

**THE ACTOR'S ART. A PRACTICAL TREATISE ON  
STAGE DECLAMATION, PUBLIC SPEAKING,  
AND DEPORTMENT, FOR THE USE OF ARTISTS,  
STUDENTS, AND AMATEURS, INCLUDING A  
SKETCH ON THE HISTORY OF THE THEATRE,  
FROM THE GREEKS TO THE PRESENT TIME**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649036844

The Actor's Art. A Practical Treatise on Stage Declamation, Public Speaking, and Deportment, for the Use of Artists, Students, and Amateurs, Including a Sketch on the History of the Theatre, from the Greeks to the Present Time by Gustave Garcia

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**GUSTAVE GARCÍA**

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TO  
HENRY IRVING,  
THIS SHORT EXPOSITION OF  
THE ACTORS' ART  
IS DEDICATED.



## Preface.

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AN experience of many years in teaching singing and acting, has convinced me, that the latter as well as the former art can be taught, like grammar, by means of a series of rules; and in the present work will be found briefly, but plainly and practically recorded, the result of my experience. Every person who addresses the public, either in the capacity of a singer, an actor, a preacher or a barrister, must study under particularly different aspects—the management of the voice, with the rules of elocution and action. Each of these branches forms a special study. The observations here offered primarily to singers and actors, may also have some interest for preachers and barristers, inasmuch as the voice and elocution are considered.

It would manifestly be impossible to treat the subject exhaustively within the limits I have been obliged to prescribe to myself, in a treatise of this kind: but it has been my endeavour to give the results of my observations and experience in a plain practical manner, that will not, I trust, be without its use to the student.







## Introductory.

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"Action, *and* utterance, *and* the power of speech, to stir men's blood."



CICERO said that memory was the treasure of the fool. In this he was right; for the intelligent man does not consider it enough to commit a few sentences to memory; every word that he learns must be thoroughly understood, every sentiment must become part of his own consciousness;—for the effect of spoken words depends in a great measure on the mode of delivery.

To declaim with effect, every sentence must be uttered as if from a mind fully permeated with the subject and confident of its own power, so that no hesitation or appearance of uncertainty may weaken the force of delivery or impede the flow of words.

The voice must be thoroughly kept under control and pitched in a medium tone, so that its power may be increased when necessary without straining, and subdued without becoming weak or inaudible. All the different shades of sentiment must remain musical—that is, sonorous and vibrating in quality. Speakers or actors who lose control over their voice, or indulge in exuberant gesticulation, fail to be impressive. A gradation must be strictly observed towards an increase or decrease of emotion. So soon as the climax point of the passage has been reached, by gradually increasing the pitch of the voice, the speaker must contrast his effect by immediately lowering the pitch either gradually or suddenly. Pathetic passages will be all the more impressive if the voice sinks low.

A speaker who delivers his words flowingly and with a musical voice adds a great charm to the work of which he is the interpreter, and enchants the listener. On the contrary, a lachrymose, gloomy or spasmodic tone—a monotonous rhythm, such as is caused by putting a jerky accent, on every alternate word or syllable—or dropping the voice at the end of the words or lines; or a mechanical elocution—all defects caused by an insensibility to rhythmical modulation—produce in the hearer a sense of extreme fatigue and annoyance.

Cardinal Maury said—"Orators should vary the inflection of their voices with each rhetorical figure, and their intonation with every paragraph. Let them imitate the simple and impressive accents of nature in delivery as well as in composition. In the flowing stream of utterance blend



"pauses, which are always striking, when cautiously used and timed." Are there any effects more electrifying than the pauses marked by Handel in the Hallelujah Chorus in his immortal Messiah—



Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

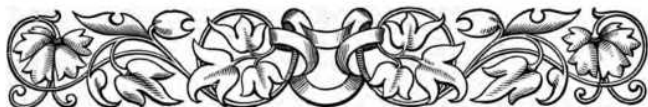
Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

"such," continues the Cardinal, "are the innocent artifices by which a Christian Orator may insure the success of his mission. Roundness and music in the voice, expression in the face, graceful and energetic actions of the body, are the natural gifts which harmonise with the power of the intellect." Cicero declared that with the features of the face, the actions of the body, and the voice, all the sentiments of the soul could be expressed. No one could be an Orator who was deficient in these faculties. Buffon speaks of "Un ton véhément et pathétique, des gestes expressifs, des paroles rapides et sonnantes."

