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The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1974
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A STUDY OF CHARACTER IN SELECTED PLAYS OF
WILLIAM INGE: COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA,
THE DARK AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS,
A LOSS OF ROSES, NATURAL AFFECTION

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Joseph Epolito, B.A., M.A.

The Ohio State University
1974

Reading Committee:
Donald R. Glancy
Roy H. Bowen
John A. Walker

Approved by
Adviser
Department of Theatre
A STUDY OF CHARACTER IN SELECTED PLAYS OF
WILLIAM INGE: COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA; THE DARK AT
THE TOP OF THE STAIRS; A LOSS OF ROSES; NATURAL AFFECTION

By

Joseph Epolito, Ph.D.

Ohio State University, 1974

Professor Donald R. Glancy, Adviser

The four plays, Come Back, Little Sheba, The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, A Loss of Roses, and Natural Affection by American playwright, William Inge, effectively evidence, by way of the characters he has created, the author's compassionate understanding of particular areas of human psychology and behavior.

This study, in analyzing "character" within those four plays, which span Inge's playwriting career (1945-1973), has utilized as a model the Aristotelian theory of characterization as most recently explicated by Sam Smiley in Playwriting: The Structure of Action. Character relationships and the action/reaction form of character development which Inge devised for each script, and his ability to accomplish a consistency of character behavior that in turn caused convincing action is also examined.

After an opening chapter that surveys factual information such as dates, places, participants, and critical reaction concerning the original productions of each of Inge's nine full-length plays, the study then focuses, successively, upon the playwright's development of the characters Lola Delaney, her husband Doc, and the young
people, Marie and Turk, from Sheba; Cora Flood, her husband Rubin, her sister Lottie, and guest Sammy Goldenbaum from Dark/Stairs; Kenny Baird, his mother Helen, and their house guest Lila Green from Roses; and Sue Barker, her son Donnie, and her lover Bernie Slovenk from Affection.

The findings of this study attest to Inge's excellent playwriting talents. His particular abilities in the area of character are 1) a controlled balance between all that characters can possibly feel and the manner in which they can acceptably articulate what they feel, 2) a firm grasp of human psychology, which is manifested in representative character constructs, 3) a control of action that allows it to be shaped by the psychological nature of the characters and, in a cause/effect manner, confines it to the conflict within the specific group of characters, 4) a control of the degree to which secondary characters are delineated and integrated into each play's major dilemma 5) a creation of an ambience and disposition by careful selection of physical details, traits, and qualities that are ingrained in character and therefore will necessarily remain at the heart of each play through a variety of production concepts, 6) a depiction of complex, universal characters that afford directors and actors extensive opportunity to experience and embody the aspects of human nature that the playwright has reflected.

Further research and production will serve to enhance Inge's reputation and perhaps re-evaluate certain of his contributions.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer's major debt of gratitude is to Professor Donald R. Glancy of the Ohio State Theatre Department, whose talents as teacher, adviser and editor were incalculable to my doctoral experience.

The writer also wishes to acknowledge two other admirable men of the Ohio State Theatre Department--Dr. Roy H. Bowen and Dr. John A. Walker. Discussions with Professor Larry Cox of the Psychology Department of Otterbein College were helpful, and I am indebted to him.

Finally, to the many others who contributed in various ways, I extend my sincere appreciation and love--Jude Yablonsky, Mildred Ehrich, Maureen Shea, Mary Sesak, Joseph Ritacco, Angela D'Ambrosia, Letitia Serra, Constance Grappo, and Robert and Nancy Pettigrew.
DEDICATION

To my mother, Mrs. Grace Epolito,
and her children, Ralph, Rose,
Carmella, Angel, and Peter.
VITA

January 21, 1935 . . . .  Born - Nutley, New Jersey
October, 1956 . . . .  B.A. Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.
1957-1966 . . . . . .  Professional Actor, Stage Manager, Director
1961-1963 . . . . . .  HB Studio, New York N.Y. Study with Uta Hagen, Herbert Berghof
June, 1966 . . . . . .  M.A. City University of New York, New York N.Y.
1966-1969 . . . . . .  Teacher, New York Public School System - Speech and Drama
1972-1973 . . . . . .  Teaching Associate, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
1974 . . . . . . . .  Guest Instructor/Director Otterbein College, Westerville, Ohio
1974 . . . . . . . .  Assistant Professor Western Illinois University Macomb, Illinois
PUBLICATIONS

Dark Night of the Soul - One Act Play: Edgemoor Publishing Co.
Ride to the Beach - One Act Play: Edgemoor Publishing Co.

Poetry - Pembroke Magazine, Wormwood Review, The Miscellany, and Gob

"Performance & Psychology: Chekhov's The Sea Gull and Allport's Theory of Becoming" - North Carolina Journal of Speech and Drama

"Genre Theory and the Practice of Readers Theatre" - The Speech Teacher

Reviews: "Readers Theatre Comes to Church" - The Speech Teacher
"A Director Prepares" - Quarterly Journal of Speech
"Stage History... Farquhar's The Recruiting Officer" - Theatre Studies

FIELDS OF STUDY

Theatre Production (Acting, Directing)... Roy H. Bowen
Donald R. Glancy

Theatre History.......................... Charles Ritter
Vera Mowry Roberts

Dramatic Literature & Criticism....... Donald R. Glancy
John C. Morrow

Readers Theatre.......................... William R. Brown
Jere Veilleux
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INTRODUCTION

In the main, this study considers the dramatic element of "character" as it has been formulated within four of the eight full-length plays of the American playwright William Inge—Come Back, Little Sheba, The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, A Loss of Roses, and Natural Affection. Characters—considered as playwriting constructs—are analyzed, as instances of the greatest strength of an important Twentieth Century American playwright.

Such a consideration continues the previous scholarly investigations—two unpublished doctoral dissertations—of this dramatist, "The Plays of William Motter Inge," by Patton Lockwood, and "The Evolution from Conception to Production of the Drama of William Inge," by Phillip B. Clarkson. Those dissertations covered the author's biography and made analyses of his plays' content and form from the 1945-1960 period. The selected plays in this study are of fundamental concern because two have been termed "successful" and two have been termed "failures" by the critical reaction that followed their initial New York productions. This study emphasizes the playwright's ability to achieve
character delineation which has been found to be both astutely conceived and shrewdly executed. These four plays span the writing career of Inge and thus allow an examination of Inge's consistency in the development of dramatic character. His plays "found to be striking in their apparent sincerity,"\(^1\) are herein considered as excellent examples of the playwriting technique that stresses the inextricable dependence of character upon plot and plot upon character. "Character is a fundamental, an initial stimulus for Inge's playwriting."\(^2\) The selected examples are analyzed to determine the abilities of William Inge with that particular element of a play's structure.

His talent with "character" established him as an observant, sensitive recorder not only of the time and milieu of which he wrote, but also of perennial human nature.

After an introductory survey of names, places, and dates of the initial productions of all of Inge's full-length works for the stage, each of the following chapters is devoted to one of the chosen four plays. After the play's plot outline has been given, an analysis of selected


\(^2\) Lockwood, p. 36.
characters within that play is assayed in order to discover and demonstrate the playwright's expertise and to appreciate the results of his creative efforts.

The system by which the chosen characters are analyzed is based primarily on the conception of the dramatic element of "character" (ethos) as it was originally offered by Aristotle as one of the six qualitative elements of the drama, in his work of the Fourth Century, B.C.--the Poetics:

... and the action involves agents, who must necessarily have their distinctive qualities both of character and thought, since it is from these that we ascribe certain qualities to their action.3

The Aristotelian elements in a drama are those qualitative ingredients that are present when a fictive construct is a drama. They are the ingredients without which the dramatic form does not exist--be it comedy, tragedy, melodrama, farce, or any admixture of those forms. Aristotle arrived at his definitions from his study of the then existing dramas. Basically, they can be defined as follows:

spectacle - all that can be seen
music - all that can be heard
diction - the words in a play; ordered, related
thought - the process of deliberation, examination within a play
character - the pattern of choices made by an agent within a play
plot - the totality or end result of a play; the fully formulated dramatic action; the constructed whole

With that ancient understanding at the center of the investigating procedure, the theory as most recently delineated by Professor Sam Smiley in his text, *Playwriting: The Structure of Action*, is utilized as a critical tool for the analysis of each Inge character treated in this study. As Professor Smiley states:

> A play primarily consists of human action, and personages of some sort must enact or reveal that action. The agents in a play carry out its action through their individualized being, their words, and their deeds. In this special sense, character is the material of plot, and plot is the form of all the characterizations, what the words and deeds amount to as a whole . . . chiefly concerned with the relationship of human character to human action. . . Drama is character in action.

The "character" work of a playwright, encompassing inspiration, selection, and composition, proceeds from his awarenesses of the physiological and psychological elements of human beings. His knowledge and sensitivities

---

4Aristotle, pp. 223-266.

toward "real" people aid and condition the composition of his imitations. So, his work begins with what he knows of people and of each one's uniqueness. Smiley states, "The personality of every human is manifest on the level of instinct, emotion and sentiment."\(^6\) Instinct is defined by Professor Smiley as the inherited, natural tendencies in a person. Emotions are feelings, and sentiment is the component of control on instinct and emotion in the form of a mental attitude or intellect. With awareness of the "real," the playwright constructs his dramatic personages by apportioning the traits they need. These traits determine the differentiation of one character from another or from all others within a play. They fall within the following six divisions:

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Biological</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>specific qualities of age, size, weight, coloring, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dispositional</td>
<td>mood and life attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>desires</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliberative</td>
<td>quality and quantity of thoughts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decisive</td>
<td>the moral and expedient choices made</td>
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In addition to differentiating traits, Professor Smiley demonstrates that good characterization is dependent, to varying degrees, upon the possession of certain crucial

\(^6\)Smiley, p. 80.
qualities of construction. They are volition (a character that determines its own action); stature (strength and intensity); interrelation (the involvement with others in a play); attractiveness (appeal of some kind); credibility (the establishment of causality); clarity (lucid in feeling, thought, and action). All of the preceding is within the realm of the playwright's work and can be determined from the play itself.

Also considered is the character element as it affects the director approaching the play for production. The playwright's work should furnish the materials that are developed by a director with his actor colleagues in any flesh-and-blood performance. That realization on stage is another creation in new time and space of the playwright's original work. In an effort to assist in that aspect of the analysis of the characters in this study, a questionnaire was sent to the actors who originated or subsequently created the roles covered by this analysis. The response, though inconclusive, was helpful in developing viewpoints concerning the characters under consideration.

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7 Smiley, pp. 79-95.

8 See Exhibit A in Appendix for discussion questions utilized in questionnaire.
CHAPTER ONE - OVERVIEW

THE FULL-LENGTH WORKS OF WILLIAM INGE
(1945-1975)

For William Inge, the years of playwriting endeavor began in 1945 and ended with his death in 1973.¹ It was in 1945 that he was inspired to write his first play by a meeting with Tennessee Williams in St. Louis, Missouri. Mr. Williams had journeyed to St. Louis for a family visit after the Chicago opening of his Glass Menagerie. He had consented to an interview with the St. Louis Star-Times art, drama, book, music critic, Mr. Inge. After a subsequent viewing in Chicago of Williams' first success the journalist began work on a first play.

William Inge had always been of a mind that the theatre would be his life, but had, to that point, never been able

¹This survey material has been drawn from the following sources:
Various articles and reviews appearing in Variety, New York Times and other newspapers, magazines and books included in bibliography and notation.
to realize his dream of pursuing an actor's career in New York. The only theatrical work he had known was touring with a Toby show, acting in summer stock and directing in college theatre. Having achieved a Master's Degree at George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, Tennessee, Inge found it necessary, during the Depression years, to work as a highway laborer, a radio announcer, a high-school English teacher, and a college professor at various times in his life.

At the completion, within three months, of his first play, Farther Off From Heaven, Mr. Inge sent it to Mr. Williams, who had just arranged with Margo Jones, producer of Theatre '47 in Dallas, Texas, to produce his Summer and Smoke there. When the Inge play was shown to Miss Jones she agreed to produce it as well during the summer of 1947. In later years, Inge stated that the play was "a family portrait sort of thing... about a shoe salesman, his ambitious wife and two maladjusted children... the play itself didn't dig very deeply into people's lives." Critical reaction in Dallas was acceptable and Inge was encouraged.

The first audience for his second produced play was in Westport, Connecticut, where Come Back, Little Sheba was given a tryout run by the Theatre Guild. Although the Westport Summer Theatre season was actually over, a brief

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but very successful run, to begin on September 12, 1949, was scheduled for the play. It had Shirley Booth and Sydney Blackmer originating the leading roles of Lola and Doc, under the direction of Daniel Mann. The acclaim given the play in that Connecticut town convinced the Guild to attempt a Broadway opening with the as-yet-unknown author. In order to accommodate the previous commitments of the leading actors and the director, the play did not go into rehearsal for Broadway until January, 1950. Then after a tryout tour in Wilmington and Boston, it opened at the Booth Theatre in New York City on February 15, 1950. In the cast with Miss Booth and Mr. Blackmer were Joan Lorring as Marie and Lonny Chapman as Turk, the two younger characters whose involvement works as a catalyst on the older, married couple.

Brooks Atkinson, writing for the New York Times, found the play "straightforward and unhackneyed and, in its best moments, terrifyingly true." And although he described it as "candid" and "splendid," he felt it was a "small play."³ John Chapman, critic for the tabloid Daily News, wrote of reactions that found the play to be "part Chekhov, part Arthur Miller and part of the divine gospel of Alcoholics Anonymous" but complained that it failed to gain his

loyalty to any one character. William Hawkins, commenting in the World-Telegram and Sun, found the characters fascinating. Lola he interpreted as stupid and lazy and marveled that she seemed "more an acquaintance than an artistic creation. Blackmer portrays Doc compellingly and with suspensefulness so that, without saying so, he emanates the possibility of an explosion." Joan Lorring as Marie he found possessed "a good natured flip quality... which contrasts with her sensitive and fearsome moments." In summing up his reaction, he considered the play "exciting only when it chooses to be, but always enticing." Not all critics were as impressed and even seemed to misinterpret characterizations or found themselves confused by Inge's work. Startling misinterpretations occur when Marie is called "implausible" or Lola is described as "an aging slut." After describing Lola in that manner, Howard Barnes lambasted the play as well, calling it a "disorderly exhibit"

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and found it wanting in "dramatic depth." Variety, later in the week of its opening, summed up the all-important opening night reaction to the play thusly:

Theatre Guild's fourth presentation of the season opened to a mixed reaction of four mildly favorable notices, two mild pans and two on the fence; first six performances grossed almost $11,000.

