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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Susan M. Paquette entitled "Using Readers Theatre Editing Techniques to Reveal Subtexts in Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Speech and Theatre.

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USING READERS THEATRE EDITING TECHNIQUES TO
REVEAL SUBTEXTS IN LILLIAN HELLMAN'S
THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

A Thesis
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DEDICATED TO

MRS. CAROLYN KEEFE

for introducing me to
the art of Readers Theatre

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate how Readers Theatre editing techniques may be used to reveal subtexts in a piece of literature. The Children's Hour was chosen as the play to be studied because of the different reactions of the critics at the 1934 opening and the 1952 reopening. Also, relatively little research has been done on Lillian Hellman and her work. Because of the major position she holds in the American theatre, more should be known about her motives and the influences behind her plays.

A brief overview is given of Hellman's life up to the opening of The Children's Hour (1934). This reveals personal influences throughout her childhood and early adult life which should be reflected in her writing. A brief look at the theatre of the early thirties reveals the political pressures of the leftist theatre which should also come through in her writing. Using the Readers Theatre editing techniques for The Children's Hour reveals these influences on Hellman's life and gives the play new meaning. Two adaptations of The Children's Hour are provided. One script emphasizes the theme of the lesbian relationship evident to critics and audiences at its opening. The other script emphasizes the lie and its controlling power and the political messages found in class struggle.

Since Readers Theatre editing techniques can be used for all literary forms it seems to provide an ideal instrument for the study of literature. It provides the interpreter, audience and critic with an entertaining and enriching experience.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Hypothesis

All the people involved in a theatrical production are working together to provide a successful theatrical experience for their audience. When the performers in collaboration with the technicians and designers make aesthetic contact or "touch" their audience so that the audience sees and feels what the characters see and feel as well as what the author has intended for the audience to see and feel, an "exchange of energy" occurs making the experience complete. It is difficult to define or explain what happens to cause this "energy exchange," but both the actor and audience are aware of its occurrence. Both the actor and the audience must experience the literature.

Oral interpretation implies that the reader presents the literature to the audience and establishes the same aesthetic feeling without the influence of other theatrical devices. The reader, however, still must contact the audience. Such contact, in fact, becomes even more important in oral interpretation than in conventional theatre since there is little visual stimulation provided for the audience. The audience must be guided toward visualizing the scene in their own minds. Since their imaginations are not bound by visual representation, oral interpretation can have a stronger impact on audiences than a full theatrical

production. Many times in a full production the audience can become preoccupied with or distracted by the scenery or costumes and lose contact with what the author is saying. Oral interpretation gives the audience only the text of the author's words through the interpreter's vocal and bodily facilities. The interpreter must invoke thought and mental imagery in the audience in order for the audience to understand the author's intent. In summary, drama adapted for oral interpretation is intended to reveal its author's intent differently than drama converted to conventional production. The literature itself becomes central, and its literary and rhetorical characteristics are thereby much more accessible for the audience.

This thesis is an investigation of the principles and processes of oral interpretation of drama as they inform the adaptation of Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour for performance as Readers Theatre. In this instance, the adaptation process will function rhetorically, its intent to produce scripts which will help audiences focus on the political and social subtexts in the play. Some explanation of the rationale for such a project is necessary.

The Rationale

Lillian Hellman was active in the struggle for social and governmental reform throughout the forties, fifties, and sixties. Through Dashiell Hammett, her close friend and companion, she

was exposed to Marxist and Communistic theory although she never officially joined the Communist Party. Her views on social injustice and class inequality have been noted in her later plays, especially The Little Foxes and Watch On The Rhine.

On the other hand, when Hellman's first play, The Children's Hour (1934) was produced, the critics only pointed to the possible lesbian relationship presented in the play. However, when The Children's Hour reopened in 1952, the critics saw new meaning behind the importance of the lie, a reflection, no doubt, of changes in the political climate. American society was in the midst of the "Red Scare", wrestling with McCarthyism and its attendant horrors.

This thesis, then, proposes to illustrate the usefulness of Readers Theatre editing techniques in producing scripts adapted from The Children's Hour which elucidates each of the subtexts noted above: Lesbianism and political repression. Each script, it will be argued, retains the central motivating metaphor of the play: the destructive power or the controlling influence of the lie. Each script preserves the flavor, style, structure and form of the original. But each script is designed to reveal its particular subtext so that audiences may experience the literature more fully and with greater perceptivity than might be possible to them in conventional productions. These principles should then be applicable to other plays to reveal new meanings intended by the author but not previously seen by audiences and critics.

The Methodology

Two imperatives affect the process of adapting drama for Readers Theatre: (1) analysis of the play itself and investigation - as far as possible - of the influences that helped determine the form, style and content of the script; and (2) understanding the principles of adaptation. This study, in general, is organized on the basis of that methodology.

Chapter II will survey the literature pertaining to both parts of the process as they affect Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour: first, the research on Hellman and her play; and second, the research on adapting drama for Readers Theatre. Chapter III includes a biographical sketch of Hellman and an examination of some of the influences in her life which appear to have shaped the final script of The Children's Hour. Chapter IV is an investigation of the principles of adaptation. Finally, Chapter V is an analysis and discussion of the adaptation of The Children's Hour for Readers Theatre.

The two scripts which resulted from this process are included in Chapter V. The first script stresses the private and public implication of lesbianism. The second script reveals the political messages inherent in the play.

CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE

Lillian Hellman made her presence known in American theatre in 1934 and since then has earned the title of America's Greatest Woman Playwright - a title in which she is quick to point out the discrimination. Her political activism, especially during the McCarthy era, as well as her repeated success on Broadway earned her being mentioned in many historical reviews of the times. Other than these historical reviews and the criticisms of her plays, little has been written about Miss Hellman. However, publication of her three volumes of memoirs have revealed her motives and desires in writing plays of social commentary. This survey will review first, the literature written about Lillian Hellman, her plays and their political motives and second, materials relevant to the concept of adapting drama to Readers Theatre as an effort to enhance the political statements being made in Hellman's plays.

Materials On Hellman and "The Children's Hour"

All of Hellman's plays have been considered successes with the exception of Days To Come. The original New York reviews all praise her use of narrative and well developed characters. Brooks Atkinson, critic for The New York Times, consistently

praised her work and classified her plays as melodramatic.¹

It is also through Mr. Atkinson that Hellman earned her reputation as a moralist. Mr. Atkinson, however, was not alone in his praises of Hellman's work. London hailed The Children's Hour in 1936,² and Another Part of the Forest was a great success in Moscow.³

All recognized her craftsmanship and praised her excellent characterizations. But, when writing in a time of political upheaval, an author must also satisfy societal critics who look towards the theatre as a means for conveying their ideals.

During the thirties and early forties this pressure was provided by the Marxists. Hellman pleased the Marxist critics with her treatment of class conflict; however, Hellman was not classified a propagandist. Her plays did not, as Mr. Atkinson pointed out in a criticism of Watch On The Rhine, incite to action.⁴ The Marxist critics wanted more direct attacks on fascism and open praise of the Communist Party.⁵ The opinions of the leftist

¹Mr. Atkinson does not label Hellman's plays as melodramatic until 1939 with the production of The Little Foxes. Brooks Atkinson, "Tallulah Bankhead Appearing in Lillian Hellman's Drama of the South, 'The Little Foxes'," NYT, 16 Feb. 1939, p. 16, col. 2.

²"'The Children's Hour' is Hailed in London," rev. of The Children's Hour, by Lillian Hellman, NYT, 13 Nov. 1936, p. 27, col. 3.

³Rev. of Another Part of the Forest, by Lillian Hellman, NYT 18 Oct. 1949, p. 34, col. 4.

⁴Brooks Atkinson, "Hellman's Watch on the Rhine'," rev. of Watch on the Rhine by Lillian Hellman, NYT, 25 March, 1941, sec. 9, p. 26, col. 7.

⁵Morgan Himelstein, Drama Was a Weapon: The Left-Wing Theatre in New York 1929-1941, (New Jersey) Rutgers Univ., 1963, pp. 213-14.

critics were well recorded in Morgan Himelstein's Drama Was a Weapon: The Left-Wing Theatre in New York 1929-1941. Himelstein's book with an excellent forward by John Gassner explains the leftist feelings of the thirties and their exemplification on Broadway. He reviews each of Hellman's plays as the leftist critics saw them, confirming his basic thesis that the Communist Movement failed to control the American Theatre.

The Marxists were not the only critics to find fault with Hellman's work, however. In an article in the January 1944 issue of Theatre Arts, Edith Isaccs states that the purpose behind Hellman's plays was her desire to have the audience leave the theatre acting more generously because of her plays.⁶ According to Isaccs, this implies that Hellman wanted to motivate her audience to definite action in reforming society. This would contradict the previously stated Marxist criticism that Hellman did not incite to action. Very few critics are in agreement with Ms. Isaccs' interpretation of Hellman's purpose. Most critics or historians look at the psychological and moral motives behind each of Hellman's characters but rarely extend their analysis to political action. David Seivers even psychoanalyzes Hellman's characters and dramas in Freud on Broadway.⁷ After giving a

⁶Edith Isaccs, "Lillian Hellman" A Playwright on the March," Theatre Arts 28, (Jan. 1944), pp. 19-24.

⁷David W. Seivers, Freud on Broadway, (New York: Hermitage House, 1955).

brief history of Freud's psychoanalysis in the twenties he traces the psychological trends in American drama. Seivers believes that Hellman has "not only a psychoanalytic insight into unconscious motives but a predilection and diplomatic duplicity" for her characters.⁸ Her depth of understanding for the characters in her plays is unanimously acknowledged by the critics.

In 1957 Joseph Wood Krutch published The American Drama Since 1918. Krutch accuses Hellman's plays of being inadequate vehicles for the emotion she is intending to portray. He sees her plays as being invented and not realistic. His entire book, however, is an informal history and critical evaluation of playwriting in America with little documentation. He only mentions the productions he feels are important, and Hellman's work is mentioned.⁹ Allan Lewis' American Plays and Playwrights of the Contemporary Theatre is a critical analysis of plays and playwrights from 1957 to 1964.¹⁰ He judges the theatre as part of a continuing experience in which he sees the playwright as expressing the goals of man. He therefore expands upon the society which fashioned the playwright's attitudes and goals which society wished to portray in its writing. He also credits Hellman as being the most successful

⁸ Seivers, p. 279

⁹ Joseph Wood Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918, (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1957).

¹⁰ Allan Lewis, American Plays and Playwrights of the Contemporary Theatre, (New York: Crown, 1965).

playwright to make the transition from the influences of the Depression and preservation of the nation to preservation of the self. He then analyzes Hellman's plays in regard to their social messages. He ends his criticism of her with the complaint that in the thirties she was stimulated by the social upheaval but not has lost her certainty.¹¹ Jean Gould, who wrote an historical study of the modern playwrights of his time, also gives a well developed analysis of Hellman. He does not go into as much depth as Lewis, but his analysis is well founded.¹² John Gassner wrote two books on the theatre of the thirties. His first, The Theatre in Our Times, is a survey of the Broadway plays, their messages and their motivations. He attempts to explain the artists' of the thirties turning towards communism or "to the sheer nihilistic despair of O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh."¹³ In his analysis of Hellman, Gassner recognizes that the possibility of propagandistic elements, such as melodrama, with their calculated effects are not obviously political because of her desire to please the majority of the audience and "not to harp on a single string."¹⁴ His second book is an assessment of the mid-century theatre

¹¹Lewis, pp. 101-108.

¹²Jean Gould, Modern American Playwrights, (New York: Dodd Mead, 1966).

¹³John Gassner, The Theatre in Our Times, (New York: Crown, 1954), p. 12.

¹⁴Gassner, p. 405.

viewed from the vantage point of Broadway productions since World War II.¹⁵ Then in a 1965 article in Modern Drama Malcom Goldstein states that "The theatre's dalliance with Marxism during the Depression propagated next to nothing, for we know of not a single figure on the left who has ever risen to attribute his social or political convictions to the impact upon him of a Marxist play."¹⁶ He then continues to point out the Marxist implications in the prominent plays of the times. He points out that in all of Hellman's plays one sees the decline of the importance of this battle which is gradually overtaken by "the dramatic possibilities of personal maladjustment."¹⁷ And indeed today Miss Hellman is not remembered for her economic and social philosophy but for her theatrical contributions.

Yet, looking at more recent studies of the 1930's theatre we see a slight shift in opinion regarding the extent of Hellman's political activism. Brooks Atkinson, Hellman's original Broadway critic, wrote a review of Broadway from a critic's point of view covering the years 1900 to 1974. He now sees Hellman as one of the many writers "opposed to the status quo in American

¹⁵ John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads: Plays and Playwrights of the Mid-Century American Stage, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960).

¹⁶ Malcom Goldstein, "Body and Soul on Broadway," Modern Drama 7 (1965), 411.

¹⁷ Goldstein, p. 414.

society." He acknowledges that she was the most organized and clearheaded writer of the time.¹⁸ However, studies of the political movement of the theatre of the thirties reveal a stronger shift in opinion on the political motivation behind Hellman's work. Malcom Goldstein's The Political Stage analyzes the theatre of the twenties which made the social themes of the thirties possible. He states that "The great success of The Children's Hour stemmed chiefly from the playwright's ability to weave tough-minded expressions of liberal social attitudes into a suspenseful plot."¹⁹ Thus, Goldstein sees Hellman as being politically motivated from her first play. This should not be surprising when one considers the times in which she was writing. Gerald Rabkin illustrates the importance of the times on the writer in Drama and Commitment. He points out that drama is pre-eminently a social art and therefore social concerns should be found in dramatic expression. "The Children's Hour and The Little Foxes implicitly condemn the vindictiveness and rapacity of bourgeois society"; i.e., Hellman does reflect social concerns.²⁰

Politics In the American Drama as Revealed by Plays Produced On the New York Stage, 1890-1945, a dissertation by Caspar H.

¹⁸ Brooks Atkinson, Broadway, (New York: MacMillan, 1974), p. 302.

¹⁹ Malcom Goldstein, The Political Stage, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 141.

²⁰ Gerald Rabkin, Drama and Commitment, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1964), p. 41.

Nannes compares the politics of 1890 to 1945 with the plays of the time to confirm the concept that the political climate is reflected in the theatre of the time. He concludes that from 1930 to 1945 "the writer not only attacked abuses but also advocated a philosophy of government for himself and for his audience."²¹ This conclusion is arrived at without dealing with the leftist theatre groups.

As mentioned earlier, Hellman's plays are noted for their realistic and melodramatic mode. In the 1934-35 season one hundred and forty-five modern plays were produced in New York. Apart from the musicals only nine plays can be called nonrealistic.²² Hellman was therefore writing in the popular mode. Her detachment from her characters is a characteristic not of tragedy, which is what Mr. Atkinson classified The Children's Hour, but of melodrama. Robert Bechtold Heilman clearly explains the differences between the two in his book, Tragedy and Melodrama:

In the structure of melodrama, man is essentially "whole"; . . . Melodrama accepts wholeness without question; for its purposes, man's loyalties and his directions are neither uncertain nor conflicting. He is not troubled by motives that would distract him from the outer struggle in which he engaged. He may indeed be humanly incomplete; but this incompleteness is not the issue. It is in tragedy that man is divided;

²¹Caspar Harold Nannes, Politics In the American Drama as Revealed By Plays Produced On the New York Stage, 1890-1945, Diss. Univ. of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pa., 1950), p. 138.

²²Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1934-35, (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1935). Compiled statistics, not quoted.

in melodrama, his troubles, though they may reflect some weakness or inadequacy, do not arise from the urgency of unreconciled impulses. In tragedy the conflict is within man; in melodrama, it is between men, or between men and things. Tragedy is concerned with the nature of man, melodrama with the habits of men (and things).²³

Once Heilman has established this difference between tragedy and melodrama he goes on to examine the melodramatic in Hellman's plays, specifically Watch On the Rhine. All the violence presented has a purpose and is not included simply for sensational effect. There are no supernatural forces controlling human destiny. Hellman even makes this point in her introduction to Four Plays.²⁴

In The Drama of Attack: Didactic Plays of the American Depression, Sam Smiley points out that not only are The Children's Hour and the rest of Hellman's Depression plays melodramatic but also didactic. Smiley studies the didactic dramas of attack in the Broadway plays of the thirties using an Aristotelian method. Smiley states that plays are didactic because

Each has a complex of thought that affects its structure and thereby employs the principles of melodrama in an altered state or omits them. . . . But [plays] are didactic because they evince the fullness of their author's social consciousness and because they express those thoughts with persuasive intensity.²⁵

²³Robert Bechtold Heilman, Tragedy and Melodrama, (Seattle: Univ. of Washington, 1968), p. 79.

²⁴Lillian Hellman, Four Plays, (New York: Modern Library, 1942), pp. vii-xiv.

²⁵Sam Smiley, The Drama of Attack: Didactic Plays of the American Depression, (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1972), p. 111.

The Children's Hour falls into the didactic category because it says more than that some people are evil. It is "only because the soil of society is ready to accept the seeds of gossip and hate [that] the evil child's gossip [can] succeed."²⁶ Thus Hellman is seen as something of a moralist and The Children's Hour as a reflection of her social consciousness.

In 1972 Richard Moody wrote the first biography on Lillian Hellman. Although it contains no original criticism, it is an interesting and accurate biography with a concentration on how Hellman wrote and modified her plays. The introduction by Harold Clurman describes Moody's work best:

There are almost more personal facts about Lillian Hellman in Richard Moody's book than in her memoirs: An Unfinished Woman. She does not wish, she has said, to be the bookkeeper of her life. . . . She avows herself "a moral writer." A facet of her morality is evident in her desire to write "beyond" herself, about the world she has observed and thought about. She does not indulge in self-dramatization.²⁷

The success of her memoirs has spurred the publication of articles and studies of Hellman. In 1976 John Hersey wrote an article for the New Republic focusing on the political rebelliousness of Lillian Hellman.²⁸ Christina Doudna was able to obtain a

²⁶Smiley, p. 108.

²⁷Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman: Playwright, Harold Clurman, intro. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), p. xi.

²⁸John Hersey, "Lillian Hellman," New Republic, 18 Sept. 1976, 25-27.

rare interview with Hellman in 1977 for Rolling Stone Magazine.²⁹ She touches the surface of a variety of subjects from her political affiliations to her relationship with Dashiell Hammett to her experiences with psychoanalysis. The personal interview does reveal some of Hellman's personality which isn't always obvious through analytical or historical studies of her work and public life. However, one aspect seems always to be evident. Martin Knelman put it into words in an article for Atlantic Monthly, "The important thing about Hellman as a writer is that you always feel she is telling the truth as she sees it."³⁰

In her book, Lillian Hellman, Doris Falk attempts to show Hellman's development as a playwright which is not shown through her memoirs. She does this by looking at the plays themselves. Falk classifies Hellman's plays as either "bystander" or "despoiler" plays. In the former the "action is slower, the plot more discursive and low-keyed, moving within the characters and events that befall them, [rather] than through their actions. . . . [T]he characters become the passive victims of the despoilers."³¹ In the despoiler plays "the chief characters . . . are those who exploit or destroy others for their own purposes. . . .

²⁹Doudna, pp. 53-56.

³⁰Martin Knelman, "Staring . . . the Writer," Atlantic, 19 Nov. 1977, 97.

³¹Doris Falk, Lillian Hellman, (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1978) p. 30.

Most of the characters are clearly defined as evil or good . . . with evil as a positive repacious force. . . ."32 Falk analyzes each play in these terms as well as provides a brief history of realism in the theatre. Another analysis of Lillian Hellman's plays is Katherine Lederer's Lillian Hellman. The book starts off with a helpful chronology and an excellent summary of Hellman's life and times. The author then studies Hellman's plays in an effort to show Hellman as a writer of "well-made melodramas."33 Lederer also provides a helpful annotated bibliography of her secondary sources.

A study of Lillian Hellman would not be complete without a look at the influence of Dashiell Hammett. Little is known about their relationship except for Hammett's encouragement in writing The Children's Hour and their mutual love and respect for each other. Richard Layman in Shadow Man: The Life of Dashiell Hammett states that it was Hammett who helped Hellman realize her literary ambition, but Hellman contributed to his decline as a writer by encouraging his political involvement.34 Layman cites the earliest mention of their political involvement as 1937. Hammett had stopped writing in 1934. Layman's statement of Hellman's political

³²Falk, p. 29.

³³Katherine Lederer, Lillian Hellman, (Boston: Twayne, 1979).

³⁴Richard Layman, Shadow Man: The Life of Dashiell Hammett, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981).

influence contradicts her description in An Unfinished Woman of her search for the political conviction which Hammett had obtained.³⁵ Hellman was therefore looking toward and allowing Hammett to influence her political convictions.

Peter Wolfe in Beams Falling: The Art of Dashiell Hammett looks at Hammett's work in relation to Hammett's political convictions and the politics of the times.³⁶ Wolfe concludes that Hammett was wooed by Marxism in the 1920's or early thirties and that his Marxist beliefs are seen in his stories. It was Hammett's failure to connect detective fiction to Marxism which finished him as a writer. However, Hammett's influence on Hellman as a writer, especially in The Children's Hour, is acknowledged by Hellman herself; therefore, a look at Hammett's influence could be a major factor in the determination of political commitment in Hellman's first play, The Children's Hour.

The critics all seem to agree that Lillian Hellman has had an impact on American Theatre. They all agree that her plays are well-made and that her characters are fully developed in her realistic and melodramatic mode. Differences of opinions arise as to the subject of her political messages and motivations.

³⁵ Lillian Hellman, Three: An Unfinished Woman, Pentimento, Scoundrel Time, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979) p. 133.

³⁶ Peter Wolfe, Beams Falling: The Art of Dashiell Hammett, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1980).

As stated at the beginning of this survey one means of clarifying the political or social implications of Hellman's work is adapting it to a Readers Theatre format. Since Readers Theatre is dependent upon the text of the play the audience can understand what the author is saying without the use of the theatrical devices such as set, costumes, lighting, etc., which can damage the audience's own concentration or impede communication of the intent of the author. Readers Theatre also allows for necessary editing of a script in order to help an audience see what is intended. Therefore, a review of the literature on adapting drama to Readers Theatre is necessary.

Materials On The Adaptation Of Drama For Readers Theatre

Little has been written about Readers Theatre let alone the adapting of drama for Readers Theatre specifically. According to An Index to Studies in the Oral Interpretation of Literature 1911-1975 and its update, An Index to Studies in the Oral Interpretation of Literature 1975-1978 only six books and thirty-six articles have been written exclusively on Readers Theatre. Only two of these deal specifically with drama in Readers Theatre. Not included, of course, are books on oral interpretation which provide a section or chapter on Readers Theatre. But it is in these general texts that we find the general attitudes towards Readers Theatre. Covered here will be the development of Readers Theatre as it is treated in the general texts and material on

the techniques for adaptation of drama for oral interpretation generally and Readers Theatre specifically.

In Interpretation: Writer, Reader, Audience Wilma Grimes and Alethea S. Mattingly cite the Readers Theatre concept saying that little has been done, but it is open to experimentation.³⁷ Two years later in The Oral Interpretation of Literature Armstrong and Brandes refer to a new concept of "staged reading" and briefly define its purpose in group interpretation. They do praise Readers Theatre's ability to use a narrator giving "the listeners the opportunity to watch the situation much as the author first saw it in his own imagination. . . ."³⁸ Louise Scrivner in 1968 goes into a little more depth on Readers Theatre in A Guide to Oral Interpretation. She states that all readers in a Readers Theatre performance must use scripts and the performance must remain in the suggestive realm.³⁹ That is, the interpreter only suggests to the audience the action taking place or the vocal quality of the characters through the use of some body language and vocal techniques. Never, she maintains, does the interpreter fully represent a scene or character. The performance is to remain in the audience's mind. They see with their

³⁷ Wilma H. Grimes and Alethea Smith Mattingly, Interpretation: Writer Reader Audience, (San Francisco: Wadsworth, 1961).

³⁸ Chloe Armstrong and Paul D. Brandes, The Oral Interpretation of Literature, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), p. 291.

³⁹ Louise M. Scrivner, A Guide to Oral Interpretation, (New York: Odyssey Press, 1968) p. 198.

imaginations and not their eyes. Scrivner then gives suggestions for choosing a play for Readers Theatre. The characteristics that a play should have include "a credible plot, good pace and climax, believable and appealing characters, purposeful and original dialogue, symbolic interest, and emotional excitement."⁴⁰

In 1977 in the fifth edition of Oral Interpretation by Charlotte I. Lee and Frank Galati the authors trace the roots of Readers Theatre back to ancient Greece. "The interest in presentation, [then and now is] in the manner of telling the story and hence in the text itself."⁴¹ Wallace Bacon expands on the textual emphasis in The Art of Interpretation. In fact, Bacon's entire text is based on the premise that oral interpretation is a way of studying literature. Readers Theatre, Bacon maintains, provides for a group study which allows for the eye to be served as well as the ear. He does, however, emphasize that the appeal must not become primarily visual since the locus must remain in the imagination of the audience.⁴²

To find specific suggestions on the adaptation of material to Readers Theatre, one needs to look at the specific articles and books mentioned in An Index to Studies in the Oral Interpretation of Literature 1911-1975. "The Group Reading: Expression for

⁴⁰ Scrivner, p. 178.

⁴¹ Charlotte I. Lee and Frank Galati, Oral Interpretation, 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977) p. 384

⁴² Wallace A. Bacon, The Art of Interpretation, (New York: Holt, Rhinhart and Winston, 1979) p. 461.

Drama of Mental Action," states that since action is subsidiary to reading, the language of the play chosen should be able to express mental action of the characters for the audience. It is also stressed that the group reading must not distort the nature of the play.⁴³ Nowhere does the article tell the reader how to avoid distortion or how to enhance the mental pictures for the audience. "On the Interpretation of Drama" Jovan Hristic emphasizes that drama is meant for performance; and the goal of interpretation, therefore, is a new performance. But again no details are given on how this goal may be achieved.⁴⁴ In 1973 Readers Theatre News began publication. Since 1978 only one article has dealt with the adaptation of drama, Agnes Moorehead's "Staging 'Don Juan in Hell.'"⁴⁵ Don Juan in Hell was the first Readers Theatre production on Broadway. It appeared in 1951. By 1964 Keith Brooks and John Bielenberg could write that the New York drama critics had accepted Readers Theatre per se even though the majority of Readers Theatre productions had been presentations of non-dramatic genres.⁴⁶ In 1967 Leslie I. Coger and Melvin White published the Readers Theatre Handbook.

⁴³ Annett E. Monroe, "The Group Reading: Expression for Drama of Mental action," CSSJ 15 (Aug. 1964), 170-76.

⁴⁴ Jovan Hristic, "On the Interpretation of Drama," NLH 3, (1972), 345-54.

⁴⁵ Agnes Moorehead, "Staging 'Don Juan in Hell,'" RTN, (Winter, 1974), 6.

