CHAMBER THEATRE: AN ANALYSIS, ADAPTATION AND PUBLIC PERFORMANCE OF "THE COUNTRY HUSBAND" BY JOHN CHEEVER

THESIS

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The purpose of this oral interpretation thesis is to explore Chamber Theatre as a medium for production. John Cheever and his work are analyzed, an explanation of Chamber Theatre is given, and Cheever's short story "The Country Husband" is adapted in Chamber Theatre script form, and a public performance is rehearsed and presented. It was discovered that students gain critical insight and understanding of narrative fiction through Chamber Theatre and that Cheever's work is very well suited to the Chamber Theatre medium due to its rich narrative qualities.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Group interpretation as a field of study has expanded greatly and with much diversity since the "stools and stands" approach which characterized the early days of the genre. More and more, productions are starting to resemble conventional theatre as attention is increasingly focused on the technical aspects of production. Many interpretation directors are employing full use of sets, lights, costumes, and other theatrical accoutrements to present their concept of the literature. Such endeavors are the source of an increasing controversy in interpretation circles. One might ask whether we are still focusing enough attention on the literature or have we become too enamoured of theatrical "trappings" and therefore have lost sight of the original intentions of sharing quality literature with emphasis on the text instead of the production.

Fortunately, we do not need to develop a new method of presentation to solve this dilemma. Happily, Chamber Theatre, a technique of group presentation which has been in use since the 1940's and only recently gained wide notoreity, can present narrative literature in a vivid,

theatrical fashion while still retaining the shamanistic flavor of storytelling.

Robert S. Breen, who created and contributed so much to the development of Chamber Theatre while at Northwestern University, explains Chamber Theatre in this manner:

> Chamber Theatre is dedicated to the proposition that the ideal literary experience is one in which the simultaneity of the drama, representing the illusion of actuality (that is, social and psychological realism), may be profitably combined with the novel's narrative privilege of examining human motivation at the moment of action.[1]

Breen has further stated that the primary concern of Chamber Theatre is "the presentation on the stage of narrative literature without sacrificing its narrative elements."[2] He feels that Chamber Theatre should be seen as a technique rather than as an art, one which "articulates the literary elements directly; the literature itself is always in focus, always present while the Chamber Theatre performance is in progress."[3]

Kleinau and McHughes describe what an audience member might see in a Chamber Theatre production:

> [You might see] A narrator, or several narrators, sometimes speak directly to the audience and sometimes relate to characters. Characters may talk with each other or speak directly to the audience. Costume pieces, properties, and even a somewhat representational stage setting may be used. The narrator would sometimes tell the story directly to the audience and sometimes let the characters show the action of the story as in a traditionally staged play. In fact, the interaction between showing and telling--as when the narrator breaks into a scene and

> comments upon it or, in the middle of telling the audience about a character, signals the character to speak--becomes one of the most interesting features of Chamber Theatre.[4]

Bowen, Aggertt and Rickertt agree that this method of handling narration is the key difference between Chamber Theatre and its parent form, Readers Theatre; i.e., the "presence of the narrator as a distinct person or persons, either as an omniscient figure or as a character or characters within the story."[5] They also feel that while both forms are theatrical in nature, Chamber Theatre is usually more so, "even using complete staging if desired."[6] Finally, Wallace Bacon, considered by many to be the dean of interpretation scholars for many years, summarizes the essential difference in this fashion: "Chamber Theatre stages; Readers Theatre essentially does not."[7]

In addressing the question of the usefulness of Chamber Theatre in presenting prose fiction, Bacon offers the following:

> Chamber Theatre is an excellent way of teaching and understanding the complex issues involved in perspective within prose fiction. "Who is looking at what?" is a constant question for the adapter of the text. We have said that this is a vital question in determining the locus of any work of literature; Chamber Theatre constantly forces it upon us. Chamber Theatre guards against the too-easy dismissal of passages of description and exposition by reminding us that such passages are always being said by someone, and with something in mind.[8]

It is the narrator's presence as a guiding and controlling force in the story that gives Chamber Theatre much of its vividness and excitement. Lee and Galati write,

> The heart of Chamber Theatre, then, is the careful, intelligent use of the narrator through whom the author controls point of view. The narrator in a Chamber Theatre production not only moves the story along but also governs the selectivity of the story and conditions the listeners' responses to the characters and the action."[9]

A key concept here is that the narrator is often used as a controlling device, arranging actions, events, and characters as if conducting an orchestra. The degree to which the narrator is used in this manner is determined by the nature and style of the story and the production concept. Kleinau and McHughes explain:

> Some narrators stand back to observe the events they're relating, calling the reader's attention to particulars, interjecting comments, and assisting characters as they play out their stories. Other narrators exhibit a much stronger control over the showing and telling, even to the extent of standing centerstage and directing the symphony, with the characters appearing and disappearing at the narrator's command. Narrator power ranges between these two extremes. One of the farthest-reaching decisions in your script-making will be your determination of the extent of power you'll allow your narrator to exhibit, because it sets a tone for the production and shapes the personalities of the narrator and characters.[10]

Coger and White emphasize the role the narrator takes in interpretation production lies within the literature itself; i.e., it is determined by the author's point of view.[11]

Long, Hudson and Jeffrey have devised three elements which

reveal point of view in prose fiction: (1) the identity of the narrator, (2) the kinds of information this narrator provides, and (3) the perspective from which this narrator relates or observes the characters and action of the story.[12] Finally, Smith points out that Chamber Theatre is best suited to a story with a strong narrative point of view.[13]

In attempting a Chamber Theatre script adaptation, it is preferable that one employ the work of a master author whose work has received considerable critical praise. John Cheever's credentials as one of the leading contemporary fiction writers are easy to validate. He has won numerous awards, including the National Book Award, the Benjamin Franklin Short Story Award, the O. Henry Short Story Award, the Howell's Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a $1,000 award in literature from the National Institute of Arts and Letters. He has been the subject of cover stories in Time and Newsweek magazines and was the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship. He once spent six weeks in the USSR as part of a cultural exchange program and was selected by Newsweek to comment on the state of America during the Bicentennial celebration. Finally, a collection of his works, The Stories of John Cheever, won the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction for 1978.

At the time of his death on June 18, 1982, the New York Times News Service stated that Cheever "possessed the ability to find spiritual resonance in the seemingly inconsequential events of daily life."[15] Braundy calls Cheever a "keeper of the mysteries of place," and speaks of his "epiphany-seeking vision."[16]

Critical acclaim and praise for Cheever's work in general has been carried over to "The Country Husband." This story, first published in 1954, was included in the 1958 collection, The Housebreaker of Shady Hill. This collection, along with Some People, Places, and Things That Will Not Appear In My Next Novel, contains, according to Waldeland, "some of the finest American short stories of the twentieth century."[17] Winner of the coveted O. Henry Short Story Award, this story was also included in the Pulitzer Prize winning collection, The Stories of John Cheever, which became the first short story collection ever to head the best-seller lists and earned Cheever the title of "The American Chekhov."[18]

Most of Cheever's stories in these collections are concerned with two strong thematic subjects: male-female relationships and suburbia. Both issues are extremely timely and relevant and both have been the focus of much recent scrunity. Concerning the male-female theme, Waldeman wrote,

> This interest in the question of power in relationships between men and women, growing out of his own family situation, has remained a major theme in Cheever's work and has, of course, made his work particularly relevant in the last decade [the 1970's] as the whole culture has focused on that issue.[19]

The male-female and suburbia aspects of Cheever's work are most fruitfully analyzed together, for the suburban environment, as the center of home, family and child-raising, has traditionally been viewed as the woman's domain. These somewhat sexist ideas, as with all conservative ideology, change slowly and die hard in the suburbs, as evidenced by a recent cover article in Texas Monthly. Entitled "No Man's Land," the story reveals the suburban living code this way:

> As downtown has always been the male bastion, so the suburb has always been a female world, created from the beginning for raising children away from the turmoil of the inner center. Parenting is the only industry . . . and its assembly line workers, supervisors, and presidents have always been women. The job of . . . [the] men is to leave town each day and earn enough money to keep the industry solvent.[20]

Goldston has stated that "the lack of variety in both the physical and social surroundings of any given suburb produces a mind-dulling boredom and sense of futile conformity which is also a rich source of tensions, even though these may not be so obvious."[21]

These themes permeate "The Country Husband," although the tone is somewhat comic and satirical. Because the protagonist of the story, Francis Weed, patriarch of an

affluent Shady Hill family, falls in love with his children's babysitter, he is ostracized from the female-dominated suburban society, only to be reinstated through the miracle of modern psychiatry. Though the story has serious overtones, Cheever punctures the dark moods with some characteristically comic lines: A description of Francis' deep anguish upon learning of Anne's (the babysitter) engagement is lightened by the observation that immediately follows; his Boy Scout-derived moral principles make him feel guilty about leaving work early. During the major conflict scene between Franics and his wife, an argument that his dependency on her is a carry-over from their wedding, including a reference to his skimpy guest list, is deflated by Francis' notion that "Cleveland was not my home."

As indicated in the above examples, "The Country Husband" is Francis Weed's story, the events seen through his eyes in a limited omniscience fashion. All of the narrative is concerned with him or the people with whom he interacts. Since Chamber Theatre deals with narrative fiction, and narration is the key feature of the story, then it is obvious that Chamber Theatre is a suitable method for "telling the tale" of Francis Weed, the country husband. Chamber Theatre is also well suited to showing the male-female relationships crucial to the story.

Anderson explains that "Literature is best served by Chamber Theatre is that in which there is a strong point of view--a dynamic interaction between the narrator and the story."[22] Finally, since "The Country Husband" is primarily concerned with the world and actions of Francis Weed, a style which reveals the motivations behind those actions would seem to best serve the needs of the literature. As Breen says, an important function of Chamber Theatre is that it uses the author's narration to "explore the motivations of the characters at the moment of action."[23]

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis has been to examine Chamber Theatre as a technique for presenting narrative fiction. Application of this technique has been made to John Cheever's short story "The Country Husband" in a fashion that it is hoped best illustrates the themes of Cheever's work and those of "The Country Husband." This thesis has shown that Chamber Theatre is an excellent method for such a presentation and that Cheever's work benefits from this production style.

Procedure

An explanation of Chamber Theatre is given based on Breen's book Chamber Theatre as well as other sources. An examination of the work of John Cheever has been

conducted using research material taken from literary criticisms, essays, reviews, and interviews. "The Country Husband" is analyzed in the light of revelations gained from examinations of his other works as well as critiques of his material. Also, "The Country Husband" was adapted in Chamber Theatre script form and presented on the campus of North Texas State University as a major Interpretation Theatre production in November, 1982, with the premiere performance at the Southwest Theatre Conference in Fort Worth, Texas.

NOTES

[1]Robert S. Breen, Chamber Theatre. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1978), p. 5.

[2]Robert S. Breen, "Chamber Theatre," in The Study of Oral Interpretation: Theory and Comment, ed. by Richard Haas and David A. Williams (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc. 1975)), p. 207.

[3]Breen, Chamber Theatre, p. 6.

[4]Marion L. Kleinau and Janet Larsen McHughes, Theatres for Literature, (Sherman Oaks, Cal.: Alfred Pub. Co., Inc. 1980), p. 69.

[5]Elbert R. Bowen, Otis J. Aggertt and William Rickertt, Communicative Reading, (4th ed., New York: MacMillan Pub., 1978), p. 424.

[6]Bowen, Aggertt and Rickertt, p. 424.

[7]Wallace A. Bacon, The Art of Interpretation, (3rd ed., New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1979), p. 470.

[8]Bacon, p. 471.

[9]Charlottte Lee and Frank Galati, Oral Interpretation, (5th ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977), p. 259.

[10]Kleinau and McHughes, p. 114.

[11]Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin R. White, Readers Theatre Handbook: A Dramatic Approach to Literature, (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1982), p. 60.

[12]Beverly Whitaker Long, Lee Hudson and Phillis Rienstra Jeffrey, Group Performance of Literature, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc.,1977), p. 38-39.

[13]Albert Len Smith, "A Chamber Theatre Adaptation and Analysis of Arthur Schnitzler's 'The Blind Geronimo and his Brother,'" (unpublished MA thesis, North Texas State University, 1980), p. 4.

[14]Lynne Waldeland, John Cheever, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), p. 13-14.

[15]Michinko Kakutani, The New York Times News Service, article in The Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 19, 1982; sec. A, p. 9.

[16]Leo Braundy, "Realists, Naturalist, and Novelists of Manners," in Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing, ed. by Daniel Hoffman, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Balknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 144.

[17]Waldeland, p. 63.

[18]Larry Swindell, column in The Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 27, 1982; sec. E, p. 8.

[19]Waldeland, p. 17.

[20]Richard West, "No Man's Land," Texas Monthly, Dec. 1980, p. 167-173.

[21]Robert Goldston, Suburbia: Civic Denial, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1970), p. 150-151.

[22]Thomas D. Anderson, "Light in August: Novel; Chamber Theatre; Motion Picture--the Role of Point of View in the Adaptation Process," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Southern Illinois, 1973, p. 11-12.

[23]Breen, as quoted in Coger and White, p. 8.

CHAPTER II

CHAMBER THEATRE

Chamber Theatre can be seen as a mirror providing the "real" or undistorted reflection of a work of literature in the performance. Such a concept presents the author's work in its clearest light and gives an undistorted presentation of a story, poem, or novel that is already distorted by the implied author's point of view.

