THE DISTAFF SIDE

by

John van Druten

A Production Thesis Presented for the Degree of Master of Arts

By

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Approved by:

[Signature]
The production thesis of The Distaff Side consisted of three parts:

(i). A production book containing an abstract of the thesis, a history and analysis of the play and a description of all elements of production.

(ii). Construction of a stage model.

(iii). Production of the play at 8:00 p.m., July 24, 25, 26, 1947 in the University Theatre in Derby Hall.

The complete production book is on file in the Department of Speech. The abstract and the history and analysis of the play are also on file in the Graduate School.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

Abstract

Section I. History and Analysis
   Part I. John van Druten and His Plays
   Part II. Stage History of The Distaff Side
   Part III. As to Kind
   Part IV. Analysis of the Script
   Part V. Direction

Section II. Character Psychographs

Section III. Tryouts

Section IV. Publicity

Section V. The Settings
    Water Color Sketch
    Working Drawings
    Photographs

Section VI. Production Notes
    Light Plot
    Costume Color Chart
    Makeup
    Sound Effects
    Director's Rehearsal Schedule
    Production Staff Date Sheet
    Curtain Calls

Section VII. Performance Notes
    Ticket
    Program
    Instructions to the House Managers

Section VIII.
    The Director's Script
"Is John William van Druten a great playwright?"

Before this question can be answered it is necessary to answer another question. "What determines a great playwright?"

Many of Mr. van Druten's plays have weak plots, but what modern author can write more skillfully of his characters? It is interesting to note parts of an article published in 1945.

Plays of the future will be more concerned with character than event. This is in line with other art forms as well as with scientific research which is seeking the essence of being rather than developing on details of its manifestations.

"...Little happens in Life With Father, The Late George Apley, or I Remember Mama. Some critics maintain they are not plays according to past definitions....Certainly there is a greater and richer variety of expression in character revelation than in the altered application of long used situations....Someone once took the trouble to enumerate the basic situations available to the dramatist. I doubt if anyone would attempt to catalogue the number of character facets that are employable. It would be like counting fingerprints. That the inner man is a richer field than his outer manifestations is evident in much class literature....A tragic price is being paid for the mistakes of a "getting" civilization. If there is to be a better world it is to be a "giving" world. 1

Van Druten's plays are more concerned with characters than with events. His characters have a depth and a grasp on life that give us true pictures of an inner man and the above mentioned persons who "give" as well as "get".

Before analysing the plays of van Druten in regard to their strength and weaknesses another question must be considered. "What goes into the making of a successful playwright?" Not one factor alone can be considered responsible for it is rather the sum total of his background and his experiences.

Several bits of advice given van Druten early in his life appear to have exerted an influence on his writing - perhaps attributing to his success in characterization. When he took his early poems to the writer and critic, J. C. Squire, he relates the following:

At last Squire spoke, talking very generally, and telling me the things I needed most to hear, calling my attention in the kindest and most indirect way possible, to the imitativeness of my verse, not so much in its form as in its content and emotion. "No artist," he told me, "has ever produced a genuine work of art unless he were first sincerely moved by its subject." He told me that it was no use pumping up emotion for the sake of writing about, sitting down to write a miserable poem or a happy poem because someone else had done so and I had liked their poems. I had, myself, first to have been one of those things - happy or unhappy -
and then to have felt the need, strongly and urgently, to record the experience. 2

Later van Druten gave up the writing of poetry in favor of writing drama. In 1924 an agent, J. L. Campbell, having seen van Druten's first play, *The Return Half*, asked to handle his work and to help him to success as a playwright. Van Druten relates the advice Campbell gave him at that time.

He asked me what I was engaged on then, and I replied that I was thinking about a very light comedy, on which remark his rather disconcerting comment was the question "why?" I found it hard to reply. I told him that I had an idea which seemed not unamusing, and I thought it might go down well, at which he looked shocked. "What a perfectly dreadful reason for writing a play!" he said. "If you have really got to write it, because the idea fascinates you and you can't leave it alone, then you must write it, however slight or bad it is, but not because you 'think it will go down well.'

...He gave me a great deal of advice before he left, all on the same theme of sincerity and of never writing anything in which I did not write about the kind of people I knew, to abandon imitation and to write wholly from within myself. "It may take a long time," he ended, "I don't think you will ever set the Thames on fire, but I do believe if you are honest and sincere with it, that you can be a good and successful playwright." 3

A year later van Druten's *Young Woodley* was produced. At the time the author was a university


3. Ibid., pp.256-257.
lecturer in Wales and his play concerned the life with which he was most familiar. It is not a great now a powerfully imagined play but a delightful and gentle thing.

Of lesser virtue was his next play, After All. This play shows van Druten's lapse of heed to the advice given to him earlier. He attempted to write a fable of middle class English life designed to prove that the stodgy virtues of one generation are gladly accepted by the succeeding one. The following is from a review by John Hutchins:

You did not quarrel with such a theme for itself, because less provocative ones than that have made good plays. You did, however question its repetition in terms as lackadaisical as its title, and eventually, as exasperating as its own setting... It was indeed so successful that it suggested some deep pleasure in - as Mr. Lardner once phrased it - hurrying home and settling down to read the telephone book.

Three months later, March 9, 1932, the Empire Theatre opened with another van Druten play, There's Always Juliet. The tone of the play was light and quiet and avoided anything inherently dramatic or clearly significant. This play draws characters with such detail that the Catholic World commented, "It all seems very simple - so does figure skating when

Another successful production, largely because of its characterizations, was *The Distaff Side*. In this play it is evident van Druten followed the advice given him in his earlier life. Many of the characters embody traits of persons he once knew well. John van Druten was a keen, sensitive boy who grew up in the sheltered confines of an English home and private schools. His father was a strict, unsociable man and a fear of him caused John to turn to his mother and successive nurses with his problems. His early dislike of men followed in his schooling. Records show that outstanding progress was made in Dame Schools and almost no advance was made when he was placed in boy's schools. A period of illness interrupted his law career and during his long months of convalescence he was again associated almost exclusively with women. *The Distaff Side* includes many of these women of his acquaintance. It has as its theme the eternal love of a wonderful wife and mother. In van Druten's autobiography he attributes the same traits to his own mother. He also writes of his demanding grandmother who kept his mother always doing things for her. Both in the play and the autobiography the mother did this uncomplainingly. Many other characteristics of his family appear in *The Distaff Side*.

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Side characters. There can be no doubt that the advice given to him "to write wholly from within himself" was followed in this play.

Deviating from his usual manner of treatment and of themes was his play, *Flowers of the Forest*, which opened at the Martin Beck Theatre, April 8, 1935. Starring Katharine Cornell and dealing with an anti-war theme the script appears to have an excess of talk and of deliberate anti-war propaganda. The theme was sincerely treated but wandered far afield in search of scenes and pathos that belong to the story but are incidental to it. Joseph Wood Krutch wrote: "nice people in their nicer and quieter plays he understands very well but he is not at home anywhere except in the drawing room... *Flowers of the Forest* is depressingly dull."

