

Good enough; we'll cop it
this very afternoon!

--grabs her arms at the el-
bows and holds her fast.

LUCILLE

How?

--she tries to shake away.

MILLER

Listen, this is the dope.

--he tightens his grip.

LUCILLE

Uh-huh.

Eagerly.

MILLER

Servants are off today, 'cept
you, the cook, and the old
dame's companion. Cook's
way down in the kitchen--
and I've fixed it to get the
companion away.

--now he releases her--he
glances toward the door to
make sure no one is coming.

LUCILLE

How?

--she looks at herself in the
mirror--pretends disinterest.

MILLER

Dennis is across the street
--watching this window.

he walks over to her.

LUCILLE

Why?

she fixes her hair.

MILLER

When the time's ready, I'll
signal him with this handker-
chief and right off the
phone here will ring.
You answer it.

he draws and waves a not too
clean handkerchief.

LUCILLE

What's the game?

Puzzled.

MILLER

Dennis is going to send a
fake message--something about
a phony check--that'll get Miss
Jones out of the house.

Want you to answer the phone
so's to be sure it's Dennis.
Then call, her, understand.

--he does not have too much
respect for her brains--he
speaks with resigned
patience. . . he whirls her
around--he speaks sharply.

LUCILLE

Yes!

--pouting.

MILLER

After that it'll be plain
sailing.

--he sits confidently.

LUCILLE

But Dennis'll want some of
the loot for doing that?

--she sits with him.

MILLER

Naw, I promised him a tenner --he smiles, and leans back
if he'd send the phone message comfortably.
and then beat it to the sta-
tion and get a couple of
tickets for us.

LUCILLE

Murmur of voices from off
right.

Oh, they're coming now.
Better get away in a hurry!

Miller runs to the window.

MILLER

Don't forget to answer that
phone!

LUCILLE

I won't! They're almost

here! Hurry up and get out!

MILLER

No, I'm going to stay right here.

LUCILLE

But they'll see you!

MILLER

No, they won't. I'll slide behind this curtain.

He slips behind one of the window curtains, which remains partly open. He is completely concealed. Lucille pretends to arrange articles on the desk, furtively glancing at right door. From right enter Miss Jones, pushing an invalid's chair in which is seated Mrs. Simms-Vane. Miss Jones, the paid companion of Mrs. Simms-Vane, is a rather dull, systematic English woman, not in the least understanding her mistress, but as a result of long service, obeying her to the letter. Mrs. Simms-Vane, a hopeless paralytic for twenty years, cannot move her chin a quarter of an inch to right or left. Her body is rigid; her cheeks are webbed with the fine wrinkles of the years; her eyes are beautiful with patience; and her mouth is lovely with the firmness of suffering. Once very beautiful, she is now, at the age of sixty, as inert as a faded flower. She wears a rich but simple dress of black silk with white lace at the throat. Miss Jones wheels the chair to left corner, somewhat

to rear, and facing the table and the mirror on the right wall. She lifts one of the invalid's hands and places it so that it rests easily on the arm of her chair. As she goes to the other side of the chair and arranges the other hand in a similar manner, Miller, with his eye on Miss Jones and watched by Lucille, silently steps from behind the curtain, glances out the window, gives a quick wave of his handkerchief--the signal to the unseen Dennis--and slips behind the curtain again without being seen by either Miss Jones or Mrs. Simms-Vane.

MRS. SIMMS-VANE

No, to the right.

Too much. More to the left.

MISS JONES

May I ask why you always want your head faced that way?

MRS. SIMMS-VANE

You may ask.

As Miss Jones starts to make a slight adjustment of the old lady's head against the back of her chair.

Miss Jones moves the head slightly.

Miss Jones moves the head again.

Cooly amused.

Mrs. Simms-Vane's tone causes Miss Jones to step back abashed, and she does not venture the question. The telephone on the desk rings. Miss Jones starts toward it; but Lucille has already picked it up.

LUCILLE

I'll answer it, Miss Jones.
Hello--Yes--Yes!

All right, I'll call her.
It's for you, Miss Jones.

Speaks into the telephone.
Glances in direction of Miller.
Turns to Miss Jones.

MISS JONES

Thank you. Hello--Yes--
Oh, is that so?--Very well.
I'll be right down to see
about it.--Thank you.
Goodbye.

Goes to the telephone.

Mrs. Simms-Vane, that was
the Empire National Bank
on the phone.

Hangs up the receiver and goes
to Mrs. Simms-Vane.

MRS. SIMMS-VANE

Yes?

MISS JONES

The cashier has discovered
what appears to be an alter-
ation in a check you gave
Andrews, the grocer. They
asked me to go immediately to
their downtown offices; and I
told them I would.

MRS. SIMMS-VANE

Very well.

MISS JONES

To Lucille.

You will remain here with
Mrs. Simms-Vane. There will
be nothing to do for her.

Even though it is raining,
she will take her daily
ride at four as usual. By
that time, probably, I shall
return.

Goes to the door at right
where she turns and says to
Lucille.

Bear in mind our sympathies are all with Mrs. Simms-Vane. Miller has come to her home in order to steal the "thirty-three" from her. She is an old woman, completely paralyzed, and he is a young man armed with a gun. The odds against her seem insurmountable.

The problem of the play is, of course, that the elderly and helpless lady must overcome two strong young crooks by her intelligence and poise. The conflict is both physical and spiritual, as her cleverness and understanding enable her to destroy them through their own traits of jealousy, greed, cruelty, and sense of inferiority.

All these traits must begin to take shape even in this opening telephone scene. By this time Miss Jones has left the room and we know the crooks are going to fail in their quest.

CHAPTER XIV

PROBLEM: HOW TO USE THE TELEPHONE AS A COMEDY DEVICE.

SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE USE OF THE PAY PHONE¹

In Two Crooks and a Lady the telephone is used on the stage in plain view of the audience. Now let us consider the telephone used in a pay booth. Our excerpt will be taken from Three Men on a Horse.

Erwin Trowbridge has lived in a suburban home writing verses for Mother's Day for a boss who pays small wages. One day, Erwin, fed up with his wife and with his brother-in-law, instead of going to the office, makes his way to a saloon, determined to declare his independence of home and business. There he falls in with two men and a girl whose "profession" is betting on the horses. Now Erwin's hobby is "doping" out the races, and he becomes fabulously rich--on paper. He picks the right horses, but never once places a bet. He tells his new friends what horses to bet on and, to their astonishment, they win--so much for Erwin and his new friends.

In the following scene which takes place in the saloon, we see one of the "boys" go into the phone booth

¹Holm and Abbot, Three Men on a Horse, 1, 2.

and instead of closing the door after himself, he leaves it wide open. It is well that he does, since he repeats exactly what Gus is telling him at the other end of the line. The entire scene is especially funny because of the talk at the phone interspersed with the lively dialogue of Patsy, Erwin, and Charlie.

The phone is used to great advantage in this sequence, since it heightens the comedy effect of the over-all mood of the play. Three Men on a Horse employs the comedy use of the phone in several scenes; sometimes the door is left open, sometimes the door is closed.

THREE MEN ON A HORSE

FRANKIE

Hello, Gus . . . this
is Frankie. Hasty Belle is
four to one . . . yeah, Gus
. . . ?

FRANKIE (Enters. Crosses right
to phone booth; speaks while
he dials.) The bets are in
I'm calling Gus. It's post
time for the fourth. (Dials
phone leaving booth door open.)

