

## The actor and his character

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**Abstract:** The analysis presented in this paper has as a starting point the empathy of the performer with the character, which is based on the combination of imagination and emotional experience. The hypothesis starts from the fact that we must have an above average level of imagination and empathic level, in order to be able to improve through learning the elaboration capacity of the student actor. In this context, the objectives of the study are applied and aim to improve the learning process. The research method started from the analysis and study of a Chekhov workshop, in which students performed scenes from the best-known plays by this author. The choice of this workshop was due to the fact that Chekhov is a master of psychological introspection, his characters being very well defined. The evaluation aimed at the level of the stage transposition capacity of the students in the characters. The results took into account, on the one hand, the level of recognition of the situations and, on the other hand, the empathy and the ability of the students to render towards the imagined character. At the same time, the aim was to determine the gap that appeared between the students' mental project and their stage realization.

**Keywords:** the capacity for stage transposition, empathy, creative imagination, expressiveness

### 1. Introduction

The capacity of stage transposition implies first of all the capacity of the performer to elaborate as correctly and as detailed as possible the character he has to interpret. So the empathy of the performer with his character remains the most important point and the starting point in any analysis of his stage activity. This elaboration represents, first of all, the imagination of the performer that blends harmoniously with his affective experience. Tudor Vianu defined this capacity as: *the aspiration to leave one's own individuality and to enter the form of foreign individualities ...*<sup>1</sup>

#### **Problem Statement:**

The problem from which this study starts is related to the activation and development of the quantity and quality of information genetically inherited or acquired through one's own experience and their application in the elaboration of a character. This can be achieved by finding solutions to improve the level of understanding of the complexity of the approach that the student actor must take.

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<sup>1</sup> Tudor Vianu, *Estetica*, Editura Orizonturi, București, 2010, p. 238.

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**Research Questions:** This study aimed to find answers to the following two questions: What is the relationship that is established between the mental elaboration of the character and the stage transposition capacity of the performer? How much can a performer's ability to stage a stage be influenced by learning?

**The hypothesis** from which this study starts is that we must have an above average level of imagination and empathic level, in order to improve through learning the ability to develop a role by the student actor.

**The objectives** of the study are applied and aim to improve the learning process. Therefore, the level of information reached by the students until the moment of evaluation is established and the most detailed detection of the existing gaps is sought. The level of cooperation between the stage partners is observed and established. We are looking for methods, procedures and techniques that by application can help in the construction of the characters and in the development of stage actions. The factors that favor and the factors that limit the stage activity of the students are delimited. In this way, methods will be found and applied to improve the teaching system of practical-applied courses, which will have an impact on the students' activity and on the most complex training of future actors.

### 2. Purpose of the Study

For this study we chose a Chekhov Workshop, in which the student-actors had to perform scenes from seven plays written by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, in which themes such as: the universe of overturned worlds, the closed space from which the hero can not free himself, the lack communication, expectation, anxiety, meaninglessness of existence.<sup>2</sup> (Banu, 2017) They performed two-part scenes in one act: *The Bear and the Marriage Proposal* and scenes from the most famous Chekhov plays: *The Cherry Orchard*, *Uncle Vanea*, *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters* and *Platonov* (or *Untitled Play*). The choice of this workshop was due to the fact that Chekhov is a master of psychological introspection, his characters being very well defined and defined, his pieces bringing that human universe full of heroes who present their problems, turmoil and failures. (Tănase, 2016) For Chekhov, theater is a component of existence that proves to be important in the development of human qualities, through the awareness of feelings. Therefore, it allows us to find our inner identity through awareness, through the development of self-knowledge and through the discovery of power and capacity for expression. For an actor, introspection works in the form of an experimental introspection, in which by searching and processing his own sensations and perceptions he ends up building, with everything that is viable in his own body and psyche, a new credible character in front of the audience. The method of introspection is based on the laws and principles of psychology, consisting

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<sup>2</sup> Banu, George, *Cehov, aproapele nostru*, Editura Nemira, București. 2017

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in the inner contemplation of emotions and the subjective observation of the phenomena of one's own consciousness.