Grenville Vernon stated in a review, "van Druten is one of the most sensitive and delicately poetic talents now writing for the theatre... plays seem thin in substance but they are always skillfully constructed, the characters have reality and the writing has charm and often poetry."

Few good reviews can be found for *Gertie Maude* produced in the fall of 1937. Ashley Dukes mentioned

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of it: "there is an entire row of good character performances, for the material of which players will always bless their playwright."

Comments are almost unanimously good for Old Acquaintance which followed in January, 1941. Robert Bendener published in the Nation:

There was no dramatic excitement but it was a good show....he does a remarkable job of steering a group of civilized people through situations which bring out their pettiness and jealousies without stripping them of their essential kindliness and decency. The play conveys a peculiarly warm conviction that humanity, even on its less rarefied levels is capable of a modest sort of nobility.

Perhaps the best comment on van Druten's playwriting ability to date is found in a review of Old Acquaintance in the Commonweal. "There are few authors now writing who know how to write high comedy, van Druten's touch is at once delicate and sure; his sense of character, particularly on the distaff side, keen and subtle; his dialogue witty, often distinguished."

A confession to Lloyd Morris of a desire to write a play with an American background brought about their collaboration for The Damask Cheek. Produced at The Playhouse, October 22, 1942 it proved to be a comedy of

manners. The values of the play are the old-fashioned values of charm and of witty commentary upon human nature and social behaviour. Rosamond Gilder in reviewing the play wrote, "Mr. van Druten has a sympathetic as well as discerning and often caustic pen when it comes to the dissection of feminine psychology as all his plays from The Distaff Side to Old Acquaintance have shown."

In 1943 at the Morosco Theatre on December 8, one of the most recent van Druten successes, Voice of the Turtle, opened. Stark Young wrote of the play and its author:

Mr. van Druten differs from the average run of Times Square playwrights in that he does not regard literature as a weakness. He is the kind of dramatist who might read Milton even after the Theatre Guild has decided that Milton was impractical or literary. Voice of the Turtle marks an advance over his work of recent years. It sticks to the point and does not try for coyness. It has many and quite genuine searchings into character. It has too a tenderness and a quiet imagination as to human living. There is an all-pervading wit that comes of education and good breeding and a perception of the more distinguished theatre values. And a definite growth in pattern, stage sense and intelligence is evident...the play is light but has overtones that are both poetic and haunting.

The reviews and analysis of the plays of John van Druten show that his strength in his dramatic writings is in characterization; his apparent weaknesses

are in theme, plot, conflict and sometimes dialogue. A great playwright should excell in all aspects of his art. The prediction of J. L. Campbell seems to have come true, "I don't think your work will ever be sensational or set the Thames on fire, but I do believe if you are honest and sincere with it, that you can be a good and successful playwright."

We cannot say John van Druten is a great playwright but we can say that he is a good and successful one.

13. Van Druten, _op. cit._, pp. 256-257.
STAGE HISTORY OF THE DISTAFF SIDE

It is important for a director to secure some knowledge of a play's past popularity to help him determine the problems inherent in the play. Much information is available concerning The Distaff Side.

First performance of John van Druten's The Distaff Side was at the King's Theatre, Edinburgh, on August 14th, 1933 and afterwards was opened at the Apollo Theatre, London, on September 5, 1933, with the following cast of characters:

Mrs. Venables .............Haidee Wright  
Mrs. Millward .............Sybil Thorndike  
Mrs. Frohisher .............Martita Hunt  
Mrs. Fletcher .............Dorothy Holmes-Gore  
Roland .....................Alexander Archdale  
Alex .....................Viola Keats  
Christopher Venables........Robert Horton  
Theresa Venables............Margaret Carter  
Miss Spicer .............Dora Barton  
Rose .....................Maude Buchanan  
Toby Chegwidden ..........Clifford Evans  
Charles Hubbard ..........Geoffrey Gomer  
Gilbert Baise .............Edgar Norfolk  

No reviews or comments are available on the English productions but it had a run of "102 per-15 formances" which is indicative of its acceptance.

Auriol Lee, who had staged this production in England came with it to New York, secured the services of Raymond Sovey for set designs and construction and


15. New York Times, September 26, 1934, LXXXI11,17
with Dwight Deere Wiman produced it at the Booth Theatre. It opened September 26, 1934 with three members of the original cast and ten new cast members. The play opened with the following actors:

Mrs. Venable .................. Mildred Natwick
Mrs. Millward .................. Sybil Thorndike
Mrs. Frohisher .................. Estelle Winwood
Mrs. Fletcher .................. Viola Roache
Roland ........................ Bretaigne Windust
Alex .......................... Viola Keats
Christopher Venable .......... Charles Bryant
Theresa Venable ............... Lillian Brennan Tonge
Miss Spicer .................... Hilda Flowright
Rose .......................... Doris Hall
Toby Chegwidden .............. Clifford Evans
Charles Hubbard ............... Charles Campbell
Gilbert Baize .................. Austin Fariman 16

The play received "mixed notices." The day following the American opening the show blurb in the New York Times quoted the following from opening night reviews:

The comedy is one of the very best, the acting is superior. You will know that you have had a good evening with a fine comedy brilliantly performed.

Percy Hammond, Herald Tribune

A worthwhile drama....the best play Mr. van Druten has so far written....a masterpiece of our time.

Robert Garld, World Telegram

A brilliant audience received it enthusiastically. I had a good time. And I'm here to say that if I had sons and daughters, rampantly modern, the first thing I'd do would be to take them to see, The Distaff Side.

Bernard Sobel, Mirror

An engaging comedy....one feels a warm regard for all the characters and for the author and his play.

Richard Lockridge, Sun

16. Ibhid.
It is a fine, sensitive play, written gracefully and with understanding. Sybil Thorndike was greeted with cheers.

\[\ldots\] You'll see no tamer acting this season, be sure of that.

Arthur Pollock, *Brooklyn Eagle*

A perceptive and highly enjoyable comedy.

\[\ldots\] the new season can at last be said to have been safely launched.

John Mason Brown, *Post*

Later, Grenville Vernon, writing for the periodical, *Commonweal*, wrote, "van Druten is a master of quiet sentiment, of clear characterization and of dialogue at once natural and distinguished. This is another delicately conceived play, which beautifully and sensitively acted makes a satisfying comedy."

The Nation under the column heading *The Quiet Side* published an interesting review which reads in part:

van Druten's chosen field is the field of the most intimate domestic affection and his characters almost without exception are persons who have contracted their interests to such a degree that these interests hardly extend beyond the limits of the family group within whose sheltering confines the characters have taken refuge from a rough world. *The Distaff Side* is also the quiet side. It has its moments of charm. His people are irresistibly likeable even when they seem to be more negative, have less real character than a member of the audience.\[\ldots\] There are flashes of humor, shrewd as well as gentle. There is not enough of anything positive to sustain the interest at any high pitch throughout an evening.\[\ldots\] The theme has something to do with wives and the different roles which they can play in the lives of their husbands.\[19\]

\[17\]
Ibid.

\[18\]

\[19\]
The Catholic World climaxed the good reviews by printing, "the play is beautiful by that same simplicity and dignity that shone through Saint Joan."

Other reviewers, among whom was Edith J. R. Isaacs, were less complimentary.