HARRY

(brings change to Erwin.)
Gee, I hope he's not a nut,
you know how a guy can get
about horses.

--touches his temple lightly
in a knowing manner.

FRANKIE

Yeah, Gus, I'm here. . .
they're at the quarter--

--cocks hat on back of head.

HARRY

Here's your change

--he sets money in Erwin's
wobbly hand.

ERWIN

Thanks. (Harry goes back
to bar.)

--Erwin doesn't even look.

FRANKIE

Yeah, yeah, Joybird. . .
Little Lie. . . Post Script
I got it . . . Hasty Belle
in that order . . .

--takes hat off and wipes
brow with it.

PATSY

This is the fourth.

--looks at his notes.

CHARLIE

The one Hasty Belle is in.

--looks at his notes.

PATSY

He ain't done much this season.

--tosses notes down in disgust.

CHARLIE

Yeah, I know.

--likewise.

ERWIN

(opens eyes.) What's the matter?

--he is really in a fog.

PATSY

(crosses to both.) Horse race.

--almost a mumble.

FRANKIE

Joybird up at the half . . .	begins to gesture with his
Who comes up? . . . Little	hat hand.
Lie . . . Now Post Script	
. . . Neck to neck . . .	
yes . . . still that way?	
. . . They're in the stretch	
. . . yes, yes . . . He's	listens, then shouts to the
past (Turning to others)	men at the bar.
he's past . . . (back to tele-	
phone) who's past? . . .	same routine.
Joybird? Hasty Belle . . .	Throws hat in the air.
passes Joybird . . . she	
does	(Hangs up, turns to others.)

Hasty Belle wins!!

CHAPTER XV

PROBLEM: HOW TO USE THE TELEPHONE TO BUILD DRAMATIC
SUSPENSE. SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON EMOTIONAL CONTROL
IN PORTRAYING A DEMENTED PERSON¹

One of the most dramatic uses of the telephone occurs in The Giant's Stair. The player should be especially careful in this play that he does not become overly emotional. The player should try to act with restraint and leave something to the imagination of the listener. Many actresses who have attempted to play the part of Til have milked themselves dry far before the emotional climax has been reached.

There will be some members of the audience who consider acting at its best when it is simply at its noisiest. In his famous speech to the players, Hamlet called this type to account:

To tear a passion to tatters, to very rags . . .
to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the
most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable
dumb-show and noise.

Remember these two warnings: Do not be overemotional, and build the emotions as the scene builds. These

¹Steels, The Giant's Stair, Act 1.

warnings are to be remembered for all scenes that call for the intensely dramatic roles. The actor must have the emotional expressions under control at all times, otherwise the emotion will have him under control. Then, he is as apt as not to walk off the stage and finish his rendition out in the front street.

Til is a poor, demented creature, but she does have flashes of lucidity. She believes in ghosts and spirits; often she feels an urge to go outdoors to "horrify" herself. It is when the wind howls, she feels the greatest need for horrifying, and this night the wind is blowing a gale.

Mrs. Weathburn is fiercely protective of the poor, demented Til. Besides, her husband is dead, and she suspects murder. She tries to remain calm while all the elements outside seem to scream murder.

THE GIANT'S STAIR

TIL

Now't John's dead--now't he's
dead and gone for a ghost--
ghost in the trees--'long with
the dead giant's ghost--troop-
in' through the trees! Hark to
that wind, Abbie!

(In the instant of silence
following, the phone bell
begins to ring. With each
prlonged, shrill iteration
Til pronounces a name like a
child repeating in sing-
song note the rule of three.

Banes'!

(Ring!)

Tolleys'!

(Ring!)

Jetherses'!

(Ring!)

Whites'! Mis' White's, Abbie. (Ring!)

Somebody wantin' Mis'

White's. Who could it be

wantin' Mis' White's?

(Rising suddenly and softly,
she steps to the instrument,
lifts the receiver from the
hook with furtive care, and
puts it to her ear.)

MRS. WEATHERBURN

Don't Til! Don't do that,
Til!

(More hopelessly.)

(Til, on whose face the blank-
ness has given way to a look
of animation at once eager,
willful, and sly, only puts
her hand over the mouthpiece
for answer, and continues
listening.)

TIL

It's Mis' Jethers, talkin' with
Mis' White. Mis' Jethers says
Jethers is havin' trouble with
his growth again. She says
the Pros'utor was by today,
and what can the Pros'utor
be snoopin' 'round this neigh-
borhood for--unless it's about
--Oh!

Oh!

(She jerks the receiver from her ear.)

(She looks at it with an expression of malignance, wounded, bewildered.)

MRS. WEATHERBURN

For heaven sake, Til!
What--

(Til replaces the receiver with a vicious click, and as abruptly goes droopy and appealing, tears in her eyes.)

MRS. WEATHERBURN

There! Don't you take on!
Come, Til, you set down in your chair again. That's a good girl!

(Crossing to put an arm about her sister's shoulders.)
(Having pushed and petted Til into place, she turns to the phone, takes the receiver, and after a moment's listening speaks into it.)

Yes, here's "somebody" again, May White. Yes, "snoopin'," Clara Jethers. Only 'tain't the same "somebody," happens. Yes, it was Til. My Til. And all I wanted to say was, I think two ladies, such as you, would consider 'emselves in pretty business, mindin' Til! Mindin' and mockin' such a one as Til! That's all. Oh, no, no, I didn't mean to be snappy, Clara. No, nor to you either, May. Only--No, I don't want you should think--How? Yes, 'tis. Blowin' furies up here. Yes, perfect cats and dogs. How? The road bridge! (To Til.) Clara Jethers says the brooks so swole down her way that their hay bridge has gone out and the road bridge like to any minute.

(To phone.)

Don't tell me! Yes, I knew 'twas
swellin', even up this far. When
I was out to the chicken I hear
it roarin' down to the meadow
bottom. Dear--dear! I guess we
shan't look to have many callers
tonight, 't any rate. More
likely to be callin' ourselves
down you ways, house and all.
No, Til, no; that was only
jokin'.

(Hastily, to the agitated
Til)

No danger of that, I guess.
I was speakin' to Til. Yes,
good night to both of you;
good night.

(To phone.)

(Replacing the receiver, she
moves away toward the
range, but halts before
reaching it, and stands
with her head lifted,
harkening to the stream
of the elements without.
After a moment she speaks
to herself.)

CHAPTER XVI

PROBLEM: HOW TO USE THE TELEPHONE TO CREATE COMEDY SUSPENSE
CHAOS. SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON DRINKING AND THE
DELAYED RESPONSE¹

The two old aunts have a very nasty habit. They put arsenic in elderberry wine which they induce certain subjects to imbibe. They sincerely believe they are doing a service to the unsuspecting individual, for they administer their concoction only to lonely old men who have nothing to live for. Their nephew, Mortimer, happens to be just in time to rescue one of their victims.

¹Kesselring, Arsenic and Old Lace, Act i.

ARSENIC AND OLD LACE

MORTIMER

City desk! Hello, Al
Do you know who this is?
That's right. Say, Al, when I
left the office, I told you
where I was going, remember?
--Well, where did I say? Uh-
huh.

Well, it would take me about
half an hour to get to
Brooklyn. What time have you
got?

That's right. I must be here.
He looks at his watch.
He hangs up, sits for a
moment, then suddenly leaps
off stool to kitchen.

.

MORTIMER

Hello!
Hello. Oh, hello, Al. My,
it's good to hear your
voice.

