FORMULA AND INNOVATION
IN THE PLAYS OF RACHEL CROTHERS

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INTRODUCTION

Rachel Crothers was America's foremost female dramatist through most of the 1920's and 1930's. This remarkable woman served the theatre not only as a popular playwright, but also as an important director, actress, and teacher for more than sixty years (1880's-1950). She is a unique figure in the history of American drama in that during her most productive years (1894-1937), she witnessed more than thirty of her plays open in New York.

The year 1906, ushered Crothers into the world of professional playwriting with a successful production of the full-length drama, The Three of Us at the Madison Square Theatre. The play ran for 227 performances before it closed, and it reopened the following year in London, with Ethel Barrymore starring in the leading role of Rhy MacChesney and with Crothers, herself, supervising the production.

Myself-Bettina, Crothers' first social problem drama, opened in 1908, and this work gave her an opportunity to stage and direct her own play. The following year, A Man's World was produced, and Crothers' reputation as a serious dramatist was born. The play was not a great commercial success, having only seventy-one performances at New York's Comedy Theatre, but it provoked debate in many newspapers and journals, and this provided the young playwright needed exposure.
Throughout the next thirty-one years, Rachel Crothers wrote and directed twenty new plays in New York, a prodigious accomplishment for any playwright. During World War I, she founded and supervised the Stage Women's War Relief, and then, in the Second World War, between 1940 and 1945, she again contributed to the national effort when she organized and led the American Theatre Wing for War Relief.

Rachel Crothers was presented numerous honors and awards during the 1930's. Ida Tarbell, in 1930, included Crothers in the list of "Fifty Foremost Women of the United States." When Ladies Meet was awarded the Megrue Prize in 1933 and was cited by the Theater Club as "the most outstanding play of the season." In 1937, Crothers was honored for her distinguished achievement at the Town Hall Club, which she helped to found in 1920. The Theater Club, in 1938, named Susan and God the season's most outstanding play. In 1939, Crothers was selected to be awarded the Chi Omega National Achievement Award for 1938, and Eleanor Roosevelt made the presentation at a White House ceremony.

From the view of official recognition, Rachel Crothers' reputation was at its peak during the 1930's. However, as a playwright, Crothers had her detractors. Many critics, from Crothers' own day to the present, have accused her of following a narrow, prescribed formula in order to assure herself commercial success. Lois C. Gottlieb, in her biography,

2 Gottlieb, p. 143.
Rachel Crothers (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), writes that Crothers' professional reputation suffers a deep, negative imprint from her close association with Broadway (assuming that this necessarily meant a sacrifice of imaginative, artistic quality in favor of mass audience appeal) and that major disagreements exist between those who rank Crothers among the innovative and significant American playwrights and those who patronize and condemn her as a successful formula dramatist.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a critical review of a representative sample of Crothers' plays. Such a study is important for two reasons. First, there has never been a critical analysis of Crothers' work to support or refute the formula charges, and this analysis will reveal if and where recurring patterns exist. Second, Rachel Crothers provides a good example of a successful playwright who never allowed the formula structure of her plays to weaken their theatrical effectiveness or wide popularity.

Contemporary works concerned with Rachel Crothers and her dramatic contribution do not include an analysis of her playwriting style. These studies are: 1) the unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The Career of Rachel Crothers, of Irving I. Abrahamson (University of Chicago, 1956), which presents a detailed biography of the playwright, lengthy appendices of plot summaries, and excerpts from critical reviews of the plays; 2) Om Prakash Bali's dissertation, The Treatment of Marriage in the Plays of Rachel Crothers (Miami University, 1979), which analyzes the plays that are primarily concerned with a woman's struggle for freedom in a man's world; 3) Lois C. Gottlieb's biography, Rachel Crothers, (Boston: Twayne
Publishers, 1979), a very helpful book which provides an accurate survey
of Crothers' plays relative to the manner in which they reflect the social
feminine concerns of their time; and 4) Woman in Focus in Major Plays and
Productions of Rachel Crothers, a dissertation by Zoe Coralnik Kaplan
(The City University of New York, 1979) which deals with ten major plays
of Rachel Crothers. This work focuses on the women characters and is
concerned with feminine life and the feminine hardships each play presents.

It has been necessary to examine a sample from the work of well-known
authorities on the subject of critical dramatic structure prevalent
during the early years of Crothers' training because this study attempts
to discover a formula playwriting structure. As primary source material,
these "how to" books provide solutions to dramatic problems encountered
by the novice playwright and were held in high regard by those trying to
learn the craft. Dramatic Technique, by George Pierce Baker, a manual
composed from lectures given at the Lowell Institute, Boston, in 1913,
provides excellent advice on playwriting techniques gained by its author
through years of teaching the subject. William Archer's Play-Making, A
Manual of Craftsmanship offers a textbook approach to the art and craft of
drama. Gustav Freytag's classic, Techniques of the Drama, represents a
structural approach to dramatic action, and The Analysis of Play Construc-
tion and Dramatic Principles, by W.T. Price, contains the theories and
philosophy of playwriting by the teacher of the American School of
Playwriting in New York. Elisabeth Woodbridge's The Drama: Its Law and
its Technique is an easy-to-read text that incorporates Freytag's ideas
on drama and includes a lengthy section on comedy. The other primary
source material used were reviews of Crothers' productions in major New
York newspapers and in theatre journals, such as Theatre Arts Monthly.

The plays of Rachel Crothers, of course, are the backbone of this
study. The four plays I have chosen as representative of her career,
and the dates in which they opened are: A Man's World (February 8, 1910),
Mary the Third (February 5, 1923), As Husbands Go (March 5, 1931), and
Susan and God (October 7, 1937). These four plays span the period of
Crothers' greatest dramatic output, ranging from the early period in 1910
(A Man's World) to her last successful play (Susan and God) at the height
of her professional career.

In order to give proper focus to the study, I have divided the text
into five chapters. Chapter I is a brief biography of Rachel Crothers
and a description of the historical period in which she lived. Since
Crothers was a very private person, details of her personal life are
scarce, but important dates that concern her professional career are
available. A useful analysis of the events and attitudes of the 1920's,
an era in which Crothers wrote many of her plays, is found in Only
Yesterday by Frederick Lewis Allen. This work covers many of the economic,
political and social currents of the time which were reflected in the
American theatre. Other sources consulted relative to American life in
the 1920's and 1930's were: The Great War and the Search for a Modern
Order and A History of the American People and Their Institutions, 1917-
1933, by Ellis W. Hawley; The Twenties: Forda, Flappers and Fanaticst,
edited by George E. Mowry; and Into the Twenties, by Burl Noggle.

Chapters II through V include detailed script analyses using as
references the critical dramatic theories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (ideas that doubtless influenced Crothers' writing style). Emphasis is placed on finding and identifying the recurring patterns in Crothers' plays.

Chapter Two deals with a thematic analysis of Crothers' work. Her plays have been classified "problem" plays by dramatic critics from her own day to the present, because each drama attempts to solve a topical social issue in a light, superficial way. All of Crothers' works studied involve women struggling with their role in modern society and attempting to win the romantic interest of their heart. With the exception of one of her earliest plays, A Man's World, Crothers always resolved her dramas with the conventional view that women belong rightfully in the home. Romantic love is portrayed as a universal equalizer among all levels of the female sex, no matter what particular generation or professional goal is being considered.

Chapter Three focuses on a character analysis. As a woman playwright, Crothers dramatizes her female characters with warmth and understanding. The heroines of each play, however, closely resemble each other in nature. Without exception, they are all beautiful, young to middle-aged, naive, and loved by a good man who wants to cherish and protect them. Initially, the women are not satisfied with their place in society's structure and desire freedom to live an independent life outside the boundaries of propriety. Underneath this sophisticated exterior, however, Crothers creates an insecure woman who desires only understanding and love from a man.
Chapter Four examines the structural form of Crothers' plays. Using the ideas of William Archer, George Pierce Baker, Gustav Freytag, and W.T. Price as a basis, Crothers' work is dissected in an attempt to reveal her alleged mechanical playwriting formula. An analysis of the "well-made" play by Stephen S. Stanton is used to detect any repeated similarities between Crothers' works and those of this nineteenth century dramatic genre. The "well-made" play formula, made famous by Scribe, Sardou, and Dumas fils, has been described by Stanton as the foundation of the problem play format of the early twentieth century. It is discovered in this chapter that skillfully Crothers' plays do resemble the work of these three well-made authors.

Crothers' dialogue is analyzed in Chapter Five. Using the theories of Archer, Baker, Freytag, and Price, her dialogue is seen to follow a clear, concise pattern of development. It is straightforward in nature and very accurate in characterizing the individual speaker. The dialogue develops naturally out of the action of the plot and is not crafted to represent the views of Crothers herself.

The final section deals with the conclusions that can be drawn concerning the playwriting formula of Rachel Crothers. It reveals the techniques she borrowed from other authors and those that are uniquely her own. An appendix, providing detailed synopses of the four plays used in the study and a chronology of the important dates in Crothers' life,

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including first performances of her plays, is also included.

Rachel Crothers was a highly productive and prominent figure in the American theatre for more than four decades. She provided many hours of entertainment for thousands of people. A "formula" playwright or not, her reputation as a productive dramatist demands a thorough investigation of her writing style.
CHAPTER I

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RACHEL CROTHERS

Rachel Crothers was born in 1878 in Bloomington, Illinois, a Victorian stronghold known as the "cultural capital" of the state. Her parents, Eli Kirk Crothers and Marie Depew Crothers, were both physicians, her mother being the first woman ever to practice medicine in Bloomington. When Rachel was very young, her mother became a doctor in order to help support her family because her husband had been forced into bankruptcy—"Your father was too generous and trusted too many people." Rachel's grandfather, Elijah Depew, had been a personal friend of Abraham Lincoln, and had helped promote his Presidential campaign.

Rachel was the youngest of nine children (five of whom died in infancy or early childhood), and spent her childhood days alone while her brothers and sisters were away at school. To entertain herself, she played with paper dolls, and these eventually came to hold a great

2 Rachel Crothers. "The Box in the Attic" (Unfinished fragment of Crothers' autobiography, dated March 12, 1953), found in Kaplan, p. 3.
significance for her: "they were the beginning of it all. . . . My theatre came into being on the floor with my paper dolls when I was four years old--building houses for them out of books--speaking their dialogue--living their lives--finishing one set of lines before I began another." 3

Crothers' theatrical activities began in earnest at the age of twelve, when she co-authored a simple play entitled Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining. She later recounted this experience in her unfinished autobiography:

Happy times began for me with plenty of friends in school. One girl in particular--May--I especially loved and admired. She was adorably pretty and an awful lot of fun. We had in common a strong sense of the dramatic. When we were perhaps twelve I suggested that we write a play to which she acquiesced and we began this drama in collaboration in profound secrecy. As the work progressed, we were more and more absorbed in it. May sometimes became a little bored and weary with the hard work I had got her into--but not for a moment did I let her stop. 4

The two girls supervised the production of the play, which was presented at May's house before their parents and friends. Crothers later wrote, "I can not at all remember the reaction of that distinguished first night audience, I only know that they didn't laugh. They were probably dumfounded[3 sic] that--such as it was--we had delivered a

3 Kaplan, p. 2.
4 Kaplan, p. 4.
complete thing."

After graduating from the Illinois State Normal University High School in 1891 at the unusually early age of thirteen, Crothers enrolled at the New England School of Dramatic Instruction in Boston, where she graduated after only one term with a certificate from the principal, Henry Mader Pitt, acknowledging her skills as a "teacher, reader, and reciter." During this period, she gave elocution recitals in Bloomington, Illinois and in the Boston area, where she presented such works as the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet, Brander Matthews' skit, "The Silent System," "The Elf Child" by James Whitcomb Riley, and selections from Sheridan's The School for Scandal.

In 1896, Crothers moved to New York and, at the age of eighteen, decided to launch her career as an actress.

I knew no one in New York—either in or out of the theatre—but I had heard of David Belasco and Daniel Frohman—and they were good enough to answer my letters and see me. But they didn't find anything in me of any value whatsoever and no jobs were forthcoming. So I decided to put my remaining and

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5 Kaplan, p. 5.
6 There is no reference to her family's reaction to her attending school in Boston, but because of obvious financial support, it can be inferred that they did not greatly object.
8 Gottlieb, p. 16.
rapidly melting dollars into a short course in a school of acting. Not that I thought I needed it at all—but it would keep me in New York. I couldn’t turn back. I had burned my bridges.

Crothers attended the Stanhope-Wheatcroft school of acting for one term as a student and remained for four years as an instructor. She began her creative work at the school by writing and directing one-act plays which were used by the students as showcases for their talents. In the fall of 1897, Crothers made her New York acting debut with E.A. Sothern’s company. She continued to actively pursue a professional acting career for several more years, appearing in many minor roles with Madame Rhea, the Lyceum Stock Company in New York, and a touring company of The Christian.

Even though acting dominated her professional life, Crothers continued to write one-act plays which received encouraging reviews. In the New York Express on October 4, 1902, a critic wrote of her play, Which Way? (one of three works presented at the Madison Square Theatre by Wheatcroft School students): "The best play of the afternoon... Miss Crothers made the hit of the performance and was assailed with ‘bravos’—an unusual incident at a dramatic school matinee."

A one-act comedy, The Rector, presented again at the Madison Square

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9 "The National Achievement Award is Presented to Rachel Crothers," The Eleusis of Chi Omega, 41 (September 1939), p. 429.
10 Gottlieb, p. 17.
11 Kaplan, p. 7.
Theatre in 1902, was Crothers' first work to be professionally performed. Arthur H. Quinn in his *A History of the American Drama*, describes this play as "a treatment, with real insight, of a young clergyman who marries a pretty but not very practical girl, instead of the wife selected for him by his congregation." 12

At the turn of the twentieth century, when Rachel Crothers was beginning her serious writing, the American theatre was experiencing a phenomenal growth and change. New theatres were appearing everywhere; where there had been twenty theatres in New York in 1903, there were eighty by 1927. 13 Stock companies were springing up all across the country, with over 2,000 operating in 1910. 14 Over 500 road shows were busy performing diluted versions of Broadway hits with casts trying diligently to imitate the originals. 15

Commercial tyranny, an unpleasant side effect of all this expansion, also flourished in the American theatre of 1900. The Syndicate, a monopoly formed in 1896, acquired control of a majority of the country's theatres and ruthlessly levied its demands on producers and performers. A few famous producers, such as David Belasco, held out against the Syndicate's dictates, as did the not so well known Rachel Crothers who

14 Taubman, p. 126.
15 Taubman, p. 126.
produced her plays in independent theatres. Performers such as Minnie Maddern Fiske, Richard Mansfield, and Joseph Jefferson, also played in churches, tents, and sports arenas rather than capitulate to the Syndicate's demands.

In spite of all its activity, the American theatre at the turn of the century did not reflect many of the new dramatic impulses which were then enveloping Europe. In Paris, André Antoine had begun to develop experimental works dealing with naturalism and truth, and, in 1887, founded the Theatre Libre. At the same time, Strindberg in Stockholm, Stanislavsky in Moscow, Yeats in Dublin, and Reinhardt in Berlin also established new theatres to encourage the production of innovative forms of dramatic art.

Although a number of European repertory companies touring in this country were performing the new and exciting plays of Ibsen, Shaw, Strindberg, and Chekhov, ardent American supporters of sophisticated drama soon began to clamor for a native theatre that would develop as an art form as well as achieve commercial success. Unfortunately, the popular, contemporary playwrights provided little incentive. Joseph Wood Krutch writes that such turn of the century authors as Tom Robertson, James A. Herne and Clyde Fitch were able to reach the high level they attained only by comparison with the other playwrights of their day.

"It is not merely that they seem conventional, unreal, timid, and old fashioned by the 'smart' standards of today, they seem almost equally conventional, unreal, timid, and old fashioned if they were read with
the best novels of the time in mind." 16

A minor step forward in the development of a responsible school of American dramatic writing was the appearance of William Vaughn Moody and his play, The Great Divide, presented on October 3, 1906 at the Princess Theatre in New York. 17 This work has been both condemned as a "hair-curling melodrama" and praised as "the first modern American drama." 18 Though the play is melodramatic in style, Moody had the foresight to see that both of his central characters changed and grew as the plot progressed, and that the happy ending made some sense. In the same year, Langdon Mitchell produced a social comedy, The New York Idea, which hinted at the spirit of the new century, with its more casual attitude toward marriage and divorce in sophisticated circles, and a few other dramatists, including Augustus Thomas, Edward Sheldon, and Percy MacKaye, began to exert some influence in this direction.

In 1906, Rachel Crothers entered into this hodgepodge of male professional playwrights with her first successful full-length play, The Three of Us (produced the same year as The Great Divide and The New York Idea). This play was first performed at the small, independently owned Madison Square Theatre, and ran for 227 performances. The following year it traveled to London with Ethel Barrymore cast in the leading role,

17 Taubman, p. 134.
and with Crothers herself supervising the production. Arthur Quinn writes of the play, "if it is not as profound a study of the contrasted Eastern and Western types as Moody gave us in the same year in The Great Divide, it is a vivid and sympathetic presentation of a girl's character." 19

In Walter Eaton's summary of the early years of twentieth century American drama, he cites this work as a sign of the growth occurring in the American theatre. 20 However, it did not differ from the prevailing criteria of theatrical success--a melodramatic plot based on secrets, a selfless "too good to be believed" heroine, and the obligatory happy ending.

Crothers' next play, The Coming of Mrs. Patrick, presented in 1907, failed and closed after thirteen performances. This unfortunate event made a lasting impression on the struggling playwright, and years later, in 1928, she recalled in a lecture given to student playwrights at the University of Pennsylvania, that before the play was performed all the managers in New York knew that there was something wrong with it, though none of them could say exactly what it was. 21 James Forbes, a professional playwright, advised her to "just cut out all this other stuff

19 Quinn, p. 51.
and stick to the main story," but neither Crothers nor the managers followed that suggestion. Later, Crothers admitted that Forbes was right. 22

_Myself-Bettina_, Crothers' first social problem drama, opened in 1908, and the leading actress, Maxine Elliott, to whom she had sold the play, offered Crothers her first chance to professionally stage and direct one of her own plays. This play was also a commercial failure, surviving only thirty-two performances at Daly's Theatre. In these early works, by attempting to give her characters environmental motives for their actions, Crothers became overly concerned with theme at the expense of characterization and plot, and this defect took its toll. Burns Mantle wrote in 1908, that _Myself-Bettina_ "is a modest little comedy drama in which the theme is so much more impressive than the manner of its handling that it creates the impression of being topheavy. . . . Miss Crothers is thoroughly earnest and no doubt feels more deeply on the subject she introduces than she is able to express, but she has invaded a field in which German and Norwegian masters of the psychological drama have preceded her and her efforts are bound to appear trivial in comparison with theirs." 23

In the following year _A Man's World_ was produced, and Crothers'

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reputation as a serious social dramatist was born. With only seventy-one performances to its credit, the play was not a great commercial success, but it provided abundant fuel for debate in various newspapers and journals. Adolph Klausman wrote glowingly in the New York Times of February 13, 1910: "Miss Crothers, in writing this interesting play ... performs a useful purpose. She emphasizes the need of a higher moral standard and a lesser tolerance of evil, and she drives her argument home by the forces of an interesting example." 24

Eaton, in At the New Theatre and Others, states that the work "by its uncompromising allegiance to its promises (though the logical conclusion is not the happy ending dear to convention), its searching truth of feminine psychology, its air of quiet but studied realism, its obvious significance as a comment on the feminist movement of the day—a thoughtful, sympathetic, intelligent comment—took its place as one of the most interesting native dramas brought to New York during the season." 25

He and She which opened in 1912 as The Herefords, concerns the struggle between the experiences of a traditional woman's life as wife and mother and her desire to be a successful artist. Its production history is confusing, since this play, unlike Crothers' other works,

went through two years of tryouts as a touring production in an attempt to convince New York producers that it could have a profitable commercial run. Initially seen, in the fall of 1911, as He and She, the play failed. In 1912 it was renamed The Herefords. A very well-known actress, Viola Allen, was cast in the lead, and another road tryout was organized, starting in Boston. Unfortunately, this effort also failed to win the play a production in New York. Eight years later, after Grothers had become better known as a playwright, and the value placed on success on the road had declined, she brought He and She to New York, playing the lead herself. The play opened at the Little Theatre to wide critical and popular acclaim, but it never achieved the commercial success for which Grothers had hoped.