Later in the run, the participating actors chose to take a cut in salary and Inge took a smaller royalty in order to keep the play open. When it finally was forced to close in July, 1950, it had played 190 performances in New York and had garnered four votes from the Drama Critics' Circle as the best play of the season. A national tour with Miss Booth and Mr. Blackmer began the following October, when it opened in Chicago at the Erlanger Theatre. The leading critic there, Claudia Cassidy of the Chicago Daily Tribune, wrote "the play is not their (the actors) equal. If it were you might have another Death of a Salesman. But it is a good play. It has overtones of the gently wistful rather than the powerful drive of tragic splendor." Changes in the cast that accompanied the two acclaimed stars included Kathleen Maguire as Marie and Dennis Weaver as Turk. The

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8Ibid.


10Claudia Cassidy, Chicago Daily Tribune, September 27, 1950, p. 23.
play traveled on to cities such as Detroit, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Seattle and closed with a very successful two-week stand at the Walnut Theatre in Philadelphia in February, 1951.

In attempting to escape what he described as "the gloomy interior. . . and the singular melancholy of Sheba," Inge began to rework the earlier play he had entitled "Front Porch" and now considered retitling "Women in Summer". However, it was as Picnic that the new play opened at the Music Box Theatre, New York City, on February 19, 1953. Jointly produced by Joshua Logan and the Theatre Guild it had begun its tryout tour at the Hartman Theatre in Columbus, Ohio, and then moved on to St. Louis, Cleveland, and Boston. From the very outset the play had been excellently received by reviewers. The Variety critic, viewing the premiere in Columbus, found Picnic to be "sharply written, superbly played." He went on to note that "the Sheba author, with careful dramatic surgery, has laid bare a generous, moving slice of life in a midwestern prairie town."

Picnic was under the directing aegis of Joshua Logan and included in its impressive cast: Ralph Meeker, Janice Rule, Peggy Conklin, Kim Stanley, Eileen Heckart,

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12Variety, January 21, 1953, p. 58.

Arriving in New York, it received, from the seven daily reviewers, six enthusiastic reactions and one negative from Walter Kerr. Brooks Atkinson, this time, was totally impressed. He commented:

Memorable though Sheba was three seasons ago, Picnic is a notable improvement. . . a rich and fundamental play. Mr. Inge knows his characters so well that you cannot distinguish them from the drama. . . the promise of Sheba is abundantly fulfilled. Picnic is an original, honest play with an awareness of people.13

As always, any production is described in a diverse manner and Picnic was no exception: "not only striking as theatrical characters but moving and genuine as human beings,"14 "a piece of synthetic folklore"15 "draws its roots from American soil,"16 and "an autumnal, fitfully erupting bit of nostalgia."17

The play aroused immediate capacity business and in its second week was at the standing-room-only level. It was an

13Atkinson, "At the Theatre" 'Picnic'", NYTCR, February 23, 1953, p. 348.


acknowledged critical and commercial success and was to play 485 New York performances. Immediately following its closing on April 10, 1954, Ralph Meeker, who had originated the pivotal role of Hal Carter, was starred in the touring company, and it traveled to Washington, D.C., for the first of many stops on its nationwide jaunt. The drama brought Inge the Donaldson Award and the Pulitzer Prize as the best play dealing with the American scene. The New York Drama Critics Circle (twenty-two critics in New York) and the Outer Circle (out-of-New York correspondents and critics) selected it as the best play of the year.

Another project involving the expansion of ideas and characters from a one-act play, People in the Wind, became Inge's next full-length work, Bus Stop. Producers Theatre, headed by Robert Whitehead and Roger L. Stevens, financed the mounting of that script and did it in such a way as to accommodate various financial backers of Inge's earlier shows. After several days of performing it in Princeton, New Jersey, at the McCarter Theatre, the troupe continued to Philadelphia, where director Harold Clurman was to contend with several production problems. For at the opening, Variety had complained of "a lack of balance, a misplaced emphasis. The character who holds the key and around whom the theme is built is not the character to whom the audience
is drawn. At this time, the leading roles of Bo and Cherie were being essayed by Jerome Courtland and Kim Stanley. The surrounding cast included Phyllis Love, Anthony Ross, Elaine Stritch, and Crahan Denton. In Philadelphia only one reviewer, Robert Sensenderfer of the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, praised the play. He called it "moving . . . richly rewarding . . . almost Chekhovian." Otherwise, the show met with adversity and ill will from the critics and columnists who wrote of its opening. One man, Earl Selby, wrote in his column of his irritation with the play. He called it the worst play he had ever seen and reported that he had walked out of the theatre. His flippancy toward the work was made startlingly clear when he joked of driving away and being passed on the road by a limousine and two motorcycles. That, he pondered, could have been the playwright of Bus Stop leaving town under armed guard.

With the replacement of Jerome Courtland by Albert Salmi in the role of the young cowboy, Bo, the production met its opening date in New York City on March 21, 1955,

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18 Variety, February 16, 1955, p. 56.
20 Ibid.
and was given an extremely warm and welcoming response. Richard Watts wrote, "He (Inge) brings to the theatre a kind of warm-hearted compassion, creative vigor, freshness of approach and appreciation of average humanity that can be wonderfully touching and stimulating. . . Mr. Inge's concern is the true dramatist's interest in character. . . they (the characters) take on reality, dignity and importance."21 Walter Kerr, in agreement with his peers, thought that Inge had "not set out to write an epic, just a warm and sensible little overnight scrap between a couple of stranded, stubborn, appealing people." It held for him, "fascination. . . not in surprises but its sharp, honest, down-to-earth eye for character."22 "An endearing, though deceptively simple comedy," contributed Robert Coleman of the Daily Mirror.23 Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times, felt "Mr. Inge has more than an evening's entertainment in mind. . . there are a number of simple truths that give height and depth to his writing."24 Miss Kim Stanley's

acting was singled out for lavish praise, and she was later given the opportunity to star in the production. She chose to remain featured, feeling that the play demanded an attitude of ensemble. Variety described her opening night performance as "a portrayal that suggests the actress shares the author's sympathy and respect for the character."25 All this was a surprising reversal from the downbeat tryout reports that had proliferated before the opening. Mr. Selby from Philadelphia saw his reaction as a way "to get egg all over your face in dramatic criticism" and ended a subsequent column with "I will not review any more plays" repeated six times.26

Bus Stop achieved capacity business immediately and settled into the Music Box Theatre for the remainder of the season and into the next. A national touring company was formed in August of 1955, to play the road simultaneously with the original production. That company included Peggy Ann Garner, Dick York, Glenn Anders, and Russell Hardie. The New York production closed April 21, 1956, after 478 performances. This proved to be Inge's longest running play and was called by many, Time magazine included,

"the season's and possibly the author's best play." 27

A reworking of his initial effort, Farther Off From Heaven, involved Inge for the next several seasons and resulted in The Dark at the Top of the Stairs. For that venture, Elia Kazan was chosen to direct. Inge was able to arrange for a share of the production profits, arranging for a percentage to go to himself and to the director as well. In early November of 1957, the show began at the Shubert Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut, the initial run of its tryout tour. It was given rave reviews by all who saw it and wrote of it. Variety praised it this way:

Dark, on which the author has been working intermittently for the past decade is an absorbing drama... the play is beautifully written and carries a wealth of emotion, humor and interesting conflict. 28

The following week, the play moved to Boston where it received unanimously favorable reviews. In Philadelphia, next, it was a box-office sell-out even though it received less than enthusiastic notices in that city.

The cast that had been assembled for this fourth Broadway-bound Inge production included Teresa Wright as Cora Flood, Pat Hingle as Rubin Flood, Eileen Heckart as


28 Variety, November 13, 1957, p. 72.
Lottie, and Tim Everett as Sammy Goldenbaum. In New York, it played the Music Box Theatre on West 45th Street as had Picnic and Bus Stop before it. Brooks Atkinson titles his review, "Illuminations by Inge" and wrote "... it has a modest look but is full of his particular insights and sympathies. It is Mr. Inge's finest play." Inge later stated, "I was sure enough of my craft by the time I started writing The Dark at the Top of the Stairs to be able to take my craftsmanship more easily for granted." He also tried experimenting technically in the play and this was misunderstood by some. The episodic structure was not accepted favorably by all critics. "There are too many people with too many diverse, or at least only imperfectly related, problems; too many abrupt shiftings from folk comedy to quite another mood." wrote Wolcott Gibbs in the New Yorker. Richard Watts, in an opening night review made this similar comment, "The threads of mutual sadness were not entirely pulled together, leaving a certain feeling that we were watching a series of individual plays." Walter Kerr, who liked the play, also wondered about the

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 seemingly diverse aspects of plot/action within the script. "The play is a thread and cannot absorb some of the knots that work themselves into it..." but nevertheless Kerr found the play "wonderfully evocative, warm, troubled and deeply moving." Variety, ever concerned about popular acceptance, noted "it seems truer, more personal and perhaps more general in its application and appeal." The production closed 469 performances later on January 17, 1959. A national touring company commenced later that same month in Wilmington, Delaware, and toured until May. It had Barbara Baxley, George L. Smith, Audrey Christie, and Doug Lambert in four of the ensemble roles. The Dark at the Top of the Stairs played to capacity audiences and was theatrically effective both in New York City and when on tour across the country.

Inge's fifth Broadway production and sixth full-length play, A Loss of Roses, was one in which he had total faith. Conceived on a three-day cross-country trip from Los Angeles to New York in 1957, it was an original script, not a reworking of something he had previously done. It seemed a logical step forward from The Dark at the Top of the

33 Kerr, "'The Dark at the Top of the Stairs,'" NYTCR, December 12, 1957, p. 161.
34 Variety, December 11, 1957, p. 72.
with a mother/son relationship made the central concern of *A Loss of Roses*.

The new play went into rehearsal as his previous play *Dark/Stairs* was commencing another tour, headed by Joan Blondell, that would play smaller cities throughout the USA for shorter stays. The opening run for *A Loss of Roses* was at the National Theatre in Washington, D.C., in October, 1959, under the auspices of producers Saint Subber and Lester Osterman. Its cast included the star, Shirley Booth as Helen Baird, Warren Beatty, making his debut as her son Kenny, and former dancer-choreographer Carol Haney as their houseguest, Lila Green. It received three mixed notices from the Washington papers. Each contended that with extensive revision there would be an effective play. *Variety* had this to say:

> Once it starts moving, *A Loss of Roses* packs forceful drama. It shapes as a possible hit... but the men-at-work sign is in order for author and director in the pre-Manhattan weeks ahead... first part slow and awkward... limited to a single idea without diversified plotting or interesting, adequately developed secondary characters.35

The actors were praised, but the secondary nature of Miss Booth's role was noticed and commented upon. "The actress is fine and resourceful, but her part is third in importance

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35*Variety*, November 4, 1959, p. 81.
among the three principals."^36

Before the production moved to New Haven, Connecticut, to continue its try-out tour, Miss Booth asked to be released from her contract. Dissension over rewrites, personality conflicts, and interpretation differences all contributed to the problems at hand. Betty Field was hired to replace the dissatisfied star and, with very little time to prepare, appeared in the New Haven showing. Now, Variety reported— in a manner quite unlike its earlier Washington reportage— that the play was uninteresting, about unattractive people, and that it told a synthetic story with the vital relationship sketchy. "Could be the case of a story taken from life, terribly important to the author but of little concern to anyone else."^37 The ill-fated production, for which Mr. Inge had put up four-fifths of the money and which had already been sold to Twentieth Century Fox for filming, was not closed in order to accomplish the smoothing out of serious problems. Instead of opting for a later date, A Loss of Roses met its scheduled New York opening date of November 28, 1959, at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre. It received one favorable review from John Chapman of the Daily News, "It is gentle,

^36Ibid.

^37Variety, December 2, 1959, p. 72.
introspective and well-played."\(^38\) The other reviewers let go with a barrage of adverse criticism that the author found "personally vengeful,"\(^39\) and which seems totally out of sorts with the content of the published play. "He has finally written a bad play," wrote Richard Watts. "The inexorable law of averages was against him and he is entitled to a momentary lapse... but it is so completely ineffectual... a misfortune."\(^40\) "A dull play," said Brooks Atkinson.\(^41\) "A skimpy play," said Robert Coleman.\(^42\) "A mess," wrote Kenneth Tynan.\(^43\) "A poor and purposeless play," echoed John McClain.\(^44\) Walter Kerr analyzed, "There is about the content and construction of the play something exceedingly small and narrow and

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\(^38\) Chapman, "Inge's 'A Loss of Roses' Introspective and Well Played," \_NYTCR\_, December 7, 1959, p. 211.


\(^40\) Watts, "Everything Didn't Come Up Roses," \_NYTCR\_, December 7, 1959, p. 211.


\(^42\) Coleman, "'A Loss of Roses' is Inge's Loss," \_NYTCR\_, December 7, 1959, p. 213.


\(^44\) John McClain, "Inge Wilts in His Latest," \_NYTCR\_, December 7, 1959, p. 213.
airless... explores a serious wound... without stirring compassion." This Inge play—less hopeful, more incriminating of the human condition—went unheralded and closed in twenty-five performances.

It was not until summer, 1962, after having worked in Hollywood on film scripts and winning the Academy Award for Splendor in the Grass, that Inge's next play, Natural Affection, opened in Phoenix, Arizona, with Shelley Winters and Ralph Meeker in the leading roles. Retrieved for rewrites and recasting, it was opened, under the direction of Tony Richardson, in Washington, D.C., for a tryout run before moving on to New York City. Performing in it then were Kim Stanley as Sue Barker, Harry Guardino as her lover, Bernie Slovenk, and Gregory Rozakis as her son Donny. The opening at the Booth Theatre on January 31, 1963, presented for the first time, a shocking, controversial William Inge play. Continuing what he had begun with A Loss of Roses, Inge had written a play that would mitigate none of the ugliness and difficulties his characters faced. Norman Nadel wrote, "This could have been strikingly good, even great... two major errors, bad taste and bad judgement... eagerness to produce the dirtiest play of the season... have thrust the implicit nature of sex prominently in front."  