Phone rings. Mortimer, in a
daze, turns toward it and
without picking up receiver,
speaks.
He comes to, picks up
receiver. Abby at table is
still holding out for a twelve
count.

ABBY

Well, anyway, they're all
down in the cellar.--

MORTIMER

Ssshh--
Oh, no, Al, I'm sober as a
lark. I just called you
because I was feeling a
little Pirandello--Piran--
you couldn't know, Al.
Look, I'm glad you called.
Get hold of George right
away. He's got to review
the play tonight. I can't
make it. No, Al, you're
wrong. I'll tell you all

To Aunts.
Into phone, as Aunts cross to
sideboard and put candelabras
from top to bottom shelf.

about it tomorrow. Well, George, has got to cover the play tonight! This is my department and I'm running it! You get ahold of George!

He hangs up and sits a moment trying to collect himself.

.

MORTIMER

Elaine!

Hello! Oh, hello, Al. Hold on a minute, will you?-- All right, it's important! . . . But it can wait a minute, can't it? Hold on!

Look, Elaine, you're a sweet girl and I love you. But I have something on my mind now and I want you to go home and wait until I call you.

ELAINE

Don't try to be masterful.

In doorway.

MORTIMER

When we're married and I have problems to face I hope you're less tedious and uninspired!

Annoyed to the point of being literate.

ELAINE

And when we're married if we're married--I hope I find you adequate!

She exits. Mortimer does take, then runs out on porch after her, calling--

MORTIMER

Elaine! Elaine!

Hello, Al? Hello . . .
Hello . . .

Hello. Hello, Al?

ABBY

That's the doorbell, dear,
not the telephone.

How do you do? Come in.

MORTIMER

Hello--let me talk to
Al again. City desk. Al!!
City desk! What? I'm
sorry, wrong number.

MORTIMER

Hello, City desk.
Hello, Al? Mort. We got
cut off. Al, I can't
cover the play tonight--
that's all there is to it,
I can't.

MARTHA

What church do you go to?
There's an Episcopal church
practically next door.

GIBBS

I'm Presbyterian. Used to
be.

He runs back in, shutting
door, crosses and kneels on
window-seat and leaps off it.
Dashes into kitchen but re-
members Al is on phone, re-
enters immediately and crosses
to phone.

He pushes hook down and starts
to dial when doorbell rings.
He thinks it's the phone.
(Abby enters from kitchen.)

Crossing to door and opening
it. Mortimer pushes hook
down--dials. Mr. Gibbs steps
in doorway.

Into phone.
Loud
He hangs up and starts dialing
again as Gibbs looks at him.
Gibbs turns to Abby.

Into phone.

Her gesture toward window
brings her to window-seat and
she sits.

MORTIMER

What's George doing in Bermuda? Certainly I told him he could go to Bermuda-- it's my department, isn't it? Well, you've got to get somebody. Who else is there around the office?

Into phone.
Rises and gets loud.

He sits on second chair.

GIBBS

Is there always this much noise?

Annoyed. Rises and crosses below table to L. of it.

MARTHA

Oh, he doesn't live with us. Abby sits above table.

MORTIMER

There must be somebody around the place. Look, Al, how about the office boy? You know the bright one--the one we don't like? Well, you look around the office, I'll hold on.

Into phone.

GIBBS

I'd really like to see the room.

ABBY

It's upstairs. Won't you try a glass of our wine before we start up?

After seating Gibbs R. of table she has sat in chair above table.

GIBBS

Never touch it.

MARTHA

We make this ourselves. It's elderberry wine.

GIBBS

Elderberry wine. Why I haven't seen any since I was a boy. Thank you.

He pulls armchair around and sits as Abby uncorks bottle and starts to pour wine.

MORTIMER

Well, there must be some printers around. Look, Al, the fellow who sets my copy. He ought to know about what I'd write. His name is Joe. He's the third machine from the left. But, Al, he might turn out to be another Burns Mantle!

Into phone.

GIBBS

Do you have your own elderberry bushes?

To Martha.

MARTHA

No, but the cemetery is full of them.

Rising

MORTIMER

No, I'm drinking, but I am not going to start now.

GIBBS

Do you serve meals?

ABBY

We might, but first just see whether you like our wine.

Mortimer hangs up, puts the phone on top of desk and crosses L. He sees wine on top of table, goes to sideboard, gets glass, brings it to table and pours drink. Gibbs has his glass in hand and is getting ready to drink.

MARTHA

Mortimer. Eh eh eh eh eh eh eh eh.

Sees Mortimer pouring wine. Gibbs stops and looks at

Martha. Mortimer pays no attention.

As Mortimer raises glass to lips with left hand, Abby reaches up and pulls his arm down.

ABBY

Mortimer. Not that.

Mortimer, still dumb, puts his glass down on the table. Then he sees Gibbs who has just got the glass to his lips, and is about to drink. He points across table at Gibbs and gives a wild cry. Gibbs looks at him putting his glass down. Mortimer still pointing at Gibbs goes around above table toward him. Gibbs, seeing a madman, rises slowly, and backs toward c.--then turns and runs for exit, Mortimer following him. Gibbs opens door right, and Mortimer pushes him out, closing door after him. Then he turns, and leans on the door in exhausted relief. Meantime, Martha has risen and crossed to below armchair, while Abby has crossed to d.c.

MORTIMER

Get out of here! Do you want to be killed. Do you want to be murdered?

ABBY

Now you've spoiled everything.

She goes to sofa and sits.

Martha sits in armchair. Mortimer crosses to c. and looks from one to the other--then to Abby.

MORTIMER

You can't do things like that. Abby, people wouldn't understand.

ABBY

Mortimer, we don't try to stop
you from doing things you like
to do. I don't see why you
should interfere with us.

Mortimer sits in wide-eyed
amazement.

CHAPTER XVII

PROBLEM: HOW TO DRINK CORRECTLY. SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON DRINKING TEA ABSTRACTEDLY¹

Drinking on the stage is really an art, one of the most complicated problems the high school student will have to face. It is strange that this should be so, since it is something we do so frequently and habitually. Perhaps that is the reason it is so difficult; the habit has become ingrained.

In The Importance of Being Earnest occurs a very famous tea drinking sequence. Gwendolyn and Cecily are being served afternoon tea. It is a bright, sunny afternoon in Cecily's garden, but neither the lovely day or garden seem to have a very happy effect on the two young girls. They are very jealous of each other, each suspecting the other of being in love with Ernest.

Now, get ready for the scene. Remember these two girls really do not taste the tea they drink since they are so angry at each other. The cake they eat might as well be so much sawdust.

¹Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest, Act II.

It is well to give a special word of warning. Never pantomime eating or drinking. Nothing is harder to do than to pantomime these two processes. Try it for yourself and you will see. This does not mean that small bites cannot be taken. You will soon learn it is the only safe procedure. You must eat and drink so that it will not interfere with your speeches. Tiny nibbles will prove best. Don't eat just before speaking, but if you should accidentally, don't try to speak with food in your mouth. Chew and swallow gracefully before you proceed.

Remember, in this scene the girls are eating and drinking in a very preoccupied manner.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

Enter Merriman, followed by the footman. He carries a salver, table cloth, and plate stand. Cecily is about to retort. The presence of the servants exercises a restraining influence, under which both girls chafe.

MERRIMAN

Shall I lay tea here as usual, Miss?

CECILY

Yes, as usual.

Sternly, in a calm voice.

Merriman begins to clear table and lay cloth. A long pause. Cecily and Gwendolyn glare at each other.