In The Distaff Side which John van Druten calls a "comedy of women" it must be said frankly that the author is the villain. Mr. van Druten is one of the most gifted young playwrights of England. He sees both young people and situations clearly and dramatically. He writes dialogue fluently, incisively. The Distaff Side uses not only all of these talents in service of a banal, false, domestic melodrama, but employs as well the talents of half a dozen of the finest women of the theatre to complete the job....But no man of Mr. van Druten's relentless and penetrating generation should be writing plays (except farce) about mothers who are supposed to be divinely good, but who are actually so stupid (in spite of the fact that they read books on education) that all their goodness had no further influence over the outrageous grandmothers, aunts, sisters, daughters, cousins, etc., that surround them than to leave these ill-tempered immoral, selfish, dissatisfied people a little drugged with contentment while radiant mother is in the room....If Mrs. Millward was anything like as radiant as Mr. van Druten says she is, she would have helped somebody in that crew to accomplish something more than what is supposed to be the daughter's great accomplishment - going off with a third rate moving picture director - hopeful to take care of him when he is sick. Really, Mr. van Druten, this must not happen again.

Brooks Atkinson was not too favorably impressed as the following excerpt shows.

Although Mr. van Druten's comedy of women, *The Distaff Side* is an innocuous job of professional playmaking, it is the sort of thing that can be acted and Sybil Thorndike is in the cast. For that much let us give thanks. It redeems the shoddiness of the Autumn theatre....Whatever the play may be, it is something to have a lady like that set down in our midst....Mr. van Druten can be a latter day Pinero when he is feeling indolent in mind. There is something intangibly distasteful about the complacence with which he has written a play for the sake of being at work....Although *The Distaff Side* leaves Mr. van Druten's career in temporary abeyance, it is the occasion for much that is heartening in the theatre. 22

No less complimentary was Stark Young.

An interesting event if but lenten entertainment. We remember the mildness throughout and keep thinking it must not be as mild as it seems. Is there a pressure there, something pushing towards intensity of mood, an edge of characterisation, a further dramatic accuracy?....It lacks a clinching of words, lines and reactions that are sharper and more immediate to life and more vibrant to the daily surface of our speaking....Play lacks shots of life. Perhaps a bit of pepper and extravagance - blade against blade of personality, the flare of one life against the flare of another. 23

After a four months run a notice appeared in the *New York Times*, January 14, 1935. "To make way for 'Laburnum Grove' John van Druten's *The Distaff Side* is moving tonight to the Longacre. It will remain there through February 2nd, and then will seek the road. A fortnight in Boston beginning February 4th will be followed by a week in Toronto; and that by other days elsewhere." 24

When the production closed it had a total of 177 performances to its credit, 153 on the first engagement and 24 on a return one. In the theatre season of 1934-35 there were 176 plays opened and only 11 had longer runs than The Distaff Side while 164 had shorter runs.

Even though there were apparent weaknesses in The Distaff Side this analysis of its notices shows that the play was liked and accepted.
AS TO KIND

A play is a pattern of character and event created by the playwright. As the audience watches the pattern emerge, they stand from some point of view selected by the playwright and see the interweaving of action and personality through his eyes. Many times a director disregards the playwright's point of view, sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally, and produces a play far afield from the author's conception.

In order to avoid the errors leading to a poor production the director must make a thorough study of the script to determine the kind of play, the inherent moods, the problems presented, the interpretation of lines and the problems of characterization - all determining his ultimate style of direction.

Is the play tragedy, comedy, melodrama or farce? Mr. van Druten underscored his interpretation of The Distaff Side as to kind when he subtitled it A Comedy of Women. But there his labelling stops and it is left to the director to determine the type of comedy inherent in the script. Before this type can be determined one must decide just what comedy is and what its types are.
What then is the nature of comedy? The answer is that in comedy temporal values prevail, and in tragedy eternal; comedy is always rooted in the social order. It deals with the relationships of individuals to society and of society to individuals.

Comedy does not move into the realm of abstract justice, but anchors itself in this world with its imperfect but easier emotional and ethical judgements. The essence of comedy is that life within its limits does "make sense" at the conclusion of the play. It is partly the sense of release from the bonds of the actual, of the conventional, of the expected, which laughter always gives; and it is partly the pleasures of the gratification of wish-fulfillment. The conclusion satisfies both our consciousness of communal good sense and good feeling; it leaves us with a coherent and stable attitude to life. In it life is made to appear intelligible and finite. 25

There are many explanations and definitions of comedy. They all agree in substance if not in terminology and detail. Elizabeth Drew writes: "the essential difference between Comedy and Tragedy is that Comedy is a sociable thing and that Tragedy is a solitary thing; that we all like to share a joke, and that everyone who suffers is alone." 26

"The pleasure that men take in comedy arises from their feeling of superiority to the persons involved in the comic action," says Ludwig Lewisohn. In The Art of the Drama we find the statement: "in general, comedy makes a less exalted appeal, and a less profound analysis of human emotions than tragedy, that is it deals more honestly and less irresponsibly with its material than farce or melodrama." On the same subject John Gassner writes:

... it would be easy to define comedy as a play that evokes laughter. It is still a sensible, practicle procedure to define it thus, provided one differentiates between the most elementary kind of fun known as farce and more intelligent laughter of high comedy.... Comedy is a way of looking at life with the mind rather than with the passions and life regarded in this manner becomes comparatively light and playful; it induces smiles, if not laughter; it asks of an audience detached observation instead of emotional involvement.

The psychologists tell us that laughter always has a sense of release behind it, and in comedy it finds this particular channel of expression which it cannot have in actual life. In the theatre we are released from the bonds of actuality and can find a primitive pleasure in identifying ourselves with the characters and situations presented on the stage.

28. Fred Millett and Gerald Bentley, The Art of the Drama, p. 84.
Even though fashion in wit changes continually there are some external elements of comedy constant in their appeal. A list of ten compiled by Elizabeth Drew are:

1. men and women
2. exposures of every aspect of humbug
3. greed
4. egotism
5. vanity
6. snobbery
7. stupidity
8. roguery
9. folly
10. inconveniences of flesh

These elements of comedy with their individual or combined twists of theme or character have given rise to various types of comedy. Gassner classifies these types as:

1. comedy of intrigue or situation
2. comedy of realism or satire
3. romantic comedy
4. high comedy or comedy of character
5. comedy of wit or manners
6. sentimental comedy

After an analysis of The Distaff Side one can clearly see it is high comedy or comedy of character. The situations are not inherently funny in themselves but are adapted to bring out the comic qualities in the characters. Human nature is revealed as it is, the characters really live, they do not just represent ideas. These characters are comic for van Druten exposes their absurdities, their incongruities, their attitudes and eccentricities which set them off from "normal life."

They are not unreal or fantastic people - but types. The meticulous characterization of the playwright has given us credible human beings in recognizable situations.

Each person in the cast of thirteen is at the same time an individual and a type. Henri Bergson tells us that every comic character is a type; conversely every resemblance to a type has something comic in it. The comic person is unconscious of the comedy he provides for others and is funny in proportion to his ignorance of himself. To analyse further the comedy in *The Distaff Side* we recall another statement of Bergson's that a witty person makes us laugh at someone else; the comic person makes us laugh at himself. With this brief analysis of comedy as a basis let us turn to an analysis of the individual characters.