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Howard Taubman, then theatre critic for the New York Times, wrote, "Mr. Inge's characters are not pleasant... and not always persuasive." Richard Watts found it, "a drama that revels in degradation... decided to beat Williams and Albee at their game in quality of sensationalism." John Chapman now calling Sheba and Picnic "superior" plays could not find anyone in this play to like or to understand. Somewhat less fearsome reviewers Robert Coleman and Walter Kerr wrote this respectively of Natural Affection:

Not a play for the fastidious or the family trade. It's a sordid, ugly, depressing work, leavened occasionally with earthy humor... people we would like to avoid. Yet, taken on its own terms, it's a most effective theatre piece. It's loaded with sex, smut and shock.

Entirely serious about the seriousness of his subject matter... means them as significant emotional statements... only the raw tissues and gyrating bacteria can be seen, not the whole flesh in which these things may be housed.

The play, severe with its problem-ridden characters, excellent in its psychological motivation, was not an easy one for Inge to write. "If my play is too bold for them, I can understand their sensibility in not wanting to watch it. I have a similar sensibility. It was very difficult for me to write."\(^52\) It closed after only 36 performances.

In 1965, Mr. Inge again tried out a play at the Westport Summer Theatre as he had done with *Come Back, Little Sheba* years before. The play was entitled *Family Things, Etc.* It featured Dorothy Stickney, Hiram Sherman, Beau Bridges, and June Harding. *Variety* found it "a slight but generally interesting play... with appealing characters."\(^53\) For the following season in New York, the play was re-named *Where's Daddy?* Under the direction of Harold Clurman were Beau Bridges and Barbara Dana as the young married couple with the husband frightened of parenthood. Betty Field appeared as the girl's mother and Hiram Sherman was the boy's former guardian. *Where's Daddy?* gave previews at the Billy Rose Theatre before its official opening on March 2, 1966. Both play and casting

\(^{52}\)Inge, Preface to *Natural Affection*, (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1963), pp. 5-6.

were considered by *Variety* in its review:

It's hardly news that William Inge is a gifted writer... he has created several of his more entertaining characters and situations. Although strikingly uneven in quality, it (the play) has the agreeable effect of improving as it proceeds. Despite its many assets, it has the glaring weakness of a thoroughly unattractive and downright obnoxious leading character... the whimpering poltroon who hasn't become and never will be a man. Casting accentuates this weakness... a comparatively inexperienced actor surrounded by two stars... expert and enormously winning... Nevertheless, there's no denying Inge's artistry as dramatist and the enthralling power of those increasingly effective scenes.54

John McLain found it "a preposterous play with an odd emotional impact."55 Stanley Kauffman of the *New York Times* saw it as "a scoopful of modern themes shoveled into an old-fashioned domestic comedy container."56 Walter Kerr felt that "Mr. Inge has been given an assignment by someone who hadn't the faintest conception of his temperament or natural equipment and that the playwright--being a laborer worthy of his hire--had dutifully executed the task."57

Richard Watts felt it was "a modest and sentimental comedy that is at the same time remarkably touching."\(^{58}\) It folded twenty-one performances later at an estimated loss of $125,000.

The final full-length work, before the author's untimely death, was The Last Pad. It is a play dealing with three men on death row, one of whom is electrocuted before the play's end. An earlier version of the play was performed at Actors Studio in New York under the title, "Do Not Go Gentle". As The Last Pad, it was given an Off-Broadway production at the Thirteenth Street Theatre in December, 1970, under the direction of Jack Doroshow. It was then produced in Los Angeles in June, 1973, where it had a run of several months. Critical reaction was not favorable and it was labeled "warmed-over Genet."\(^{59}\)

The canon of theatre work ascribed to the playwright is comprised of the above-noted plays and the dramatic publications listed here. A reworking of the earlier Picnic, entitled Summer Brave, and the one-acts: To Bobolink, For Her Spirit, People in the Wind, A Social Event, The Boy in the Basement, The Tiny Closet, Memory of Summer, Bus Riley's Back in Town, The Rainy Afternoon, The


Mall, An Incident at the Standish Arms, The Strains of
Triumph, The Call, A Murder.
Scene from *Come Back, Little Sheba*, 1974
Players Club Theatre, Columbus, Ohio
Martha Sullivan as Lola Delaney
CHAPTER II

COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA

A study of loneliness, Come Back, Little Sheba describes the journey of a couple from loneliness to complete isolation (through a series of incidents involving a boy and girl somewhat representative to them of their own youth) and back to a sense of loneliness. . 1

The lights come up on "an old house in a run-down neighborhood of a Mid-western city." 2 It is a morning in late spring. Doc Delaney comes downstairs to the kitchen and begins to prepare his breakfast. Marie, a young girl of college age, who rooms in the house, also enters from her downstairs bedroom and greets Doc playfully. With youthful good spirits she chats with him and even teases him, aware of the pleasure he gets from her company. As she leaves to bathe, she passes Lola Delaney, Doc's wife, on the stairs. Lola enters the kitchen and sits heavily. She is overweight, unkempt and complains of dreams and her inability to sleep late anymore. She tells Doc of the


2William Inge, Come Back, Little Sheba, (New York: Samuel French, 1951), p. 5. All other references to the play are from this edition, with page numbers noted parenthetically in the text.
recurring dream in which her lost dog, Little Sheba, returns. She reminisces of the dog's appeal as a "cute little puppy" (p. 9) and of how sad it was to see the animal grow old. Doc answers, "Yah. Little Sheba should have stayed young forever. Some things should never grow old. That's what it amounts to, I guess" (p. 10). Lola forces Doc to repeat his Alcoholics Anonymous prayer at the table. They talk of his success at remaining sober for one whole year and of this feat's elimination of all the frightening trouble that prevailed when he was in the habit of almost constant intoxication:

Doc: ... When I go out to help some poor drunk, I have to give him courage—to stay sober. Most alcoholics are disappointed men--They need courage--
Lola: You weren't ever disappointed, were you Daddy?
Doc: (After a pause) The important thing is to forget the past and live for the present. And stay sober doing it. *(p. 11)*

They go on to discuss their boarder, Marie, and her friend, Turk, a college athlete whom she dates. Doc does not like to hear about that aspect of Marie's life. Lola, however, finds "almost psychopathic enjoyment"³ in the relationship of the young couple:

³Dusenbury, p. 12.
Doc: A big brawny bozo like Turk, he probably forces her to kiss him.
Lola: Daddy, that's not so at all. I came in the back way once when they were in the living room and she was kissing him like he was Rudolph Valentino.
Doc: (An angry denial) Marie is a nice girl. (p. 12)

After Doc's departure for his chiropractor office, Lola and Marie talk. Lola is made aware of the possible arrival of Marie's fiance, Bruce, an employed, marriageable young man. Marie is given permission to use the living room to complete her drawing of Turk for a poster contest she is entering. Lola also suggests that Marie and Turk might like to use the living room again in the evening as Doc will be gone on an Alcoholics Anonymous duty call. Marie's activities induce Lola to reminisce of her once youthful prettiness and the strictness of her father regarding her social life. "Doc was the first boy my dad ever let me go out with. We got married that spring" (p. 16). Their very early marriage caused Doc to leave his pre-medical course and to go to chiropractor school instead.

When Turk bursts into the room, Marie rushes off to complete her dressing, and Lola flirts with the young man as he tells her of his athletic prowess and his current sports training. To explain the javelin to Lola's coquettish question, "The javelin: What's that?" he says:
It's a big, long lance. (Assumes the magnificent position) You hold it like this, erect--then you let go and it goes singing through the air, and lands yards away, if you're any good at it, and sticks in the ground, quivering like an arrow. (p. 18)

When Turk and Marie leave, Lola thinks again of her lost dog and slowly walks to the front porch and calls, "Little Sheba, Come, Little She-ba..." (p. 18). She then proceeds to extract some moments of social contact with the postman, her neighbor Mrs. Coffman, and the milkman. Because of responsibilities which call them away, they are put off by Lola's attempts to prolong each of their visits. A radio soap opera gives Lola vicarious thrills as she settles down to listen, but in a few minutes a Western Union messenger delivers a telegram for Marie. Lola opens it and learns that Marie's suitor Bruce will arrive the following day. Marie and Turk return in order to have him pose for her life drawing. He gets out of his clothes and into his track shorts and proceeds to pose with a broom as his javelin. Lola's embarrassment with his semi-nudity sends her to the kitchen, and Doc returns to find the aggressive Turk and Marie rough-housing. He is bewildered by what he sees and irritated with his wife for allowing what he considers to be improper activity for a young girl to occur in his living room:
Besides it's not her fault. If those college people make her do drawings like that, I suppose she has to do them. I just don't think it's right she should have to, that's all. (p. 29)

Lola tells Doc of Bruce's impending visit and of her plans to have a dinner party for the two of them. Because of Turk's present, she keeps him from congratulating Marie. As Doc voices his concern for Marie and her involvement with Turk in the other room Turk embraces Marie passionately.

For Scene Two the house has been greatly transformed. There are new additions such as lampshades and curtains. The rooms have been tidied and cleaned; garbage bags have been disposed of, dishes have been washed, etc. It is the evening of the same day and Lola and Doc have just finished supper. Having gone into the living room, Doc plays the radio and reacts strongly to a playing of "Ave Maria."

Again, Lola enters and interrupts some personal fantasy he is indulging "of some ideal of beauty he never fully realized" (p. 33). Lola coerces him into an oft-repeated card trick and then reminisces about their high school dances. She recalls also the passionate love that Doc, as a young man, felt for her:

We'd been going together all year and you were always so shy. Then for the first time you grabbed me and kissed me. Tears came to your eyes, Doc, and you said you'd love me forever and ever. Remember? You said--if I didn't marry you, you wanted to die--I remember 'cause it scared me for anyone to say a thing like that. (p. 36)
She cannot help proceeding to their problem of the out-of-wedlock pregnancy that sent her to a midwife rather than a proper doctor. The baby had not lived and Lola was left unable to conceive again. Her more and more frantic behavior forces Doc to try to stop her:

Doc: No, no, Baby. We should never feel bad about what's past. What's in the past can't be helped. You—you've got to forget it and live for the present. . . . We gotta keep on living, don't we? I can't stop just cause I made a few mistakes. I gotta keep goin'—somehow. (p. 38)

Lola realizes she has upset him and attempts to enliven the atmosphere with radio music. She even induces him to dance with her, at first vigorously and then in somewhat winded fashion. Lola has broken into a Charleston routine when Marie's entrance embarrasses her and sends her out to the kitchen. Marie discovers her telegram and realizes Bruce is intending to visit. Just as Turk arrives for his evening with Marie, Doc realizes that Lola had opened the telegram. In the living room, Turk immediately moves from the pretense of studying to kissing and embracing the girl, as Doc and Lola in the kitchen consider showing them Doc's card tricks. When Lola spies them through the door, she tries to get Doc to peek at them with her:

Lola: Come and look Daddy.
Doc: NO. (shocked and angry)
Lola: Just one little look. They're just kids, Daddy, it's sweet. (Drags him by the arm)
Doc: (Jerking loose) Stop it, Baby. I won't do it. It's not decent to snoop around spying on people like that. It's cheap and mischievous and mean. (p. 42)
Lola leaves the kitchen to get a sweater as she has decided to walk Doc to the bus stop. Left alone, Doc defiantly reaches for the whisky bottle kept on display in the kitchen cabinet, as Marie and Turk's laughter is heard from the front porch.

Left alone together in the house, Marie and Turk argue, dance, embrace, and kiss before he can convince her to invite him once more for another night together in her room:

Turk: Now, Miss Buckholder, what is your opinion of the psychodynamic pressure of living in the atomic age?
Marie: Turk, don't make fun of me.
Turk: Tonight?
Marie: (Her eyes dance as she puts him off just a little longer) --well.
Turk: Tonight will never come again.
(This is true. She smiles.) O.K.?
Marie: Tonight will never come again--O.K. (p. 47)

As they dance out the door, intending to return later when the Delaneys have gone to sleep, Lola reveals herself from behind the kitchen door where--since her return--she has been observing them. She slowly, unhappily, moves onto the porch and attempts to call Little Sheba.

As Act II commences, it is the next morning and Doc and Lola are, once again, at breakfast. But Doc is less attentive to Lola's ramblings. He has not slept well, and he is concerned that he heard a man's laugh late at night. Lola is excited about the prospect of preparing dinner and entertaining Marie and the expected Bruce. Doc, before
leaving by the front door, stops to fondle Marie's scarf
found on the davenport once more. He hears Turk's laughter
in the bedroom and is physically stunned and deeply dis-
illusioned to discover what he considers to be the immoral
behavior of Marie. After he leaves, Lola shows off her rare
good housekeeping to her neighbor, Mrs. Coffman. Upon
the neighbor's departure from the kitchen, Doc returns
and runs into an embarrassed Turk leaving Marie's room.
Lola enlists Marie's aid in setting up and decorating
the table for the planned dinner. Taking advantage of
their move upstairs for napkins "so nice I keep them
in my bureau drawer wtih my handkerchiefs" (p. 53),
Doc grabs the whisky bottle from its shelf and carries
it with him out of the house undiscovered by Lola, who
is in a whirl of unaccustomed activity.

In the next scene, it is 5:30 P.M. Both women are
dressed in their best attire and are putting a final
touch (a lilac centerpiece) on the table. Lola asks
Marie to explain her ability to juggle her two beaux and
learns that Marie never considered Turk as a serious suitor.
Bruce arrives and is introduced to his hostess. Chit-chat
concerning cocktails sends Lola to the kitchen cabinet to
prepare her guests a drink. She discovers that the bottle
is missing and is immediately extremely worried, realizing
what that can mean. Doc has not arrived home, so Lola dials
an Alcoholics Anonymous number to seek aid from the men who
have helped Doc previously. She apologizes to her guests for not serving cocktails and insists that they light the candles, behave like two lovebirds, and eat dinner without her and Doc.