### 3. Research Methods

The subjects, chosen in order to perform this test, were second year students, specialization *Performing Arts (Acting)*, from the Faculty of Arts of *Spiru Haret* University, associate professor class. dr. Mirela Gorea and lecturer univ. dr. Dana Voicu. The students had to make a character from the Chekhov drama, chosen by the class teachers, whom they played in a show mode, during an actor's art exam. For each character, the teachers selected a representative scene from the Chekhov plays, which was studied for an entire semester. In the work, the analysis of the character in the context of the whole play and its approach within the presented sequence were followed. These studies in Chekhov's theater are used to teach the art of acting because they make up a gallery of human types and at the same time accumulate a whole series of scenic situations that highlight the qualities that highlight the personality of students. The preference of the class teacher in choosing the study material was made according to the composition of the group of students, being mandatory to resort to moments and scenes as diverse as possible, aiming to achieve performance in terms of creativity, expression and expressiveness. In order to obtain a depth of the approach, each student actor had to make a single character, the unidirectional concentration allowing a more detailed and therefore more correct elaboration, thus emphasizing the quality of the work done. The recording of the states and feelings of the tested subjects was made through photographs and filming of the entire exam. The evaluation of the performance of each student was done by the method of judges, the grading being done by the agreement of a group of certified specialists, represented by five academics, including 2 art teachers of the actor, who were the coordinators of the student group, a speech teacher, a dance teacher, because in the evaluation of nonverbal communication we need a movement expert and a psychologist, who participated in the study, not only as a specialist in art psychology, but also as a graduate of the Faculty of Theater. Thus, the aim was to obtain an informed jury, whose evaluation should aim at a wide range of aspects, related both to the world of art and to the world of psychology. For the evaluation, an evaluation scale with marks from 1 to 10 was used. After the centralization of the obtained data, an average of the marks was made, based on which a classification of the evolutions of the tested subjects was made. These values were centralized in Table 1.

I will give below some examples of expressions of the characters played by the subjects, with the situations of the scenes described by the author:

Photo 1: *Tenderness and care - Uncle Vania* by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov

The character Elena Andreevna, the wife of Serebreakov Alexandr Vladimirovici, 27 years old, talking to her stepdaughter Sonia (Sofia Alexandrovna), with whom she is

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trying to improve the relationship. Reply: *Why are you crying? ... Come on, come on, be good! ... How stupid I am! Look, I'm crying now ...*<sup>3</sup>



Photo 2: *Adoration, love - The seagull* by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov

The character Konstantin Gavrilovici Treplev, son of the artist Irina Nikolaevna Arkadina, in love with the daughter of a rich owner, Nina Mihailovna Zarecinaia, with whom he meets in act IV, when she returns home 2 years after her escape with the writer Boris Alexeevici Trigorin. Treplev's love is unshared, he remains a victim of the world in which he lives, an maladapted person who considers himself incomprehensible to those around him. Reply: *... I cry to you, I kiss the ground you have trodden; wherever I look, I see only your face with its gentle smile, which illuminated the best years of my life ...*<sup>4</sup>.



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<sup>3</sup> Cehov, A. P., Theatrical piece: *Uncle Vania*, act II, *The seagull. Uncle Vania.*, Editura: Polirom, Iași, 2016, p. 245.

<sup>4</sup> Anton Pavlovici Cehov, Theatrical piece: *The seagull*, act IV, *The seagull. Uncle Vania.*, Editura: Polirom, Iași, 2016, p. 209.

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Photo 3: Fear, Mercy, and Compassion - Three Sisters by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov.

The character Anfisa, who is the old nurse of the three sisters, aged 80 years. As he gathers aid for those whose homes have been burned, he talks to Olga about the fire in the city that left many people without anything and in which many people died. Reply: They all gathered downstairs, under the stairs,... I told them, "Please go upstairs, you can't stay here." But they began to mourn and mourn ...<sup>5</sup>



Photo 4: Disapproval - Three Sisters by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov.