Grothers wrote six additional plays which were produced in New York before 1920: Ourselves (1913) which deals with prostitution and the moral climate in which it flourishes; Young Wisdom (1914) which is concerned with the emancipation of women, monogamy, the double standard, marriage, motherhood, and human sexuality; Old Lady 31 (1916) which centers on an elderly couple faced with poverty, hard luck and human weaknesses in 1860; Mother Carey's Chickens (1917) which recounts how an urban and fatherless family cheerfully turns adversity into a tool for forging character; A Little Journey (1918) which is set in a railroad car traveling from east to west; and 39 East (1919), a lighthearted romance which relates the adventures of a small town girl in the big city.

Howard Taubman writes that the preparation for the revolution of the
nineteen twenties occurred in a multiplicity of ways and places. 26 Actor-managers like Henry Miller, E.A. Sothern and Margaret Anglin, and managers such as Harrison Grey Fiske, Winthrop Ames, and Arthur Hopkins promoted ideals beyond the conventional and successful. Teachers such as George Pierce Baker, famous for his "Workshop 47" at Harvard, and Frederich H. Koch at the University of North Dakota and the University of North Carolina, were eager to move beyond commercial boundaries.

In 1910, a group of enthusiasts desiring a more mature drama formed the Drama League and began publication of the Drama Quarterly which survived until 1931. In 1912, "Little Theatres" began to appear across the country, including the Toy Theatre in Boston, the Chicago Little Theatre, and the Little Theatre of Winthrop Ames in New York. Most of these houses closed after only a few years, but a few, such as the Cleveland Playhouse and the Pasadena Playhouse, became distinguished semiprofessional or professional centers of dramatic art.

The Washington Square Players, which became the nucleus of the Theatre Guild came into existence in 1915, as did the Provincetown Players, the latter converting a stable on Macdougal Street in Greenwich Village into the Playwright's Theatre, which had an exciting career until 1929. Eugene O'Neill was the shining contributor of this group, which produced, in addition to his short pieces, such works as The Emperor Jones, Diff'rent, The Hairy Ape, All God's Chillun Got Wings and Desire

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26 Taubman, p. 149.
Under the Elms.

However, a rift was forming between those who desired a theatre of experimental and high art forms and those who wanted a commercial theatre to offer the best entertainment for the public. The two sides became extremely polarized. Ellis Hawley, an historian of the nineteen twenties, writes of the conflict, "If high culture in the 1920's can be seen as the creative outpouring of an estranged and increasingly autonomous subculture, the period's popular art[sic] are viewed as an array of commercialized responses to mass leisure and affluence." 27 Hawley places the output of commercial theatre "closer to the realm of narcotics than to that of art" and states that much of it was produced "under stipulations that virtually forebade the expression of profound feelings or insights." 28

Rachel Crothers aligned herself solidly behind the commercial theatre and became increasingly hostile to the anti-commercial doctrines of the "new American theatre." This culminated in her participating in an interesting activity which clearly revealed the sharp divisions that existed between the commercial and anti-commercial camps. In 1915, Augustus Thomas led seventy dramatists from the Society of American Dramatists and Composers (including the prominent Rachel Crothers) in a well publicized "pot boiling experiment." By following prescribed

28 Hawley, p. 166.
formulas for character and action, the group intended to collaborate and produce a successful Broadway play. They selected a popular actress to star in the production and created a character type with which she was identified—a sympathetic but ruined woman. Next, they determined the play's "big situation" and created events leading up to and away from this pinnacle. Finally, they included an illicit romance surrounded by mystery and an offstage pistol shot to capitalize on the American preference for this type of melodramatic entertainment.

Thomas offered the completed scenario to any student in George Baker's playwriting class at Harvard who would supply the dialogue. He even agreed to help find a producer for the finished work. Baker disliked the excessive commercialism of the scheme, and Eugene O'Neill, a student in the class, was reportedly so disgusted that he rushed out after class and drank himself into a stupor. 29

In a lecture presented at the University of Pennsylvania in 1928, Crothers cautioned her listeners: "Again I say, with all my heart, there is one very grave menace to the theatre in New York which has come out of this mad passion for the inside of the theatre, and that is the so-called small art theatre." 30 She defined these theatres as little rebellious groups trying to elevate the stage by performing only works

29 Gottlieb, p. 77.
having literary value too great for the commercial theatre.

The scenery is arty, the acting is immature, the direction weak, but each little group has a cult and a following; they raise money, they create false ideas about the art of the theatre, and all this depletes the very stream of energy and money which ought to go into one strong current for an endowed theatre. An art theatre, yes, but art supplied by the very best out of the professional theatre. 31

Quantitatively, the New York theatre reached its highest point in the nineteen twenties, and Rachel Crothers contributed to it a prolific amount of dramatic material; during that decade, eight of her plays were performed on Broadway. At the same time, there appeared a varied scope of commercial theatre from other major playwrights, including important works by Eugene O'Neill, (e.g., Beyond the Horizon, The Emperor Jones, and Strange Interlude); Elmer Rice’s The Adding Machine and Street Scene; Maxwell Anderson’s White Desert, What Price Glory, Saturday’s Children and Gods of Lightning; Philip Barry’s You and I, The Youngest and Paris Bound; and George Kaufman and Marc Connelly’s Dulcy, To the Ladies and Beggar on Horseback.

Broadway also opened its doors to foreign drama for those audiences demanding a "higher artistic" form of theatre. From 1919 to 1929 the Theatre Guild presented 47 plays from abroad, including works by Shaw, Kaiser, Toller, Tolstoi, Andreyev, Ibsen, Strindberg and others.

The 1920's was a cynical, restless time with the country trying to struggle back to normalcy following World War I. "Flappers," the young, independently minded "new" women of the post-war decade, smoked cigarettes openly and defiantly, drank "hard" liquor, and "necked" in parked cars. "Flapping Not Repented Of," in The New York Times, July 16, 1922, discussed the nature of this current feminine type.

... She will never make you a hatband or knit you a necktie, but she'll drive you from the station hot Summer nights in her own little sport car. ... She'll dance as long as you care to, and she'll take everything you say the way you mean it, not getting 'sore' as her older sister did. 32

"Petting" and "necking" were new terms invented to describe departures from courtship rules. According to Eleanor Rowland Wembridge in "Petting and the Campus" necking was "only from the neck up" while petting involved "anything else" you pleased. 33 F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote concerning the relaxed morals of his generation, "None of the Victorian mothers--and most of the mothers were Victorian--had any idea how casually their daughters were accustomed to be kissed." 34

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Families were torn with dissension over cigarettes, gin, and the after-dark activities in the backseat of their automobile. Two million soldiers returned home from Europe and were expected to settle into the humdrum routine of American life as though nothing had happened, to accept the moral values of elders who seemed to be living in an idyllic land which the horrors of war had killed for them. They could not do it and they loudly said so. "The older generation had certainly pretty well ruined this world before passing it on to us," wrote John F. Carter in the Atlantic Monthly, September, 1920. "They give us this thing, knocked to pieces, leaky, red-hot, threatening to blow up; and then they are surprised that we don't accept it with the same attitude of pretty, decorous enthusiasm with which they received it, way back in the 'eighties'." 35

Changes in fashion mirrored the instability of society. The short skirt, the boyish form, the straight, long-waisted dresses, the frank use of make-up were all signs of a real change in the American feminine ideal. By the mid-twenties one male observer was writing with appreciation of the "New Nakedness" in the "New Era of Undressing." 36

Women had won the right to suffrage in 1920, and now they wanted freedom, freedom to work and especially to play without any moral

35 Allen, p. 79.
guidelines. The liberated woman of the 1920's would have chuckled over Rachel Crothers' agonizing with the double standard in *A Man's World* of just ten years earlier. Millions of people were moving toward acceptance of what a bon-vivant of earlier days had said was his idea of the proper state of morality—"A single standard, and that a low one." 37

A number of organizations, such as the Y.W.C.A., were active in protesting what they felt to be an enormous amount of immodest dress and loose conduct. Through its press department the Y.W.C.A. supplied newspapers with material which appeared under such headlines as "High Heels Losing Ground Even in France" and "It Isn't What the Girl Does, It's Just the Way She Does It." 38

Neither did state legislatures overlook the chance to prescribe morality. In Utah, a statute enacted in 1925 provided a fine and imprisonment for those wearing street skirts higher than three inches above the ankle. Philadelphia permitted seven inches of ankle and leg to be seen, but in Ohio it was declared that "no female over fourteen years of age shall wear a skirt which does not reach to that part of the foot known as the instep." 39

Playwrights of the time were expressing this revolutionary climate in the American theatre. Taubman writes that their realism did not

37 Allen, p. 96.
attempt to imitate or outdo nature, but it chose only "pieces of reality that would shed light on character and emotion." 40 Characters were common people, not sugar coated or soured with mechanical, old fashioned theatrical ideas of what people must be like. The clear distinctions between heroes and villains were replaced by subtler differences. Trite situations were no longer acceptable nor was the belief that it was adequate to be a smooth-talking moralist.

Alan Downer, a theatre historian, writes that period playwrights "pulled down the revered stereotypes which had been his [the playwrights'] dependable guides: the inviolability of marriage, the sanctity of mother love, the heroism of war, the respectability of commerce." 41 They stopped looking at life through rose-colored glasses, acknowledged society's pretensions and excesses, and invited all Americans to see themselves as others see them.

The decade opened for Rachel Crothers, more preoccupied with a nagging failure from her past than with the literary experimentation of the present, with a starring role in a financially unsuccessful revival of He and She. This was followed in 1921 by a great commercial success, Nice People, which ran for 242 performances and starred Francine Larrimore. This play, a comment on post-war society with emphasis on its youth,

40 Taubman, p. 166.
anticipates the country's obsession with its younger generation. The opening scene reveals young men and women smoking, drinking, and discussing, among other things, whether women's underwear is outdated. The play itself deals with a rich, spoiled New York flapper, Teddy Gloucester, 42 who through the course of the play, turns into a hard-working self-reliant farmer.

*Everyday*, starring Tallulah Bankhead, also opened in 1921, but it closed after only thirty performances. Here the action is concerned with a romance between two young people and how their love is able to restore value to a competitive and superficial world. In 1923, Crothers devoted a whole play, *Mary the Third*, to the generation gap of the twenties. The production of this work ran for 160 performances at the Thirty-Ninth Street Theatre in New York. It deals with three generations of women, their opposing views of marriage, and their similar hopes that love will last forever. The play also reveals the difference between romantic expectations and the monotony of daily living and how the "new woman" of the 1920's plans to adjust to a complex, transitional society.

*Expressing Willie*, produced in 1924, satirizes the followers of Freud who believed that the release of suppressions would produce a healthier human being. The central figure, Willie Smith, is the unsuspecting target of an exotic divorced woman who uses psychoanalysis

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42 Here again, Crothers uses a male name for a female character. This occurs in only two of her plays—*A Man's World* and *Nice People*.
in an attempt to seduce him into a hasty marriage proposal.

A Lady's Virtue experienced a moderately successful run of 136 performances in 1925, while Venus, in 1927, closed after only eight nights. The latter deviates from Crothers' realistic social comedies in its reliance on a futuristic life on Venus, where beings progress in terms of increased mental and spiritual awareness and perform a chemical experiment on earth that results in drastic sexual role reversals.

Crothers' last work of the 1920's, Let Us Be Gay, ran for 132 performances in 1929. The play focuses on the life of Kitty Brown, a sexually active woman of high society who lives by the new morality, but who by the end of the work has traveled full circle and pleads for husbands and wives to restore the value of marriage by practicing sexual fidelity. In spite of its message, the tone is light, and serious questions concerning monogamy are interleaved with gossip about ongoing romances.

The Stock Market crash of October, 1929, ended the prosperity of the post-war 1920's. The theatre, like most other businesses, did not experience an instantaneous bottoming out of production or patronage; 240 plays, including revivals, were performed in New York during the 1929-30 season. 43 Producers went courageously ahead with their plans and commitments, and only in the second half of the season were they forced to retrench somewhat as people came to the theatre less often.

43 Taubman, p. 203.
Soon, however, there were fewer hits, reduced profits, lower salaries, trimmed rentals, and many empty theatres.

The theatre's problems in the early 1930's resulted from not only the disastrous financial situation of the country, but also from the rapidly developing sophistication of talking motion pictures. Movie studios increasingly competed for popular and successful actors and playwrights. During the 1930-31 season, 190 productions were presented in New York, 50 fewer than the previous year, and by 1938-39, there were only 80.

As the new decade arrived, Broadway was producing its usual commercial fare--comedies that promised more racy situations than they delivered, farces with an abundance of physicality and humor, melodramas that relied on action and suspense rather than on character or theme, and romances that solely depended on sentiment and sweetness. Noel Coward was currently at the pinnacle of his career appearing in Private Lives with Gertrude Lawrence and Laurence Olivier, and in Design for Living with Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt.

"Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" from Americana (1932-33), became the theme song of the era, and theatre people, like millions of other unemployed Americans during the 1930's found themselves in desperate straights. Rachel Crothers helped to organize the Stage Relief Fund to raise money for needy theatre workers' most urgent bills. Selena Royle,

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Taubman, p. 206.
an actress, founded the Actors' Dinner Club, which offered meals at $1.00 apiece to those who could afford the price and without charge to theatre people who could not afford to pay. During one winter in the Depression, 150,000 meals were served, 120,000 of them at no cost. 45

As in prior decades, the battle between commercial and non-commercial theatre raged on. New theatre groups were formed to produce plays of social protest that traditional theatre managers refused to handle. Some members of these new groups were political leftists dedicated to radical social action. An example of this non-commercial theatrical form was the Group Theatre, an offshoot of the Theatre Guild. Graduates of the Group (including Lee Strasberg, Stella and Luther Adler, Franchot Tone, John Garfield, Elia Kazan, and Clifford Odets), made an important impact which influenced the theatre for the next thirty to forty years.

However, Rachel Crothers, remaining true to form, continued to align herself with the commercial theatre which perceived its purpose as to provide a diversion from care and misery. She called the theatre "the quickest escape from ourselves into the world of imagination" and emphasized the point that "escape is more and more imperative as civilization makes life more hideous for us." 46 Therefore, as most playwrights of the Depression era were concerned with financial problems in their works, Crothers "excluded any such reference from her

successful comedies of manners." Her plays of the 1930's, like her plays of the 1920's, are set among the sophisticated, wealthy class of society.

As Husbands Go, produced in 1931, had 148 performances in its first run, and 131 performances in a 1933 revival. The play is simple and sentimental, and focuses on a woman's expectations for happiness and self-realization. Crothers contrasts the values of a middle-aged Midwestern woman with European permissiveness and sophistication. Her happy ending reaffirms the Wizard of Oz moral, that true happiness is always found in your own backyard.

When Ladies Meet was a successful production that ran for 173 performances in its first New York run in 1932 and thirteen performances in its revival in 1933. The play is based on a romantic triangle between a man, his wife, and another woman. The two women, unaware of their rivalry, become friends and learn important lessons about love, marriage, and themselves. The play won the Negrue Prize for Comedy, as the best comedy of the season, and it left its audience, "a little brighter and a little more cheered up" in the middle of America's economic Depression.

Crothers achieved her greatest commercial success in 1937 with her last professionally produced play, Susan and God, which ran for 228

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48 Gottlieb, p. 133.
performances in New York. This work was later adapted for a film produced in 1940, with its screenplay written by Anita Loos. The play concerns Susan Trexel, a wealthy, bored, and dissatisfied wife and mother who, while traveling in Europe, embraces an evangelical religion which bears a close resemblance to Buchmanism or the Oxford Group movement. 49 Susan goes about trying to convert everyone she knows in America to this movement, but by the end of the play it is she who is forced to change in order to rebuild her own life and that of her family.

In the New York Times of November 7, 1937, Crothers wrote that she wanted to prove in Susan and God that "happiness comes from giving, not taking, from suffering and from service." 50 The play's conventional happy ending is explained in Crothers' hope to express a little optimism in a discouraged and pessimistic world.

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49 The Oxford Group Movement, founded by Frank Buchman in 1921 at Oxford University, is not to be confused with the famous Oxford Movement of 1833 which restored the theology of the High Church to the Church of England. According to the Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition, (Danbury, Conn.: Americana Corporation, 1972) p. 678, the Oxford Group Movement held that its members were "an expeditory force from all faiths and races engaged in a race with time to modernize the character and purpose of man." They stressed "love of home, homeland, and humanity." Buchman aimed to develop in every country, groups of leaders trained in the four moral standards of "absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love." The confession of sins was seen as a way to attain the high state of spirituality needed to become a member of the movement.

It seemed to me that in this sick world, heartbroken over its own failures, that side by side with more universal horror than the world had ever known, there is a more universal hunger and reaching out for a spiritual healing, a wider search for the Infinite Truth that can answer our fumbling questions and help us to go on believing in Goodness—in God.

Although Susan and God was Crothers' last contribution as a playwright to the American theatre, she continued to remain intermittently active in the theatre for another fourteen years as a producer and director, and her plays were revived often by theatre groups throughout the country. She was awarded the Chi Omega National Achievement Award for 1938 in a White House ceremony presided over by Eleanor Roosevelt. Her philanthropic work continued during World War II when she organized and led the American Theatre Wing for War Relief and founded the Stage Door Canteen in New York. In 1941, Crothers was honored by the Drama Study Club for the year's most distinguished service to the theatre.

Even though all of Crothers' plays dealt exclusively with romantic love and the relationships between men and women, Crothers herself never married. She was called a "workaholic," a person singlemindedly dedicated to her art and craft—but a person who loved it all. "I thank God I love my work better than anything else in the world—it is so exciting and interesting... Work is the most healing thing in the

51 "Whence Came Susan," p. 189.
world, and I am especially grateful now that I have an all absorbing work to do and consider myself a very lucky person..." 52

During the 1930's and for some years later, Grothers kept an apartment in New York but spent most of her time at her large, comfortable Connecticut farmhouse, which she named "Roadside." 53 She died there in 1958, at the age of eighty.

52 Kaplan, p. 256.
53 Gottlieb, p. 145.
CHAPTER II
A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Crothers' dramatic reputation has long been negatively colored by the accusation that she routinely followed a prescribed playwriting formula in order to achieve commercial success. The evidence supporting this allegation can be found in Crothers' own day. John Hutchens, in criticizing As Husbands Go in his "Broadway in Review" column in Theatre Arts Monthly (May, 1931), argued that after twenty-five years of writing practice for Broadway, this latest Rachel Crothers comedy could have been written from three months to ten years earlier. "The sum of its virtues when well assembled, is skillful minor entertainment unhampered by efforts to communicate messages or points of view. Indeed, As Husbands Go is so completely within the 'sure-fire' formula that it may bear a rewarding scrutiny." 1 Unfortunately, Hutchens' scrutiny does not provide an investigation of great depth and therefore remains a superficial labeling of Crothers' technique as "matching a laugh for a heart throb," or a stab at her direction of the play, which he calls

"calculating," because it supplements an "amusing speech with appropriate business." 2

Similar criticism is still found today. Zoe Kaplan maintained in her 1979 dissertation that "because she [Crothers] developed a solid sense of craft and of what makes a piece of theatre work effective, [her] plays are enjoyable and 'well-made' . . . for if Crothers was an innovator in subject matter she was not one in style. . . ." 3 Kaplan, however, does not elaborate on the relationship between Crothers' plays and those of the "well-made" play school of Scribe, Sardou, or Dumas fils. Crothers, herself, added credence to the accusation by participating in the highly publicized "pot boiling" project of the Augustus Thomas group to produce a successful Broadway play by following prescribed formulas for character and action. 4

While the charges and evidence are apparently authentic, no one has yet defined the exact formula allegedly used by Crothers in her plays. The playwright herself discussed only the technical chronology she used in attacking new dramatic ideas. When asked by student playwrights about her playwriting method, Crothers sketched it out as "first the idea, then the story which will concretely develop this idea, then the characters

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2 Hutchens, p. 371.
3 Kaplan, p. 18.
4 See Chapter I, pp. 21-22.
which spring instantaneously with the story because they are the story and they are the idea—out of them and their natures it all comes. Then the construction. . . . And last, the dialogue where the characters take the whole thing into their own hands and say to me what they think." 5

Although this outline provides only the mechanical steps followed by Crothers in developing her plays, and although each dramatic story will obviously differ, her writing formula should be discernible in one or all of the other four criteria listed: 1) idea; 2) characters; 3) construction; and 4) dialogue. These divisions broadly cover the bases of playwriting and provide appropriate starting points for an analysis of her work.