GWENDOLYN

Are there many interesting walks in the vicinity, Miss Cardew?

CECILY

Oh, yes! A great many. From the top of one of the hills quite close one can see five counties.

GWENDOLYN

Five counties! I don't think I should like that. I hate crowds.

CECILY

I suppose that is why you live in town?

sweetly.

Gwendolyn bites her lip, and beats her foot nervously with her parasol.

GWENDOLYN

Quite a well-kept garden
this is, Miss Gardew.

Looking around.

CECILY

So glad you like it, Miss
Fairfax.

GWENDOLYN

I had no idea there were
any flowers in the country.

CECILY

Oh, flowers are as common
here, Miss Fairfax, as people
are in London.

GWENDOLYN

Personally I cannot understand
how anybody manages to exist
in the country, if anybody who
is anybody does. The country
always bores me to death.

CECILY

Ah! This is what the news-
papers call agricultural
depression, is it not? I be-
lieve the aristocracy are
suffering very much from it
just at present. It is almost
an epidemic amongst them, I have
been told. May I offer you
some tea, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLYN

Thank you.

With elaborate politeness.

Detestable girl! But I
require tea!

Aside.

CECILY

Sugar?

Sweetly.

GWENDOLYN

No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more.

Superciliously.
Cecily looks angrily at her, takes up the tongs and puts four lumps of sugar into the cup.

CECILY

Cake or bread and butter?

Severely.

GWENDOLYN

Bread and butter, please.
Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

In a bored manner.

CECILY

Hand that to Miss Fairfax.

Cuts a very large slice of cake, and puts it on the tray.

Merriman does so, and goes out with footman. Gwendolyn drinks the tea and makes a grimace. Puts down cup at once, reaches out her hand to the bread and butter, looks at it, and finds it is cake. Rises in indignation.

GWENDOLYN

You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I am known for the gentleness of my disposition, and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far.

CECILY

To save my poor, innocent, trusting boy from the machinations of any other girl there are no lengths to which I would not go.

rising.

GWENDOLYN

From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. I felt that you were false and deceitful. I am never deceived in such matters. My first impressions of people are invariably right.

She puts on her gloves with much ceremony--not once does she glance toward Cecily

CECILY

It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am trespassing on your valuable time. No doubt you have many other calls of a similar character to make in the neighborhood.

she rings the bells for Merriman--she then suppresses an ever so slight suggestion of a yawn.

It would seem that on this note Gwendolyn and Cecily are to leave each other, never wishing to speak to each other in their lifetime. But such is not the case. Before one is aware of it, they are again calling each other sister. Such is the way things happen in a satire, especially in one written by such an elegant satirist as Oscar Wilde.

This is a play of sheerest nonsense, and it would be well to keep this fact in mind when doing the drinking scene. The movements are all artificial, not for one moment giving the audience the impression that it is observing anything but the most preposterous artificiality.

CHAPTER XVIII

PROBLEM: HOW TO EAT CORRECTLY. SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON EATING MUFFINS WITH GREAT DELIBERATION¹

The same precious artificiality that Oscar Wilde established in the tea drinking scene between Cecily and Gwendolyn is further evidenced in the muffin eating sequence between Algernon and Jack, but the emphasis is entirely different. The two girls drink their tea and eat their cake with no relish at all and pay no attention to their eating. Their whole focus is on throwing the verbal barb. The two men are very conscious of the eating process. Algy takes great delight in eating the muffins, both because he definitely likes them, and also because he sees that he is infuriating Jack.

This brings us to a point the high school actor should begin to consider: the use of indefinite business. Indefinite business is the sort of thing an actor might do by drumming on the table with his fingertips, or whistling through his teeth, or any one of a number of things. The manipulation of parts of the costume or furniture could create opportunities for indefinite business.

¹Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest, Act II.

Algy has wonderful chances for indefinite business in his muffin scene. When he breaks the muffin, he does so elaborately; when he adds butter and jam, it is with broad gestures and great ceremony. All of this, of course, only adds to Jack's discomfiture. Even the smacking of the lips, and the satisfied sigh is exaggerated, but since it has the desired effect on Jack, Algy goes merrily along.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

JACK

This ghastly state of things is --looking away
 what you call Bunburying, I
 suppose?

ALGERNON

Yes, and a perfectly wonderful claps his hands almost
 Bunbury it is. The most won- childish
 derful Bunbury I have ever
 had in my life.

JACK

Well, you've no right what- still looking away
 soever to Bunbury here.

ALGERNON

That is absurd. One has a right
 to Bunbury anywhere one chooses.
 Every serious Bunburyist he looks at muffins
 knows that.

JACK

Serious Bunburyist! Good now he looks at him.
 heavens!

ALGERNON

Well, one must be serious he picks muffin up and opens
 about something, if one it very gently.
 wants to have any amusement
 in life. I happen to be
 serious about Bunburying.
 What on earth you are serious
 about I haven't got the remo-
 test idea. About everything,
 I should fancy. You have an
 absolutely trivial nature.

JACK

Well, the only small satis- he smirks as he talks.
 faction I have in the whole

of this wretched business
is that your friend Bunbury
is quite exploded. You won't
be able to run down to the
country quite so often as you
used to do, dear Algy. And a
very good thing, too.

ALGERNON

Your brother is a little off he spreads the butter with
colour, isn't he, dear Jack? great ceremony.
You won't be able to disappear
to London quite so frequently
as your wicked custom was.
And not a bad thing either.

again he looks away

JACK

As for your conduct toward Miss
Cardew, I must say that your
taking in a sweet, simple,
innocent girl like that is
quite inexcusable. To say now he looks back.
nothing of the fact that
she is my ward.

As for your conduct toward

--

ALGERNON

I can see no possible defense
at all for your deceiving a
brilliant, clever, thoroughly now he begins to eat with
experienced young lady like the greatest of relish, taking,
Miss Fairfax. To say oh, such small bites.
nothing of the fact that she
is my cousin.

JACK

I wanted to be engaged to he crosses legs at knees.
Gwendolyn, that is all. I
love her.

ALGERNON

Well, I simply wanted to be he takes a bit and sighs.
engaged to Cecily. I adore Her.

JACK

There is certainly no chance
of your marrying Miss Cardew.

he taps his foot.

ALGERNON

I don't think there is much
likelihood, Jack, of you and
Miss Fairfax being united.

he takes another muffin
and breaks it.

JACK

Well, that is no business of
yours.

he looks away.

ALGERNON

If it was my business, I
wouldn't talk about it.
(Begins to eat muffins.) It
is very vulgar to talk about
one's business. Only people
like stockbrokers do that,
and then merely at dinner
parties.

this time he spreads jam
on the muffin.

JACK

How you can sit there, calmly
eating muffins when we are in
this horrible trouble, I
can't make out. You seem to
me to be perfectly heartless.

he is furious

ALGERNON

Well, I can't eat muffins in an
agitated manner. The butter
would probably get on my cuffs.
One should always eat muffins
quite calmly. It is the only
way to eat them.

talk is slightly muffled
because of the muffin.

JACK

I say it's perfectly heartless
your eating muffins at all,
under the circumstances.

uncrosses legs and crosses
the other way.

ALGERNON

When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. Indeed, when I am in really great trouble, as anyone who knows me intimately will tell you, I refuse everything except food and drink. At the present moment I am eating muffins because I am unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins.
(Rising)

leans back in chair
dreamily--takes a bit.