⁴⁶ Keith Brooks and John Bielenberg, "Readers Theatre as Defined by New York Critics," SSJ 29, (1964), 288-302

Included is a brief history and purpose of Readers Theatre as well as techniques for adapting and directing material and some sample scripts. This publication reveals that work was being done in Readers Theatre even though little had been published.⁴⁷

The root of Readers Theatre can be traced to ancient Greece where oral interpretation finds its beginning.⁴⁸ Wandering minstrels known as "rhapsodes" read the epic, didactic and gnostic poetry in measured, rhythmic style.

When these poems, which were read by one person, had more than one character in them, a type of activity which approaches the art of the interpretive reading of plays was developed. When . . . two characters were read by two different individuals, the drama began.⁴⁹

During the medieval times the Church combined the use of drama and interpretive reading. Coger attributes the development of Readers Theatre to the antiphonal chant of the medieval Church. She then compares it more recently to Brecht's Epic theatre.⁵⁰ Leslie Abel and Robert Post credit the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski with the beginning of Readers Theatre.⁵¹ In an effort

⁴⁷ Leslie I. Coger and Melvin R. White, Readers Theatre Handbook, (Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1967).

⁴⁸ Eugene Bahn, "Interpretative Reading in Ancient Greece," QJS 18, (1932), 434-37.

⁴⁹ Coger and White, p. 10.

⁵⁰ Leslie I. Coger, "Interpreters Theatre: Theatre of the Mind," QJS 49, (1963), 157-64.

⁵¹ Leslie G. Abel and Robert M. Post, "Towards a Poor Readers Theatre," QJS 59, (1973), p. 437.

to reveal the full richness of the literature, both Brecht and Grotowski started with a play which justifies the use of plays in Readers Theatre.

Joanna MacLay, author of Readers Theatre: Towards a Grammar of Practice, believes that plays are the most readily available for Readers Theatre since they were written with performance in mind. Readers Theatre, she maintains, can also provide new insights into the structure or texture of plays that conventional staging might tend to obscure.⁵² Specific rules in adapting drama to Readers Theatre are seen in Jerry V. Pickering's Readers Theatre which gives suggestions on directing as well as a look at the adaptation of literature to Readers Theatre⁵³ and Charles Sandifer's article "From Print to Rehearsal: A Study of Principles for Adapting Literature to Readers Theatre." Mr. Sandifer never indicates for what genre these principles apply.

In the selection of material the literature must:

- (1) be significant
- (2) benefit from the Readers Theatre performance
- (3) have characteristics that enhance the Readers Theatre style of production
- (4) have an appeal for the audience

⁵² Joanna H. MacLay, Readers Theatre: Towards a Grammar of Practice, (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 7-8.

⁵³ Jerry V. Pickering, Readers Theatre, (Calif.: Dickenson, 1975).

In the fundamentals of adapting the material he suggests:

- (1) keep in mind time considerations
- (2) be faithful to the author of the material
- (3) careful analysis of the material for its theme and content which the adapter wishes to convey
- (4) know production limitations.

As far as cutting the material he suggests:

- (1) eliminate the eliminable and
- (2) retain an adequate reflection of the parent work⁵⁴

Most writers emphasize the last two points. The production should always reflect the parent work. The material and messages should not be distorted but enhanced. The only other aspect that is mentioned by the majority of authors is that in Readers Theatre the actors suggest rather than represent. For this reason many authors believe that as far as production principles go, anything can be used as long as it only suggests the meaning so that the audience sees it in their minds and not on the stage. Joanna Maclay also gives excellent suggestions on directing a Readers Theatre performance. In directing she uses Dunker's law of motion to establish relationships.⁵⁵ Mathias Reitz in an article in Speech Teacher applies Stanislavski's theories of acting to Readers Theatre performances. He also defines

⁵⁴Charles M. Sandifer, "From Print to Rehearsal: A Study of Principles for Adapting literature to Readers Theatre," ST 20, (1971), 115-120.

⁵⁵Maclay, Chapt. 4, pp. 16-44.

Readers Theatre "as a medium through which plays are presented . . ." thereby distinguishing his method from those used for other Readers Theatre genres.⁵⁶

Alan Benson wrote in "The Dramatic Director and Reader's Theatre: Blessing or Curse?" that "Reader's Theatre is certainly a unique and valuable development in the speech-theatre area and its popularity undoubtedly should and will continue to grow, but it must never be considered an adequate substitute for real theatrical experience."⁵⁷ However, many feel that it is Readers Theatre with its suggestive nature that will bring life back into the theatre. Back in 1941 Robert Edmund Jones wrote that "by draining the theatre of its literalness they are giving it back to imagination again."⁵⁸ It is the interpreter's purpose to place the literature in the audience's imagination. Since the "techniques for the individual performer are the same as those . . . in solo readings of dramatic material"⁵⁹ we will need to look at the adaptation of drama to oral interpretation in general.

⁵⁶ Mathias Reitz, "The Application of Selected Dramatic Theories of Stanislavski as a Solution to Disunity in Readers Theatre," ST 15, (1966), 191-196.

⁵⁷ Alan Benson, "The Dramatic Director and Reader's Theatre: Blessing or Curse?," ST 17, (1968), p. 330.

⁵⁸ Robert Edmund Jones, The Dramatic Imagination, (New York: Duel, Sloan and Pearce, 1941), p. 134.

⁵⁹ Scrivner, p. 20.

Joanna MacLay and Thomas O. Sloan explain that "the interpreter is an experiencer of literary work - a speaker of it, a doer of it - and each time he experiences the work, whether with only himself as audience or with others, he finds out something about it."⁶⁰ It is this discovery of new meanings which concerns the interpreter and this writer. Jean DeSales Bertram expands on the concept in The Oral Experience of Literature. "The major focus for the interpreter must be upon the author's intent and purpose. . . ."⁶¹ Charles H. Woolbert and Sevrina E. Nelson state that the Readers Theatre focus adds the study of sentence structure in the discovery of an author's intent.⁶² This thesis will look at the use of Readers Theatre in discovering an author's true intent in writing.

Robert Post encourages the use of Readers Theatre in teaching literature to students. "Dramatic form will come alive when student readers are assigned or assign themselves to each of the parts of a play."⁶³ Readers Theatre then is a valuable instrument to educators. As previously stated, Wallace Bacon also supports this use of oral interpretation in the study of literature.

⁶⁰ Joanna H. MacLay and Thomas O. Sloan, Interpretation: An Approach to the Study of Literature, (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 7.

⁶¹ Jean DeSales Bertram, The Oral Experience of Literature, (San Francisco: Chandler, 1967), p. 4.

⁶² Charles Woolbert and Severina E. Nelson, The Art of Interpretive Speech, 4th ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1956), p. 136.

⁶³ Robert M. Post, "Ensemble Oral Interpretation," ST 23, (1974), p. 152.

Two general texts have been published which are not included in An Index To Studies in the Oral Interpretation of Literature which need to be mentioned. Beverly Whitaker Long's Group Performance of Literature (1977), although not aimed at plays but other literary genres, includes excellent general principles on selection, analysis and adaptation of literature.⁶⁴ The Liberal Art of Interpretation by Chester Clayton Long (1974) is problematical in classification and adds nothing new to this study.⁶⁵

Oral interpretation makes the page come alive for the reader and the audience. It allows them to visualize in their minds what the author is expressing. It allows them to see a piece of literature in a way not previously seen in other forms of production. This new insight into the literature is what makes the use of Readers Theatre a valuable tool in understanding the purpose the writer had in mind at the time of its conception. This concept will be shown by adapting Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour to Readers Theatre. Therefore, in order to understand the background and influences effecting Hellman's life and thus her work we need to have a biographical look at her life up to the writing of The Children's Hour.

⁶⁴Beverly Whitaker Long, Lee Hudson and Phillis R. Jeffrey, Group Performance of Literature, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

⁶⁵Chester Clayton Long, The Liberal Art of Interpretation, (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

CHAPTER III

LILLIAN HELLMAN, ACTIVIST PLAYWRIGHT

Biographical Sketch¹

Lillian Florence Hellman was born in New Orleans to Julia Newhouse and Max Hellman on June 20, 1906. Her father and his two sisters who lived with them were the children of German-Jewish immigrants. Julia Newhouse was born in Demopolis, Alabama, and later lived with her family in Cincinnati and New Orleans. The Newhouses were strong, aggressive and rich. Max Hellman was a poor shoe store owner. The conflicts which their varied backgrounds caused after the Hellman family moved to New York are vividly recalled by Hellman in An Unfinished Woman and Pentimento.

That New York apartment where we visited several times a week, the summer cottage where we went for a visit each year as the poor daughter and granddaughter, made me into an angry child and forever caused in me a wild extravagance mixed with respect for money and those who have it. The respectful periods were full of self-hatred and during them I always made my worst mistakes.²

Thus Lillian Hellman was reared in class conflict. Because of the dominance of her mother's family, it is perhaps natural that Hellman gave her affection to her father's family.

The Hellmans moved to New York when Lillian was six; however, six months out of every year was spent in New Orleans at her

¹This sketch outlines Hellman's life only up to the production of The Children's Hour (1934).

²Hellman, Three, p. 15.

aunts' boardinghouse. It was here that Lillian learned to knit, embroider, sew and cook as well as to understand "that the unfortunates who begged at the kitchen door and feasted on the leftovers were to be treated with dignity. Hellmans did not boast of their good deeds."³ The attitudes she formed in New Orleans were the attitudes she would retain and use in later life, although Hellman's independent spirit must be credited to the Newhouses. Yet the strongest influence in Hellman's childhood was her Negro nurse Sophronia. It was Sophronia who taught Lillian to ignore the color line and treat all people with dignity while understanding the struggle these people had endured.

Lillian Hellman attended the Washington Square branch of New York University for three years. Because of her divided childhood education between New York and New Orleans she was more advanced in some subjects but less educated than other students. She recalls her feelings of rebellion and searching during this time in An Unfinished Woman.

I was openly rebellious against almost everything. I knew that the seeds of the rebellion were scattered and aimless in a nature that was wild to be finished with something-or-other and to find something-else-or-other, and I had sense enough to know that I was overproud, over-sensitive, overdaring because I was shy and frightened.⁴

Although her college career was never completed, it did expose her to the writings of Kant, Hegel, Marx and Engels.

³Moody, p. 12.

⁴Hellman, Three, p. 41.

Hellman's first job was at Horace Liverwright's publishing house. Here she was exposed to writers and their works. She did not care much for the lady intellectuals: "they talked so much about so little. . . . But at parties [she] saw them in action and felt envy for their worldliness, their talent, their clothes, their age - and bewilderment at their foreign, half-glimpsed problems."⁵ This was perhaps her first motivation towards writing: a longing to belong to a class of people she felt she could never enter. A step closer to this class was provided by her marriage to press agent and novice writer, Arthur Kober on December 13, 1925.

After leaving Liverwright's Hellman wrote book reviews for the New York Herald Tribune, read plays for Anne Nichols, Harry Moses, and Leo Bulgakov, worked as a publicist and subscription manager for a stock company in Rochester, New York, and was a publicist for a Broadway show called The Bunk of 1926. The summers were spent in Paris where Kober edited an English-language magazine, The Paris Comet, in which two of Lillian's short stories appeared. She calls these early efforts "lady-writer stories."⁶

In 1930 Kober was offered a job as a scenario writer for Paramount Pictures in Hollywood. Hellman found a job at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer reading manuscripts for fifty dollars a week.

⁵Hellman, Three, p. 46.

⁶Lederer, p. 2.

She did not like relating with celebrities. Some who knew her husband "had to make the kind of half rise-bow, acknowledged in all world's where classes are sharply marked to mean you are above the ordinary but not enough above to include you in the circle."⁷ Hellman was never to be attracted by theatre people or their glamor, which would later cause her difficulties in casting and directing plays. A year later Hellman and Kober separated with Hellman returning to New York. However, during that year in Hollywood she had met Dashiell Hammett who was to become her closest friend and strongest influence until his death in 1961. In 1932 Hellman divorced Kober amicably in Hollywood, and she and Hammett returned to New York.

Although Hammett was one of the highest paid writers of the time he could not hold on to money for any length of time. Therefore, life in New York was sustained by favors from friends while Hammett finished writing The Thin Man. He had fashioned the character of Nora after Hellman.

Nora is intelligent, impetuous, curious, and a little scatterbrained, qualities which cause her to get involved in situations that Nick must help her get out of when he would prefer simply to drink and relax.⁸

During this time Hammett taught Hellman the concentration needed to be a writer. "A writer must learn by practice. Read, think, and study, and then write some more."⁹

⁷ Hellman, pp. 68-69.

⁸ Layman, p. 142.

⁹ Moody, p. 31.

Two of her short-short stories got into print in The American Spectator, "I Call Her Mama Now" and "Perberty in Los Angeles."

Both are satirical stories about a ten-year-old girl whose parents are divorced. These stories are awkward and simplistic, revealing little of her later skill.

Hellman's first attempt at playwriting came in collaboration with Louis Kronenberger. Together they wrote about an eighteenth-century queen who became so bored with her royal routine that she tried to become a commoner. Hammett insisted the play was no good; indeed, The Dear Queen never reached the stage.

Hammett had not encouraged Hellman to be a playwright; he disliked the theatre and so did she. He wanted her to try a novel. But when she persisted, he introduced her to William Roughead's Bad Companions in which she found the basis of her first play.

In 1934 The Thin Man was published and The Children's Hour was produced. The latter was the beginning of Hellman's career as a playwright; the former was Hammett's last novel. The Children's Hour ran in New York for eighty-six weeks, ran on the road a year, and was produced in London and Paris. Because of its main theme of lesbianism, it was censored in Boston, Chicago and London. Hellman did not intend to write a shocker; censorship and the resulting publicity were simply fortunate accidents.¹⁰ All the

¹⁰Moody, p. 38.

facts were in Bad Companions. She simply adapted them to the stage. The sensationalism, however, did attract audiences. But there is more to the play than the main theme which caused so much excitement. Under the almost overpowering and pervasive lesbian relationship is a statement about the times, society and a need for reform. To discover these themes one must look at the times which created the need for reform and the influences upon Hellman which would cause her to include social messages in her first play.

The Influences of the Theatre of the Early Thirties

The theatre of the 1920's set the stage for the political themes of the thirties. The theatre of the early twenties was the reactionary theatre following the First World War. There was a larger desire to return to normalcy than to start revolutionizing institutions. The major themes of the twenties rested in individual psychology with the principal influence being Sigmund Freud. "Although social issues were not neglected, it was the problems of the individual in relation to his family or his inner self that appeared to have the strongest theatrical appeal."¹¹ The plays focused on the characters and the mood of a prosperous nation willing to listen to ideas of sexual freedom (such as O'Neil's Anna Christie and Strange Interlude and Howard's They Knew What They Wanted) but not drastic social reform. Plays had happy endings reflecting the optimism of a prosperous age. Yet without these and other domestic plays breaking the ground for moderate social change in attitude the theatre of the thirties which

¹¹Goldstein, p. 4.

combined sexual frustration with a social restructuring would not have been possible.

The twenties, however, were not a glorious and prosperous time for everyone. As early as 1901 the Socialist party had been founded and in 1919 its farthest Left members began the planning that led eventually to the formation of the Communist party. The 1920's raids on radicals' meetings brought together the liberals and the radicals in voicing complaints. Discriminatory practices in the professional and business worlds as well as the verdicts from the Tom Mooney and Sacco and Vanzetti cases brought widespread disapproval.¹² Since drama is pre-eminently a social art, it is not surprising that these social concerns as well as others should find dramatic expression.¹³ From 1900 to 1930 the dramatist recognized the growing knowledge of his audience.

They attacked specific abuses but never probed below the surface to a fundamental philosophy of government that would make for such future abuses impossible. They were plays of protest but not of thought.¹⁴

With the collapse of America's economic system the writers not only attacked abuses but also advocated a philosophy of government.

The Communists believed that the theatre could help activate their revolution against American Capitalism and all the Depression

¹²The first play which specifically dealt with an issue was Anderson's Gods of the Lightning (1928) which was a dramatization of the Sacco-Vanzetti case.

¹³Rabkin, p. 28

¹⁴Nannes, p. 138.

evils. They believed further "that the drama would be useful as a propaganda agency in the period of reconstruction when the Party would lead the country forward first to the proletarian state and then to the classless society."¹⁵

These politically motivated plays were produced by organizations devoted to social criticism from the point of view of the Left. Two of the largest of these production organizations were The Group Theatre and the Theatre Union. Although they only produced seventy-four plays during the thirties they did create recognized divisions of contemporary playwriting known as "propaganda plays," "revolutionary dramas," and "plays of social significance."¹⁶ The Theatre Union was the first and only professional American Marxist theatre. It "was an overtly committed theatre; its *raison d'etre* was to demonstrate the efficacy of the slogan: "Theatre is a Weapon."¹⁷ However, of the seventy-four socially significant productions only one, Victor Wolfson's Excursion, was a clear illustration of Marxist philosophy. Many were Marxist only by implication - a fact that exasperated the Party's orthodox critics.¹⁸ And in fact few leftist sympathizers realized the implications of the Marxist theory. It became just one more element of fashionable intellectualism; along with amateur Freudianism.

For such writers as John Wexley and Lillian Hellman, plot motivation based only on the individual's difficulty

¹⁵Himelstein, p. 3.

¹⁶Krutch, p. 247.

¹⁷Rabkin, p. 45.

¹⁸Himelstein, p. 215.

of establishing personal relationships remaining from the theatre of the twenties seemed shallow and, therefore, inadequate. They wished to analyze the social forces that created killers, perjurers, slanderers, and other antisocial beings.¹⁹

The dramatists constructed their plays around proletarian subject matter with a didactic purpose. That is, they created with the primary intent of teaching or persuading. The play is, therefore, intended to be a functional tool rather than an object of beauty. Sam Smiley categorized the ideas expressed by these playwrights in four active verbs: to depict, to exhort, to accuse and to censure.²⁰ He cited Odets' Golden Boy, Shaw's Bury the Dead, Rice's We the People and Hellman's Little Foxes and The Children's Hour as examples of didactic plays.

Each has a complex of thought that affects its structure and thereby employs the principles of melodrama in an altered state or omits them. . . . But these [plays] are certainly didactic because they evince the fullness of their authors' social consciousness and because they express those thoughts with persuasive intensity. . . . Although not one is totally a Marxian play, each shows the influence of the Marxian pattern of thought then so prevalent. . . . They do not project the Marxian revolt of the economically oppressed, but they clearly indicate the necessity for change - social, economic, political - and for each person to find a system of values within himself.²¹

In The Children's Hour Hellman has said more than that some people are evil. Using Smiley's four categories, Hellman depicted the viciousness of the upper class through the character of Mrs. Tilford,

¹⁹Goldstein, p. 125.

²⁰Smiley, p. 63.

²¹Smiley, pp. 111-112.

exhorted the societal system that allowed a girl's lie to destroy the lives of two people, accused the people of the society for allowing this to happen, and censured the ruling class through Mrs. Tilford and her realization of the wrong she has committed. Part of the power and persuasiveness of the play is the absence of a normal ending (that is, an ending that ties together all loose ends) and the lack of a central hero or heroine. The Children's Hour is therefore formulated as a dianotic melodrama and revealed the author's social consciousness with persuasive intensity.

As mentioned earlier, The Children's Hour was banned in Boston, Chicago and London because of its theme of lesbianism. And to some degree which cannot be measured this accounted for some of its popularity. But plays about homosexuality had also been banned in New York and other cities around the nation. Why was this one allowed to run? Brooks Atkinson claimed that it was "the drive of Miss Hellman's writing, and the momentum of the performance that . . . turned The Children's Hour into an indictment of smalltown malice."²² Malcom Goldstein states that

The Children's Hour was allowed to run, presumably because sexual deviation could not be considered its principle issue. . . . Central to the play is a less controversial topic: The plight of the open-minded individual when assaulted by a stubborn and powerful conservative force.²³

Hellman described the theme as "good and evil."²⁴ Hellman studied

²² Atkinson, Broadway, p. 303.

²³ Goldstein, p. 149.

²⁴ Hellman, Four Plays, introduction, p. ix.

the tyranny of the aged and wealthy (the character of Mrs. Tilford) over the young and the poor (the two teachers). Yet Hellman implies in the ending that there is still hope for the young to overcome their elders through Mrs. Tilford's downfall and one teacher's acknowledging that she will try to go on with her life. This theme reflected the political mood of the time with the New Deal's beginning to give hope to the young.

When confronted with the political intent of her plays Hellman insists that she's "never been interested in political messages. . . . Like every other writer, [she] used [her]self and the time [she] lived in."²⁵ But the times she lived in were political and the people she surrounded herself with had political motivations. Perhaps her feelings on political intent were more clearly stated in her biography.

Good writers have a good look at the world around them and then write it down. That's all. . . . Writers should not see their work. Writers shouldn't have anything to do with words like betrayal or courage or bigness or smallness or sex or Greek or new or old [or propaganda].²⁶ You write it down but you mustn't stand back and see it. You do it and go to bed and leave the big words for other people. It just isn't your business to tell people what you're doing or wanted to do.²⁷

Hellman never used the stage as a blatant soapbox. She did not scream her messages or intent. The play came first with any

²⁵Lederer, p. 65.

²⁶Moody's brackets

²⁷Moody, p. 130.

political messages - or reflections of the times and her feelings - neatly wrapped in the story. Her first play, The Children's Hour, reflected the qualities of her later plays. She used realistic modes and settings with strongly etched characters and a serious theme with an indignant tone. The tone's object was "a society made up of a group of individuals so bound by their own mores and conventions as to feel compelled, for the preservation of that society, to punish those who deviated from it."²⁸ Hellman's formation of these social views and the relatively quiet form in which they were produced can be found in one of her strongest influences, Dashiell Hammett.

Dashiell Hammett was a very private person. He did not talk about himself or his political beliefs, which did not mean that he was lacking in political motivation. He simply chose a different medium with which to share his moral conscience with others. Within all his stories is written his political beliefs and attitudes towards himself and society.²⁹ Hammett did not scream his messages and probably influenced Hellman not to scream hers.

He was wooed by Marxism in the twenties but rarely did he act like one during his writing heyday. He loved to drink and spend money quickly and not on the suffering of the proletariat. But his art reflects his social concern.

²⁸Falk, p. 45.

²⁹Peter Wolfe gives an excellent analysis of Hammett's stories and the political messages contained in each revealing the changes in Hammett's convictions.

The characters of Dan Rolff of Red Harvest (1929) and Ned Beaumont of The Glass Key (1931) are both identified with Hammett. Their illness (tuberculosis), gambling, sensitivity, and pride are all traits of Hammett. They all suffer. "The idea of the physical suffering of the artist goes back to Schopenhauer, Freud, and Joyce, all of whom saw the artist as a misfit whose neurotic unfitness for the everyday world forces him to fabricate his own."³⁰ This suffering corresponds with the Marxian downgrading of intellectualism as sterile and empty.³¹ Stories like "Eloise Morey" (1923) and "Second Story Angel" (1923) reflect a Marxist contempt for all (including artists) not furthering the class war and the workers' revolution. And though he calls attention to mysteries relating to matters of deep human concern, he never unveils them.

The metaphysical issues called forth in Falcon and Glass Key and the ancient taboos grazed in Thin Man all get whipped into the froth of social comedy, where their terror fades. Hammett's primitivism survives chiefly as stylistic flourish.

This escapest way of dealing with his vision made fiction writing more of a denial than a fulfillment for Dashiell Hammett. The Marxist implications of his stance must have made him smile. He had reached an artistic deadend. After Thin Man, he had nowhere either to grow into or to hide.³²

Since Hammett did all his writing except for the Thin Man before he met Hellman, it is obvious that he was already politically committed when their relationship began. In An Unfinished Woman Hellman gives the impression of searching for something to believe

³⁰ Wolfe, p. 8.

³¹ Wolfe, p. 8.

³² Wolfe, p. 163.

in and act upon. Her search is evidenced all through her marriage with Kober and in her attempting various jobs and in her need for independence. She states that what she needed was "a teacher, a cool teacher, who would not be impressed or disturbed by a strange and difficult girl."³³ This teacher was to be Hammett. Hellman respected and loved Hammett. And since Hammett stopped writing the year Hellman started and believed the artist was obligated to further the class war, it is not difficult to see how Hammett easily influenced Hellman to see the needs of reform in society (since she was the object of many of the evils in her childhood) and the need to write them carefully into her plays. The messages, although sometimes interwoven so tightly they are not seen at first glance, are present in Hellman's plays. In the case of The Children's Hour the lesbian theme-which was taboo at the time-covered too thickly the implications of the story. Later, in the 1950's when the play reopened, the critics saw The Children's Hour not as a story of lesbianism but a story about a lie. The play had not changed, but the times and the critics had.

The contention of the present study is that adapting the play to a Readers Theatre format will elucidate both the messages revealed in the fifties and other previously unseen implications as well.

³³Hellman, Three, p. 63.

CHAPTER IV

ADAPTING DRAMA FOR READERS THEATRE

Selection

It is generally agreed that oral interpretation of a piece of literature implies that the reader as well as the audience can experience a new and greater understanding of that literature. For example, Wilma Grimes and Alethia Mattingly define oral interpretation "as the full revelation of whatever experience is inherent in the literature."¹ Charlotte Lee is more specific with her definition adding the concept of "communicating to an audience a work of literary art in its intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic entirety."² However, the interpreter does not simply recreate the literature for the audience but "creates anew the experience of which those words are a part. . . . Creation, in short, is four-fifths of interpretation."³

Readers Theatre draws upon the traditions of both oral interpretation and conventional theatre, but it is not limited by the conventions of either. It is free to experiment and explore various avenues of literary experience. The exact origin or originator is unknown. Many people credit Brecht and his Epic theatre as the source of Readers Theatre.

¹Wilma Grimes and Alethea Mattingly, p. 9

²Charlotte Lee and Frank Galati, p. 3.

³Maclay and Sloan, p. 8.

Brecht invented or evolved his Epic form because he wanted his audience to think. He wanted to prevent the audience from becoming so emotionally involved in the characters that they no longer evaluated the significance of the thoughts presented.⁴

The oral interpreter allows the audience to see the action and color of a scene and hear the characters' voices in their minds. And because the imagination can create so much more vividly than the eye can see, a piece of literature can have much more meaning for the listener.

As stated earlier, Leslie Abel and Robert Post credit Jerzy Grotowski as helping to form Readers Theatre. Grotowski, a Polish director, "started by eliminating what is not absolutely necessary for live theatre and was left with just the actor and the audience [and the text]."⁵ Both Brecht and Grotowski emphasize the thoughts or messages of the author. They stress the text. It is in this emphasis that Readers Theatre finds its purpose. As Abel and Post point out, "The purpose of oral interpretation and Readers Theatre is to realize the fullest potential of the written text through performance."⁶ Charlotte Lee also agrees that "Readers Theatre can open a text up and let us inside in unexpected and challenging ways."⁷ However, if an author is writing for the theatre will

⁴Coger, p. 158.