First is Mrs. Venables, a bony old lady of seventy-five, who demands from everyone a slavish compliance to her whims. Her insistence upon one chair being hers and only hers, her habit of eating soft chocolates and giving only the hard ones to others, her ordering the assembling of the family are all a source of amusement. But she is a type! In addition to being a type she exemplifies several of the eternal elements of comedy: vanity, greed, egotism, snobbery, to some extent stupidity, and her age adds the inconveniences of the flesh.
Lis, Mrs. Pobisher, is basically comic. As a type she represents the unconventional, cosmopolitan women of society. Vanity is the most comic of all weaknesses and Lis is vain. Her affectations, her flirtations, her scorn of plebian manners and people, her fear of getting old and her self-admiration all bear out her vanity. Another comic element displayed by Lis is snobbery. This is shown in her disdain of Newcastle and all that Nellie represents, in her disregard for Theresa and combines with vanity in her treatment of Marcel. Lis's involvement with Gillie brings another comic situation to the audience through making vice funny. One sees the entire situation of Lis and Gillie through the eyes of Lis. You laugh with her at the possibility of their being married in blackest Africa and the prospect of the vicar calling. The audience never minds their past ten years together of 'living in sin.' A comic effect is often secured through the repetition of the same situation repeated with different characters. For example, the same Lis who has spent ten years living with a man to whom she was not married, objects to Alex's misstep and insists upon a different code of morals for her niece than the one she has lived by.

Nellie is another well known type. An attractive young girl who leaped into romance and marriage only to find herself buried in a small town with an unromantic
husband and four children dependent upon her. The basic cause of her now being a comic character was her folly in marrying Arthur which has been the cause of her retrogression. Her ignorance of modern dress and manners all stems from her isolation brought about by this folly. Her amusing mannerism of playing with her handkerchief pictures her nervousness at having been uprooted from Newcastle and her realisation of being a misfit. Both Nellie and Liz strengthen the other’s comic element through their contrast to each other.

Not the most comic of the characters but still a carrier of the comedy and plot is Roland. He is a typical, intellectual, lazy boy of twenty years. His egotism is one of the elements of comedy. An example of comic effect in his character is his way of taking literally an expression which was used figuratively. For specific example his speech to Liz: "Stir Mother up? What do you suggest I do? Take her joy riding on my motor bike? Why, yes, Grandma might come too. I’ll bring 32 a boyfriend for her from the hospital."

Theresa is another type easily recognized - a bachelor girl. About her the usual comment is often made, "What she needs is a good, strong, he man." Her interest in social work and in getting others to do something she considers worthwhile is entertaining. It

32. The Director’s Script, p.56.
is so because she is typical of an individual who has been deprived of a husband, home and family and has devoted herself to a cause. Her interest and absorption has been so complete that she cannot understand why others do not throw themselves into a mission - the comic element of stupidity. Comedy is emphasized in Theresa by having her gestures and costume, masculine, sharp and free from feminine frills.

Theresa might be termed a bachelor-girl but we find a type more representative of the old maids in Miss Spicer. Again we have a fundamentally comic person for the audience laughs at her because of her mannerisms. A comic sort of stupidity exists in her lack of realization of how much she is missing in life. Comedy directs attention to gestures and Miss Spicer attracts much attention in this manner. Examples are her fluttery hands, mincing steps, manner of peering at someone or thing, her facial expressions, her movement as she uttered "dear," her funbling of objects and her adorative movements as she observed the romantic in life. She is neither a new character in drama nor life and a source of much pleasure in both.

Placed in the drama to complicate the plot but actually another carrier of the comedy is Charles Hubbard. Newly rich and still impressed with himself, he exemplifies the comic element of egotism, vanity, snobbery and stupidity.
His implied disdain of the Millward home, amazement at dressing for dinner so early, his disregard of Toby and the baby Austin and his self satisfied manner are examples of these elements.

As in life we find self-assured men of middle age who are the object of female adoration, so we find Gillie. Frequent reference to Gillie in the first and second acts makes the audience ready to accept him when he appears in the third. He is a vain, egotistical man - perhaps somewhat stupid but a non-conformist with the underlying qualities of a rogue. As with Liz, vice is made comic and the process of handling his situation with Liz is given added impetus through inversion. Until this scene, Gillie has dominated Liz and now he realizes she has left him and he pleads for her to return. He goes so far as to offer marriage and to agree to live in Paris. In spite of his capitulation the audience knows it is only a temporary reform and are completely satisfied with him.

From this discussion of the play as to kind it appears that it is the director's problem to direct and produce *The Distaff Side* so that each person is alive as an individual, representative of a type and likeable even when an object of humor.
ANALYSIS OF THE SCRIPT

An analysis of The Distaff Side is necessary to determine its strengths and weaknesses and to foresee the problems of production.

A structural analysis shows a total of 103 French scenes.

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With the above scene analysis in mind it is interesting briefly to analyse the number of speeches and lines for each character.

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<tr>
<td>Toby Chegwidden</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert Baize</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Hubbard</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These two tables show that the burden of the play is being carried by three characters. To avoid monotony van Druten has rotated the number of persons in successive scenes following a pattern of 2-3-4-3-2-3-1-3 and its variations.
A more useful analysis of scene division often used is that each scene represents an idea incidental or pertinent to the main story or idea. Alexander Dean has classified all such scenes into four kinds of technical arrangements.

1. **Scenes of Incidental Action.** These are scenes not pertaining to the main action but, nevertheless, scenes of activity through which exposition, atmosphere, or presentation of characters are woven.

2. **Scenes of Background.** In these the locale, setting of the place, or time is established.

3. **Scenes of Main Action.** These contain the main situations of the story in which the plot is in graphic or dramatized form.

4. **Scenes of Dramatized Emotional Relationship.** They are scenes of mental and psychological states and attitudes.

Following Dean's classification we find these scenes of ideas in *The Distaff Side*:

- Scenes of incidental action: 76
- Scenes of background: 13
- Scenes of the main plot: 36
- Scenes of the sub-plot: 15
- Scenes of emotional relationship: 15
- Total number of scenes: 155

The latter plan of scene division is the method chosen for this analysis.

Scenes of incidental action are the greatest contributors to the comic element and not to be lightly treated. *The Distaff Side* is a high comedy, a comedy of character, and through the character development opportunity

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*Alexander Dean, Fundamentals of Play Directing*, pp. 207-211.
arises to display the more humorous aspects of each character. The main plot and theme are both serious. The sub-plot of Gillie and Liz is humorous because the characters make it so, but a careful balance of the serious and high comedy elements must be achieved.

A survey of Act I shows us that the title The Distaff Side is most apropos and revealing for there is no intense plot. Instead a family is introduced - a family of women - where each is strongly individualized, but also representative of a type. In this respect van Druten shows craftsmanship and it is evident that characterization is the chief element of the play. Remembering the play is basically a comedy we find that the comedy is in the characters, not in the situations. It is evident in this act that van Druten's weakness is in plot development.