Robert Breen explains the "mirror" approach to interpretation in this manner:

> The whole context of literature as an art can be placed in a mirror, the mirror held up to nature. Such a mirror is not a simple reflector devoted to verisimilitude in its presentation of exterior form. The mirror which literature holds up to nature is not only looked at, but looked through. To see through a mirror there must be an illumination from the lamp within the viewer so that he or she actually becomes a participant in the story by virtue of emphatic identification. . . .
>
> The function of Chamber Theatre is to use the art of the theatre and all its theatrical devices which encourage the illusion of direct apprehension in order to reflect "the sort of world which mirrors itself," the world which has already been distorted by the narrative point of view. In short, Chamber Theatre holds an undistorted mirror up to an image of a world which the point of view of the narrator has already distorted in his or her individual glass. "Distortion" is used here to refer to those modifications of life which characterize art. Life must be shaped and reshaped before meaning can be clearly apprehended.[1]

From this we can see that the purpose of Chamber Theatre is to present literature in its most undiluted and undistorted form in order to reveal the author's vision in its best light. Production values must accent, not overpower, the story unfolding on stage. In fact, Chamber Theatre should be considered a form of group storytelling rather than interpretation, the better to recreate the shamanistic flavor of oral tradition. Kleinau and McHughes refer to this aspect by giving Chamber Theatre performers status as "stager(s) of tales."[2]

An important concept to consider at this point is that Chamber Theatre utilizes the epic mode in presenting narrative fiction. Breen explains that traditionally the epic mode is concerned with <u>telling</u> a story, as opposed to the dramatic mode, which <u>shows</u> the story. However, "It is difficult, in the light of actual literary practice, to maintain such a categorical distinction, for dramatists and novelists alike will show <u>and</u> tell."[3] He resolves this technical dilemma, however, by pointing out the different virtues of each form:

> The dramatic form of storytelling has the virtue of presenting simultaneous action which is in the condition of life, while the narrative form is privileged to interrupt the action, either to explore motivations at the moment of action or to shift the reader's attention from the foreground to the background. Chamber Theatre by its own laws seeks to combine the virtues of the acted drama with those of the written narrative.[4]

Further, Chamber Theatre does not pretend to use the concept of "willing suspension of disbelief," i.e., the audience views the events as if they were actually happening. Instead, the temporal (past tense) mode of storytelling is utilized, so the effect is not one of creation but of re-creation, in the best campfire tradition. This is accomplished by presenting the story essentially word for word as written, though, as Bacon points out, the text "may (be) cut and abridge(d) in the interests of bringing a long text into manageable length for an evening's entertainment."[5]

POINT OF VIEW

Maclay and Sloan define point of view as "the physical temporal, and emotional relationships between character and scene [in a story]."[6] In other words, who is telling the story, and what are his attitudes toward other characters and events in the story? Raban comments:

> A work of fiction deals by definition with the interaction of characters. In real situations there are obviously as many interpretations of an affair as there are people concerned, since for each person the situation is coloured and defined by his own role within it. An outsider is likely to view any conflict through the eyes of the most sympathetic character involved. Watching Hamlet, for instance, most of us would implicitly adopt Hamlet's own viewpoint. But the play would take on a very different shape if we put ourselves in the place of Polonius or Gertrude.[7]

Breen identifies four major types of narrators through which point of view is expressed: first-person, major character; first-person, minor character; third-person, omniscient; and third-person, objective observer.[8]

A first-person, major character narrator is usually telling his own story, and the action, events, and characters of the story revolve around him. The story is characterized throughout by the use of the "I" pronoun. Kleinau and McHughes define the first-person, minor character narrator, who also employs the "I" pronoun, as one "who is telling someone else's story [and is] usually near the periphery of the action and thus obtains a wider scope of vision than the narrator who is also the main character."[9] However, Breen points out that while this narrator is usually more objective, he can still "exercise a subtle and persuasive control over the reader's sensibilities."[10]

Examples of both types are abundant in literature. All Quiet on the Western Front, Erich Maria Remarque's novel of a group of German schoolboys thrust into the horror of World War I, is told by one of those boys, Paul Baumer. His personalized observations vivify the tale of young men who "know only that in some strange and melancholy way we have become a wasteland."[11] A good example of the first-person, minor character narrator is in Dorothy

Canfield's short story "Sex Education" in which a woman reminisces about her youth. The narrator remembers herself as one of several young girls listening to her Aunt Minnie's "moral lesson" story about "an experience in her girlhood that made a never-to-be-forgotten impression on her."[12]

The major difference between the two types of third-person narrators is dependent on their ability or inability to be aware of the inner thoughts and emotions of the characters. Both narrators speak from outside the story, but the omniscient narrator, according to Breen, is "privy to the dreams, private thoughts, and feelings of the characters and [is] also able to report simultaneous actions from a number of places. . . ."[13] Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey further divide this type of narrator into one with general omniscience (knows everything about everyone) and one with limited ominiscience (knows the feelings and thoughts only of certain characters).[14]

James Thurber's "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" is an excellent example of a story with limited omniscience narration. Indeed, Mitty's entire fantasy life is played before him, while the other characters merely react to him. Philip Roth's "The Conversion of the Jews" is written in general omniscience form: we are given everyone's feelings, the Rabbi's, the janitors, and those of the

major character, Ozzie, while he pretends to prepare to jump off the synagogue roof.

The other major type of third-person narrator, the objective observer, is described by Breen as one who

> . . . must be content to report only what he or she sees or hears as a human being living at a particular time and in a spccific place. Unlike most of us, however, the objective storyteller may not pass on to the reader any peculiar biased views of the events.[15]

However, Breen points out that complete objectivity is practically impossible because "human beings by nature observe selectively and this in itself is a form of interpretation."[16]

In performance, narration can be spoken by one person, or it may be divided among several performers. One method is the use of two narrators instead of one (bifurcation) to show two facets of his personality. Coger and White comment:

> When the narrators are ominicient, they and the characters: (a) may share sentences (this is called the split line); (b) may say lines together for special emphasis; (c) may repeat the words of the other for special emphasis.[17]

Narration may also be given to members of the performing ensemble, either collectively or singly. Coger and White feel that "using more than one speaker seems to superimpose one image on another, revealing textual density and complexity of character as in the montage technique used in film making."[18]

Finally, Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey have outlined four practical considerations for translating the narrative voice into performance. Briefly, they are

1. Conceptualize the narrator as a person;
2. Formulate an interesting and imaginative handling of the narrator;
3. The dialogue tag is the most constant reminder of the narrator's reporting of action and character interaction;
4. If you are interesting in retaining prose structure, you must allow the narrator to function basically as he or she does in the story; i.e., don't rewrite into play form.[19]

STYLE

Style involves transferring the written language of the printed page into the spoken language of Chamber Theatre. Breen feels that the definition of style as "a thinking out into language" should be augmented "to include feeling as a condition of human experience that can be externalized in language."[20] But he also advises the adaptor not to forget the importance of gesture and nonverbal behavior. "It is the function of Chamber Theatre to express the style of the written dialect in spoken form and to augment the spoken style with consonant or congruent gestural behavior."[21]

Kleinau and McHughes note that adaptors gain two major insights from an examination of style in a story: (1) they learn something of the nature and attitude of the character using the language, and (2) they learn to distinguish which

character (or which self) is doing the speaking or thinking.[22] They divide the discussion of style into two principle areas of concern: style and character, style and narrator action. In considering the first of these, Kleinau and McHughes direct the prospective adaptor to note the choice of words, or diction. Are the words short and simple, or long and complex? Does the speaker choose concrete images or abstract terms? What are the evidences of history and culture in the use of regionalisms and ideoms?[23] These are only some of the areas of diction with which an adaptor may be concerned. When considering syntax, the adaptor should note the kinds of sentences used by the character: long or short, simple or complex, interrogative or declarative, etc. Kleinau and McHughes also comment that "Diction and syntax work together to create a rhythmic texture, which also characterizes the speaker."[24]

The pattern of movement used by the narrator is a key indicator of style and narrative action. Kleinau and McHughes explain

> A first person narrator has a different frame of reference than a third person narrator, which results in a fundmental difference in movement. The first person narrator moves in psychic time between past and present; the third person narrator, although making use of time systems, moves in psychic space between the narrator's own consciousness and the consciousness of the characters. General language style (diction, syntax, rhythm, verb tense, and person)

> provides clues to immedaite position and pattern of movement for both first person and third person narrators.[25]

Breen remarks that Chamber Theatre provides a "palpable experience of style," which is one of the strongest contributions to the student's understanding of literature.

> (The student) should not only speak but "act the style. In other words, the student should lend substance to the metaphors commonly used by critics to identify styles: "mellifluous," "graceful," "stilted," "wooden," "pompous," "circular." He should move and speak with those qualities which the metaphors assign to the particular style.[26]

STAGING

After the considerations of point of view and style have been satisfied, the next goal is the transference of the text to the stage for performance, assuming that a stageable script has been adapted. First, the concept of performing attitude should be examined. First, the concept of performing attitude should be examined. Bertolt Brecht's theory of alienation provides the clue which reveals discoveries in performance. This term is often misconstrued to mean that the actors should deliberately seek to anger or intimidate members of the audience. As Brecht uses the term, however, alienation involves the <u>aesthetic distance</u> a performer maintains between himself and the audience. His goal is not the verisimilitude of the theatre; not representing real life, but presenting an aspect of life

with the author's point of view in mind. The audience members are never led to believe that the action they are seeing is actually happening in front of them; there is no "willing suspension of disbelief." The careful performer can reflect these nonrealistic attitudes through ironic uses of voice and body.

An effective alienating technique is the performer's use of offstage focus. Klainau and McHughes describe four characteristics of this unique device. Summarized, they are as follows.

1. The audience seems to be in the middle of even the most highly charged emotional and intimate experience.
2. The direct open stance of the readers and the offstage direction of the visual focus help to set in motion the imaginative orientation of the audience to the scene being presented.
3. Offstage focus helps shift attention to the text.
4. The audience is confronted by the performer's presence.
5. The face-to-face relationship between audience and performer can suggest a mirror image.[27]

When the performers use <u>onstage</u> focus, they address each other directly. Most successful Chamber Theatre

productions skillfully integrate both offstage and onstage focus.

Once a suitable script is obtained, the director must devise a production concept on which he will base all aspects of directing and designing. This concept often involves the use of a metaphor; i.e., My life is a star, and all production values are arranged with that metaphor in mind. Hamlet's line, "Denmark's a prison!" can be the foundation for such a conception of that play: performers could wear dark, drab clothes, symbolic of prison outfits; lighting could be dim and foreboding; Hamlet's own movement could be slow, lethargic. The use of such a line from the story or poem in question is an excellent source for directing and design ideas.

As stated before, characters in Chamber Theatre speak about themselves in the third person and in the past tense. Lee and Galati note that if this convention seems peculiar to us, "We need only remember that all of the actors on stage are telling the story, indeed <u>showing</u> the story to the audience."[28]

These, then, are the major elements to consider in Chamber Theatre: point of view, style, and staging. If one pays careful attention to these, then one can find the correct thematic mirror for a Chamber Theatre production.

NOTES

[1]Robert S. Breen, Chamber Theatre, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1978), p. 13.

[2]Marion L. Kleinau and Janet Larsen McHughes, Theatres for Literature, (Sherman Oaks, Cal.: Alfred Pub. Co., Inc., 1980), p. 68.

[3]Breen, Chamber Theatre, p. 2.

[4]Robert S. Breen, "Chamber Theatre," in The Study of Oral Interpretation: Theory and Comment, ed. by Richard Haas and David A. Williams, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1975), p. 209.

[5]Wallace A. Bacon, The Art of Interpretation, (2nd ed., New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972), p. 424.

[6]Joanna H. MaClay and Thomas O. Sloan, Interpretation: An Approach to the Study of Literature, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1972), p. 20.

[7]Jonathan Raban, The Technique of Modern Fiction, (Notre Dame: The Notre Dame Press, 1969), p. 33.

[8]Breen, Chamber Theatre, pp. 21-35.

[9]Kleinau and McHughes, p. 72.

[10]Breen, Chamber Theatre, p. 26.

[11]Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front, Greenwich, Conn.: Little, Brown and Co., 1929), p. 16.

[12]Dorothy Canfield, "Sex Education," in Foursquare by Dorothy Canfield, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1945), p. 285.

[13]Breen, Chamber Theatre, p. 28.

[14]Beverly Whitaker Long, Lee Hudson, and Phillis Rienstra Jeffrey, Group Performance of Literature, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1977), p. 39.

[15]Breen, Chamber Theatre, p. 32.

[16]Breen, Chamber Theatre, p. 32.

[17]Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin R. White, Readers Theatre Handbook: A Dramatic Approach to Literature, (3rd ed., Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1982), p. 65.

[18]Coger and White, p. 65.

[19]Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey, p. 42-43.

[20]Breen, Chamber Theatre, p. 36.

[21]Breen, Chamber Theatre, p. 36.

[22]Kleinau and McHughes, p. 86.

[23]Kleinau and McHughes, p. 87-88.

[24]Kleinau and McHughes, p. 88.

[25]Kleinau and McHughes, p. 89.

[26]Breen, "Chamber Theatre," p. 209-210.

[27]Kleinau and McHughes, p. 188-189.

[28]Charlotte I. Lee and Frank Galati, Oral Interpretation, (5th ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977), p. 265.

CHAPTER III

JOHN CHEEVER AND "THE COUNTRY HUSBAND"

"There is still a newness to this country, a freshness. We are still experimenting. This is a haunted nation. Haunted by a dream of excellence."[1]

One the eve of our nation's two hundredth birthday, Newsweek magazine selected a number of important Americans to comment on the state of the Union, its past, present, and foreseeable future. John Cheever was selected to give his viewpoint as "The Novelist." His economical response accurately reflects his primary role as an observer of American society, particulary suburbia's upper-middle-class social mores; a man, who, as Prescott noted at the time of his death, "gave voice to the inarticulate agonies that lie just beneath the surface of ordinary lives."[2]

Most critics refer to Cheever as a suburban writer. Despite the fact that he has located many of his stories in New York City and a surprising number of them in Italy, a majority of his work is concerned with a way of life described by Goldstone as "a desire to return to childhood, to withdraw from a threatening, increasingly complicated, increasingly remote, apparently unrewarding public arena

to a private nest not unreminiscent of the womb."[3] In retrospect, Cheever's career can be said to have developed along the lines of his own life: As he moved from city to suburb in the postwar boom, so did the settings and events of his stories.

Cheever's reputation as a correspondent for the genteel suburban lawn chair set has led many critics to ignore him. In truth, even though most of his short stories graced the pages of the somewhat staid New Yorker magazine, Cheever was a master of his considerably polished craft. Spinning the tale of a returned expatriate's fascination with superliterate graffiti in "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," or reaffirming basic interpersonal values in "The Pot of Gold," he maintained a remarkably high level of consistency in his writings throughout his career. Indeed, Time magazine noted a hint of grandeur in Cheever's treatment of seemingly mundane subjects,

> In both his novels and stories, Cheever has taken, more or less intact from the past, the ancient American moral severities and told a hundred parables to show that the emancipated middle class about which he now writes must pay homage to the tribal gods of purity and order.[4]

Except for his Italian stories, Cheever has set almost all of his stories in the northeast, particularly New York City and a thousand imaginary suburbs. Before examining these, we should delve into his background for insight into

the early influences on the man that Time magazine called "Ovid of Ossining."

