

An Actor Prepares – Chapter Questions

Chapter 1 - The First Test

1. What is the setting?
2. What is the first test?
3. Do you know the play Othello by Shakespeare? Be prepared to discuss what it is about.
4. What view is taken on punctuality?
5. What does the narrator do to prepare? How successful is he?
6. What is the narrator's response to being on the big stage? What occurrence helps him cope?
7. What happened to the narrator during the exhibition performance?

Chapter 2 – When Acting is an Art

1. What, according to the director, were the two moments of art in the student presentations?
2. What does the director mean by "... gave ourselves up completely"?
3. Is it good for an actor to so lose themselves they don't remember the moment?
4. What happens when the subconscious becomes conscious? How, then, can the subconscious be used?
5. Finish the statement: "You may play well or you may play badly; the important thing is that you should play _____".
6. Look at the last sentence on p. 15. (The fundamental aim of our art is the creation of the inner life of a human spirit, and its expression in an artistic form.) What does this mean?
7. How is the body dependent on the soul?
8. What is forced acting? (p. 18)
9. What is the *Art* of representation? (italics mine) How does it differ from mechanical acting?
10. Discuss Tortsov's comment to Grisha. "Only the dead have no sensations." (p. 24)
11. Discuss mechanical acting and clichés.
12. Explore overacting and its use of stereotypes.

Chapter 3 – Action

1. What was the difference between the sitting exercise done by the students and that demonstrated by the director? What was the secret of his success?
2. What is the difference between action and motion?
3. What made the difference in Maria's two "find the brooch" scenes?
4. What happened when the students acted isolated emotions?
5. Did the intricate, detailed set help the acting exercises?
6. The students' repeated requests for ideas from the director shows a lack of what quality in them?
7. What vital little word is suggested by the psychopath scenario given by the director? How can this monosyllable help the actor?
8. What do the words *regisseur* and *mise-en-scene* mean?
9. How are Pushkin's words "sincerity of emotions, feelings that seem true in given circumstances – that is what we ask of a dramatist" of importance to an actor? Is this approach trivial?

Chapter 4 – Imagination

1. What is theatrical reality?
2. What is the most important tool an actor uses to turn a play into theatrical reality? (technique, using imagination in the process)
3. Which is more important, technique or imagination?
4. Does the author give sufficient clues to character in the text?
5. Talk about the famous tragic actor (p. 61). Are all actors liars?
6. Discuss the three generalities of types of imaginations.
(Imagination w/initiative, w/out initiative but open to suggestion, and unresponsive.)
7. Discuss the importance of active vs. passive imagination. (Point out that picturing yourself in a scene is passive – try to see the scene through your eyes as though you were a part of the scene).
8. Discuss the use of "if" to alter, define or create the environment.
9. Discuss the importance of logic and specificity in imagination.
10. Discuss the director's two important actor "must-haves"
 - a. An unbroken series of supposed circumstances
 - b. A solid line of inner visions bound to same
11. Of what use was the exercise where the actors became inanimate objects? (p. 70-76)
12. Discuss the summary (p. 76-78) and its implied contradiction.

Chapter 5 – Concentration of Attention

1. Recount the domestic tragedy suggested by the director. Was it sufficient to hold the concentration of the actors?
2. What happened when, on the open stage, the director asked the students to find out which girl has lost her heel?
3. Finish this sentence: In order to get away from the _____ you must be interested in _____. (The secret)
4. Finish this sentence: The actor must have a _____ and that _____ must not be in the auditorium. (How to put the secret to use)
5. How did the director use points of light? Circles of light? How can an actor use this concept?
6. What was the point of the recall exercise?
7. Recount the story of the minister and the milk. What does it illustrate?
8. Compare and contrast external and internal (outer and inner) attention.
9. Are actors multi-taskers?
10. How important is observation to an actor?

Chapter 6- Relaxation of Muscles

1. What is the harm if unrelated muscles?
2. What was the point of the piano lifting exercise?
3. What is the point if the story of the actors with the eyebrow contraction?
4. Should the actor be tense during moments of excitement?
Point out example of yelling on stage.
5. p. 109 sleeping infant and cat.
6. What is the point of the “strike a pose exercise?”(economy of movement e.g. cat)
7. What is the point of the “magic if” application to poses and gestures?

Chapter 7- Units and Objectives

1. What is the significance of the turkey dinner?
 2. Traveling home from the dinner, the narrator divides his trek into units. What is his difficulty? How does the director suggest he deal with the problem? (small number of units define a channel)
 3. In light of all of this, explain the difference between units and objectives.
 4. What happens if you keep your role divided into units?
 5. How important is it for an actor to be able to dissect and analyze a play? Why?
 6. The director states that, “There is (a) more important (than unit division) inner reason. At the heart of every unit lies a creative objective to prepare your role (p.127). ” Why, then is it wrong to directly use the creative objective to prepare your role?
 7. Discuss the 9 guidelines to light objectives (p. 129).
 8. Discuss the 3 types of objectives:
 - External or physical- (mechanical) discuss tropism.
 - Rudimentary psychological- emotions in an everyday responsive way.
 - Inner or psychological- deep rooted and calculated
 9. Discuss inseparability of the physical and psychological.
 10. Discuss the naming of objectives. (verbs not nouns)
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- Select a character; Divide the action of “Little Red Riding Hood” into units and objectives.