JACK

(Rising) Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way. (Takes the muffins from Algernon.)

he really jerks the
muffins away.

ALGERNON

(offering tea-cake) I wish you would have tea-cake instead. I don't like tea-cake.

he hands him the plate
and tries to get back the
muffins.

JACK

Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own muffins in his own garden.

he is so amazed he re-
leases the muffins.

ALGERNON

But you have just said it was perfectly heartless to eat muffins.

he is now ready to sit down
and eat.

JACK

I said it was perfectly heartless of you, under the circumstances. That is a very different thing.

again the faraway glance.

ALGERNON

That may be. But the muffins are the same. (He seizes the muffin-dish from Jack.)

eating with great gusto.

JACK

Algy, I wish to goodness you would go.

He nibbles tea-cake.

ALGERNON

You can't possibly ask me to go without having some dinner. It's absurd. I never go without my dinner. No one ever does, except vegetarians and people like that. Besides I have just made arrangements with Dr. Chasuble to be christened at a quarter to six under the -- name of Ernest.

now he picks up a napkin and too elaborately wipes his mouth.

he folds his legs.

JACK

My dear fellow, the sooner you give up that nonsense the better. I made arrangements this morning with Dr. Chasuble to be christened myself at 5:30, and I naturally will take the name of Ernest. Gwendolyn would wish it. We can't both be christened Ernest. It's absurd. Besides, I have a perfect right to be christened if I like. There is no evidence at all that I ever have been christened by anybody. I should think it extremely probably I never was, and so does Dr. Chasuble. It is entirely different in your case. You have been christened already.

he also folds his--throughout the rest of this scene they fold and unfold simultaneously--

fold

ALGERNON

Yes, but I have not been christened for years.

--unfold--

JACK

Yes, but you have been christened. That is the important thing.

fold--

ALGERNON

Quite so. So I know my constitution can stand it. If you are not quite sure about your ever having been christened, I must say I think it rather dangerous your venturing on it now. It might make you very unwell. You can hardly have forgotten that someone very closely connected with you was very nearly carried off this week in Paris by a severe chill.

--unfold--

JACK

Yes, but you said yourself that a severe chill was not hereditary.

--he rises and starts to pace--

ALGERNON

It usen't to be, I know--but I daresay it is now. Science is always making wonderful improvements in things.

he is ready to take the last muffin.

JACK

(Picking up the muffin-dish.) Oh, that is nonsense; you are always talking nonsense.

he is angry.

ALGERNON

Jack, you are at the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't.

he slaps his wrist.

There are only two left.
(Takes them.) I told you I
was particularly fond of
muffins.

JACK

But I hate tea-cake.

ALGERNON

Why on earth then do you
allow tea-cake to be served
up for your guests? What
ideas you have of hospital-
ity!

again the elaborate dab at his
lips with the napkin.

JACK

Algernon! I have already
told you to go. I don't
want you here. Why don't
you go!

ALGERNON

I haven't quite finished my
tea yet! And there is still
one muffin left. (Jack
groans, and sinks into a
chair. Algernon still
continues eating.)

and there goes the last one
with as much relish as the
first.

Act-Drop

CHAPTER XIX

PROBLEM: HOW TO EAT WHEN THE FAMILY MEETS. SPECIAL EMPHASIS
ON EATING WHILE ANGRY AND EATING WHILE DRUNK¹

Sometimes an eating scene has such a vast amount of business connected with it the actual amount of eating that is done is really not very considerable. This is true in the very famous eating scene in Ah, Wilderness! There is so much bringing in dishes to the table, taking things away, and passing dishes all around, the audience pays little attention to exactly how much food is consumed. However, the actors must be especially careful about the drinking of the soup. The soup must be drunk and swallowed. Nothing is more annoying than seeing the actors pretending to drink, but really failing to do so.

It is a strange thing that a simple process such as eating demands all of the actor's resources to make it look pleasurable to the audience. Such, however, is the case. Eating on stage is no fun, so, an actor is really acting when he can make it appear so.

Sid's part calls for drunkenness. Now, when Sid comes to the table he is really in a roseate mood, but as

¹O'Neill, Ah, Wilderness, Act II.

the scene progresses, he grows more incoherent and more unsteady in his movements. At no time does he show evidence of quarrelsomeness; he is not thick-tongued, nor is he disgusting. Throughout the entire scene he remains jovial. The more he falls under the alcoholic influence, the more deliberate his movements become.

MRS. MILLER

All right, Norah. You can bring in the soup.

Goes to pantry door, opens it and calls.

She comes back to the back-parlor entrance just as Miller enters. He isn't drunk by any means. He is just mellow and benignly ripened. His face is one larger, smiling, happy beam of utter appreciation of life. All's right with the world, so satisfyingly right that he becomes sentimentally moved even to think of it.

MILLER

Here we are, Essie! Right on the dot! Here we are!

He pulls her to him and gives her a smacking kiss on the ear as she jerks her head away. Mildred and Tommy giggle. Richard holds rigidly aloof and disdainful, his brooding gaze fixed on his plate. Lily forces a smile.

MRS. MILLER

Don't you Crazy!

So I see, you're here! And if I didn't, you've told me four times already!

Pulling away--embarrassedly, almost blushing. Then recovering herself--tartly.

MILLER

Now, Essie, don't be critical. Don't be carp-ingly critical. Good news can stand repeating, can't it? 'Course it can!

beamingly.

He slaps her jovially on her fat buttocks. Tommy and Mildred roar with glee. And Norah, who has just entered from the pantry with a huge tureen of soup in her hands, almost drops it as she explodes in a merry guffaw.

MRS. MILLER

Nat! Aren't you ashamed!

Scandalized.

MILLER

Couldn't resist it! Just
simply couldn't resist it!

Norah, still standing with the
soup tureen held out stiffly
in front of her, again
guffaws.

MRS. MILLER

Norah! Bring that soup
this minute!

Turns on her with outraged
indignation.

NORAH

Guiltily.

Yes, Mum.

She brings the soup around
the head of the table, pass-
ing Miller.

MILLER

Why, hello, Norah!

Jovially.

MRS. MILLER

Nat!

She sits down stiffly at the
foot of the table.

NORAH

Airah now, don't be making
me laugh and getting me into
trouble!

Rebuking him familiarly

MRS. MILLER

Norah!

NORAH

Yes, Mum. Here I am.

A bit resentfully. She sets
the soup tureen down with a
thud in front of Mrs. Miller
and passes around the other
side, squeezing with difficulty
between the china closet and
the backs of chairs at the
rear of the table.

MRS. MILLER

Tommy! Stop spinning your napkin ring! How often have I got to tell you? Mildred! Sit up straight in your chair! Do you want to grow up a humpback? Richard! Take your elbows off the table!

MILLER

Well, well, well. Well, well, well. It's good to be home again.

MRS. MILLER

Oh! Nat, I do wish you wouldn't encourage that stupid girl by talking to her, when I'm doing my best to train--

MILLER

All right, Essie. Your word is law! We did have the darndest fun today! And Sid was the life of that picnic! You ought to have heard him! Honestly, he had that crowd just rolling on the ground and splitting their sides! He ought to be on the stage.

MRS. MILLER

He ought to be at the table eating something to sober him up, that's what he ought to be. Here, Norah. Sit down, Nat, for goodness sakes. Start eating, everybody. Don't wait for me. You know I've given up soup.

Coming to his place at the head of the table, rubbing his hands together genially.

Norah exits into the pantry and lets the door slam with a bang behind her.