Very early the next morning, Lola is sprawled on the davenport, asleep. Slowly she wakens. Deeply troubled, she makes another call to Ed Anderson, a helpful Alcoholics Anonymous colleague, concerning the whereabouts of her missing husband. In the living room, with coffee to revive her, she sits in dishabille as Doc enters the kitchen surreptitiously and replaces the whiskey bottle he had stolen the previous night. Discovering Lola in the living room, he argues with her as his drunken state becomes more and more apparent. The venom he feels toward his wife and her part in the disillusionment he feels toward Marie specifically and life generally prod him into verbal and physical abuse of Lola:

I suppose you tucked them in bed together and peeked through the keyhole and applauded. . . . You and Marie are both a couple of sluts. . . . My mother didn't buy those dishes for whores to eat off of. (Jerks the cloth off the table, sending the dishes rattling to the floor.) . . . Scream your head off, you fat slut. Holler till all the neighbors think I'm beatin' hell outuv you. . . . I outa hack off all that fat, and then wait for Marie and chop off those pretty ankles she's always dancing around on--then start lookin for Turk and fix him too. . . . (pp. 61-63)

Once out of control, he searches for something to use to
harm her. Finding an ax, he lunges for Lola and they struggle:

Doc: I'm gonna fix you now, once and for all.
Lola: . . . Remember Doc. It's me, Lola. You said I was the prettiest girl you ever saw. Remember, Doc. It's me. Lola. (p. 63)

He collapses in a drunken stupor, as he mutters, "Lola, my pretty Lola" (p. 63).

Help finally arrives and after an intense struggle with these two men, Doc is dragged off to the City Hospital, a place he has previously seen and dreads. Mrs. Coffman straightens up the disarray in the house and then leaves the numbed Lola alone. An exuberant Marie and Bruce bound into the room to announce their plans to her. Undeterred by premarital sexual relations with Turk, Marie proclaims she is leaving school and marrying Bruce. They quickly gather some essentials into a piece of luggage, too flushed with happiness to notice Lola's state, and are off. Desolatated, Lola goes to the telephone and places a long distance call to her parents. She asks for permission to return home, but is told by her mother that her father—having never forgiven her forced marriage—will not relent about not wishing to see her:

Lola: . . . No, I guess it wouldn't do any good for you to come here--I --I'll let you know what I decide to do. That's all, Mom. Thanks. Tell Daddy hello. (p. 71)

Utterly bereft and engulfed in sorrow, Lola puts down the telephone.
As the play's final scene begins, a week has passed.

The house is neat again: Lola is seen busily at work, dressed and groomed well herself. She turns down Mrs. Coffman's offer to accompany her neighbor's family to the Spring Relays at the college stadium. She is awaiting Doc, whose release from the hospital is imminent. After a cheery visit from the milkman, Lola hears Doc at the front door. The tension and embarrassment between them slowly dissolves as they reach to each other in their mutual need:

Lola: Did everything go all right--I mean--did they treat you well and--
Doc: (Now loses control of his feelings. Tears in his eyes, he all but lunges at her, gripping her arms, drilling his head into her bosom) Honey, don't ever leave me. Please don't ever leave me. If you do, they'd have to keep me down at that place all the time. I don't know what I said to you or what I did. I can't remember hardly anything. But please forgive me--please--please--And I'll try to make everything up.
Lola: . . . Daddy. Why of course I'll never leave you. You're all I've got. You're all I ever had. (p. 74)

They move into the kitchen as Lola states she will make her husband a big, satisfying breakfast. As Doc settles at the table for another morning meal together, Lola is busy around the kitchen preparing it for him. She tells him of an all-encompassing dream that had elements of all the people and problems that have been confusing and confounding her--Doc, her father, Marie, Turk and Little Sheba. In her dream there was the sad death of her long cherished
dog and she, at the behest of Doc, left the animal in the middle of a field because he told her, "Honey, we gotta go on." The dialogue continues:

Lola: I don't think Little Sheba's ever coming back, Doc. I'm not going to call her any more.
Doc: Not much point in it, Baby. I guess she's gone for good. (p. 76)

Lola continues preparing breakfast, Doc sips his fruit juice. The morning continues. . . .
"I hate a play that tells me what to think. I have to leave my characters for the audience to make their own judgments of." So spoke William Inge to a New York Times interviewer soon after the initial success of his first New York production. The reactions to *Come Back, Little Sheba* inclined Inge to regard the New York audience and critics as schizophrenic:

Admiration, affection, confusion, dislike, indifference, and warm enthusiasm all have been expressed by reviewers for a play which at the time of writing I expected... one-sure effect on its spectators.

Inge was firmly convinced that "Doc and Lola are people the world was never aware of, but the world's ignorance doesn't make them any the more or less interesting and likable as human beings." Mr. Inge chafed under some of

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6Ibid.

7Ibid., p. 23.
the criticism leveled at his play. Some of this resentment was caused by what he thought were gross misinterpretations of his character of Lola. He was quoted as saying:

The only personal rancor I was induced to feel by reactions to the play was for those who carelessly referred to Lola as a "slut." The whole point of her character is that, despite her love of dreaming and disregard for household responsibilities (childish rather than slovenly), she is not a slut; she is essentially a very virginal, sincere, and honest woman. 8

Winifred L. Dusenbury in her analysis of the play as a study in personal failure described Lola Delaney with this astute and pertinent observation:

Her dependency upon an outside source for stimulation of the imagination indicates her lack of inner direction, and makes plausible her incompetency in dealing with life's problems. 9

Her further view of the play as "the cry of a woman with a pitiful lack of self-sustainment" 10 is amply established by the deliberative traits of the character. The dramatic action caused by the character of Lola as she recognizes, considers, evaluates, or weighs alternatives is that of a being very much dependent upon others. Important

8 Ibid.
9 Dusenbury, p. 10.
10 Ibid.
examples of that are her desperate attempts at winning the good will of the tradesmen who come to her house and her involvement in her young boarder's love-life.

Physically, Lola is overweight, poorly groomed, and forty years old. Yet despite her appearance, she cultivates a little-girl attitude with her husband, echoing him and even reaching the point of calling him "Daddy." She is a woman who has remained a perennial youngster, psychologically unable to catch up with her years. The revelation of the character's dispositional traits or customary mood and life-attitude Inge commences by describing her in his way: "Her eyes are dim with a morning expression of disillusionment, as though she had had a beautiful dream during the night and found on waking none of it was true" (p. 8). She yearns to sleep longer. "I can't sleep late like I used to. It used to be I could sleep til noon if I wanted to, but I can't any more" (p. 9). That confession establishes a recognizable pattern of the Freudian view of "anxiety." His view is that a personality with feelings of uneasiness, fear, and suffering can reach an uncontrollable stage of development, which results in "anxiety."

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
In the face of such anxiety one possible type of defense is that of regression. A person who encounters traumatic experiences retreats to an earlier stage of development. . . . The path of regression is determined by the earlier fixations of the person.12

This being a relative condition, the personality does not regress completely but rather includes immature forms of behavior that will evidence some aspect of the condition and result in an unevenness of personality. Lola has attempted to escape her anxiety with sleep and fantasizing. Even at this early stage of the play's development these attempts are not working as palliatives any longer. For Lola dreams about the dog, Little Sheba, that is lost to her. The actual loss of a pet would ordinarily be considered coincidental or an unfortunate chance happening. But the character's loss of youth and lack of fulfillment, which is the crux of the problem that is about to climax in her life, is intermingling with that happening and is manifesting itself in dreams. These dreams, in turn, cause her to wonder and contribute to her waking-hour concerns. A cycle is thus established. The problems cause the dreams; the dreams aggravate the problem. In Norman Malcolm's treatise on dreams, Dreaming, he postulates that "the telling of a dream is the criterion

of the occurrence and content of a dream. Dreaming is not to be something logical independent of dream reports.\textsuperscript{13}

The author considers the continuity between dreams and waking life in this manner:

\begin{quote}
The concept of dreaming requires that some of the same objects, people, thoughts, perceptions, emotions, that are encountered and experienced in normal waking life should be present in dream: some identity and continuity is necessary. This identity consists in the dream-teller's employment of the same language that he was taught and learned to employ to describe the scenes and experiences of life.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

The dreams Lola describes in the play are shrewdly wrought by Inge. He takes the issues that are of subconscious concern to her and utilizes details from her real-life situation to particularize dream experiences which she will relate to Doc, but of whose implications and meaning she will remain unaware. There were critics who objected to the symbolism in her dreams. Wolcott Gibbs wrote, "It is doubtful whether so much elementary and perhaps slightly preposterous symbolism has ever been crowded into one dream before in the history of the theatre . . ."\textsuperscript{15} But that is short-sighted commentary. The

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{14} Malcolm, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{15} Wolcott Gibbs, "Come Back, Little Sheba", \textit{The New Yorker}, February 25, 1950, p. 68.
\end{flushright}
playwright's selection of symbols and patterns were of his own choosing, and he felt qualified enough to argue in their behalf.

Any exposition of dream symbolism is regarded as phoney, just as a dramatist's use of sociological, political, musical, and artistic references in a play usually have caused reviewers immediately to take for granted he is misinformed. All I can say is that, as far as I know, there is no established set of dream symbols one must go by, that the meaning of such symbols necessarily varies from one individual to another, that several psychiatrists read my script and gave their approval. . . . Lola's dreams have a dramatic function and purpose, I believe, whether a scientific one or not.16

As declared by Havelock Ellis, "all dreaming is a process of reasoning."17 Lola's dreams are quite acceptable as examples of a synthesis of images or as constructions she would build:

I dreamt I put her on a leash and we walked down town--to do some shopping. All the people on the street turned around to admire her, and I felt so proud. Then we started to walk, and the blocks started going by so fast that Little Sheba couldn't keep up with me. Suddenly, I looked around and Little Sheba was gone. . . . (p. 9)


Well based on her personal and emotional foundations, the symbolic and referential aspect of Lola's dreams are understandable and acceptable to the audience. That she does not realize even their rudimentary psychological meaning is totally in keeping with everything else that establishes her foolishness and her simplicity. Lola should not understand. The author's understanding and usage is obvious. Agreement with that usage is not as important as an acceptance—given Lola's situation and frame of mind—of the authenticity of the dreams as hers.

Doc's reaction to Lola's sadness concerning Sheba's growing old may not be a fully conscious one, and his line, "Some things should never grow old" (p. 10), may be just another maxim said to appease his wife. But after uttering it, he would certainly be aware of its reference to his wife, and he reacts to her at the breakfast table in much the same manner that the audience reacts to the significance of the line. Only Lola does not realize it. This an example of Inge's excellent ability to create characters about whom the audience knows more than they do themselves. The interest he is able to arouse in such constructs is achieved by a master's hand in finding for the present stage presence, the necessary and apt revelations that work to complete the impression. Lola is suffering with the problem, but has not the astuteness
to intellectualize any of it. As, for instance, in the
telling of her final dream:

Marie and I were going to the Olympics
back in our old High School Stadium. . .
There was Turk. . . throwing the javelin. . .
Do you know who the man in charge was? It
was my father. . . . You came trotting out
there on the field just as big as you
please--And I couldn't find Little Sheba.
I almost went crazy looking for her and
there were so many people I didn't know
where to look. . . -- she was lying in the
middle of the field--dead. . . I wanted
to go to her, but you wouldn't let me.
You kept saying, "We can't stay here,
Honey; we gotta go on." (p. 76)

The dream is further evidence of a character whose
activity stems from a combination of traits that condition
her behavior, whether she is aware of it or not. For
even at this late point of the play's development, as
the audience makes inferences concerning the shape, the
images, and the wordage of Lola's dream, Inge intends
that Lola be unaware of its implications.

Inge also intends that the growth or change in Lola
at the end of the play comes from what has happened to
her and not from any perceptive thinking on her part about
what she dreamt and thought. Her husband's departure,
the terror of his attempted murder, the final rejection
of her father--all those incidents have forced her into
a new attempt at salvaging her and Doc's lives. The
implications of the dream are lost on her.

Lola's house is in a messy state. That too has been
determined by the playwright to reveal the dispositional and motivational bent of the character. In regard to the slovenly household—conventionally considered to be her responsibility as a wife—Lola has not consciously opted for inactivity, she has slid into it:

I oughta be gettin your breakfast, Doc, instead of you gettin' mine. (p. 9)

The house is such a mess, Turk. I bet you think I'm an awful housekeeper. (p. 17)

Yes, I'm going to (get busy). . . I'm going to start my spring house-cleaning one of these days real soon. (p. 22)

But given the slightest opportunity for social contact, Lola is activated. She is never offensive to any of the people who come to her house (Marie, Turk, Bruce, Mrs. Coffman, Postman, etc.) Rather, it is her extreme desire to have them supply her with items of interest that initially irritates them and eventually forces them to capitulate. Lola's need to communicate with the others is of such a desparate nature that it can be frightening to them. But her innate sweetness eventually wins over all those who take the time (or are forced to take the time) to communicate with her, as in the following examples:

Postman: I'll see that you get a letter if I have to write it myself. (p. 21)
Milkman: I sent my picture in to Strength and Health last month. It's a physique study. If they print it, I'll bring you a copy. (p. 24)

Mrs. Coffman: If you want me for anything, let me know. (p. 69)

Inge's usage of minor characters conveys, decidedly, the lonely, desperate nature of the woman, but also assists in establishing both Lola and Doc as "lovable, weak, warmhearted, foolish, naive, a little pretentious and only occasionally brave."¹⁸

Lola's relationship with Marie is not an unpleasant one. The woman's interest in Marie is extremely beneficial to the young girl and Marie realizes that, although Lola does not. Lola's reward is to live vicariously in Marie the youth she missed. At various times she is eager and willing to fantasize an equality of age and experience with the college girl:

Marie: Turk was saying just the other night what good sports you both are.
Lola: That so?
Marie: Honest. He said it was just as much fun being with you as with kids our own age.
Lola: Oh, I like that Turk. He reminds me of a boy I used to know in High School, Dutch McCoy. . . (p. 14)

Lola: I used to be pretty, something like you. (She gets her picture from table) I was Beauty Queen of the Senior Class in High School. My dad was awful strict, though. Once he caught me holding hands with that good looking Dutch McCoy. Dad sent Dutch home and wouldn't let me go out after supper for a whole month. Daddy would never let me go out with boys much. Just because I was pretty. He was afraid all the boys would get the wrong idea--you know. I never had any fun at all until I met Doc. (p. 16)

Lola flirts in a coquettish manner with Turk, asking him about his sports and commenting on his strength and build. When he tells her that she's "a swell skirt" (p. 18), Lola is extremely flattered and pleased, in the very way she may have reacted to Dutch McCoy, so many years before. The regressions in her might be considered charming if it were not the basis of the dilemma in which she finds herself. For her involvement with the young girl's affairs and her not sharing her husband's view of the situation will further antagonize her husband and increase the rift between them. But Lola cannot think otherwise. She is still too sentimental and adolescent to be anything but thrilled by the romantic activities of Marie. A possible psychological explanation for such behavior may be found in the following commentary:
Disturbances of development may occur not only in the form of a total arresting of development but also in the form of retaining more characteristics of earlier stages than is normal. When a new development meets with difficulties, there may be backward movement in which the development recedes to earlier states that were more successful experiences. Fixation and regression are complementary to each other. Freud used the simile of an advancing army in enemy territory leaving occupation troops at all important points. The stronger the occupation troops left behind, the weaker is the army that marches on. If the latter meets a too powerful enemy force, it may retreat to those points where it had previously left the strongest occupation troops. The stronger a fixation, the more easily will a regression take place if difficulties arise.  