⁵Abel and Post, p. 437.

⁶Abel and Post, p. 437.

⁷Lee and Galati, p. 389.

he not use the theatrical devices available to him to help convey his thoughts? This is undoubtedly true especially in plays which rely heavily on action and setting and little on the dialogue.

Michael Kirby, in his article "On Literary Theatre," answers this question by stating that "all theatre is made up of signs - lights, costumes, sets, etc. But Readers Theatre eliminates and extends the intellectual process of interpreting signs by using just words, expression, and some gesture."⁸ But this premise also necessitates a text which holds the author's message. Since some texts do not fulfill this requirement completely, i.e., messages are conveyed visually as well as textually, some are not suitable for Readers Theatre. Many plays, however, adapt very easily and in fact are enhanced by a Readers Theatre performance. Joanna Maclay believes that plays are the most readily available source for Readers Theatre since they are written with performance in mind. "Readers Theatre could provide new insights into the structure or texture of plays that conventional staging might tend to obscure."⁹ Jerry Pickering points out in Readers Theatre that, even though plays are most readily available, all plays are not necessarily best for Readers Theatre. He adds that many traditional plays, however, are greatly improved by the transition to Readers Theatre; "the often excessive baggage of set, costume and staging techniques can get in the way of the literature itself, and when these are stripped away a new

⁸Kirby, p. 105

⁹Maclay, p. 8.

and more valid play sometimes emerges."¹⁰ It should be noted that - in a full theatrical production - effective staging, lighting, and costumes are meaningless if the actor does not deliver his lines properly.¹¹ This does not imply that interpreters are actors. They are not. The actor and the interpreter both study the characters and from their study portray the character as they understand it. Readers Theatre and oral interpretation place the burden of the production on

the spoken word and its stimulation of the audience's intellect, empathy and imagination. . . . Readers Theatre demands overall selectivity and suggestion, while the mounted play allows full representation.¹²

The actor becomes a character while the interpreter suggests the character. And since the skilled playwright is able to shape characters who speak and react convincingly, the skilled interpreter is able to communicate to his audience the essence of the playwright's message without the help and sometimes hindrance of other theatrical devices.¹³ The final goal of oral interpretation and Readers Theatre, like drama, is a performance - a new performance.

Although Readers Theatre is still a basically new concept open to experimentation, some principles have developed on the techniques of selection of material, adaptation, and performance. It is generally agreed that the literature selected for any form of oral

¹⁰Pickering, p. 33.

¹¹Armstrong, p. 21.

¹²Reitz, p. 192

¹³Greeting, p. 154.

interpretation should be significant and appealing for the audience. It should have a good pace and climax with symbolic interest and emotional excitement. When dealing specifically with a play there should be a credible plot, believable characters, purposeful and original dialogue and a dependence on theme or character rather than on action and situation. And when adapting drama specifically for Readers Theatre, the literature must benefit from the Readers Theatre performance as well as enhance the Readers Theatre style of production. Since drama is written to be heard, it often contains poetic prose or prose poetry which is especially compatible to oral interpretation. Since good theatre also combines equally an author's ideas with supporting emotion, drama is also generally well suited for Readers Theatre keeping in mind the above stated recommendations. A final and perhaps peripheral way in which drama benefits from Readers Theatre arises from the fact that Readers Theatre provides for group interpretation. Since a single interpreter can only read effectively so many characters in any given performance, play selection is limited to plays or scenes with few characters. Group performance provides for a larger cast and consequently a vastly increased choice of plays. It is important to remember, however, that whatever the size of its cast or the length of a play, any script must be edited to conform to production restrictions.

Analysis

Before the literature can be adapted to performance a careful analysis of the play's extrinsic and intrinsic aspects is necessary. Beverly Whitaker Long suggests the use of Kenneth Burke's dramatistic theory for analysis since it can be applied to both the extrinsic and intrinsic aspects. Five key terms are used to develop the analysis: Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose. When studying the literature extrinsically the editor would ask "who (agent) wrote (act) it, when and where (scene), with what means or how (agency), and why (purpose)."¹⁴ When looking at the literature intrinsically the questions change to who is speaking (including physical and personality traits), where and when is the speaker speaking (including time, scene and relation to objects in the scene), how does the speaker speak (including their point of view, mode and structure) and why does the speaker speak (including his purpose and message to other characters as well as it relates to the author's purpose).¹⁵ Long emphasizes that "No performance can demonstrate all the interpretations, all levels of meaning in a text."¹⁶ But a careful analysis makes it easier to adapt the material to Readers Theatre to emphasize the desired subtext. "The text is the mere external tip of a giant iceberg of inner action."¹⁷ Once the

¹⁴Beverly W. Long, p. 14.

¹⁵Beverly W. Long, pp. 14-15.

¹⁶Beverly W. Long, p. 17

¹⁷Beverly W. Long, p. 29.

analysis is completed and a fuller understanding of the play is obtained the editor can begin the adaptation of the material.

Adaptation and Staging

When adapting literature to Readers Theatre, time considerations for the production as well as production limitations should be kept in mind. However, the most important concern in adaptation is remaining true to the author's intent. To discover the author's intent the director and the interpreter should begin with a careful in-depth study of the author. In order for an interpreter to understand a piece of literature he must discover what is behind the words on the page. A writer blends theme, mood, philosophy and literary form into an effective piece of literature. It is the interpreter's responsibility to understand and convey as nearly as possible the author's meaning. After examining the author, the interpreter analyzes the specific piece to be presented. He studies the sentence structure, imagery, characterization and phrasings of the material to reveal further the author's specific intent for that piece of literature. This study also gives the interpreter the basis for communicating with his listeners. It reveals the moods and emotions he will have to convey.

When editing the literature to adapt to Readers Theatre the interpreter must remember to retain an accurate reflection of the parent work. To conform with time and physical limitations, subplots or minor characters may have to be eliminated. This can be done as long as it doesn't change the basic plot or the author's overall

intent. The interpreter cannot edit the piece to make it say what he wants it to say. The interpreter must be faithful to the author. This ability to edit drama provides the interpreter with the opportunity to use a narrator to lead the audience through transitions between various scenes as well as to provide any necessary exposition.

Although Readers Theatre allows the use of a narrator to help the audience, traditional aides to spectacle like costumes, makeup and sets are limited. Though there are no specific rules dictating their limitations, the director should keep in mind the general rule that the performance is to stay in the realm of the suggestive. Wallace Bacon states that "Whenever the text emphasizes something to be seen - rather than heard - Readers Theatre is usually required to put it onstage."¹⁷ Yet if the performance is achieving its purpose and being seen in "the mind's eye" then the audience should not need any help in visualizing what the author intends. Joanna MacLay also feels that certain props or costumes when particularized in the text should be made particular and visual in the production.¹⁸ But, if everything in the production up to that point has been suggestive, then the sudden appearance of a prop such as a gun or a full costume could be distracting for the audience since the visual effect could never match the audience's imagination. All costumes, props and makeup should remain generalized and suggestive.

¹⁷ Bacon, p. 458.

¹⁸ MacLay, pp. 46-47.

Staging is also suggestive. For many plays just having the readers sitting on stools with little movement is enough.¹⁹ Joanna MacLay points out that the use of lecterns or reading stands is not necessary unless the director wishes to use them as a symbol of restricting that character from the audience. The characters without a stand would therefore appear to be freer and more open than the other characters.²⁰ When staging a Readers Theatre production the director should keep in mind the emphasis desired and the relationships between the characters. Readers Theatre allows experimentation with extensive or limited movement depending on the piece being performed and the intention of the author and director. It should be remembered, however, that the impact which a facial expression or suggestive gesture can have on an audience is greater than the full motion. Platforms can also be used to show domination or alienation depending on the piece of literature and the director. Characters can move on and off platforms or to and from areas of the stage quite effectively to show their changing situation within the context of the play. Not only are the body positions important but so are characters' focal positions. A dialogue with two characters facing the audience full front has a different impact from one with the characters crossing their lines of focus by turning slightly in or with the characters turned

¹⁹The Readers Theatre production of Don Juan in Hell used such staging and was successful.

²⁰Maclay, pp. 54-55.

profile to the audience.²¹ The position desired depends again on character relationship and the situation in the play. "The offstage locus serves what Brecht has called the "alienation effect," and gives a certain distancing to the performance."²² When staging a performance for Readers Theatre, Jerry Pickering gives three uses for composition that a director should keep in mind.

The first and most important is that composition, at the most complex level, provides a means of communicating with the audience in terms of physical and psychological character relationships and attitudes. Second, it supplies a means for enhancing and supporting the mood of the production by paralleling the work's emotional content. And third, it helps in developing a pleasing, aesthetic, visual complement to the spoken material.²³

One of the visual conventions of a Readers Theatre production is the presence of the text on stage; although, recently it has been observed that more and more performers are memorizing the text and deleting the physical presence of the script. There are no set rules governing the use of the script in Readers Theatre. However, it is a Readers theatre; the term itself implies the use of a script. The script's presence also emphasizes for the audience "that this is a performance of a work of literature, and it does remind them that the reader is a performer and not merely the character he is reading."²⁴ A reader holding a script also

²¹Pickering, p. 80.

²²Bacon, p. 458.

²³Pickering, p. 82.

²⁴Pickering, p. 83.

helps to separate the reader from the audience. This alienation effect helps the audience remember that these are the words of the author and not the reader as well as reminding them that this is not reality but a performance. An aesthetic distance is achieved by the script's use.

There are no stringent rules governing Readers Theatre which gives it the freedom to explore and experiment with various forms of literature and performance. It is able to look below the surface of a play and see what the author intended its' audiences to discover. Readers Theatre allows and demands this exploration of literature and should be used to chart the unseen side of the literary world.

CHAPTER V

ADAPTING THE CHILDREN'S HOUR FOR READERS THEATRE

Analysis of the Play

The adaptation of a script for Readers Theatre proceeds from a full and careful analysis of the play. Including all the information which resulted from this author's analysis of The Children's Hour, however, would be superfluous here. But some of the conclusions which resulted from that analysis are pertinent to the adaptation.

The play is a serious - perhaps melodramatic - treatment of the insidious and overwhelming effects of a young girl's lie about the relationship between her two female teachers. Although lesbianism is never stated in the play, it is implied. The plot is straightforward but not entirely simple since each complication introduces new characters whose own needs (or rationalizations of whose needs as they effect perpetration of the lie) compound and enrich the conflict in the play. But that conflict - good against evil - is simple and justifies the use of the term melodramatic. That term is also applicable to the setting or situation created for the play and in part to the characterization as well.

The play is set in an exclusive, private girl's school established, owned and operated by two friends; the teachers mentioned earlier whose personal relationship is the subject of the lie. The school is located in a small, affluent community. Self contained, isolated and gossip-ridden, the village becomes a microcosm within

which to demonstrate the pervasive corruption of the lie.

The majority of characters in the play are well developed sociologically and psychologically. The glaring exception is the child, Mary, who is presented as little short of a sociopathic monster without conscience or for that matter any redeeming character or personality trait. She does, however, remain a believable character. Her lie, implying a lesbian relationship between her teachers, Karen and Martha, destroys their lives: the school is bankrupted, Karen's marriage plans thwarted, and Martha commits suicide.

These are the fundamental elements of The Children's Hour on which are based the Readers Theatre adaptations.

Presented are two adaptations of The Children's Hour. The first emphasizes the lesbian relationship obvious to audiences and critics at the play's opening performance. The second adaptation emphasizes the political views which are more subtly placed throughout the play. The editorial changes made in the adaptations are described later in this chapter.

Adaptation One: The Lesbian Subtext in The Children's Hour

The script and stage directions for this adaptation emphasize the social implications of the lesbian relationship presented in the play.

The Children's Hour is a closed literary situation. The audience is in the position of an observer. Character angles are out above

the audience. All characters carry manuscripts in black folders. The stage is black. The only furnishing is a stool down stage right for the narrator. All characters wear black. The children are in knee length dresses, Karen is in a knee length skirt, Martha is in a pants suit, Cardin is in a black sports coat, pants and shirt, Mrs. Mortar is in a full length skirt and Mrs. Tilford is in a full length gown.

NARRATOR: (The stage is black with a single white spot on the narrator who is down stage right. He speaks directly to the audience without the use of a manuscript. A stool is provided for the narrator to sit on during the performance. He never leaves the stage but watches the performance quietly.) Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour opened on Broadway in 1934 and ran for 86 weeks. It was also produced in London and Paris. Its shocking subject matter made it a sensation for audiences as well as censors. It was banned in London, Boston, and Chicago. Not a bad start for a new playwright. The lesbian theme however, is only the surface to more subtle subtexts. Lillian Hellman explores the human relationship where evil destroys in the form of misplaced or possessive love.

We open with a room in the Wright-Dobie School for girls, a converted farmhouse eighteen miles from the town of Lancet. It is early in an afternoon in April. The children, seven of them, are in elocution class and not paying attention to the recitation.

(Lights up to represent classroom lighting. Characters are on stage as diagramed in Figure A-1, Appendix A).

PEGGY: (Reading from manuscript in a sing-song voice with slumped shoulders and continually shifting weight on feet as if bored and wanting to sit down.) "It is twice blest; it blesseth him that gives and him that takes: 'tis mightiest in the mightiest it becomes the throned monarch better than his crown; his septre shows the force of temporal power, the tribute to awe and majesty, wherein . . ."

MRS. MORTAR: (standing erect and shaking her head, her focus is straight out but slightly lowered to adjust to Peggy's height, speaking sadly and reproachfully) Peggy, can't you imagine yourself as Portia? Can't you read the lines with some feeling,

some pity? (dreamily and with a sigh she looks up in reminiscence) Pity. Ah! As Sir Henry said to me many's the time, pity makes the actress. Now, why can't you feel pity?

PEGGY: (in a puzzled tone, looking straight out and up adjusting to Mortar's height) I guess I feel pity.

ROSALIE: (said with curious excitement, eyes big with focus out and up leaning slightly forward with the question) Weren't you ever in the movies, Mrs. Mortar?

MRS. MORTAR: (flattered and moving focus slightly left) I had many offers, my dear. But the cinema is a shallow art. It has no--no--(vaguely) no fourth dimension. (moving focus back to Peggy's) Now, Peggy, if you would only try to submerge yourself in the problem. You are pleading for the life of a man. (standing erect and stately, looking straight ahead above her previous focus) "But mercy is above this sceptred sway; it is enthroned in the hearts of kings, it is an attribute to God himself; and earthly power doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice. We do pray for mercy and that same prayer doth teach---"

PEGGY: (matter of factly yet pleased with herself, looking at book) You've skipped three lines.

MRS. MORTAR: (indignantly, looking down to Peggy's focus) In my entire career I've never missed a line.

(enter Mary SL to center stage - See Figure A-1, Appendix A)

PEGGY: (holding book up and out with finger pointing in book) But you did skip three lines. See?

MRS. MORTAR: (disturbed, changing focus to avoid Peggy to the right) Mary!

MARY: (with wide-eyed innocence, looking toward center of audience but above their heads adjusting to Mortar's height) Yes, Mrs. Mortar?

Mrs. Mortar: This is a pretty time to be coming to class, I must say. Even if you have no interest in your work you might at least remember that you owe me a little courtesy. Courtesy is breeding. Breeding is everything. Always remember that.

ROSALIE: (with fake sincerity) Please, Mrs. Mortar, can I write that down?

PEGGY: (focus at Rosalie is down and slightly the left of center)
But we wrote it down last week. (all giggle).

MRS. MORTAR: (ignoring the children) Mary, I'm still awaiting
your explanation. Where have you been?

MARY: (to avoid Mortar's focus she looks down at her manuscript
with one hand above script as if looking at a bunch of flowers)
I took a walk. I went to get you these flowers. I thought
you would like them and I didn't know it would take so long
to pick them.

MRS. MORTAR: (flattered) That was very sweet of you Mary; I
always like thoughtfulness. But you should not allow any-
thing to interfere with your classes. (to Peggy's focus)
You may put that book away, Peggy. I am sure your family
need never worry about your going on the stage.

PEGGY: I don't want to go on the stage. I want to be a light-
house keeper's wife.

MRS. MORTAR: Well I hope you won't read to him. (giggles; enter
Karen, SR to DSR, See Figure A-2, Appendix A, stands at a
slight angle in. Mortar continues with fist to breast to
impress Karen) "One master passion in the breast, like
Aaron's serpent, swallows all the rest."

KAREN: (gives an annoyed look to the audience in reaction to
Mortar, then looks out and down and slightly to the right
of center to Peggy's focus) Peggy, have you found your
bracelet?

PEGGY: (disappointed, looking up and out to left to adjust to
Karen's position and height) No, I haven't, and I've looked
everywhere.

KAREN: Have another look. It must be in your room somewhere.
(looking down as if at papers in her hands)

MRS. MORTAR: (still trying to impress Karen) Peggy has been
reading Portia to us.

KAREN: (sympathetically and looking at Peggy's focus) Peggy
doesn't like Portia?

MRS. MORTAR: I don't think she quite appreciates it, but--

KAREN: Well, I didn't either. I don't think I do yet. (Mortar
reacts as if insulted - straightens up stiffly with nose

slightly in the air; there is a pause while Karen eyes Mary at her focus farther to the right beginning to get tense)
Where'd you get those flowers, Mary?

MRS. MORTAR: (smiling and defending Mary while looking at Mary's focal point) She picked them for me. It made her a little late to class, but they're the first wild flowers of the season.

KAREN: (direct, strong gaze at Mary's focal point) But not the very first, are they, Mary?

MARY: (avoiding glance and getting nervous) I don't know.

KAREN: Where did you get them?

MARY: Near Conway's cornfield, I think.

KAREN: It wasn't necessary to go so far. There was a bunch exactly like them in the garbage this morning.

MRS. MORTAR: (taken aback and standing erect with shoulders and head back but looking at Mary's focus) Oh, I can't believe it! What a nasty thing to do!

KAREN: (all characters react to a bell ringing although no bell is used) There's the bell, (all children and Mortar turn around) Wait a minute, Mary, Mary, I've had the feeling-- and I don't think I'm wrong-- that the girls here were happy; that they liked Miss Dobie and me, that they liked the school. Do you think that's true?

MARY: Miss Wright, I have to get my Latin book.

KAREN: I thought it was true until you came here a year ago. I don't think you're very happy here, and I'd like to find out why? Why, for example, do you find it necessary to lie to us so often?

MARY: (acting innocent) I'm not lying. I went out walking and I saw the flowers and they looked pretty and I didn't know it was so late.

KAREN: (out of patience, very short and strong, body tense and eyes glaring) Stop it, Mary! I'm not interested in hearing that foolish story again. I know you got the flowers out of the garbage can. What I do want to know is why you feel you have to lie out of it.

MARY: (stubbornly, very tense - almost stamping her feet) I did pick the flowers near Conway's. You never believe me. You believe everybody but me. It's always like that. Everything I say you fuss at me about. Everything I do is wrong.

KAREN: You know, that isn't true. (trying another tactic - not as tense - trying to reason and compromise) Let's try to understand each other. If you feel that you have to take a walk or that you just can't come to class, or that you'd like to go into the village by yourself, come and tell me-- I'll try to understand. I don't say that I'll always agree that you should do exactly what you want to do, but I've had feelings like that, too--everybody has--and I won't be unreasonable about yours. But this way, this kind of lying you do, makes everything wrong.

MARY: (Head up, body tense and eyes closed) I got the flowers near Conway's cornfield.

KAREN: (matter of factly) Well, there doesn't seem to be any other way with you; you'll have to be punished. Take your recreation periods alone for the next two weeks. No horseback riding and no hockey. Don't leave the school grounds for any reason whatsoever. Is that clear?

MARY: (eyes big) Saturday, too?

KAREN: Yes.

MARY: (demanding) But you said I could go to the boat-races.

KAREN: I'm sorry, but you can't go.

MARY: (threatening-body leaning slightly forward) I'll tell my grandmother. I'll tell her how everybody treats me here and the way I get punished for everything I do. I'll tell her I'll--

KAREN: (not wanting to listen) Go upstairs, Mary.

(Mrs. Mortar turns around).

MARY: (realizing her threat doesn't work she tries for sympathy - hesitantly) I don't feel well.

KAREN: (getting annoyed) Go upstairs now.

MARY: I've got a pain. I've had it all morning. It hurts right here. Really it does--

KAREN: Ask Miss Dobie to give you some hot water and bicarbonate of soda.

MARY: It's a bad pain. I've never had it before. (getting desperate and beginning to panic)

KAREN: I don't think it could be serious.

MARY: My heart! It's my heart! It's stopping or something. (looking at audience) I can't breathe (faints awkwardly - does not fall but suggests it was a bowed head and closed eyes and turns around)

MRS. MORTAR: Do you think--? Heart trouble is very serious in a child.

KAREN: (exasperated) Get Joe. (Mortar turns and Martha enters DSR as Mary turns - See Figure A-3, Appendix A)

MARTHA: (Karen and Martha cross focus - Karen slightly to right and Martha slightly left) What happened to her? She was perfectly well a few hours ago.

KAREN: She probably still is. I told her she couldn't go to the boat races and she had a heart attack (sarcastically).
Mortar's with her.

(lights gradually dim on rest of stage with spots up on Karen and Martha)

MARTHA: Anything really wrong with her?

KAREN: (relaxing of tension) I doubt it. She's a problem, that kid. Her latest trick was kidding your aunt out of a sewing lesson with those faded flowers we threw out. Then she threatened to go to her grandmother with some tale about being mistreated.

MARTHA: And, please God, Grandma would believe her and take her away.

KAREN: Which would give the school a swell black eye. But we ought to do something.

MARTHA: How about having a talk with Mrs. Tilford?

KAREN: (smiling) You want to do it? (Martha shakes her head) I hate to do it. She's been so nice to us. Anyway, it wouldn't do any good. She's too crazy about Mary to see her faults very clearly--and the kid knows it.

MARTHA: How about asking Joe to say something to her? She'd listen to him.

KAREN: That would be admitting that we can't do the job ourselves.

MARTHA: Well, we can't, and we might as well admit it. We've tried everything we can think of. She's had more attention than any other three kids put together. And we still haven't the faintest idea what goes on inside her head.

KAREN: She's a strange girl.

MARTHA: That's putting it mildly.

KAREN: (laughs) It's funny. We always talk about the child as if she were a grown woman.

MARTHA: (seriously, body more erect with slight tension) It's not so funny. There's something the matter with the kid. That's been true ever since the first day she came. She causes trouble here; she's bad for the other girls. I don't know what it is--it's a feeling I've got that it's wrong somewhere--

KAREN: (trying to avoid the tension) All right, all right, we'll talk it over with Joe. Now what about our other pet nuisance?

MARTHA: (laughs, relaxing again) My aunt the actress? What's she been up to now?

KAREN: Nothing unusual. Last night at dinner she was telling the girls about the time she lost her trunks in Butte, Montana, and how she gave her best performance of Rosalind during a hurricane. Today in the kitchen you could hear her on what Sir Henry said to her.

MARTHA: Wait until she does Hedda Gabler standing on a chair. Sir Henry taught her to do it that way. He said it was a test of great acting.

KAREN: You must have had a gay childhood.

MARTHA: (bitterly) Oh, I did, I did, indeed, God, how I hated all that--(with a shudder)

KAREN: (after a slight pause-gently but looking directly at Martha's focus) Couldn't we get rid of her soon, Martha?

I hate to make it hard on you, but she really ought not to be here.

MARTHA: (looking down-after a moment) I know.

KAREN: We can scrape up enough money to send her away. Let's do it.

MARTHA: (affectionately and looking again at Karen's focus) You've been very patient about it. I'm sorry and I'll talk to her today. It'll probably be a week or two before she can be ready to leave. Is that all right?

KAREN: Of course. Did you get Joe himself on the phone?

MARTHA: He was already on his way. (touch of annoyance in her voice) Isn't he always on his way over here?

(lights gradually get hotter but never extreme)

KAREN: (laughs) Well, I'm going to marry him some day, you know.

MARTHA: (not looking at Karen but avoiding her glance as if uncomfortable and gradually getting tense - standing more erect with a stiffness) You haven't talked of marriage for a long time.

KAREN: I've talked of it with Joe.

MARTHA: Then you are thinking about it--soon?

KAREN: (said easily with a hint of excitement) Perhaps when the term is over. By that time we ought to be out of debt, and the school should be paying for itself.

MARTHA: (nervously playing with book) Then we won't be taking our vacation together?

KAREN: (just realizing Martha's reactions looks at her focus intently) Of course we will. The three of us.

MARTHA: (melancholally and still looking away) I had been looking forward to some place by the lake--just you and me--the way we used to at college.

KAREN: (cheerfully) Well, now there will be three of us. That'll be fun, too.

MARTHA: (after a pause) Why haven't you told me this before?

KAREN: (puzzled) I'm not telling you anything we haven't talked about often.

MARTHA: But you're talking about it as soon now.

KAREN: I'm glad to be able to. I've been in love with Joe a long time.

MARTHA: (in a dull bitter tone but looking at Karen's focus) You really are going to leave, aren't you?

KAREN: (concerned and a little annoyed - getting tense and leaning slightly forward at questions) I'm not going to leave, and you know it. Why do you say things like that? We agreed a long time ago that my marriage wasn't going to make any difference to the school.

MARTHA: But it will. You know it will. It can't help it.

KAREN: That's nonsense. Joe doesn't want me to give up here.

MARTHA: (rapidly) I don't understand you. It's been so damned hard building this thing up, slaving and going without things to make ends meet--think of having a winter coat without holes in the lining again! --and now when we're getting on our feet, you're all ready to let it go to hell.

KAREN: (annoyed-body back - voice tense) This is a silly argument, Martha. Let's quit it. You haven't listened to a word I've said. I'm not getting married tomorrow, and when I do, it's not going to interfere with my work here. You're making something out of nothing.

MARTHA: (depressingly and looking away) It's going to be hard going on alone afterward.

KAREN: (angry and leaning forward) For God's sake, do you expect me to give up my marriage?

MARTHA: I don't mean that, but it's so -- (physically turns from diagonal or crossed angle to straight ahead as Cardin enters from SL to DSL of Center - See Figure A-4, Appendix A, lights rise with a spot on Cardin)

CARDIN: (relaxed and friendly) Hello, darling. Hi, Martha. What's the best news?

MARTHA: (still tense) Hello, Joe.

KAREN: (relieved at the interruption, relaxes with shoulders down - Her focus is straight out) We tried to get you on the phone. Come in and look at your little cousin.

CARDIN: Sure. What's the matter with her now?

KAREN: You'd better come and see her. She says she has a pain in her heart.

CARDIN: (cheerfully) Our little Mary pops up in every day's dispatches.

MARTHA: (impatiently - focus is straight out) Go and see her. Heart attacks are nothing to play with.