Crothers, like her contemporary, William Archer, the author of *Play-Making*, believed the first step in writing a play is to choose an idea, a theme. 6 The underlying theme in all of Crothers' plays is romantic love, with a frequent subordinate idea being the struggle of women against restraints on their sex by society. The main characters are always young to middle-aged women in love with likable, sympathetic men, who find it necessary to live outside the boundaries of society. These women, with their independent ideals, cause the conflicts in each play by opposing the values of the society in which they live. The resolution of this tension is either an unhappy ending or an unexpected reversal. Because the principal characters tend to clash with the norms

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of their environment and propound theories which attempt to change society, Crothers has been called a social "problem playwright." 7

John Gassner has defined "problem plays" as "limiting forms" which try "to squeeze big subjects into nutshell." 8 They endeavor, he feels, to tackle a large and complicated issue by means of a small complication in the lives of inconsequential people. This minor conflict manages to reduce the universality of the subject to a middle-class cliche. Therefore, a problem play is ostensibly timely and seems to contain some substance, but in reality its treatment is superficial, either defining too simply or resolving too easily a contemporary problem that could be, or should be, rendered with more complexity.

Crothers' plays may be viewed in this manner. Her early works, such as A Man's World, are oriented more toward social reform than are her later plays (e.g., As Husbands Go and Susan and God), but they all attempt to solve large social issues in a limited and parochial manner. Crothers, however, never admitted to having a particular "axe to grind," nor to using her work as a personal social/political forum. "I've been told that my plays are a long procession reflecting the changing attitude of the world toward women. If they are, that was completely unconscious on my part. Any change like that, that gets on to the stage, has already

7 Krutch, p. 163.
happened in life." 9

The theme of *A Man's World* involves a large moral question—the injustice of the double standard. Eleanor Flexner, author of *American Playwrights: 1918-1938, The Theater Retreats from Reality*, praises the drama for tackling "the question of the double standard more unequivocally and intelligently than it had yet been treated by an American dramatist." 10 However, this topical social issue is reduced to small magnitude which can only reflect itself in the personal lives of the main characters.

The heroine of the play is given a male name (Frank Ware), the origin of which is never discussed. This free-spirited, social reforming, single parent falls in love with Malcolm Gaskell, a conservative newspaperman who represents not only the social views held by various male members of their boarding house, but also by society at large. His masculine code emphasizes two main judgments of women; namely, that their nature is emotional, submissive, and morally superior to man's, and that their behavior is subject to man's approval. "Women are only meant to be loved," Malcolm tells Frank, "and men have got to take care of them." 11 Malcolm believes that moral standards are

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different for the two sexes. "Man sets the standards for woman. He knows she's got to suffer for it" (I, 40). Malcolm, however, should not be confused with a "chauvinist." He is a man who respects the values of his 1909 society, and he is very much in love with Frank. Malcolm tells her, "I love you, Frank. I'd lay down my life for you. You're the whole world to me" (IV, 110).

The other female characters in the play, besides Frank Ware, likewise subscribe to Malcolm's views. Lione Brune, the temperamental opera singer who foments suspicion against Frank, expresses a very cynical acceptance of the double standard which barely masks her dislike of men. Clara Oakes, a pathetic painter of miniatures, begs for a man to love her. "There's nobody to take care of me and I'm simply not capable of taking care of myself." She continues, "I've tried--God knows I've tried--and what is the use? ... I often wish I were pretty and bad and could have my fling and die" (III, 86).

Frank eventually rebels against the pressure of Malcolm's type of caring. She wants to be free and especially demands that people accept her for what she is in the present and not judge her for what she might have done in the past. Because she insists on keeping secret from everyone, except one male confidant, the facts surrounding the birth of her adopted son, Kiddie, a measure of intrigue and gossip develops. Malcolm asks her to reveal her past to him but Frank argues that he should accept her "just as you see me here--just as you accept a man" (II, 72). The conflict comes to a head with the identification of Malcolm as Kiddie's father. Malcolm readily admits his affair with
Kiddie's mother in Paris, but he brushes it aside and refuses to admit any wrong-doing. He excuses his behavior by insisting that because he is a man his sexual life must be judged under different standards than those that apply to women. He begs Frank to see that only her ideals separate them, and that her beliefs bear little resemblance to the facts of natural differences between men and women.

Frank, emotionally unable to accept Malcolm's past, refuses to believe the popular view that "men will be men" and ends the relationship. She is left a lonely woman with little chance for a happy future. Frank retains her ideals and her adopted son, Kiddie, but she loses the man she loves. Three of the four main characters in the play take a conventional stand toward the double standard while only one, Frank Ware, rebels.

A Man's World fits Gassner's definition of a "problem play" since it lacks a sense of magnitude. Its subject matter is the double standard, the unfairness of the differences in the roles of men and women, but its dramatization in the lives of these two inconsequential characters diminishes it to a mere topical argument between a man who represents the values of his middle class society and an inhibited woman who is in love with an idealized "perfect" man she has created in her mind. Nowhere in this play does Crothers attempt to broaden her thematic scope by challenging the entire American society and its morality which permits the existence of the double standard. Instead, she superficially deals with a symptom of society's decay (the double standard) and does not attack the large problem at its root, society itself.
A Man's World not only reflected the strong forces of the commercial theatre of its time (e.g., the popularity of the "problem play") but it also mirrored an advancing current in American drama inspired by the growth of a new movement in Europe. Quoted in a review of A Man's World appearing in Collier's Magazine, March 19, 1910, Henrik Ibsen states: "'The Social Revolution,' which is impending in Europe, is chiefly concerned with the future of... the women. It is for this I hope and wait..." The review continued:

Numerous are those who have prophesied that the great factor in the evolution of society must be the ascent of women. She will not ascend, however, without forcing men to make the climb along with her... All who have the opportunity we advise to see Rachel Crothers' play A Man's World. It is one of the shadows which an approaching order casts ahead. It reflects, with truth and conviction, some of the social ideals up to which awakening woman is determined man shall live by. 12

During the years surrounding America's entry into World War I, Crothers stopped debating social problems and began instead to experiment with a formula heavily influenced by the popular domestic comedy play--a blend of comedy and romance held together by a great deal of sentiment. Crothers did not abandon altogether her focus on women struggling within the confines of a stifling society, but she began to employ her female characters in a more conventional manner, as vehicles

for romance and as representative examples of stereotypical or traditional feminine qualities.

Lois Gottlieb, in her book, Rachel Crothers, alleges that at this time Crothers may have begun to resent the label of a "thesis playwright," 13 but it was more likely that her commercial "sixth sense" recognized a movement away from the social problem play. Edmond Gagey in Revolution in American Drama writes that most of the popular "topical" domestic comedies of the 1920's were not concerned with such potentially serious matters as illegitimacy and prostitution, but rather with changes in manners and morals as they affected the family. 14 The "new woman," infidelity, and divorce became recurrent motifs in thousands of transformations, but none was as appealing to this decade as the revolt of the Younger Generation against traditional conventions. A common approach was to censure or ridicule the flapper and her male counterpart but at the same time to show that they had intrinsically good qualities and would come out all right in the end (e.g., the plot of Mary the Third).

Gagey praises Crothers as a prolific writer of sentimental and problem comedies, who was extremely skillful in straddling current moral issues. "A keen and sagacious playwright, Miss Crothers... showed an unerring gift for selecting a timely subject, treating it with

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13 Gottlieb, p. 76.
apparently daring, properly diluted with sentimentality, and ending with
the conventional—or at least the matinee audience—viewpoint." 15

Mary the Third, a comedy produced in 1923, deals with three
generations of women in one family. The generation gap that exists
between them, especially concerning their expectations of love, marriage,
and divorce, provides the conflict of the play. The idea of marriage as
a workable and desirable institution is vindicated, and, in the end, the
youngest Mary ("the Third") sets out on her marital road with as high
expectations of happiness and fulfillment as her grandmother had in 1870.

To emphasize the similarities between the generations, Crothers
begins the play with a prologue in which Mary I is seen demurely sitting
with her young beau, William, on "an old mahogany sofa, upholstered in
black hair cloth." 16 Their romantic vignette ends as they look into
each other's eyes and repeat a vow to love each other forever (which will
echo down through the generations).

The second half of the same prologue shows Mary II (Mary the First's
daughter) on the same sofa with her young man, Robert, swearing, as did
the earlier couple, to make their love "the most wonderful love that was
ever in the world" (Prologue, 16). As Act One opens, the sofa is still
on stage, but it has now been upholstered in chintz, a hint that beneath

15 Gagey, p. 188.
16 Rachel Crothers, Mary the Third (New York: Brentano's, 1923),
Prologue, (p. 3). All further references to this work appear in the text.
a new exterior may lie a more enduring framework from the past. Mary the Third represents the "new woman" of the Twenties, but beneath her flapper clothes and liberated ideals exists a romantic woman searching to follow the same path as her mother and grandmother did before her. The play ends with young Mary and her boyfriend, Lynn, hopefully promising to make their love and marriage work because "there can't be any doubt about a love as great as theirs" (III, 104).

The dramatization of the differences between the generations makes up the largest part of the play. There are minor skirmishes between father and son over the use of the family car, and a major battle develops between husband and wife, but the play's most incisive observations on love, marriage and the role of the liberated "new woman" of the 1920's come from the generational conflicts between the women. It is the general lack of "moral fiber" in the young generation that is at issue, along with the importance of appearance and the relationship of honesty and dishonesty between men and women.

Each generation has its particular way of facing the problem of living. Granny (Mary the First) argues that modern morality is no less stringent than it has always been, no matter what fads may be in style; "Right and wrong haven't changed a bit and no amount of angling and twisting and dodging can get away from facts" (I, 43). She feels it is important to keep up appearances, "When I was your age, it was the fashion to be happy. Women loved their husbands and appreciated their blessings. Or, if they didn't, they didn't air it from the housetops" (I, 25). Further, Granny proposes that modern women could learn a
great deal about managing men from the women of her generation, who pretended to be under a man's thumb, while in reality they twisted men around their little fingers.

Mary the Second is more ambivalent in her ideas on life. She is caught in the middle between an older generation's view of duty to the old ways and the younger generation's search for beauty and happiness in everything. She attempts to straddle the fence but comes down on one side or the other, depending upon the particular problem and her own emotional state. She tells Granny ruefully, "... I'm not sure what is my real self..." (I, 23). She rejects the feminine principles by which her mother raised her as old-fashioned and inapplicable to the modern woman, yet she upholds the traditional value of woman making a show of respectability. She warns her daughter that society will be more impressed by the external signs of wrongdoing than by any internal moral code. (See synopsis of Mary the Third.)

Mary the Third, the "modern" flapper, is trying to determine her own guidelines for living. She is ready to flaunt a proposed two-week, camping trip with her boyfriend, Lynn, in front of the world, with the naïveté of expecting approval from her elders. She also shows her immaturity by exuberantly announcing to her mother that "free love" is the only solution to relations between men and women, and that her mother has missed her potential by not living "with a lot of men" (I, 32). When Mary overhears her parents arguing painfully that they have not been able to communicate with each other for several years, she becomes set on a divorce being the only solution to their problems.
However, despite all of her talk, this Mary is as romantic as her Grandmother is realistic. With her love and marriage plans, she is searching for that "great love that embraces everything—that envelopes and sweeps one away—so there's no doubt about anything" (I, 39). There is irony in this statement because with the more casual and open approach to life and sex in the 1920's, the opposite would seem to be indicated. Crothers implies in this play that the inherent human longing for something not only perfect but permanent is what has not changed from generation to generation but, because it appears more elusive, the need to find it has intensified.

In the final scene of the play, Mary the Third is shown to be overpowered by romance. She reverses her idea about the necessity of a divorce between her parents and urges her father to reconcile himself with her mother. As the curtain falls, Mary and her young man voice the same romantic vows of the past generations.

The comedy of the play arises from the differences expressed by each generation concerning their approach to life and the disparity between Mary the Third's search for freedom in marriage and her emotional capitulation to love. Although the play is a comedy, it nevertheless fits the requirements of a "problem play" in attempting to superficially handle a large social issue—the generation gap, as represented by the "new" ideas of marriage and divorce—by compacting it into a cliché ("love conquers all"). However, as a comedy, it does not propose to treat its subject very deeply.

The heroine of the play, Mary the Third, like her predecessor, Frank
Ware, struggles against the will of society, which is represented by the Old Order, her parents and grandmother. She tries to be different by refusing to settle for anything but "truth, honesty, and beauty" and by rejecting the values of the past as sterile and empty modes of restrictive thought. The ending reveals, though, that people, like the old mahogany sofa, do not change, and that Mary, too, will compromise her ideals for love. Mary the Third's future, therefore, will contain no greater guarantee of happiness than those of past generations.

In the 1920's, Crothers had dealt with the new problems of the flapper and the "anything goes" attitude of the post-war era, with the serious question of divorce always threatening the stability of the family. In the 1930's, she wrote a series of drawing-room comedies that were set against a background of wealth and ease. People, whose daily life was depressed and unglamorous, flocked to the theatre for escape. Here Rachel Crothers once again demonstrated an uncanny instinct for the popular themes in dramatic subject matter.

As Husbands Go is a comedy that contrasts European moral sophistication with American provinciality. It deals with a woman's search for self-realization, which she finds not in exotic Paris, France but at home in ordinary Dubuque, Iowa. Lucile Lingard, the married heroine of the play, has been romantically swept off her feet on a European tour, by a young English poet, Ronald Derbyshire. Her widowed best friend (and traveling companion), Emmie Sykes, has fallen in love with a Continental gentleman, Hippolitus (Hippy) Lomi. With these characters, Crothers paints a picture of middle-aged, middle-class, conservative
women placed against a background of European permissiveness and sophistication. Although the language surrounding the women's discussion of European sexual mores is coy and euphemistic, Crothers is showing that Europe has provided these women with a hedonistic rather than American puritanical outlook toward sexual pleasure. These "foreign" romances have re-awakened the women to a new sense of life, and they both express a strong desire to overthrow the domestic dullness of Iowa for an exciting, fresh life with their new lovers (the term "lovers" is used loosely, as neither couple has passed beyond kissing).

The women return home to America—Emmie with Hippy, and Ronald soon to follow Lucile. However, once Hippy is able to convince Emmie's daughter, Peggy, that he loves her mother as much as he does her money, their relationship assumes a secondary stature. The central conflict of the play revolves around Lucile, her husband Charles, and Ronald. (See the synopsis of As Husbands Go.) Eventually Charles discovers Ronald's true intentions toward Lucile, and for the greater part of the play he is primarily concerned with getting Ronald to go home and with protecting his wife.

Charles and Ronald are decent men who happen to love the same woman; Charles loves Lucile very deeply, but what Ronald feels is more in the realm of infatuation. Throughout the play it is Charles who draws the sympathy from the audience as he demonstrates, by his understanding and concern for Lucile's feelings, that he is a person capable of loving another selflessly. It is also through Charles that Lucile eventually finds herself.
Lucile, on the other hand, almost appears unworthy of Charles' devotion. She is an insipid, spoiled housewife who has neither the common sense of Mary the Third, to sacrifice her ideals of self-fulfillment for love, nor the starchy moral make-up of Frank Ware to deny herself personal happiness for the sake of her principles. Lucile is never certain about the correct course of action because of the guilt she feels concerning Charles. Even at the resolution of the play, she eagerly avoids confronting Charles with the truth about her relationship with Ronald. Because she is chronically searching for her lost identity (which is never really missing) Lucile is a confused, ineffective character. It is only through Charles' love and guidance that she is finally able to comprehend that her life in Dubuque does not confine her, but does, instead, define her.

This comedy continues to fit into the mold of the "problem play." Lucile is portrayed as rebelling against her lifestyle and that which society dictates she should be, a contented wife and homemaker. She wants more. However, instead of revealing the struggle of an independent, intelligent woman breaking out of the bonds of a suffocating life, Crothers simplifies the problem by characterizing Lucile as a self-centered, slightly dimwitted person who appears to be suffering from nothing more than the "seven year itch." Crothers, therefore, upholds the value of love and marriage and the idea that a woman belongs at home. She never addresses the larger social issue of feminine oppression, but prefers, instead, to dwell on the effects of an inconsequential fleeting romance.
The themes of Susan and God, Crothers’ last successful play, center around the main character, Susan Tredel. This is a play about "humility, integrity, and service, whose fundamental idea belongs to every man, rich and poor, idle and worker alike." It is a satirical comedy with romantic melodramatic elements. The play is light and humorous, but the serious rumblings of war run as a dark undercurrent.

Susan, the rich and dissatisfied wife of an alcoholic, and the mother of an unhappy teenage daughter, encounters a new evangelical religion based loosely on the Oxford Group Movement (See Chapter I) while traveling abroad in Europe. The first act opens with her return home to America to "spread the word." Crothers explains the use of this particular movement:

I have merely used the Oxford Group as the cult which has so strongly appealed to the kind of people to which Susan Tredel belongs. Everyone realizes, I hope, that it might be any cult, any code of ethics of conduct that Susan, or any other completely selfish person, had taken hold of, never believing for one instant that it could be applied to herself. 18

As the play begins, Susan sees herself as a reformer of America’s crumbling morality. Crothers emphasizes the shallow attraction of the new religion by juxtaposing Susan’s insights into a cure of modern spiritual malaise with reports of the latest European lingerie fashions.

18 Kaplan, p. 219.
Susan confidently tries to save her friends, but nobody takes her seriously. "... She's just getting a big kick out of ... the last thing she ran into." 19 When she exhorts them to cleanse their souls by confessing their mistakes and they play along, Susan naively believes her friends have fallen under her spell.

Quite by accident, however, Susan's husband, Barrie, has overheard her conversion speech and believes she has changed. "If you believe what you've just said, Susan--I believe it to... You have just said something that changes the whole stinking world." Barrie ends this speech with, "I never knew you Susan" (I, ii, 70-71).

Having been trapped in front of her friends by Barrie, who begs her to give him and their daughter, Blossom, another chance to become a happy family, Susan spends an idyllic summer with them in their country house. (See synopsis of Susan and God.) In the following two acts, Susan is forced to discover her role in the family as well as her real inner self. Barrie remains sober, Blossom is transformed into a happy teenager, and even Susan feels some pleasure in the giving of herself where she is needed, to her family. She is not, however, ready to acknowledge the need fully. Barrie asks her to cut short the week in August in which she is to speak at a convention in behalf of her religious movement, so that she will be able to attend Blossom's birthday party.

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Rachel Crothers, Susan and God (New York: Random House, 1938), Act One, Scene One, (p. 28). All further references to this work appear in the text.
Susan replies, "I've given up my entire summer—you surely can't ask me to give up any more" (III, 143). Susan is still so completely self-involved that even the happiness her presence has afforded her husband and daughter, is immediately brushed aside in her craving for wider approbation. She asks Barrie, "Don't you think it's more important to reach out to thousands of souls—than it is to stay at home one more week—with one child" (III, 142)?

Crothers was greatly concerned with the social imperfections of the upper class in their daily living. Ultimately, Susan's tenacious drive for religious salvation is directly related to the unpleasant facts of her domestic life, specifically to the weakness of Barrie's alcoholic addiction. Barrie uses alcohol to escape from his sense of uselessness in being a rich man who has never had to work for his money. His wealthy birth has negatively effected his marriage to Susan from the very beginning. Susan explains to Blossom that she has worked hard to fill her life with things outside her marriage and family, not because she particularly wanted to, but because it was emotionally necessary to do so. Children like Blossom are the victims of this disordered family life, and Crothers criticizes these cruel and neglectful upper-class relationships.