Then exasperatedly.

Beamingly.

Then laughingly.

Norah comes back with a dish of saltines--begins ladling soup into the stack of plates before her.

Then to Norah, handing her a soup plate.

Norah begins passing soup.

MILLER

Essie, Sid's sort of embarrassed about coming--I'm afraid he's a little bit--not too much, you understand--

Sits down but bends forward to call to his wife in a confidential tone.

LILY

with stiff meekness

Very well, Nat.

MILLER

All right, Sid. The coast's clear.
Good soup, Essie! Good soup!

Beaming again--calls
He begins to absorb his soup ravenously.

A moment later Sid makes his entrance from the back parlor. He is in a condition that can best be described as blurry. His movements have a hazy uncertainty about them. His shiny fat face is one broad, blurred, Puckish, naughty-boy grin, his eyes have a blurred, wondering vagueness. As he enters he makes a solemnly intense effort to appear casual and dead, cold sober. He waves his hand aimlessly and speaks with a silly gravity.

SID

Good evening.

They all answer "Good evening," their eyes on their plates. He makes his way vaguely toward his place, continuing his grave effort at conversation.

Beautiful evening. I never remember seeing--more beautiful sunset.

He bumps vaguely into Lily's chair as he attempts to pass behind her--immediately he is all grave politeness.

Sorry--sorry, Lily--deeply sorry.

LILY

It's all right.

SID

Wha' was I sayin'? Oh, sunsets. But why butt in? Hasn't sun--perfect right to set? Mind y'r own business.

And there you are! Am I right?

MILLER

Right.

SID

Right!

Soup?

MRS. MILLER

Of course, it's soup. What did you think it was? And you hurry up and eat it.

SID

Well!

Well, all right then! Soup be it!

Her eyes on her plate--stiffly.

Manages to get into his chair at last--matters to himself.

He pauses thoughtfully, considering this--then looks around from face to face, fixing each with a vague, blurred, wondering look, as if some deep puzzle were confronting him. Then suddenly he grins mistily and nods with satisfaction.

Humoring him.

He is silent, studying his soup plate, as if it were some strange enigma. Finally he looks up and regards his sister and asks with wondering amazement.

Again regards his soup with astonishment.

Then suddenly--

He picks up his spoon and begins to eat, but after two tries in which he finds it difficult to locate his mouth,

Spoon, is this any way to
treat a pal?

Down with spoons!

We'll drink to the dead
already and hurrah for the
next who dies.

Your good health, ladies
and gents.

MRS. MILLER

Sid:

SID

Eh?

MRS. MILLER

Oh, nothing. Never mind.

SID

Are you--publicly rebuking
me before assembled--? Isn't
soup liquid. Aren't liquids
drunk?

What if they are drunk?
It's a good man's failing.

Am I right or wrong?

MRS. MILLER

Hurry up and finish your
soup, and stop talking
nonsense!

he addresses the spoon
plaintively:
Then suddenly comically angry,
putting the spoon down with a
bang.

He raises his soup plate and
declaims
Bowing solemnly to right and
left.
He starts drinking the soup.
Miller guffaws and Mildred
and Tommy giggle. Even
Richard forgets his melan-
choly and snickers, and Mrs.
Miller conceals a smile. Only
Lily remains stiff and silent.

With forced severity.

Peers at her muzzily, lower-
ing the soup plate a little
from his lips

Solemnly offended.

Then considering this to
himself.

He again peers mistily about
at the company.

SID

Oh, no, Essie, if I ever so far forget myself as to drink a leg of lamb, then you might have some--excuse for--just think of waste effort eating soup with spoons--fifty grueling lifts per plate--billions of soup-eaters on globe--why, it's simply staggering! No more spoons for me! If I want develop my biceps, I'll buy Sadow Exerciser!

Turning to her--again offendedly.

Then darkly to himself

He drinks the rest of his soup in a gulp and beams around at the company, suddenly all happiness again.

Am I right, folks?

MILLER

Haw, haw! You're right, Sid.

Who has been choking with laughter.

SID

Poor old Nat! Always wrong--but heart of gold, heart of purest gold. And drunk again, I regret to note. Sister, my heart bleeds for you and your poor fatherless chicks!

Peers at him blurredly and shakes his head sadly.

MRS. MILLER

Sid! Do shut up for a minute! Pass me your soup plates, everybody. If we wait for that girl to take them, we'll be here all night.

Restraining a giggle--severely.

They all pass their plates, which Mrs. Miller stacks up and then puts on the sideboard. As she is doing this, Norah appears from the pantry with a platter of broiled fish. She is just about to place these before Miller when Sid catches her eye mistily and rises to his feet, making

her a deep, uncertain bow.

SID

Ah, sight for sore eyes, my beautiful Macushla, my star-eyes Mavourneen--

MRS. MILLER

Sid! Will you get to bed, you idiot!

SID

Immediately--if not sooner.

Mutters graciously.
He turns to pass behind Lily, then stops, staring down at her.

But wait. There is still a duty I must perform. No day is complete without it. Lily, answer once and for all, will you marry me?

LILY

No, I won't--Never!

With an hysterical giggle.

SID

Right! And perhaps it's all for the best. For how could I forget the pre--precepts taught me at mother's dying knee. "Sidney," she said, "never marry a woman who drinks! Lips that touch liquor shall never touch yours!" Too bad! So find a woman once--and such a slave to rum! What can we do to save her, Nat?

Nodding his head.

Gazing at her mournfully.

Turning to Nat.
In a hoarse, confidential whisper.

Better put her in institution where she'll be removed from temptation! The mere smell of it seems to drive her frantic!

MRS. MILLER

You leave Lily alone, and go to bed! Struggling with her laughter.

SID

Right!

He comes around behind Lily's chair and moves toward the entrance to the back parlor-- then suddenly turns and says with a bow.

Good night, ladies--and gents. We will meet--bye and bye!

He gives an imitation of a Salvation Army drum.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Come and be saved, Brothers!

He starts to sing the old Army hymn.

"In the sweet Bye and bye We will meet on that beautiful shore.

He turns and marches solemnly out through the back parlor singing.

Work and pray, while you may. We will meet in the sky bye and bye."

CHAPTER XX

PROBLEM: HOW TO COMMIT SUICIDE BY EATING. SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE PAINSTAKING, DELIBERATE MOVEMENT OF THE AGED PERSON¹

Old Heythrop, the old English of the play, has reached the end of his life, and he knows it. He also knows that he can extend his life a few more months, perhaps years, if he lives very carefully and eats very carefully. But somehow it does not seem worth the effort. All his life he has done what he wanted to do; it seems only right and proper for him to continue. If he cannot, he reasons he would be better off dead.

The doctors have told him unless he follows a strict diet, he will literally kill himself with his improper eating and drinking. He smiles grimly to himself; no doctor is going to tell him what to eat and drink. So now he intends to die, to commit suicide with his knife and fork and glass.

The illusion of dying may be attained in many different ways. It should be played slowly, but this is especially true in the case of Heythrop. He is a very old man, and, besides, he is a very sick man. He has only the

¹Galsworthy, Old English, Act iii.

last vestige of any physical energy. As the scene progresses, the actions become more and more deliberate; the breath will come in shorter and much more audible gasps. Every few moves there will be a long pause to regain strength for succeeding moves.

Most people wish to cling to life as long as possible, but in the case of Heythrop he is actually playing this scene with something akin to enjoyment. He is rather proud of himself; all those around him have taken such care to prolong his life. Well, he will show them that he can still do what he wants to do.