The first four scenes of Act I include the details of the immediate situation and antecedent action. In the first speeches the characters of Mrs. Venables and Mrs. Millward are drawn and at the same time the comic element is introduced in the character of grandmother. It is well to observe here that the dramatist in his better scenes frequently includes or calls for a bit of business which aids greatly in emphasizing his purpose. In this scene Grandmother's distaste of milk, her disappointment over a hard chocolate and cryptic dialogue with herself not
only reveals the matriarch of the family but reveals her in a humorous manner. In the opening conversation the seed is planted for interest in Theresa and her works, Spicer and her position in the household, Liz's expected arrival and Eve's children, Alex and Rolland. After the entrance of Alex we are prepared for the precipitation of the conflict or major question. The exposition acquaints us with Charles Hubbard and his background and with Toby who is less popular at the moment with Alex. The beginning of the conflict is seen after the discussion of Alex's "young men" and Grandma state of Charles, "Perhaps he'll get his father to write a bigger part for you next time." Alex replies, "That's passed through my mind, too." This scene shows van Druten's ability to create character through dialogue for almost devoid of action a certain dislike for Charles is born and an unconscious liking and sympathy is created for Toby.

Miss Spicer's introduction precipitates no crisis but contributes to the background and comic element. Her entrance timed with Grandma's irritation makes her at once an object of amusing sympathy. Excellent dialogue has been given her better to portray her character. A previous table shows that Miss Spicer had 39 speeches but 71 lines. This talkiness is evident in the count and

34. The Director's Script, p. 8.
more evident in the non-essential information she supplies. As the handmaiden of Grandma she lends an opportunity to Grandmother to develop an irritable, demanding and amusing nature.

The following scene of main action between Alex and her mother further develops the conflict for the major question when Alex's confused state of mind is revealed as she weighs her fondness for Toby against the wealth and influence of Charles. Adroitly used as preparation for the entrance of Liz and the sub-plot of the affair between Liz and Gillie is the mention of Aunt Liz and the discussion of her past. Not only does this scene lead on toward the attack of the play but it is important for it reveals Eve as the understanding, patient, loveable mother.

Liz's arrival scene is one of interest because of her delayed entrance which has been built up through small talk. A technical contrivance to bring Liz on to an empty stage where the audience could receive the full impact of her arrival has been further heightened by hearing a hubbub of familiar voices offstage and a new voice topping them.

Rolan's introduction seems contrived and merely incidental action which only furthers Liz's flirtatious nature until you analyze van Druten's purpose and discover
two more things are accomplished here. Eve is again shown in the role of mother and pal; Roland's profession is introduced which makes acceptable his caring for Toby when he becomes ill.

Rose's entrance to ask for Mrs. Frobisher's keys seems to have no motivation nor purpose and has no relation to what precedes or follows. It is necessary to manufacture interesting business to keep the play from dropping or the interest waning.

Now Eve and Liz are alone on stage and a conflict is initiated which later proves to be the sub-plot of the play. Liz tells of leaving Gillie and her intention of marrying Marcel. The audience's doubt and belief that her move is a wise one is brought about by Eve's expression of her fears and Liz's reply:

Eve: Are you in love with him?
Liz (with a giggle): Eve dear! If you saw him...
Eve: What's the matter with him?
Liz: He's a Belgian. He's...(searching for a word) funny!
Eve: Then............ 35

With these few remarks the audience absorbs the feeling about Marcel and is better prepared for the ending of the sub-plot when it comes. Also this scene builds Liz as an amusing and most interesting person. Her lines show her sense of humor and her actions must be correlated with them to help the audience see things through her eyes.

35. Ibid., p.15.
The next five scenes of incidental action relate additional exposition and re-emphasize Grandma's dogmatic ways, the purpose of the family gathering and Aunt Nellie's provinciality. Much of the humor in these scenes is brought about through Liz's actions and reactions.

One of the weakest scenes in Act I is Toby's introduction. There is little action and much exposition. Extreme care will have to be taken to avoid a drop in tempo and audience interest.

As Alex enters her relationship to Toby is suggested in her first line and movement to him. "Toby, what a mess you're in! You do want a haircut. (she straightens him) Now, then." Their ensuing conversation provides the major dramatic question of the play. Will Alex marry Toby and go to America or will she turn him down in favor of a career and what Charles represents? We now find the beginning of a plot and true conflict.

The scene of attack is about to resolve itself with Alex's acceptance of Toby when the arrival of Charles furthers the complications. The contrast of Charles and Toby, shows the conflict of man against man and causes Alex to favor first one and then the other. This gives to the observer a sense of suspense and conflict. The climax, not of the major question but of the moment, will Alex go out tonight with Charles or

36. Ibid., p.21
remain home with Toby, is resolved in her leaving with Charles. This scene offers more than the conflict for it humorously contrasts the traits of the two suitors. The more this contrast can be developed the better the scene will be.

The last three scenes of incidental action in the first act return to the theme of "wonderful Eve." She bids Alex and Charles goodbye, attempts to console and compensate Toby, tells Roland goodnight and turns out the lights in preparation for retiring when Liz enters. With this last scene of Eve sitting on the arm of Liz's chair in the quiet solitude of the room, we realize the plot is subordinate to the theme - Eve.

At the end of the discussion of the first act it is well to inject the skeletal information that the play is revealing. Already we have found the plot is too slight and that the play cannot depend upon it for success. On what does the play depend? The first act has given a definite answer - its characters. They have been masterfully drawn by the author and must be just as well portrayed by the actors. Their actions and their speech must convey the living reality and interests of their lives to the onlooker. Just how has the playwright developed his play to do this? We see first that he has chosen representative people. Each character in The Distaff Side has his counterpart in every community. Not only has van Druten made these characters recognizable
but he has given them typical actions plus interesting quirks of character which maintains interest in them. Their mannerisms and habits are representative of persons of that type and one feels you have known them well for a long period of time. Their dialogue is realistic and convincing. Psychologists tell us human attention changes every ten seconds. The playwright avoided losing the audience's attention by having the characters make short speeches. When longer ones are made by the characters they are interrupted by a question or a remark by another character. At times characters like Eve, Alex and Liz deliver long speeches but fortunately these can be broken by rhythm of delivery and interest is maintained. In writing their dialogue the dramatist has been especially adept at capturing a rhythm of speaking which is natural to the character. This adds much to characterization.

Following the pattern set in the first act of having characters enter on an empty stage and through their conversation deliver all kinds of exposition, the second act begins. Charles, essentially a comic character in his stuffiness and scorn of the middle class brings out even more the vital question at stake for Alex. Which one shall it be? To bring Rose in to tell Alex where everyone is and that Toby is expected was not too clever but the scene can be made interesting if Rose is treated as
more than the conventional maid.

Most good plays are said to repeat an important idea at least three times to make sure the audience grasps it. Van Druten's *The Distaff Side* does this. The theme of the wonderful wife and mother has been brought up several times in Act I and again it is stressed when Alex tells Charles of the love her mother had for her father. The repetition has been done in regards to Nellie's provinciality, Grandma's birthday, Alex's struggle and Toby's new job.