Eventually, Susan finally recognizes that she has been deluded by her "religious" conversion, and that salvation is not an externally visible, easily attainable state, but the difficult and ongoing process of internal examination and effort. Crothers achieves this change in Susan, not as a result of any character growth, but by arousing her jealousy over Barrie
and his relationship with another woman. Barrie, too, has been transformed. He evolves from a weak, dependent alcoholic bumbler into the rock to which Susan clutches for her sole support at the end of the play. The reconciliation of Susan and Barrie emphasizes Crothers' continuing support of the family unit and the necessity for the traditional male/female relationship.

As a "problem play," Susan and God attacks the idea that a young, intelligent woman such as Susan finds it necessary to use a religious movement to fill the emptiness in her life. Crothers writes:

Never in my wildest moments would it occur to me to try to tell anybody about God, but I thought in Susan's foolishness, prattling in a new way about old troubles which she wanted to drive into other people, but in no way expected to have them driven into herself, if when they, like a boomerang, came back at her, she would find they were actually true and that happiness comes from giving, not taking, from suffering and from service. 20

Crothers did not deal with the large issue of the causes and effects of religious movements such as the Oxford Group, nor did she come to any conclusion about the conditions of a society that encouraged young, intelligent women like Susan to be caught up in faddist causes. Crothers avoided the serious social implications of cult worship by dwelling on Susan's selfish peculiarities. The large impact generated by the Oxford Group Movement became less important than the resolution of Susan and Barrie's marital problems. The play on the surface seems to tackle an

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important theme, the effect of a religious movement on individual lives, but in reality it is only a superficial attempt at resolving a romantic problem.

Rachel Crothers' plays do, in fact, follow a discernible formula. All of her work, from the early thesis dramas dealing with social equality between the sexes, to her later sentimental domestic comedies, are problem plays. Krutch wrote that Crothers "belongs to a continuous American tradition as old as Royal Tyler [The Contrast, 1787]. . . . her works are for all their light touch . . . definitely 'problem plays.'" 21 They are intended, he believed, to be "a commentary upon a specific situation definitely localized by the references to strict contemporary manners and costumes." 22 Or, as John Gassner would have said, she has reduced the universality of her subject to the little nutshell of individualized, contemporary problems.

Crothers' plays reflect the popular currents and ideas of their time. She wrote about the double standard using the realistic problem play format (A Man's World) at a time when Ibsen and new European drama were beginning to exert some influence in America. In the 1920's, she changed to sentimental domestic comedies as they became popular, and she dealt with such prevalent problems as the younger generation's rebelling against the traditional values of their parents (Mary the Third), and the

21 Krutch, p. 163.
22 Krutch, p. 165.
exotic, romantic entanglements of a restless housewife (As Husbands Go). In the thirties, Crothers scored her biggest hit with Susan and God, another escapist, romantic comedy with a recurring comfortable theme: happiness is where you find it.

The underlying themes in Crothers' plays are twofold. The first is romantic in nature. A young to middle-aged woman loves a decent man who wants to take care of her. The conflict concerns the love and courtship of this couple, and the way they solve their problems determines the resolution. The second theme involves women in conflict with society. The heroine is attempting to carve out a life for herself apart from one which society considers to be "respectable." The resolution of this theme provides two possible solutions. First, if she refuses to conform to the norms of society, the heroine will lose the man she loves and remain a single, isolated figure sentenced to a lonely life. On the other hand, if she reforms, with the help and understanding of her husband or male friend, she will receive a second chance for happiness and fulfillment. Crothers' moral outlook is very conservative as she continually places herself on the side of marriage and the family. This is contrary to the view expressed by Om Prakash Bali, The Treatment of Marriage in the Plays of Rachel Crothers and Zoe Kaplan, Woman in Focus in Major Plays and Productions of Rachel Crothers, both of whom believe that in all of her plays Crothers is striking a blow for women's liberation. Bali writes: ". . . A Man's World takes a tragic view of the marriage problem and Miss Crothers consistently shows that marriage, by
its very nature, places a woman in a subordinate role. The central argument of Mary the Third is that women's economic dependence on man forces her to play a role that is contrary to her nature."  

However, nowhere in the text of the play is there a reference suggesting that Mary's economic situation is related to the cause of her unhappy marriage. Nor are there any lines that indicate that the institution of marriage is contrary to a woman's nature. In fact, the opposite is concluded to be true since each generation looks to find love through marrying.

Kaplan states that "although Crothers denied being a feminist, she inevitably dealt with the general question of women's rights and responsibilities, for which the author has stood for some time as a representative in drama." She continues, maintaining that "there is more than a trace of bitterness in Crothers' dramatizing of injustice toward women." Crothers, however, denied that she intentionally represented in her plays society's changing attitude toward women. She stated that she was merely reflecting on the stage what had already occurred in life.

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24 Bali, p. 46.
25 Kaplan, p. x.
26 Kaplan, p. xv.
27 Flexner, p. 240.
Kaplan's last statement is also unsupported in the texts of Crothers' plays. The female central character is never shown to be a victim of male injustice or prejudice, but is instead revealed to be involved in a search for her personal identity. Without the guidance and support of an understanding male (usually her husband or good friend), Crothers infers, the heroine would falter and eventually fail in her quest. Men, therefore, are not portrayed with bitterness, but are seen as dependable, necessary counterpoints to women.

As a barometer of contemporary social thought, Crothers' themes did accurately mirror the views of her commercial theatre audience. (See Chapter I.) They were definitely "problem plays" which treated the theme of women and their place in society on a somewhat shallow and superficial level, but they also provided entertainment for the popular audience and an opportunity for them to view their time in history through the critical eye of a contemporary playwright. Edith Isaacs wrote in "Facie memoir for American Social Comedy":

When in some future day, some scholar begins his research on the social history of our times, he may well turn to the dramas of Rachel Crothers to build at least one angle of his many-sided structure. For the last quarter of a century, Miss Crothers has been writing successful plays, popular hits, and her work covers the progress of that period, in a social sense at least, more thoroughly and more representatively than that of any other dramatist. 28

CHAPTER III

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

During the early twentieth century, many theories concerning the necessary qualities of good characterization appeared in various "how to" books written especially for aspiring student dramatists. In one such work, Dramatic Technique by George Pierce Baker, originator of the famous "English 47" playwriting course at Harvard University (and based on eight lectures delivered by its author at the Lowell Institute in Boston during the winter of 1913), characterization is described as the chief means of creating in an audience sympathy for the subject or the people of the play. Although a dramatic situation may be great, maintains Baker, whether it can be developed into anything fresh and contributive depends on a careful study of the people involved. The old statement, "know thyself," becomes for the dramatist, "know your characters as intimately as possible." 1

Crothers consistently followed this advice in developing her plays. "Dramatic art," she writes, "... grows out of the understanding of

human nature and the skill of depicting human nature." 2 Her central character is always a woman in conflict with society, struggling for a chance to determine her own destiny—a character very much like Crothers herself, who fought off the conventionality of a small Illinois town and struck out to succeed on her own in New York. Zoe Kaplan writes, "as a woman, she has written with understanding about women and the problems they have faced—as well as created in and out of their homes..." 3

The dominant Crothers heroine is described in a stage direction as:

... forceful and fearless as a young Amazon, with the courage of belief in herself—the audacity and innocence of youth which has never known anything but freedom—the loveliness of a big nature and sunniness of an undying sense of humor. What she wears is very far from fashion, but has charm and individuality and leaves her as free and unconscious of her strength and beauty as an animal. 4

This description, romantic, idealized, and extravagant, fits almost all of Crothers' leading female characters, who are pictured as being young, naive, intelligent, beautiful, and possessing an inner reserve of strength. Crothers also provided her male characters with an elaborate and sentimental image. They are good looking, successful (making

3 Kaplan, p. 240.
enough money is never a problem, intelligent, charming, easy to love, and strong, especially when called upon for emotional support by the heroine in her time of crisis.

Charles Lingard is forty-five—medium sized and unremarkable—but he becomes good looking as his slow charm grows apparent in his self effacement and his wise tolerance. His smile illumines his face and reveals a rare sense of humor and great sweetness. There is a dignity and strength in his simplicity—and one feels that he has built the house—but that he has not built it for himself. 5

Such lengthy descriptions of character do not follow the guidelines of Baker, who states that the safest principle in preparing a manuscript for acting is to restrict stage directions to matters of setting, lighting, essential movements, and those intonations which cannot be conveyed by dialogue alone. Crothers, however, does not discuss the technical needs of her plays in any of her stage directions, preferring, instead, to elaborate on those qualities of her characters which are brought out in the text. These character descriptions demonstrate an important weakness in Crothers' style of characterization; her "intimately known" characters are usually identical to one another.

John Gassner writes, "Her characters are pallid stencils... the women lonely, alluring, smartly turned out 'thoroughbreds,' the men upstanding, affable American businessmen. One and all they are

5 Rachel Crothers, As Husbands Go (New York: Samuel French, 1931), Act I, (p. 2). All future references to this work appear in the text.
charming, commonplace, and completely lacking in individuality." 6

A deficiency of original character, however, was not the main concern in Baker's chapter on characterization. The most important aspect of this dramatic element, and the point where American plays often break down, he feels, is in the logic of character, especially since the motivation for an action grows out of character and not situation. 7 In a play, the need for correct motivation may be fundamental; that is, the characters may seem to an audience to be unconvincing from the start, it may be apparent in some insufficiently explained change or transition in character, or it may appear in only the final scene of the play, where characters who have been consistent in the past are made to act in a certain way which seems improbable to the audience. There needs to be an inevitableness in the conduct of the characters on the stage just as there is with the actions of people in real life. Crothers agrees strongly with this point. "Inevitability, I believe, is the greatest quality in playwriting, not surprise or invention. . . . Inevitability is a true and psychological result coming out of the nature of the characters as they act and react upon each other under the given conditions of the play." 8

6 Gassner, p. 244.
7 Baker, p. 252.
It is generally accepted that character motivation must fulfill three requirements. First, it must be clear; a play is in trouble from the moment the audience cannot understand why a particular character does what he is doing. Second, it must be plausible, naturally or made so by the skill of the playwright. Accounting for the actions of a character is possible only if his conduct rests on motives which any audience can recognize as humanly natural and likely to produce the situation involved. Finally, the actions of the character must be believable, not only in that they agree with what is accepted as human nature, but also in that they do not conflict with what has been done by the character in preceding parts of the play. Logical action, past and present, is the best method of characterization.

Rachel Crothers' characters, for the most part, are logically and properly motivated. Frank Ware, in *A Man's World*, is a completely independent woman, this supposedly being an outgrowth of an unusual upbringing in Europe by a rather avant-garde father, a writer, who encouraged her to read, think, understand, and "touch all kinds of life" (I, 35). Frank's free lifestyle provides a sharp contrast with the refined model of feminine behavior acceptable in 1909 America. Frank is a woman who "pays her own way" and who, although single, is raising an adopted child. Frank demands her own way in running her life. When Malcolm questions her about her midnight visits to a Lower East Side ghetto, (although these are perfectly innocent, having only to do with gathering information for her book) she retorts: "You don't suppose I'm going to give up all my chances of seeing and knowing and
understanding just because a few silly people are talking about me. I'm not going to spend my life explaining" (I, 34).

In another manifestation of her independent nature, Frank refuses to reveal the secret of Kiddie's birth to anyone but Fritz, a musician friend living in the same boarding house. Grothers provides a logical explanation for this action since Frank's whole lifestyle seems to be a reaction against the pressure from social groups or particular individuals. Frank's liberal views are contrasted with those of her fellow boarding house artists who, though they profess to be Bohemians, are really quite conventional in terms of their attitude concerning male-female roles.

Even though Frank wants to be a "free woman," she remains basically a romantic capable of only one true love. "You don't know what it means for a woman to love only one man in all her life. . . . It's true. You're the one man, Malcolm" (II, 82). It is Frank's misfortune that she gives her love to Malcolm Gaskell, a man principle prevents her from marrying because of her strong stand against the double standard.

Malcolm Gaskell has all the characteristics of a powerful and assertative man who an independent, intelligent woman could love and respect. He is a typical "Hemingway hero," and the heartbreak is

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9 Grothers, A Man's World, p. 82.
authentic when Frank is forced to renounce him in order to maintain her principles. The "unconventional" (unhappy) ending of Frank and Malcolm's relationship occurs inevitably. Frank is a proud woman who places great value in her ideals and it, therefore, becomes impossible for her to marry a man whose attitude concerning the double standard is at such variance with her own commitment to equality.

The character of Frank Ware shows a pattern of logical motivation. The present action (her attempt to live a socially "free" life) is consistent with past events (her upbringing in Paris and her repugance for the double standard) which makes the resolution (her rejection of Malcolm) inevitable and plausible.

The character of Mary the Third, however, is not so reasonably drawn. Here the plot deals with three successive generations of women in one family. Grothers succinctly characterizes the first two Marys in the prologue, which brings forward, through action and dialogue, their various ideas concerning love and marriage. These two women continue to progress logically throughout the play with their behavior being based on previous causes and effects. Mary the First does not change her view that socially correct conduct remains the same from generation to generation. She scolds her daughter: "... You're getting more like everybody else--callous--just callous. You let things slip and you're not holding up strict enough standards to your children" (I, 23). Mary the Second continues to remain perpetually ambivalent and perplexed about the "values" of the Younger Generation. Her low-keyed responses to her mother's gibes are significant: "I
expect you were a much better mother than I am, dear" (I, 24). She appears defeated and disinterested in guiding her children, but as the play progresses it is revealed that she is bewildered by her own marital unhappiness.

Mary the Third, though, experiences an unexplained, abrupt change in personality which appears very improbable in light of her past actions. Until the final moments of the play she continually champions the causes of the young flapper--free love, living with many men, frankness in marriage, and respectable divorce--but eventually reason is mysteriously overcome by romance. She reverses herself about the necessity of her parents obtaining a divorce, and she urges her father to follow after her mother, to "make her love you... make it all over" (III, 102). There is no force compelling her to change except for the realization that her father does love her mother, a fact that was never doubted in the past. Critics who felt the commercial pull (e.g., the audience's expectation of a happy ending) in Crothers' work deplored this illogical conclusion. Ludwig Lewisohn, in an article in The Nation, praised Mary the Third as "the contemporary American girl of the best type, with too much 'intelligence, courage, vividness of thought and impulse to fling herself head foremost into the delusions of the past." 10 Nevertheless, Crothers veered away from motivating Mary the Third's actions in a logical manner in the last scene of the play.

With Lucile Lingard (As Husbands Go) Crothers returns to providing plausible reasons for character action. Lucile is described in the prologue as "thirty-five--a very beautiful woman--slender and delicately lovely" (Prologue, 3). Early in the play's action Lucile reveals to Ronald Derbyshire, her English poet friend, her life's desire: "No one has ever known--what I might be--and how starving I am--to be--what I might be" (I, 19). Lucile's search for recognition and self realization leads her to succumb to the excitement and glamor of an illicit love affair in an exotic European setting. It is only by clearly seeing Ronald in the cold light of Dubuque that Lucile begins to appreciate all that her "old life" has to offer, especially the kind, loving husband who worships her and wants to protect her from harm, which, unfortunately, in Lucile's case, is self-imposed.

Lucile has been pampered and spoiled by Charles since the time of their marriage (there is no mention of Lucile ever needing to work), and despite her belief that he does not understand or appreciate her, she depends upon him for all her financial, emotional, and physical needs. She is in many respects a child who craves the security of a male authority figure. Her indecision regarding which man to love (apparently due to a lack of experience in making important judgments) is finally resolved by Charles, who provides her with an easy, face-saving escape. Lucile becomes a mere observer while Charles convinces Ronald that she is not the woman he believed her to be in Paris. Ronald agrees to go home, and Lucile willingly keeps her European affair a secret as she falls into Charles' waiting arms. The final scene,
therefore, becomes the inevitable and plausible resolution for a major crisis in the life of a completely dependent woman. Her character does not magically discover hidden courage to face the consequences of her relationship with Ronald, but she continues, instead, to act logically and consistently relative to her past behavior patterns.

Susan Trelax's actions in *Susan and God*, like those of Mary the Third, do not follow the guidelines on inevitability. Her character dominates the play, and from the first scene Crothers portrays her as a legitimately restless but self-deluded woman. While Lucile Lingard attempts to escape from her secure life because she is bored, Susan relies upon a faddist cause as an alternative for an unhappy marriage. Lois Gottlieb writes that Susan, fashionable, manipulative, a flighty egomaniac, has struck at least one critic as a handicap to the entire play in that he believes that Crothers was unaware of how disagreeable Susan really was.  

11 Crothers describes Susan as "a woman with so much charm that it covers most of her faults--most of the time--for most people."  

12 The character of Stubbie accurately remarks that Susan has "too much charm. Life has never disciplined her at all" (I, 22). Therefore, Susan finds it easier to save the souls of thousands of strangers than to deal with the demands of her family. Yet Susan has

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11 Gottlieb, p. 140.
12 Crothers, "Whence Came Susan," p. 190.
more willingness to experience all that life has to offer compared with her friends who are content to remain cynical onlookers.

Susan's past actions reveal an energetic, intelligent woman, but one who is also insensitive, vain, and selfish. She takes on the responsibility of providing her daughter, Blossom, with a happy summer vacation and "drying out" her alcoholic husband, Barrie, as a temporary detour in a life she is carving out alone. There are no indications that Susan intends to continue her life with them on a permanent basis (she even furnishes Barrie with another woman, Charlotte, to love after she is gone). However, after Barrie leaves on a drinking binge with Charlotte for a few days, Susan is unexpectedly reformed, and after "seeing the light," she realizes that her place is at home.

The final scene produces a 360 degree turn: Susan understands that honest religion must come from within and that it is she, not her friends, who is in need of salvation. She wants very much to hold her marriage together and tells Barrie, "... I want to be so much more to you than I've ever been before" (III, 164). She begs him to "please let me try again" (III, 164), and now she is humbly willing to search for redemption on God's terms instead of her own.

As in Mary the Third, there is no outside force or internal conflict compelling enough to cause this drastic change in Susan. She has not undergone a religious experience, nor has any person convinced her of the error of her ways. The audience must deduce that it is jealousy, brought about by Barrie and Charlotte's trip, which has forced Susan to appreciate her family. This is not a particularly logical resolution
based on her past actions, and it is somewhat jarring when it occurs.

Frank Buchman wrote in a review of *Susan and God* in *The New Yorker*, October 16, 1937:

> My own great complaint about 'Susan and God' is a moral one. It seemed to be both sad and wasteful that in the end, after these two gifted ladies Crothers and Gertrude Lawrence who played Susan had labored and produced the ultimate bitch, it should have been necessary to give her a sudden vision of the Light so that her heart was changed and purified. I liked Susan the way she was, and I would have been grateful if Miss Crothers could have written one final line to suggest that perhaps under it all the prospect of a happy and united family still gave her the creeps. 13

Therefore, of the four plays studied, Crothers gives only half of her heroines proper motivations for their actions. The other two lack consistency in relation to their past actions during the final scenes. She appears to have modified her ideas concerning inevitability following her early plays (those appearing after *A Man's World*) in order to allow for the inclusion of happy endings.

Freytag, in his *Technique of the Drama*, agrees with Baker that "the persons of the drama must show only that side of human nature, by which the action is advanced and given motive." 14 He also believes that characters must possess dramatic unity, probability (like Baker),

13 Frank Buchman, p. 28.
importance, and magnitude (the latter two qualities were discussed in Chapter Two in the thematic analysis), and that they should be fitted for a strong and progressive expression of dramatic life.

He defines the law of unity as it applies to character by stating that in drama there must be only one chief hero about whom all the other people arrange themselves in different degrees; it is a monarchic arrangement. The unity of the action is centered around one dominant character, and the focus of the audience must be directed toward him as quickly as possible.