Tragedians, comedians, singers and public speakers must bear in mind that fulness of sound, modulation of the voice, alternate animation and repose in the delivery, as well as a sober and appropriate action, are the indispensable conditions which will enable them to impress their auditors. We would advise singers, in practising, to declaim the words of their songs before singing them. It is said that Voltaire made one of his pupils, who had a tendency towards exuberant gesticulation, recite a piece with her hands tied to her sides. Salvini, whom I consider the finest speaker I ever heard, is a striking example of the impression made by a musical and sonorous voice.





## Chapter I.

### THE VOICE.



THE human voice, through the influence of age, sex, and constitution, undergoes many modifications. Besides the striking difference existing between the voices of various human beings, there are many qualities or shades belonging to the voice of the same individual. Every voice is capable of assuming the inflexions caused by the different passions, and of imitating animals, as well as nearly all the noises which strike the ear.

The manner of taking breath being the first consideration in the formation of the voice, we will consider the functions of the organs employed in respiration.

The mechanism employed in speaking, as well as in singing, is the combined action of four sets of organs, which, though they act simultaneously, have each their peculiar and independent functions, namely:—

- |                         |         |                            |
|-------------------------|---------|----------------------------|
| I. The lungs            | - - - - | The bellows or air supply. |
| II. The larynx          | - - - - | Vibratory organs.          |
| III. The pharynx        | - - - - | Reflecting organs.         |
| IV. Organs of the mouth | - -     | The articulating organs.   |

#### THE LUNGS (THE BELLOWS, OR AIR CHEST).

The lungs are the indispensable agents for respiration, and are placed below the organ of the voice, performing functions analogous to the bellows of a church organ; that is to say, they furnish the wind required for producing the different sonorous vibrations. Air enters into and escapes from the lungs by a multitude of minute tubes, called the *bronchial* tubes, which, as they ascend to the throat,

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This and the following chapter are chiefly based on Manuel Garcia's *Treatise on Singing*, published by Messrs. Hutchings and Romer.

unite into a single highly-elastic pipe, known by anatomists as the *trachea*. This, rising vertically up the anterior part of the neck, communicates with the larynx, the organ next in succession. The lungs are a receptacle for the accumulation of air, and do not, as most persons suppose, give origin to the sounds commonly denominated *chest notes*. The cause of this error is as follows. Men—not women—experience in singing or speaking, in the lower tones of their voice, a strong vibration, both in the chest and the back, but (analogously in this respect to the harmonic board of pianos and violins) the chest receives the vibrations only by transmission, having no power to originate them. These organs are enclosed by the ribs, and rest upon the diaphragm, which wholly separates them from the abdomen. The development of the lungs in the art of inspiration may be effected simultaneously from above, downwards, by the contraction of the diaphragm, and laterally by the distention of the ribs. Whether these two operations could be performed independently of each other is at least doubtful, but perfect inspiration appears to depend upon their united action. With females, indeed, the act of inspiration is more usually effected by the raising of the chest; but it may be very much questioned whether this is not mainly due to the confinement in which their ribs are habitually held.

#### MECHANICAL ACTION IN BREATHING.

##### (THE BREATH).

No persons become accomplished speakers or singers, until they possess an entire control over the breath—the very element of sound. In order that the lungs may freely receive the external air, the chest must be sufficiently capacious to allow of their full dilation; and in effecting this, the diaphragm, which is a wide covered muscle separating the lungs from the cavity of the abdomen, plays an important part. The action of breathing consists of two separate operations, the first being that of inspiration, by which the lungs draw in the external air; and the second, that of expiration, by which they give out the air just inspired. To insure easy inspiration, it is requisite that the head be erect, the shoulders thrown back without stiffness, and the chest expanded. This double movement enlarges the compass or the circumference of the lungs: first at their base, and subsequently throughout their whole extent, leaving them full liberty to expand, until they are completely filled with air.

When the lungs have been *gradually* filled without any *jerking* movement, they have the power of retaining the air without effort; this *slow* and complete