Weight of the conflict seems to be on Charles' side when Alex asks, "You've got quite a lot of pull one way and another, haven't you?" The suspense continues to grow until she turns from him, refuses a kiss, and is saved by the entrance of Liz and Nellie.

Not only here but in the beginning of Act I Theresa has been strongly mentioned and an anticipation of her entrance is being built up, much more than her minor role warrants. Its only purpose apparently is to provide contrast with the stay-at-home, successful wife and mother, Eve. Nellie's social life provides excellent contrast material to the continental Liz.

Alex, the protagonist, offers further complications in the major dramatic question when she reveals to Liz her intimacy with Toby and asks for advice. Liz's reaction to Alex is a surprise for one remembers her relations with Gillie and hardly expect her to rail against Alex's behaviour. As one expects Liz to send Alex out to marry

Toby we expect a solution to the conflict. However, Alex introduces a new scene by stating, "If I told you I thought I could marry Charles Hubbard, what would you say then?" Liz now surprises all by answering, "I'd say then, if you like him at all you'd be extremely silly not to."

The plot is further advanced with Toby's return, his change in plans and his plea for Alex to accompany him. The obstacle, Charles, seems more apparent than ever when Toby becomes ill and again Alex's interest returns to Toby. The suspense of Toby's illness reveals Alex's love and concern for him, again stresses Eve's competency and brings in Roland. The following scenes inject more humor by the return of other characters. Nellie's and Theresa's small quarrel, Grandmother's scoffing and domineering qualities are sources of amusement. The entrance of Christopher just adds to the atmosphere (and male numbers) and prepares for Eve another scene of love and confidence. Liz and Gillie are again brought to our attention in the scene just following when a telephone call brings the issue to notice and the announcement that Gillie is back in town. Without any reference to him we immediately think of Marcel and the complications bound to result. Now the sub-plot is developing. The concluding scene of Act I uses Christopher as a foil further to build Eve as a loving wife and mother and the second curtain is hers.
Lacking in variety Scene II of Act II opens as have two curtains before in the play - on an empty stage. Again voices are heard off stage, this time revealing the end of the birthday party. As Eve prepares for the night, one feels sorry for the lonely Nellie and her unexciting life. However, it appears the author intended Nellie less as a sympathetic character than as another character to show Eve as the consoler and unselfish stabilizer of the family. As Nellie reads the poem and discusses her life with Arthur it only brings more vividly to mind the life of Eve and Andrew, their happiness, and the attempt to go on remembering even after death.

The sub-plot is brought into focus with Liz's confession to Eve that Gillie is in town and wants to see her. Liz's inner nature and true feelings for Gillie are discerned and we see a new Liz, not the superficial one we've been so far accustomed to. This miracle has been brought about by Eve.

Both the main plot and the sub-plot are in a state of suspended crisis. A major conflict, which not only furthers the plot but is one of the two strongest scenes in the play for Eve, is now presented. Alex confesses to her mother of her relations with Toby. Alex's sense of futility, of inability to meet her problems is a build to the confession and the climax of Eve's reaction is an unexpected turn of events. In contrast to the scene where Alex confided to Liz the scene with Eve is quiet and her
chief concern is to find "why?" As Alex is unable to answer Eve has been given the scene by the playwright. Her philosophy and views on love and marriage expressed here seem to explain her whole life, why she is what she is and what she wants her daughter to be. The philosophy in the scene is excellent but one must avoid monotony and not let it be talky. It must be built to such an intensity that no action is needed to hold the listener.

A sudden return to action is motivated as Toby enters in his delirium. Main action, renewing the suspended crisis of Charles, Alex and Toby now prevails. Toby's mental wanderings strengthen his proclaimed love of Alex, bring out the wonderful qualities of Eve and forces the full realization to Alex of how much Toby needs her. Just as one is again convinced that Toby has removed the obstacle of Charles, the telephone rings and the author reminds us that Charles is still in the picture. Alex's reaction to Charles is negligible and her fear for Toby is so deep that another curtain scene belongs to Eve as she comforts her daughter. A note of warning must be given here to avoid a quiet curtain with no build to intensity. The scene may be Eve's but the curtain build should be climactic.

Many of the opening scenes of Act III are expository and humorous, further revealing the characters of Roland, Liz, Spicer and Theresa. Renewed interest in the drama is cleverly introduced through a new personality, Gillie. This introduction gives the audience a new
character to watch when they may be slightly tired of the old ones. Consequently, Liz and Gillie's scene creates interest and the director has little trouble in maintaining suspense in the sub-plot. Their entire scene is one of conflict and crisis. Suspense and interest grows in Gillie's disclosure of his father's death, his inheritance of money, as he tells that Mae has consented to divorce him, and finally when he capitulates and agrees to live in Paris if Liz so chooses. In spite of conventions, the playwright's intention is to make one glad that Liz brought the resolution into focus and decided to return to Gillie.

Now that the sub-plot is disposed of, van Druten returns to the main plot - Alex and Toby. Toby, (and the audience) have apparently resigned themselves to Alex's refusal of Toby when in a whirlwind of events Alex returns. As Mrs. Millward exits Alex rushes to Toby:

Alex: Toby... I've got a present for you.
Toby: A parting gift?
Alex: (takes a large envelope from her bag and hands it to him. He looks at her;)
Toby: (takes out a passport and a steamship ticket; Alex)
Alex: My ticket and my passport. I'm coming with you." 38

The resolution, climax or denouement is over. The main dramatic question is answered. Alex is going with him. Again characterization and humor comes to the foreground in the reaction to the news. Mrs. Venables still is self

38. Ibid., p64.
centered. Spicer is joyful over someone else's happiness, and Eve is pleased and radiant as the scene closes.

The last scene of Act III is a realistic tying of loose ends: Alex thanks her mother for all she has meant to her; Liz reveals her marriage plans to Gillie; Grandmother, somewhat chastened, offers her best wishes; Nellie, sighing, plans her return to Newcastle. As befitting the play and theme the last scene is Eve's. The playwright offers Eve a chance to forsake her solitude by having Christopher propose marriage. Her answer is what we expect.

Christopher, I couldn't. I'm terribly, terribly, sorry, but I couldn't. I like you. You know that. I'm deeply, deeply fond of you. But marriage and all it means is something different. That couldn't happen twice.....for me. 39

39. Ibid., p. 75
The Distaff Side is obviously not presentational but realistic and representational for it has a recognizable setting and characters and a probable plot and theme. Granted the script is representational there are still two divisions to be considered. Is this play to be done in the style of naturalism or realism? The naturalist's great desire is to imitate life. Plots are treated with such simplicity and lack of emphasis that one wonders if they could be called plots. The naturalistic setting is detailed and correct, in fact so correct in detail that it is often a distracting influence. Obviously The Distaff Side does not belong here. The second division of representational style is realism. "True realism in the theatre aims at giving the effect of reality and not of reality itself." Whereas naturalism presents things just as they are, details and all, realism eliminates until only those elements vitally necessary, but still authentic, are present. A realistic production must create a sense of verisimilitude. Its arrangement of life for the stage must seem recognizable and plausible; whatever artifice or heightening is employed must be made to appear unobtrusive or natural. Artistic selection is necessary but must be inconspicuous to preserve the illusion of reality.