CARDIN: (surprised at Martha's tone) Never played with one in my life.

(Cardin and Karen turn with both taking a step back. Mortar turns after a pause, steps to the right - See Figure A-5, Appendix A)

MRS. MORTAR: I was asked to leave the room. It seems that I'm not wanted in the room during the examination. (indignant and focus crossed with Martha - See Figure A-5, Appendix A)

MARTHA: What difference does it make? (annoyed and still tense)

MRS. MORTAR: What difference does it make? Why, it was a deliberate snub.

MARTHA: There's very little pleasure in watching a man use a stethoscope.

MRS. MORTAR: Isn't it natural that the child should have me with her? Isn't it natural that an older woman should be present? (no answer) Very well, if you are so thick-skinned that you don't resent these things--

MARTHA: What are you talking about? Why, in the name of heaven should you be with her?

MRS. MORTAR: It--it's customary for an older woman to be present during an examination.

MARTHA: (laughs stiffly) Tell that to Joe. Maybe he'll give you a job as duenna for his office.

MRS. MORTER: So you don't resent your aunt being snubbed and humiliated?

(lights slowly dim to just spots on Martha and Mortar)

MARTHA: Oh, Aunt Lily! (exasperated - shoulders down)

MRS. MORTAR: Karen is consistantly rude to me, and you know it.

MARTHA: Karen is very polite to you, and what's more important-- very patient.

MRS. MORTAR: Patient with me? I, who have worked my fingers to the bone! (erect - head up)

MARTHA: Don't tell yourself that too often Aunt Lily; you'll come to believe it.

MRS. MORTAR: I know it's true. Where could you have gotten a woman of my reputation to give these children voice lessons, and elocution lessons? Patient with me! Here I've donated my services--

MARTHA: I was under the impression you were being paid.

MRS. MORTAR: That small thing! I used to earn twice that for one performance.

MARTHA: (sarcastically) The gilded days. It was very extravagant of them to pay you so much. (pause) You're not very happy here, are you, Aunt Lily?

MRS. MORTAR: Satisfied enough, I guess, for a poor relation.

MARTHA: (Makes a motion of distaste) Aunt Lily, you've talked about London for a long time. Would you like to go over?

MRS. MORTAR: (with a sigh - looking out in reminicence) It's been twenty years, and I shall never live to see it again.

MARTHA: Well, you can go any time you like. We can spare the money now, and it will do you a lot of good. You pick out the boat you want and I'll get the passage. (Talking rapidly, anxious to end the whole thing - avoiding her focus) Now that's all fixed. You'll have a grand time seeing all your

old friends, and if you live sensibly I ought to be able to let you have enough to get along on. (a little tense - not sure of Mortar's reaction)

MRS. MORTAR: (slowly) So you want me to leave?

MARTHA: (trying to lighten the situation but her body remains very tense) That's it. We don't want you around when we dig up the buried treasure.

MRS. MORTAR: So? You're turning me out? At my age! Nice, grateful girl you are.

MARTHA: (exasperated) Oh, my God, how can anybody deal with you? You're going where you want to go, and we'll be better off alone. That suits everybody. (dim spot rises on Peggy who turns and steps forward - See Figure A-5, Appendix A) During dialogue she leans slightly forward with big curious eyes) You complain about Karen, and now you have what you want and you're still looking for something to complain about.

MRS. MORTAR: (with dignity, head up, body erect with shoulders square) Please do not raise your voice.

MARTHA: You ought to be glad I don't do worse.

MRS. MORTAR: I absolutely refuse to be shipped off three thousand miles away. I'm not going to England. I shall go back to the stage. I'll write my agents tomorrow and as soon as they have something good for me--

MARTHA: The truth is I'd like you to leave soon. The three of us can't live together, and it doesn't make any difference whose fault it is.

MRS. MORTAR: You wish me to go tonight? (appalled)

MARTHA: Don't act, Aunt Lily. Go as soon as you've found a place you like. I'll put the money in the bank for you tomorrow.

MRS. MORTAR: You think I'd take your money? I'd rather scrub floors first.

MARTHA: I imagine you'll change your mind.

MRS. MORTAR: I should have known by this time that the wise thing is to stay out of your way when he's in the house.

MARTHA: When who is in the house?

MRS. MORTAR: Don't think you're fooling me, young lady. I wasn't born yesterday. Every time that man comes into this house, you have a fit. It seems like you just can't stand the idea of them being together. God knows what you'll do when they get married. You're jealous of him, that's what it is.

MARTHA: (suddenly standing very erect, voice very tense) I'm very fond of Joe, and you know it.

MRS. MORTAR: (slowly with a strong gaze at Martha's focus) You're fonder of Karen, and I know that. And it's unnatural, just as unnatural as it can be. You don't like their being together. You were always like that even as a child. If you had a little girl friend, you always got mad when she liked anybody else. Well, you'd better get a beau of your own now--a woman of your age.

MARTHA: (getting angry) The sooner you get out of here, the better. Your vulgarities are making me sick and I won't stand for them any longer. I want you to leave---(she breaks off; lights up suddenly, both change focus down and to the right to Peggy's focal point) What were you doing outside the door?

PEGGY: I came down to see how Mary was. (stammering slightly - frightened - eyes big with body erect and tense.)

MARTHA: And you stopped long enough to see how we were. Did you deliberately listen?

PEGGY: I didn't mean to. I heard voices and I couldn't help--

MRS. MORTAR: (fake social tone) Eavesdropping is something nice young ladies just don't do.

MARTHA: Go upstairs now. We'll talk about this later. (Peggy turns)

MRS. MORTAR: You mean to say you're not going to do anything about that? That's the trouble with these new-fangled notions of discipline and--(Cardin turns and steps forward - See Figure A-6, Appendix A).

MARTHA: (quickly, relieved at the interruption) How is Mary?

MRS. MORTAR: (exits head in the air up right - See Figure A-6, Appendix A) Good day, Joseph.

CARDIN: What's the matter with the Duchess?

MARTHA: (adjusting focus to Center) just keeping her hand in, in case Sir Henry's watching her from above. What about Mary?

CARDIN: Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

MARTHA: (sighs) I thought so.

CARDIN: I could have managed a better faint than that when I was six years old.

MARTHA: Nothing the matter with her at all, then?

CARDIN: No, ma'am, not a thing. Just a little something she thought up.

MARTHA: But it's such a silly thing to do. She knew we'd have you in. Maybe she's not so bright. Any idiots in your family, Joe? Any inbreeding?

CARDIN: Don't blame her on me. It's another side of the family.
(Laughs)

MARTHA: Look, Joe, have you any idea what is the matter with Mary? I mean, has she always been like this?

CARDIN: She's always been a honey. Aunt Amelia's spoiling hasn't helped any, either. But forget Mary for a minute. You and I have got something to fight about. Every time anything's said about marrying--about Karen marrying me--you--(she winces) There it is. I'm fond of you. I always thought you liked me. What is it? I know how fond you are of Karen, but our marriage oughtn't to make a great deal of difference--

MARTHA: God damn you. I wish-- Joe, please, I'm sorry. I'm a fool, a nasty, bitter--

CARDIN: Aw, shut up.

(Karen turns and steps forward - See Figure A-6, Appendix A)

KAREN: Well, the angel child is now putting her clothes back on.

MARTHA: The angel child's influence is abroad even while she's

unconscious. Her roommate was busy listening at the door while Aunt Lily and I were yelling at each other.

KAREN: We'll have to move those girls away from one another.
(all react to bell ringing)

MARTHA: That's my class. I'll send Peggy down. You talk to her - (exits SR - See Figure A-6, Appendix A)

KAREN: All right.

CARDIN: (to Mary who has turned and stepped forward - See Figure A-7, Appendix A) How's it feel to be back from the grave?

MARY: (with a pout and tense body and direct gaze at Cardin's focus) My heart hurts.

CARDIN: (laughing) Science has failed. Try a hairbrush.

MARY: It's my heart, and it hurts. I want to see my grandmother. I want to-- (Peggy turns - See Figure A-7, Appendix A)

KAREN: Girls, I want to talk to you.

PEGGY: I'm awfully sorry, really. I just didn't think and--

KAREN: I'm sorry too, Peggy. You never used to do things like this. We'll have to separate you two. Peggy, you will move into Lois's room, and Lois will move in with Evelyn. Mary will go in with Rosalie.

MARY: (disgusted) Rosalie hates me.

KAREN: That's a very stupid thing to say. I can't imagine Rosalie hating anyone.

MARY: (starting to cry) And it's all because I had a pain. If anybody else was sick they'd be put to bed and petted. You're always mean to me. I get blamed and punished for everything. (to Cardin's focus) I do, Cousin Joe. All the time for everything.

CARDIN: You've been unpleasant enough to Miss Wright. I've got to go now. (to Karen) The next time she faints, I'd wait until she gets tired of lying on the floor.

KAREN: Wait a minute. I'll walk to the car with you. (to the girls) Go up now and move your things. Tell Lois to get her stuff ready. (exits Karen and Joe SL - See Figure A-7, Appendix A)

PEGGY: (eyes big) Did you really have a pain?

MARY: (indignant) I fainted, didn't I?

PEGGY: (with a sigh) I wish I could faint sometimes. I've never even worn glasses, like Rosalie.

MARY: A lot it'll get you to faint.

PEGGY: What did Miss Wright do to you when the class left?

MARY: (pouting and looking down) Told me I couldn't go to the boat races.

PEGGY: Whew! But we'll remember everything that happens and we'll give you all the souvenirs and things.

MARY: I won't let you go if I can't go. But I'll find some way to go. (curiously) What were You doing?

PEGGY: I guess I shouldn't have done it, really. I came down to see what was happening to you, but the doors were closed and I could hear Miss Dobie and Mortar having an awful row. Then Miss Dobie opens the door and there I was.

MARY: And a lot of crawling and crying you did too, I bet.

PEGGY: I was sort of sorry about listening. I guess it wasn't--

MARY: Ah, you're always sorry about everything. What were they saying?

PEGGY: (wanting to impress Mary - leaning forward) Well, they were talking about Mortar going away to England and Mortar got awful sore and said they just wanted to get rid of her, and then they started talking about Dr. Cardin.

MARY: What about him?

PEGGY: (getting anxious) We'd better get started moving; Miss Wright will be back first thing we know.

MARY: (fiercely) Go on!

PEGGY: They're going to be married.

MARY: (disappointed) Everybody knows that.

PEGGY: But everybody doesn't know that Miss Dobie doesn't want them to get married. How do you like that? (Rosalie turns)

ROSALIE: I have a class soon. If you're going to move your things-- not that I want you in with me--you'd better start right now. Miss Wright's coming in a minute.

PEGGY: We're coming

MARY: No. Let Rosalie move our things.

ROSALIE: You crazy?

MARY: Rosalie, you go on up and move my things and don't say a word about our being down here. And the next time we go to town, I'll let you wear my gold locket and buckle. You'll like that, won't you, Rosalie?

ROSALIE: (draws back, moves hands nervously) I don't know what you're talking about. (stares a moment) But I'll do it this time, but just 'cause I got a good disposition. But don't think you're going to boss me around, Mary Tilford. (Rosalie exits SL)

PEGGY: Now what made her so agreeable? (looking towards Rosalie's focus)

MARY: (with a slight smile) Oh, a little secret we got. Go on, now, what else did they say?

PEGGY: Well, Mortar said that Dobie was jealous of them, and that she was like that when she was a little girl, and that she'd better get herself a beau of her own because it was unnatural, and that she never wanted anybody to like Miss Wright, and that was unnatural. Boy! Did Miss Dobie get sore at that!

MARY: What'd she mean Dobie was jealous?

PEGGY: (jumps, claps her hand to her mouth) Oh, my God! Rosalie 'll find that copy of Mademoiselle de Maupin. She'll blab like the dickens.

MARY: No, she won't (slowly - squinting as if calculating) But there's one part in it-- I'm going home.

PEGGY: Mary--you can't do that.

MARY: Can't I? You just watch. I'm not staying here. I'm going home and tell Grandma I'm not happy. They can't get

away with treating me like this, and they don't have to think they can.

(blackout - spot up on narrator)

NARRATOR: Mary, determined to get her revenge on her teachers, rushes home to her grandmother, Mrs. Amelia Tilford. Mrs. Tilford is an influential figure in the small town. Being an older woman living alone, she enjoys her granddaughter. Mary, realizes the power her grandmother holds and her influence over her grandmother. Mary reports the activities at school and the effects, as we shall see, are devastating.

We are in Mrs. Tilford's sitting room, an elegant room, warm, spacious, and filled with expensive furniture, everything in good taste and suggesting upper-crust affluence. Mrs. Tilford has decided to confront her nephew Joseph Cardin with the situation.

(lights up - warm - on Cardin and Tilford - See Figure A-8, Appendix A)

CARDIN: (friendly) Hello, Amelia.

MRS. TILFORD: (dignified and proper - never overly friendly)
Hello, Joseph.

CARDIN: How are you feeling? Headaches again?

MRS. TILFORD: No.

CARDIN: Those are good powders. Bicarbonate of soda and water. Never hurt anybody yet.

MRS. TILFORD: Yes. How have you been, Joseph?

CARDIN: My good health is monotonous. (slight pause) --Amelia, we're talking like people waiting for the muffins to be passed around. What's the matter with you?

MRS. TILFORD: (difficult to say - not looking at Cardin's focus)
I--I have something to tell you.

CARDIN: Well, out with it.

MRS. TILFORD: It's a hard thing to say, Joseph.

CARDIN: (taken aback - shoulders and body posture back) Hard for you to say to me? (guessing at subject - relaxes body tension) Don't worry about Mary. I guessed that she ran

home to tell you about her faint. It was caused by nothing but bad temper and was very clumsily managed, at that.

MRS. TILFORD: I heard about the faint. That's not what is worrying me.

CARDIN: (gently) Are you in some trouble?

MRS. TILFORD: We all are in trouble. Bad trouble.

CARDIN: We? Me, you mean? Nothing's the matter with me.

MRS. TILFORD: When did you last see Karen?

CARDIN: Today. This afternoon.

MRS. TILFORD: Oh. Not since seven o'clock?

CARDIN: (worried and getting tense) What's happened since seven o'clock?

MRS. TILFORD: Joseph, you've been engaged to Karen for a long time. Are your plans any more definite than they were a year ago?

CARDIN: You can get ready to buy the wedding present. We'll have the wedding here, if you don't mind.

MRS. TILFORD: Why has Karen decided so suddenly to make it definite?

CARDIN: (confused - slightly raised shoulders) She has not suddenly decided anything. The school is pretty well on its feet, and now that Mrs. Mortar is leaving---

MRS. TILFORD: I've heard about their putting Mrs. Mortar out.

CARDIN: Putting her out? Well, maybe, but a nice sum for a trip and a promise that a good niece will support you the rest of your life is an enviable way of being put out.

MRS. TILFORD: (slowly) Don't you find it odd, Joseph, that they want so much to get rid of that silly, harmless woman?

CARDIN: I don't know what you're talking about, but it isn't odd at all. Lily Mortar is not a harmless woman, although God knows she's silly enough. She's a nasty, tiresome, spoilt old bitch. If you're forming a Mortar Welfare Society, you're wasting your time. It's not like you to waste your time. Now what's it that's really on your mind?

MRS. TILFORD: You must not marry Karen.

CARDIN: (shocked, body very tense and back, grins nervously) you're a very impertinent lady. Why must I--(imitates her) not marry Karen?

MRS. TILFORD: Because there's something wrong with Karen--something horrible.

CARDIN: (getting angry) I don't think I can allow you to say things like that, Amelia.

MRS. TILFORD: I have good reason for saying it. (breaks off, reacts to door bell) Who is that: I won't have her here.

(Karen and Martha turn and step forward - See Figure A-8, Appendix A - lights gradually get hotter)

CARDIN: Then you don't want me here either. Darling, what?--

KAREN: (confused - shoulders up and leaning forward) Is it a joke, Joe?

MARTHA: (with great force) We've come to find out what you are doing.

CARDIN: What is it?

KAREN: We didn't know what it was. Nobody would talk to us, nobody would tell us anything.

MARTHA: I'll tell you. You see if you can make any sense out of it. At dinnertime Mrs. Munn's chauffeur said that Evelyn must be sent home right away. At half past seven Mrs. Burton arrived to tell us that she wanted Helen's things packed and that she'd wait outside because she didn't want to enter a place like ours. Five minutes later the Well's butler came for Rosalie.

CARDIN: What was it?

KAREN: Mrs. Rogers finally told us.

CARDIN: What? What? (he leans forward slightly with the question)

KAREN: (delivered directly to audience) That--that Martha and I are--in love with each other. (focus back to Cardin) In love with each other. Mrs. Tilford told them.

CARDIN: (stares at Karen's focus for a moment and then looking at Tilford's) Did you tell them that?

MRS. TILFORD: (looking away) Yes.

CARDIN: Are you sick?

MRS. TILFORD: You know I'm not sick.

CARDIN: (snapping the words out) Then what did you do it for?
(his body is tense and leaning slightly forward)

MRS. TILFORD: (slowly) Because it's true.

KAREN: (strong gaze at Tilford's focus - incredulously) You think it's true, then?

MARTHA: (angry with clenched fist) You fool! You damned, vicious--

KAREN: Do you realize what you're saying?

MRS. TILFORD: (finally looking up) I realize it very well. And that's why I don't think you should have come here. I shall not call you names, and I will not allow you to call me names. It comes to this: I can't trust myself to talk about it with you now or ever.

KAREN: What's she talking about, Joe? What's she mean? What is she trying to do to us? What is everybody doing to us?

MARTHA: (suddenly with violence; body tense and leaning forward)
Didn't you know we'd come here? Were we supposed to lie down and grin while you kicked us around with these lies?

MRS. TILFORD: This can't do any of us any good, Miss Dobie.

MARTHA: Listen, listen. Try to understand this: you're not playing with paper dolls. We're human beings, see? It's our lives you're fooling with. Our lives. That's serious business for us. Can you understand that?

MRS. TILFORD: (angrily for the first time) I can understand that, and I understand a lot more. You've been playing with a lot of children's lives, and that's why I stopped you. I know how serious this is for you, how serious it is for all of us.

CARDIN: (bitterly) I don't think you do know.

MRS. TILFORD: I have done what I had to do. What they are may possibly be their own business. It becomes a great deal more than that when children are involved.

KAREN: (wildly) It's not true. Not a word of it is true; can't you understand that?

MARTHA: (trying to be calm) Listen: are you willing to stand by everything you've said tonight?

MRS. TILFORD: Yes.

MARTHA: All right. That's fine. But don't get the idea we'll let you whisper this lie: you made it and you'll come out with it. Shriek it to your town of Lancet. We'll make you shriek it-- and we'll make you do it in a courtroom. Tomorrow, Mrs. Tilford, you will have a libel suit on your hands.

MRS. TILFORD: (calmly) It is you I am thinking of. I am frightened for you. It was wrong of you to brazen out here tonight; it would be criminally foolish of you to brazen it out in public. That can bring you nothing but pain. I am an old woman, Miss Dobie, and I have seen too many people, out of pride, act on that pride. In the end they punish themselves.

CARDIN: (slowly) So you took a child's word for it?

MARTHA: (shakes her head) I knew it, too.

KAREN: (in disbelief) That is really where you go it? I can't believe it--it couldn't be. Why, she's a child.

MARTHA: She's not a child any longer.

KAREN: (looking away off into the distance up and left) Oh, my God, it all fits so well now. That girl has hated us for a long time. We never knew why, we never could find out.

MARTHA: There wasn't any reason. She hates everybody and everything. Where is she? Bring her out here and let us hear what she has to say.

MRS. TILFORD: (Quickly and firmly) I won't have her go through that again. You came here demanding explanations. It was I who should have asked them from you. You attack me, you attack Mary. I've told you I didn't mean you any harm. I still don't. You have been in my house long enough. Get out.

CARDIN: (strong and demanding) No. When two people come here with their lives spread on the table for you to cut to pieces, then the only honest thing to do is to give them a chance to come out whole. So where is Mary? Mary! Come here.

(enter Mary to Down right)

MRS. TILFORD: (gently) Don't be afraid, dear.

CARDIN: (calmly and slowly looking to right and down to adjust to Mary's focus) Look: everybody lies all the time. Sometimes they have to, sometimes they don't. I've lied myself for a lot of different reasons, but there was never a time when, if I'd been given a second chance, I wouldn't have taken back the lie and told the truth. You're lucky if you ever get that chance. If you made a mistake, you must take this chance and say so. You won't be punished for it. Do you get all that?

MARY: (timidly) Yes, Cousin Joe.

CARDIN: (grimly) All right, let's get started. Were you telling your grandmother the truth this afternoon? The exact truth about Miss Wright and Miss Dobie?

MARY: (without hesitation) Oh, yes.

CARDIN: All right, Mary, that was your chance; you passed it up. Why don't you like Miss Dobie and Miss Wright?

MARY: (slowly and calmly) Oh, I do like them. They just don't like me. They never have liked me. They're always picking on me. They're always punishing me for everything that happens. No matter what happens, it's always me.

CARDIN: Did you get punished today?

MARY: (pouting and mad) Yes, and it was just because Peggy heard them and so they took it out on me.

KAREN: (quickly and loudly) That's a lie.

CARDIN: (with a quick glance towards Karen's focus) Ssh. Heard what, Mary?

MARY: Mrs. Mortar told Miss Dobie that there was something funny about her. She said that she had a funny feeling about Miss Wright, and Mrs. Mortar said that was unnatural. That was why we got punished, just because--

KAREN: That was not the reason they got punished.

MRS. TILFORD: Miss Dobie?

MARTHA: (embarrassed and looking at Cardin's focus) My aunt is a stupid woman. What she said was unpleasant; it was said to annoy me. It meant nothing more than that.

MARY: (anxious to tell all) And, Cousin Joe, she said every time you came to the school Miss Dobie got jealous, and that she didn't want you to get married.

MARTHA: She said that, too. For God's sake, can't you see what's happening? This--this child is taking little things, little family things, and making them have meanings that--(to Mary) Where did you learn so much in so little time?

CARDIN: What do you think Mrs. Mortar meant by all that, Mary?

MRS. TILFORD: (sternly) Stop it, Joseph!

MARY: I don't know, but it was always kind of funny and she always said things like that and all the girls would talk about it when Miss Dobie went and visited Miss Wright late at night--

KAREN: (angrily) And we go to the movies at night and sometimes we read at night and sometimes we drink tea at night. Those are guilty things, too, Mrs. Tilford.

MARY: And there are always funny sounds and we'd stay awake and listen because we couldn't help hearing and I'd get frightened because the sounds were like--

MRS. TILFORD: You are trying to make her name it, aren't you?

CARDIN: (ignoring her) Go on. What did you think they were? Why did they frighten you?

MARY: (slight stammering) I don't know.

CARDIN: (Smiles at Tilford's focus) She doesn't know.

(lights get hot)

MARY: (hastily, eyes big - leaning slightly forward) I saw things, too. One night there was so much noise I looked through the keyhole and they were kissing and saying things and then I got scared because it was different sort of and I--

MARTHA: That child--that child is sick.

KAREN: (calmly-looking straight ahead but tense) There's no keyhole on my door.

MRS. TILFORD: (quickly) What?

MARY: (too quickly) It wasn't her room, Grandma, it was the other room, I guess. It was Miss Dobie's room.

MARTHA: (tense and strong gaze at Mary's focus) I share a room with my aunt. It is on the first floor at the other end of the house. It is impossible to hear anything from there.

MRS. TILFORD: (her voice shaken) What is this, Mary? Why did you say you saw through a keyhole? Can you hear from your room?

MARY: (starts to cry) Everybody is yelling at me. I don't know what I'm saying with everybody mixing me all up. (stamping foot) I did see it!

MRS. TILFORD: What did you see? Where did you see it? I want the truth now!

CARDIN: (relieved - body relaxed but jaw still tense) We can go home.. We are finished here. It's not a pleasant place to be.

MARY: All-all right. It was Rosalie who saw them. I just said it was me so I wouldn't have to tattle on Rosalie.

CARDIN: (wearily) Oh, my God!

MRS. TILFORD: Please wait a minute. Rosalie is spending the night here. Rosalie! (enter Rosalie SL but not as far down as Mary)

CARDIN: You're giving yourself an awful beating, Amelia, and you deserve whatever you get.

MRS. TILFORD: (worried and confused) I don't know. I don't know anymore. I'm sorry to keep you up so late, Rosalie. You must be tired. (rapidly but not sure how to phrase it) Mary says there's been a lot of talk in the school lately about Miss Wright and Miss Dobie. Is that true?

ROSALIE: (confused with eyes big) I--I don't know what you mean.

KAREN: (gently) Don't be frightened. Rosalie, Mary has told her grandmother that certain--certain things at school have been--er--puzzling you girls.

ROSALIE: History puzzles me. I guess I'm not very good at history.

KAREN: No, that's not what she meant. She says that you told her that you saw certain--certain acts between Miss Dobie and myself. She says that once, when the door was open, you saw us kissing each other in a way that--women don't kiss one another.

ROSALIE: (quickly and loudly-shaking her head) Oh, Miss Wright, I didn't, I didn't; I never said such a thing. Mary always makes things up about me and everybody else. I never said any such thing ever.

MARY: (slowly and squinting her eyes) Yes, you did Rosalie. You're just trying to get out of it. I remember just when you said it. I remember it, because it was the day Peggy's bracelet was--stolen, and nobody knew who did it, and Peggy said that if her mother found out, she'd have the thief put in jail. Grandma, there's something I've got to tell you that---

ROSALIE: (with a shrill cry-tense and shaking-looking at Mary but looking down at the end) Yes, Yes, I did see it. I told Mary. What Mary said was right. I said it, I said it--

(fast blackout)

NARRATOR: The evil is done. The supposed innocence of a child brings ruin to the well ordered lives of those around her. After four months of a long, drawn out trial which Karen and Martha lose the teachers are left alone, totally alone.

ACT THREE

(cool lights - character angles straight ahead - See Figure A-9, Appendix A)

MARTHA: (in a slight monotone) It gets dark so early now. Cooking always makes me feel better. Well, I guess we'll have to give the Duchess some dinner. When the hawks descend, you've got to feed'em. Where's Joe? (no answer) Where's Joe?

KAREN: (staring into space straight ahead and slightly down) Gone.

MARTHA: A patient? Will he be back in time for dinner?

KAREN: No.

MARTHA: We'll save dinner for him, then. Karen! What's the matter?

KAREN: (in a dull far away tone) He won't be back anymore.

MARTHA: (slowly and carefully) You mean he won't be back anymore tonight.

KAREN: (looking at Martha's focus) He won't be back at all.

MARTHA: What happened?

KAREN: (matter of factly) He thought we had been lovers.

MARTHA: (tensely) I don't believe you.

KAREN: (wearily) All right.