The character Olga, talking to the two sisters Masha and Irina about the situation they are in and making predictions for what will happen. In a moment of despair, Masha reveals herself to her sisters, who, due to social conveniences, refuse to support her. To Masha's reply:... I love... I love... I love him... you just saw him!... Well, what can I tell you... in a word, I love Verşinin!..., Olga gives the following answer: Leave this, Masha, I still can't hear you.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Anton Pavlovici Cehov, Theatrical piece: *Three Sisters*, act III, *Works II, Theatre.*, Editura: Tracus Arte, Bucureşti., 2014, p. 328.

<sup>6</sup> Anton Pavlovici Cehov, Theatrical piece: *Three Sisters*, act III, *Works II, Theatre.*, Editura: Tracus Arte, Bucureşti., 2014, p. 341.

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Photo 5: Despair - Platonov (Untitled play) by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov.

The character Mikhail Vasilyevich Platonov, a teacher in a rural area, talks to Anna Petrovna (a young widow). This makes him a declaration of love, which he rejects, accepting the status of provincial Don Juan, who lives his unhappiness daily. The reply: "But it's like you're mine. Were you made for me ?! Go to another my dear... Go to another who deserves you."<sup>7</sup>



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<sup>7</sup> Anton Pavlovici Cehov, Theatrical piece: *Platonov*, act III, *Works II, Theatre.*, Editura: Tracus Arte, București., 2014, p. 169.

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Photo 6: *Astonishment - The Bear* by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov.

The character Grigori Stepanovich Smirnov, landowner, comes to ask Elena Ivanovna Popova for the money lent to her late husband, explaining that if she does not get money to pay the interest to the bank, she will lose her own estate. He is amazed that she does not want to pay his debt or talk to him. The reply: “*Look! Stupidly... Seven months since her husband died! But I have to pay the interest! ...*”<sup>8</sup>



The data obtained were centralized in the table below:

**Table 1: Evaluation of the expression capacity and stage transposition of student-actors**

Nr. crt.	The initials of the first and last name	Stage expression ability - The character played	Stage transposition capacity						The average obtained
			Photo 1	Photo 2	Photo 3	Photo 4	Photo 5	Photo 6	
1.	A. M. M.	Grade 5 – Irina ( <i>Three Sisters</i> )	6	7	7	5	6	7	6,14
2.	B. M.	Grade 6 – Nina Mihailovna Zarcinaia ( <i>The Seagull</i> )	6	6	7	7	5	6	6,14

<sup>8</sup> Anton Pavlovici Cehov, Theatrical piece: *The Bear, Works II, Theatre.*, Editura: Tracus Arte, București., 2014, p. 118.

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3.	C. I. V.	Grade 10 – Olga ( <i>Three Sisters</i> )	10	9	9	8	10	9	9,28
4.	G. L. M.	Grade 7 – Maşa ( <i>Three Sisters</i> )	8	7	8	9	7	7	7,57
5.	H. A. M.	Grade 10 – Natalia Stepanovna ( <i>A Marriage Proposal</i> )	9	9	9	10	9	10	9,42
6.	I. R. R.	Grade 7 – Ania – fiica Raveţkaiei Liubov Andreevna ( <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> )	8	8	7	7	8	6	7,28
7.	P. I. M.	Grade 9 – Nina Mihailovna Zarecinaia ( <i>The Seagull</i> )	9	8	9	9	10	8	8,85
8.	P. R. A.	Grade 8 – Elena Andreevna ( <i>Uncle Vanya</i> )	9	9	8	8	6	7	7,85
9.	R. A. I.	Grade 6 – Sonia - Sofia Alexandrovna ( <i>Uncle Vanya</i> )	5	5	4	5	4	6	5,00
10.	R. M.	Grade 7 – Anna Petrovna ( <i>Untitled Play</i> )	5	5	6	5	5	5	5,42
11.	R. E.	Grade 8 – Anfisa ( <i>Three Sisters</i> )	8	8	9	7	9	9	8,28
12.	S. D.	Grade 6 – Maşa ( <i>Three Sisters</i> )	6	7	7	6	8	6	6,57
13.	C. C.	Grade 10 – Konstantin Gavrilovici Treplev ( <i>The Seagull</i> )	10	10	10	10	10	10	10,00
14.	C. M. D.	Grade 10 – Lopahin Iermolai Alexeevici ( <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> )	9	10	10	9	9	10	9,57
15.	C. G.	Grade 8 – Mihail Vasilievici Platonov ( <i>Untitled Play</i> )	8	8	9	7	9	8	8,14
16.	D. R. I.	Grade 7 – Trofimov Piotr Sergheevici ( <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> )	8	9	9	8	7	9	8,14
17.	E. A. C.	Grade 6 – Astrov Mihail Lvovici ( <i>Uncle Vanya</i> )	7	7	8	9	6	6	7,00
18.	I. D.	Grade 6 – Voiniţki Ivan Petrovici ( <i>Uncle Vanya</i> )	5	4	6	4	6	5	5,14