The Beginning

John Cheever was born in Quincy, Massachusetts, in 1912 and lived there for most of his early years. His father, owner of a shoe factory until the 1929 stock market crash, was a descendant of a family of seafaring New Englanders. His mother, an Englishwoman, opened a gift shop after the crash and assumed the role of primary supporter for the family. Waldeland has noted two major influences that these facts reveal: the New England tradition, with its clear sense of morals and high value of artistic and cultural achievement; and his parents' unhappy marriage, with traditional roles reversed.[5] About the latter influence she writes:

> Cheever's childhood provided him with a first-hand view of the sort of failure of nerve which a business reversal can precipitate in a man who prides himself on supporting his family; in the case of Cheever's father, it was exacerbated by his wife's success in the world of business and her growing emotional independence. Cheever, more sympathetic to his father, left home early.[6]

This subject, male-female relationships, is the dominant one in Cheever's work along with his treatment of suburbia. The two should be examined in tandem, as Stevenson and Gold suggest:

> Many of his short stories have taken as their subject matter problems in love and marriage among the upper middle-class, men and women living for the most part in the suburbs of New York, eager for the excitements of adulterous love but also pulled by the forces of moral conservatism.[7]

Both subjects will be scrutinized in greater detail later.

At seventeen, Cheever learned the truth about his life: he was not to continue his formal education, and he would enter the writing profession. These revelations were the product of both good and bad experiences: he was expelled from Thayer Academy in South Braintree, Massachusetts; and his first short story was accepted for publication by the New Republic magazine, a feat nothing short of miraculous for an author his age. After a tour of Europe, he settled in Boston where he was subsidized by his brother who gave him support and kept food on the table while John polished his craft. Later he moved to New York City, living in a bare room on Hudson Street, and began writing his stories, most of which appeared in the New Yorker or similar magazines before being collected and published in book form. In 1941, he married Mary Winternitz and served in the U.S. Army for four years. At the end of the war, he was discharged and his first volume of stories The Way Some People Live was released. He and Mary later moved to Ossining, N.Y., where he continued his writing with occasional interludes for teaching

or travel. The Cheevers had three children: Ben, who later became an editor for Reader's Digest; Fred, who studied at Stanford; and Susan Cheever Cowley, a Newsweek writer who arranged the "Duet of Cheevers" interview with her father.

Cheever produced his award-winning fiction in the thirty years that followed, including the short story collections The Enormous Radio and Other Stories (1953), The Housebreaker of Shady Hill and Other Stories (1958), Some People, Places, and Things That Will Not Appear in My Next Novel (1961), The Brigadier and the Golf Widow (1964), and The World of Apples (1973); and the novels The Wapshot Chronicle (1957), The Wapshot Scandal (1964), Bullet Park (1969), and Falconer (1977). In the late 1970's, he was briefly institutionalized for treatment of alcoholism; out of this experience he wrote Falconer. The compilation The Stories of John Cheever was published in 1978, four years before his death on June 18, 1982. His last work, the novella Oh, What A Paradise It Seems! was released just three months before his death.[8]

In the five decades of his career, Cheever improved and expanded his unique vision and scope as his settings moved from New York City through Shady Hill and its numerous counterparts, and to Italy and back again. Throughout his stories, he presented a picture of reality

and the human condition far more accurate than newspaper accounts. Unlike many other writers who maintain that life is lived at the extremes, Cheever seems to contend that the true passions of man lie just below the surface of his seemingly placid exterior. Moore has stated, "His best stories move from a base in a mimetic presentation of surface reality--the scenery of apparently successful American middle-class life--to fables of heroism."[9] Bracher also notes this link to the distant past, " . . . Cheever's stories approximate the original function of comedy. If tragedy deplores the death of Dionysus, comedy celebrates the renewal of Life that follows the death, 'the epiphany or manifestation of the risen hero'."[10]

Cheever uses a bittersweet comic tone in most of his works to reveal these essential human truths. His style implies that there are no simple answers or cut-and-dried solutions for the problems of modern society. Probably the best summation of this style is given by Peden,

> Cheever writes in a relaxed, seemingly casual but thoroughly disciplined manner; his general mood is a compound of skepticism, compassion, and wry humor; he is concerned with the complexities, tensions, and disappointments of life in strictly contemporary world, a world of little men and women, non-heroic, non-spectacular, non-exceptional. Loneliness, perhaps the dominant mood of the short fiction of the forties, fifties, and early sixties, permeates [his work].[11]

The two main subjects of Cheever's work, male-female relationships and suburbia, will be examined in the following sections along with their corresponding themes.

Male-Female Relationships

Throughout his career, the bulk of Cheever's work has been concerned with the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of male-female interpersonal relationships in one way or another, particularly in marriage. Time magazine refers to this subject as "a vexation or a crisis in relations between husband and wife," and further notes that, "The heart of the matter is probably best deduced from the fact that John Cheever, almost alone in the field of modern fiction, is one who celebrates the glories and delights of monogamy."[12]

Waldeland has commented that this emphasis on martial relations seems to spring from Cheever's own marriage. She writes,

> Obviously Cheever sees most successful human relationships as surviving on sustained efforts of will and imagination. Marriage and family relationships are perhaps his most frequently chosen subjects, and it is clear throughout his fiction that Cheever has drawn extensively upon his experience as husband and father, just as he has made use of his experiences as son and brother.[13]

Cheever himself confirms this idea in his Newsweek interview: "That two people of our violent temperament have been able to live together for nearly forty years as we

have seems to me a splendid example of the richness and diversity of human nature. . . . "[14] Obviously, Cheever believes in the institution of marriage, despite the inevitable problems that arise. Still, he confided in that same interview that "there's scarcely been a week in which we hadn't planned to get a divorce,"[15] and a close examination of his work reveals one of his primary concerns to be marital relations at the crisis point.

Concerning this subject, Hicks observes that Cheever's great gift was for "entering into the minds of men and women at crucial moments,"[16] an essential technique in adapting Cheever to Chamber Theatre style. Many of his stories explore the interpersonal consequences of such moments. In "Just Tell Me Who It Was," an overweight, middle-aged suburbanite suspects his young wife of infidelity with a neighbor, confronts the man in a train station, and knocks him down "with no warning at all." Cheever shows his considerable attention to craft in creating the situation:

> The villain was Henry Bulstrode. It was Henry who had been with her on the train when she returned that rainy night at two. It was Henry who had whistled when she did her dance at the Women's Club. It was Henry's head and shoulders he had seen on Madison Avenue when he recognized Maria ahead of him. And now he remembered poor Helen Bulstrode's haggard face at the Townsend's party--the face of a woman who was married to a libertine. It was her husband's unregeneracy that she had been trying to forget. The spate of drunken French she had aimed

> at him must have been about Maria and Henry. Henry Bulstrode's face, grinning with naked and lascivious mockery, appeared in the middle of the guest room. There was only one thing to do.[17]

In "The Enormous Radio," Jim and Irene Wescott experience a soap-opera-like strain in their relations, caused by the behavior of their mysterious radio, which tunes in other family conversations throughout the building. "The Season of Divorce" concerns a man who falls in love with the narrator's wife. Again marital relations are tested and resolved only when the narrator chases his wife's erstwhile suitor out of the house with a potted geranium. Charley Mallory uses analytical logic to solve his problems in "The Geometry of Love," only to lose his life in the process.

Throughout these stories, Cheever employs his genteel tone as an ironic counterpart to the harsh realities of married life. This contrast of light tone and heavy subject matter prompted Life magazine to report, "Cheever is damned if he will write the least pornography 'except in a triumphant sense,' but his books crackle with sexual friction."[18]

Suburbia

Cheever maintained an interest in documenting relationships even as his characters made the transition from city life to suburbia. His first book, The Way Some People Live, focuses on life in New York City, but beginning with

The Enormous Radio, most of his stories and novels are concentrated in places like St. Botolphs and Proxmire Manor, Shady Hill and Bullet Park. Concerning life in these newly-created townships, Wood writes,

> The commuter schedule for the husband, the nursery and social schedule for the wife, the school day for the growing child, these govern suburban life relentlessly. There are no longer any options, but instead unbreakable patterns for the day, the week, the year, and the generation.[19]

Many Americans who left the sprawling and unsettled metropolises in the 1950's and sought refuge in the suburbs obviously did not always find paradise. Underneath a surface of family harmony and correct social decorum often lay a pulsating world of inner passions, sordid sexual drives, and otherworldly fantasies as exotic as those in the cities. Braudy confirms this myth of a suburban labyrinth in this manner,

> In the supposedly bright and open suburbs, Cheever found a vein of fantasy, gothicism, and allegory--witches who lived down dark streets in coastal Connecticut, love affairs with solutions out of Ovid, fatalities in which pettiness was transformed into myth.[20]

Cheever catalogued many of these phantasmagorical occurrences in his stories, contrasting their otherworldliness with his genteel tone.

In "The Swimmer," Neddy Merrill intends to give a heroic quality to a bright midsummer Sunday by embarking on a marathon swim home through the pools of his Westchester

County neighbors. He starts out on a cheerful note, climbing fences and hedges with ease and engaging in light conversation with his neighbors. But then a thunderstorm stops him temporarily, and afterwards the tone of the events is darker, like the autumnal chill that has drifted into the air. The lighthearted banter with his neighbors turns sour. He is spurned by an old lover. Near exhaustion, he finally arrives home to discover that "no one has lived there for some time." Waldeland comments,

> The real point of the story is the juxtaposition of the celebratory motive of Neddy's act with the social realities that emerge as the story progresses, realities that have to do with the role wealth and social status play in this world which Neddy wishes to invest with legendary beauty and meaning. The abruptness of the ending leaves us haunted by this sotyr. Whatever "happened," we have seen a brightly lit, intelligible, comfortable world suddenly become dark and cold. The story, like a nightmare, leaves the reaer with a residual uneasiness.[21]

Although not all of Cheever's work features this unworldly quality, mysterious elements pervade many of his pieces. In "Metamorphosis," a mother transforms her prematurely spinsterish daughter into a swimming pool. "The Death of Justina" concerns an advertising writer who cannot bury his wife's cousin due to the restrictive zoning laws. A woman is mythically transformed in "Torch Song" into an Angel of Death. These elements are particularly important in understanding Cheever's treatment of the American suburb, although they are also apparent in stories set elsewhere.

He seems to destroy the notion of suburb-as-refuge. Modern man, who has supposedly eliminated his ancient fears with the invention of Christianity and candles, is still a slave to supernatural and primeval forces that have dogged him since the beginning of time. Suburbia, conceived as a paradise in which he escapes temporarily from his mechanistic existence, cannot protect him totally from these forces. Sometimes, as in "Torch Song" or "The Five-Forty-Eight," these forces seem to personify into horrific antagonists for the main character. At other times, they surface as primitive longings or urgings in a particular character, and their presence acts as a sobering element in an otherwise comic piece. These are the "tribal gods" referred to by Time magazine, and perhaps their presence explains why Kazin should write about "the mystery of why, in this half-finished civilization [in Cheever's work], this most prosperous, equitable, and accomplished world, everyone should seem so disappointed."[22] This link with ancient myth and legend seems to add credence to the work of a man whose stories appeared in the conservative New Yorker magazine "with the regularity of Cutty Sark advertisements."[23]

The Country Husband

In 1964, Time magazine selected Cheever as the subject of a cover story which was entitled "Ovid in Ossining."

Among the many observations about the breadth and scope of Cheever's work, Time had this to say about "The Country Husband," "Some [of his short stories] such as 'The Country Husband' . . . are as perfect as a short story can get and have dimensions and echoes far beyond their relatively small compass."[24] Cheever himself believes that the short story form is an excellent one for him and is indeed indicative of such larger dimensions. He writes,

> I'm still interested in the short story form. Certain situations lend themselves only to the short story. But generally it's a better form for young writers, who are more intense; whose perceptions are more fragmentary. A face glimpsed in a train is a short story for a young writer. As you get a little older you lose some of this intensity, your perceptions become more protracted, and you think about the longer form.[25]

Critical acclaim for "The Country Husband" came almost simultaneously with its publication in the November 20, 1954, issue of New Yorker magazine. The next year Cheever was awarded the prestigious O. Henry Short Story Award for this story, and it has been one of his most frequently anthologized works. Chesnick notes, "['The Country Husband'] utilizes a fine control of narrative pace and considerable technical ingenuity in demonstrating how discontents can pile up for the previously happy suburbanite."[26] The story was included in the collection The Housebreaker of Shady Hill and Other Stories (1958), and in the Pulitzer Prize

winning anthology, The Complete Stories of John Cheever (1978).

The point of view in "The Country Husband" is third-person: limited omniscience. The speaker is careful to reveal the inner thoughts of only one person: Francis Weed, the country husband. The title may be borrowed from The Country Wife, a Restoration comedy by William Wycherly, which features a male-dominant situation instead of female-dominant and has been described by Allison, Carr, and Eastman as a play that "sees matrimony as only a legal form of bondage and prostitution from which anyone in his or her right mind would seek escape, either deviously (by 'hypocrisy'), or openly, by defying convention."[27]

The events in the story are arranged chronologically, and time is generally handled realistically, although Cheever tends to jump forward in time (usually to the next day), once he has made his point. This technique is one he has used in other stories, most notably in "Goodby, My Brother," which concerns a family's week-long summer vacation.

"To begin at the beginning," Francis Weed is flying home on an airplane which miraculously has a safe crash-landing. No one is injured, and soon a fleet of taxis picks up the passengers and returns them to Philadelphia. Francis continues on to New York and catches his usual

commuter train to Shady Hill. But the weather around New York has been mild, and Francis has trouble finding a sympathetic audience for his adventure story. He arrives at his Dutch Colonial home, eager to tell his family, but his children are fighting, and this dispute leads him into a quarrel with his wife, Julia. These events have disrupted the normal pattern of his existence, and at a party a few nights later another event occurs to disrupt this routine further. He recognizes the Farquarson's maid as a French woman who was publicly chastised for living with a Nazi official during World War II. His senses and his memory are opened by this encounter and later that night he encounters Anne Murchison, the beautiful girl who babysits for his children. Francis falls in love.

After dreaming of running away with Anne to Europe, Francis awakens to find that his existence has been reborn and that "the world that was spread out around him was plainly a paradise." He even sees a vision of Venus through one of the train windows. With a newfound irreverence, he insults the matriarch of Shady Hill society, an act that will later prove costly. He believes that he has placed too much emphasis in his life on such social structures, realizing that the majority of his neighbors, despite being gifted and talented people, were "also bores and fools." Throughout the next few days, Anne permeates

his mind: he tries to steal a kiss from her in the front hallway of his home; he calls to her on the train, only to find he has addressed an older woman instead; he blissfully writes her a love letter never intended for her eyes.

Suddenly an autumnal chill blows with the force of a gale through the dreams of springlike ardor. Clayton Thomas, a young man "who had once made some trouble," announced his engagement in the Weed home--to Anne Murchison.