MARTHA: (automatically and lookin away) I don't believe it. He's never said a word all these months, all during the trial--
(suddenly at her focus and leaning slightly forward) Didn't you tell him? For God's sake, didn't you tell him it wasn't true?

KAREN: Yes.

MARTHA: He didn't believe you?

KAREN: (shruggs her shoulders) I guess he believed me.

MARTHA: (angrily) Then what have you done?

KAREN: What had to be done.

MARTHA: It's all wrong. It's silly. He'll be back in a little while and you'll clear it all up--Oh, God, I wanted that for you so much.

KAREN: Don't. I feel sick to my stomach.

MARTHA: What's happened to us? What's really happened to us?

KAREN: I don't know. (deliberately) I want to be sleepy. I want to go to sleep.

MARTHA: Go back to Joe. He's strong; he'll understand. It's too much for you this way.

KAREN: (irritably) Stop talking about it. Let's pack and get out of here. Let's take the train in the morning.

MARTHA: The train to where?

KAREN: I don't know. Some place; any place.

MARTHA: A job? Money?

KAREN: In a big place we could get something to do.

(lights gradually get colder)

MARTHA: They'd know about us. (sarcastically) We've been famous.

KAREN: A small town, then.

MARTHA: They'd know more about us.

KAREN: (as a child would say it) Isn't there anywhere to go?

MARTHA: No. There'll never be any place for us to go. We're bad people. We'll sit. We'll be sitting the rest of our lives wondering what's happened to us. You think this scene is strange? (almost viciously) Well, get used to it; we'll be here for a long time. Let's pinch each other sometimes. We can see whether we're still living.

KAREN: (shaking her head - desperate) But this isn't a new sin they tell us we've done. Other people aren't destroyed by it.

MARTHA: They are the people who believe in it, who want it, who've chosen it. We aren't like that. We don't love each other. (speaks casually) I don't love you. We've been very close to each other, of course. I've loved you like a friend, the way thousands of women feel about other women.

KAREN: (only half listening) Yes.

MARTHA: (slowly and looking at her focus differently) Certainly that doesn't mean anything. There's nothing wrong about that. It's perfectly natural that I should be fond of you, that I should---

KAREN: (listlessly) Why are you saying all this to me?

MARTHA: (softly) Because I love you.

KAREN: (vaguely) Yes, of course.

MARTHA: (louder) I love you that way--maybe the way they said I loved you. I don't know. (yells) Listen to me!

KAREN: What?

MARTHA: I have loved you the way they said.

KAREN: (quickly) You're crazy.

(following dialogue moves quickly)

MARTHA: There's always been something wrong. Always--as long as I can remember. But I never knew it until all this happened.

KAREN: (Horrificed) Stop it!

MARTHA: You're afraid of hearing it; I'm more afraid than you.

KAREN: (putting a hand up to ear but then lowering it slowly in a clenched fist) I won't listen to you.

MARTHA: You've got to know it. I can't keep it any longer. I've got to tell you how guilty I am.

KAREN: (deliberately) You are guilty of nothing.

MARTHA: I've been telling myself that since the night we heard the child say it; I've been praying I could convince myself of it. I can't, I can't any longer. It's there. I don't know how, I don't know why. But I did love you. I do love you. I resented your marriage; maybe because I wanted you; maybe I wanted you all along; maybe I couldn't call it by a name; maybe it's been there ever since I first knew you--

KAREN: (tensely between teeth) It's a lie. You're telling yourself a lie. We never thought of each other that way.

MARTHA: (bitterly) No, of course you didn't. But who says I didn't? I never felt that way about anybody but you. (slower) I've never loved a man--I never knew why before. Maybe it's that.

KAREN: (carefully) You are tired and sick.

MARTHA: (As though talking to herself - focus on audience) It's funny; it's all mixed up. There's something in you, and you don't know it and you don't do anything about it. Suddenly a child gets bored and lies--and there you are, seeing it for the first time. (closes eyes) I don't know. It all seems to come back to me. (smiles - focus back to Karen) There's a big difference between us now, Karen. I feel all dirty and--I can't stay with you anymore, darling.

KAREN: (in a shaken, uncertain tone) All this isn't true. You've never said it; we'll forget it by tomorrow.

MARTHA: Tomorrow? That's a funny word. Karen, we would have had to invent a new language, as children do, without words like tomorrow.

KAREN: (crying softly) Go and lie down, Martha. You'll feel better.

(very cold blue lights - Martha turns and bows head; Karen jumps in reaction to gun shot - gasps; lights to total blue and then blackout)

Adaptation Two: The Political Subtext in The Children's Hour

The script and stage directions for this adaptation emphasize the political implications found in class struggle and the controlled power of the lie presented in the play.

All character angles are out above the audience except for Mary who uses direct on-stage focus and the children who use direct focus when talking to each other. All characters carry manuscripts except Mary. The stage is black. The only furnishings are a stool down stage right for the narrator and a platform two feet high at center stage. The costumes for all characters are the same as the previous script.

NARRATOR: (The stage is black with a single spot on the narrator who is down stage right. He speaks directly to the audience without the use of a manuscript. A stool is provided for the narrator to sit on during the performance. He never leaves the stage but watches the performance quietly.) During the late twenties and early thirties the American theatre was used as a political soap box. The chief reason for this being the influence of the Depression which was creating a hardening of political convictions. Lillian Hellman began writing in this climate of social upheaval. The people were tired of the old capitalistic government which had failed and were looking for a better way. Many believed the answer was in Communism. At this time Lillian Hellman was living with Dashielle Hammett, a member of the Communist Party and a professed Marxist. Lillian Hellman was looking for

something to believe in about which she could make a statement to improve the class bound society. Perhaps the theme she chose to portray her message was too overpowering.

With this in mind we shall look again at The Children's Hour. This time, however, we shall remove the strong lesbian theme and include the final scene which the original critics felt should be eliminated. Yet it is in the final scene that we see meanings that the 1934 critics missed.

We open once again in the Wright-Dobie School for girls. It is an afternoon in April. The children are in elocution class.

(The stage is black with a spot on Peggy who is reading Portia's speech with emphasis. The lights gradually come up to represent classroom lighting. The characters are on stage as diagramed in Figure B-1, Appendix B)

PEGGY: (read strongly with meaning as Portia would have done it - focus is direct eye contact with audience) "The quality of mercy is not strained, it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blest; it blesseth him that gives and him that takes. 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes the throned monarch better than his crown.

MRS. MORTAR: Mary! (standing erect with focus down and right to adjust to Mary's height - Peggy moves to right of platform)

MARY: (with large innocent eyes looking directly up at Mrs. Mortar) Yes, Mrs. Mortar?

MRS. MORTAR: This is a pretty time to be coming to class, I must say. Even if you have no interest in your work you might at least remember that you owe me a little courtesy. Courtesy is breeding. Breeding is everything. Always remember that.

ROSALIE: (fake sincerity - looking out and up a little to left and adjusting to Mortar's height) Please, Mrs. Mortar, can I write that down?

PEGGY: (looking straight at Rosalie) But we wrote it down last week. (all giggle)

MRS. MORTAR: (ignoring the children) Mary, I'm still awaiting your explanation. Where have you been?

MARY: (avoids looking at her by looking down as if she had flowers in hands - at end of sentence looks directly at Mortar) I took a walk. I went to get you these flowers. I thought you

would like them and I didn't know it would take so long to pick them.

MRS. MORTAR: (flattered) That was very sweet of you Mary; I always like thoughtfulness. But you should not allow anything to interfere with your classes. (to Peggy's focus) You may put that book away Peggy. (to impress Karen who has turned) "One master passion in the breast, like Aaron's serpent, swallows all the rest."

KAREN: (gives the audience an annoyed look in reaction to Mortar, then looking out and down to Peggy's focus with concern) Where'd you get those flowers, Mary?

MRS. MORTAR: She picked them for me. It made her a little late to class, but they're the first wild flowers of the season (smiling and defending Mary - looking at Mary's focus)

KAREN: But they're not the very first, are they, Mary?

MARY: (avoiding glance by looking down and getting nervous) I don't know.

KAREN: Where did you get them?

MARY: Near Conway's cornfield, I think.

KAREN: It wasn't necessary to go so far. There was a bunch exactly like this in the garbage this morning.

MRS. MORTAR: (standing erect with head up) Oh, I can't believe it! What a nasty thing to do!

KAREN: There's the bell. (no real bell is ever used but characters react to it; all children and Mortar turn around. (See Figure B-2, Appendix B) Wait a minute, Mary, Mary, I've had the feeling--and I don't think I'm wrong--that the girls here were happy; that they like Miss Dobie and me, that they liked the school. Do you think that's true?

MARY: Miss Wright, (squirmish) I have to get my Latin book.

KAREN: I thought it was true until you came here a year ago. I don't think you're very happy here, and I'd like to find out why. Why, for example, do you find it necessary to lie to us so often?

MARY: (acting innocent) I'm not lying. I went out walking and I saw the flowers and they looked pretty and I didn't know it was so late.

KAREN: (out of patience, very short and strong - body tense)
Stop it, Mary! I'm not interested in hearing that foolish story again. I know you got the flowers out of the garbage can. What I do want to know is why you feel you have to lie out of it.

MARY: (stubbornly, very tense - stamping a foot) I did pick the flowers near Conway's. You never believe me. You believe everybody but me. It's always like that. Everything I say you fuss at me about. Everything I do is wrong.

KAREN: You know, that isn't true. (trying another tactic - not as tense - trying to reason and make a compromise) Let's try to understand each other. If you feel that you have to take a walk or that you just can't come to class, or that you'd like to go into the village by yourself, come and tell me-- I'll try to understand. I don't say that I'll always agree that you should do exactly what you want to do, but I've had feelings like that, too--everybody has--and I won't be unreasonable about yours. But this way, this kind of lying you do, makes everything wrong.

MARY: (head up and body tense) I got the flowers near Conway's cornfield.

KAREN: (matter of factly) Well, there doesn't seem to be any other way with you; you'll have to be punished. Take your recreation periods alone for the next two weeks. No horseback-riding and no hockey. Don't leave the school grounds for any reason whatsoever. Is that clear?

MARY: Saturday too?

KAREN: Yes.

MARY: (demanding) But you said I could go to the boat-races.

KAREN: I'm sorry, but you can't go.

MARY: (threatening and taking a step or two towards Karen with body tense, fists clenched and leaning slightly forward) I'll tell my grandmother. I'll tell her how everybody treats me here and the way I get punished for everything I do. I'll tell her I'll--

KAREN: Go upstairs, Mary.

MARY: (Mrs. Mortar turns) I don't feel well.

KAREN: Go upstairs now.

MARY: I've got a pain. I've had it all morning. It hurts right here. Really it does.--

KAREN: Ask Miss Dobie to give you some hot water and bicarbonate of soda.

MARY: (beginning to panic) It's a bad pain. I've never had it before.

KAREN: I don't think it could be serious.

MARY: My heart! It's my heart! It's stopping or something. I can't breathe (faints awkwardly)

MRS. MORTAR: Do you think--? Heart trouble is very serious in a child.

KAREN: Get Joe. (Mortar turns and Mary stands with back to audience as Martha turns)

MARTHA: What happened to her? She was perfectly well a few hours ago.

KAREN: She probably still is. I told her she couldn't go to the boat-races and she had a heart attack. Mortar's with her.

(lights gradually dim on rest of stage with spots up on Karen and Martha)

MARTHA: Anything really wrong with her?

KAREN: (relaxing, easing of tension) I doubt it. She's a problem, that kid. Her latest trick was kidding your aunt out of a sewing lesson with those faded flowers we threw out. Then she threatened to go to her grandmother with some tale about being mistreated.

MARTHA: And, please God, Grandma would believe her and take her away.

KAREN: Which would give the school a swell black eye. But we ought to do something.

MARTHA: How about having a talk with Mrs. Tilford?

KAREN: (smiling) You want to do it? (Martha shakes her head) I hate to do it. She's been so nice to us. Anyway, it wouldn't do any good. She's too crazy about Mary to see her faults very clearly--and the kid knows it.

MARTHA: How about asking Joe to say something to her? She'd listen to him.

KAREN: That would be admitting that we can't do the job ourselves.

MARTHA: Well, we can't, and we might as well admit it. We've tried everything we can think of. She's had more attention than any other three kids put together. And we still haven't the faintest idea what goes on inside her head.

KAREN: She's a strange girl.

MARTHA: That's putting it mildly.

KAREN: (laughs) It's funny. We always talk about the child as if she were a grown woman.

MARTHA: It's not so funny. (seriously with a strong gaze at Karen's focus with body tense and erect) There's something the matter with the kid. That's been true ever since the first day she came. She causes trouble here; she's bad for the other girls. I don't know what it is--it's a feeling I've got that it's wrong somewhere--(the last line is delivered directly to audience)

KAREN: All right, all right, we'll talk it over with Joe. Now what about our other pet nuisance?

MARTHA: (laughs) My aunt the actress? What's she been up to now?

KAREN: Nothing unusual. Last night at dinner she was telling the girls about the time she lost her trunks in Butte, Montana, and how she gave her best performance of Rosalind during a hurricane. Today in the kitchen you could hear her on what Sir Henry said to her.

MARTHA: Wait until she does Hedda Gabler standing on a chair. Sir Henry taught her to do it that way. He said it was a test of great acting.

KAREN: You must have had a gay childhood.

MARTHA: (bitterly) Oh, I did, I did, indeed. God, how I hated all that--

KAREN: (gently but looking directly at her focus) Couldn't we get rid of her soon, Martha? I hate to make it hard on you, but she really ought not to be here.

MARTHA: (after a moment and looking down) I know.

KAREN: We can scrape up enough money to send her away. Let's do it.

MARTHA: (looking again at Karen's focus) You've been very patient about it. I'm sorry and I'll talk to her today. It'll probably be a week or two before she can be ready to leave. Is that all right?

KAREN: Of course. Did you get Joe himself on the phone?

MARTHA: He was already on his way. (said matter of factly)

(lights gradually rise as Cardin enters Stage Left and moves to center stage as diagramed in Figure B-3, Appendix B)

CARDIN: Hello, darling. Hi, Martha. What's the best news?
(relaxed and friendly)

MARTHA: (friendly, focus is slightly to left of where it was for Karen) Hello, Joe.

KAREN: (Focus is out center with body turned slightly in to cross focus with Cardin) We tried to get you on the phone. Come in and look at your little cousin.

CARDIN: Sure. What's the matter with her now?

KAREN: You'd better come and see her. She says she has a pain in her heart.

CARDIN: Our little Mary pops up in every day's dispatches.

(Cardin and Karen turn and take a step back - Martha moves to center as Mortar turns after a slight pause - See Figure B-4, Appendix B)

MRS. MORTAR: I was asked to leave the room. (indignant - body slightly turned in for Martha to cross focus) It seems that I'm not wanted in the room during the examination.

MARTHA: (half smiling and shaking her head in disbelief) What difference does it make?

MRS. MORTAR: What difference does it make? Why, it was a deliberate snub.

MARTHA: There's very little pleasure in watching a man use a stethoscope.

MRS. MORTAR: Isn't it natural that the child should have me with her? Isn't it natural that an older woman should be present? (no answer) Very well, if you are so thick-skinned that you don't resent these things--

MARTHA: (good natured irritation) What are you talking about? Why in the name of heaven should you be with her?

MRS. MORTAR: It--it's customary for an older woman to be present during an examination.

MARTHA: (laughs) Tell that to Joe. Maybe he'll give you a job as duenna for his office.

MRS. MORTAR: So you don't resent your aunt being snubbed and humiliated?

(lights slowly dim with white spots on Martha and Mortar)

MARTHA: (still with slight disbelief in voice) Oh, Aunt Lily!

MRS. MORTAR: Karen is consistently, rude to me, and you know it.

MARTHA: (matter of factly) Karen is very polite to you, and what's more important--very patient.

MRS. MORTAR: Patient with me? I, who have worked my fingers to the bone!

MARTHA: Don't tell yourself that too often Aunt Lily; you'll come to believe it.

MRS. MORTAR: I know it's true. Where could you have gotten a woman of my reputation to give these children voice lessons, and elocution lessons? Patient with me! Here I've donated my services--

MARTHA: I was under the impression you were being paid.

MRS. MORTAR: That small thing! I used to earn twice that for one performance.

MARTHA: (sarcastically) The gilded days. It was very extravagant of them to pay you so much. (pause) You're not very happy here, are you, Aunt Lily? (said with true concern)

MRS. MORTAR: Satisfied enough, I guess, for a poor relation. (dim spot on Peggy who has turned and leans slightly forward listening)

MARTHA: (makes a motion of distaste, then gently) Aunt Lily, you've talked about London for a long time. Would you like to go over?

MRS. MORTAR: (with a sigh) It's been twenty years, and I shall never live to see it again.

MARTHA: (gently and trying to make it sound inviting) Well, you can go any time you like. We can spare the money now, and it will do you a lot of good. You pick out the boat you want and I'll get the passage. You'll have a grand time seeing all your old friends, and if you live sensibly I ought to be able to let you have enough to get along on.

MRS. MORTAR: (slowly) So you want me to leave?

MARTHA: (lightly) That's it. We don't want you around when we dig up the buried treasure.

MRS. MORTAR: So? You're turning me out? At my age! Nice, grateful girl you are.

MARTHA: (still good natured but getting a little annoyed) Oh, my God, how can anybody deal with you? You're going where you want to go. You complain about Karen, and now you have what you want and you're still looking for something to complain about.

MRS. MORTAR: (head up, shoulders square with dignity) Please do not raise your voice.

MARTHA: You ought to be glad I don't do worse.

MRS. MORTAR: I absolutely refuse to be shipped off three thousand miles away. I'm not going to England. I shall go back to the stage. I'll write my agents tomorrow and as soon as they have something good for me--

MARTHA: The truth is (slight pause - not wanting it to come to this) I'd like you to leave soon. The three of us can't live together, and it doesn't make any difference whose fault it is.

MRS. MORTAR: (over dramatically) You wish me to go tonight?

MARTHA: Don't act, Aunt Lily. Go as soon as you've found a place you like. I'll put the money in the bank for you tomorrow.

MRS. MORTAR: You think I'd take your money? I'd rather scrub floors first.

MARTHA: I imagine you'll change your--(she breaks off; lights up

suddenly - looking at Peggy's focus) What were You doing outside the door?

PEGGY: I came down to see how Mary was. (frightened - eyes big and body tense)

MARTHA: And you stopped long enough to see how we were. Did you deliberately listen?

PEGGY: I didn't mean to. I heard voices and I couldn't help--

MRS. MORTAR: (fake social tone) Eavesdropping is something nice young ladies just don't do.

MARTHA: Go upstairs now. We'll talk about this later. (Peggy turns)

MRS. MORTAR: You mean to say you're not going to do anything about that? That's the trouble with these new-fangled notions of discipline and--(Cardin turns - See Figure B-4, Appendix B)

MARTHA: (relieved at the interruption her focus to Joe is straight out) How is Mary?

MRS. MORTAR: Good day, Joseph. (exits, head in air up right - See Figure B-4, Appendix B)

CARDIN: What's the matter with the Duchess?

MARTHA: Just keeping her hand in, in case Sir Henry's watching her from above. What about Mary?

CARDIN: Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

MARTHA: (sighs) I thought so.

CARDIN: I could have managed a better faint than that when I was six years old.

MARTHA: Nothing the matter with her at all, then?

CARDIN: No, ma'am, not a thing. Just a little something she thought up. (delivered directly to audience)

MARTHA: But it's such a silly thing to do. She knew we'd have you in. Maybe she's not so bright. Any idiots in your family, Joe?

CARDIN: Don't blame her on me. It's another side of the family. (laughs)

(Karen turns and steps forward)

KAREN: Well, the angel child is now putting her clothes back on.

MARTHA: The angel child's influence is abroad even while she's unconscious. Her roommate was busy listening at the door while Aunt Lily and I were yelling at each other.

KAREN: We'll have to move those girls away from one another. (all react to a bell ringing)

MARTHA: That's my class. I'll send Peggy down. You talk to her.
(exits Stage Right - See Figure B-4, Appendix B)

KAREN: All right.

CARDIN: (to Mary's focus who has turned and stepped forward) How's it feel to be back from the grave?

MARY: (with a pout and looking down) My heart hurts.

CARDIN: (laughing) Science has failed. Try a hairbrush.

MARY: (looking directly at Cardin) It's my heart, and it hurts. I want to see my grandmother. I want to--

(Peggy turns and steps forward)

KAREN: Girls, I want to talk to you.

PEGGY: I'm awfully sorry, really. I just didn't think and--

KAREN: I'm sorry too, Peggy. You never used to do things like this. We'll have to separate you two. Peggy, you will move into Lois's room and Lois will move in with Evelyn. Mary will go in with Rosalie.

MARY: (disgusted and looking directly at Karen) Rosalie hates me.

KAREN: That's a very stupid thing to say. I can't imagine Rosalie hating anyone.

MARY: (starting to cry) And it's all because I had a pain. If anybody else was sick they'd be put to bed and petted. You're always mean to me. I get blamed and punished for everything.
(to Cardin) I do, Cousin Joe. All the time for everything.

CARDIN: You've been unpleasant enough to Miss Wright. I've got to go now. The next time she faints, I'd wait until she got tired of lying on the floor.

KAREN: Wait a minute. I'll walk to the car with you. (exit Karen and Cardin - Stage Left - See Figure B-5, Appendix B)

PEGGY: (eyes big and speaking directly to Mary) Did you really have a pain?

MARY: I fainted didn't I?

PEGGY: I wish I could faint sometimes. I've never even worn glasses, like Rosalie.

MARY: A lot it'll get you to faint.

PEGGY: What did Miss Wright do to you when the class left?

MARY: Told me I couldn't go to the boat-races. (disgusted)

PEGGY: Whew! But we'll remember everything that happens and we'll give you all the souvenirs and things.

MARY: I won't let you go if I can't go. But I'll find some way to go. What were you doing?

PEGGY: I came down to see what was happening to you, but the doors were closed and I could hear Miss Dobie and Mortar having an awful row.

MARY: What were they saying?

PEGGY: Well, they were talking about Mortar going away to England and Mortar got awful sore at that and said they just wanted to get rid of her, and then they started talking about Dr. Cardin.

MARY: What about him?

PEGGY: (having second thoughts) We'd better get started moving; Miss Wright will be back first thing we know.

MARY: (fiercely) Go on!

PEGGY: They're going to be married.

MARY: (disappointed) Everybody knows that.

PEGGY: (wanting to impress) But everybody doesn't know that Miss Dobie doesn't want them to get married. How do you like that? (Rosalie turns and steps forward)

ROSALIE: I have a class soon. If you're going to move your things--

not that I want you in with me--you'd better start right now.
Miss Wright's coming in a minute.

PEGGY: We're coming.

MARY: No. Let Rosalie move our things.

ROSALIE: You crazy?

PEGGY: (nervously) It's all right. I'll get your things.

MARY: (to Peggy) Stop being such a sissy. (to Rosalie) Rosalie, you go on up and move my things and don't say a word about our being down here. And the next time we go to town, I'll let you wear my gold locket and buckle. You'll like that, won't you, Rosalie?

ROSALIE: (draws back, moves hands nervously) I don't know what you're talking about. (stares a moment) But I'll do it this time, but just 'cause I got a good disposition. But don't think you're going to boss me around, Mary Tilford. (Rosalie exits)

MARY: (smiling) No, indeed. And get the things done neatly, Rosalie. Don't muss my linen bloomers--

PEGGY: Now what made her so agreeable?

MARY: Oh, a little secret we got.

PEGGY: (jumps and claps her hands to her mouth) Oh, my God! Rosalie 'll find that copy of Mademoiselle de Maupin. She'll blab like the dickens.

MARY: No, she won't. (pause - pensive look looking at audience) But there's one part in it-- (laughs and then calmly) I'm going home.

PEGGY: Mary--you can't do that.

MARY: Can't I? You just watch. I'm not staying here. I'm going home and tell Grandma I'm not happy. They're scared of Grandma--she helped 'em when they first started, you know--and when she tells 'em something, believe me, they'll sit up and listen. They can't get away with treating me like this, and they don't have to think they can.

(blackout and then a spot up on narrator)

NARRATOR: At some time in her life Lillian Hellman saw someones arm get twisted. She sets out to show the evils of manipulation and the willing belief in lies. We now go to Mrs. Tilford's sitting room where the future of those involved is determined.

(lights up on characters as positioned in Figure B-6, Appendix B)

CARDIN: Hello, Amelia. (very friendly)

MRS. TILFORD: (dignified and proper - never overly friendly) Hello, Joseph.

CARDIN: How are you feeling: Headaches again?

MRS. TILFORD: No.

CARDIN: Those are good powders. Bicarbonate of soda and water. Never hurt anybody yet.

MRS. TILFORD: Yes. How have you been, Joseph?

CARDIN: My good health is monotonous. (slight pause)--Amelia, we're talking like people waiting for the muffins to be passed around. What's the matter with you?

MRS. TILFORD: (difficult to say--not looking at his focus) I--I have something to tell you.

CARDIN: Well, out with it.

MRS. TILFORD: It's a hard thing to say, Joseph.

CARDIN: (taken aback - shoulders and body posture back) Hard for you to say to me? (guessing at subject) Don't worry about Mary. I guessed that she ran home to tell you about her faint. It was caused by nothing but bad temper and was very clumsily managed, at that.

MRS. TILFORD: I heard about the faint. That's not what is worrying me.

CARDIN: (gently) Are you in some trouble?

MRS. TILFORD: We all are in trouble. Bad trouble.

CARDIN: We? Me, you mean? Nothing's the matter with me.

MRS. TILFORD: When did you last see Karen?

CARDIN: Today. This afternoon.

MRS. TILFORD: Oh. Not since seven o'clock?

CARDIN: (worried and getting tense) What's happened since seven o'clock?

MRS. TILFORD: Joseph, you've been engaged to Karen for a long time. Are your plans any more definite than they were a year ago?

CARDIN: You can get ready to buy the wedding present. We'll have the wedding here, if you don't mind.

MRS. TILFORD: Why has Karen decided so suddenly to make it definite?

CARDIN: (confused - raising shoulders slightly) She has not suddenly decided anything. The school is pretty well on its feet, and now that Mrs. Mortar is leaving--

MRS. TILFORD: I've heard about their putting Mrs. Mortar out.

CARDIN: Putting her out? Well, maybe, but a nice sum for a trip and a promise that a good neice will support you the rest of your life is an enviable way of being put out.

MRS. TILFORD: (slowly) Don't you find it odd, Joseph, that they want so much to get rid of that silly, harmless woman?

CARDIN: I don't know what you're talking about, but it isn't odd at all. Lily Mortar is not a harmless woman, although God knows she's silly enough. She's a nasty, tiresome, spoilt old bitch. If you're forming a Mortar Welfare Society, you're wasting your time. It's not like you to waste your time. Now, what's it that's really on your mind?

MRS. TILFORD: You must not marry Karen.