OLD ENGLISH

MELLER

Yes, Sir. Of course, Molly will be handy. Sir, if you want anything.

He goes to the door, stands a moment, looking at the old man blowing rings from his cigar; throws up his hands suddenly, and goes out.

Old Heythrop very slowly and with a feeble hand takes up the glass and sits revolving it before his nose.

HEYTHROP

Send in my resignations tomorrow--not give that cur a chance.

To himself

He is drinking the brandy as the door is opened and Adela Heythrop comes in. She is in a white cloak, with one hand and arm in a long white glove and the other glove dangling from it. She has reached him before he sees her.

ADELA

Father! Meller let out you're drinking brandy after champagne and port. That's absolute poison. It'll kill you.

Old Heythrop thrusts out his tufted lower lip and reaches for the bottle.

ADELA

Oh! no. If you behave like a baby, you must be treated like one.

She seizes the bottle and puts it back on the sideboard.

HEYTHROP

So--you bully me--too--to-night!

With his hand to his throat,

as if he felt again the sensation of the afternoon.

ADELA

Well, really, Father! One would think you had no self-control at all. I don't know whether I ought to go out.

Old Heythrop's passion seems to yield before a thought. His face slowly assumes a sort of grin, in which there is a dash of cunning.

HEYTHROP

Perfectly well. Why not!

ADELA

If it weren't for Temperance I wouldn't. And I tell you, plainly: If you go on like this, I won't have liquor in the house. Good night!

She turns and goes rustling away. The old man sits listening. There is the sound of a door shut and of a carriage moving from the door.

HEYTHROP

Gone! Not so fast, my lady! Not under your heel till tomorrow.

To himself.

He makes an effort to get up but cannot, and sits a moment breathing hard; then, stretching out his hand, he rings the bell.

Last night to call my soul my own.

After a moment the girl Molly comes in, and stands regarding him.

MOLLY

What would you be wantin', Sirr?

HEYTHROP

Good girl. Help me up.

MOLLY

Oh! Ut's me that's not strong enough. Would I get Cook?

HEYTHROP

Now!

MOLLY

Sure, it's you have the big heart; it's never bate you are.

HEYTHROP

Thank you. That'll do. Want you again--ring.

MOLLY

Yes, Sirr. I'll be up all the time. It's the great unhookin' there'll be when the mistress comes home from her ball.

HEYTHROP

Bully me--will she!

Molly takes his hands and pulls but cannot raise him. He looks rather helplessly from side to side.

Old Heythrop shakes his head. He puts his hands on the arms of the chair, and shifts his body toward the edge of the chair, then holds out his hands.

The girl pulls and this time slowly raises him. He stands very still and flushed.

He does not move till she has gone. Then a smile comes on his face and he goes across to the sideboard.

Throughout the scene he retains his dignity.

Muttering.

He reaches up and takes the brandy bottle and a sherry glass. With infinite difficulty he pours into it, and slowly, slowly drinks it

down; then, grasping the bottle to his chest, he moves across back to his chair, and sinks into it, with the bottle still clasped. For a few seconds he remains like that; then seems to realize that the attitude does not become a gentleman. Now begins his last struggle. The bottle is clasped in his arms; but his hands with which he must place it on the table have lost all feeling. Again he struggles, and succeeds in shifting his body in the chair towards the table which nearly overlaps the arm. He rests, breathing stertorously, inch by inch he edges the base of the bottle till it touches the table; then rests again. With a groan and a supreme effort he screws his trunk over towards the table, and the bottle stands.

Done it! What's this?
Red!

Tomorrow!

His lips relax in a smile. His body sags back in the chair, he sits motionless, and slowly his eyes close. There is a sound of suffering, and the word "Tomorrow," repeated in a whispering sigh, dies into silence.

CHAPTER XXI

PROBLEM: HOW TO BEHAVE WHEN OLD FRIENDS MEET.

SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE USE OF SNUFF AND THE
SNEEZE THAT ALWAYS FOLLOWS¹

An old, old couple meet one sunny morning on a bench in a park. He is a crotchety old man, and she is a sweet, but determined old woman. They begin to quarrel about the bench. He says the bench is his, that he has sat on it every day for months and that it is his. She says since the bench is in a public park it is public property, so that makes it hers. He grumbles for a while, but finally settles himself to reading a book.

¹Quintero, A Sunny Morning, Act 1.

A SUNNY MORNING

DONA

Here they come! They know just when to expect me. These are for the slowest, these for the gluttons, and these for the little ones which are the most persistent.

There, that big one is always first! I know him by his big head. Now one, now another, now two, now three--that little fellow is the least timid. I believe he would eat from my hand. That one takes his piece and flies up to that branch alone. He is a philosopher. But where do they all come from? It seems as if the news had spread. Ha, ha! Don't quarrel. There is enough for all. I'll bring more tomorrow.

DONA

Look out!

DON

Are you speaking to me, senora?

DONA

Yes, to you.

DON

What do you wish.

Glances toward the trees at the right. She rises, walks toward the right, and throws three handfuls of bread crumbs. Laughs. She returns to her seat and watches, with a pleased expression, the pigeons feeding.

--Don Gonzalo enters, wipes his brow, and snorts at the feeding pigeons.

Laura pays no attention to him until he deliberately pushes a pigeon aside with his cane.

Indignantly.

he leans on his cane and looks straight at her.

--she goes on feeding.

still staring.

DONA

You have scared away the birds who were feeding on my crumbs. she puts away the crumb bag in her purse.

DON

What do I care about the birds. --he again looks away.

DONA

But I do. she fans herself, annoyed.

DON

This is a public park. -- he wipes his brow.

DONA

Then why do you complain that the priests have taken your bench? she hides her smile with her fan.

DON

Senora, we have not met. I cannot imagine why you take the liberty of addressing me. I do not care to listen to nonsense. He sets his hat on the bench and wipes the top of his hot head.

he stirs in his seat in indignation.

DONA

You are very polite. she smiles too sweetly.

DON

Pardon me, senora, but never interfere with what does not concern you. --he frowns.

DONA

I generally say what I think. still too sweetly.

DON

And more to the same effect. Gave me the book, Juanito. --he pretends the conversation is at an end.

JUANITO

Here, senor.

He takes a book from his pocket, hands it to Don, then exits by the right. Don Gonzalo casting indignant glances at Dona, puts on an enormous pair of glasses, takes from his pocket a reading glass, adjusts both to suit him, and opens his book.

DONA

I thought you were taking out a telescope.

--she laughs outright but not meanly.

DON

What that you?

he pays her no attention.

DONA

Your sight must be keen.

DON

Keener than yours is.

now he looks at her.

DONA

Yes, evidently.

she returns his look.

DON

Ask the hares and part-ridges.

he starts to turn the pages of the book.

DONA

Ah! Do you hunt?

DON

I did, and even now--

DONA

Oh, yes, of course!

she does not believe him, and he knows it.

DON

Yes, senora. Every Sunday I take my gun and dog, you understand, and go to one of my estates near Aravaca and kill time.

he continues to leaf the book.

DONA

Yes, kill time. That is all you kill.

she starts her lace work.

DON

Do you think so? I could show you a wild boar's head in my study--

he wipes his glasses.

DONA

Yes, and I could show you a tiger's skin in my boudoir. What does that--

--again her outright laugh, which he finds so annoying.

DON

Very well, senora, please allow me to read. Enough conversation.