All of Crothers’ plays reflect the law of unity in regard to their characters. There is one central figure—a woman—who demands the attention of all the supporting members of the cast, and it is around her that the action of the play revolves. Frank Ware is the dominant character in A Man’s World. Malcolm Gaskell and the other supporting characters of the play exist only as instruments to bring to the surface Frank’s "inner qualities." Malcolm forces her to choose between love and ideals, and her decision to remain true to herself reveals not only her sacrificing nature, but also the great importance she places on her personal values. Leone Brune and Clara Oakes hold opposite points of view concerning the acceptance of the double standard and the role of the liberated woman. Leone tells Frank that "men are pigs of course. They take all they can get and don't give any more than they have to. It's a man's world—that's the size of it" (II, 94). Frank counters with: "If women decided that men should be equally disgraced for the same sin, they would be" (II, 94). Clara abjectly
confesses that "No man has ever asked me to marry him . . . I've never had a beau--a real beau--in my life . . . I--I've always been superfluous and plain. . . . If I were . . . the most insignificant little runt of a man--I could persuade some woman to marry me--could have a home and children and hustle for my living--and life would mean something" (II, 86-87). Frank tries to ease her pain by telling her that while "life has been dull and commonplace and colorless for you . . . there are worse things than that" (II, 87). She continues, "You've learned that life is easier for men than for women--you know what it is to struggle for existence . . . I'd like to have you teach drawing and modeling in this new club for girls we're opening" (II, 87).

The action of the play concerns the developing mismatched love between Malcolm and Frank. It is through her traumatic conflict with him that Frank learns an important lesson about herself: what she is expected to offer and what she is emotionally capable of giving to another human being.

The character of Mary the Third, for theatrical effect, is not introduced during the prologue. Baker writes that a character of importance usually appears during the opening scene of a play. 15 However, the need of the audience for detailed information (in this case the need to understand the two preceding generations of Marys) determines their point of entry.

15 Baker, p. 289.
Mary the Third is the "intellectual flapper caught at the moment when she is putting her theories of freedom into practice." 16 She, the two young men who love her, and another couple propose to go away on a camping trip in order to be natural and free to really know one another. "... Some of us—all of us, in fact—are in love with some of the others—and we're going to take this way of finding out—just what kind of love it is, and what we're going to do with it" (I, 28). This unconventional expedition is the catalyst which starts the forward movement of the play's action; it causes the explosive argument between Robert and Mary II which forces all the family members to re-evaluate their respective ideas concerning love and marriage.

Granny (Mary I) and Mother (Mary II) represent various degrees of contrasting opposition to Mary III's "modern" view of life. The arguments between the members of the three generations force Mary III to examine more thoroughly her own position. The disagreements also provide psychological insight into the behavior of each Mary so that the audience can understand their separate motivations. Granny and Mother are colorful characters whose constant bickering almost upstages Mary the Third's role as the central character. Commenting on Mother's air of boredom, Granny says: "When I was your age I never missed a party. Euchre was a much better game than bridge, too. Much more sociable. You could talk all you wanted to, and I usually took the

16 Kaplan, p. 126.
prize" (I, 20). Mother retorts: "I bet you did" (I, 20).

It is Mary the Third, though, who develops the idea of divorce as the only solution to her parents' marital breakdown, and it is Mary the Third who later changes her mind, throws her "new fangled" ideas out the window, and abandons herself to the old fashioned illogic of love, just as Mother and Granny had done in their day.

The action of the play, therefore, centers around the character of Mary the Third and her coming of age in a modern, changing world. It presents the obstacles she has to overcome, the traditional beliefs of society and the naive impossibility of her own, and it reaches the conclusion that her fate should be a repeat performance of her past generations.

Lucile Lingard is the central character in *As Husbands Go*. However, like Mary the Third, her dominant position is somewhat challenged by the forceful yet sympathetic nature of her husband, Charles. But it is Lucile's will that determines the dramatic action of the play, and the other characters act only in response to what she does.

Lucile's love for both Charles and Ronald causes them to compete for her affection, and it is through this struggle that the elements of her own character are revealed. Her inability to accept the reality of her situation as a homemaker and wife of a successful businessman from Dubuque, and her desire to avoid, at almost any cost, an emotional confrontation, show her to be a childish, spoiled, pampered woman. In the last scene, Lucile's need for a romantic adventure seems to have
abated, but like a child she is still desperately dependent on the protective love provided by Charles.

As an interesting sidelight, male relationships, including admiration and comradery, are dealt with in *As Husbands Go* for the first and only time in Crothers' work. 17 She accomplishes the difficult task of making believable Charles' and Ronald's friendship and respect for one another so that Lucile's and Ronald's unfitting relationship can be aborted by means of the two men's silent understanding. Charles deviates from the stereotypical American businessman of the era in that he appreciates poetry and beauty, is aware of his own feelings (which he is not afraid to express), and has the capacity to selflessly love his wife and acquiesce to her needs. In the scene in which the two men are seen drinking after a day of fishing and talk of Lucile's being in love with "someone else," Ronald sincerely confides: "I like you better than any man I ever saw in my life—or ever hope to see" (III, 130). Charles returns the compliment, calling Ronald "a man's man as well as a woman's man" (III, 127). Their appreciation and mutual admiration comes about by means of their indirect conversation about Lucile. Charles says: "I love her. I don't want a woman just because she happens to be married to me. . ." (III, 126). Ronald replies: "But if she hasn't told you anything—why not let it alone? Why dig anything

17 Kaplan, p. 178.
up" (III, 126)? And Charles answers: "I don't love her that way ... if she finds somebody she wants more than she does me—I want her to have him" (III, 126). Therefore, even though Charles and, to some degree, Ronald, win the sympathy and support of the audience, it is still Lucile who controls the action and remains the central character.

In the play Susan and God, Susan Trexel is the dominant character. Brooks Atkinson wrote in the New York Times, October 17, 1937:

"Basically, 'Susan and God' is a character study of Susan Trexel, a vain and indulgent woman of the world who avoids responsibilities." 18

These unflattering characteristics are emphasized by Crothers in dealing with Susan's relationship with her family which consists of her well meaning, alcoholic husband, Barrie, and love-starved, adolescent daughter, Blossom. Susan serves as the focal point toward which all the other characters are inevitably drawn. Atkinson continues:

After all these years Miss Crothers knows how to write a play that works. ... She is an objective playwright. All through the play she makes her situations round out her characters more by action than by word. ... She is still primarily fascinated by the relationship of human beings. 19

Susan, like Lucile Lingard and Mary the Third, has no professional

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19 Atkinson, p. 143.
career and no financial need to have a job. She is totally self-involved, and because she is solely concerned with gratifying her own ego, she finds it much more rewarding to "save" the souls of strangers than to devote the many hours of private, personal time needed to work at salvaging her marriage and family. Susan's character does not change as a result of internal growth or progression, and it is only after Barrie, hurt and defeated, has "gone off the wagon," that Susan realizes her mission of saving souls is not what she really wants to do, after all. "... All the things I've been running away from--are the only ones I want now" (III, 70).

The arrival of Susan, like that of Mary the Third, is delayed until the middle of the first act. The audience is, therefore, given in advance all the necessary information concerning her whereabouts and personality through dialogue between the wealthy friends and neighbors who are anxiously awaiting her return to America. These people not only provide the exposition, but they also serve as an interesting background for Susan's entrance. They create the unhappy, restless mood of the bored, leisured upper class, and they present her, almost on a silver platter, a varied grab bag of wayward lives in need of salvation. An example of this kind of character is Susan's friend and neighbor, Irene Burroughs, in whose country house the play takes place. Irene has been divorced twice and is currently having an affair with the man she hopes to marry next, Michael O'Hara. Crothers describes her as an "incisive-restless--dissatisfied and hard--but nevertheless an extremely attractive woman" (I, 5). The minor characters in the play thus support,
in varying degrees, the development of the central character, Susan Trelux, and this dramatic work, like the other three plays studied, reflects Freytag's concept of unity.

To summarize, the first recurring quality of Crothers' characterizations is that she appears to understand her characters thoroughly, and she writes about women from a woman's point of view. However, her heroines and leading men comprise a very narrow range of personality types and tend to become carbon copies of each other. Female characters are consistently shown to be young to middle-aged, beautiful, intelligent, emotionally preoccupied, and restless. The men are always kind, sympathetic, unselfish, wealthy, and possess an inner strength when it is needed in a crisis.

The second distinctive quality of Crothers' characterizations is that her characters seem, only at times, to have logical motivations for their actions. When a "happy ending" is desired, Crothers will sacrifice the requirement of inevitability and conviently mold her characters to fit the particular situation. This defect may be more a result of compromising to audience expectations than of misunderstanding correct dramatic technique since some characters do retain reasonable motives.

The third quality concerns Crothers' approach to stage directions which in her plays deal with character descriptions rather than technical demands. Important character traits are revealed in the text, but Crothers also interjects her own subjective interpretations into the _dramatis personae_. 
The fourth and final trait is that Freytag's idea of unity of character is found in all of Crothers' plays. There is only one dominant character, always a woman, whose will sustains the dramatic action. This protagonist is surrounded by supporting characters whose purposes are to provide the necessary circumstances for unveiling her latent inner qualities. The central character has only one purpose: finding herself through love, and this essential need, Crothers believes, is a universal motive. "The vital things of character," she writes, "don't belong to anybody's day—they're eternal and fundamental." 20 (See Chapter Two for a thematic analysis.)

It is the central character's pursuit of her objectives that the audience follows during the course of a Crothers play. The protagonist's strong interest in achieving her goal creates a similar interest in the audience and arouses appropriate emotions (the fact that this occurs and is expected by the audience is reflected in the great degree of commercial success which has greeted most of Crothers' work). Her central characters provide good dramatic material; they know exactly what their objectives and goals are and, except for Crothers' compromising occasionally to achieve a happy ending, she allows them to progress on a logically motivated course of action.

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Crothers, Nice People (New York: Brentano's, 1921), p. 37.
CHAPTER IV
PLOT ANALYSIS

During a speech given at the University of Pennsylvania in 1928, Rachel Crothers called the construction of the plot in a play "the framework upon which all the other material rests--the outline by which the story is displayed." She warned the student playwrights: "The longer I work at playwriting, . . . the more I am convinced that construction is the great stumbling block for us all, and that bad construction causes more good possibilities to remain unfulfilled than any other element in the writing of plays."  

In an analysis of plot construction it is necessary to distinguish between the terms "plot" and "story." Many dramatic critics have attempted to define these words, but each seems to prefer his own unique description. George Pierce Baker defines "story" as "what a play boils down to when you try to tell a friend as briefly as possible what it is about." The "plot," on the other hand, is the story "so

3 Baker, p. 57.

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molded by the dramatist as to gain for him, in the theatre, the emotional response he desires." 4 It contains elements of suspense, surprise, and climax. According to W.T. Price, "plot" is "that which works out the play" (that is, the arrangement of the important happenings). 5 Unfortunately, Price expands this fairly simple definition into a confusing simile concerning wheels, with a play being compared to an arrangement of wheels within wheels. He defines "story" as a plot lacking cause and effect. 6 A third author, William Archer, interchanges the names of the terms, at times calling plot, story or story, plot. For this study, however, the term "plot" will simply denote the over all organization of the drama into a meaningful pattern. It includes the part of the story dramatized in the play and embraces the entire structure created by the playwright. "Story," on the other hand, contains not only the present action being dramatized, but also the past events and future happenings not presented on stage. An example of the relationship between these two concepts can be seen in Oedipus. Oedipus' life, from his birth to his death, makes up the "story." The "plot," though, is that part of the story which Sophocles chose to dramatize on stage—the part of Oedipus' life which begins

4 Baker, p. 58.
5 Price, p. 65.
6 Price, p. 72.
when he is attempting to free Thebes from the plague and ends when he is blind and awaiting word from the gods.

Because a plot reveals dramatized events, it is concerned with action, this described by Freytag as "an event or occurrence, arranged according to a controlling idea and having its meaning made apparent by the characters." 7 Action is composed of many elements and consists in a number of dramatic moments which become effective when they follow a regular pattern. Action, therefore, needs to present complete unity (a central idea, plan, or purpose), which gives the play structure. Elisabeth Woodbridge states in *The Drama—Its Law and Its Technique*, that the unity of action is an "organic unity" and is not necessarily arrived at by shaping all the actions around one character. "The play must have, not merely a running story that can be told, but a center, a determined line of development." 8

Unity of action is found in all of Crothers' plays. Her work is devoted to the forward progression of the central event in the life of the central character and does not digress into many extraneous activities. In *A Man's World*, the action involves Frank Ware's struggling romance with Malcolm Gaskell; *Mary the Third* is concerned with young Mary's surrender of reason to her romantic nature; *As Husbands*

7 Freytag, p. 27.
Co involves one woman's choice between two men who profess to love her; and, in Susan and God, the action centers around Susan and her choice between finding fulfillment outside the home or accepting the responsibilities of her family.

For the purposes of analyzing the plots of Crothers' plays, Freytag's theory of that which constitutes the essential component parts of the drama will be used as a general guide. This system provides a clear, concise, and easy to understand approach to the examination of dramatic construction.

The "introduction" is, according to Freytag, the first inherent part of the drama. All dramatic material is dependent on something presupposed (the "exposition"). These earlier, necessary circumstances must be clearly presented in the opening scenes so that the audience can understand the relevant history of the characters. Crothers states: "The more that is revealed of situation, atmosphere conditions, people and their relationships to each other—the more that is shown of this by the opening lines of the play, the better the construction." However, some subtlety must be used in the delivery of this form of information. Baker concludes that sophisticated playwrights (those more ambitious than the ones who employ servants, confidants, telephones, and long lost friends) reveal the needed material naturally enough that

9 Freytag, p. 117.
no one ever doubts that it could have been appropriately divulged in another way. These writers want the information to be so interestingly conveyed that the audience thinks only of what is happening rather than merely the dry facts being imparted.

Crothers demonstrates little skill in accomplishing the disclosure of exposition. In Mary the Third and As Husbands Go, the technique of a revealing prologue is employed as an expedient solution, while in A Man's World and Susan and God, exposition is rather awkwardly handled in the opening scene during a conversation between friends who are awaiting the return of the central character. The prologues (discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five) appear as entities separate from the body of the play itself, but they are more effective in incorporating action with instructive dialogue than Crothers' clumsy technique of simply telling the characters (and the audience) the pertinent facts. However, as used by Crothers, both expository devices deliver the necessary background information clearly and swiftly and provide the audience with an understanding of the characters' identities, their pasts, the time and place of the play, the mood of the piece, and what in the present and past relations of the characters has caused the action to commence. Since most of Crothers' plays have a moderately late point of attack ("The further on in the story the play begins, the better." 12), a great deal of exposition must be delivered.

11 Baker, p. 171.
Freytag's second component of drama, the "inciting incident" which forms the transition from the "introduction" to the "rising action," consists of either an internal change in the central character, or an outside force that causes the "rising action" to be set in motion. The inciting incident (or initial complication) may range from an entire scene to just a few words, but it seldom receives much elaboration. It usually occurs at the beginning of a play and provides motivation and direction for the characters.

The inciting incident in A Man's World is situated in the middle of the first act where Leone, the opera singer, decides, in a fit of jealousy, to seek revenge on Frank for flirting with her boyfriend, Fritz. Even though Frank is innocent, it is Leone's objective to destroy Frank, which brings about the rising action.

Mary the Third's inciting incident is also found early in the first act when Mary the Third and her friends reveal the plans for their coeducational camping trip. This announcement causes the arguments to expand among the three female generations, and between Mary the Second and her husband, Robert.

Ronald's arrival in Dubuque, shortly after the prologue, starts the rising action in As Husbands Go. From that point, the dramatic action is primarily concerned with the competition between Ronald and Charles,

13 Freytag, p. 121.
and with Lucile's indecision concerning the man to choose.

The inciting incident in Susan and God occurs near the beginning of Act One when Barrie overhears Susan's sermon concerning the powers of her new religion. This important moment provides impetus for their summer spent together as a normal family. With the inciting incident, the action of the play has begun, the main characters have been introduced, and complication (caused by the disruptive inciting incident) has received appropriate attention.

The "rising action" of the play is Freytag's third component and it incorporates all of the dramatic moments, scenes, and acts which lead up to the "climax." 14 Archer calls the "climax" the "great crisis" which brings out "vivid manifestations of character, not only in the main character, but in those around him." 15 He continues that this point is reached by a series of lesser crises (which compose the rising action). These small crises cause tension and "to engender, maintain, suspend, heighten, and resolve a state of tension" is to Archer the main objective of the dramatist. 16

Price defines action (in this case that which leads to the climax), as "... the overcoming of some obstacle and of course, the [audience's] doubt. It's characteristic is doubt as to the outcome of the matter at

14 Freytag, p. 125.
15 Archer, p. 41.
16 Archer, p. 41.
hand. . . . Action means change all the time." 17

In Crothers' plays this ascent of the action is accomplished in several stages as each protagonist attempts to meet and solve the particular obstacles that are put in her way. For this reason, there are many peaks and plateaus in the forward movement to the climax. Frank and Malcolm, in A Man's World, first argue theoretically about the inevitability and the injustice of the double standard in society, but eventually they arrive at a truce. It is not long, however, before the action jumps ahead again as Leone insinuates that Frank is Kiddie's natural mother. This greatly upsets Malcolm who expects Frank's past to be innocent and pure. Frank is able to reassure him that Kiddie is not her own son, and the dramatic action returns to a peaceful state. Leone, then, sees a resemblance to Malcolm in Kiddie's painted miniature and accuses Frank of not only being his mother, but of hiding the fact that Malcolm is Kiddie's natural father. This last leap in the action leads to the climax, the confrontation between Malcolm and Frank in which their whole future lies in jeopardy.

In Mary the Third the "rising action" begins with the announcement of the unchaperoned camping trip. This shocking piece of news greatly upsets both Mother and Granny. However, Mother and Mary the Third are able to calmly come to the conclusion that if Mary re-thinks the whole idea more carefully, Mother will not be forced into telling Father.

17 Price, p. 126.
Lynn, (Mary the Third's boyfriend and potential camp-mate) arrives with his own set of doubts concerning the propriety of the trip, but Mary is able to convince him of the importance of its mission (to provide them with the opportunity to really get to know each other). When Father (Robert) returns home from work later the same afternoon, Granny attempts to inform him about the plans, but Mother manages to forestall the inevitable explosion by notifying Granny that Mary has changed her mind, and is now not planning to go. The peaceful conditions are soon disturbed again, though, when Mary, unbeknown to her family, leaves with Lynn and their friends after all. However, she soon experiences a change of heart, and in order to please her parents, she returns home the same night. Unfortunately, her homecoming occurs just in time for her to overhear the terrible fight between her parents which eventually shakes the foundation of the whole family.

Ronald's arrival in Dubuque signals the start of the rising action in _As Husbands Go_. He is initially introduced to Charles as another of Emmie's suitors, postponing the revelation that he and Lucile have already had a romantic relationship in Paris. Later the same evening, Ronald is invited to visit the Lingard home. When Charles requests that Lucile sing his favorite song, "Ah Love But a Day," she can manage only a few bars before stumbling, as she is looking only at Ronald. Charles quickly becomes aware of their romantic feelings, which leads them all to the fishing trip, in which comes the climactic scene of the play.

The dramatic action in _Susan and God_ begins its upward movement at
the instant the intoxicated Barrie misunderstands the religious sermon Susan is enthusiastically giving to her friends. Rather than perceiving it as only excited chatter concerning a faddist cause which has temporarily caught Susan's fancy, he believes it to be a sincere expression of her true feelings about the power of God and the advantages of confession. To the delight of her friends, Susan is trapped into accepting Barrie's plea that they give their marriage another chance by spending the entire summer, as a family, in their country home. Susan manages, however, to insert into this agreement three important conditions: first, that the living arrangement is temporary; second, that she and Barrie will remain "just friends" during the trial period; and finally (the condition she is sure he will break), that the whole plan will be canceled if he cannot remain sober. Barrie, however, surprises Susan by abiding by all of her rules, until it becomes apparent that even a happy summer together will not change her desire to make a life for herself alone. Depressed, and feeling as though he has been abandoned, Barrie leaves for a two day drinking spree with another woman, this leading inevitability to the climax of the play.