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19.	M. G. A.	Grade 9 – Grigori Stepanovici Smirnov ( <i>The Bear</i> )	9	9	10	8	10	10	9,28
20.	M. T. S.	Grade 6 – Stepan Stepanovici Ciubucov ( <i>A Marriage Proposal</i> )	7	7	5	7	6	6	6,28
21.	M. M. E.	Grade 10 – Astrov Mihail Lvovici ( <i>Uncle Vanya</i> )	10	9	10	10	10	10	9,85
22.	P. N.	Grade 10 – Ivan Vasilievici Lomov ( <i>A Marriage Proposal</i> )	9	9	10	10	9	10	9,57
23.	P. G.	Grade 9 – Mihail Vasilievici Platonov ( <i>Untitled Play</i> )	8	9	10	10	9	9	9,14
24.	Ș. O. F.	Grade 8 – Epihodov Semion Panteleevici ( <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> )	8	8	9	9	7	9	8,28

Caption: photo - photo

The overall average obtained for the group of students was approximately 7,841. The relatively high averages obtained by the students show us that there was a degree of difficulty adequate to the level of learning they reached. This shows us that the training related to solving stage tasks, done during the almost two years of theater school, helped in obtaining a high speed of resolvability and an adequate and expressive stage expression. Therefore, we can say that the students demonstrated the possession of the professional competence, which is revealed in the acquisition of the completed stages and their creative capitalization.

### 4. Findings

In this study, as main objective, the application of the logical mechanism specific to the scenic processuality on texts from the Chekhovian dramaturgy was followed. The capacity for stage transposition is inextricably linked to the stage expressiveness of the performer, the way of appreciating talent being given by the ideal, correct, justified and organically integrated way in combining the inner elaboration of the stage message with a certain expression. According to studies conducted on student actors over time by psychologists, we can say that there is a correspondence between the stage transposition and the expressiveness of the performer, who established based on research results that the existence of a certain level of ability corresponds to a certain level or equal to the other capacity. This is also noticeable in the present study.

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In the evaluation of the elaborated character we took into account: the most correct realization of a physical and mental structure of the character, the correct establishment of the dominant character (intellectual, temperamental and affective level), the most appropriate simulation of the character's emotions and feelings and the correct justification. inner monologue. Thus, it was possible to follow the level of development of the capacity to express and sustain a role.

For the future actor it was an experience that remains important by discovering the natural qualities he has, by activating the joy of the game and the ability to get involved in the game and by the ability to look at the character he plays as a unitary whole that has in order to obtain behavioral truth. At the same time, the aim was to highlight the student's ability to use the means of expression and techniques acquired in all practical disciplines (actor's art, speech, stage movement) studied until the end of the second year. Through this the student had to demonstrate his professional competence acquired through learning.

For the acting students, the realization of the stage moments involved the participation with their entire personality. The internal springs of each student at the realized stage, direct, dynamize and support the artistic realization of the approach. This determines a specific attitude for which the student actor prepares for a long time in the rehearsals during the semester.