--this is a tight-lipped speech.

DONA

Well, you subside, then.

she adjusts her scarf.

DON

But first I shall take a pinch of snuff. Will you have some?

Takes out a snuff box. Offers the box to Dona.

DONA

If it is good.

without looking at him.

DON

It is of the finest. You will like it.

--he is insulted.

DONA

It clears my head.

DON

And mine.

DONA

Do you sneeze?

DON

Yes, senora, three times.

DONA

And so do I. What a coincidence!!

taking a pinch of snuff.

he also takes a pinch.

they sneeze alternately, three times each. Her sneezes decrease in force, but his grow. Taking the snuff, both await the sneezes, anxiously, and sneeze alternately, three times each.

After those three friendly sneezes which establish peace between them, they begin to reminisce of the days of their youth. As they talk, the truth comes to each of them: long, long ago they were sweethearts. Now, here they are in their old age sitting on a park bench talking to each other. But each resolves to himself he will not reveal his identity to the other. As they leave each other that lovely sunny morning, they agree to meet again on the next sunny morning.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PROBLEM OF MEMORIZATION

Memorize as a whole. This is one of the most important rules in memorizing. Some will oppose this rule, contending that part learning will prove just as effective. In isolated instances perhaps this is true, but the overall memorized material is most likely to be a disconnected and haphazard accomplishment if this plan is followed. The average high school actor will be sure to have a mastery of word and idea if he learns the material as a whole.

Learn the material letter perfect. Some high school actors feel they have learned their part when they have a general idea of it, have the gist of it. How utterly wrong they are. It would be preposterous to say Shakespeare with only the general idea of the lines. Any worthwhile playwright has spent weeks or even months writing the play; sometimes he works hours on just the right word. So, it is asking little enough of the actors to speak the word the author wrote.

Besides, there is another factor involved in learning the right words; the actor is being fair with the other people on the stage. They have a right to hear what the author wrote. The strange contradiction about actors who

wish to take liberties with the author's lines is that they are very annoyed with others who do the same.

Memorization must have right motivation. The high school actor should learn his actions before he learns his lines, and then actions should always be practiced with lines. A director will often hear an actor complain, "Well, maybe I forgot my lines on the stage, but I could say them at home perfectly. I went through my whole part without any mistakes." When the director asks him where he practiced his lines, he'll say, "Why . . . in my bedroom, stretched out on my bed." No wonder the lines vanish into thin air when he gets on the stage and tries to put actions and words together. The two situations are entirely different. If a person really knows his part he can say it regardless of the circumstances, on a streetcar, in a cafeteria, or even in a boiler factory. He will not be distracted by outside circumstances, whatever they are. But he will never be able to achieve this happy state unless he practices lines and actions together consistently. When he can do this, and he is able to say his part over and over without a single mistake, he really knows his part. Furthermore, if he can take anybody's part in any of the scenes in which he appears, and he is able to say the other person's lines perfectly, he really knows the play.

This is the kind of high school actor the director is constantly seeking.

Spread memorization over as long a period as possible. Do not be in a hurry to learn the lines. Let us say the director has asked for the parts to be learned letter perfect in two weeks. Use the full two weeks for memorization. The director has assumed the actor will spend at least one hour a day every day for the entire two weeks, that the actor will think critically about the part each day for the full time, rather than practice it madly fourteen hours the first day and then never give it another thought for the next thirteen, or worse yet, forget about it for thirteen days and then burn the midnight oil on the fourteenth!

To use another illustration, an athlete practicing for a race knows he must train steadily and faithfully over at least a month's time if he is to ready himself for his event. His muscles could not be made supple if he were to start the day before the race, even though he practiced the whole twenty-four hours. Getting ready for a play involves the same faithful and gradual build-up.

Final suggestions. Some people say that they simply cannot memorize, that there is something constitutionally wrong with them. That is not true. Anyone can memorize. Of course, some can learn faster than others, but

memorization is perfectly possible for anyone of average intelligence, but regardless of whether it be a slow learner or a fast learner there must be readiness for the learning. That is why it is so absolutely essential for the high school actor to read a selection carefully and thoughtfully. Even after his first reading he should see how much of the material he can say aloud. He should be able to say the ideas expressed by the author even though he fumbles for the right words. It will be amazing how quickly the words, the right words, seem to come once the right idea is firmly fixed.

One final thought about memorization: A person should practice memorizing something every day. The memorizing process will be facilitated by daily practice, even though it be seven lines. There are enough words in the great plays to last a high school actor ten life-times. Before he knows it, he will have built himself a storehouse of imperishable worth.

CHAPTER XXIII

CONCLUSION

"Problems for the High School Actor" has been presented to the beginning actor and his drama teacher with the hope that it would lay the foundation for a more fruitful and intelligent approach to an eventual participation in the finished production. Perhaps the high school actor will take up an acting career as his life's work, but it would do well to make a final plea for all those who seriously contemplate creative amateur dramatics as a pleasant adjunct to a busy life after high school.

Far greater happiness would be the lot of many persons if they could find some way to express themselves creatively. This is true in the high school student's life, but it will be even truer when he leaves high school and seeks an outlet for his creative impulse. There are far too many people who squelch this impulse. They seek pleasure only by absorbing, never giving out. They take in ball games, go to the movies, and listen to various forms of entertainment. Today television has all but completely usurped our leisure time.

Now a certain amount of passive enjoyment is most wholesome and can contribute to a full life, but it is far more valuable as far as real happiness goes, that one becomes

a participant rather than an onlooker. The person who spends his spare time viewing a television screen is apt to end by being bored by all forms of pleasure, and will futilely seek new thrills in order to derive satisfaction out of life.

Most adults seek to let the interesting things in life amuse them, too often only wasting personal talents which, if put to use, would give far keener pleasure than merely being a spectator.

There is no greater pleasure than that which comes through the cultivation and expression of one's latent talents, even if only in a small way. Persons who have never experienced the thrill of having created something have never really known the meaning of real pleasure. Many have derived that special pleasure through making things with a brush, or with a needle and thread and scissors. Others found it in singing. It can be satisfied in many ways.

The enjoyment, on the other hand, of playing a role in a play, whether with an amateur theatrical company, or with a little theatre company or in a school or college production is one of the most complete forms of self-expression. In the first place, it extends over weeks of rehearsal; between times, it occupies the mind with pleasurable reminiscence and anticipation. Even during the tedious

practices and memorizations of lines, the creative impulse is being used. Then, with the final performance before the audience, the keenest joy of creative self-expression is experienced.

The performance over, there is the recollection of that wonderful experience to be lived with for months, probably even a lifetime. One has but to listen to a professional or an amateur actor talk about his parts in plays to realize how true this is--that even though the audience is dead and gone the experience will always be fresh and vibrant in his heart and mind.

Farewell, then, to the high school drama teacher. If this study has presented even one fresh point of view, the investigator will feel amply rewarded. If it has reminded the drama teacher of the importance of dramatics in the educative process of the high school student, the effort has been worthwhile.

And now, a final farewell to the high school actor: the first few steps have been taken. A radiant future lies ahead, whether drama proves to be a vocation or an avocation. Perhaps, for a few "the passionate few" as Arnold Bennett called them, drama will be a life's work. But wherever the high school actor goes, whatever he does in his life beyond the high school years, let him be sure

he maintains an active and creative interest in his beginning steps in the theatre.

In the words of Eugene Tesh in The Flattering Word,
"Who knows? Someday we may see you on Broadway!"

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