His planned rendezvous shattered, Francis is soon engaged in a violent quarrel with Julia, who threatens to leave him. In a fit of jealous rage, he tries to ruin Clayton's chances for a job in Shady Hill. Finally, overwhelmed with guilt and remorse for this action, he seeks psychiatric treatment. In the end, he has taken up woodworking for therapy, where he finds "some true consolation in the simple arithmetic involved and in the holy smell of new wood." More important, he has been reintegrated into the Shady Hill socioeconomic structure. The story closes on a magic night where "kings in golden suits ride elephants over the mountains."

Cheever's use of male-female relationships at a crisis point is evident in this story. He has taken care to indicate that Francis and Julia's marriage is a strong one that will survive this temporary crisis. When he first

enters his home after the crash, she addresses him "serenely" and calls him "darling." They are shown engaged in traditionally tranquil domestic activities of a typically happy suburban family: parties, after-dinner coffee and conversation, even a photo session for the family Christmas card. It is this emphasis on domestic activity, even after the crisis (when Julia is cutting roses in her garden) that indicates that the relationship will survive this incident and others in the future.

Still, this relationship is not without drawbacks. Most of their dialogue together, except in the presence of others, is in the form of two lengthy quarrels or involves some domestic ritual activity; Julia reminding Francis to put the car in the garage, wash his hands for dinner, and so forth. Their marriage is built on activities, not words. Attempts to reconcile these disputes with rational discussion fail, and instead they are resolved by action. (Julia ascends the stairs, and Francis escapes to the garden after the first argument; a tearful reconciliation scene in Julia's bedroom ends the second.)

At this point, one can see how the basic problem in Francis and Julia's relationship is linked with Cheever's other main theme--life in the suburbs. The most fundamental

conflict in the story concerns who has control in their marriage.

"The Country Husband" was written in the 1950's. At that time, the concept of suburbia was still relatively new. Many people naturally assumed that the traditionally male-dominant family unit would survive in the suburbs. A number of observers and critics, however, have indicated a shift in dominance, even in the "old-fashioned" suburban family. Young notes that

> As the father's authority has been eroded, the mother has had to assume it. It is she who enforces decisions singly or jointly made, who permits or denies those myriad daily demands. Increasingly she sets the structure as well as the style of authority. . . . [28]

Concerning this power struggle in the suburbs, Wood writes,

> The commuter-father is no longer the figure of authority; stern measures of discipline are not countenanced, and even if they were, the father is not home enough to use them in the proper time and place. . . . It is left to the mother . . . to rear the child and run the suburb. Educated women, wanting motherhood but expecting something more, anxious to put their talents to use beyond the family circle, are in charge. Skipping from one meeting to another, indulging or wanting to indulge in extramarital affairs, ceaselessly expunging their feelings of guilt by overprotecting their children, they rule suburbia.[29]

In a nutshell, Francis and Julia's marital problems surface in this battle for control in the relationship. Francis seeks refuge in an extramarital affair, arouses the wrath of Shady Hill's female-dominant social structure, is

driven by guilt and self-doubt to seek psychiatric aid, and, according to Kazin, "the story ends derisively on the brainwashed husband who will no longer stray from home."[30] Thus, "The Country Husband" can be seen as a symbolic parallel to the shift from male-dominance to female-dominance in the American suburb in the 1950's.

This basic theme permeates Cheever's work. Although the transfer of authority from male to female isn't always accomplished in the end, the struggle is always present. Sometimes, as in "The Geometry of Love," the husband attempts to regain control, only to lose his own life. In "The Hartleys," the parents are reconciled from their separation after the death of their daughter on a second honeymoon. A distraught husband resorts to the use of music as witch-craft to gain control of his wife in "The Music Teacher."

The latter story is also an example of the mystical suburban genre or the basic concept of otherworldliness examined earlier. Waldeland observes that this quality is characteristic of the stories of The Housebreaker of Shady Hill.[31] Kazin notes that the characters became "'eccentrics'," crazily swimming from pool to pool, good husbands who fell in love with the baby-sitter."[32] In other words, this otherwordliness surfaces in the form of unusual character traits in Shady Hill. He comments further,

> The subject of Cheever's stories is regularly a situation that betrays the basic unreality of some character's life. It is a trying out of freedom in the shape of the extreme, the unmentionable . . . Loneliness is the dirty little secret, a personal drive so urgent and confusing that it comes out a vice. But the pathetic escapade never lasts very long. We are not at home here, says Cheever. But there is no other place for us to feel we are not at home.[33]

"The Country Husband" is filled with imagery, and Cheever employs a rich use of narrative description, which is one of his trademarks, throughout the story. The most famous descriptive line closes the story, "It is a night when kings in golden suits ride elephants over the mountains." Cheever says he suddenly shouted this line to his wife coming out of the maid's room of a rented house, and that he often composes his stories aloud. ("The forebearance of my family has been inestimable," he notes wryly.)[34] This line is a direct reference to Mr. Farquarson's line earlier in the story, "She [his wife] makes me feel like Hannibal crossing the Alps." In the face of Francis and Julia's conflict, this line is a poetic reference to the fact that on a night like this anything magical can happen, even a reconciliation.

An excellent description of Shady Hill can be found in the line, "The village hangs, morally and economically, from a thread, but it hangs by its thread in the evening light." Hicks points out that "This figure of speech

suggests [Cheevers] vision of the quality of life he writing about; for his characters, life in Shady Hill, whatever its limitations, represents stability."[35] Cheever uses several poetic descriptions of place in the story: the living room of the Weed's Dutch Colonial house is "spacious and divided like Gaul into three parts;" the psychiatrist's office is "filled with the candy smell of mouth-wash and the memories of pain;" a snow-filled valley where Francis dreams of skiing, is seen as "rising into wooded hills, where the trees dimmed the whiteness like a sparse coat of hair."

One of the most unusual aspects of the story is the fact that Cheever tends to stop in the middle of a situation to add a long passage of narrative description. The most memorable example of this technique occurs in the section where Francis comes home to find Anne in the hallway and tries to kiss her but is interrupted by Gertrude Flannery. Cheever stops the story here to tell us who Gertrude is, what she is doing there, and most important, explains her role in the socioeconomic structure of Shady Hill: she is the neighborhood stray. Cheever uses this technique to explain all of the outcasts in Shady Hill: Gertrude Flannery, Clayton Thomas, and Jupiter, the Mercer's retriever, who Waldeland describes as "the dog who undermines all order in Shady Hill; only animals are allowed to indulge their

anarchic impulses, and even they will not get away with it forever."[36] This device is present in other Cheever stories as well; most notable is the description of Anna Ostrovick, the first-rate Polish cook who fed anybody and everybody in "Goodbye, My Brother."

Poetic images abound throughout the story: Venus combs her golden hair as she drifts through the Bronx; Francis' staring eye strikes us with a wilderness of animal feeling; Jupiter has a gallant and heraldic muzzle. Simile and metaphor are also used frequently: Jupiter is an anomaly, Francis' world after his encounter with Anne is plainly a paradise, the Weed's home is a battlefield; also, the "Moonlight Sonata" music rings up and down the street like an appeal for love and tenderness, the sky shines like enamel, the morning is thrown like a gleaming bridge of light over Francis' mixed affairs.

The crisis in "The Country Husband" occurs quite late in the story. One major problem in staging any of Cheever's work is that his climaxes tend to be very subtle and not easily apparent after a first reading. After careful study, Francis' meeting and falling in love with Anne Murchison must be considered the <u>inciting action</u>, the event which sets the entire drama in motion. The <u>crisis</u> takes place after Francis learns of Anne's engagement to Clayton Thomas, and he tries to ruin Clayton's chances of finding

a job in Shady Hill. The climax occurs when Francis is overcome by guilt at his action and seeks the aid of Dr. Herzog. At story's end comes the denouement: Francis has taken up woodworking as therapy and is reconciled with Julia; he is symbolized by the cat that wanders into Julia's garden, dressed in doll's clothes, a symbolic gesture of female domination.

The most sharply drawn character is Francis, in keeping with his position as hub of the story wheel around whom the others revolve. He has comparatively little dialogue for such an important character. Most of one's knowledge of him comes through narrative description, from a persona who seems by turns to be alternately masculine and feminine, but who is definitely familiar with the social class and structure of Shady Hill. The long passages and other narrative descriptions reveal much of life in this suburb, and since this is a favorite technique of Cheever's, one can assume that the persona reflects much of the author's feelings.

Bracher writes about Francis,

> The reader feels his complete vulnerability to the girl's dark, troubled beauty, his frustrated knowledge of the possibilities and dangers of the situation, and the almost ludicrous efficacy of a primitive "cure;" woodworking and "the holy smell of new wood."[37]

Waldeland observes that Julia seems closer to the stereotype of the typical suburban woman and quotes the passage of Julia's anxiety over receiving party invitations as proof of her obsession with social concerns. She comments further,

> That this amounts to an essentially critical portrait of Julia is made clear when she fails to respond to her husband's near-miss in the airplane crash and also when her only reaction to his increasingly abberant behavior is to resent his rudeness to one of the arbiters of Shady Hill social life because it might mean a decrease in party invitations. All in all, the women in The Housebreaker of Shady Hill are not destructive or hopelessly trivial, but Cheever shows an awareness of the dangers of life for women in an affluent society if they do not have avenues to a feeling of usefulness and meaning in their lives.[38]

From all this, it is evident that while Cheever is not blind to the problems of life in suburbia's monogamy, he still sees the newness and freshness of the American experience. Fantasy and reality blend together in "The Country Husband" to create a magical world where anything can happen, even kings in golden suits that ride elephants over the mountains.

NOTES

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[2]Peter S. Prescott, Newsweek, June 28, 1982, p. 68.

[3]Robert Goldston, Suburbia: Civic Denial, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1970), p. 10.

[4]"Ovid in Ossining," Time, March 27, 1964, p. 68.

[5]Lynne Waldeland, John Cheever, (Boston: Twayne Publishing, 1979), p. 16.

[6]Waldeland, pp. 16-17.

[7]Herbert Gold and David L. Stevenson, eds., Stories of Modern America, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1961), p. 169.

[8]Biographical information was provided by Newsweek, March 14, 1977, pp. 68-73, and June 28, 1982, pp. 66-73; Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times News Service, article in The Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 19, 1982, sec. A., p. 9; and by Waldeland, pp. 13-20.

[9]S. C. Moore, "The Hero on the 5:42: John Cheever's Short Fiction," Western Humanities Review, Spring 1976, p. 147.

[10]Frederick Bracher, "John Cheever and Comedy," Critique, Spring 1963, p. 68.

[11]Wiiliam Peden, The American Short Story: Front Line in the National Defense of Literature, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1964), p. 47

[12]Time, pp. 68.

[13]Waldeland, p. 19-20.

[14]Susan Cheever Cowley, "A Duet of Cheevers," Newsweek, March 14, 1977, p. 69.

[15]Cowley, p. 69.

[16]Granville Hicks, "Cheever and Others," Saturday Review, September 13, 1958, p. 33.

[17]John Cheever, "Just Tell Me Who It Was," from The Stories of John Cheever, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1978), p. 385.

[18]Wilfred Sheen, "Mr. Saturday, Mr. Monday and Mr. Cheever," Life, April 18, 1969, p. 39.

[19]Robert C. Wood, Suburbia: Its People and Their Politics, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958), p. 6.

[20]Leo Bruady, "Realists, Naturalists and Novelists of Manners," in The Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing, ed. by Daniel Hoffman, (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 1979) p. 144.

[21]Waldeland, p. 95.

[22]Alfred Kazin, Bright Book of Life: American Novelists and Storytellers from Hemingway to Mailer, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971), p. 113.

[23]Richard H. Rupp, Celebration in Postwar American Fiction, 1945-1967, (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1970), p. 27.

[24]Time, p. 67.

[25]John Cheever, quoted by Rollene Waterman in Saturday Review, September 13, 1958.

[26]Eugene Chesnick, "The Domesticated Stroke of John Cheever," New England Quarterly, Dec. 1971, p. 539.

[27]Alexander Allison, Arthur Car and Arthur Eastman, Masterpieces of the Drama, 3rd ed., (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), pp. 279-280.

[28]Leontine Young, The Fractured Family, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1973), p. 78.

[29]Wood, p. 7.

[30]Kazin, p. 112.

[31]Waldeland, p. 35.

[32]Kazin, p. 111.

[33]Kazin, p. 111-112.

[34]John Cheever, preface to The Stories of John Cheever, p. viii.

[35]Hicks, p. 33.

[36]Waldeland, p. 68.

[37]Bracher, p. 73.

[38]Waldeland, pp. 77-78.

CHAPTER IV

CONCEPTUALIZING "THE COUNTRY HUSBAND" AND POSTPRODUCTION CONSIDERATIONS

> I see literature as expression, and for me, to be human is to express. When we express, we share--share what it means to be human. I see communication as a sharing of our humanness, and as a human I feel our primary purpose in life is to find out what it means to be human.[1]

In order for literature to be communicated to its fullest possible potential, careful planning and thorough preparation are essential. Literature not only has inherent aesthetic values, but also serves as an extremely effective tool of communication, and performance of the literature has many advantages that aid the communication process, especially for the performers. Colson sheds some light on these advantages,

> In the process of studying a story, rehearsing it, discussing it among themselves, and experimenting with various performance modes which might more accurately illuminate the text, students gain a thorough understanding of that story and a much better knowledge and appreciation of an author's work in general. By extension they may acquire an increased interest in and appreciation of all good literature.[2]

Careful analysis of the literature is the first step in preparing a selection for performance. From this, a concept can be devised--for the script as well as the

production--by which truth and insight can be revealed from the selection. Too often, we are subjected to the trivialities of the "Let's do a show!" school of mentality in the form of literature that has not been analyzed, concepts which have not been carefully formulated, and productions which have not been rehearsed. Art is best released through careful and meticulous attention to craft, and the production concept is a workable tool through which this release can take place. Kleinau and McHughes comment further,

> The production concept is the master plan that tells you how to reassemble and shape the inner workings of your story, which you have laid bare through analysis. . . . It is both the result of the analytical choices you've made thus far and the foundation of your scripting and production choices to come. Your concept needs to be logical in terms of the physical space and facilities you'll be using. As you visualize outlines of the finished product, consider possible stagings, audience relationships, and movement of performers. Play with the possibilities that the story now presents to you; soon you'll feel a master concept beginning to form that will be your vision of the story, a vision that will bind the action images together into a workable context.[3]

Directing a production, according to Hodge, is not "pinning down a playscript to the ground like a wrestler but releasing it to let it fly with the angels."[4] With this in mind, one may proceed with conceptualizing "The Country Husband."