Freud posited the theory that the whole goal of life is to achieve pleasure. When, as an infant, the resolution of the conflict of one stage of development does not occur evenly and too much energy has been expended at that one stage, it leaves not enough energy to complete the succeeding stages. A personality may become totally or partially fixated at the level of its last success and happiness. When as an adult, conflicts or pressure of life become untenable, the personality can return to its fixated area.

Lola, having had difficulty in finding satisfaction in, what one would assume to be, her oral stage manifests, at this difficult period of her life, these evidences of the fixation: overweight, sloppiness, garrulity, and most importantly, the inability to manage a situation by herself. She relies on outsiders to furnish her with the proof of her previous attractiveness and appeal. There are, for instance, her total reliance on her husband, her living in the past, and her voyeurism of the Marie-Turk episodes to serve as the Inge devices to establish his character as possessing this psychological graph.

Doc Delaney's acceptance or rejection of Lola is an important determinant in the woman's self-image. She looks to him for her esteem as he does to her. Their personal failures obstruct the judgment that they would like and instead arouse another that they subconsciously resent. Unfortunately, until almost totally destroyed, they remain powerless or too apathetic to strive to change it. Inge makes it clear that Lola's deliberative and decisive actions--the things she considers and the choices she makes--are very much affected by her husband. It is only when she does not know what he thinks of an issue that she reacts independently. And it is such independent thought that produces tension or conflict.
in the household. She is pliable in his hands, and apparently if he ever stated outright everything she was to do and think, she would comply. It is because Doc does not speak out, without provocation, on certain subjects that she is genuinely flabbergasted and upset when she finds that her thoughts differ from his. Ordinarily, he has only to voice his wishes to get Lola to comply:

Doc: What if someone walked into the house now? What would they think? Lola: Daddy, Marie just asked me if it was all right if Turk came and posed for her. Now that's all she said, and I said O.K. But if you think it's wrong, I won't let them do it again. (p. 29)

Doc: Baby, don't use that word. Lola: I'm sorry, Doc. I hear Marie and Turk say it all the time, and I thought it was kinda cute. Doc: It sounds vulgar. Lola: I won't say it again, Daddy. (p. 33)

Doc: . . . I can't stop just 'cause I made a few mistakes. I gotta keep goin' --somehow. Lola: Sure, Daddy. Doc: I--I wish you wouldn't ask me questions like that, Baby. . . . Lola: I'm sorry, Doc. I didn't mean to upset you. (p. 38)

When Lola does act independently, she fears his opposition as she had feared her father's years before. Helpless and dependent by nature, she has been forced into further
compliance in fear of arousing Doc to any of the uncontrolled behavior of his previous, heavy-drinking period. But she does not really understand him. She tries often in the play to cater to him, but her choices are the wrong ones—the ones that actually aggravate their problem. On his part, Doc cannot seem to allow a full-fledged intimacy between them. His reserve, his tendency toward pomposity, his self-righteousness, and his ineptitude are present and are manifested in the "suppressed hatred" he eventually hurls at his wife. That attitude contributes as much to the couple's isolation as do any of Lola's weaknesses.

The construction of this major character is complete and sure. A great deal of work towards a final construct was done during the rehearsal period for the original New York production of the play. The contributions of director Daniel Mann and actress Shirley Booth have been acknowledged by Inge. Miss Booth's early reservations about the role and her influence with the playwright were factors in altering the character of Lola from villain to victim. She commented afterwards about her contributions:

20 Dusenbury, p. 11.

I said to Mr. Inge that neither Lola nor Doc should be the villains, but the victims and that life should be the villain. . . . With this firmly entrenched in the audience's mind, I felt the character became something for which the audience could feel tolerance, pity and generosity. . . .

Actress Joan Lorring, in remembering that first rehearsal period writes "Shirley Booth transformed Lola from (as I read the character as written) a boring woman to a bored and lonely one. . . ." 22 It was sensible of Mr. Inge to accept this early criticism and use it constructively. For, as written now, Lola is a character of volition—so constructed that what happens to her is inevitable; of stature—a character created with strong strokes and intensity; and of attractiveness—her appeal is winning, and concern for her is understandable. The construction is credible and clear. Its final excellence is that Lola seems to be an absolute original and yet, is representative at the same time.

THE CHARACTER OF DOC DELANEY

The excellence of character creation in *Come Back, Little Sheba* extends beyond the major character of Lola

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22 Quoted in Clarkson, p. 41.

23 Letter to author from Joan Lorring, June 4, 1974.
to Doc Delaney and others as well. Physical characteristics for Doc are not actually designated by playwright Inge. We learn he is a few years older than Lola and therefore into his forties. The manner of dress required by stage action necessitates a suit jacket. His strong, graceful hands are mentioned several times by Lola, his habits of good grooming are cited in stage directions and also praised by Lola. Other information about him is scattered throughout the dialogue of the play. Lola divulges that he had been the dutiful son of a wealthy widow. He took his mother to church every Sunday, and was raised "as a real gentleman" (p. 53). He was in pre-medical training when he was forced to marry Lola and they lost their child. Afterwards, he was forced to settle for chiropractor school instead to support Lola. These happenings are still vital to them at this time, twenty years after his first strong attraction Lola forced the unexpected upon him. Both his and Lola's fear of societal ostracism made their "error" a dreadful and important burden. As Lola speaks these concerns, Doc is feeling them with her.

Lola: I mean, are you sorry you had to marry me?
Doc: We were never going to talk about that, Baby.
Lola: You were the first one, Daddy, the only one. I'd just die if you didn't believe that... Do you think we did
wrong, Doc? . . . I don't think anyone knows about it except my folks, do you? . . . I wish the baby had lived, Doc . . . If we had gone to a doctor, she would have lived, don't you think? . . . Why were we so afraid?

Doc: We were just kids . . . (p. 37)

By this period of his life, in spite of the harbored hostility he feels toward his wife, Doc has given his life some shape. It is only when his thoughts linger too long on what might have happened to him had other choices been made, that this shape to his life is threatened. "He has established certain values and ideals it satisfies him to live up to." 24

No--no Baby. We should never feel bad about what's past. What's in the past can't be helped. You--you've got to forget it and live for the present. If you can't forget the past, you stay in it and never get out . . . (p. 37)

This tenuous adjustment has been made after a long, continuing struggle that saw first the death of his child, his withdrawal from medical school, his years as a chiropractor, the senseless squandering of his mother's bequest, his alcoholism, the deterioration of his practice, and finally the rebuilding of his life with a resignation to it.

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I might be a big M.D. today, instead of a chiropractor; we might have had a family to raise and be with us now; I might still have a lot of money if I'd used my head and invested it carefully, instead of gettin' drunk every night. We might have a nice house, and comforts, and friends. But we don't have any of those things. So what. We gotta keep on living, don't we? I can't stop just 'cause I made a few mistakes. I gotta keep goin'—somehow. (p. 38)

While his ideals and philosophies are manifested by his overt behavior, the inner conflicts and the great strain in the man are detectable as well. Everything he does and says, as well as the things he tries not to do and say substantiate the disposition of the character. This disposition—the moods and attitudes—stems from the thwarted desires that once were so strong and that now have been submerged but can, in no way, be made to disappear. Outwardly, he blames himself, but there is evidence in his out-of-control behavior in the play of a transference of blame to Lola and a deep resentment of what she is and what she is not. The alcohol, eliminating inhibitions and eliminating self-control, allows the man to erupt the virulent anger he feels:

Doc: He probably has to marry her, the poor bastard. Just cause she's pretty and he got amorous one day—Just like I had to marry you.
Lola: Oh, Doc.
Doc: You and Marie are both a couple of sluts.
Doc's relationship with Lola has affected his life and will continue to do so for all his remaining years. He is as innocent and good-hearted as she. Neither possesses the sturdiness often required for material success, but they should, by controlling their spiritual excesses, reach a companionship and attract others to them as well. A dependency in the relationship is eventually admitted by Doc. It is as if while confined at the hospital he came to realize that his wife had never failed to assist him even when he failed himself. In his plea to her is even a grammatical error that is fascinating to note, since Doc earlier mocked Lola for such a slip. It is as if he is now realizing he is as capable of error (all kinds) as she is, and even more importantly, is acknowledging it.

Honey, don't ever leave me. Please don't ever leave me. If you do, they'd have to keep me down at that place all the time. I don't know what I said to you, what I did. I can't remember hardly anything. But please forgive me--please--please--And I'll try to make everything up. (p. 74)
It is the presence of Marie Buckholder in his household that works as a catalyst upon him. She inadvertently brings him the disturbance from which he can recover only by using all his strength and begging the assistance of Lola. The young girl, with no awareness other than the fact that he "responds" to her, becomes for Doc an idealized woman—to a small degree his young Lola, but mainly the embodiment of a concept he has harbored all his life. Caught up with this "madonna image" of women, he makes the college girl something she is not and never even pretends to be. He intimates this, early in the play, as they talk in the kitchen.

Yes, you want to study hard, Marie. Learn to be a fine artist some day. Paint lots of beautiful pictures. I remember a picture of a cathedral my mother had over the mantelpiece at home, one of those big cathedrals in Europe somewhere. Made you feel religious just to look at it. (p. 7)

Doc sees Marie as pure—with the kind of behavior he has been taught to consider as purity. She is "fresh and clean" (p. 8); she is "a nice girl" (p. 12); she is "sweet and innocent" (p. 43). The religious reverence for Marie has been considered to be a sublimated physical desire for her by some who have studied the play. He is embarrassed when admonished to kiss her, "Can't spend

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Lockwood, pp. 32-33.
my time kissing all the girls" (p. 13). He is never enthusiastic about her fiance Bruce and is outright hostile with jealousy in regard to the athlete Turk:

Marie's too good to be wasting her time with him. (p. 32)

And I say he's no good. Marie's sweet and innocent; she doesn't understand guys like him. I think I oughta run him outa the house. (p. 43)

Doc's attitude is more the spirit that is shattered rather than any strong physical jealousy. It is a sensitive man's too earnest belief in the concept of women on pedestals, as something other than flesh-and-blood creatures. Doc's brand of chauvinism not only affects his treatment of Lola, but contributes greatly to the climax caused by Marie. His innocence is shattered by what he learns of the young people's sexual behavior. This new awareness goes against all the reserved and gentlemanly behavior by which has has always lived.

Some critics have commented on the "slow" first act of Come Back, Little Sheba. Opening night critics seemed unable to accept the playwright's contribution as the major effect of the evening but instead found the

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play, "a scenario for a good play," 27 "a slender and unfulfilled play," 28 "so slight it verges on the monotonous." 29 Confused by a play that did not fit the conventional structure but moved forward according to the needs of particular character relationships, they gave the chief credit for the success to the stars of the production. Inge later described the play's form as similar to what he had experienced as an unnatural quiet in the atmosphere before a tornado.

> It wasn't dull or monotonous quiet; it somehow had intensity and meaning and there would be just an occasional breath of breeze to suggest a hidden restlessness that had to break. 30

That description is also applicable to the playwright's structuring of Doc's behavior throughout the play. The final, drunken attack that is made to seem inevitable comes as a climax to the play's action. This impressive scene of some seventeen minutes duration in which Doc taunts Lola, attacks her, and finally collapses when reminded of the love he once felt for her, is prepared

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for by Inge's sturdy hand upon the character of Doc. Throughout the play are flashes of anger in which Doc loses control for a second and to which Lola reacts with instinctive, conciliatory fear. They are the breaks that add suspense and interest. The first and softest occurs at their first breakfast scene:

Lola: When I think of the way you used to drink, always getting into fights, we had so much trouble. I was so scared. I never knew what was going to happen.
Doc: That was a long time ago, Baby.
Lola: I know it, Daddy. I know how you're going to be when you come home now. (She kisses him lightly) (p. 10)

Others:

Lola: Shhh, Daddy. Don't get upset.
Doc: (very angrily) All right, but if anything happens to the girl, I'll never forgive you. (p. 31)

Lola: Daddy you wouldn't do that (run Turk out of the house)
Doc: (Very heated) Then you talk to her and tell her how we feel.
Lola: Hush, Daddy. They'll hear you.
Doc: I don't care if they do hear me. (p. 43)

Each of these short and varied breaks in the outward control of Doc are steps that carry the character closer and closer to an irrevocable outburst. By way of character, playwright Inge has managed to give his play a decisive and logical forward movement.
THE CHARACTER OF MARIE BUCKHOLDER

When Marie Buckholder, a young girl who has come to college to study art, rents a room in the Delaney house, youth is in Doc's and Lola's midst.

Youth to Lola was a song that ended before she had quite learned the tune. Youth to Doc was a snare that tore him away from the straight, upward path to a future of security and respect.31

To the disappointed, middle-aged man, Marie becomes an embodiment of the earnest, spiritual ideals he has held concerning womanhood. She becomes for Lola a device by which to live vicariously the extravagances she missed. Lola sees Marie in much more realistic light than Doc can. Doc is too intent foisting upon the girl an unrealistic spirituality that is not at all what the girl really is.

Marie, Inge describes, as

a young girl of eighteen or nineteen who rooms in the house... skipping airily into the kitchen. Her hair is piled in curls on top of her head and she wears a sheer dainty negligee and smart, feathery mules on her feet. She has the cheerfulness only youth can feel in the morning. (p. 7)

Marie should not be understood as a younger version of Lola or a Lola as she used to be. Although Howard Barnes

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in his opening night review, saw Marie as "a pale reflection of her landlady,"\(^{32}\) he once again missed what Inge's work intends. Their only common ground is the prettiness that Marie possesses and Lola once had. Marie conveys a separate and distinct dispositional and motivational pattern. Miss Buckholder is very much aware of reactions to her and utilizes them to her advantage. For instance, she says the right things to ingratiate herself with Doc, because she senses his attraction to her. She can please him very much by saying:

Dr. Daloney, you're so nice to your wife, and you're so nice to me; as a matter of fact, you're so nice to everyone. I hope my husband is as nice as you are. Most husbands would never think of getting their own breakfast. (p. 8)

Doc reacts as she knew he would; hence she accomplishes just what she intends. She flirts with him when she says, "Aren't you going to kiss me, Dr. Delaney?" and is amused by his disconfiture (p. 13). With Lola, she is gossipy and gives the older woman the conversation for which she is so eager.