CARDIN: (shocked - taken aback, body tense, he grins after a second) You're a very impertinent lady. Why must I--(imitates her) not marry Karen.

MRS. TILFORD: Because there's something wrong with Karen--something horrible.

CARDIN: I don't think I can allow you to say things like that, Amelia.

MRS. TILFORD: I have good reason for saying it. (breaks off in reaction to door bell) Who is that? I won't have her here. (Karen and Martha enter as in Figure B-6, Appendix B)

CARDIN: Then you don't want me here either. Darling, what?--

KAREN: (confused - shoulders up, leaning slightly forward) Is it a joke Joe?

MARTHA: (with great force) We've come to find out what you are doing.

CARDIN: What is it?

KAREN: We didn't know what it was. Nobody would talk to us, nobody would tell us anything.

MARTHA: I'll tell you, I'll tell you. You see if you can make any sense out of it. At dinnertime Mrs. Munn's chauffeur said that Evelyn must be sent home right away. At half past seven Mrs. Burton arrived to tell us that she wanted Helen's things packed and that she'd wait outside because she didn't want to enter a place like ours. Five minutes later the Well's butler came for Rosalie.

CARDIN: What was it?

KAREN: Mrs. Rogers finally told us.

CARDIN: What? What?

KAREN: That--that Martha and I are--in love with each other. In love with each other. Mrs. Tilford told them. (Cardin stares for a moment)

CARDIN: Did you tell them that?

MRS. TILFORD: (head held high) Yes.

CARDIN: Are you sick?

MRS. TILFORD: You know I'm not sick.

CARDIN: (snapping the words out) Then what did you do it for?

MRS. TILFORD: (Slowly and with strong gaze at his focus) Because it's true.

KAREN: (incredulously) You think it's true, then?

MARTHA: You fool! You damned, vicious--

KAREN: Do you realize what you're saying?

MRS. TILFORD: I realize it very well. And that's why I don't

think you should have come here. I shall not call you names, and I will not allow you to call me names. It comes to this: I don't trust myself to talk about it with you now or ever.

KAREN: What's she talking about, Joe? What's she mean? What is she trying to do to us? What is everybody doing to us?

MARTHA: (softly but directly to the audience) Pushed around. We're being pushed around by crazy people. That's an awful thing. And we're standing here--We're standing here taking it. (focus back to Tilford - with violence) Didn't you know we'd come here? Were we supposed to lie down and grin while you kicked us around with these lies?

MRS. TILFORD: This can't do any of us any good, Miss Dobie.

MARTHA: Listen, listen. Try to understand this: you're not playing with paper dolls. (focus at audience) We're human beings, see? It's our lives you're fooling with. Our lives. That's serious business for us. (focus to Tilford) Can you understand that?

MRS. TILFORD: (angrily for the first time) I can understand that, and I understand a lot more. You've been playing with a lot of children's lives, and that's why I stopped you. I know how serious this is for you, how serious it is for all of us.

CARDIN: (bitterly) I don't think you do know.

MRS. TILFORD: I have done what I had to do. What they are may possibly be their own business. It becomes a great deal more than that when children are involved.

KAREN: (wildly) It's not true. Not a word of it is true; can't you understand that?

MARTHA: (trying to be calm) Listen: are you willing to stand by everything you've said tonight?

MRS. TILFORD: Yes.

MARTHA: All right. That's fine. But don't get the idea we'll let you whisper this lie: you made it and you'll come out with it. Shriek it to your town of Lancet. We'll make you shriek it--and we'll make you do it in a courtroom. Tomorrow, Mrs. Tilford, you will have a libel suit on your hands.

MRS. TILFORD: It is you I am thinking of. I am frightened for you.

It was wrong of you to brazen out here tonight; it would be criminally foolish of you to brazen it out in public. That can bring you nothing but pain. I am an old woman, Miss Dobie, and I have seen too many people, out of pride, act on that pride. In the end they punish themselves.

CARDIN: (slowly) So you took a child's word for it?

MARTHA: (shakes her head) I knew it too.

KAREN: (in disbelief) That is really where you got it? I can't believe it--it couldn't be. Why, she's a child.

MARTHA: She's not a child any longer.

KAREN: Oh, my God, it all fits so well now. That girl has hated us for a long time. We never knew why, we never could find out.

MARTHA: There wasn't any reason. She hates everybody and everything.

KAREN: Your Mary's a strange girl, a bad girl. There's something very awful the matter with her.

MARTHA: Where is she? Bring her out here and let us hear what she has to say.

MRS. TILFORD: (quickly and getting upset again) I won't have her go through with that again. You came here demanding explanations. It was I who should have asked them from you. You attack me, you attack Mary. I've told you I didn't mean you any harm. I still don't. You have been in my house long enough. Get out.

KAREN: (to audience) The wicked very young, and the wicked very old.

CARDIN: (strong and demanding) No. When two people come here with their lives spread on the table for you to cut to pieces, then the only honest thing to do is to give them a chance to come out whole. So where is Mary? Mary! Come here.

(Mary turns on platform)

MRS. TILFORD: (gently) Don't be afraid, dear.

CARDIN: (calmly and slowly - focus is straight out) Look: everybody lies all the time. Sometimes they have to, sometimes they don't. I've lied myself for a lot of different reasons, but there was never a time when, if I'd been given a second chance, I wouldn't have taken back the lie and told the truth. You're lucky if

you ever get that chance. If you made a mistake, you must take this chance and say so. You won't be punished for it. Do you get all that?

MARY: (calmly) Yes, Cousin Joe.

CARDIN: (grimly) All right, let's get started. Were you telling your grandmother the truth this afternoon? The exact truth about Miss Wright and Miss Dobie?

MARY: (without hesitation) Oh, yes.

CARDIN: All right, Mary, that was your chance; you passed it up. Why don't you like Miss Dobie and Miss Wright?

MARY: Oh, I do like them. They just don't like me. They never have liked me. They're always picking on me. They're always punishing me for everything that happens. No matter what happens, it's always me.

CARDIN: Did you get punished today?

MARY: Yes, and it was just because Peggy heard them and so they took it out on me.

KAREN: That's a lie.

CARDIN: Ssh. Heard what, Mary?

MARY: Mrs. Mortar told Miss Dobie that there was something funny about her. She said that she had a funny feeling about Miss Wright, and Mrs. Mortar said that was unnatural. That was why we got punished, just because--

KAREN: That was not the reason they got punished.

CARDIN: What do you think Mrs. Mortar meant by all that, Mary?

MRS. TILFORD: Stop it, Joseph!

MARY: I don't know, but it was always kind of funny and she always said things like that and all the girls would talk about it when Miss Dobie went and visited Miss Wright late at night--

KAREN: (angrily and to the audience) And we go to the movies at night and sometimes we read at night and sometimes we drink tea at night. (To Tilford) Those are guilty things, too, Mrs. Tilford.

MARY: And there are always funny sounds and we'd stay awake and listen because we couldn't help hearing and I'd get frightened because the sounds were like--

MRS. TILFORD: You are trying to make her name it, aren't you?

CARDIN: (ignoring her) Go on. What did you think they were? Why did they frighten you?

MARY: (slight stammering) I don't know.

CARDIN: (smiles at Tilford) She doesn't know.

(lights get hot)

MARY: (hastily) I saw things, too. One night there was so much noise I looked through the keyhole and they were kissing and saying things and then I got scared because it was different sort of and I--

MARTHA: That child--that child is sick.

KAREN: (calmly - straight out to audience) There's no keyhole on my door.

MRS. TILFORD: What?

MARY: (quickly) It wasn't her room, Grandma, it was the other room, I guess. It was Miss Dobie's room.

MARTHA: (tense gaze at Mrs. Tilford) I share a room with my aunt. It is on the first floor at the other end of the house. It is impossible to hear anything from there.

MRS. TILFORD: (her voice shaken) What is this, Mary? Why did you say you saw through a keyhole? Can you hear from your room?

MARY: I did see it! I did see it!

CARDIN: We can go home. We are finished here. It's not a pleasant place to be.

MARY: (slow and strong) All right. It was Rosalie who saw them. I just said it was me so I wouldn't have to tattle on Rosalie.

CARDIN: (wearily) Oh, my God!

MRS. TILFORD: Please wait a minute. Rosalie is spending the night here. Rosalie! (Rosalie turns)

CARDIN: You're giving yourself an awful beating, Amelia, and you deserve whatever you get.

MRS. TILFORD: I don't know. I don't know, anymore. I'm sorry to keep you up so late, Rosalie. You must be tired. (rapidly) Mary says there's been a lot of talk in the school lately about Miss Wright and Miss Dobie. Is that true?

ROSALIE: (stammering, confused) I--I don't know what you mean.

KAREN: (gently) Don't be frightened. Rosalie, Mary has told her grandmother that certain--certain things at school have been--er--puzzling you girls.

ROSALIE: History puzzles me. I guess I'm not very good at history.

KAREN: No, that's not what she meant. She says that you told her that you saw certain--certain acts between Miss Dobie and myself. She says that once, when the door was open, you saw us kissing each other in a way that--women don't kiss one another.

ROSALIE: (quickly and loudly-shaking her head) Oh, Miss Wright, I didn't, I didn't; I never said such a thing. Mary always makes things up about me and everybody else. I never said any such thing ever.

MARY: (slowly) Yes, you did Rosalie. You're just trying to get out of it. I remember just when you said it. I remember it, because it was the day Peggy's bracelet was--stolen, and nobody knew who did it, and Peggy said that if her mother found out, she'd have the thief put in jail. Grandma, there's something I've got to tell you that--

ROSALIE: (shaking and eyes big - with a shrill cry) Yes, Yes, I did see it. I told Mary. What Mary said was right. I said it, I said it-- (Mary smiles)

(blackout and then a spot on narrator)

NARRATOR: The arm is twisted and lives are ruined. Karen will not be able to enter that upper class by her marriage to Cardin and Martha tries to prevent anymore evil by killing herself. Yet Miss Hellman does not end the play with this destruction. We will now go to the final scene, a last summing-up. It is here that we see the destruction of those ruling and the hope of survival for triumph of the lower class.

We are back at the school just after Martha's suicide. Mrs. Tilford has just arrived.

(cool lights - See Figure B-7, Appendix B for staging)

MRS. TILFORD: (focus straight ahead) Karen.

KAREN: Why have you come here?

MRS. TILFORD: (carefully) I know it wasn't true, Karen.

KAREN: I don't care what you know. It doesn't matter anymore.
If that's what you had to say, you've said it. Go away.

MRS. TILFORD: I've got to tell you. Last Tuesday Mrs. Wells found a bracelet in Rosalie's room. The bracelet had been hidden for several months. We found out that Rosalie had taken the bracelet from another girl, and that Mary knew that and used it to force Rosalie into saying that she had seen you and Miss Dobie together. (Karen begins to laugh) Don't do that Karen. I have only a little more to say. I've talked to Judge Potter. He will make all arrangements. There will be a public apology and an explanation. The damage suit will be paid to you in full and--and anymore that you will be kind enough to take from me. I--I must see that you won't suffer anymore.

KAREN: We're not going to suffer anymore. Martha is dead. So you've come here to relieve your conscience? Well, I won't be your confessor. It's choking you, is it? You've done a wrong and you have to right that wrong or you can't rest your head again. You've come to the wrong place for help. (to audience) A public apology and money paid, and you can sleep again and eat again. That done and there'll be peace for you. (to Tilford) You're old, and the old are callous. Ten, fifteen years left for you. But what of me? It's a whole life for me. A whole God-damned life. And what of her?

MRS. TILFORD: (quietly) You are still living.

KAREN: Yes, I guess so.

MRS. TILFORD: Let's try to make something for you. You're young and I-I can help you. Take whatever I can give you. It won't bring me peace, if that's what's worrying you. Those ten or fifteen years you talk about. They will be bad years.

KAREN: Mary?

MRS. TILFORD: I don't know.

KAREN: You could send her away.

MRS. TILFORD: No. Whatever she does, it must be to me and no one else. She's--

KAREN: Yes. Your very own, (to audience) to live with the rest of your life. It's over for me now, but it will never end for you. (to Tilford) She's harmed us both, but she's harmed you more, I guess. I'm sorry. (lights a little warmer)

MRS. TILFORD: Then you'll try for yourself?

KAREN: All right.

MRS. TILFORD: I'll go to Joe right away. He must know what I know, Karen. You must go back to him.

KAREN: (smiles) No, not anymore.

MRS. TILFORD: You must, you must---Perhaps later, Karen?

KAREN: Perhaps.

MRS. TILFORD: You'll be all right?

KAREN: I'll be all right, I suppose. Goodbye, now.

MRS. TILFORD: Goodbye, my dear.

KAREN: Goodbye.

(blackout)

Analysis of the Readers Theatre
Adaptation of The Children's Hour

Some editing of the original script is common to both of the adaptations presented above. Because of the time and physical limitations of Readers Theatre the elimination of some characters is necessary in both scripts. Only three of the original seven children are used. Their presence on stage in the original production was needed to emphasize the setting of a school, but in both adaptations the location is described by the narrator. The three remaining

children are essential to the plot. The only other characters eliminated are Agatha, a maid for Mrs. Tilford, and a grocery boy. These are very small parts which do not contribute to the plot and are thus easily removed without drastically changing the play.

In preparing the first adaptation some lines are eliminated throughout the play in order to conform to time restraints. The only scene that is completely eliminated is the first scene of the second act. In this scene Mary whispers to her grandmother that Karen and Martha are lovers. The audience in the original play never hears this but only sees the reaction on Mrs. Tilford's face. It is not until scene two of that act that the audience discovers exactly what has been reported. For this reason the first scene is eliminated in favor of the narrator who describes what has occurred. The dialogue resumes with scene two. Such editing gives even more impact to the discovery of the accusation. Act three is reduced to become exclusively a dialogue between Karen and Martha. Karen's confrontation with Joe earlier in the scene is explained in the remaining dialogue as Hellman wrote it. Mrs. Mortar's return is also eliminated since it does not effect the plot and for time limitations. The very end of the play with Mrs. Tilford's return and confession is also eliminated. This scene comes immediately after Martha's suicide. When the play opened many critics felt this ending was overburdened and unnecessary.²¹

²¹ Atkinson, NYT, Nov. 21 1934, col. 2, p. 23. is one example of this complaint.

Hellman even admits the fault in her introduction to Four Plays.²²

Its elimination here leaves the audience uncertain of the truth of the lesbian relationship as well as giving dramatic impact to the ending of the adaptation.

In the second script the play opens with Peggy reading Portia's mercy speech in a strong voice with meaning instead of the sing-song voice of the first script to show the impact and irony of the speech in the play. Little if any mercy is ever shown. The script then goes straight to Mary's entrance to enhance the correlation between Mary and the lack of mercy as well as for time limitations. All implications of lesbianism are also removed from the first act. The dialogue between Karen and Martha is edited which in the first script gave the audience the first glimpse at Martha's jealousy of Joe. The dialogue between Martha and Mrs. Mortar where lesbianism is implied is also edited. The audience then has no indication of lesbianism in the first act. This not only makes Mary's accusations in the second act seem absurd but stresses how quickly and easily someone will act without proof and how quickly people follow a person with influence. The focus of the play is no longer on the possibility of Martha and Karen's lesbianism but on their manipulation by someone from an upper class. The narrator offers a brief explanation of class dominance. In act three we immediately pick up after Martha's suicide. The early part of this act has been cut in this

²²Hellman, Four Plays, p. viii.

script because of the emotion involved. For an audience to listen to the suicide scene a second time would not have as strong an impact as their memory of the first script. The ending of the play is included in this script because it is here that we see the downfall of the upper class and the hope of survival for the lower class. Lillian Hellman intended this final summing-up to have meaning. Perhaps because the scene is tense and overburdened, she failed in her purpose. But as she has said, "I would rather make the attempt and fail, than fail to make the attempt."²³ By adapting the play to Readers Theatre the meaning in the last scene is evident.

The staging diagrams at the back of the scripts explain the reasons behind the stage positions and their differences. A platform is used in the second script to emphasize the dominance and aggression of persons and classes over each other.

Thus by adapting The Children's Hour to Readers Theatre new meaning is given to the play. With the elimination of the lesbian theme other political and social subtexts are uncovered. These subtexts have been present in the text since its conception by Hellman, however, a vehicle which provided a deeper look was needed for them to be discovered. Readers Theatre provided that vehicle.

Summary and Conclusions

Perhaps because The Children's Hour was Hellman's first play the critics did not know what to expect and therefore missed her

²³ Hellman, Four Plays, p. ix.

underlying messages. Or perhaps her lesbian theme covered too heavily her intentions. Whatever the reasons The Children's Hour needed a deeper analysis to reveal its subtexts. Readers Theatre editing techniques provide this deeper examination. Moreover, by examining the author's background one is able to see what past influences motivate the writer. Lillian Hellman, for example, experienced social and class discrimination during her childhood. When she began writing, the main influence in her life, Dashiell Hammett, was involved in social and political reforms. These factors helped determine her motivation. Their influence is present in Hellman's plays.

Readers Theatre then requires a study of the author and the times in which the literature was written. The editor must also carefully study the work itself, the images used and how they are conveyed. One must understand the piece of literature as fully as possible in order accurately to portray the meaning to the audience. Once the interpreter understands the literature he can use the editing techniques provided by Readers Theatre to help reveal the previously unemphasized subtexts. Since Readers Theatre can be used in all forms of literature it seems to provide an ideal technique for the study of literature as well as a new and enriching entertainment experience for the audience. Readers Theatre adds another aspect to the theatrical experience which can continue to grow since every reading is a new performance for the reader, audience and critic.

One of the values from this study is in the questions it raises. The two scripts which resulted from this study were adapted with performance in mind. However, up to this point, they have not been produced. It would be interesting to see if an audience could sit through the two performances together and see the differences in the themes. A quantitative study could be done showing the audience's reactions to the two scripts. This would not only reveal any differences on the understanding of the play but it would also show the effectiveness of Readers Theatre adaptation. Since Readers Theatre is still open to experimentation studies need to be done showing its effectiveness on audiences as it influences their understanding as well as their enjoyment of the literature. The further study and development of Readers Theatre could revolutionize the theatrical world.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

STAGING DIAGRAMS FOR ADAPTATION ONE

The following abbreviations are used:

Mr - Mrs. Mortar

P - Peggy

R - Rosalie

M - Mary

K - Karen

Ma - Martha

C - Cardin

T - Mrs. Tilford

N - Narrator

A solid line indicate the direction of a character's entrance or exit. A dashed line indicates a character's focal point. Outlined letters indicate a character's back to the audience. The narrator remains down left throughout the performances.

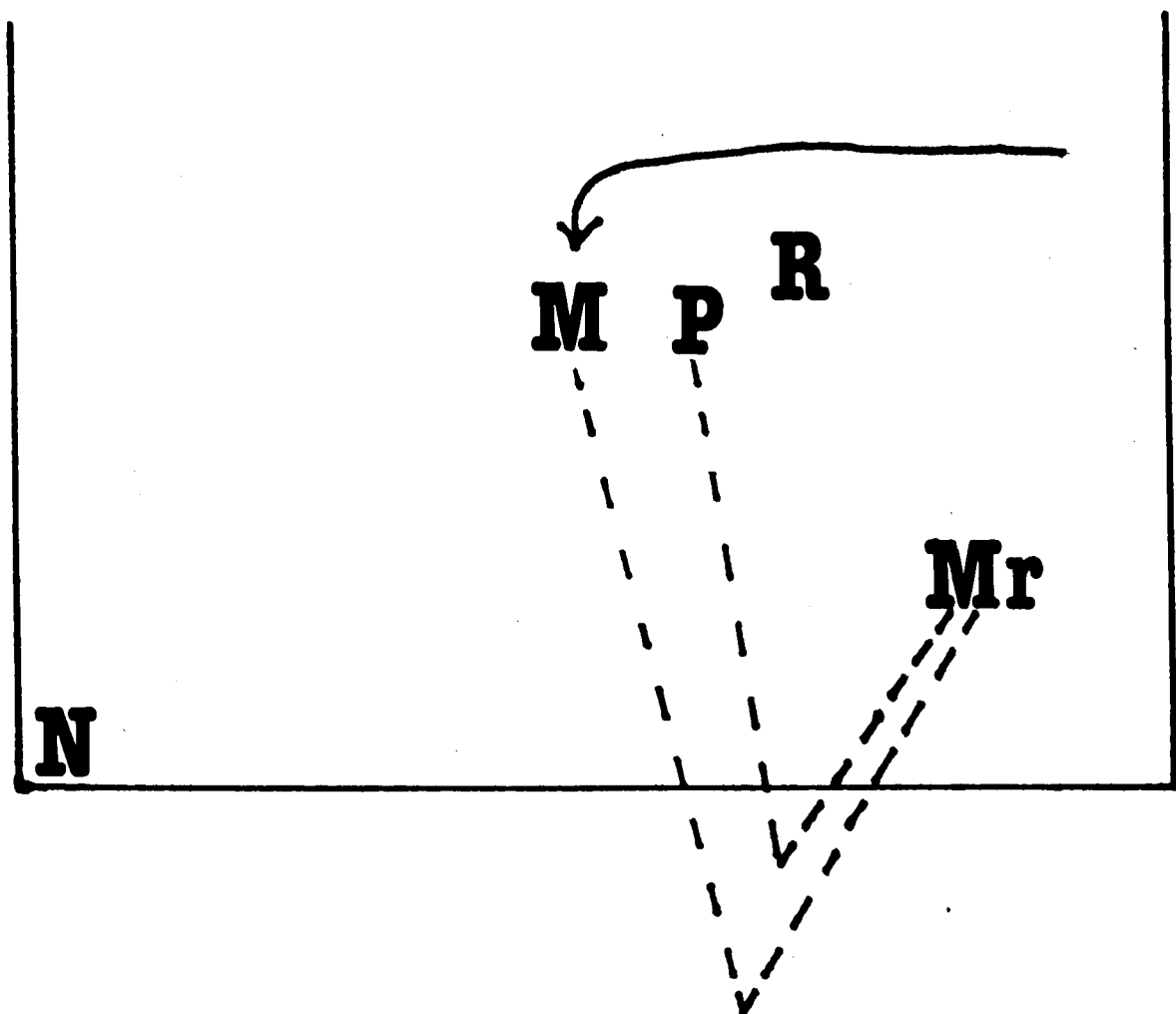


Figure A-1. Opening of Act I, Adaptation One.

Mrs. Mortar is placed down left because it is a formal classroom setting as well as the fact that her personality is very formal and distant. She is always "on stage."

The children are on the left because of the conspiracy of which they are all a part. Mary, however, is center stage because of her domination over the other children and the lives of all involved.

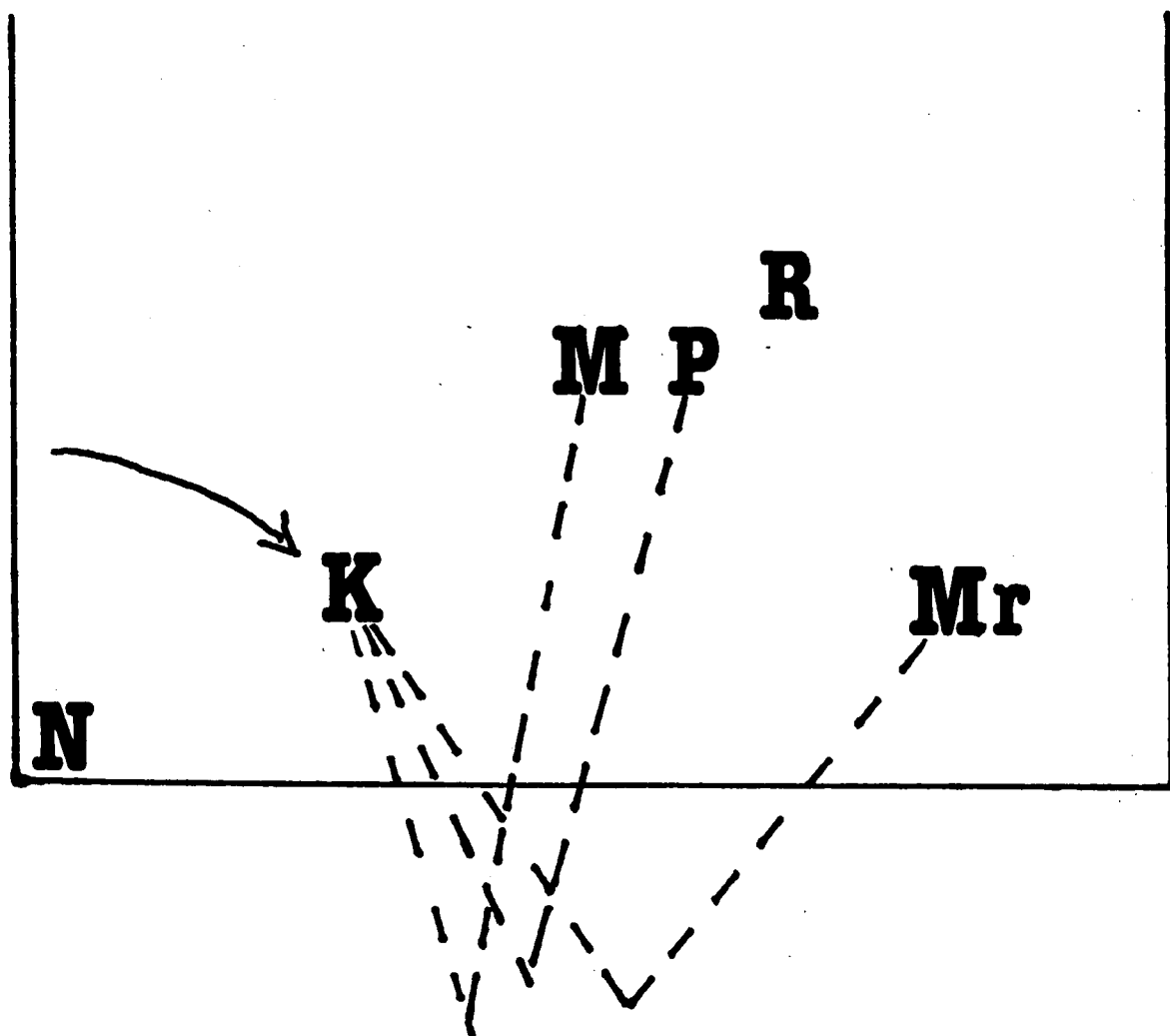


Figure A-2. Karen's entrance, Adaptation One.

Karen enters to down right because of her warm personality and because of her long sequence with Mary.