We can say, therefore, that the symbolic language of the student actor is the result of a complex process, with a continuous and integrative character, in which he adapts the imitation of reality to a reality of the proposed situation. Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra said: Undoubtedly, the actor imitates, imitation is his own art, but he imitates by interpreting, commenting, modifying, approaching in his own way the model he imitates. It transforms him, it transforms him according to his nature and the needs of the scene.<sup>9</sup>

In order to raise awareness of the success and / or failure of the Chekhov Workshop, after the examination, a discussion-type evaluation of the five judges with the participating student actors was used. The discussions aimed to obtain a direct, objective communication, gradually eliminating the fear of being judged, for students to reach release, abandoning restrictive self-control and the need for confirmation and approval of the class teacher, considered by them. , as the supreme court of their professional success. The two acting teachers in the class directed the discussions and evaluation through questions about what was communicated, ie to the objective factor, not to what was felt, thus trying to eliminate the subjective factor, without suggesting the personal way in which he would have thought for obtaining their own solutions. Examples of approach in question: Was student X's focus on the action and the stage situation complete or incomplete ?, Why ?, Was the problem, respectively the

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<sup>9</sup> George Grigore, *Gesture theater*, Editura: Fundației România de mâine, București, 2013, p.121.

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realization of the character, solved or not ?, Did he keep his concentration during the scene ?, The character of was it done or not? and so on.

Although all teachers do psycho-pedagogical studies, in order to be able to work in education, in their training predominates the specialization they are going to teach. In this context, teachers with artistic specialization are only partially approved in the field of psychology. The fact that the jury was composed of four specialized teachers and only one psychologist shows us that the evaluations reflect more the artistic side of the evolution of the subjects, than the psychological side. This is a disadvantage of the present study.

Another disadvantage is the small number of subjects tested, which shows that the study is rather a case study for the promotion of students with whom the evaluations were performed. Therefore, we cannot talk about a general situation. That is why the results cannot be extended to the whole artistic education. For this, it would be necessary for the tests to be given on several student promotions, and for the results to be compared with similar achievements in the world of established actors.

### 5. Conclusion

The main purpose of the actor is the way in which he makes his art an occasion of enthusiasm and joy for himself, but especially for his spectators. The words of the character Nina Mihailovna Zarecinaia remain emblematic in this sense: ... *Now I am not like then ... I am a real actress: I play with pleasure, with enthusiasm. The scene makes me drunk and I feel beautiful. (...) with each passing day the powers of my soul increase. Now I know, I understand that what we do, whether we play on stage or write, the main thing is not the glory, it is not the brilliance, it is not what I dreamed, but our power to endure. Know how to carry your cross and keep your faith. I believe and suffer for a while. And when I think of my calling, I no longer fear life.*<sup>10</sup> This is an artistic creed of impressive contagion and, at the same time, mobilizing for the perseverance that the actor must show. We mention here that the perseverance we refer to has the meaning of transposing the performer into the character.

In this study, in the evaluation of the transposition capacity of the performer in the character (in this case the transposition of the actor student in the Chekhov character), the internal condition of achieving an expressive behavior and adequate to the proposed situation was followed. It is known that this elaboration is realized through projectivity, in its quality of cognitive side of the scenic transposition. The evaluation followed three parameters, which the teachers considered to be the most important: the originality of the imagination, the stage foreshadowing and the emotional experience.

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<sup>10</sup> Anton Pavlovici Cehov, Theatrical piece: *The Seagull*, Act IV, *The seagull. Uncle Vania.*, Editura: Polirom, Iași, 2016, p. 46.

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There will always be a gap between the elaboration and transposition of movements (and in general in the transposition into character), but through a constant and creative exercise it is possible to improve it, because bodily expression becomes a result of the combination of means of expression and internal elaboration. This is the stake for which a student struggles throughout his years of study, and an interpreter struggles throughout his entire career. We can say that when there is a call, the obstacle becomes a generator of new stimuli, which will determine a new elaboration, and the mechanism will be repeated, until it reaches a form as close as possible to the character sought, ie its superior communicative expression.

We end our approach with Chekhov's considerations, which demonstrate how powerful theater is embedded in people's lives, through the reply of Piotr Nikolaevich Sorin, Irina Nikolaevna Arkadina's brother from the play *The Seagull*, who states: *You can't live without theater*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Anton Pavlovici Cehov, Theatrical piece: *The Seagull*, Act I, *The seagull. Uncle Vania.*, Editura: Adevărul Holding, București, 2010, p. 184.