Lola: Tell me more about Bruce.
Marie: Well, he comes from one of the best families in Cincinnati. And they have a great big house. And... (p. 15)

Marie asks Lola to do things for her, and Lola gets a
great deal of pleasure from doing so. Marie takes
advantage of the offer of the front room and the
privacy of the house in order to socialize just as
she pleases with Turk. She seems to have thought
through her options as a young, attractive woman of
her time and reveals that she is looking out for her­
self all along the way. At this point, she is incapable
of anything beyond egocentric physical and material con­
cerns. Marie--unlike Lola--is calculating and aware of
what is best for her to do in order to get what she
wants, as the following three comments indicate:

Bruce is so dependable and--he's a
gentleman too. (p. 15)

Bruce is going to come into a lot of
money some day. (p. 16)

I like Turk but he's not the marrying
kind. (p. 56)

She manipulates all that come into contact with her in the
play (Lola, Doc, Bruce, and even Turk). She is a very
strong, self-serving young woman--strong in her indepen­
dence: "Sometimes I'm glad I didn't know my father.
Mom always let me do pretty much as I please" (p. 16).

She is also strong in her decisive actions. Following is
the dialogue that caps two very important moves within
the structure of the play's action upon which Marie
deliberates and decides. First is a moral choice, Marie finds she is forced to make:

Tonight will never come again—O.K.
Let's go out somewhere first and have a few beers. We can't come back till they're asleep. (p. 47)

Secondly, an important choice of expedience has been maneuvered by the young woman:

We've made all our plans. I'm quitting school and flying back to Cincinnati with Bruce this afternoon. His mother has invited me to visit them before I go home. Isn't that wonderful? (p. 70)

Marie's habit of skipping, running, dancing should not be misleading. She should not be thought of as a feather-weight. She behaves in the manner that she feels is the best way to accomplish her desires. To tease Doc, she allows him to run his fingers through her hair. By conversing with Lola, she gets attention and favors. In enticing Turk, she gets the sexual affair she wants before settling into married life. It is intriguing that she walks, rather than skips or dances, when she is with her strait-laced Bruce, because that is the role she will now play to succeed at getting what she wants. Marie is not without a kind of sincerity in her appreciation of what the Delaneys have done for her, "Tell Doc good-by for me, will you, and remember, I think you're both a coupla peaches" (p. 71). For they have appreciated her, in no way got in the way of what she intended, and, in fact,
helped her along.

Joan Lorring, the originator of this role, stated that she was given the "key" to her work on Marie by fellow-actress Shirley Booth, who reminded her colleague that there is a character spoken of in the play who is never seen—a fluffy, lively, gay, creature—Little Sheba. Miss Lorring went on to create a Sheba for the audience to see; one which she felt was the Marie that William Inge had intended. Critical reviews describing Miss Lorring's Marie indicate that under the softness and frivolity she had also the strength and determination inherent in the Inge script. Critics Theophilus Lewis and Harold Clurman said, respectively: "a brisk and tactful handling of an essentially unwholesome character and "Miss Lorring shows decided promise in an attractive blending of the street-earthly and the lyric."

Marie is no Lola, and never will be. That is to her advantage in many respects. She is presented as possessing a self-centered strength and a sense of her own identity. Her cleverness with the males in her life

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33 Letter to author from Joan Lorring, June 7, 1974.


denotes that she uses men because that is an expedient way for a woman to get things done. Ordinarily, a young woman remains "respectable", within the approval of society, and finds a personal identity only through a male. Therefore, a strong-willed, intelligent young woman such as Marie does not aspire for a career of her own, but finds rather that she will be the force behind her husband's career. She will not compete with Bruce or any other man, but she will use him. 36

She is a character, representative of the manipulative nature. But in order to get something from those she manipulates she must also give something. Marie will do those things necessary to get what she wants. The intelligence of Marie is evident in how she manipulates. She uses each related character in the role that each can fulfill for her, managing attention from Lola, adoration from Doc, sex with Turk, and marriage and security from Bruce.

THE CHARACTER OF TURK

Turk is the young athlete-proud of his body, sure in his appeal for women of all ages--who is brought into

36A practical application of the preceding analysis was utilized by a young actress, Constance Grappo, in her work on the role of Marie in a March 1974 production of Come Back, Little Sheba at Players Theatre, Columbus, Ohio. Her "acting score" is included in the Appendix as Exhibit B.
the Delaney household by Marie, the classmate with whom he is having a lusty relationship.

He is a young, big, husky, good-looking boy, nineteen or twenty. He has the openness, the generosity, vigor and health of youth. He's had a little time in the service, but he is not what one would call disciplined. He wears faded dungarees and a T-shirt. (p. 17)

Playwright Inge gives little more factual information about Turk's background. But within the confines of the stage action, his relationships with Marie, Lola, and Doc are importantly intertwined, clear, and interesting. Turk's main concern and that which motivates all his behavior and relationships is his eagerness to have "good times."

He is an athlete whose brawny ability has carried him to college and it is that which he intends to work out and not his brain.

Gotta get to the library. Haven't cracked a book for a biology exam and Marie's gotta help me. . . . She doesn't realize how busy I am. I'll only have a half hour to study at most. I gotta report to the coach at 10:30. (p. 17)

He is ingenuous about the display of his muscular body. He loves for it to be admired, and his obvious enjoyment mitigates any possible negative reaction to such extreme exhibitionism that the other characters might feel. "How do you want this lovely body" (p. 27)? he asks Marie when it comes time for him to pose for her. His concern is
even comical, when after just short minutes of posing, he complains, "Baby, I can't hold this pose very long at a time. . . . No bother (Rubs his shoulder--he poses). Hard pose, though. Gets me in the shoulder" (p. 27).

Doc, however, resents Turk for the threat he obviously is to Marie's "purity." Because of this, Doc will not allow himself to like or tolerate the presence of Turk around the house. Turk recognizes the older man's resentment and reacts in kind:

Turk: He hates my guts.
Marie: Oh, he does not.
Turk: Yes, he does. If you ask me, he's jealous. . . . He's got a wife of his own, hasn't he? Why doesn't he make a few passes at her? (p. 44)

All enjoyments--posing, sports; all concerns--studies, Doc's hostility; all take second place to Turk's main concern--the male-female game of the hunt, the chase, the struggle, the conquest. Turk searches out sex with a desirable partner in a straight-forward fashion. He thinks Marie fulfills his needs nicely and pursues her aggressively through out the play:

Turk: Hi, Juicey.
Lola: Remember, Marie, you and Turk can have the room tonight. All to yourselves. You can play the radio and dance and make a plate of fudge, or anything you want.
Marie: (To Turk) O.K.?
Turk: (With eagerness) Sure. (p. 18)
Turk: Didn't she ever see a man before?
Marie: Not a big, beautiful man like you, Turky. (Turk smiles, is flattered by any recognition of his physical worth, takes it as an immediate invitation to love-making. . . (p. 28)

(Turk enters from bedroom and goes to. Marie, starting to make advances.)
Lola: Marie's just doing a picture of him, Doc.
Doc: You always stick up for him. . . but if anything happens to the girl, I'll never forgive you.
(Doc goes upstairs. Turk then grabs Marie, kisses her passionately.) (p. 31)

Marie: Oh Turk, this is all we ever do.
Turk: Are you complaining?
Marie: (Weakly) --no. (p. 45)

It is in no way conceivable that Turk be considered a "villain" out to besmirch a young innocent. His gentleness and playfulness have been made clear by the open, direct, fun-loving approach he takes to Marie. He is sincere when he says, "Honey, I know I talk awful rough around you at times; I never was a very gentlemanly bastard, but you really don't mind it--do you?. . . Anyway, you know I'm nuts about you" (p. 46).

His attitudes are those of a very young boy, having as good a time as he can muster at the things he enjoys most. He represents an immature, callow twenty-year-old. The problems in the household do not concern him. He is hardly aware of them. His one attempt at eavesdropping on the Delaneys is cut short by Marie and he is quickly
back to making romantic passes at her in his own good-natured, confident manner. The playwright has provided just the right amount of particulars in this characterization. Proof of the correctness of selection is the fact that although not as many particulars for Turk are known, his utilization in the action of the play is vital and his impression is strong.
CONCLUSION

The characterizations in Come Back, Little Sheba are its fundamental. They represent people who are "small"; that is, they are people whose influence never goes beyond their immediate circle. They affect only each other, not the nation, the state, or the community. But the depiction of them and the relationships between them are handled deftly by Inge, resulting in a play which accomplishes what the playwright wrote as his "mission"—to write a good play that brings some illumination to life.¹ About his playwriting habits, Inge stated:

I have never sought to write plays that primarily tell a story; nor have I sought deliberately to create new forms. I have been most concerned with dramatizing something of the dynamism I myself find in human motivations and behavior.²

In his own words, Inge acknowledges that the distillation of life that he seeks to accomplish is approached through the realm of "character."


Though the major impetus to Inge's writing is the creation of character, the play is not formless. As analyzed by Patton Lockwood, it has been found to be asymmetrical but balanced. Lockwood observes that:

Inge's play, like those of Chekhov, Williams, Saroyan, and Wilder, does not fit the pattern of standard conventional structure. It is a unique product shaped by the needs of particular character relationships and the situations they evoke.\(^3\)

The playwright has the ability to have character establish and determine the action of the play with a cause/effect procedure. It is, after all, the Aristotelian dictate that a play be "an imitation of an action" that is the final judge of the calibre of the work. The question is whether or not all of the ingredients, however approached by the author, make up the form of the drama—its action. In \textit{Come Back, Little Sheba} and the other plays examined in this study, as well as in the two most frequently produced Inge plays, \textit{Picnic} and \textit{Bus Stop}, there is an imitation of action which shows a considerable hold on the reins of playwriting.

Structure refers to the total effect or the total organization of a literary work. It is the full scheme of the work. Another basic term for this structure is "plot." Plot is primarily concerned with "what happens";

\(^3\)Lockwood, p. 41.
and shows the play to be concerned with a series of incidents or episodes that follow one another according to some plan of the playwright. In Inge's case, this plan comes from what the character relationships cause to brew. His drama is truly "character in action," and each work has its own particular structure. However, the search for proof of dimension for this play has led critics to discuss it in terms of the conventional quantitative structure of drama, which separates the events of a play into the categories of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement. Jerry Leroy Crawford concluded, in his thesis study of the play that:

Inge's unified action resulting from a carefully constructed plot controls the characters and the dramatic progression of Come Back, Little Sheba. The long beginning action employs exposition, complications, and climaxes necessary to rising action. The central dramatic question is organized in serious terms. Inge varies the predominately serious form by interspersing gay moods throughout the play. The final scene is the most important of these. The middle action is composed of a major climax and the crisis of the play and starts the falling action. This is conclusively resolved in the end action, along with the central dramatic question. The analysis demonstrates that Come Back, Little Sheba is a well structured play.

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4 Smiley, p. 79.

The two characters, Doc and Lola Delaney, share an equal importance in the play. They function as dual protagonists undergoing changes and adjustment; they embody the theme of resignation or acceptance of life that Inge propounds within the play. They are given the language of the every day speech of the appropriate social class to which they belong; and it is appropriate, functional dialogue. But it is not random or unselected. Inge's careful consideration of character development commands each character creation to speak in its own appropriate manner. The double track of the play's diction is that it is ordered by Inge to reveal the thought which characters intend to communicate and also to communicate much that they persist in wanting to remain hidden. Inge also succeeds at delineating states of unconsciousness in the character, who are made to think, speak, and act in certain ways and never know why.

In Come Back, Little Sheba, the deliberation and diction of Doc, Lola, and Marie is fully achieved. Each of the three constructs evidences clearly the six traits of characterization that Professor Smiley suggests as a modus operandi in determining the degree of characterization. As stated earlier, the character of Turk, however, is investigated to just the degree needed to substantiate his place in the action of the play. But the
Delaneys and Marie are characters with the necessary qualities of volition, in that they determine their own action and stature, in that they possess strength and intensity as agents. Their inter-relating is vital to the course of action, as well. For instance, if Marie were not in the household, the Delaney conflict might never have happened or might have been postponed. The confusion concerning Marie Buckholder for some critics occurs when the remaining qualities of attractiveness, credibility and clarity are applied to the character construction. There is general agreement that Doc and Lola possess those qualities and are reacted to accordingly, whereas the character of Marie has been minimized, and Inge's seeming intention for the character has been misinterpreted. As constructed, there is an appeal in the girl if her willful and manipulative nature is accepted as being her only recourse to achievement. There is also credibility and clarity to what she does if the director and actress will accept her importance as catalyst and afford her the time and effort required to create fully Inge's "unattractive" girl as an attractive character.

Each play must be discussed as possessing two lives—one as drama and one as theatre. Come Back, Little Sheba, as the creation of Inge, has existed as drama since 1949
and has validity and strength. It was formulated by the playwright who took full advantage of all the Aristotelian elements—even spectacle for that was in his mind's eye at the time he prepared the work. A performance is the second life of the play. That second life is regenerated with each production and comes about by the work of theatre artisans utilizing the text as one of their ingredients in creating an existential theatre event. Then, the play exists in time and space and is a process. Whereas the playwright was the creator of the first life, it is the director who creates the second.

The director of *Come Back, Little Sheba* must recognize the "universality" of what Inge has accomplished. For the playwright's mind has constructed an art object that possesses logical movement because of what the characters are to each other and because of what the characters do to each other. That movement is toward an end that the playwright has made to seem probable and necessary. That movement is universal in that it is knowable to all others who utilize their rationality in understanding the work of the playwright. With actors who will study the text, subtext, action, and reaction of its characters, *Come Back, Little Sheba* will continue
to be "a good play," as Harold Clurman found it to be on opening night. And it will continue to foster the good productions that audiences have been seeing in many places, at many times, ever since.