The "climax" constitutes the ultimate component in Freytag's scheme of the drama. 18 It is here that the results of the rising action are strongly and decisively displayed. Baker defines the climax as "the

18 Freytag, p. 128.
point of greatest intensity reached in a . . . play." Woodbridge calls it the "turning point," or the moment after the "activity of the aggressive force" is completed, and "a moment before the reversal begins." Freytag describes it as "almost always the crowning point of a great, amplified scene . . . the middle point of a group of forces that go upward and downward." For this study, however, climax will simply mean the point at which the issue of the conflict is determined and the dramatic question is answered (a combination of the three previous definitions).

Crothers always places the climax near the end of the play. This prevents most of her work from suffering from a weak final act, which according to Archer, occurs when the climax is located at the end of the second act or at the beginning of the third. In such a case there is no more forward thrust of action; the dramatic question has been answered, and all that remains for the audience to view is a lengthy discourse on the resolution.

20 Woodbridge, p. 83.
21 Freytag, p. 130.
23 Archer, p. 324.
The climax of *A Man's World* occurs during Frank and Malcolm's final scene where Frank confronts him with the knowledge that he is Kiddie's natural father. There is a chance that their relationship can still be successfully untangled if Malcolm will admit it was wrong to have a love affair with Kiddie's mother. But since Malcolm refuses to do this, the dramatic question becomes: will Frank compromise her values in order to keep the man she loves?

*Mary the Third*'s climax occurs in the scene where Mary the Third, after her parents' marriage has temporarily broken up, has the opportunity to reject marriage (and Lynn) and to live out her "new" ideas. The dramatic question is: will Mary the Third be different from the past generations of Marys and follow reason instead of romance?

In *As Husbands Go* the climax is located when Ronald and Charles, while intoxicated, have come to an official understanding that they both love Lucile. The dramatic question here is: will Ronald realize that Lucile will be happier with Charles and go quietly home to England?

The climax in *Susan and God* occurs when Susan confronts Barrie after he returns from his drinking bout. Barrie has left Susan for Charlotte and the dramatic question becomes: will Susan be able to convince Barrie to give their marriage another chance?

The "downward movement" of the action, the sequence of scenes compromising the return to a balanced situation, appears next. Freytag calls this the most difficult part of the drama, especially in plays
where the main characters are the directing force (including Crothers' works). 24 Up to the climax, the interest of the audience has been focused on the direction in which the chief characters have been moving. However, after the deed is accomplished, there is a pause, and suspense must be created in something new. Freytag suggests adding new characters, or enlarging and expanding the emotional reactions of the protagonist and antagonist. 25 However, because Crothers places her climax so near the end of the last act, she does not have much difficulty in dealing with the short downward action that remains.

It is at this point in the play that the audience understands the connection of events and sees the ultimate purpose of the playwright. The audience begins to look for the logic in characterization and obvious errors in construction. Freytag writes that the number of stages the central character passes through on his way to the resolution cannot be determined by a rule, except that in general there will be fewer than found in the rising action (this is certainly true in Crothers' case). 26

In all of Crothers' plays the "downward movement" comprises only a very small part of the text. This component, however, also includes

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24 Freytag, p. 133.
25 Freytag, p. 177.
26 Freytag, p. 134.
the force of the final suspense, which is something of a hindrance
thrown in the way of the already indicated direction of the end.

The final suspense in *A Man's World* occurs when Malcolm refuses to
admit that his affair was wrong and instead hopes to change Frank's
mind by appealing to her feelings of love. In this he almost succeeds.
"I love you, Frank. I'd lay down my life for you... We've
found each other... You know it's the perfect thing on earth—a
perfect love and we've found it" (IV, 110). Frank can only sob: "Oh!
... Oh! No, no, no" (IV, 112).

In *Mary the Third* the final suspense begins after Mary has encour-
aged her father to win her mother back. However, she starts to change
her mind about the value of marriage again when she speaks with Lynn,
who tries to assure her: "... we're different... We know what we've
got" (III, 103). Mary, though, is not sure. "How do we know we do?
What if the very things I think are strong and stunning in you now I'd
think were pig-headed and kickable after awhile?... If they hadn't
been married, if they hadn't been tied to each other... they would
have had to please each other in order to hold each other" (III, 103).

Lucile almost destroys her chance for a happy life in *As Husbands
Go* by wanting to clear her conscience and confess to Charles. She
confides this desire to Emmie: "I'm going to tell Charles the whole
thing... I can't look him in the eyes—ever again—if I don't"
(III, 151). However, Emmie wisely advises her to be cautious. "But
you can't hurt him like that. Thank God he doesn't know... There's
no reason why you should nearly kill him—just to help your conscience"
(III, 152).

The final suspense in Susan and God occurs after Barrie has returned home from his drinking bout. He tells Susan that she need not pity him and that he will no longer stand in her way. This, however, is not what she wants to hear, and she tries to encourage him. "... You've done the hard part--three whole months--coming home so fit--and strong. You're not going to let this once make you think you can't win out--are you" (III, 163)? Barrie rejects her pleading. "Oh--don't be sorry for me. We'll get down to cases tomorrow. Everything will be all right for you, Susan--and exactly as you want it" (III, 163).

Freytag calls the closing action the "catastrophe" (or resolution) and this element contains the necessary consequences of the action and characters. 27 Even though it is here that the protagonist or antagonist tends to express the author's point of view toward the material of the play, Freytag maintains that the playwright must keep what he dramatically presents brief, simple, and free from elaboration--or, as in Crothers' case, free from moralizing. 28

The resolution of A Man's World involves Frank's remaining true to her principles in regard to men and the double standard and therefore refusing to continue her relationship with Malcolm Gaskell. Malcolm tells her: "I'm not a man to beg, Frank. Do you want me to go? Is

27 Freytag, p. 137.
28 Freytag, p. 139.
that it? Is this the end" (IV, 113)? Frank answers: "There's nothing else. It is the end" (IV, 113). Crothers' last direction states: "He goes out closing the door" (IV, 113).

The action in Mary the Third is resolved with Mary the Third and Lynn repeating words of love similar to those of past generations of Marys and their future husbands: "... Lynn, I wouldn't marry you if I didn't know that ours is the love that will last forever. There can't be any doubt about a love as great as ours, can there, dear" (III, 104)? To which Lynn replies: "You bet there can't... I love you" (III, 104). And Mary promises: "... we must make it the most wonderful love that was ever in the world" (III, 104).

As Husbands Go closes with Charles reassuring Lucile that their life together will continue as securely as it has in the past. Charles rises from his chair and says to Lucile: "Well--I s'pose it's the same old Sunday dinner--chicken--mashed potatoes and all. And I'm hungry..." (III, 157). He looks at Lucile and says, "Coming" (III, 157)? Crothers writes in a stage direction, "Lucile goes slowly towards the door--then turns to Charles and sinks against him in complete abandon" (III, 157). She whispers: "Hold me--close" (III, 158)?

The resolution in Susan and God occurs with Susan and Barrie pledging to work out their marriage problems. Susan tells him: "Oh--I want to be so much more to you than I've ever been before. Please let me try again" (III, 164). Barrie answers her with: "I'm not worth hanging on to. You know that" (III, 164). Susan then includes a piece of her "new" philosophy: "Oh dearest--I don't think God is something
out there--to pray to. I think He's here--in us. And I don't believe He helps out one bit--till we dig and dig and dig--to get the rottenness out of us. Barrie--hold me. Oh, dear God--don't let me fall down again" (III, 165). Crothers clearly brings her point of view across to the audience in all of these plays, but it is well disguised in the dialogue and appears to be the natural outgrowth of the resolution.

All of Crothers' plays contain a unity of action (as discussed earlier) and a unity of place. A Man's World is set in a New York boarding house, Mary the Third in the Hollister family home, As Husbands Go in the Lingard home, and Susan and God in the country home of Irene Burroughs. The unity of time, however, is not strictly observed since in each play studied several days elapse. Crothers treats the passage of time as having logically occurred between the acts.

Most of Crothers' plays contain three acts (A Man's World has four). She writes concerning their dramatic construction: "The more closely knit together the acts are, the better. The more that is known about the situation in the new act the moment the curtain goes up, without going back and telling what has happened in between the acts, the better construction. It isn't necessary that each act should go straight on in time--but is necessary that it be the direct result of what the other act finished with." Baker agrees with Crothers and states: "Each act should lead the audience on to the acts which follow. It

should at least maintain an interest already established, and in most cases should increase that interest." 30

Crothers practiced this technique in all of her plays. It is seen, for example, in Mary the Third, where Act Two ends with Mother and Father trying desperately to convince Mary the Third and her brother, Bobby, that despite the argument they overheard there is really nothing seriously wrong with their marriage. This does not work, and the act closes with Mary the Third's disillusioned speech: "... We always thought there was something between you and Mother, sort of holy—and different—that most people didn't have at all. How do you s'pose we feel when we know that isn't so? I don't see that it makes much difference what we do—anyway—when everything's all wrong with you"

(II, 78).

Crothers increases the interest of the main action of the play by ending each act at a climactic moment. The resolution occurs near the beginning of the next act. Therefore, Act Three begins three hours later with Mother telling Father: "We must make them know it was never—quite so bad before" (III, 79). This line is a direct carry-over from the last scene of the previous act since the parents have yet to determine a way to maintain the appearance of a happy marriage in front of their children. The act soon evolves into an attack on marriage (by Mary the Third), the eventual break-up of Mother and Father, and

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the vows of love between Mary the Third and Lynn.

Each act, therefore, involves the pattern of an inciting incident, followed by rising action which leads to a climactic moment. The resolution of this tense moment becomes (after a pause of miscellaneous action used to increase suspense in the audience) the inciting incident of the following act. In *As Husbands Go*, Act Two ends with Charles and Ronald becoming good friends after their fishing trip. Charles has convinced Ronald that he truly loves Lucile and that she really is not the woman he (Ronald) imagined her to be while they were in Europe. As the act closes, Ronald is beginning to seriously think over the idea of leaving Iowa without Lucile. The action of the third act, consequently, begins its ascent with Lucile receiving a farewell letter from Ronald.

In summary, Rachel Crothers values dramatic construction. Each of her plays is built on a foundation following the pattern set down by Freytag in 1894. There is always an introduction, followed by the inciting incident (complication), which starts the progressive rise of the action until it reaches its main climax. There the downward movement begins, hindered momentarily by the final suspense, until the resolution once more brings balance to the dramatic situation.

Crothers' plays consist of three or four acts, these abiding by the unities of place and action; time, however, remains flexible. Each act is the direct consequence of the previous one, and they all form segments which, when placed together, increase the interest of the dramatic action. Therefore, regarding construction, Crothers' plays
follow a definite pattern based on the guidelines set down by Freytag and elaborated by critics such as Archer, Baker, Price, and Woodbridge.

In Chapter Two, it was stated that Zoe Kaplan, in her dissertation, "Woman in Focus in Major Plays and Productions of Rachel Crothers," labels Crothers' plays "well-made" 31 but that she does not analyze any of the playwright's work in enough detail to discover what makes them fit into this dramatic genre. Neither does Kaplan adequately define the term, "well-made" play. However, Stephen S. Stanton, in an introduction to Camille and Other Plays, provides a clear and concise description of this once-popular play form. He writes that "well-made" plays always display seven important structural features: 1) a plot based on a secret known to the audience but kept from certain characters until its revelation in the climactic scene discloses a deceitful character and returns to "good fortune" the hero with whom the audience has been in sympathy; 2) action and suspense which has been increasingly intensified by exposition through such theatrical contrivances as fortuitous entrances and exits, letters, etc.; 3) successes and failures fluctuate during the hero's struggles with his adversary; 4) the "counterpunch" of peripeteia and scene a faire which represents the lowest and highest degree of the hero's fortune, which occurs due to the revelation of secrets to the "opposing side"; 5) a major misinterpretation of a word or situation which is obvious to the audience

31 Kaplan, p. 17.
but withheld from the participating characters; 6) a logical and believable denouement; and 7) the reproduction of the entire pattern of the play's action in each separate act. 32

Stanton continues his analysis of the "well-made" play by revealing how it became suited to the demands of the nineteenth century "problem" play. "No piece," he states, "... can be said to fit the requirements of the well-made play unless, besides exhibiting these seven features in the precise pattern just described, it also combines them in a manner that seems convincing and logical, or unless the scene a faire takes the form of a coup de theatre--the disclosure of a withheld truth that contains a moral judgment." 33 Stanton explains that this moral judgment does not necessarily need to be profound, but at least the moral boundaries are to be clearly perceived. Since Crothers' plays have been called "problem plays" (see Chapter Two), it is necessary to investigate the relationship between her dramas and those of the "well-made" play school. Using Stanton's seven characteristics of the well-made play as guidelines, it should be possible to discern if Crothers' plays do, indeed, fit this dramatic category.

Stanton's first feature concerns a well-kept secret that is revealed to all the participating characters at the climactic moment of

33 Stanton, p. xiv.
the play. Following this revelation, the hero returns to a state of good fortune. In *A Man's World*, the disclosure of the important secret occurs when Leone divulges to Frank her suspicion that Malcolm Gaskell is Kiddie's natural father. The audience is made aware, early in the play, that Leone has discovered a physical resemblance between Kiddie and Malcolm, but this information is kept from Frank until the climax (see synopsis of *A Man's World*). This tragic information leads to the unveiling of Malcolm's past and prevents Frank from marrying him, a man she would be unable to respect. Well-being is returned to Frank's life since she is not forced to compromise her ideals and principles in what could inevitably be an unhappy marriage.

The "secret" in *Mary the Third* involves the dissatisfaction in the marriage of Robert and Mary II. The audience discovers in the first act, through dialogue, that Mary II is unhappy with her husband and, indeed, her whole life. However, none of the other characters in the play seem able to detect her negative feelings. It is only after her discontent is revealed to Robert, Mary III, and Bobby, that Mary II's life begins to improve. The "fraudulent" character in the play is her unhappy marriage and facade of respectability, symbolized in the physical form of Robert.

In *As Husbands Go*, the love affair between Lucile and Ronald represents the secret to be revealed. Charles discovers Ronald's true feelings toward his wife at a party, but the audience has known of Ronald's love since the prologue. After this secret has been disclosed, Charles works at courting his wife and eventually succeeds in winning
her back.

The secret in *Susan and God* involves Barrie believing that Susan has truly found religion and, in so doing, has changed her personality. However, the audience is shown Susan's insincerity in her dealings with her friends and in the way she equates the importance of religion with the current fashion and social gossip. Once Barrie becomes aware of Susan's secret and her fraudulent form of religion, his good fortune returns. Susan realizes she needs him and her family, and they plan to live "happily ever after."

The second of Stanton's criteria deals with the increasingly aggravated nature of the action and suspense, which is a reaction to the exposition and contrived physical happenings. Stanton, in his introduction, writes that "because the play presents only the crisis of the whole story, the first act is almost expository . . . and the action . . . begins near the end of the first act and progresses in the form of a battle of wits. . . ." 34 The first act, therefore, contains a great deal of relevant past information, and the dramatic action does not occur until the end of the act. Once the inciting incident occurs, tension is increased by such theatrical contrivances as fortuitous entrances, exits, letters, and coincidences.

The way Crothers follows this dramatic idea of placing a great deal of exposition in the beginning of the first act followed by the inciting

34 Stanton, p. xiv.
incident can be found in the early part of this chapter where Freytag's components of the drama are discussed. The interesting plot contrivance, however, of *A Man's World* involves the use of coincidence in the lives of Frank and Malcolm. It seems very strange that in a city the size of Paris the young woman who dies while giving birth to Malcolm's illegitimate child should be befriended by Frank and her father. It is even more of a coincidence that in New York City Frank should fall in love with the same Malcolm she unknowingly blames for the death and disgrace of the young woman in Paris. The plot of this play is one of intensification, each scene building on the previous one and increasing the amount of tension.

The devised theatrical effect used in *Mary the Third* concerns the overhearing of important information that was meant to be private. After arriving home from the aborted camping trip, a chance entrance and a convenient hiding place (behind a door) permit Mary the Third to listen to her parents' secret marital problems. This knowledge increases the suspense of the play (the plot is also one of intensification), since it eventually leads to Mary the Third's demanding her parents divorce.

In *As Husbands Go* the theatrical contrivance is the love song that Charles requests Lucile to sing at a party. Ronald and Lucile's romance is detected by Charles during this song and because the two lovers do not want their affair to be discovered so soon they become extremely agitated. As with the other two plays, this plot involves considerable intensification.
Susan and God like Mary the Third uses a fortuitous bit of overheard information (a theatrical contrivance) to bring about the inciting incident. Barrie, who is supposed to be out of voice range, accidently hears Susan expounding her new religion and believes that what she is saying is the truth. Without this ill-gained knowledge, Barrie would not have suggested a reconciliation with Susan.

Stanton's third requirement deals with the ups and downs of the hero's fortune in the play. In all of Crothers' dramas, the protagonist does not obtain her goal immediately. Instead, she suffers many setbacks along with the advances toward her goal. See the play synopses for specific details.

The fourth point requires that each play dramatize the lowest and highest moments in the hero's fortune, these brought about by the revelation of a secret to the opposing side of the conflict. This step occurs in A Man's World, when Malcolm's past secret of fathering Kiddie is exposed to Frank. She is, of course, devastated by this news (lowest degree of fortune), but she is then able to rise above the blow by holding onto her principles. Even though the ending is tragic, the fact that Frank has avoided what could be an unhappy marriage to a man who differs so much from her values, is a sign that good fortune has returned to her life.

Mary the Third is depressed and overwhelmed when she discovers that her parents do not have the happy marriage she had believed them to have. She overcomes this bad fortune by acknowledging that not every situation can be "beautiful all the time." She uses the peripeteia, or lowest
point of fortune, as a spring board for jumping into maturity by accepting the possibility of fallible human relationships.

Susan Trexel experiences her greatest mishap when Barrie leaves her for Charlotte. This unfortunate event, however, causes Susan to re-think her outlook on life and religion, and this brings about her appreciation of her husband and family. The scene a faire (obligatory scene or highest point in the hero's fortune) occurs when Barrie returns home and Susan succeeds in convincing him to give their marriage another chance.

Part Five of Stanton's list concerns the major misunderstandings of a word or situation by the participating characters, while the truth is quite obvious to the audience. This event occurs in A Man's World when Frank, aware of the gossip in the boarding house dealing with her suspected relationship to her adopted son, Kiddie, assumes that the rumors are only speculations. The audience, however, is well aware that the rumors are more damaging than Frank imagines, since they concern Malcolm's relationship to Kiddie as well.

This step does not apply to Mary the Third or As Husband A Go, since there is no misinterpretation by a character of a word or action in either play. In Susan and God, though, there are two instances of this happening. The first occurs in Act One when Susan's friends pretend to accept her evangelizing and stage a "fake" confession scene. The audience is completely aware of their game and can enjoy the trick being played on Susan, who takes it all very seriously. The second concerns Barrie's belief in Susan's new religion. Unlike the audience,
which has witnessed Susan's selfish nature, Barrie is completely taken in by her charitable and pious words.

Part Six of Stanton's list deals with a logical and believable denouement, and, here again, of the four Crothers' plays studied, only half display this feature (see Chapter Two for an analysis of Crothers' happy endings). The two plays which contain a logical revelation which easily clarifies the outcome of the plot *A Man's World* and *As Husbands Go*. In each of these works the central characters, Frank Ware and Lucile Lingard, perform consistently their dramatized personality type. The final scene between Frank and Malcolm does not hold a surprise ending or an unexpected reversal. Frank has been adament in her feelings concerning sexual equality for men and women since her introduction in Act One, and she remains steadfast in her beliefs even when it means sacrificing her relationship with Malcolm.

Lucile Lingard also remains in character throughout *As Husbands Go*. She is consistently dependent upon others for her happiness, and she lacks the ability to control her own destiny. Because she is weak and confused, her character is incapable of making a logical decision. She reveals this weakness in Act One when she is unable to tell Charles that she is planning to leave him for Ronald, and she suffers from the same affliction in the last scene of the play when she decides against telling Charles the entire truth about her relationship with Ronald.

*Mary the Third* and *Susan and God* do not involve particularly logical denouements since Crothers here preferred a happy ending to one of plausibility. To be consistent with the character Crothers drew of
Mary the Third, Mary would have refused to marry Lynn after seeing her parents' unhappy marriage. Since she professed to be a "new" liberated woman, perhaps she would have even chosen to live with Lynn on a trial basis. However, there is no logical explanation for her total change of mind regarding the value of marriage, especially after she advised her own parents to divorce. Susan, in Susan and God, should have left Barrie after he went away with Charlotte on a drinking spree. Crothers gives no valid reason for Susan's change of heart toward Barrie, except that after he leaves, Susan finally realizes how much her family means to her.