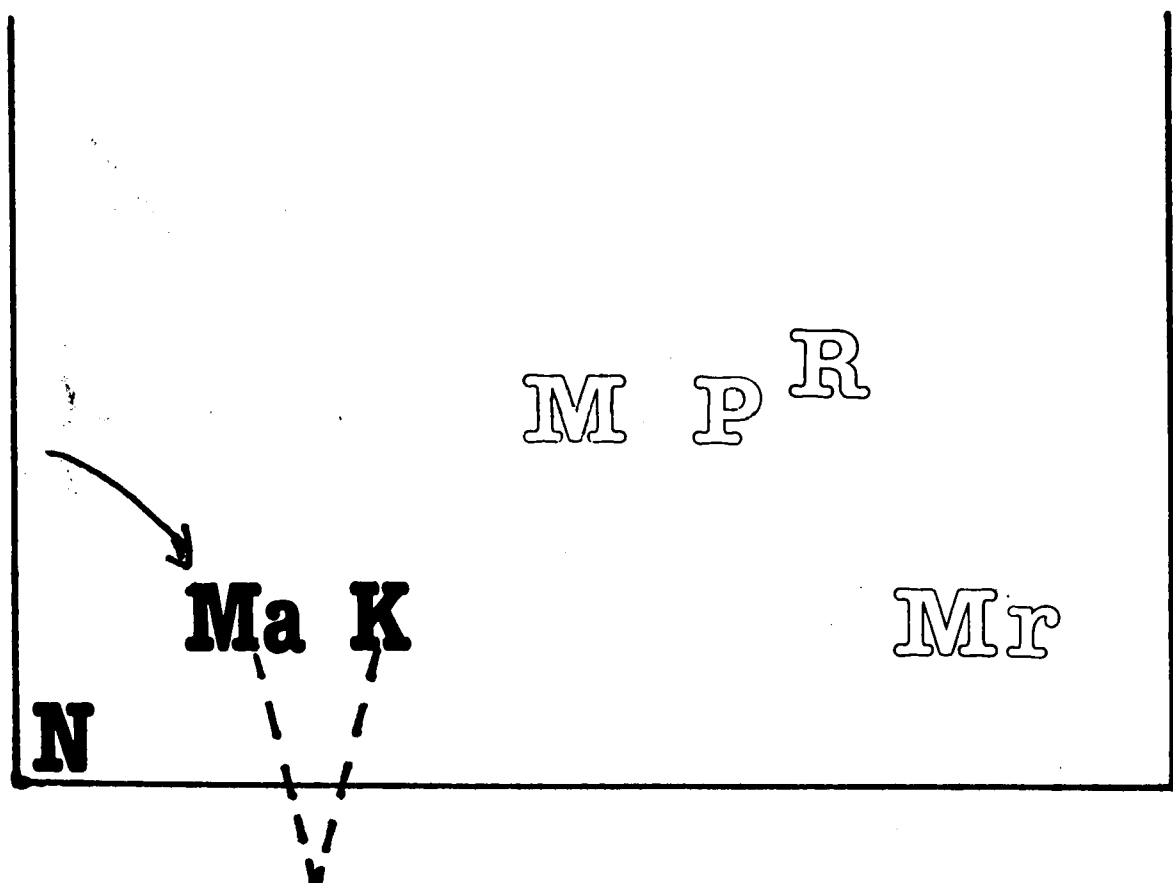


Figure A-3. Martha's entrance, Adaptation One.

Karen and Martha are down right because of the length of their conversation and the hinting of perhaps a closer intimacy between them.

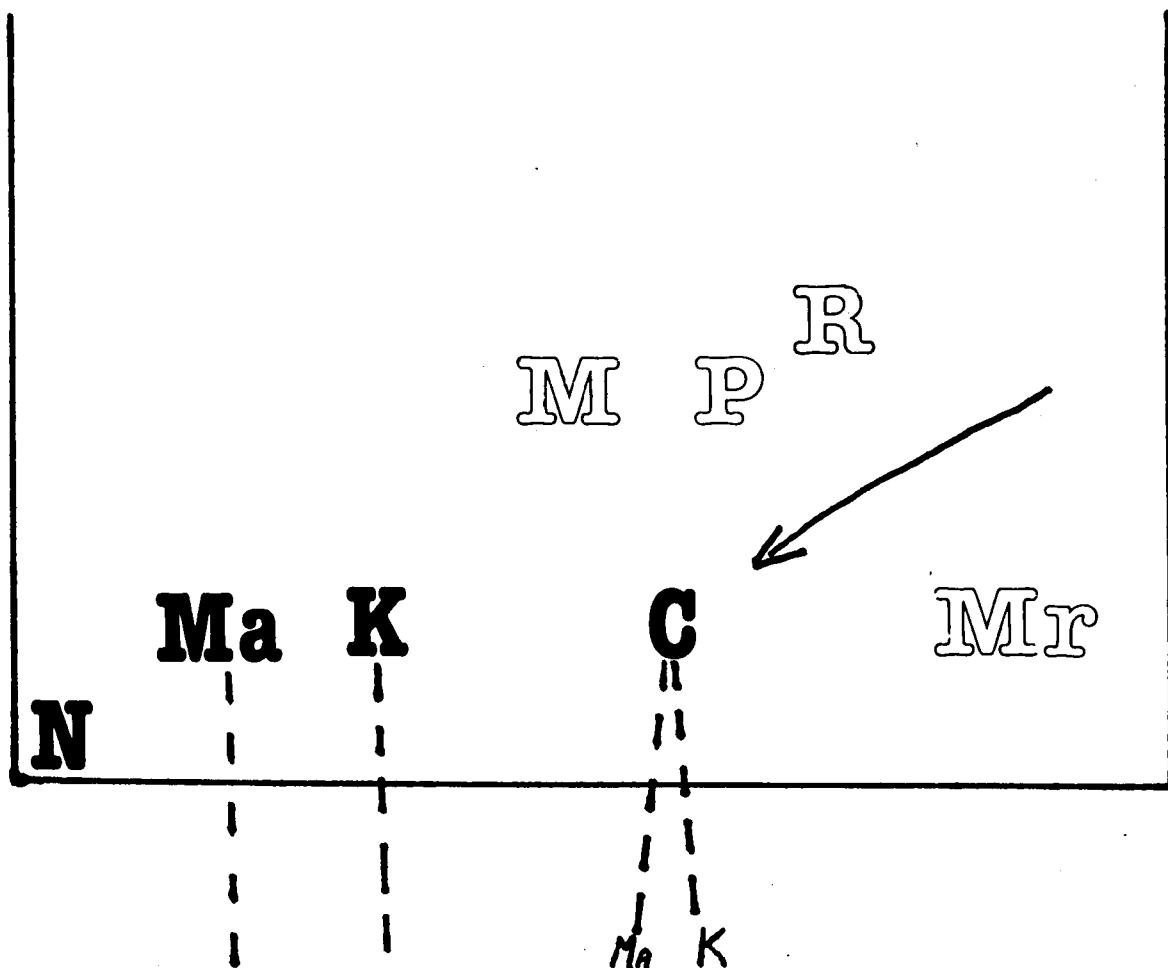


Figure A-4. Cardin's entrance, Adaptation One.

Cardin enters to the center to stabilize the threatening conversation of Karen and Martha.

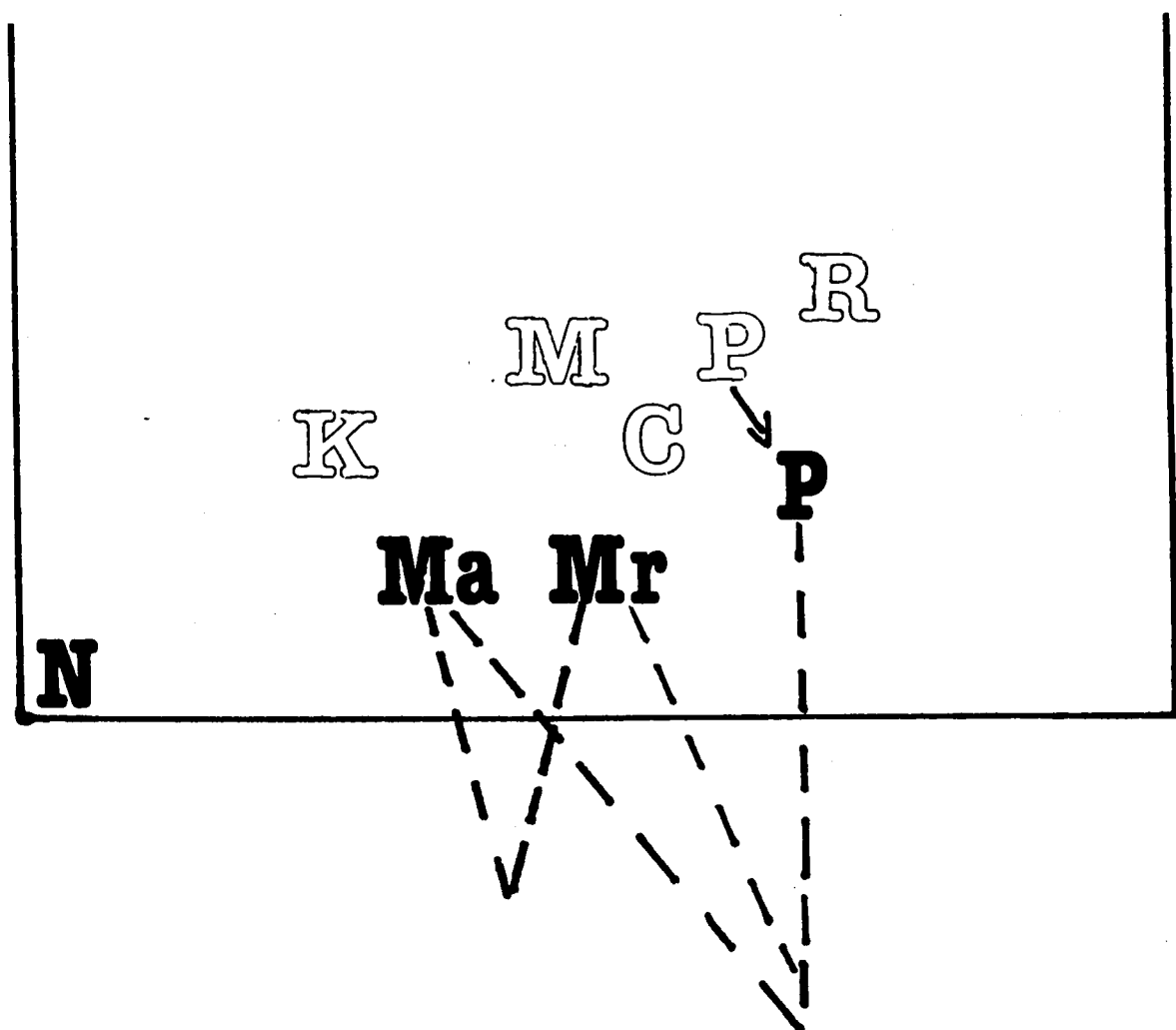


Figure A-5. Martha and Mortar's quarrel, Adaptation One.

Martha and Mortar move to center because of the intense quarrel and accusations which create the crisis.

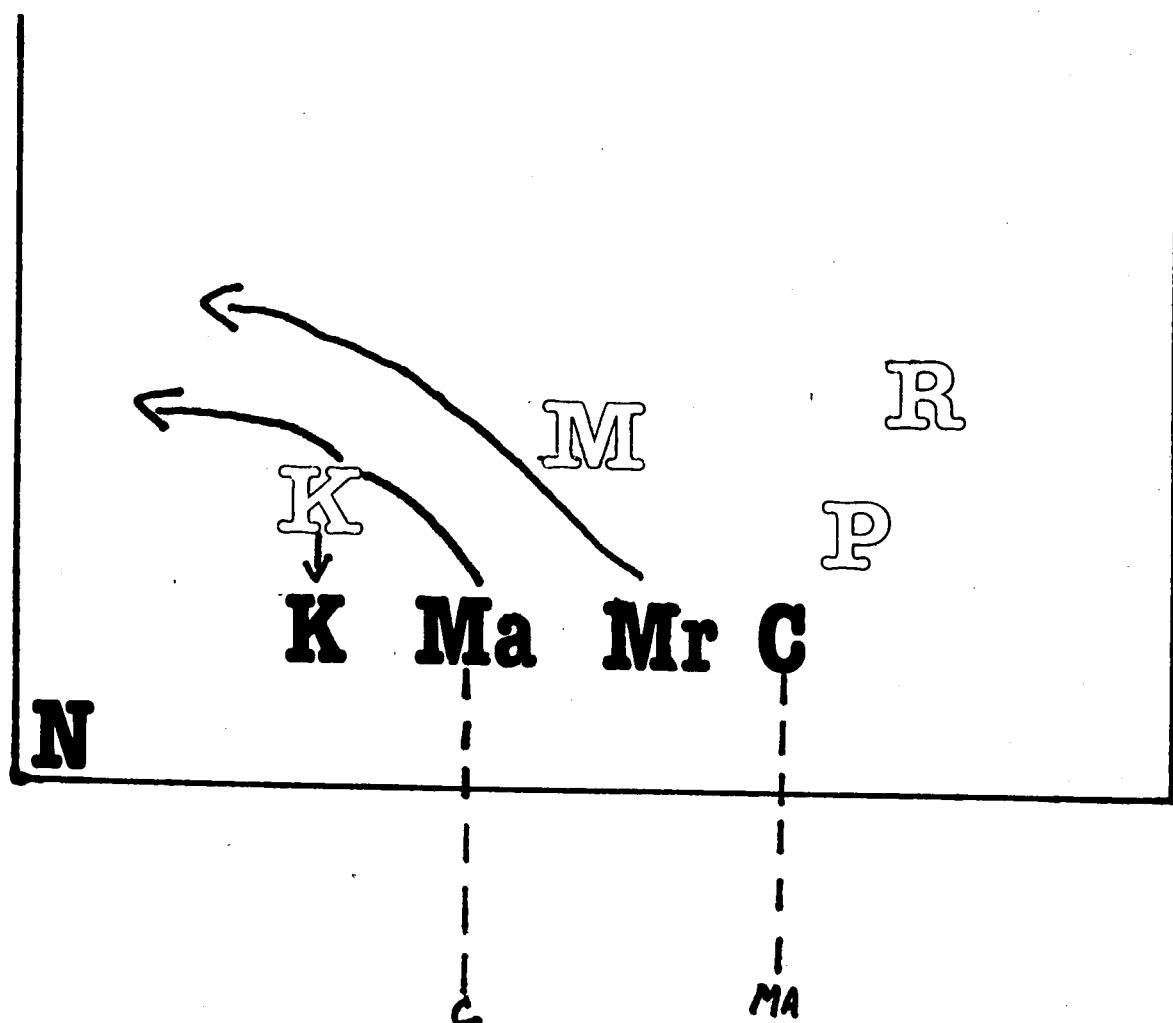


Figure A-6. Mortar's exit, Adaptation One.

Cardin turns interrupting Martha and Mortar's conversation. Mortar exits dramatically stage right. Karen turns and steps forward. Martha exits stage right.

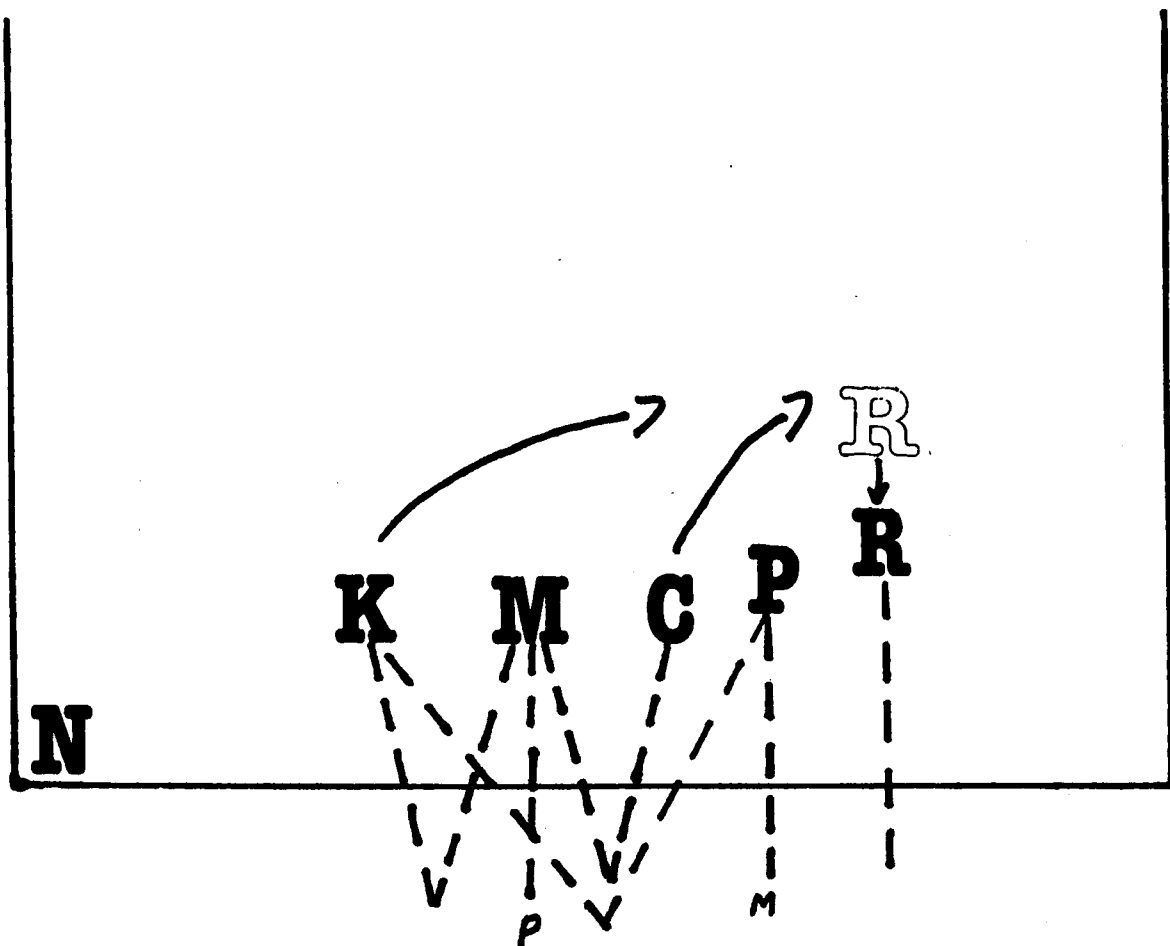


Figure A-7. Karen and Cardin's exit, Adaptation One.

Mary moves farther down center to emphasize her superiority while Peggy and Rosalie remain left as the conspiracy is formulated.

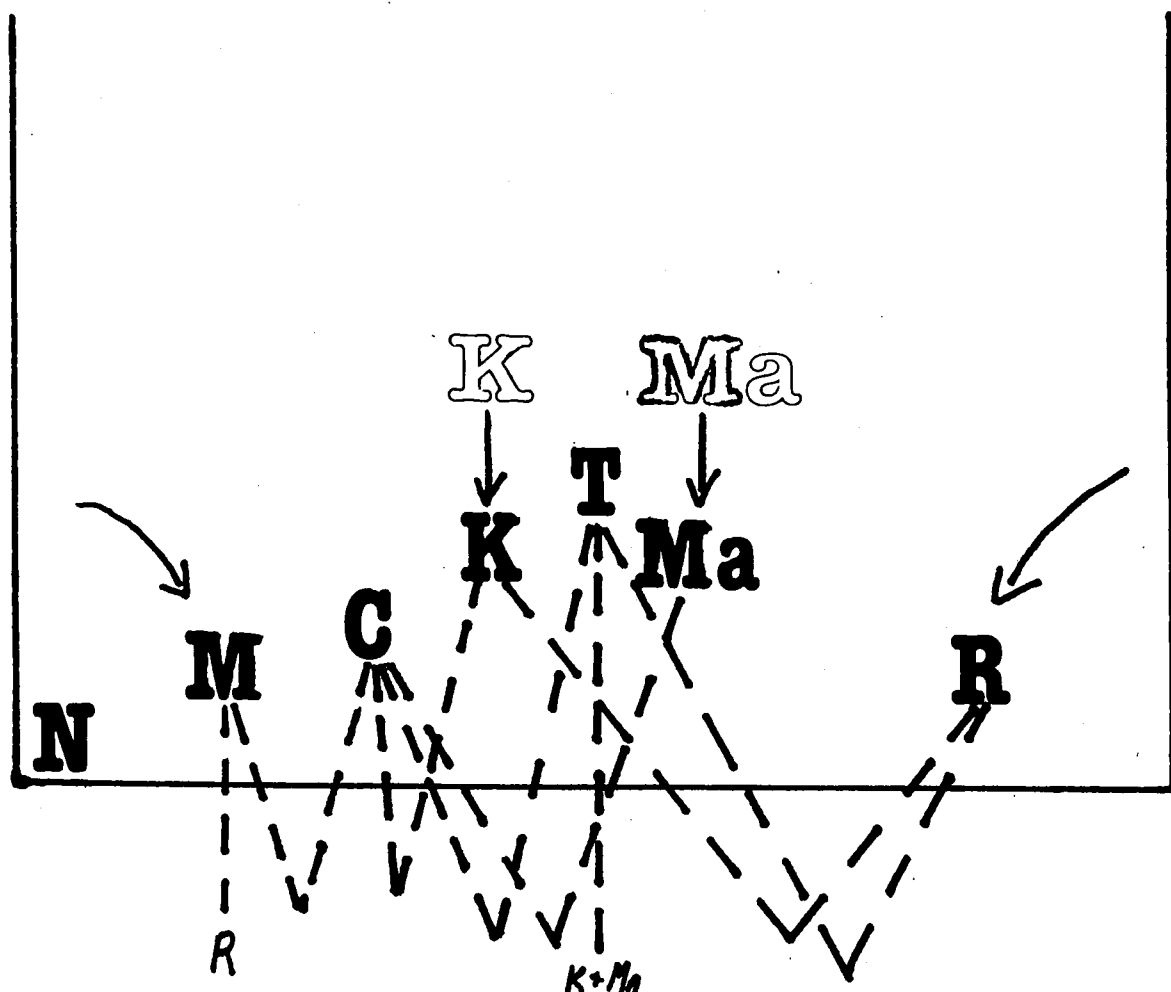


Figure A-8. Act II, Adaptation One.

Mrs. Tilford is center because of her upper class regalness. She also passes judgement on Karen and Martha.

Mary is down right for her confession or gossip she has started.

Karen and Martha are on either side of Tilford as she controls them with Martha on the left since this begins her loss of stability.

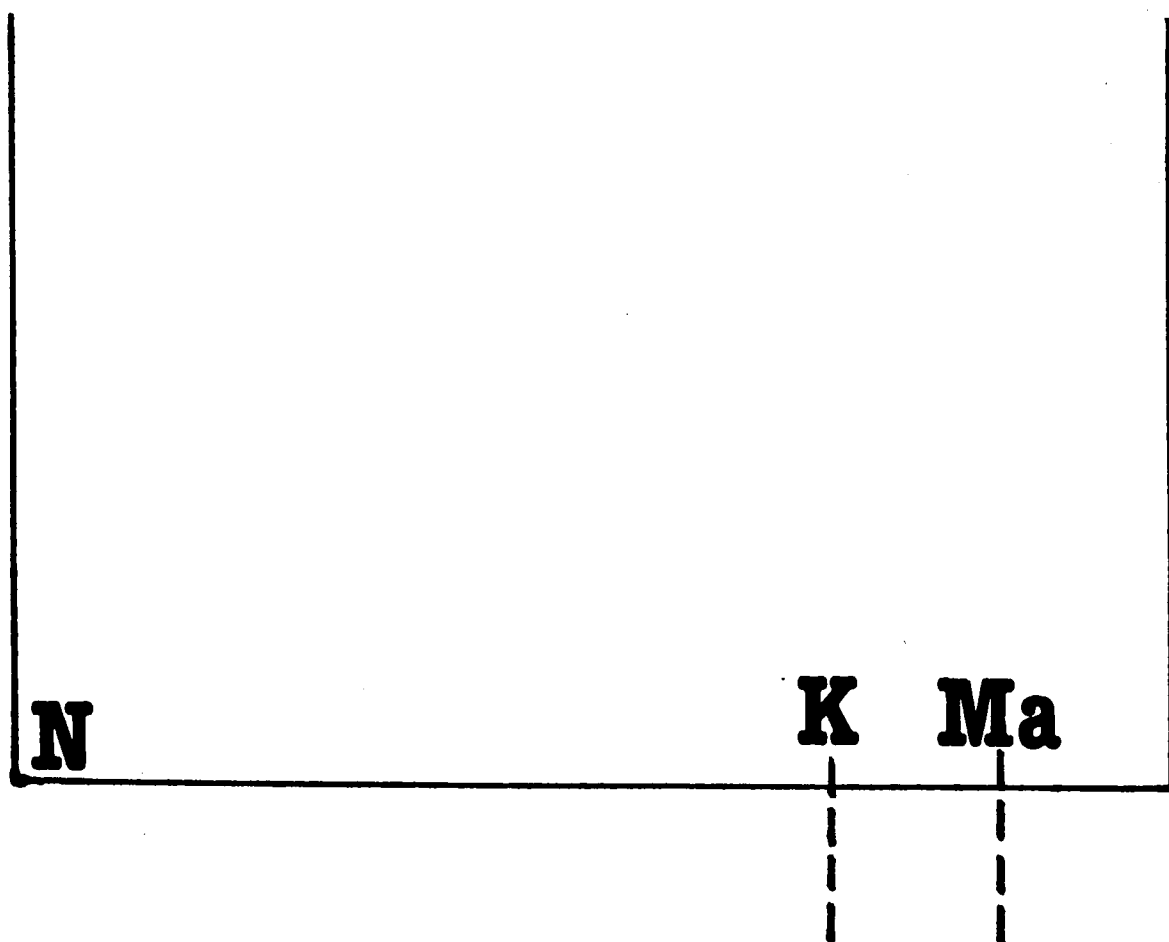


Figure A-9. Act III, Adaptation One.

Karen and Martha end down left because of the cold emptiness now surrounding them. Their world is very unstable.

APPENDIX B

STAGING DIAGRAMS FOR ADAPTATION TWO

The following abbreviations are used:

Mr - Mrs. Mortar

P - Peggy

R - Rosalie

M - Mary

K - Karen

Ma - Martha

C - Cardin

T - Mrs. Tilford

N - Narrator

A solid line indicates the direction of a character's entrance or exit. A dashed line indicates a character's focal point.

Outlined letters indicate a character's back to the audience.

□ indicates a platform which is placed center to be used to emphasize domination and superiority.