The Distaff Side may now be classified as a realistic comedy. It is realistic in content because it deals with people we know in familiar situations. It is realistic in writing and consequently in production, because the material has been chosen with a great deal of selectivity and give the plot validity and the characters reality. Only those elements are used which are necessary for our understanding of the characters and the story. No attempt is made to give a completely life-like picture and a rigid control is needed over the details of characterization, movement and business.

No better method can be employed to help a director achieve his aim, in this instance a realistic comedy, than a careful planning of the play in terms of the five elements of directing: composition, rhythm, picturization, movement and pantomimic dramatization. Just as it is impossible to take one aspect of a famous painting and credit it with the total effect so it is with the elements of directing; no one effect can be secured without a carefully porportioned blending of the elements for the total effect of unity in art. The audience should feel this unity but should not consciously realize the technique which brought it about.

To attempt to go into detail as to manner and methods
used to achieve the various results in *The Distaff Side* would be to repeat the director's notes in the script. It is interesting to note, however, the more obvious problems faced by the director and the detailed manner of their solution.

The cardinal problem presented in the play was to make an average person interesting in his everyday course of events. There was no powerful plot to interest the audience - only a theme. A theme of a home where a remarkable mother kept her family on an even keel and through her gracious, radiant love and understanding, assured us that not all great women have achieved world renown. Van Druten wrote:

The number of great persons in real life is, unhappily, small enough, but the elements of fineness, are pretty widely and evenly distributed among the human race....May we not have plays of the everyday people around us, for after all how many of us can count "great people" among our friends?....Why write about such people at all, is the cry. Well, it is partly because there is in all of us something that enjoys seeing our own existences portrayed on the stage, just as, at other times, we enjoy escape from them....It may be harder to make a great play around ignoble persons than around gods and heroes but it is not impossible. 41

The play had a plot and you were conscious of it but you were more conscious that there were live, people living in Saint John's Wood, facing their daily problems as those individuals would. Without the complications of a strong plot each person had to maintain interest individually

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and collectively through technical means - the fundamentals of directing.

In the analysis of the author's intentions in his script we learned that the house was representative of Eve, a generous mother, an exalted woman - an image of perfection. To provide a setting that was Eve's it was necessary to choose a set and a floor plan that gave a feeling of comfort, simplicity, dignity, freshness and beauty, a room that was lived in to its fullest. With this to remember the fourth wall had to be removed. Including a fireplace with a cheery fire, a bay window overlooking a garden, bookshelves filled with interesting books and odds and ends, sofa, chairs and a hassock the homey reality was achieved. Colors played an important part. The soft blue walls with white woodwork and the chairs and sofa in their floral patterned slipcovers with huge splashes of red and neutral yellow helped give the freshness, beauty and comfort representative of Eve.

Real people had to be made to live in these rooms and their reason for being there clearly expressed. Knowing this all the actors strove to approximate the effect of actual conversation. They eliminated all inflated and rhetorical elements and developed a pattern of British utterance, each individual according to his character. Liz and Gillie worked to sound cosmopolitan with no dialectal or colloquial pattern. Rose, representative
of a working class, used a more broad colloquial pattern, not cockney, but more near it than the high English pattern chosen by the rest as typical of their character, locale and position.

Dialogue in itself was not sufficient to carry to the audience the desired effect. Psychologists tell us the eye is quicker than the ear so it was important to convey to the audience the dramatic situation in the placement of characters to suggest their mental and emotional attitudes toward one another. Each character developed by study and rehearsal, movements and pantomime indicative of his own character which aided immeasurably in establishing the actual rhythm and picturization for the overall effect. Once these bits were accepted, whether contributed by the cast member or the director, they became a part of the pattern and were blended into the whole.

As the curtains opened Eve and Mrs. Venables were each reading a book. The slight moment of silence conveyed the impression of two women quietly pursuing their own interests. This effect was accomplished with the dominance of horizontal lines and the placing of Mrs. Venables DR, Eve LC, surrounding them with space, giving a picture of each alone, yet together. Mrs. Venables' controlled pantomime and crypt authoritative voice called attention
to her shen she started speaking, but Eve immediately became a center of attention as she made a strong cross from L to R, went upstage L of Mrs. Venables and, emphasized by level and body position, continued their conversation. Both women were characterized in their locale and shared the scene.

With thirteen persons in the cast numerous entrances were called for. To justify properly each person he had to be made important and the scene built to his entrance. Following the described scene above incidental conversation prepared the audience for characters entering later and technical use of the fundamentals reinforced their entrances. In the case of Alex's first entrance Eve and Mrs. Venables were kept seated, together in conversation and picturization as Alex entered through the archway UL. Several kinds of emphasis were given to her. First, she entered on a higher level than the two seated women and upstage of them which called for Mrs. Venables to directly focus on her and Mrs. Millward to counterfocus. As she made a strong cross from that area to RC of Mrs. Venables the movement attracted more attention than the stationary objects, in addition to which she had a full front position. Using pantomime to tell much of the relationship of the three women, she kissed her grandmother dutifully, patted her mother lightly on the shoulder and returned to her emphasized position on the step, poised for flight until called back into the room by a query concerning Toby.
As Spicer entered, her fluttering indecisive movements were all the better seen for Alex, Eve and Mrs. Venables were seated and still. Spicer was standing, receiving direct focus for her movements when crossing from one area to another while she talked.

The problem of making an entrance worthy of the cosmopolitan Liz was confronted. Conversation had aroused interest in her coming. With the sound of the car Alex and Eve both jumped up, breaking the restful horizontal line and dashed offstage. The hubbub outside introduced the voice of Liz and increased the interest. When she entered all eyes were on her for she was emphasized by the height of the step, surrounded by space, had the advantage of the increased tempo, was reinforced by the archway and followed her appearance with a strong cross to DC to survey the room. Other characters entered and talked with her but for the most part she stood alone, balancing the figures of Eve and Alex and taking their focus while pantomiming affectations.

Much use was made in The Distaff Side of movement from weak to strong areas. All entrances from the hall to DLC were from a weaker to a stronger area as the exits were strengthened by movements from a lower to a higher level. Movement from L to R to add strength was utilized by all characters. One example of the use of strong and
weak movement for contrast was where Spicer and Theresa entered in Act III, one after the other. Spicer, the weak, indecisive, fluttery female, made an entrance from the R crossing L - weak movement in keeping with her character. Just the opposite was Theresa, strong, independent and concise who entered from L and strode R - surely an added strength through strong movement to a strong area.

When Liz and Eve were left alone and Liz revealed her break with Gillie and plans to marry Marcel a new problem, that of pacing, was introduced. Liz was to be more emphasized than Eve but Eve must not be made weak and should be strong enough to take over at times. This was done by contrast. In the first portion of the scene Eve remained quietly on the sofa while the nervous mood of Liz was shown through restless pacing, jerky movements and pantomime. To avoid confusion in the spectator's minds the pacing was planned in a definite pattern. Liz moved from R to L, then diagonally UR back of the chair, back down to the L point and R again. After the pattern was formed she used a slight variation of it to avoid a set pattern look and tiring the audience. Liz emphasized her lines by stopping and holding the movement for the line and then picking up her pacing in a faster tempo. Eve interrupted and her strong cross from L to R to Liz gave her command of the situation in composition and picturization as well as dialogue and pantomime. Back it
went to Liz when she moved L then U and Eve took a lower level by placing one knee on the chair with a diagonal focus to Liz who was now standing full front, upstage, reinforced by the bay window.