THE SCRIPT

Since the story revolves around Francis Weed, all extraneous scenes, characters, and events should be eliminated. In keeping with the shift from male to female dominance, most of the performers should be women except for a male narrator who should be closely identified with Francis in manner and appearance. This male narrator will serve as Francis' aide and confidant--and also his conscience. He will be the only friend that Francis can rely on in an increasingly female-dominant society until Francis commits the ultimate act of betrayal and attempts to ruin Clayton Thomas. Since Clayton (played by the male narrator) is accepted by Julia, this act becomes a bone of contention between her and Francis in their struggle for control.

Julia should have a similar confidant in the form of a female narrator. This method is known as bifurcation--dividing the narration in two parts--and the result according to Coger and White, "seems to superimpose one image on another, revealing textual density and complexity of character as in the montage technique used in film making."[5] Besides playing some necessary minor roles--such as the Weed children--the function of the narrators will be to control the action, events, and pace of the story. This control will not be a free, democratic exchange.

Instead, the narrators will reflect the growing tension of the Weed's marriage by struggling for dominance of the production. In the end, the female narrator will control the last scene.

Francis, Julia, and Anne Murchison will all be played by separate performers. The role of Anne, although relatively minor in terms of the number of lines, is still so crucial to understanding the concept of the story that the performer should assume no other part with one important exception--she should also play Dr. Herzog. A circular effect is thus created, and thus implies that the cause of a man's affliction is also his cure.

Anne's character should be drawn with light, dreamlike strokes, suggesting a fantasy. She should represent everyman's Juliet, vixen, and Helen of Troy all rolled into one; i.e., all the good qualities of Woman. Francis must seem overwhelmed upon meeting her. To aid in this stunning effect, three girls will be used to speak the narrative lines describing Anne. They will have individual lines but will also maintain a chorus identity. They will be in direct control of Francis' scenes with Anne and will also add commentary. Thus, in the course of the production, their purpose changes from fantasy figures to Fates--and, once again, reinforces the image of female dominance.

The opening scene should strongly establish the rules that will be used throughout the show. The Narrators describe the plane crash, and Francis speaks the lines of narration that are directly concerned with him. This allows him to comment on his own actions, an essential technique in Chamber Theatre which helps to avoid the appearance of verisimilitude. Often, the first line a performer speaks will be narration, thus insuring the Brechtian critical detachment necessary to this form. In the second scene, the Narrators play the Weed children in Francis' home but switch back and forth between narrator voice and character voice as needed, a method that will be used as necessary.

The pace of the story slows down at this point, and the narrative passage describing evening in Shady Hill is adapted in the form of a monologue assigned to Francis. Here emphasis is place on Cheever's rich, image-filled narration. The script continues in this manner, cutting for time, emphasis, and simplicity. The long narrative passages are cut with some of the narration incorporated into the corresponding scenes. In this case, the cut was made in the interests of pace onstage. These narratives contain some excellent detail but also slow down the dramatic action too much to be staged.

Besides commenting on the action when Francis and Anne meet, the Girls are used to describe the scene when Francis discovers someone drove Anne home and also when he writes the love letter.

The struggle for direct control is most apparent in the Clayton Thomas scene. Because this section is mostly dialogue, the Narrators speak the dialogue tags to remind the audience of the element of past-tensiveness. After Francis slaps Julia, the Female Narrator assumes complete dominance of the scene and also assumes complete identification with Julia. This is accomplished by letting her feed Julia the lines that Francis doesn't love her, by stealing one of Francis' narratives away from him ("Her figure, so helpless . . . "), and reaches a climax when she and Julia interchange the lines most directly concerned with control in their marriage. ("Did you say I was dependent on you?") Since this scene ends happily, the Male Narrator reenters at this point and speaks the last narrative line, thereby regaining control of the scene. To aid simplicity in staging, the following scene is adapted as a long monologue for the Male Narrator.

Perhaps the most serious challenge in adapting "The Country Husband" for Chamber Theatre is that the story has no stageable climax. After the phone call in which Francis tries to ruin Clayton and a brief interlude with his

secretary, he is left alone to wrestle with his demons. The best method for showing this inner struggle is to bring it on stage as a series of flashbacks, completed with the identical lines used earlier. The phrase "He's a thief" is used by Francis to show that this event is frozen in time, between the lines of the story. As the other performers recreate the events, his frenzy grows, and he begins to articulate his frustrated desire by repeating Anne's name over and over. His mental breakdown reaches a climax as the other performers surround him, repeating the plane image that acts as a metaphor for Francis' state of mind. The other performers then describe the climax that has just taken place and seal Francis' destiny.

Francis does not speak in the psychiatrist's office scene, indicating his need for treatment. Instead, the Male Narrator describes the action as Francis interacts with the Girls--who have played small parts throughout the show and here represent the secretary and the policeman. In the final scene, the Female Narrator is in control, clearly indicating the passage to female dominance. Now cured, Francis can speak once again, but his only line describes his treatment--like so many "mental" patients, he is reduced almost to an automaton.

THE PRODUCTION

Breen offers the following advice about scenery in Chamber Theatre,

> It would seem, then, that the best kind of setting, speaking generally, for Chamber Theatre productions, is the kind that has a minimum of standard, generalized pieces that can be fleshed out with detailed verbal descriptions provided by the author's text.[6]

This was the primary consideration for designing the scenery; the second was that since the show was to be premiered at the Southwest Theatre Conference in Fort Worth and possibly also performed at an interpretation festival, the scenery needed to be flexible and very easy to move. The large number of settings in the story, many of which last for only a short time, were another consideration.

In the final design, the space was bare except for six chairs which were used to represent the car, the Weed's home, and all the other settings. An experiment was first attempted using UIL set pieces, but these proved too cumbersome to shift quickly and also tended to limit and define the boundaries of the objects they represented.

Lighting was a special problem, also, because of the desire to travel with the production and due to the lack of good lighting facilities in the performance space. Here the decision was made to set the lights at one level, including the houselights, and leave them. The illusion

presented was one of audience involvement with the action since the lights did not clearly define where the performing space ended and the audience space began.

In the matter of costuming, it was decided to follow Breen's advice, "The theatre tends to encourage full dress, while the novelist economizes and selects with great care those elements that best 'reveal' character."[7] In other words, carefully selected clothes that are suggestive, not representative, of character should be used. The men were dressed in nonmatching blue suits. Like a fun house mirror, this meant that the Male Narrator presented an image of solid respectability, while Francis' more shabby outfit made him appear as a distorted image of the Male Narrator.

Since the world of the production was shown through Francis' eyes, the women were costumed as he would have seen them, rather than as they would appear to everyone else. The women wore leotards and tights and wraparound skirts, giving them a sensuous image that was contrasted with the men's business attire. Julia and the Female Narrator were to look as identical as possible, reinforcing the mirror concept of Chamber Theatre. Anne Murchison, representing a fantasy, would not wear a wraparound skirt, and the color of her clothes would be different. Even her movement is different from the generally realistic

movement used by the others at one point: In the section where she enters Francis' mind, a dance sequence would be effective in reinforcing the fairy tale quality of the imaginary relationship between her and Francis.

Thus, "The Country Husband" presented a considerable challenge for the director anxious to share its themes, messages, and insights with an audience. In order that the literature be communicated properly, conceptualization is essential.

POSTPRODUCTION CONSIDERATIONS

This production of "The Country Husband" revealed several strengths about Cheever's work and the Chamber Theatre mode. Most important, it is felt that the crisis, climax, and denouement were clarified and sharpened for the audience by the flashback technique. The majority of Cheever's work is organized in such a fashion that the climax occurs in a single line of narration that may be missed in a first reading. By stopping the story to reveal the state of Francis' mind, the audience was given clear indication how each event in the story contributed directly to his breakdown. Also, the use of two narrators symbolically reflected the male-female struggle for control that is the core of the story. Furthermore, the stripping away of all nonessential production elements such as sets, lights,

and costumes was advantageous in that the literature was allowed to stand on its own merit. The audience's appreciation of the production was further aided by the use of limited suggestion of movement, as it provided them with a visual means of focusing their attention and their imagination on the most important images in the story.

An important educational benefit gained from the production for both cast and director was the opportunity to experiment with the alienation style of performance. Students rarely have a chance to explore this style with a director in a group performance situation except in those rare instances when a Brecht play is staged. Also, the value of Chamber Theatre was shown in that it gives the student an excellent grasp of the differences between acting and interpretation, suggesting a character and becoming one, and verisimilitude and alienation.

"The Country Husband" production experience also suggested a number of potential areas for future research. Other works by Cheever could be adapted into Chamber Theatre form, particularly selections from one of his novels. Or, several of his stories could be adapted into another production mode to determine which is the ideal method for presenting his work. Also, practical guidelines for directing and staging Chamber Theatre productions could be

formulated for the benefit of other directors interested in this mode.

In the final analysis, Chamber Theatre has many elements which make it a potentially exciting medium for the performance of literature; such as an opportunity to experiment with performance styles, a clearer understanding of the narrator's function, and a better appreciation of the narrative mode of fiction. More important, Chamber Theatre has proven to be a viable new area of research into the human condition. And without the potential for a better understanding of the human condition, why are we here?

NOTES

[1]David A. Williams, "Communication Through Literature," The Hallie Maude Neff Wilcox Lectures in Communication Studies, (Waco, Texas: The Baylor University Press, 1981), p. 10.

[2]Ted Colson, "Literature and Oral Communication," unpublished lecture, Division of Interpersonal and Public Communication Colloquium Series #2, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 1982, pp. 2-3.

[3]Marion L. Kleinau and Janet Larsen McHughes, Theatres For Literature, (Sherman Oaks, Cal.: Alfred Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 105-106.

[4]Francis Hodge, preface to Play Directing: Analysis, Communication and Style, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. v.

[5]Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin R. White, Readers Theatre Handbook, 3rd ed., (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1982), p. 65.

[6]Robert S. Breen, Chamber Theatre, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), 78.

[7]Breen, p. 80.

CHAPTER V

"THE COUNTRY HUSBAND"

THE SCRIPT

Cast of Characters

(2 male, 6 female)

Male Narrator

Female Narrator

Francis Weed

Anne Murchison

First Girl

Second Girl

Third Girl

The Script

NARRATORS & FRANCIS: To begin at the beginning,-

MALE NARRATOR: -the airplane from Minneapolis in which Francis Weed was travelling East ran into heavy weather.

FEMALE NARRATOR: The sky had been a hazy blue, with the clouds below the plane lying so close together that nothing could be seen of

the earth. Then mist began to form outside the windows, and they flew into a white cloud of such density that it reflected the exhaust fires. The color of the cloud darkened to grey, and the plane began to rock.

MALE NARRATOR: Francis had been in heavy weather before, but he had never been shaken up so much.

FRANCIS: The man in the seat beside him pulled a flask out of his pocket and took a drink. Francis smiled at his neighbor, but the man looked away; he wasn't sharing his painkiller with anyone.

BOTH NARRATORS: The plane had begun to drop and flounder wildly.

FEMALE NARRATOR: A child was crying.

FRANCIS: The air in the cabin was overheated and stale, and Francis' left foot went to sleep.

BOTH NARRATORS: It was black outside the ports. The exhaust fires blazed and shed sparks in the dark. Then the lights flickered and went out.

FEMALE NARRATOR: The stewardess announced that they were going to make an emergency landing.

FRANCIS & BOTH NARRATORS: All but the child saw in their minds the spreading wings of the Angel of Death.

FRANCIS: The pilot could be heard singing faintly, "I've got sixpence, jolly, jolly sixpence. I've got sixpence to last me all my life. . . ."

MALE NARRATOR: The loud groaning of the hydraulic valves swallowed up the pilot's song, and there was a shrieking high in the air, like automobile brakes, and the plane hit flat on its belly in a cornfield-

FRANCIS: -and shook them so violently that an old man up forward howled, "Me kidneys! Me kidneys!"

FEMALE NARRATOR: The stewardess flung open the doors, and someone opened an emergency door at the back,-

FRANCIS & BOTH NARRATORS: -letting in the sweet noise of their continuing mortality--the idle splash and smell of a heavy rain.

MALE NARRATOR: They were not far from Philadelphia, and from there Francis Weed got a train to New York. At the end of that journey,

he crossed the city and caught, just as it was about to pull out, the commuting train that he took five nights a week to his home in Shady Hill. From there, he drove in his secondhand Volkswagen up to the Glenhollow neighborhood, where he lived.

FEMALE NARRATOR: The Weed's Dutch Colonial house was larger than it appeared to be from the driveway.

MALE NARRATOR: The living room was spacious and divided like Gaul into three parts.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Around an ell to the left as one entered from the vestibule was the long table, laid for six, with candles and a bowl of fruit in the centre.

FEANCIS: The sounds and smells that came from the open kitchen door were appetizing,-

FEMALE NARRATOR: -for Julia Weed was a good cook.

MALE NARRATOR: The largest part of the living room centered around a fireplace. On the right were some bookshelves and a piano. The room was polished and tranquil, and from the windows that opened to the west

there was some late-summer sunlight, brilliant and as clear as water.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Nothing here was neglected; nothing had not been burnished.

JULIA: It was not the kind of household where, after prying open a stuck cigarette box, you would find an old shirt button and a tarnished nickel.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Louisa Weed, a pretty girl of nine, was looking out the western windows.

MALE NARRATOR: Her younger brother Henry was standing beside her.

FRANCIS: Francis, taking off his hat and putting down his paper, was not consciously pleased with the scene; he was not that reflective. It was his element, his creation, and he returned to it with that sense of lightness and strength with which any creature returns to its home. Hi, everybody, he said. The plane from Minneapolis . . .

MALE NARRATOR: Nine times out of ten, Francis would be greeted with affection, but tonight the children are absorbed in their own antagonisms. Francis has not finished

his sentence about the plane crash before Henry plants a kick in Louisa's behind.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Damn you!

MALE NARRATOR: Francis makes the mistake of scolding Louisa for bad language before he punishes Henry. Now Louisa turns on her father and accuses him of favoritism.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Henry is always right; she is persecuted and lonely.

FRANCIS: Francis turns to his son,-

MALE NARRATOR: -but the boy has justification for the kick--she hit him first; she hit him on the ear, which is dangerous.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Of course she hit him on the ear; she meant to hit him on the ear because he messed up her china collection.

MALE NARRATOR: That's a lie!

JULIA: Hello, darling. Wash your hands, everyone. Dinner is ready. Julia whisks the family off to what she thinks is the relative safety of the dining room. Then Henry starts again with:

MALE NARRATOR: Do I have to look at that big, fat slob?