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Scene from The Dark at the Top of the Stairs
Original New York Production, 1957
Teresa Wright as Cora Flood
 CHAPTER THREE

THE DARK AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS

The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, Inge's fourth Broadway production was a 1957 revision of his earlier play, Farther Off From Heaven, produced by Margo Jones' Dallas-based "Theatre 47" in June, 1947. While several significant changes were made from the original to the later play, the action of both plays takes place in the early 1920's. Its setting is the living room in the Oklahoma home of Rubin Flood, a thirty-six year-old harness salesman, his wife, Cora, and their children, a ten-year-old son, Sonny, and a sixteen-year-old daughter, Reenie. An almost Chekovian series of arrivals and departures, with the second-act visit of Cora's sister, Lottie, and her husband Morris, and the subsequent arrival of Reenie's girlfriend Flirt, Flirt's boyfriend, Punky, and Reenie's blind date, Sammy Goldenbaum, provide for the further revelation and complication of character relationships that contribute to the action of Inge's domestic play.

The Dark at the Top of the Stairs opens with the first of several quarrels between Rubin and Cora as Rubin is preparing to leave town on a business trip. Cora mildly scolds Rubin for his habitual, disruption of her household order with the rhetorical question, "How many times do I have to
tell you to rinse your hands before you dry them on a towel?"¹ The argument gradually builds as Cora complains that Rubin's job keeps him away from the home too much, implying that he neglects his wife and family, a criticism that is confirmed by Rubin's description of Reenie and Sonny: "The girl plays the piano, don't she? And the boy does something, too. Gets up and speaks pieces, or something like that" (p. 9).

Cora attempts to familiarize Rubin with their childrens' personalities by noting Reenie's excessive shyness with anyone except her father and Sonny's inability to socialize with boys his own age, but Rubin refuses to accept any blame for his lack of communication with his children and, instead, places the burden of guilt on his wife:

Rubin: Ya pampered 'em so much and coddled 'em they thought I was just bein' mean if I tried to drill some sense into their heads.
Cora: Rubin, Don't say that.
Rubin: You're always kissing and makin' over the boy until I sometimes wonder who's top man around here. . . .
Cora: If I kept the kids too close to me, it's only because you weren't there, and I had to have someone close to me. I had to have someone. (p. 10)

Cora's confession of loneliness brings her back to the subject of Rubin's job, but when Rubin warns her "t'accept me the way I am, or start lookin' for a new man" (p. 11),

¹William Inge, The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, (New York: Dramatist Play Service, Inc., 1958), p. 8. All other references to the play are from this edition, with page numbers noted parenthetically in the text.
she changes the subject asking him for money so that Reenie may buy a present for Mary Jane Ralston, a wealthy schoolmate, who is the guest of honor at a country-club birthday party to which Reenie has been invited.

The Floods' talk is interrupted by boys' voices taunting Sonny. Cora drives her son's accosters away despite her husband's advice to let Sonny "fight it out for himself" (p. 13). When Sonny is safely inside, Rubin, with Cora's well-intentioned encouragement, offers to teach the boy self defense, but Sonny, turning away from his father, refuses him. Cora then scolds Rubin for not being able to help Sonny, and Rubin leaves the house in a fit of exasperation.

After Rubin's departure Cora questions Sonny about his diffident attitude towards his father, his relationship with the other boys, his obsession with going to the movies, his preoccupation with his collection of photographs of motion picture stars, and his choice of only "serious" recital pieces. But every topic of conversation brings an indifferent, evasive, or negative reaction from her son. Their dialogue is interrupted by the clandestine arrival of Reenie's new party dress. When the conversation turns to the subject of Reenie's blind date, her lack of self-confidence is confirmed by what Cora interprets as self-pitying observations; "No one ever dances with me" (p. 21), and "They give blind dates to all the girls in town that nobody else wants to take" (p. 21). A further
source of apprehension lies in the fact that the blind date, Sammy Goldenbaum, is Jewish, to which Reenie responds, "I never knew a Jewish boy before, I'm scared" (p. 21). When Cora criticizes her daughter's fear as "just looking for excuses" (p. 22), Reenie is driven to tears. Cora apologizes and telephones her sister Lottie, inviting Lottie and Morris to her home for dinner that Friday.

Cora's telephone call is ended by the sudden arrival of Rubin, who has just found out about the purchase of the dress from a salesman at the local pool hall. Rubin is furious at "findin' out what's goin' on while my back is turned" (p. 23). While he drowns his anger in a swallow of whiskey, he complains that "I ain't got money to throw away on no party togs" (p. 24). Cora retorts:

But you always have money for a bottle of bootleg whiskey when you want it, don't you? And I daresay, you've got money for a few other things, too, that I needn't mention just at present. (p. 24)

The 'few other things' are identified as a pair of black-bottomed hose for Mavis Pruitt, an alleged lady friend of Rubin's according to some gossiping friends of Cora who live in a town on Rubin's sales route. Rubin has some difficulty covering up the affair, and when Cora finally declares, "You never wanted to marry me" (p. 26), Rubin replies, "I admit, in some ways I din wanna marry nobody. Can't you understand how a man feels, givin' up his freedom" (p. 27)? Cora begins to ask Rubin how he thinks a woman feels when she has to get married because she is pregnant, but Rubin quickly
changes the subject back to the topic of the dress, vowing that if the dress doesn't go back to the store, he will leave the house and never return. Cora again refers to his adultery; and when she provokes him to hit her, he "sends Cora reeling back into the parlor" (p. 27) and bolts outside saying:

I'll go to Ponca City and drink booze and take Mavis to the movies, and raise ev'ry kind of hell I can think of. T'hell with you! (p. 27)

Having overheard the fight between their parents, Reenie and Sonny ask their mother what will happen if Rubin does not return. When Cora replies, "If worst comes to worst we can always go to Oklahoma City and move in with your Aunt Lottie and Uncle Morris" (p. 28). Sonny is ecstatic and Reenie is heartbroken. The first act ends with Reenie playing the piano as Cora tells Sonny, "I want you kids near me tonight. . . . Oh God, wouldn't it be nice if life were as sweet as music" (p. 29). Inge then indicates: "For a moment, mother and son lie together in each other's arms. Then Cora stands, as though fearing her own indulgence, and takes Sonny by the hand" (p. 29) to set the table for dinner.

The theatrical mood shifts markedly from the atmosphere supported by the quiet Chopin nocturne at the end of Act One to the "banging rendition of 'Smiles' coming from the parlor" (p. 30) that opens the second act. The time of the action is four days later, shortly after Cora's dinner for Lottie and Morris, and shortly before Reenie's departure for the country-
club birthday party. While Reenie is upstairs and Cora and Sonny are clearing the dishes from the table, Lottie informs Morris of her sister's fight with Rubin, warning him of Cora's plan to move into their home in Oklahoma City. Lottie advises her husband:

> She's going to come to you sometime this evening and ask you about it, and all you have to say is, "I'm leaving all that in Lottie's hands, Cora." (p. 32)

Lottie's one-sided conversation with Morris about her sister's marriage is interrupted by Reenie, who claims she does not feel well enough to go to the party. When Cora finally intercedes, "I'm not going to let her play sick and not go" (p. 35), Reenie's strategy is defeated and she goes back upstairs. Morris, Lottie, and Cora discuss Cora's family problems. Cora tries to broach the subject of her move to Oklahoma City, but Lottie diverts the conversation to small talk about hair styles, and Cora finally retreats, leaving Lottie and Morris to be entertained by Sonny and his collection of movie photos. Lottie soon volunteers to style Reenie's hair for the party, and Cora takes the opportunity to discuss her future plans with Morris.

Morris is just reaching the point in the conversation with his sister-in-law when he must give an answer to Cora's request when they are disturbed by Lottie's anxious announcement that Reenie is vomiting all over the bathroom and by the simultaneous arrival of Reenie's girlfriend Flirt with the military school escorts for the evening. The boys are
Flirt's boyfriend, Punky, and Reenie's blind date, Sammy Goldenbaum. Cora runs upstairs to her daughter, instructing Sonny to welcome the guests.

After Flirt's introductions, Lottie comes downstairs "babbling all the way down of exuberant inconsequentials" (p. 42). Sammy immediately introduces himself as the son of a minor Hollywood actress, and Lottie further discovers that this good-looking boy with a slight stammer never knew his Jewish father, has had several unknown stepfathers, has spent little time with his "busy" mother, and has lived most of his life in military boarding schools. While Flirt and Punky dance and "neck" to the piano roll music of "The Shiek of Araby," Sammy and Sonny play with the ceremonial sword on Sammy's uniform. Afterwards, Sonny entertains the guests with a recital of the "To be or not to be" soliloquy from Hamlet.

Midway through Sonny's speech Cora comes downstairs with Reenie. Sammy is introduced to his blind date, and he immediately tries to put her at ease by voicing the same emotional anxieties that he imagines Reenie feels about parties:

I always worry that people aren't going to like me when I go to a party. Isn't that crazy? Do you ever get kind of a sick feeling in the pit of your stomach when you dread things? Gee, I wouldn't want to miss a party for anything. But every time I go to one, I have to reason with myself to keep from feeling that the whole world's against me. (p. 48)

Sammy and Reenie are just about to depart when Sonny
asks to go along to the party with his sister and her date. Sammy has no objections, but Reenie, Cora, and Flirt convince Sammy that it would not be advisable. Sonny flies into a tantrum in rejection. Cora and Lottie, offering threats and bribes, are incapable of controlling Sonny's outburst. But Sammy quietly explains to Sonny that, if he acts that way again, no one will ever ask him to a party. Sammy promises to send some party favors home with Reenie so that Sonny can have his own party, and the considerably astonished sisters, Cora and Lottie, say goodnight to the party couples. While Lottie agrees with Cora's observation that Sammy is a very nice young man, she mentions Morris' feeling that, though he seemed like a perfectly happy boy to Lottie, he looked like a very unhappy boy to him. Lottie criticizes her husband for imagining everyone's unhappy and Morris decides to go for a walk, leaving Lottie to wonder if she has said anything wrong. Lottie, concerned about Morris' sudden disappearance, confesses to Cora that he often "just gets up like that and walks away... because he just wants to get away from me at times" (p. 42). Cora is initially surprised to hear her sister's complaints about what she assumed was a perfectly happy marriage, but as their conversation progresses Lottie further reveals to Cora that, despite her remarks to the contrary, she always wanted children, that she and Morris have not made love for three years, and that she never enjoyed sex with Morris, even on their honeymoon.
Lottie's revelations are interspersed with crude comments and lewd jokes, to which Cora responds:

Cora: Sometimes you talk shamefully, Lottie, and when I think of the way Mama and Papa brought us up.
Lottie: Oh, Mama and Papa, Mama and Papa! Maybe they didn't know as much as we gave them credit for.
Cora: You're changed since you were a girl, Lottie.
Lottie: What if I am! (p. 54)

The sisters' recollections of their childhood brings them to further reminiscences of their parents. Lottie reminds Cora of the way their parents cautioned them about men, and implies that Cora's premarital pregnancy was the cause of their father's stroke. Morris returns to tell Lottie that they should leave for home soon to avoid an approaching storm, and at the moment of the sisters' parting Lottie decides to agree to Cora's request to move in with them:

Lottie: Look, Cora. . . if you and the kids wanta come over and stay with us. . . we'll manage somehow.
Cora: Oh, thank you Lottie. (They embrace as though recognizing the bond of their blood.) But I'm going to work this out for myself. . . . (p. 58)

After her sister leaves, Cora makes a sudden decision and tries to phone Rubin at his hotel but discovers that her husband has not been there all week. She sends Sonny upstairs to bed and goes into the kitchen. We hear her muffled cries. Sonny then suddenly cries out in fear, and the second act ends with a scene between mother and son
having reference to "the dark at the top of the stairs":

Sonny: Mom! (Cora returns, not wanting Sonny to know she has been crying.)
Cora: Sonny, I thought I told you to go upstairs. (She looks at him now in his embarrassed fear.) Sonny, why are you so afraid of the dark?
Sonny: 'Cause... you can't see what's in front of you. And it might be something awful.
Cora: You're the man of the house, now, Sonny. You mustn't be afraid.
Sonny: I'm not afraid... if someone's with me. (Cora walks over to him and takes his hand.)
Cora: Come, boy. We'll go up together. (They start up the stairs to face the darkness, hovering there like an omen.)
(p. 59)

The action of Act Three begins in the late afternoon of the next day. Looking at Reenie's virtually untouched lunch tray, Cora interprets her daughter's lack of appetite as "feeling sorry for yourself, just because you didn't have a good time last night" (p. 60). Cora told by Reenie, in error, that Sammy left the dance with another girl, even though he had held Reenie's hand and had given her her first kiss in the car on the way to the party. Reenie breaks into tears with the admission that she liked Sammy very much and concludes that it might be better to live alone one's whole life than risk being hurt by someone you love. Cora, disturbed at her daughter's attitude, offers some pertinent advise:
Cora: Daughter, when you start getting older, you'll find yourself getting lonely and you'll want someone; someone who'll hear you if you get sick and cry out in the night; and someone to give you love and let you give your love back to him in return. Oh, I'd hate to see any child of mine miss that in life. (p. 63)

A moment of quiet realization between mother and daughter is disturbed by the arrival of Sonny, who has just earned five dollars for reciting poetry at a wealthy townswoman's tea-party. Although Sonny wants to spend his salary on movies and ice cream, Cora insists that he deposit the cash in his piggy bank. She recalls Sonny's fear of the storm and darkness on the preceding night but realizes she must tell him that he can not behave as a baby any longer and get into bed with her. He has grown too old for that.

As Sonny leaves to go to the store for his mother, Flirt arrives with the correct and awful news about Sammy's departure from the dance. He took the midnight train to Oklahoma City and committed suicide by jumping from the fourteenth-story window of his hotel room. After Cora and Reenie experience the initial shock of hearing of Sammy's death, Cora asks Flirt why he killed himself. Flirt, wondering where Reenie was when it all happened, explains that while Sammy was dancing with Mary Jane Ralston, Mrs. Ralston confronted Sammy:
Flirt: She said she wasn't giving a party for Jews, and she didn't intend for her daughter to dance with a Jew, and besides, Jews weren't allowed in the Country Club, anyway. (p. 67)

Flirt further informs them that Sammy's mother, on hearing the news of her son's death, replied that she would pay for, but would not attend, Sammy's Oklahoma City funeral and requested that her name be kept out of the obituraries because she does not want it known that she had a son.

After Flirt leaves, Cora interrogates Reenie to discover the truth about what happened on her daughter's blind date. Reenie confesses that, fearing Sammy would think she was a "wallflower" because no one cut in on their dances, she hid in the ladies' room and told her date to dance with Mary Jane Ralston. Cora lectures her daughter, "It's a fine thing when we have so little confidence in ourselves, we can't stop to think of the other person" (p. 69); and when Sonny who has overheard the circumstances of Sammy's suicide, declares, "I hate people" (p. 69), Cora tries to placate and advise him. Sonny leaves for the store and the band of neighborhood boys begin again to jeer at him, but Cora stops herself from attacking his assailers.