In order to avoid monotonity and audience restlessness, partially feared because of the weak plot, it was especially important to change areas with the changes in thought. The latter part of Act I illustrates how this was done. Alex entered when Toby was talking to Eve DR and paused on the step UL. Eve crossed to Liz ML and they exited as Alex crossed DR to Toby - where they played their scene. As Charles entered Alex was drawn UL to greet him and then they came slightly LC to meet Toby. The scene contrasting Charles and Toby was played with Charles UC and Toby DR with Alex shuttling between as her affections changed. With Eve's entrance and introduction to Charles the main action was DLC. As Alex and Charles exited Eve took the action to the DRC area as she went to Toby. With Toby's exit and Roland's entrance Eve went to turn out the desk light, then the sofa lamp, carrying the scene with Roland URC. As he exited, Liz entered, sank in the chair LC and Eve sat on the chair arm dead center as the Act I curtain fell.

Another scene of main action, Alex confiding to Liz was a problem of two characters sharing emphasis. Here Alex was kept standing DR, reinforced by the fireplace, while Liz, shocked and upset over the information confided to her,
paced R to L, back to R, then L and U, D to the R.

Alex's stillness was more a picture of complete bafflement while Liz's agitation was evident in her quick movements. Principally by contrast, Liz giving and taking the U position, and through sharing of the same plane was the scene shared.

It is interesting to note here that contrast in Nellie and Liz was made more evident by having Liz on her feet, restlessly moving about, whereas Nellie while less emphatic in character was standing still or more often slumped on the chair or sofa.

Throughout the three acts deep or multiplane use of form expressed the warmth, richness, mellowness, sincerity and realism so vitally a part of Eve and her home. Not only was deep form used for as the mood effect changed so did the form. The compact form around Toby when he suffered an influenza attack expressed the warmth and concern of the others whereas the single plane or shallow form was used when Alex and Toby were excited over Toby's telegram, when Liz and Gillie were fighting and making up and the diffused form was used to stress Alex's turmoil and Liz's defiant individualism.

Because of the weak plot line, bits of business needed to be included to maintain interest and supplement characterization. In Act I Rose entered and asked for Mrs. Frobisher's keys which would have been only a short
uninteresting scene of incidental action. To build this to a more interesting pitch a bit of pantomime was introduced which helped in clarifying the characters. Rose remained on the steps until Liz crossed to her while looking in her bag for the keys. As she approached, Rose held out her hand. Liz kept hunting, with Eve, Rose and Roland all focused on her. The evident stuffed and confused state of her purse, apparently an everyday occurrence with Liz, was an object of male amusement by Roland and of much interest to Rose while Eve looked on with empathic understanding. Another pantomimic inclusion abetted Charles's characterization. When Alex offered him a cigarette he took it and while she went on talking, he looked at it, saw the brand name, frowned, replaced it in the box and took out a cigarette of his own and proceeded to light and smoke it. This all stressed the snobbish Charles. In the play's opening Mrs. Venables told us she wasn't fond of milk but her look of obvious distaste when drinking it was more blatant than her words.

The latter half of Scene I, Act II presented a major problem of handling a number of persons on a small stage at one time and still maintaining good composition and picturization. Toby's collapse with influenza placed him on the sofa L while Roland, Eve and Alex had been fussing over him. Nellie entered R and came down R, balanced the scene and pictured her loss of contact with the things and people of the house. Theresa's sweeping entrance and surveyal of the room carried her to Nellie to argue about
the just spoken line. Eve moved back to Toby and Mrs. Venables and Miss Spicer entered. Nellie emphasized her mental outlook by moving a level lower on to the hassock. As Christopher entered he stopped by Eve who was on the sofa leaving the doorway cleared for Liz. Spicer was now U of the table and Theresa was UR of bay-window surveying the room and tying the composition down from its downstage weight. After Liz entered DLC the room was filled with eight people on stage and blocking avoided with the emphasis changing from one person to another by slight changes in one or another form of composition. In this particular spot the picturization showed Eve and Christopher closely related, with Liz a spectator; Theresa U looking it all over; Nellie the humble insider but outsider and Spicer fussing over Mrs. Venables who was taking it as her right.

In order to prepare the audience for the closing picture of the play it was necessary to point the photograph of Andrew. Placing it on the desk seemed logical and in keeping with the realistic setting but here it was not obvious enough so needed forced attention. Actually this was done four times before the closing scene where it figured so importantly. First, Liz commented on Andrew's photograph being good, then later Nellie noticed and remarked on it. In Act II Eve picked it up when she was talking to Alex about the enduring love one should have to marry, and in the opening of Act III Rose was dusting
the photograph. When Eve, in the closing minutes, emphasized by space, area and body position took her husband's picture in hand and shared with it her renewed faith in their daughter, the audience accepted it as a logical ending.

An example of a portion planned with composition and picturization was the confession of Alex to her mother. Alex needed to be humble so a lower level was indicated. In the preceding scene Liz had carried the hassock to chair LC. The hassock remained there when she exited a few speeches later. As Alex complained of loathing herself she sank to the hassock. Eve sat in the chair just above the hassock and was in a position to take Alex's head into her lap and to look out over it. Not only was the picturization that of a mother comforting a daughter but compositionally the mother was given strength by a higher level and a full front position.

In The Distaff Side no conscious effort was made to establish a rhythm. The actors unconsciously established their own rhythm as they worked with the lines and other characters. The fundamental rhythm established was that set by Eve, one of three beats to the measure which conveyed gentleness, smoothness, restfulness and quiet. Other characters developed variations of the tempo in line with their temperaments. Miss Spicer and Nellie were a trifle slower and Liz, Theresa and Mrs. Venables adopted a faster tempo in movement, speech and gestures. The end of each
act was built by increased tempo. This was especially true of Scene I, Act III, where Alex and Mrs. Venables accelerated by shouting at each other. Builds within the scenes were established correlating with the believed intentions of the playwright as set forth in the play analysis.

One more instance can be noted which shows all the fundamentals of directing. As Liz and Nellie entered Alex welcomed the chance to avoid Charles' embrace moved L to meet them. Charles sauntered DR putting the three women L and Charles balancing the composition R. This aided picturization for the grouping of the women abetted by the compositional distance of Charles gave them a united family look and kept him the outsider. Liz had a strong movement, a cross DC, and when seated LC it permitted visual focus and pantomimic action between Alex and Charles and brought him back into the picture. As he said his goodbyes and moved U to Alex, the rhythm was unbroken.

As in any production numerous problems were presented but the aim of the director was to make an audience believe real people lived in St. John's Wood - all giving the "illusion of the first time."


BIBLIOGRAPHY