Stanton's seventh point requires a reproduction of the entire play's action pattern in each act. All four of the plays abide by this rule since each act always contains action and suspense that build in intensity, ups and downs in the fortunes of the hero, and a climactic scene which discloses the faults of the antagonist. This seventh point on Stanton's list, like number five, is discussed in greater depth in the early part of this chapter under Freytag's components of drama.

Except for requirements five and six, Crothers' plays fit exactly into Stanton's format for the "well-made" play. Her characters and situations may, at times, seem contrived, but there are, nonetheless, always plausible, and they follow the demands of common sense. Her denouements, except occasionally (as mentioned above), are not appendages, but evolve inevitably from the action of the plot. The exposition is given in a careful and precise manner. Also, all of Crothers' plays contain a scene a faire which presents a moral lesson.
In *A Man's World*, the obligatory scene expounds the evils of the double standard. *Mary the Third*’s moral is that while fads from one generation to another may change, the people involved do not. Marriage, therefore, is a socially viable institution. *As Husbands Go* and *Susan and God* teach that women belong at home with their husbands and families. Therefore, since Crothers' plays follow closely the outline suggested by Stanton, it can be inferred that they owe a great deal structurally to the earlier plays of Scribe, Sardou, and Dumas fils who perfected this playwriting technique in the nineteenth century. Because the *scene a faire* contains a moral it can also be assumed that Crothers' plays evolved structurally from the "well-made" play formula into a variation of the "problem" play (see Chapter Two for an analysis of the "problem" play format).

The structural design of Crothers' dramas shows a close relationship to the playwriting techniques which were expounded by drama critics of her time, such as Archer, Baker, Freytag, Price, and Woodbridge. Crothers' works also show a striking resemblance to the "well-made" play formula. The subject matter of her plays may have been unique and topical, but the construction of her plays was dependent upon the workable ideas of others.
CHAPTER V

DIALOGUE ANALYSIS

Great dialogue flashes the light on characters as lightning illuminates the dark earth—in flashes. Great dialogue doesn't stand still and analyze. It conveys so much in a few words that the actor holds a great instrument in his hand, and with it can make the audience know the depths of his being. Fairly good dialogue is the commonest gift found in all playwriting, and the most misleading. It promises so much but it doesn't make a play. Very great dialogue is the rarest gift, and is the flower, the crowning touch of drama.

Rachel Crothers, The Construction of a Play.

Rachel Crothers is a widely acknowledged master of sparkling and witty dialogue. Bronson Howard, the author of Shenandoah, who was often called the dean of American drama and the country's first truly professional playwright, wrote the following after attending Crothers' first Broadway success, The Three of Us, which opened on October 17, 1906:

You may search the history of the drama in any language for more exquisite dialogue—flowing more perfectly and continuously from the beginning to the end of the play—than that to be found in The Three of Us. This dialogue is

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1 Wilson, p. 217.
unexcelled for the accurate expression of the purpose for which it is used. It is simply a stroke of genius!

Adolph Klausman, in his review of *A Man's World*, *New York Times*, February 13, 1910, stated that "*A Man's World* in the directness of its narrative, in its well knit situations, in its clear, crisp characterizations, and in its excellent dialogue, will compare most favorably with the best works of the best American playwrights up to date."  

Arthur Quinn devotes a chapter to Rachel Crothers in his *A History of the American Drama, From the Civil War to the Present*, and concerning her dialogue he writes, "So easy is the flow of her dialogue that it is often unappreciated by the school of critics who are looking for the unusual and the peculiar."  

Lois Gottlieb cites a critic who describes Crothers' dialogue as a model for all aspiring playwrights. He defines it as "facil, economical, bright, apparently spontaneous, always in character, every line written to be spoken..."

George Baker, in his *Dramatic Technique*, discusses three criteria of good dialogue. These are: 1) the dialogue must state clearly the

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2 Kaplan, p. 42.
3 Klausman, p. 123.
4 Quinn, p. 60.
5 Gottlieb, p. 38.
facts the audience needs to understand if the play is to move ahead; 2) dialogue must help the forward movement of the story; and 3) the first two criteria must be accomplished in character. 6

Clearness, to Baker, does not mean simply stating facts, but involves phrasing them in such a way that the audience's interest is not allowed to lapse. Extraneous words are to be cut, and what remains should be so absorbing by its characterization that the audience will assimilate the facts unconsciously. Lines should never be difficult to deliver nor hard to say clearly.

To aid the dialogue in moving the story forward, Baker calls for "hidden exposition." There should be no nosey servants, long lost friends, nor confidants who need to be brought up to date on past events. This necessary form of information should be so interestingly conveyed that the audience is only aware of what is happening in the present rather than the facts themselves. Baker continues his discussion by stating that dialogue must be "fitted" for the stage. Details which do not push forward the action, no matter how "fascinating," will be eliminated by the skilled dramatist, since these extra words are usually the cause of a play being unduly long, and they also weaken the imperative dialogue of which they are a part.

However, dialogue that merely states the facts and keeps the action moving onward needs to be molded by accurate characterization. As

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6 Baker, p. 319.
audiences are composed of people, they will naturally care more about the human being in the situation than for the situation itself. Therefore, only by representing a situation not just for itself, but as felt by the people involved can it be made interesting.

Characters must speak their own language. Most problem or thesis plays run a risk when their speeches narrate, describe, expound or argue not in the style of the particular character, but in the voice of the author. The more authentic the emotion a character is feeling, the more compact and connotative is its expression. People under extreme emotional stress do not usually describe in elaborate language what they are feeling. According to Baker, when a character stands outside himself describing what he feels, the speaker is really the author in disguise, explaining what he is incompetent from lack of sympathetic power to phrase with simple, moving accuracy. 7 Emotion, therefore, if given its own way, will find the right words to express itself. When a dramatist works as he should, the emotion of his characters gives him the right words for carrying their feelings to the audience.

The dramatist must compact and concentrate everyday speech in his play. He needs to edit and select his dialogue so that in a very short space the events can be presented in character with particular phrasings that will interest the audience.

Baker concludes that good dialogue has charm, grace, wit, irony,

7 Baker, p. 338.
and beauty of its own. 8 Dialogue which only states the facts is dull and commonplace. If the charm, grace, wit, and irony of the dialogue does not come from the characters speaking, then that dialogue fails in one of its chief essentials, proper characterization.

W.T. Price agrees with Baker on the important "Three Criteria" needed for successful dialogue, but he weaves even tighter the relationship between dialogue, action, and character. He defines dialogue as the development of the action by means of words. 9 Dialogue has its bearing on the past and future, but its specific quality concerns the present moment. This, he feels, is especially important in the first scene where the exposition is usually given. There needs to be an immediate reason for the characters to say all that is said. Dialogue is made up of all the necessities of the situation which are needed for the sense of immediate action. Therefore, dialogue depends on the action and the purpose of a scene; it does not stand off by itself. The characters cannot say what they want to; it must be arranged that they will want to say only certain things. Character must be maintained throughout the play and the relations of the people stable in some respects, unstable in others, because of the progressive action.

William Archer is just as adament as the previous two authors in maintaining the necessary partnership of dialogue, action, and character.

8 Baker, p. 407.
9 Price, p. 354.
He writes simply, "all dialogue, except the merely mechanical parts—the connective tissue of the play—should consist of either pieces of character or pieces of the situation." 10

Freytag becomes even more specific when he speaks of character. He agrees that the most important part of an action has its place in the dialogue scenes, but he feels these scenes are especially relevant when they are between two people. The purpose of these scenes, he states, is to bring into prominence from the "assertions and counter-assertions," a result which moves the action further. 11

Finally, Rachel Crothers lists her own theories for writing dialogue. She believes, first, that characters should not tell each other things that they already know, 12 this correlating with Baker's theory that dialogue should advance the action. Second, she feels good dramatic dialogue reveals but does not explain. 13 The fewer words the character speaks and the more he shows of himself by them, the better the writing. (This second point agrees with Baker's first criterion concerning clear dialogue and also with the close relationship between dialogue and character.) Crothers, though, states that dialogue should

10 Archer, p. 390.
11 Freytag, p. 221.
not take away from the audience’s imagination by telling them everything. She writes, "it is better writing to merely suggest—to awaken the imagination of the audience and make them feel and see through that—than to tell them all there is to be told about everything and thereby stop their imagination." 14 Concerning clearness of the dialogue, then, Crothers seems to be advocating a compromise between the stating of needed facts and the mere suggestion of them.

In summation, Baker, Price, Archer, Freytag, and Crothers agree in theory that it is necessary for dialogue to: 1) state clearly the facts that the audience needs to understand in order for the play to move smoothly ahead, 2) move the action of the play forward, and 3) involve characterization in accomplishing the first two steps.

In the practical world of the successful playwright, Rachel Crothers followed these three criteria for good dialogue in her work for the stage. *A Man’s World* is written in clear, concise dialogue form. The speeches of the characters are not full of pedantic expressions. The final scene of the play is concerned with the inevitable break-up of Frank Ware and Malcolm Gaskell. The audience is to understand that if Malcolm will only admit that his past relationship with Kiddie’s mother (a relationship which produced Kiddie out of wedlock) was wrong, Frank, who lives by her principles, will forgive him and be willing to build a new life with him. Malcolm, however, is as honest a man as

Frank is an honest woman, and he refuses to say anything but the truth as he sees it. The clear dialogue that flows between them is liberally laced with revealing characterization, yet Rachel Crothers does not appear to be preaching from a soap box. The dialogue comes naturally from the characters themselves.

MALCOLM  Good God, Frank! You're a woman. You talk like a woman--you think like a woman. I'm a man. What do you expect? We don't live under the same laws. It was never meant to be. Nature, nature made men different.

FRANK  Don't make nature the excuse for ruining the life of a good girl. Oh, Malcolm, do you think it wasn't wrong.

MALCOLM  I only know I love you. You said you loved me. I won't give you up.

FRANK  Oh!

MALCOLM  Frank, you're not as cold and hard as that. You're going to forgive me.

FRANK  Oh, I want to forgive you. If you could only see. If your soul could only see. Oh, dear God! Malcolm, tell me, tell me you know it was wrong--that you'd give your life to make it right. Say that you know this thing was a crime.

MALCOLM  No! Don't try to hold me to account by a standard that doesn't exist. Don't measure me by your theories. If you love me you'll stand on that and forget everything else.

FRANK  I can't. I can't.

MALCOLM  I'm not a man to beg, Frank. Do you want me to go? Is that it? Is this the end?

FRANK  There's nothing else.

MALCOLM  Do you mean that?

FRANK  There's nothing else. It is the end. (IV, 113)
Crothers writes with this kind of realistic clarity in all of her plays. Another example can be found in *Susan and God*, where humor is used effectively to inform the audience that a trick is going to be played on Susan by her friends who are weary of her persistence in trying to force them into personal confessions for "their own good."

In this scene, the audience needs to know that there is a trick in the making so that it will recognize the "confession" later as a fake. The audience will also need to understand that the motivation of the perpetrators is not malicious, but is only the desire to stop Susan's religious evangelism. Employing humor as an aid keeps the scene interesting as well as informative—one of the requirements that Baker feels is present in clear dialogue.

**STUBBIE**  
Somebody ought to do something to bring her [Susan] to her senses.

**MIKE**  
I know the best way to do that.

**CHARLOTTE**  
How?

**MIKE**  
Throw a confession scene.

**IRENE**  
What?

**MIKE**  
I'll tell her I'm terribly impressed with what she's been saying—and I'll confess I--killed a man—or stole a million—or some little thing like that.

**CHARLOTTE**  
Oh—I think that would be sort of mean.

**LEONORA**  
She's got it coming to her.

**STUBBIE**  
Certainly she has. I think it's an excellent idea, Mike.

**CLYDE**  
How are you going to do it?
IRENE    We all have to act.
LEONORA  Well, I can't act unless I rehearse. What do we do?
STUBBIE  Shall I write a few lines?
MIKE     No--no--just make it up as you go. When I begin--try to stop me--so I'll have something
to act up to. (I, 65-67)

Crothers' dialogue is fairly sophisticated in the handling of
exposition. There are no convenient servants or long absent friends
to be fortuitously brought up to date on the events of the past. In
Mary the Third and in As Husbands Co, however, Crothers uses the device
of a prologue to present the histories of the main characters. The
prologue in Mary the Third begins with Mary the First's seductive
approach to "man stealing" in the 1870's followed by her daughter,
Mary the Second's, optimistic hope for a happy life in 1897 with Robert,
the young man she chooses to marry. By the time the first act opens in
1922, the audience has been introduced to two of the leading characters
and has witnessed a very revealing moment in each of their lives which
both effects their own personal values and effects their present
situation.

Lucile Lingard and Emmie Sykes are shown in the prologue of As
Husbands Co, dining with their European boyfriends at an exotic
restaurant in Paris. Not only are four of the main characters presented
to the audience in this section, but so is the major conflict of the
play itself. (See synopsis of As Husbands Co.)

These prologues, however, are appendices to the plays rather than
integral parts of their structure. Their purpose seems to be an easy alternative for freeing Crothers from working exposition into a scene that will move the action forward. These separate bits of the past contain necessary background information, but they are not connected to any other sequence of the action and therefore they stand as small vignettes of their own.

The exposition in *A Man's World* is revealed in a conversation between three male friends of Frank Ware who are waiting in her apartment for her to return home from work. In this one scene, the important aspects of Frank, Malcolm, and Kiddie's past are told to the audience in a way that does advance forward the dramatic action of the play.

**WELLS**... Did you see a criticism of Frank's book this morning?

**EMILE** Non--I had not ze time. I haf painted all day like mad. I have had ze most wonderful--

**WELLS** Here you are. (Finding the article.) "The Beaten Path" is the strongest thing that Frank Ware has ever done. Her first work attracted wide attention when we tho't Frank Ware was a man, but now that we know she is a woman we are more than ever impressed by the strength and scope of her work. ... It is decidedly the most striking book of the year... How does she get it?

**EMILE** Sere iss only one way. A woman only gets what a man gives her.

**WELLS** Leone says the man is Gaskell.

**EMILE** Zut! Gaskell has not ze romance--ze mystery--ze charm for a secret love.

**WELLS** I'm hanged if I can tell whether it is Gaskell or not--but if it is--why the devil won't she marry him? I tell you Malcolm Gaskell's going to be a big man someday. He's got the grip on this newspaper
all right. . . (I, 13)

The fact that Frank is a successful writer and that the men feel that Malcolm Gaskell must be helping her, sets up the idea that Frank and Malcolm have a close relationship of some importance to the plot. Emile and Wells speculate between themselves that Frank's personal life has not been totally innocent—the introduction of the rumor that eventually brings about the climax of the play. Fritz is the only person who attempts to defend Frank's reputation which reveals a significant aspect of his character—his love and admiration for Frank Ware.

WELLS I think Frank has had some grand smash up of a love affair sometime. I don't know whether Kiddie's her child or not—don't care—none of my business—but after she's had the courage to adopt the boy, and refuses to explain who he is—after she's made people respect her and accept the situation—I can't see for the life of me why she lets another thing (the suspected love affair with Malcolm) come up for people to talk about.

FRITZ There is no other thing! That iss a lie.

EMILE How do you know?

FRITZ You know—you know it iss a lie! Why don't you kill it?

EMILE How can you kill a lie about a woman?

FRITZ Wid de truth.

EMILE Mais! What is ze truth?

FRITZ De truth iss—that she is a good woman and you are too small too liddle-too-too-too too bad in your mind to know wat dot means. (I, 16)
The exposition in Susan and God is delivered in a style similar to that in A Man's World. Five friends are gathered together to await the arrival of another friend, Susan Trexel, who has been traveling abroad and whom they have not seen in some time. Passing the minutes in what appears to be idle conversation, the five friends begin to reminisce about Susan and her troubled marriage to Barrie.

LEONORA What's Susan's trouble?
STUBBIE Too much charm. Life has never disciplined her at all.
IRENE Susan's the most intelligent fool I've ever known.
STUBBIE I've never been sure whether Barrie drinks because Susan's tired of him—or Susan's tired of him because he drinks. (I, 11-12)

As in A Man's World, the exposition contains not only needed information about the important missing characters, but it also reveals traits of the people who are present. Susan's friends are a "rather jaded and luxury-loving group of socialites" whom Susan calls "hard-boiled worldlings." (I, 25) The dialogue reflects, in a natural style, their ambivalent relationships with each other.

Crothers' dialogue is connective; that is, it often grows out of an earlier speech or action and leads directly into another. This technique, used for pushing the action of the play forward, is found in Mary the Third, Act Three. The scene begins at the breakfast table on the morning following the previous night's shocking revelation that Mary the Second (Mother) and her husband, Robert, (Father), have been living an unhappy marriage based on lies and deceit. The children,
Mary the Third and her brother, Bobby, who are not present in the beginning of this scene, have overheard the argument and have already expressed their surprise and dismay to both parents. Granny (Mary the First) opens the scene with naive humor, a sharp contrast to the tension existing underneath the surface in Mary the Second and Robert.

GRANNY You two had a tiff? What if you have? This is another day. You have to begin all over again.

FATHER It looks like rain.

GRANNY Does it?

FATHER We need rain. The country needs it badly.

GRANNY Yes, I s'pose it does.

FATHER It's been the driest spell we've had for some time.

GRANNY Robert's doing pretty well, Mary. You might say something.

MOTHER I have a headache, Mother. I can't talk. (III, 82)

Mary the Third and Bobby solemnly enter into the dining room together, and after the perfunctory "good mornings," Granny, who still feels the uneasy tension, asks the youngest Mary, "... Why can't you start off the day like a happy family ought to" (III, 82)? This innocent question connects the preceding night's quarrel to the superficial banalities of the morning to a new explosion of opposing forces—the children are adamently against the reconciliation of their parents. Mary tells her father, "If you and Mother want a divorce, we'll see you through" (III, 84). When Robert informs her that the argument will not lead to the termination of their marriage, Mary
stubbornly replies, "Do you mean you've patched it up? We won't let you" (III, 85).

Another example of successful connective dialogue is found in the Third Act of A Man's World. Fritz has again defended Frank's reputation to Leone who has announced to all her friends in the boarding house that she sees a resemblance to Malcolm Gaskell in the miniature of Kiddie. Leone believes that Frank and Malcolm are Kiddie's natural parents. Fritz is suspicious too, but mainly he is afraid that Malcolm will hurt Frank. Because of this fear, Fritz tries to discern Frank's real feelings toward Malcolm.

FRITZ  You would like to believe in him above any man in the world?
FRANK  I do.
FRITZ  Den I will ask him some ding--some body has got to do it for you--but--if anything bad should come of dis--
FRANK  Oh--I'm not afraid--and he wouldn't lie to you!
FRITZ  You are very sure of him. Don't--don't let it--don't let it--mean too much to you if--if he is not de man you tink. It would mean everything to you, won't it? Frankie, don't--don't break your heart about a man. I--I couldn't bear it--if anybody hurt--you. (III, 89)

As Fritz starts to leave, Leone enters, jealously intent upon confronting Frank with her suspicions.

LEONE  Oh, we can't be blind, you know, even to please you.
FRANK  You mean Kiddie looks like me--and you draw the self evident conclusion.
LEONE Oh, no, not at all. We mean he looks like Malcolm Gaskell.

FRANK What?

LEONE Why you ever let him come here—why you ever undertook such a pose and expected to carry it out is more—

FRANK What do you mean?

LEONE I mean he's your child and Malcolm Gaskell is his father. (III, 91)

By connecting the dialogue, Crothers links Frank's confession to Fritz concerning her love for Malcolm to Leone's devastating accusation that Frank and Malcolm are Kiddie's parents. This charge destroys any chance Frank's love has of surviving and the revelation of her tender emotions to Fritz only reinforces the intensity of her loss. Crothers moves the action forward but always with accurate characterization.