JULIA: Everybody enters into this skirmish, and it rages up and down the table for five minutes.

FRANCIS: Can't the children have their dinner earlier?

JULIA: I can't cook two dinners and lay two tables.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Julia paints for Francis with lightening strokes that panorama of drudgery in which her youth, her beauty, and her wit have been lost.

FRANCIS: But you've got to understand me! I was nearly killed in an airplane crash, and I don't like to come home every night to a battlefield.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Now Julia is deeply committed.

JULIA: He doesn't come home every night to a battlefield. The accusation is stupid and mean. Everything was tranquil until he arrived.

MALE NARRATOR: Henry goes to her side. Poor Mummy! And they climb the stairs together.

FRANCIS: Francis goes into the back garden for a cigarette and some air. It was a

pleasant garden, with walks and flower beds and places to sit. The sunset had nearly burned out, but there was still plenty of light. Put into a thoughtful mood by the crash and the battle, Francis listened to the evening sounds of Shady Hill. Varmits! Rascals! Old Mr. Nixon shouted at the squirrels in his bird-feeding station. Avaunt and quit my sight! A door slammed. Someone was playing tennis on the Babcock's court; someone was cutting grass. Then Donald Goslin, who lived at the corner, began to play the "Moonlight Sonata." He did this nearly every night. He threw the tempo out the window and played it rubato from beginning to end, like an outpouring of tearful petulance, lonesomeness, and self-pity--of everything it was Beethoven's greatness not to know. The music rang up and down the street beneath the trees like an appeal for love, for tenderness, aimed at some lonely housemaid--some freshfaced, homesick girl from Galway, looking at old snapshots in her third-floor

room. Here, Jupiter! Francis called to the Mercer's retriver whose high spirits and retrieving instincts were out of place in Shady Hill. Jupiter broke up garden parties and tennis matches, and got mixed up in the processional at Christ's Church on Sunday, barking at the men in red dresses. Here, Jupiter, Jupiter! Francis called, but the dog pranced off, shaking the remains of a felt hat in his white teeth. Looking in at the windows of his house, Francis saw Julia had come down and was blowing out the candles on the table.

MALE NARRATOR: The day after the airplane crash, the Weeds were to have dinner at the Farquarson's.

JULIA & FRANCIS: Julia and Francis Weed went out a great deal.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Julia was well-liked and gregarious, and her love of parties sprang from a most natural dread of chaos and loneliness.

JULIA: She went through her morning mail with real anxiety, looking for invitations, and she usually found some, but she was

insatiable, and if she had gone out seven nights a week, it would not have cured her of a reflective look--the look of someone who hears distant music--for she would always suppose that there was a more brilliant party somewhere else.

FRANCIS: Francis limited her to two week-night parties, putting a flexible interpretation on Friday,-

JULIA & FRANCIS: -and they rode through the weekend like a dory in a gale.

MALE NARRATOR: Francis came home late from town, and Julia got the sitter while he dressed, and then hurried him out of the house. The party was small and pleasant, and Francis settled down to enjoy himself.

FEMALE NARRATOR: A new maid passed the drinks.

MALE NARRATOR: Her hair was dark, and her face was round and pale and seemed familiar to Francis.

FRANCIS: Her face was, in a wonderful way, a moon face--Norman or Irish--but it was not beautiful enough to account for his feeling that he had seen her before, in

circumstances that he ought to be able to remember. He asked Nellie Farquarson who she was.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Nellie said the maid had come through an agency, and that her home was Trenon, in Normandy--a small place with a church and a restaurant that Nellie had once visited.

MALE NARRATOR: While Nellie talked on about her travels abroad, Francis realized where he had seen the woman before.

FRANCIS: It had been at the end of the war. He had left a replacement depot with some other men and taken a three-day pass in Trenon. On their second day, they had walked out to a crossroads to see the public chastisement of a young woman who had lived with the German commandant during the Occupation.

MALE NARRATOR: The round white face had aged a little, but there was no question but that the maid who passed his cocktails and later served Francis his dinner was the woman who had been punished at the crossroads.

The prisoner withdrew after passing the coffee,-

FRANCIS: -but the encounter left Francis feeling languid; it had opened his memory and his senses, and left them dilated.

FEMALE NARRATOR: He and Julia drove home when the party ended, and Julia went into the house.

MALE NARRATOR: Francis stayed in the car to take the sitter home.

FRANCIS: Expecting to see Mrs. Henlein, the old lady who usually stayed with the children, he was surprised when a young girl opened the door and came out onto the lighted stoop.

FIRST GIRL: She stayed in the light to count her textbooks.

SECOND GIRL: She was frowning-

THIRD GIRL: -and beautiful.

GIRLS: Now, the world is full of beautiful young girls,-

MALE NARRATOR: -but here Francis saw the difference between beauty and perfection. All those endearing flaws, birthmarks, moles, and healed wounds were missing, and he

experienced in his consciousness that moment when music breaks glass, and felt a pang of recognition as strange, deep, and wonderful as anything in his life.

FRANCIS: It hung from her frown, from an impal-

GIRLS: -pable darkness in her face- -a look that impressed him as a direct appeal for love.

MALE NARRATOR: In the light, he saw that her cheeks were wet.

FRANCIS: You're new.

ANNE: Yes. Mrs. Henlein is sick. I'm Anne Murchison.

(GIRLS softly chant "Anne" under the following dialogue.)

FRANCIS: Did the children give you any trouble?

ANNE: Oh, no, no.

FRANCIS: You've been crying.

ANNE: Yes.

FRANCIS: I hope it was nothing that happened in our house.

ANNE: No, no, it was nothing that happened in your house.

MALE NARRATOR: Her voice was bleak.

ANNE: It's no secret. Everybody in the village knows. Daddy's an alcoholic, and he just called me from some saloon and gave me a piece of his mind. He thinks I'm immoral. He called just before Mrs. Weed came back.

FRANCIS: I'm sorry.

ANNE: Oh, LORD!

MALE NARRATOR: She turned toward Francis, and he took her in his arms and let her cry on his shoulder.

SECOND GIRL: She shook in his embrace.

GIRLS: And this movement accentuated his sense of the fineness of her flesh and bone.

FIRST GIRL: The layers of her clothing felt thin-

THIRD GIRL: -and when her shuddering began to diminish, it was so much like a paroxysm of love that Francis lost his head and pulled her roughly against him.

MALE NARRATOR: She drew away.

ANNE: I live on Belleview Avenue. You go down Lansing Street to the railroad bridge.

FRANCIS: All right.

MALE NARRATOR: The road Francis took brought him right out of his own neighborhood, across the tracks, and toward the river, to a street where the near-poor lived, in houses whose peaked gables and trimmings of wooden lace conveyed the purest feelings of pride and romance, although the houses themselves could not have offered much privacy or comfort, they were all so small.

FRANCIS: The street was dark, and, stirred by the face and beauty of the troubled girl, he seemed, in turning into it, to have come to the deepest part of some submerged memory.

MALE NARRATOR: In the distance, he saw a porch light burning.

FRANCIS: It was the only one,-

ANNE: -and she said that the house with the light was where she lived.

MALE NARRATOR: When he stopped the car, he could see beyond the porch light into a dimly lighted hallway with an old-fashioned clothes tree.

FRANCIS: Well, here we are,-

MALE NARRATOR: -he said, conscious that a young man would have said something different.

ANNE: She did not move her hands from the books, where they were folded, and she turned and faced him.

MALE NARRATOR: There were tears of lust in his eyes. Determinedly, not sadly, he opened the door on his side and walked around to open hers.

FRANCIS: He took her free hand, letting his fingers in between hers, climbed at her side the concrete steps, and went up a narrow walk through a front garden where dahlias, marigolds, and roses--things that had withstood the light frosts--still bloomed and made a bittersweet smell in the night air.

MALE NARRATOR: At the steps, she freed her hand and then turned and kissed him swiftly. Then she crossed the porch and shut the door.

FRANCIS: The porch light went out, then the light in the hall. A second later, a light went on upstairs at the side of the house,

shining into a tree that was still covered with leaves. It took her only a few minutes to undress and get into bed, and then the house was dark.

MALE NARRATOR: Julia was asleep when Francis got home. He opened a second window and got into bed.

FIRST GIRL: But as soon as his eyes were shut,

THIRD GIRL: as soon as he dropped off to sleep,

GIRLS: the girl entered his mind,

(GIRLS chant "Anne" under the following dialogue as Anne dances around Francis' bed.)

SECOND GIRL: Moving with perfect freedom through its shut doors and filling chamber after chamber with her light, her perfume, and the music of her voice.

THIRD GIRL: He was crossing the Atlantic with her on the old Mauretania and, later, living with her in Paris.

MALE NARRATOR: When he woke from his dream, he got up and smoked a cigarette at the open window. In the morning, Francis was left with vivid memories of Paris and the Mauretania. He had been bitten gravely. He washed his body, shaved his jaws, and

missed the seven-thirty-one. The train pulled out just as he brought his car to the station,

FRANCIS: and the longing he felt for the coaches as they drew stubbornly away from him reminded him of the humors of love.

MALE NARRATOR: He waited for the eight-two, on what was now an empty platform.

FRANCIS: It was a clear morning; the morning seemed thrown like a gleaming bridge of light over his mixed affairs. His spirits were feverish and high.

MALE NARRATOR: The image of the girl seemed to put him into a relationship to the world that was mysterious and enthralling.

FRANCIS: Then he saw an extraordinary thing: at one of the train windows sat an unclothed woman of exceptional beauty, combing her golden hair.

MALE NARRATOR: And Francis followed her with his eyes until she was out of sight. Then old Mrs. Wrightson joined him on the platform-

One of the GIRLS ENTERS AS Mrs. Wrightson.)

MRS. WRIGHTSON: and began to talk. Well, I guess you must be surprised to see me here the

third morning in a row, but because of my window curtains, I'm becoming a regular commuter. The curtains I bought on Monday I returned on Tuesday, and the curtains I bought Tuesday I'm returning today. On Monday, I got exactly what I wanted--it's a wool tapestry with roses and birds--but when I got home, I found they were the wrong length. Well, I exchanged them yesterday, and when I got them home, I found they were still the wrong length. Now I'm praying to high Heaven that the decorator will have them in the right length, because you know my house, you know my living room windows, and you can imagine what a problem they present. I don't know what to do with them.

FRANCIS: I know what to do with them.

MRS. WRIGHTSON: What?

FRANCIS: Paint them black on the inside, and shut up.

MALE NARRATOR: There was a gasp from Mrs. Wrightson, and Francis looked down at her to be sure that she knew he meant to be rude.

She turned and walked away from him so damaged in spirit that she limped.

FRANCIS: A wonderful feeling enveloped him, as if light were being shaken about him, and he thought again of Venus combing and combing her hair as she drifted through the Bronx.

MALE NARRATOR: The realization of how many years had passed since he had enjoyed being deliberately impolite sobered him. Among his friends and neighbors there were brilliant and gifted people-

FRANCIS: -he saw that-

MALE NARRATOR: -but many of them, also, were bores and fools,

FRANCIS: and he had made the mistake of listening to them all with equal attention.

MALE NARRATOR: He was grateful to the girl for this bracing sensation of independence.

FRANCIS: Birds were singing-

MALE NARRATOR: -cardinals and the last of the robins.

FRANCIS: The sky shone like enamel.

MALE NARRATOR: Even the smell of ink from his morning paper honed his appetite for life,

FRANCIS &
MALE NARRATOR: and the world that was spread out around him was plainly a paradise.

MALE NARRATOR: The autumnal loves of middle age are well publicized,

FRANCIS: and he guessed he was face to face with one of these,

MALE NARRATOR: but there was not a trace of autumn in what he felt.

FRANCIS: He wanted to sport in the green woods, scratch where he itched, and drink from the same cup.

MALE NARRATOR: After leaving the office that day, Francis went to a jeweller's and bought the girl a bracelet.

FRANCIS: How happy this clandestine purchase made him, how stuffy and comical the jeweller's clerks seemed, how sweet the women who passed at his back smelled!

MALE NARRATOR: He did not know when he would see the girl next. He had the bracelet in his inside pocket when he got home. Opening the door to his house, he found her in the hall. Her smile was open and loving. Her perfection stunned him

like a fine day--the day after a thunderstorm. He seized her and covered her lips with his, and she struggled but she did not have to struggle for long.

(One of the GIRLS enters as Gertrude.)

GERTRUDE: Because just then little Gertrude Flannery, the neighborhood stray, appeared from somewhere and said, "Oh, Mr. Weed . . ."

MALE NARRATOR: There are times when the lines around the human eye seem like shelves of eroded stone and when the staring eye itself strikes us with such a wilderness of animal feeling that we are at a loss. The look Francis gave the little girl was ugly and queer, and it frightened her. He reached into his pocket--his hands were shaking--and took out a quarter.

FRANCIS: Go home, Gertrude, go home, and don't tell anyone. Gertrude, don't-

MALE NARRATOR: He choked and ran into the living room as Julia called down to him from upstairs to hurry up and dress.

FEMALE NARRATOR: The thought that he would drive Anne Murchison home later that night ran like a golden thread through the events of the party that Francis and Julia went to, and he laughed uproariously at dull jokes, dried a tear when Mabel Mercer told him about the death of her kitten, and stretched, yawned, sighed, and grunted like any other man with a rendezvous in the back of his mind.

FRANCIS: As he sat talking, the smell of grass was in his nose, and he was wondering where he would park the car. Nobody lived in the old Parker mansion, and the driveway was used as a lover's lane. Townsend Street was a dead end, and he could park there, beyond the last house. The old lane that used to connect Elm Street to the riverbanks was overgrown, but he had walked there with his children, and he could drive his car deep enough into the brushwoods to be concealed.

FEMALE NARRATOR: The Weeds were the last to leave the party, and their host and hostess spoke of their

own married happiness while they all four stood in the hallway saying good night.

MALE NARRATOR: She's my girl,

FEMALE NARRATOR: their host said, squeezing his wife.

MALE NARRATOR: She's my blue sky. After sixteen years, I still bite her shoulders. She makes me feel like Hannibal crossing the Alps.

FEMALE NARRATOR: The Weeds drove home in silence. Francis bought his car up to the driveway and sat still, with the motor running.

JULIA: You can put the car in the garage. I told the Murchison girl she could leave at eleven. Someone drove her home.

FEMALE NARRATOR: She shut the door, and Francis sat in the dark.

GIRLS: He would be spared nothing then, it seemed that a fool was not spared,

THIRD GIRL: ravening,

SECOND GIRL: lewdness,

FIRST GIRL: jealousy,

GIRLS: this hurt to his feelings that put tears in his eyes, even scorn.