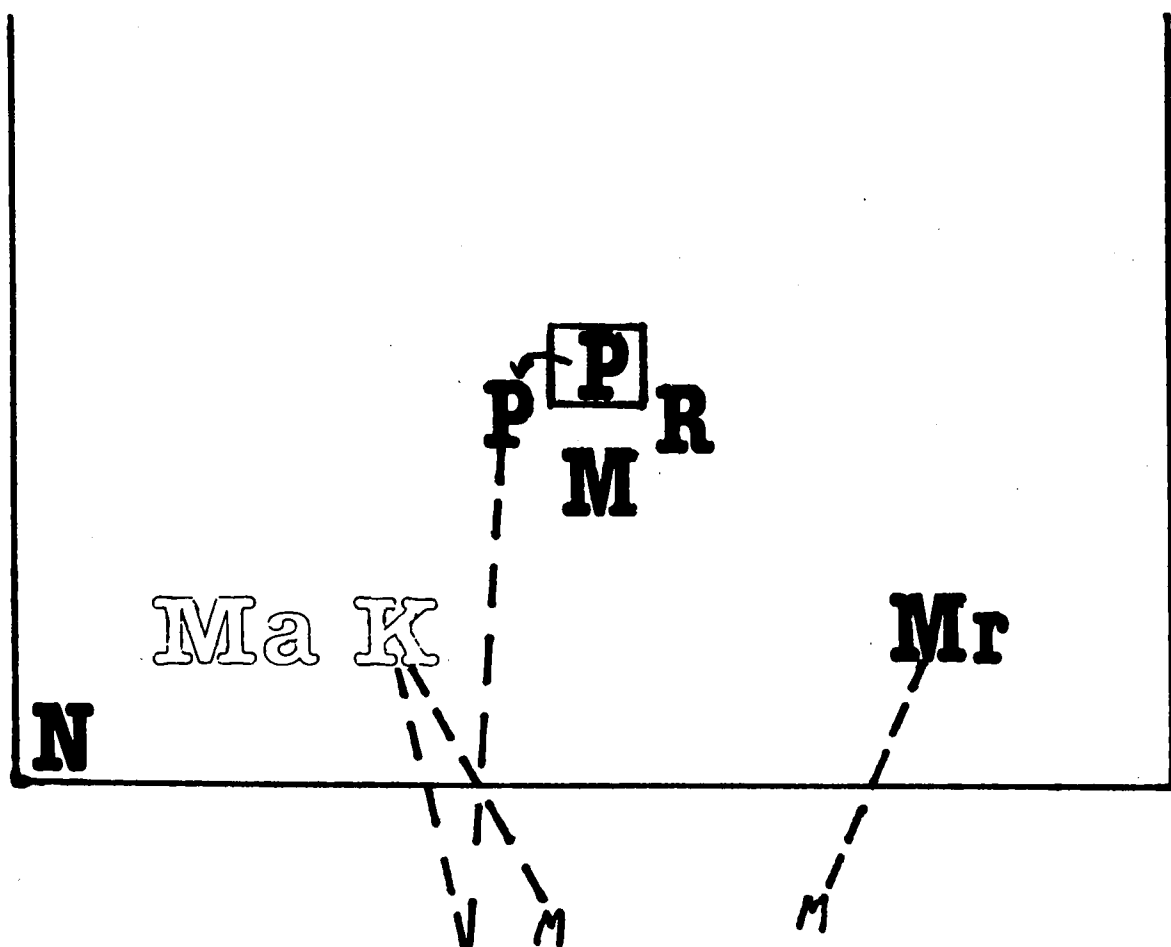


Figure B-1. Opening of Act I, Adaptation Two.

Peggy begins on the platform to emphasize how little mercy is shown on the situation. Peggy then moves right of the platform so that Peggy and Rosalie surround Mary at the center to show the domination of the children over their teachers.

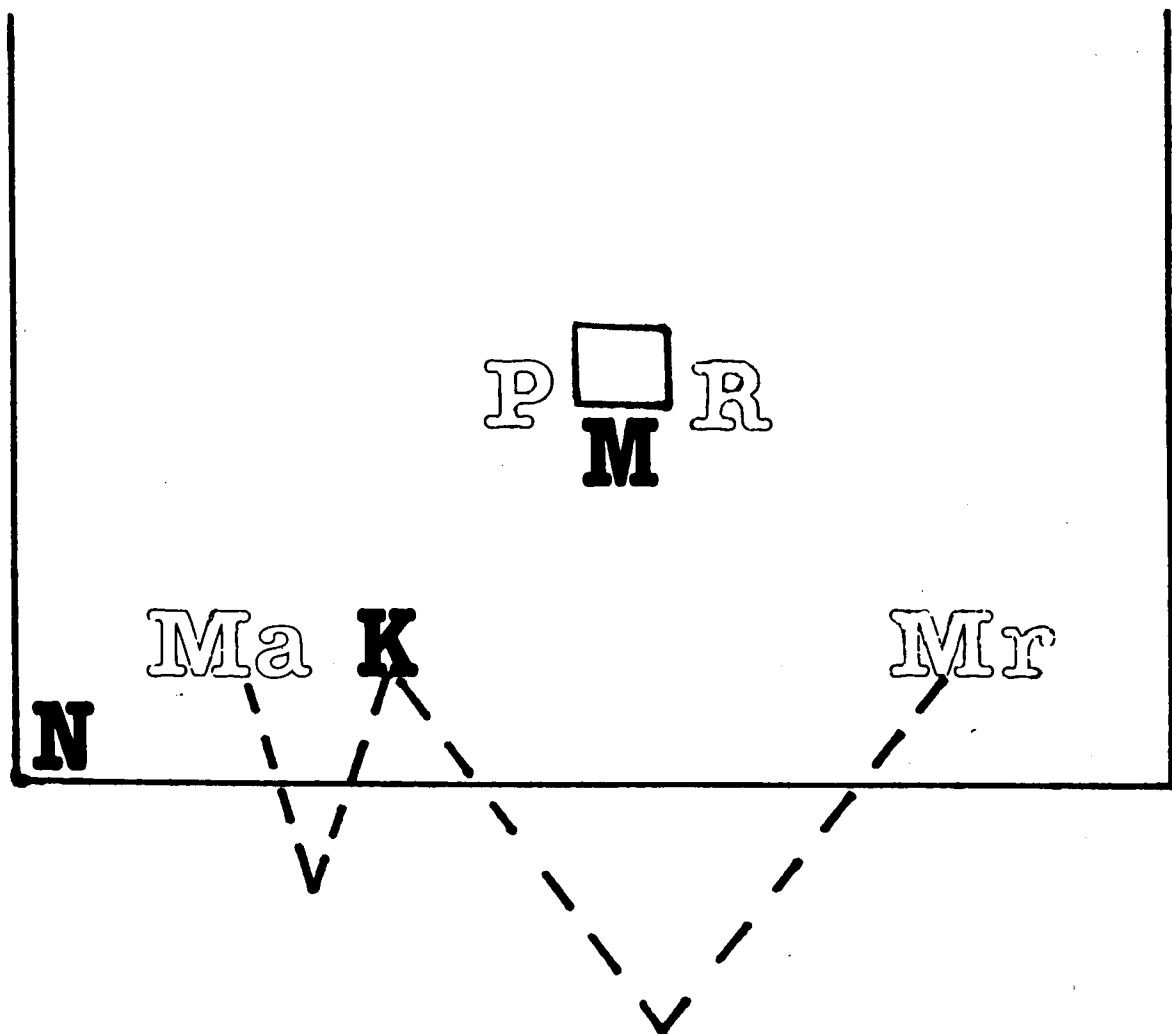


Figure B-2. Karen and Mary's confrontation, Adaptation Two.

Only Karen and Mary are facing the audience for their confrontation. The focal points are given for the other characters for the early part and latter part of the scene when they are facing the audience.

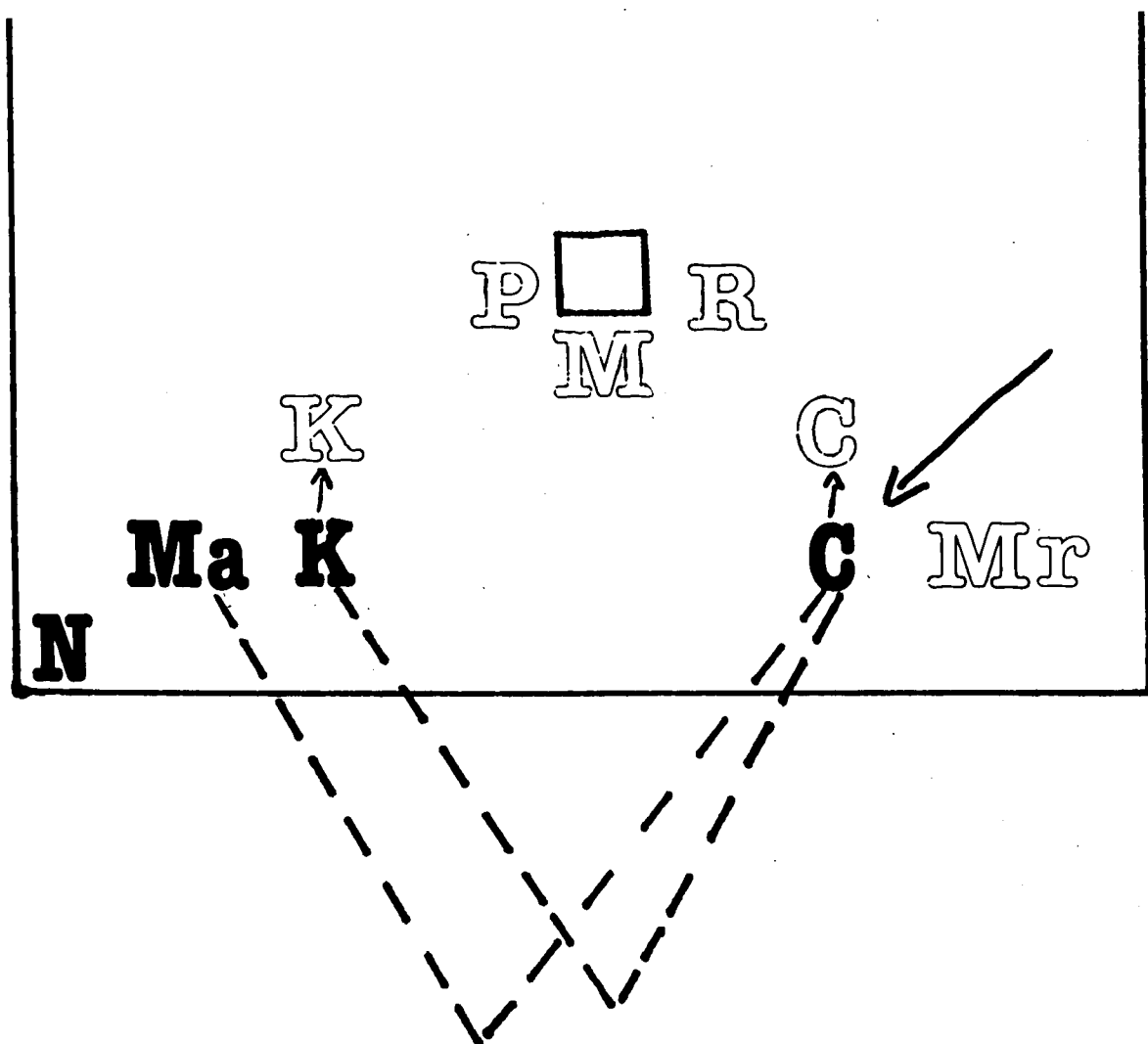


Figure B-3. Cardin's entrance, Adaptation Two.

Cardin enters stage right and then turns and steps back after lines.

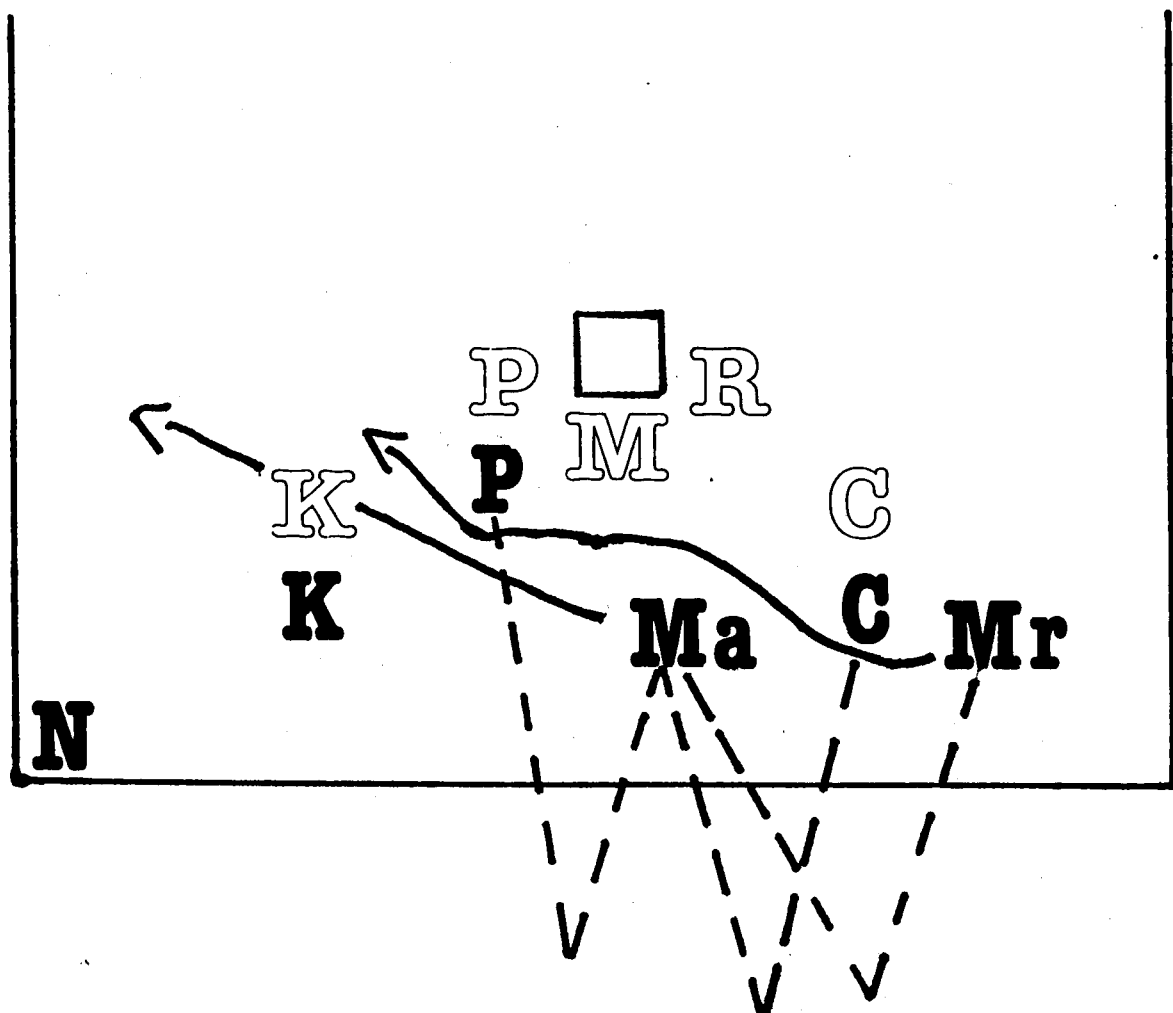


Figure B-4. Mortar's exit, Adaptation Two.

Mortar makes a statement with her exit by walking all the way across stage.

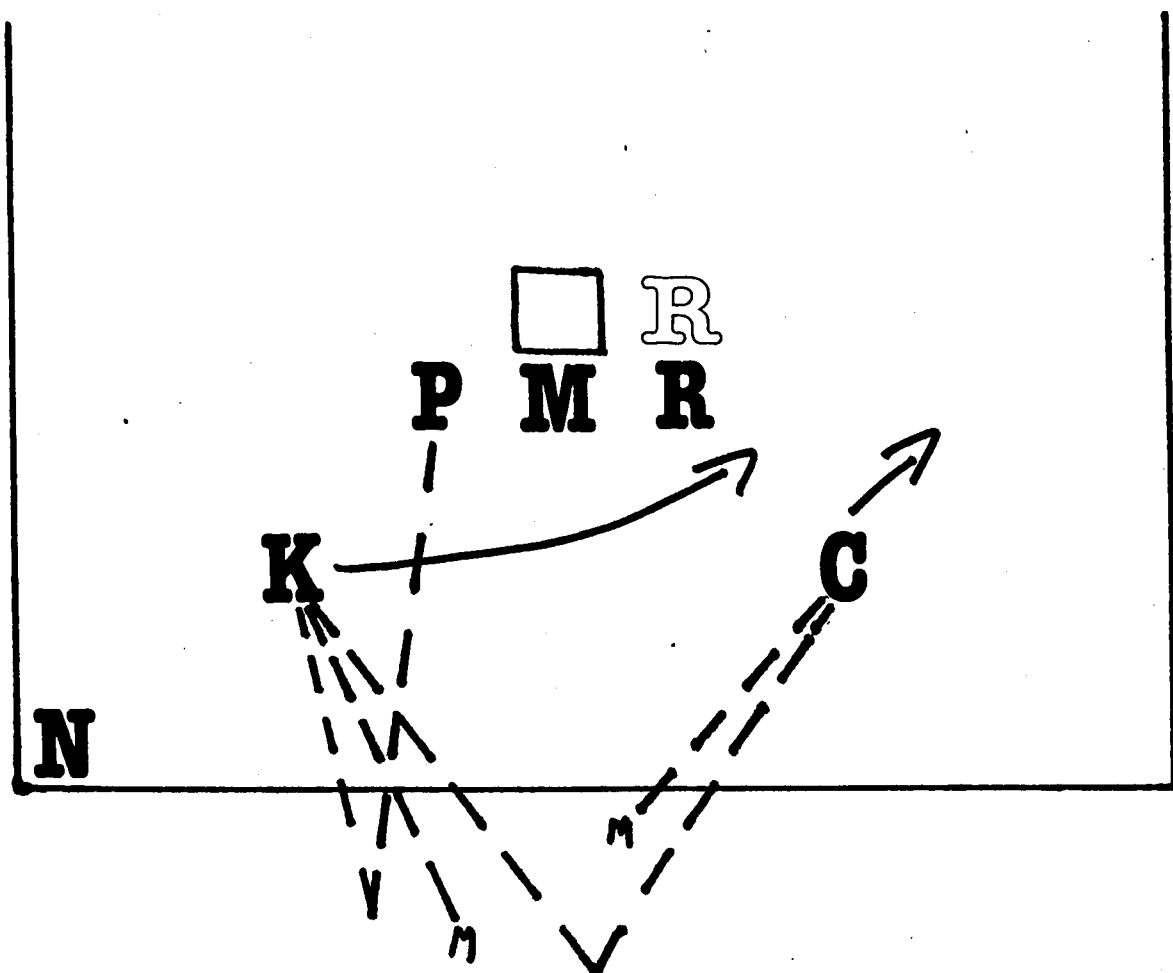


Figure B-5. Karen and Cardin's exit, Adaptation Two.

Karen and Cardin exit stage left as Rosalie turns to enter the scene with Peggy and Mary.

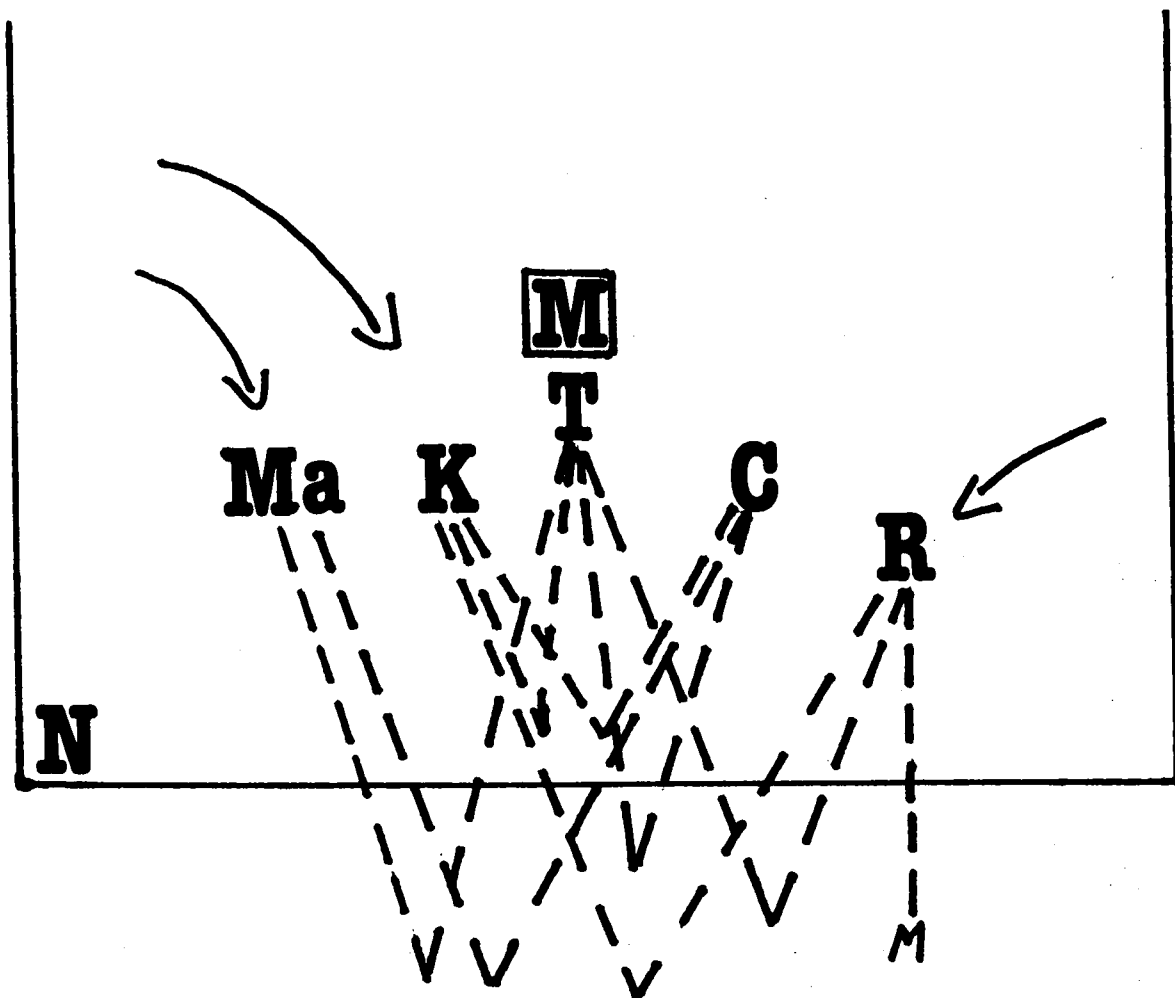


Figure B-6. Act II, Adaptation Two.

Mary is on the platform to emphasize her domination with her aunt beneath her helping her pass judgement.

Karen and Martha are up right to show the unreality of the situation.

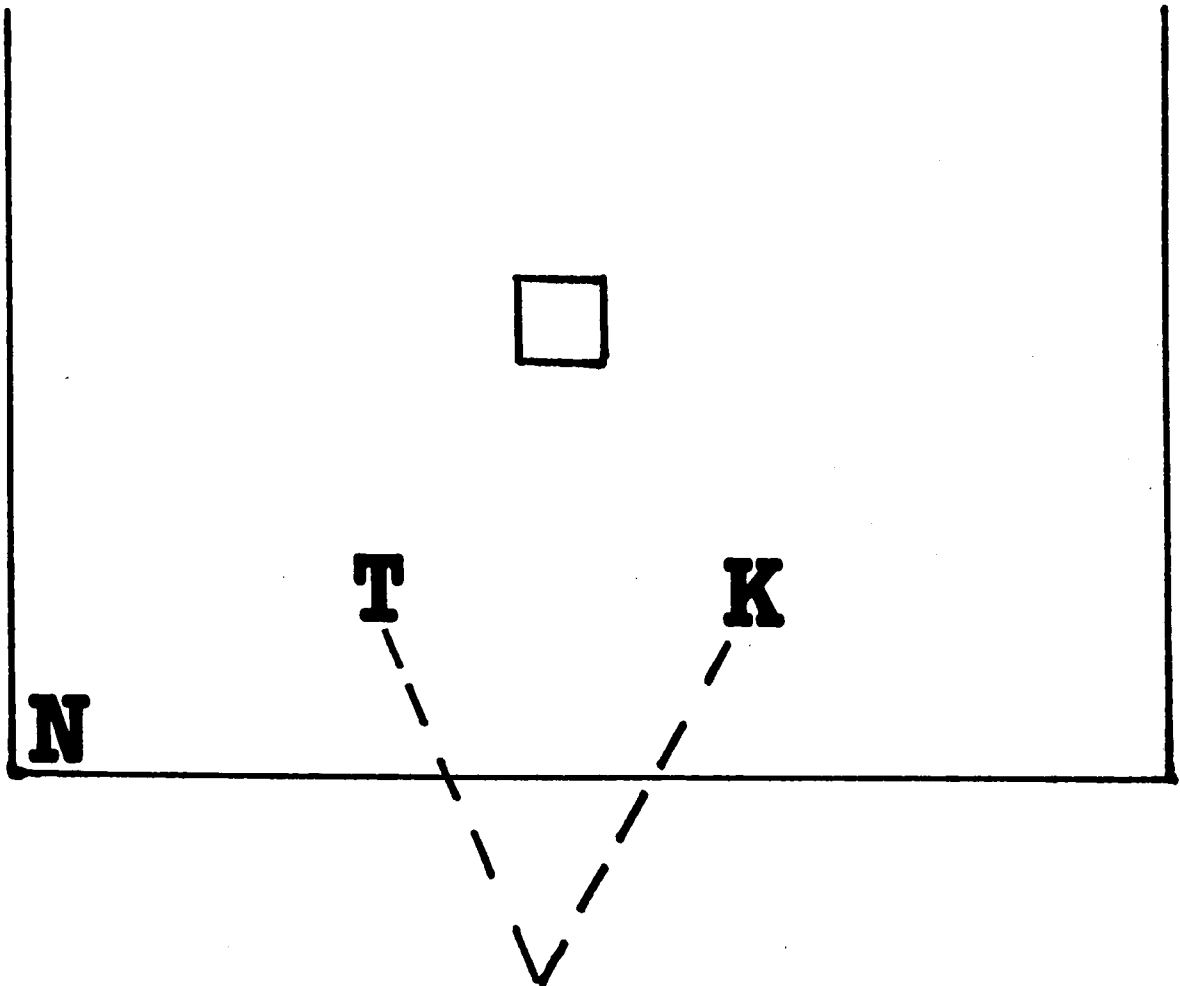


Figure B-7. Final scene of Act III, Adaptation two.

Karen is left of center because her life is still unstable but there is hope.

Mrs. Tilford is right for her confession.

VITA

Susan Michele Paquette was born in Portchester, New York on September 25, 1958. She later moved to Trenton, New Jersey and then to Norristown, Pennsylvania where she was graduated from Bishop Kenrick High School in June, 1976. The following September she entered West Chester State College, and in June, 1980, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech Communication. In the Fall of 1980 she accepted a teaching assistantship at the University of Tennessee and began study toward a Master's degree. This degree was awarded in August, 1982.

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