Crothers' dialogue, by its straightforward nature, characterizes the individual speaker and the person who is being addressed. It is reflective of the speaker's moods and not the authors, and it is carefully crafted to accomplish several things at once. Clarity, the forward thrust of the action, and characterization are mixed together to form a bright, interesting, and revealing text. Rachel Crothers does, indeed, follow the criteria for good dialogue prescribed by Baker, Price, Archer, and Freytag.
CONCLUSION

The main goal of this thesis has been to determine whether the dramas of Rachel Crothers follow a discernable formula. By examining the thematic content, character types, plot structures, and forms of dialogue in four major Crothers plays, it has become apparent that there are important recurring patterns in her work.

From Crothers' first professionally produced full-length drama, The Three of Us (1906), until her last successful play, Susan and God (1937), Rachel Crothers consistently dealt thematically with the conflict of young women struggling to live outside the strict regimen of society. Crothers' plays have been labeled "problem plays" by many dramatic critics because of their shallow treatment of major social issues, including double social standards for men and women, divorce, the loose morals of the flapper, and the deterioration of the younger generation. The problem faced by each Crothers heroine is never analyzed in a complete or thorough fashion but remains a superficial study of a topical social problem.

Young, naive, beautiful women are the central characters in Crothers' plays. They form the nucleus around which the male characters cluster. These women are determined to attempt a life-style that runs counter to the expectations of society. With the exception of A Man's
World, where the heroine resolves to live a life alone, Crothers' central female characters are successfully guided by wise and understanding men into realizing the errors of their "liberated" ideas, and they gladly return to their proper place at home. Because "happy endings" were expected and appreciated by the commercial theatre audience, Crothers was guilty, on occasion, of sacrificing a logical conclusion based on inevitability for one supporting popular sentiment. This compromise of logic is especially evident in the final scenes of Mary the Third and Susan and God.

By examining Crothers' work in the light of the critical dramatic playwriting theories of William Archer, George Pierce Baker, Gustav Freytag, and W.T. Price, it is apparent that Crothers' plays follow a definite structural pattern concerning the arrangement and development of plot. Each play contains a late point of attack, a first act devoted to exposition, rising action in the middle acts which leads to a climax, and a relatively small amount of falling action concluding with a satisfactory denouement.

It is shown, through a comparison with the format of the well-made play, that Crothers' dramas are a sophisticated variation of this once-popular (nineteenth century) dramatic form. Crothers utilizes the theatrical contrivances of coincidence, secrets, discoveries, revelation, and confidants in an effective manner which owes a great deal of its success to the earlier works of Scribe, Sardou, and Dumas fils. According to Stephen S. Stanton, when the obligatory scene of a play contains a moral as well as the other necessary dramatic elements for
a well-made play, the work becomes a problem play. ¹ Crothers' dramas, therefore, clearly fit into this dramatic classification.

Even though the plays of Rachel Crothers can be called "well-made," this does not imply that they are necessarily inferior pieces of theatre. Stanton writes that the principle argument against the well-made play is that "the term has become synonymous with trashy play-writing—with the play that amuses but says nothing." ² John van Druten, however, comes to the defense of the well-made play in his book, *Playwright at Work*, with a quote by Clifford Bax, the British playwright and poet: "We ought to admire the well-made play as we admire a well-made man, and if we were to elaborate this analogy we should find that many modern plays are skinny creatures or cripples or over-large in the head." ³ Crothers' plays follow a commercially successful pattern of construction and they also attempt to convey at least a dash of conventional morality. Her works are entertaining, but their thematic content is sufficiently profound and strong to reassure the audience of the validity of society's values.

Dialogues is one of Crothers' playwriting strengths. In all of her

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¹ Stanton, p. xiv.
² Stanton, p. vii.
work she consistently refrains from promoting a personal philosophy through the words of the characters and instead, uses dialogue to reveal the inner qualities of the individual speaker. Her dialogue is clear, natural, and witty, and it aids in the forward movement of the play's action.

In summary, a recurring dramatic pattern occurs in all of Crothers' works. It can be found in theme, character, plot, and dialogue. Crothers was a very prolific playwright who discovered a formula which worked successfully for her and which she continued to develop and elaborate on throughout her professional career. She was a woman who worked in all aspects of theatre—a woman totally involved with her art. Her knowledge of acting and directing aided her as a producing playwright. She once advised young dramatic authors: "Know your theatre from the ground up, and the more you know of all the factors in the production of your play, the more as you meant it will come to your public." 4 It is this great amount of experience in the different branches of theatrical production, as well as her ability to have written more than thirty plays which appeared on Broadway, that makes Rachel Crothers truly a creative and productive woman of the theatre.

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4 Crothers, "Construction of a Play," p. 130.
APPENDIX A

SYNOPSIS OF ANALYZED WORKS

Synopses are arranged in the order in which the plays are discussed.

A Man's World

Act One is set in a New York boarding house which is the home of both male and female Bohemian artists. It is eight o'clock on a winter evening. Frank Ware, the heroine and central character in the play, lives in this house with her adopted son, seven year old Kiddie. Frank, who earns her living as a professional writer, sees herself as a "free spirit" with no constraints on her behavior. This unconventional life style, however, arouses the suspicions and prejudices of those around her.

As the play opens, Frank's newest novel, a sociological study of the Lower East Side, The Beaten Path, is being highly praised by the critics. Even though her friends say they are pleased by her success, they really suspect it was accomplished with a man's help and not solely by Frank's own talent. One tenant in the house, the hot-tempered female singer, Leone, even suggests that Frank is only pretending to be a strong, independent woman in order to hide her romance with another roome, Malcolm Gaskell, the newspaper journalist. Leone is the first person to question Frank's virtue, and later
intimates that Frank is probably Kiddie's natural mother but is ashamed to acknowledge her dissolute past. However, the true story is that Frank did adopt Kiddie in Paris after she witnessed his young, unmarried mother die while giving birth, and since that time Frank has "cursed the man who ruined his Kiddie's mother and branded him with disgrace" (III, 104). A few years later Frank returned with Kiddie to New York.

Against her better judgment, Frank falls deeply in love with Malcolm Gaskell: "Love is such a sad, and, awful thing. It is the greatest danger in the world--isn't it--the love of men and women. If we could only get along without it" (III, 90). The gossip grows that Frank is Kiddie's real mother but Frank insists on keeping secret the facts of Kiddie's birth from everyone except Fritz, a German musician, who is her loyal confidant. Malcolm questions Frank about her past, but she insists on her right to be judged on her present merits. She argues that Malcolm should accept her "just as you see me here--just as you accept a man" (II, 72). Malcolm disagrees though, and defends his position by stating that when a man loves a good woman he has the right to know her past.

In Act Two, Leone, still believing that Frank is Kiddie's natural mother, becomes obsessed with jealousy concerning the close relationship between Fritz and Frank. At Clara's (a mutual friend of all the characters) art exhibition, she reveals to everyone present that she sees a strong resemblance to Malcolm Gaskell in a miniature of Kiddie. Frank, at first blinded by her love, denies seeing any likeness between
Kiddie and Malcolm. However, in Act Three, she manages to pry from Malcolm the painful details of his affair with Kiddie's mother. He readily admits to the relationship, and although he is not proud of it, neither is he ashamed: "I never said anything about marrying her. She knew what she was doing" (III, 102). Malcolm begs Frank to see that only her stubborn ideals separate them, and that they do not take into account the inborn differences between men and women. He argues that Frank's love should be strong enough to overlook this indiscretion. Frank rejects the view that "makes nature the excuse" (IV, 112) for having ruined a woman's life and ends their relationship. The play closes as Malcolm sadly exits from her apartment.
Mary the Third

The Prologue begins at a dance in 1870. Mary the First, "a girl of twenty . . . is dressed in an evening gown of the period. . . . The skirt voluminous with ruffles and lace. Her arms, bosom and shoulders are bare—but the fashion of her hair is demure and maidenly. . . . She is soft and pretty and flower-like. Her voice is sweet. Shyness and modesty are her manner. Her movements are graceful and coy and mincing—full of a conscious charm" (Prologue, 3).

Mary I is found sitting on an "old mahogany sofa, upholstered in black hair cloth" waiting for William, her former steady beau, to come looking for her. She had jilted him for her present suitor, Hiram, who is wealthier, but now because William has just inherited a great deal of money she is determined to have him back. Unfortunately, William is presently engaged to her best friend, Lucy. Sweetly, but with the will of iron, Mary I manages to undermine the unsuspecting Lucy: "You ought to know that I will be loyal to Lucy always—above everything. . . . Dear, dear little Lucy! I must be true to her. . . . You're a great, big, strong, man. You can do as you please and still control your feelings. I'm only a weak little thing. I wouldn't dare try to go on seeing you after you are married. I might not be able to hide my feelings" (Prologue, 6). And so Mary snags William away from Lucy making him think it is his idea. The scene ends with a recurring vow that passes down from generation to generation:

MARY . . . Will you love me forever?

WILLIAM Forever and ever.
MARY: In this world and the next?

WILLIAM: Longer than eternity.

MARY: There never has been a love as great as this. I feel it. I know it. Oh, William, I love you so! I love you! (Prologue, 9)

In the second half of the Prologue the time changes to 1897, and a new parallel scene shows that now it is Mary's daughter, Mary the Second, sitting on the "old mahogany sofa" at a dance. Fashion, music, and slang have changed but the coquettish charms of women are still the same and so is their effect—to catch the best husband as possible.

Two rivals are competing for Mary's affection. Robert is the pragmatic man who intends to rise up in the world and Richard is the opposite, an idealistic dreamer. Robert sweeps Mary off her feet when he promises, "I'll give you anything on earth and the moon and the stars thrown in. Honest, Mary, no man ever loved a girl the way I love you. . . . I'll make you the happiest girl in the world. I love you. And we'll never change. Never" (Prologue, 15-16). When he asks if she loves him too, Mary answers, "Oh I do, Robert—and we must make it the most wonderful love that was ever in the world" (Prologue, 16).

Act One opens in 1922 in the home of Robert and Mary II. The old sofa is now upholstered in chintz. While the first two Marys have grown old and middle-aged respectively, Mary the Third is "twenty--slender and straight as a boy . . . vibrating with vitality and eagerness" (I, 27). A large generation gap exists between all three Marys. Granny criticizes her daughter's permissiveness over young Mary, "You're certainly not bringing your children up the way I brought
you up" (I, 21). The two also disagree over marriage. Granny's original attitude is very simple—you marry as well as you can and you live with the results. Mary II, though, is starting to think that there must be something more to it. When Granny praises her son-in-law, Robert, "... As men go, he's a very fine man. You're a very fortunate woman" (I, 24), her daughter answers, "As women go, I suppose I am" (I, 24). Later, Mary II tells Granny that she wants better things for her daughter than "... the hateful ugliness of--respectable everyday life" (I, 26).

Mary the Third is a young flapper of the 1920's. She also has two young men, similar to Robert and Richard, in love with her and they, along with another couple, are planning to go away on a camping trip where they can be free to get to know one another. Sex is implied, but Mary tells her mother that the trip is not just for the purpose of sleeping together, since they could do that and stay home. Granny is appalled at Mary's idea and leaves Mary and Mother to discuss men and marriage. Mary believes that her parents have a sound marriage and is oblivious to her mother's silent dissatisfaction with her life.

Robert, Mary's father, disapproves of the camping trip too, but one night Mary and her friends decide to sneak off on the adventure anyway. In Act Two, almost at the camp site, Mary has second thoughts about hurting her parents and fakes an appendicitis attack in order to return home. She enters the house in the early hours of the morning and hides with her younger brother, Bobby (who has been her ally in the camping trip plan), when they hear their parents coming. Hidden, they
are able to listen to the surprising scene which reveals the truth about the failure of their parents' marriage. Mary II accuses Robert of not communicating with her and she characterizes their marriage as being full of lies and deceit. Their conventional marriage seems to have been a sham, and when Mary and Bobby come out of hiding after their parents have gone, they are shattered.

Act Three begins early the next day as the children confront Robert and Mary II with what they had heard and suggest a divorce to be the only solution. Mary II is ready to leave but Robert wants to win her back. This problem remains ambiguous as Mary III and Lynn (the young man who is most like her father) begin planning their own marriage. Their understanding of life together, of course, is tempered by the times, "Why don't we make it honest and decent and fair--and if we have made a mistake we'll quit" (III, 104), and having reassured themselves with these modern ideas, plight their troth just as did the generations before them:

**MARY**  
I wouldn't marry you if I didn't know that ours is the love that will last forever. There can't be any doubt about a love as great as ours, can there, dear?

**LYNN**  
You bet there can't... Your eyes are the most beautiful things in the world. They have in them everything I want.

**MARY**  
I love you.

**LYNN**  
I love you.

**MARY**  
And we must make it the most wonderful love that was ever in the world. (III, 104-105)
As Husbands Go

The Prologue begins in late summer, about four o'clock in the morning at a corner of a private room in a small cafe in Paris. Lucile Lingard, the adored and indulged thirty-five year old wife of a Dubuque, Iowa businessman, has been traveling in Europe with her rich widowed friend, Emmie Sykes. Both women have fallen in love with European men--Lucile with the young English writer, Ronald Derbyshire, and Emmie with Hippolitus Lomi (Hippie), an older Continental dandy.

Act One opens five weeks later as the travelers return home. Once in America though, the lovers run into trouble. Emmie brings Hippie back with her to Iowa, but her demanding teenage daughter, Peggy, is convinced that he is only after her money. In Act Two, Scene I, five more weeks have passed and Ronald has followed Lucile to Dubuque. Lucile, however, realizing how much her husband, Charles, loves her, suffers from anxiety and a guilty conscience trying to keep her lover's true identity a secret while working up the courage to tell Charles she is leaving him. (Subconsciously, Lucile is aware that what she feels for Ronald is infatuation and that she is in love with being in love.)

Lucile lies to Charles by explaining that Ronald, like Hippie, is interested only in Emmie. Charles, however, sees through this flimsy masquerade when Lucile falters while singing a love song to Ronald. Instead of confronting Lucile though, Charles in Act Two, Scene II, devises his own plan for separating the lovers by becoming good friends with Ronald. On a fishing trip, he manages to gain Ronald's confidence and admiration. He plays on the Englishman's ego and dependence, making
him realize that the raving, young beauty in Paris who inspired him to great, poetic heights, is really only a nice, sweet, thirty-five year old woman who has been pampered all her life. Charles also tells Ronald that he loves Lucile too much to ever stand in the way of her happiness: "... If she finds somebody she wants more than she does me--I want her to have him" (II, ii, 126).

At the climax of the play in Act Three, Charles gets Ronald so intoxicated that he forgets to escort Lucile to the country-club dance, and by the end of the scene, the triangle has been irrevocably broken. The play ends happily with Hippie and Emmie planning their marriage since Hippie has successfully convinced Peggy that he really does love her mother (and her money). Ronald leaves the country, and Lucile, wanting to unburden herself, is gently kept by Charles from confessing her love affair. Throughout, Charles offers Lucile only love and understanding. He leaves her with nothing to regret, and her closing line, "Hold me--close" (III, 158), indicates her dependence and appreciation of his love, and the prospect for a better relationship in the future.
Susan and God

Act One, Scene One, begins in the terrace room of Irene Burrough's house in the country. It is late afternoon on a Saturday in June. Susan Trexel, the restless wife of a gentle alcoholic, Barrie Trexel, and the bored mother of a lonely teenage daughter, Blossom, who travels from boarding school to camp and back again with the changing seasons, encounters a new evangelical religion (bearing a close resemblance to the Oxford Group Movement) while traveling in Europe. She finds emotional satisfaction with her faith in the movement which is based on a "new idea" of God and self improvement, and a sense of purpose is restored to her life by her ability to bring others close to God.

The play opens with Susan's return to America. She tries to "save" her friends but no one takes her seriously. When she admonishes them to cleanse their souls by confessing the errors of their ways and they play along, she believes she has helped them find the way to salvation. Quite by accident, however, in Act One, Scene Two, Susan manages to convert her husband, Barrie (he overhears her preaching and thinks that she has changed and that there may now be hope in saving their troubled marriage). Susan had decided to divorce him when she returned to the States, but in Act Two, he persuades her to give him one more chance to prove that he can stop drinking and straighten out his life. Susan agrees to his idea of opening their country house and, together with Blossom, live there as a family for the summer, on the condition that he does not touch a drop of liquor.
Act Three, Scene One, begins three months later, with Blossom blooming into a happy, well-adjusted teenager, Barrie still sticking to his promise (made even harder by Susan's insistence that they live together as just "friends") and Susan still wanting a divorce in order to assume her public calling as an evangelist. In the final scene of the play, Act Three, Scene Two, Barrie, hurt and rejected by Susan, breaks his vow of abstinence and goes off on a two day drinking binge. Susan, however, mistakenly believes that he has left with Charlotte, the woman she has encouraged as a romantic interest for him, in preparation for the time when they will be divorcing. When Barrie returns, Susan realizes for the first time the importance of her family, "Life has come straight back at me. All the things I've been running away from—are the only ones I want now" (III, 160). She asks him for forgiveness and another chance to start a new life together.

As the curtain begins to fall, Susan holding on to Barrie, promises to use religion as a positive tool for her own soul searching: "Oh, dearest--I don't think God is something out there--to pray to. I think He's here—in us. And I don't believe He helps one bit—till we dig and dig and dig—to get the rottenness out of us. Barrie—hold me. Oh, dear God—don't let me fall down again" (III, 164-165).

APPENDIX B

CHRONOLOGY

Included is a list of all Rachel Crothers' produced plays, together with the theatres and dates of their first productions.

1878 Rachel Crothers, the youngest of four children of Dr. Eli Kirk Crothers and his wife, Dr. Marie Depew Crothers, was born December 12, in Bloomington, Illinois.

1891 Graduated from Illinois State Normal University High School.

1892 Graduated after one term from the New England School of Dramatic Instruction in Boston.

1896 Moved to New York to begin a career in the theatre.

1897-1902 Attended Stanhope-Wheatcroft school of acting, first as a student, then as an instructor.

1897 Made New York acting debut with E.H. Southern's Company.

1899 Amateur production of Criss-Cross and other one-act plays written for drama school students.

1902 Production of The Rector, a one-act play, Madison Square Theatre, New York, April 3, 1902.

1907 Traveled to London to oversee the production of The Three of Us, starring Ethel Barrymore.

The Coming of Mrs. Patrick. Madison Square Theatre, New York, November 6, 1907.

1908 Myself-Bettina. Powers Theatre, Chicago, January, 1908; Daly's Theatre, New York, October 5, 1908. This was Crothers' first opportunity to stage and direct her own play.


1912 He and She. Plymouth Theatre, Boston, February 5, 1912 (as The Herefords); Little Theatre, New York, February 12, 1920 (as He and She).

1913 Ourselves. Lyric Theatre, New York, November 13, 1913.


1917-1920 Founded and led Stage Women's War Relief.

1918 A Little Journey, starring Estelle Winwood. Little Theatre, New York, December 26, 1918. From this point, Crothers supervised the staging of all her plays.


1920 Unsuccessful New York revival of He and She, starring Rachel Crothers.

*Everyday.* Bijou Theatre, New York, November 16, 1921.

1923 *Mary the Third.* Thirty-Ninth Street Theatre, New York, February 5, 1923.


1925 *A Lady's Virtue.* Selwyn Theatre, Chicago, October, 1925; Bijou Theatre, New York, November 23, 1925.


1929 *Let Us Be Gay.* Little Theatre, New York, February 21, 1929. This production started Crothers' long professional association with producer, John Golden.

1931 *As Husbands Go.* John Golden Theatre, New York, March 5, 1931.

*Caught Wet.* John Golden Theatre, New York, November 4, 1931.


1934-1935 Worked several months in Hollywood writing film scripts.

1937 *Susan and God.* Plymouth Theatre, New York, October 7, 1937. Starred Gertrude Lawrence and was cited by Theater Club as the most outstanding play of the season.
1939  Awarded the National Achievement Award for 1938 in a White House ceremony.

1940-1945  Organized and led the American Theatre Wing for War Relief. Founded the Stage Door Canteen in New York.

1940  Produced and directed Paul Vincent Carroll's *The Old Foolishness*.

1941  Honored by Drama Study Club for the year's most distinguished service to the theatre.


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