FEMALE NARRATOR: For he could see clearly the image he now presented, his arms spread over the

steering wheel and his head buried in them for love.

MALE NARRATOR: Francis had been a dedicated Boy Scout when he was young, and, remembering the precepts of his youth, he left his office early the next afternoon and played some round robin squash,

FRANCIS: but, with his body toned up by exercise and a shower, he realized that he might better have stayed at his desk.

MALE NARRATOR: It was a frosty night when he got home. The air smelled sharply of change. When he stepped into the house, he sensed an unusual stir.

FRANCIS: The children were in their best clothes, and when Julia came down she was wearing a lavender dress and her diamond sunburst.

FEMALE NARRATOR: She explained the stir:

JULIA: Mr. Hubber was coming at seven to take their photograph for the Christmas card. She had put out Francis' blue suit and a tie with some color in it because the picture was going to be in color this year.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Julia was light hearted at the thought of being photographed for Christmas.

JULIA: It was the kind of ceremony she enjoyed.

MALE NARRATOR: Francis went upstairs to change his clothes. He was tired from the day's work and tired with longing and sitting on the edge of the bed had the effect of deepening his weariness.

FRANCIS: He thought of Anne Murchsion, and the physical need to express himself, instead of being restrained by the pink lamps on Julia's dressing table, engulfed him.

MALE NARRATOR: He went to Julia's desk, took a piece of writing paper, and began to write on it:

GIRLS: Dear Anne, I love you, I love you, I love you . . . (GIRLS chant.)

FIRST GIRL: No one would see the letter, and he used no restraint.

SECOND GIRL: He used phrases like "Heavenly bliss," and "love nest."

THIRD GIRL: He salivated, signed, and trembled.

MALE NARRATOR: When Julia called him to come down, the abyss between his fantasy and the

practical world opened so wide that he felt it affect the muscles of his heart.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Julia and the children were on the stoop, and the photographer and his assistant had set up a double battery of flood-lights to show the family and architectural beauty of the entrance to their house. People who had come home on a late train slowed their cars to see the Weeds being photographed for their Christmas card.

JULIA: A few waved and called to the family.

FRANCIS: It took half an hour of smiling and wetting their lips before Mr. Hubber was satisfied.

MALE NARRATOR: The heat of the lights made an unfresh smell in the frosty air, and when they were turned off, they lingered on the retina of Francis' eyes.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Later that night, while Francis and Julia were drinking their coffee in the living room, the doorbell rang. Julia answered the door and let in -

JULIA: Clayton Thomas!

MALE NARRATOR: He had come to pay her for some theatre tickets that she had given his mother some time ago, and that Helen Thomas has scrupulously insisted on paying for,

JULIA: though Julia had asked her not to.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Julia invited him in to have a cup of coffee.

MALE NARRATOR (AS CLAYTON) : I won't have any coffee,

FEMALE NARRATOR: Clayton said,

MALE NARRATOR: but I will come in for a minute.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Clayton's father had been killed in the war, and the young man's fatherlessness surrounded him like an element. This may have been conspicuous in Shady Hill because the Thomases were the only family that lacked a piece; all the other marriages were intact and productive. Clayton was in his second or third year of college, and he and his mother lived alone in a large house which she hoped to sell. Clayton had once made some trouble. Years ago, he had stolen some money and run away; he had got to California before they caught up with him.

FRANCIS: When do you go back to college, Clayton?,

FEMALE NARRATOR: Francis asked.

CLAYTON: I'm not going back,

FEMALE NARRATOR: Clayton said.

CLAYTON: Mother doesn't have the money, and there's no sense in all this pretense. I'm going to get a job, and if we sell the house, we'll take an apartment in New York.

JULIA: Won't you miss Shady Hill?

FEMALE NARRATOR: Julia asked.

CLAYTON: No. I don't like it.

FRANCIS: Why not?

CLAYTON: Well, there's a lot here I don't approve of. Things like the club dances. Last Saturday night, I looked in toward the end and saw Mr. Granner trying to put Mrs. Minot into the trophy case. They were both drunk. I disapprove of so much drinking.

FRANCIS: It was Saturday night.

CLAYTON: And the way people clutter up their lives. I've thought about it a lot, and what seems to me to be really wrong with Shady Hill is that it doesn't have any

future. So much energy is spent in perpetuating the place--in keeping out undesirables, and so forth--that the only idea of the future anyone has is just more and more commuting trains and more parties. I don't think that's healthy. I think people ought to be able to dream big dreams about the future. I think people ought to be able to dream great dreams.

JULIA: It's too bad you couldn't continue with college.

CLAYTON: I wanted to go to divinity school.

FRANCIS: What's your church?

CLAYTON: Unitarian, Theosophist, Transcendentalist, Humanist.

FRANCIS: Do you have any girl friends?

CLAYTON: I'm engaged to be married. Of course, I'm not old enough or rich enough to have my engagement observed or respected or anything, but I bought a simulated emerald for Anne Murchison with the money I made cutting lawns this summer. We're going to be married as soon as she finishes school.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Francis recoiled at the mention of the girl's name. Then a dingy light seemed to emanate from his spirit, showing everything--Julia, the boy, the chairs--in their true colorlessness. It was like a bitter turn of the weather.

CLAYTON: We're going to have a large family. Her father's a terrible rummy, and I've had my hard times, and we want to have lots of children. Oh, she's wonderful, Mr. and Mrs. Weed, and we have so much in common. We like all the same things. We sent out the same Christmas card last year without planning it, and we both have an allergy to tomatoes, and our eyebrows grow together in the middle. Well, good night.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Julia went to the door with him. When she returned, Francis said that Clayton was lazy, irresponsible, affected, and smelly. Julia said that Francis seemed to be getting intolerant: the Thomas boy was young and should be given a chance. Julia had noticed other cases where Francis had been short-tempered.

JULIA: Mrs. Wrightson has asked everyone in Shady Hill to her anniversary party but us.

FRANCIS: I'm sorry, Julia.

JULIA: Do you know why they didn't ask us?

FRANCIS: Why?

JULIA: Because you insulted Mrs. Wrightson.

FRANCIS: Then you know about it?

JULIA: June Masterson told me. She was standing behind you.

FRANCIS: Julia walked in front of the sofa with a small step that expressed, Francis knew, a feeling of anger. I did insult Mrs. Wrightson, Julia, and I meant to. I've never liked her parties and I'm glad she's dropped us.

JULIA: What about Helen?

FRANCIS: How does our daughter come into this?

JULIA: Mrs. Wrightson's the one who decides who goes to assemblies.

FRANCIS: You mean she can keep Helen from going to the dances?

JULIA: Yes

FRANCIS: I hadn't thought of that.

JULIA: Oh, I knew you hadn't thought of it,

FEMALE NARRATOR: Julia cried, thrusting hilt-deep into this chink of his armor.

JULIA: And it makes me furious to see this kind of stupid thoughtlessness wreck everyone's happiness.

FRANCIS: I don't think I've wrecked anyone's happiness.

JULIA: Mrs. Wrightson runs Shady Hill and has run it for the last forty years. I don't know what makes you think that in a community like this you can indulge every impulse you have to be insulting, vulgar, and offensive.

FRANCIS: I have very good manners,

MALE NARRATOR: Francis said, trying to give the evening a turn toward the light.

JULIA: Damn you, Francis Weed!

FEMALE NARRATOR: Julia cried, and the spit of her words struck him in the face.

JULIA: I've worked hard for the social position we enjoy in this place, and I won't stand by and see you wreck it. You must have understood when you settled here that you couldn't expect to live like a bear in a cave.

FRANCIS: I've got to express my likes and dislikes.

JULIA: You can conceal your dislikes. You don't have to meet everything head-on, like a child. Unless you're anxious to be a social leper. It's no accident that Helen has so many friends. How would you like to spend your Saturday nights at the movies? How would you like to spend your Sundays raking up dead leaves? How would you like it if your daughter spent the assembly nights sitting at her window, listening to the music from the club? How would you like it--

MALE NARRATOR: He did something then that was, after all, not so unaccountable, since her words seemed to raise up between them a wall so deadening that he gagged: he struck her full in the face.

FEMALE NARRATOR: She staggered and then, a moment later, seemed composed. She went up the stairs to their room. She didn't slam the door. When Francis followed, a few minutes later, he found her packing a suitcase.

FRANCIS: Julia, I'm very sorry.

JULIA: It doesn't matter.

FEMALE NARRATOR: She was crying.

FRANCIS: Where do you think you're going?

JULIA: I don't know. I just looked at the timetable. There's an eleven-sixteen into New York. I'll take that.

FRANCIS: You can't go, Julia.

JULIA: I can't stay. I know that.

FRANCIS: I'm sorry about Mrs. Wrightson, Julia, and I'm--

JULIA: It doesn't matter about Mrs. Wrightson. That isn't the trouble.

FRANCIS: What is the trouble?

FEMALE NARRATOR: You don't love me.

JULIA: You don't love me.

FRANCIS: I do love you, Julia.

FEMALE NARRATOR: No, you don't.

JULIA: No, you don't.

FRANCIS: Julia, I do love you, and I would like to be as we were--sweet and bawdy and dark--but now there are so many people.

FEMALE NARRATOR: You hate me.

JULIA: You hate me.

FRANCIS: Julia, darling.

FEMALE NARRATOR: When she felt his hand on her shoulder, she got up.

JULIA: Leave me alone, I have to go.

FEMALE NARRATOR: She brushed past him to the closet and came back with a dress.

JULIA: I'm not taking any of the things you've given me. I'm leaving my pearls and the fur jacket.

FRANCIS: Oh, Julia. Her figure, so helpless in its self-deception,

FEMALE NARRATOR: (simultaneously) Her figure, so helpless in its self-deception, bent over the suitcase made him nearly sick with pity. She did not understand how desolate her life would be without him. She didn't understand the hours that working women have to keep. She didn't understand that most of her friendships existed within the framework of their marriage and that without this she would find herself alone. She didn't understand about travel, about hotels, about money.

FRANCIS: Julia, I can't let you go! What you don't understand, Julia, is that you've come to be dependent on me.

FEMALE NARRATOR: She tossed her head back and uncovered her face with her hands.

JULIA &
FEMALE NARRATOR: Did you say I was dependent on <u>you</u>? Is that what you said?

JULIA: And who is it that tells you what time to get up in the morning-

FEMALE NARRATOR: -and when to go to bed at night?

JULIA: Who is it that prepares your meals,

FEMALE NARRATOR: and picks up your dirty clothes,

JULIA: and invites your friends to dinner?

JULIA &
FEMALE NARRATOR: If it weren't for me-

JULIA: your neckties would be greasy-

FEMALE NARRATOR: and your clothing would be full of moth holes.

JULIA &
FEMALE NARRATOR: You were alone when I met you, Francis Weed, and you'll be alone when I leave.

JULIA: Since I'm not taking the fur jacket, you'd better put it back into storage. There's an insurance policy on the pearls that comes due in January. The name of the laundry and the maid's telephone number--all those things are in my desk. I hope you won't drink too much, Francis. I hope that nothing bad will happen to

you. If you do get into serious trouble, you can call me.

FRANCIS: Oh, my darling, I can't let you go! I can't let you go, Julia.

(MALE NARRATOR ENTERS)

MALE NARRATOR: He takes her into his arms.

JULIA: I guess I'd better stay and take care of you for a little while longer.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Late the next afternoon, Julia called to remind Francis they were going out for dinner that night.

MALE NARRATOR: The call only served to remind Francis of the girl. Riding to work that morning, he had seen the girl walk down the aisle of the commuter train. He was surprised; he hadn't realized that the school she went to was in the city, but she was carrying books; she seemed to be going to school. His surprise had delayed his reaction, but then he got up clumsily and stepped into the aisle. Several people had come between them, but he could see her ahead of him, waiting for someone to open the car door, and then, as the train swerved, putting

out her hand to support herself as she crossed the platform into the next car. He had followed her through that car and halfway through another before calling her name--"Anne! Anne!"--but she didn't turn. He followed her into still another car, and she sat down in an aisle seat. Coming up to her, all his feelings warm and bent in her direction, he had put his hand on the back of her seat--even this touch had warmed him--and leaning down to speak to her, he saw that it was not Anne. It was an older woman wearing glasses. He went on deliberately into another car, his face red with embarrassment and the much deeper feeling of having his good sense challenged;

FEMALE NARRATOR: for if he couldn't tell one person from another, what evidence was there that his life with Julia and the children had as much reality as the litter, the grass smell, and the cave-shaped trees in Lover's Lane?

FRANCIS: A few minutes after Julia's call, Trace Bearden called.

MALE NARRATOR: Look, fellar, I'm calling for Mrs. Thomas. You know, Clayton, that boy of hers doesn't seem to be able to get a job, and I wondered if you could help. If you'd call Charlie Bell--I know he's indebted to you--and say a good word for the kid, I think Charlie would--

FRANCIS: Trace, I hate to say this, but I don't feel that I can do anything for that boy. The kid's worthless. I know it's a harsh thing to say, but it's a fact. Any kindness done for him would backfire in everybody's face. He's just a worthless kid, Trace, and there's nothing to be done about it. Even if we got him a job, he wouldn't be able to keep it for a week. I know that to be a fact. It's an awful thing, Trace, and I know it is, but instead of recommending that kid, I'd feel obliged to warn people against him--people who knew his father and would naturally want to step in and do something.

I'd feel obliged to warn them. He's a thief. . .

(GIRLS chant "Anne" under the following. The intensity of the dialogue and the chants built to a climax with Francis' "Anne!"

FRANCIS: He's a thief.

MALE NARRATOR: Francis had been in heavy weather before, but he had never been shaken up so much.

FRANCIS: He's a thief.

BOTH NARRATORS: The plane had begun to drop and flounder wildly.

FRANCIS: He's a thief.

JULIA: He doesn't come home every night to a battlefield.

FRANCIS: He's a thief.

ANNE: No, no, it was nothing that happened in your house.

FRANCIS: He's a thief.

MALE NARRATOR: In the morning Francis was left with vivid memories of Paris and the Maure-tania.

FRANCIS: A thief.

MALE NARRATOR: The image of the girl seemed to put him into a relationship to the world that was mysterious and enthralling.

FRANCIS: A thief.

MALE NARRATOR: He was grateful to the girl for this bracing sensation of independence.

FRANCIS: A thief.

MALE NARRATOR: Her perfection stunned him like a fine day--the day after a thunderstorm.

FRANCIS: A thief.