Chapter 8 - Faith and a Sense of Truth

1. What is the difference between actual truth and an artistic sense of truth? (hint: compare the 2 “purse scenes”)
2. **Who** must have faith in the created reality?
3. Discuss: “Truth cannot be separated from belief, nor belief from truth”.
4. How is falseness helpful? (p. 142) e.g. self-righteousness. Persian carpets.
5. Point out: Some can see falseness in others, but not in **self**. (p. 144) (Know Thyself)
6. Beware the carping critic! – Audiences are much more forgiving.
7. Discuss the need for truth in little things, first. (ex.: have students prepare a peanut butter sandwich).
8. Why is it difficult to act “dramatic” (tragic) inaction? (p.151-152) What makes it easier? (bring up inner monologue).
9. Obs.: Individual moments of truth can be strung together into a continuous current of truth. (e.g. – notes into a melody) Discuss: Why is it important to stay in character offstage?
10. Discuss the actor’s two-part job: The life of the human body and the creation of the human soul. How are they interrelated? How is the latter developed? (Relationship)
11. Compare acting a role with going on a journey.
12. OBS: Moments of great feeling often manifest themselves in **small actions**. The opposite is overacting.
13. Compare/Contrast: “seem” and “be” (p. 170)
14. Discuss: “[Onstage] we use . . . truth transformed into a poetical equivalent by creative imagination.”
15. Compare the last line “cut 90%” with Michael Shurtleff’s 12 (see #s 8 and 9, esp.)

Chapter 9 – Emotion Memory

1. Why was the recreation of the scene with the madman at the door false?
2. Why is the *unexpected* useful to creativity?
3. What is *emotion memory*?
4. What is the difference between *sense memory* and *emotion(al) memory*?
5. Discuss the *synthesis* of *emotional memory*. (First, define synthesis) e.g. the tragic accident (p. 184-187) and the Italian with the monkey (p. 187).
6. Discuss: “Through conscious means we reach the subconscious” (p. 191)
7. Director Tortsov instructs his students, “Never lose yourself on stage”. (p. 192) Does this surprise you?
8. Tortsov also says, “Always and forever, when you are on the stage, you must play yourself.” Do you agree with this?
9. Do technical elements help or hinder an actor’s emotional memory?
10. How does the phrase “Never begin with results. They will appear . . . as the logical outcome of what has gone before” relate to feelings / emotions onstage?
11. Why is it good that our emotion memories are not crystal clear reproductions of the original happenings?
12. How do we summon the correct feelings? (p. 206-207) (Coax them out with exercises, use the conscious to summon the subconscious.)
13. Discuss Tortsov’s last full paragraph on p. 207.

Chapter 10 – Communion

- 1) What *is* communion? (p. 209-210)
- 2) How can a picture or any “inanimate” object have “life”? (p. 211)
(e.g. a chandelier, painting, sculpture, play, composition)
- 3) Examine the phrase re: “looking at but not seeing” (p. 212). What does this say about focus? (The vacant eye is the mirror of the empty soul).
- 4) Discuss the image of the necklace (p. 212-213) and how it relates to an actor’s part (cf. an actor’s personal life intruding on the part she plays)
- 5) Why is it necessary for characters to communicate? For actors? (p. 214)
- 6) Discuss *self-communion*, or voicing something aloud when alone. When is this useful to an actor? (soliloquy). What does Tortsov have to say about it? (p. 215: “Prana” – the cerebral center [reason] and the nerve center [emotion] in communication w/ea. other.)
- 7) Discuss communication w/another actor on stage (216-217).
(Communication w/ the living spirit of the created character).
- 8) Grisha expresses doubts. (p. 217-218) Tortsov claimed to have gotten that info before Grisha spoke! How? What is meant by the “unbroken flow”?
- 9) Sometimes we actors have to communicate w/ *the public*. (p. 220-221) 3 methods: a) indirectly w/the audience, b) directly w/the audience, c) mob scenes.
- 10) (Mechanical) actors who play to the audience *bypassing* their fellow actors are mere exhibitionists (p. 221-222)
- 11) (p. 222) Discuss: It’s easier to *represent* a relationship (w/ another actor) than to *actually have one*.
- 12) (p. 225-227) Discuss the “bell ringing” exercise.
- 13) (p. 227) What do you think of the “bound actor” exercise?
- 14) Discuss “invisible rays” (of communion).
- 15) (p. 234-236) Discuss the concept of “grasp”.
- 16) (p. 238-240) Discuss the mechanical creation of the “rays” (e.g. artificial respiration & the siphon).