JULIA: I told the Murchison girl she could leave at eleven. Someone drove her home.

FRANCIS: Thief.

FEMALE NARRATOR: His arms spread over the steering wheel and his head buried in them for love.

FRANCIS: Thief.

MALE NARRATOR: When he stepped into the house, he sensed an unusual stir.

FRANCIS: Thief.

JULIA: Clayton Thomas!

FRANCIS: Thief.

CLAYTON: We're going to have a large family.

FRANCIS: Thief.

JULIA: And it makes me furious to see this kind of stupid thoughtlessness wreck everyone's happiness.

FRANCIS: Anne.

JULIA: You don't love me.

FRANCIS: Anne.

JULIA & FEMALE NARRATOR: You were alone when I met you, Francis Weed, and you'll be alone when I leave.

FRANCIS: Anne.

MALE NARRATOR: He takes her into his arms.

FRANCIS: Anne!

BOTH NARRATORS: The plane had begun to drop and flounder wildly.

FRANCIS: Anne!

BOTH NARRATORS: drop and flounder wildly!

FRANCIS: Anne!!!

BOTH NARRATORS: drop and flounder wildly!!!!!

FRANCIS: Anne!!!!!

BOTH NARRATORS: drop and flounder wildly!!!!!

FRANCIS: Anne!!!!!

BOTH NARRATORS: drop and founder!!!!!

FRANCIS: Anne!!!!!!

BOTH NARRATORS: drop and founder!!!!!

FRANCIS: Anne!!!!!

BOTH NARRATORS: DROP!!!

FRANCIS: ANNE!!!!

BOTH NARRATORS: DROP!!!!!!

FRANCIS: ANNE!!!!!

BOTH NARRATORS & GIRLS: DROP!!!!!

FRANCIS: ANNE!!!!!

BOTH NARRATORS, GIRLS & JULIA: DROP!!!!!

FRANCIS: ANNE!!!!!

ALL: DROP!!!!!

FRANCIS: ANNE!!!!!!!!!

ALL: DROP!!!!!

FRANCIS: ANNE!!!!!!!!

ALL: DROP!!!!!!!!

FRANCIS: AAAAAAAAAANNNNNNNNNNEEEEEEEEEE!!!!!!!!!

MALE NARRATOR: He now faced alone the wickedness of what he had done.

FEMALE NARRATOR: The girl would be at his house when he got home.

MALE NARRATOR: He would spend another evening among his kind neighbors, picking and choosing dead-end streets, cart tracks, and the driveways of abandoned houses.

THIRD GIRL: There was nothing to mitigate his feeling--nothing that laughter or a game of softball with his children would change-

MALE NARRATOR: -and, thinking back over the plane crash, the Farquarson's new maid, and

Anne Murchison's difficulties with her drunken father, he wondered how he could have avoided arriving at just where he was.

SECOND GIRL: He was in trouble.

JULIA: He had been lost once in his life, coming back from a trout stream in the north woods.

FIRST GIRL: And he had now the same bleak realization that no amount of cheerfulness or hoepfulness or valor or perserverance could help him find, in the gathering dark, the path he had lost.

ALL: And he saw clearly that he had reached the point where he would have to make a choice.

MALE NARRATOR: The psychiatrist's office was in a building that was used mostly by doctors and dentists and the hallways were filled with the candy smell of mouthwash and the memories of pain. The scene for his misere mei Deus was, like the waiting room of so many doctors' offices, a cruce token gesture towards the sweets of domestic bliss: a place

arranged with antiques, coffee tables, potted plants, and etchings of snow-covered bridges and geese in flight, although there were no children, no marriage bed, no stove, even, in this travesty of a house, where no one had ever spent the night and where the curtained windows looked straight onto a dark air shaft. Francis gave his name an address to the secretary (ONE OF THE GIRLS enters as the SECRETARY) and then saw, at the side of the room, a policeman moving towards him. (ANOTHER GIRL enters as the POLICEMAN.)

POLICEMAN: Hold it, hold it. Don't move. Keep your hands where they are.

SECRETARY: I think it's all right, Officer, I think it will be-

POLICEMAN: Let's make sure.

MALE NARRATOR: She began to search Francis' clothes, looking for what--pistols, knives, an icepick? Finding nothing, she went off, and the secretary began a nervous apology.

SECRETARY: When you called on the telephone, Mr. Weed, you seemed very excited, and one

of the doctor's patients has been threatening his life, and we have to be careful. If you want to go in now?

MALE NARRATOR: Francis pushed open a door connected to an electrical chime and in the doctor's lair sat down heavily.

(The girl playing ANNE MURCHISON enters as DR. HERZOG.)

He blew his nose into a handkerchief, searched in his pockets for cigarettes, for matches, for something, and said hoarsely, with teams in his eyes,

FRANCIS: I'm in love, Dr. Herzog.

FEMALE NARRATOR: It is a week or ten days later in Shady Hill. The seven-fourteen and come and gone, and here and there dinner is finished and the dishes are in the dishwashing machine. The village hangs, morally and economically, by its thread in the evening light. Donald Goslin has begun to worry the "Moonlight Sonata" again. Marcatoma sempre pianissimo! He seems to be wringing out a wet bath towel, but the housemaid does not heed him. She is writing a letter to Arthur Godfrey. In the cellar

of his house, Francis Weed is building a coffee table.

FRANCIS: Dr. Herzog recommended woodwork as therapy, and Francis finds some true consolation in the simple arithmetic involved and in the holy smell of new wood.

FEMALE NARRATOR: Francis is happy. Acorss the street, a door on the Babcock's terrace flies open, and out comes Mrs. Babcock without any clothes on, pursued by her naked husband. (Their children are away at boarding school, and their terrace is screened by a hedge.) Over the terrace they go and in at the kitchen door, as passionate and handsome a numph and satur as you will find on any wall in Venice.

JULIA: Cutting the last of her roses in her garden, Julia hears old Mr. Nixon shouting at the squirrels in his bird-feeding station. "Rapscallions! Varmits! Avaunt and quit my sight!"

FEMALE NARRATOR: A miserable cat wanders into the garden, sunk in spiritual and physical discomfort.

Tied to its head is a small straw hat--a doll's hat--and it is securely buttoned into a doll's dress, from the skirts of which protrudes its long, hairy tail. As it walks, it shakes its feet, as if it had fallen into water.

JULIA: Here, pussy, here, poor pussy!

FEMALE NARRATOR: Here, pussy! But the cat gives her a skeptical look and stumbles away in its skirts. The last to come is Jupiter. He prances through the tomato vines, holding in his generous mouth the remains of an evening slipper. Then it is dark; it is a night where kings in golden suits ride elephants over the mountains.

APPENDIX A

COPY OF LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO ADAPT AND PERFORM "THE COUNTRY HUSBAND"

1001 N. Bowen Road
Arlington, Texas 76012
July 15, 1982

The New Yorker Magazine
25 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036

Gentlemen:

John Cheever, whom many critics called "The American Chekhov," died June 18, 1982. He will be long remembered for his inestimable charm and wit, and for his delightful tales of American suburbia.

I am a Master of Arts candidate in the Speech department of North Texas State University in Denton, Texas. In order to fulfill my requirements for this degree, I must present a short story by a major writer of American fiction as a Group Interpretation production. This production would be given on the campus of North Texas State University in the fall of 1982. (Approximate dates: November 12-14.)

I would like to adapt and present "The Country Husband", by John Cheever, a short story from the collection The Housebreaker of Shady Hill, and I graciously request your permission to do so.

Let me clarify a few points that may aid you in rendering a decision:

-This production is strictly a non-profit endeavor. No admission fee will be collected, and no money will change hands.

-This production is presented for educational purposes only, to fulfill my requirements for the Master of Arts degree.

-The production will not be videotaped or tape recorded.

-My adaptation will closely follow the original text of "The Country Husband, almost word for word. No additions will be made to the text, and deletions will be made only in the interests of time.

-This production has the full approval and sponsorship of the Department of Speech and Drama, North Texas State University.

I would very much appreciate your full support in this endeavor, and your permission to adapt and present "The Country Husband."

Thank you for your time and attention. I await your prompt reply.

Sincerely;

Chris Meesey

APPENDIX B

COPY OF LETTER GRANTING PERMISSION TO ADAPT AND PERFORM "THE COUNTRY HUSBAND"

ICM
INTERNATIONAL CREATIVE MANAGEMENT, INC.

Writer's Direct Dial No.
(212) 556- 6891

28 July 1982

Chris Meesey
1001 N. Bowen Road
Arlington, Texas 76012

Re: " The Country Husband" by John Cheever

Dear Chris Meesey,

This letter will grant you the right to adapt and produce two performances of the above short story as a part of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree at North Texas State University, as stated in your letter of 15 July

No other use may be made of this material and all rights remain with The Estate of John Cheever.

The following acknowledgement must be printed in the program:

"Special permission for these performances has been granted by International Creative Management on behalf of the Estate of John Cheever. "The Country Husband" Copyright (c) 1954 by John Cheever. First published in The New Yorker Magazine."

Sincerely,

Lynn Nesbit

/LN

APPENDIX C

COPY OF PROGRAM FOR SOUTHWEST THEATRE CONFERENCE PERFORMANCE

"THE COUNTRY HUSBAND"

a short story by

John Cheever

Adapted and Directed for Chamber Theatre by Chris Meesey

The Readers:

Shannon Crane

Sharon Croft

Frank Gonzales

James Howard

Valerie Maurer

Marilyn Woods

The production is in partial fulfilment for the masters degree in Speech Communication and Drama with an emphasis in Oral Interpretation at North Texas State University

Southwest Theatre Conference

Fort Worth, Texas

October 29, 1982

APPENDIX D

COPY OF OFFICIAL SOUTHWEST THEATRE CONFERENCE PROGRAM

SOUTHWEST THEATRE CONFERENCE

THIRTY-FIFTH ANNUAL CONVENTION

Americana Hotel

Fort Worth, Texas

October 27-30, 1982

APPENDIX E

COPY OF FLYER ANNOUNCING

"THE COUNTRY HUSBAND"

"THE COUNTRY HUSBAND"

by

JOHN CHEEVER

You are invited to attend a Chamber Theatre production of this John Cheever short story. The presentation is directed by Chris Meesey under the supervision of Dr. Ted Colson as partial fulfilment of the requirements for a masters degree with an emphasis in Oral Interpretation of Literature.

The Forum

Speech Communication & Drama Building

Thursday & Friday, November 11 & 12, 1982

7:00 P. M.

The performance is open to everyone & admission is free

APPENDIX F

COPY OF MEDIA NOTICE

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Thurs., Nov. 11 - Fri., Nov. 12

"The Country Husband": a Chamber Theatre production of the John Cheever short story will be presented by NTSU Reader's Theatre and The Division of Interpersonal and Public Communication as part of Communication Awareness Week. Adapted and directed by Chris Meesey, supervised by Dr. Ted Colson.
7 PM in the Speech/Drama Building, Room 265, (The Forum Room), North Texas State University, Denton.
FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

APPENDIX G

COPY OF COMMUNICATION AWARENESS WEEK SCHEDULE

DIVISION OF INTERPERSONAL AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AWARENESS WEEK

NOVEMBER 8-12,1982

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Monday, November 8th

1) Communicating Through Literature. NTSU's Readers' Theatre presents "Real Men Don't Eat Quiche," 12-1 p.m., 1 O'Clock Lounge. Famous "Bubble" display in Courtyard.
2) Division of Interpersonal and Public Communication, SPRING SEMESTER PREVIEW, 7-8 p.m., Speech Building, Room #265. Pick up course syllabi, meet professors, pre-enroll.

Tuesday, November 9th

1) Debate: The Essence of Democracy. NTSU's debate squad will argue both sides of "Should the United States eleminate its military presence in El Salvador?" 12:30-2 p.m., Union Courtyard.
2) Division of Interpersonal and Public Communication SPRING SEMESTER PREVIEW, 7-8 p.m., Wooten Building, Room #122. Pick up course syllabi, meet professors, pre-enroll.

Wednesday, November 10th

1) Interpersonal Communication: Sampler I. "The Unspoken Dialogue:Nonverbal Communication and Human Relations," will take place in the 1 O'Clock Lounge; "Interpersonal Communication Vignettes" and "Saying NO Effectively" 12-1 p.m., Courtyard.
2) Association for Communication Transfer (ACT) meeting, 3:30-4:30, Speech Building, Room 275. (ACT is a professional organization for majors/minors in interpersonal and public communication.)

Thursday, November 11th

1) Interpersonal Communication: Sampler II. "Name Memory," "Small Groups and the Tower of Babble," "Too Close for Comfort," 12-1 p.m., Courtyard.
2) Communicating Through Literature. NTSU's Readers' Theatre adaptation of John Cheever's "The Country Husband," 7:00 p.m., Speech Building, Room 265.

Friday, November 12th

1) A Potpourri of Public Communication. Advanced public speaking students will present speeches for a variety of situations, persuasive and ceremonial; "Persuasion in the Mass Media"--an exposition of the ways in which your thinking is affected by the media, 12-1 p.m., Courtyard.
2) Communication Through Literature. NTSU's Readers' Theatre adaptation of John Cheever's "The Country Husband," 7:00 p.m., Speech Building, Room 265.

SPECIAL BONUS

Wednesday, November 17th

Interpersonal and Public Communication Colloquium #2. Dr. Ted Colson will speak on "Literature and Oral Communication." Dr. John Gossett will address the issues involved in "Free Press and Fair Trial: Courtroom Cameras and the First Amendment," 4-5:30 p.m., Speech Building, Room 265.

APPENDIX H

COPY OF NTSU PROGRAM

NTSU READERS THEATRE

APPENDIX I

EXPLANATION OF PICTURE PLATES

I. (Top) Entire Cast - Opening Composition
NARRATORS: "To begin at the beginning-" (Clap)

(Bottom) Francis, Female Narrator, Henry, Julia--Dinner.
HENRY: Poor Mummy!

II. (Top) Francis, The Girls, Anne--Dream Sequence
THE GIRLS: The girl entered his mind.

(Bottom) Francis, Anne--Dream Sequence
SECOND GIRL: He was crossing the Atlantic with her on the old Mauretania . . .

III. (Top) Entire Cast- Closing Composition
FEMALE NARRATOR: It is a night where kings in golden suits ride elephants over the mountains.

(Bottom) Cast and Director
Left to Right: Sharon Croft, Marilyn Woods, Jim Howard, Shannon Crane, Valerie Maurer, Frank Gonzales, (Kneeling) Chris Meesey.

APPENDIX I

PICTURE PLATE I

PICTURE PLATE II

PICTURE PLATE III

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