Reenie goes upstairs to clean her room, and while Cora is in the parlor, Rubin returns "in his stocking feet, carrying several bags which he drops onto the floor with a
clatter" (p. 70). Frightened by the noise, Cora runs into the living room to discover her husband. Rubin reports that he left the car in the garage downtown and removed his boots before entering the room because he "din wanna track up your nice, clean house" (p. 70), but when Cora mentions that she tried to call him at his hotel, Rubin offers no explanation for his whereabouts. Cora leaves the room briefly to run some water for a hot bath for Rubin, and when she returns, Rubin informs her that he has lost his job. He then explains that he wasn't at his hotel because he was being interviewed for a job selling machinery.

Cora immediately seizes the opportunity to dissuade Rubin from taking another sales job that will keep him away from the family, but her demands trigger an emotional outburst from Rubin:

Rubin: God damn! I come home here t'apologize to you for hittin' ya. I been feelin' all week like the meanest critter alive, because I took a sock at a woman. My wife, at that. I walked in here ready to beg ya to forgive me. Now, I feel like doin' it all over again. Don't you realize that every time you talk that way, I just gotta go out and raise more hell, just to prove to myself I'm a free man? Don't you know that when you talk to a man like that, you're not givin' him credit for havin' brains, or any guts, or a spine, or... or a few other body parts that are pretty important, too... Did it ever occur to you that maybe I feel like a cheapskate because I can't buy you no fur coat? Did you ever stop to think maybe I'd like to be able to send my kids away to a fine college?
Cora: All I'm asking is for you to give something of yourself.
Rubin: God damn it! What have I got to give em? In this day and age, what's a man like me got to give? With the whole world so all fired crazy about makin' money, how can any man, unless he's got a million dollars stuck in his pocket, feel he's got anything else to give that's very important? (pp. 71-72)

Cora is shocked to discover Rubin's doubts about his self-importance. Rubin continues, expressing his anxieties about taking a new job and detailing his sense of awe and discomfort at the need to adjust to a strange modern world. Cora gains a new awareness of her husband, and after Rubin apologizes to Cora for striking her and getting angered over the purchase of Reenie's dress, they confide:

Rubin: That's all I gotta say, except that... I love ya. You're a good woman and I couldn't get along without you.
Cora: I love you, too, Rubin. And I couldn't get along without you another day... Rubin: Just don't get the idea you can rearrange me like ya do the house, whenever ya wanna put it in order.
Cora: I'll remember. (There is a short silence between them now that follows this new understanding.) (p. 74)

Cora asks Rubin to continue to tell her about his fears, but Rubin informs her: "It's hard for a man to admit his fears, even to hisself... He's always afraid of endin' up like... like your brother-in-law Morris" (p. 74). Remembering her conversation with Lottie, Cora embraces Rubin with new appreciation of him. Their affectionate reunion is interrupted by Sonny's return from the
Rubin speaks briefly to Sonny and greets Reenie, who runs off to play a piece on the piano for her father. In an effort to arrange to be home alone with Cora that evening, Rubin offers Sonny enough money to go to the movies, but Sonny, turns away from his father, and tells Rubin that he does not want to go. With a feeling of failure Rubin puts a warm hand on Sonny’s shoulder, and exits upstairs, telling Cora to join him now.

Left alone in the living room together, Reenie and Sonny share their grief over Sammy Goldenbaum’s death, and in an unprecedented gesture of love and compassion toward his sister, Sonny offers to let Reenie keep the party favors that Sammy had collected for him. Sonny then asks Reenie to go to the movies with him. When Reenie wonders where they will get the money to go, Sonny defies Cora’s demand that he save the five dollars he earned and he breaks open his piggy bank: “I don’t care. She’s not going to boss me for the rest of my life” (p. 77). Cora is a silent witness to her son’s “gesture of heroic defiance” (p. 77), but she does not interfere. As Sonny and Reenie leave for the movies.

Cora starts up the stairs to her husband, stopping for one final look at her departing son. And Sonny, just before going out the door, stops for one final look at his mother, his face full of confused understanding. Then he hurries out to Reenie, and Cora, like a shy maiden, starts up the stairs where we see Rubin’s naked feet standing in the warm light. (p. 78)
THE CHARACTER OF CORA FLOOD

As the most visible character in The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, Cora Flood is the most seen, heard, and talked about member of Inge's Oklahoma family. She is present in virtually every scene, quarrelling with Rubin, protecting Sonny, counseling Reenie, and confiding in Lottie. While most of her efforts are ostensibly geared toward creating harmony and order among members of her own family, her actions fail to account for the fact that the demands that she places on them must be subservient to, or at least compatible with, the demands which life places on them. Her view of the ideal family structure is irreconcilable with the "real" world that the family must inhabit. That is the problem that Inge has created within the framework of Cora. It is the problem of character that is essential to the action of the play. All that is seen and heard is working upon the motivational and dispositional aspects of Cora Flood, to the degree that new realizations occur frequently, and what remains is a very much changed character at the end of the play.

In an opening scene with Sonny discussing his collection of movie photos, Cora advises her son: "There's a mighty big difference between pictures of people and the way people really are" (p. 15). In The Dark at the Top of the
Stairs Cora's discovery of the differences between her "pictures" of people and life and the way people and life "really are" changes her relationships with members of her family and alters her view of the world.

In an initial quarrel, Rubin criticizes Cora for not being able to accept him for the way he is, for all of their seventeen years of marriage. In their final confrontation, Rubin again refers to his wife's distorted picture of him:

All these years we been married, you never once really admitted to yourself what kinda man I am. No, you keep talkin' to me like I was the kinda man you think I oughta be. (He grabs her by the shoulders) Look at me. Don't you know who I am? Don't you know who I am? (p. 72)

Cora has not known her husband. He voices a truth about her when asking those questions. In fitting people to her idealized views of them and preparing them for her world, she comes to realize that both her wife and her mother roles have not actually been fulfilled. All of her relationships--from the constant one with her husband to the one-time meeting with Sammy Goldenbaum--teach her and change her. Cora's younger child, Sonny, tries to force the same impression of his identity on Cora that Rubin effects in the last act. He is attempting that by way of tantrums, by his choice of recital pieces, and finally
by his act of defiance in breaking open his bank in the closing scene. Early in the play Cora is confused about Sonny. She says, "He's not like you, Rubin. He's not like anyone I ever knew" (p. 9). Later she confesses to her son, "You're a speckled egg, and the old hen that laid you can't help wondering how you got into the nest" (p. 15). It is only after Cora tells Sonny that he can no longer come crawling into bed with her that she is able to be more articulate about her son's personality:

I think you're older in your feelings than I ever realized. You're a funny mixture, Sonny. In some ways as shy as your sister. In other ways, bold as a pirate. (p. 65)

Among other concerns that affect Cora are her views of her sister's marriage. Cora's view that "I'd always felt you and Morris were so devoted to each other. I'd always felt you had an almost perfect marriage" (p. 55) is altered by Lottie's confession of Morris' impotence and her frigidity. Also, Cora's initial opinion of Sammy Goldenbaum as a perfectly happy boy is shattered by the news of his later suicide. That suicide, prompted by the anti-Semitic remarks of a woman whose voice "probably sounded like the voice of the world" (p. 67), according to Cora, forces her to make the following observation about the world to her son:
There are all kinds of people in the world. And you have to live with them all. God never promised us any different. The bad people, you don't hate. You're only sorry they have to be. (p. 69)

Cora's lesson of coexistence with "the bad people" in the world had never been one she had actively practiced in raising her children before Sammy's suicide. By her own admission, she always felt she could give them "life like a present, all wrapped in white, with every promise of happiness inside" (p. 75). Her efforts had been geared to protecting her children from life, not preparing them for it. She fought Sonny's neighborhood bullies, threatening to "call their mothers" (p. 13) if they did not leave him alone. In a conversation among Flirt, Reenie, and Sammy, Inge indicates that "Cora quietly takes hold of Flirt's arm and prevents her from taking over" (p. 48). That is indicative that she is protecting Reenie from Flirt's tendency to dominate the entire scene. Protectively, the mother is attempting to have the inexperienced girl assert herself and enjoy what Cora views as a happy social experience for a teen-age girl. It is only after Sammy's suicide and after Cora is forced to admit the need to live with all kinds of people, good and bad, that she is able to restrain herself from constantly protecting her children. For instance, after she reacts to the voices of Sonny's
accosters—voices "that sound like the voices that have plagued humanity from the beginning of time" (p. 69)—she makes the decision to not interfere.

According to Lottie, Cora's tendency to protect, rather than prepare her children for life's harsh realities stems at least partially from the sisters' upbringing. Lottie tells Morris:

I've always looked after Cora, ever since we were girls. I took her to her teacher the first day of school. I gave up the wishbone for her every time we had fried chicken. She was the baby of the family and I guess we all felt we had to pamper her. (p. 37)

Lottie feels that Cora, insulated from life since their childhood, would be unable to withstand an everyday contact with humanity if she followed through with her plans to move to Oklahoma City:

Cora said something to me about her getting a job at one of the big department stores over in Oklahoma City. Can you see her doin' a thing like that? I can't. "Cora," I said, "you wouldn't last two days at that kind of work, on your feet all day, taking people's sass." Well, I don't know if I convinced her or not, but I gave her something to think about. (p. 32)

Cora's vulnerability, as alluded to by her sister, is balanced by Lottie's description of Cora's strong will power. For instance, in discussing their parents' reaction to Cora's decision to marry Rubin, Lottie says:
They felt like Cora might as well be dead as married to a man like Rubin. But Cora was always a determined creature. Mama and Papa were no match for her when she wanted her own way. (p. 33)

That strong will is the complexity that Inge adds to the character of Cora and which is as substantial a part of the character as is its vulnerability. It is that will-power that makes her protection of her children unlike that of another mother. It forces her protection above and beyond that of other mothers. Cora's is a fierce protection. Early in the play, it is her will-power that causes her to blame Rubin for their problems with their children. At various times she blames him for not being interested in them and even says, "A lot you care about your daughter, a lot you care about any of us" (p. 26). She refuses to see her share in the creation of the problems of their lives. But after the occurrences of the four days in the play's action, she has the strength to acknowledge the errors that she herself has compounded with her children.

To Reenie, she admits, "I have my own score to settle for. I've always accused your father of neglecting you, but maybe I've hurt you more with pampering" (p. 61). In the moments of realization concerning her son, Cora makes a revelatory admission:
Sonny: I don't like you anymore.
Cora: Sonny!
Sonny: I don't care. You make me mad.
Cora: (Going to him) Oh God, I've kept you too close to me, Sonny. Too close, I'll take the blame, boy. But don't be mad. Your mother still loves you, Sonny. (But she sees they are at an impasse.)
(p. 65)

In *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, Cora's strong sense of volition is misguided directed at accomplishing the impossible task of making the will of the real world submit to her idealized world. In the last act, Cora criticizes Rubin, "Sometimes you talk awfully rough and bad natured" (p. 74), and the conversation proceeds:

Rubin: Well... life's rough. Life's bad natured.
Cora: I know. And I keep trying to pretend it isn't.
Rubin: I'll remind ya.
Cora: Every time I see the kids go out of the house, I worry, like I was watching them go out into life, and they seem so young and helpless.
Rubin: But ya gotta let 'em go, Cora. Ya gotta let 'em go. (p. 75)

For Cora Flood, the liberation of her family is difficult to accomplish not only because she fears the harshness of the outside world, but also because she fears the possibility of being left alone. When Rubin criticizes her for "kissing and makin' over the boy" (p. 10) in the first scene, Cora's response about her intense need to have someone close to her evidences this trait. On the night Rubin leaves home, Cora pleads, "Oh, God what would I do without you kids... I want you kids near me tonight"
Cora's plan to keep Rubin near her by demanding he take a desk job in their home town results only in arguments. Her attempt to keep Sonny near her develops into a nearly incestual relationship, which Cora eventually realizes she must stop. The one attempt to initiate Reenie into the outside world has an adverse result when Reenie encounters unexpected pain in the suicide of Sammy Goldenbaum, an experience which prompts Reenie to declare: "I don't want to need anyone, ever in my life. It's a horrible feeling to need someone" (p. 63). Her daughter's distraught cry makes Cora realize that she must tell the girl of priorities. The ethical thought of the character results in the decision to tell her that a choice for loving and its vacillations is preferably to a life of loneliness and uninvolvment. Not to know love and its possible pain is to miss something in life. When she teaches that, Cora's life-attitude concerning what is truly important alters.

For Cora, love becomes the force that alone is capable of diminishing the fear of the world's pain and loneliness. She is able to admit to Reenie, "The people we love aren't always perfect, are they? But if we love them, we have to take them as they are" (p. 60). Reenie and Sonny are united in their mutual pain concerning Sammy Goldenbaum. Finally, Rubin and Cora exchange vows of love on Rubin's
condition that Cora not continue to think she can "rearrange" him. Cora's impossible will to order only happiness, benevolence, and freedom from pain for her family in a world that arbitrarily offers none of those things, is altered in her final realization, "All I can promise is life itself" (p. 75).

THE CHARACTER OF RUBIN FLOOD

While in Cora Flood, Inge depicts a physically weak specimen of a woman who combats her fear of the world by trying to isolate herself and her family from life's realities, in Rubin Flood, Inge draws a physically strong type whose similarly unsuccessful reaction to the modern world is to fight the restrictions it places on his freedom. Rubin is, from the outset, depicted as a man who is unprepared for the social and economic progress of the Twentieth Century. In the first scene, when Cora tries to convince her husband to take a job in a local grocery store, Rubin resists with the statement:

The way other men make a livin' is their business. I gotta make mine the best way I know how. . . . I was raised on a ranch and thought I'd spend my life on it. Sellin' harness is about all I'm prepared for. . . as long as there's harness to sell. (pp. 8-9)
Rubin's qualifying statement about the limited appeal of his product in the modern technological world is analogous to his feelings about the limited need of his influence in his domestic environment. When Cora says of their children, "Sometimes they act like they didn't have a father" (p. 9), Rubin responds, "Seems to me you get along all right without me" (p. 9). If the world no longer needs harness, all that Rubin is prepared to sell, then his family must not need a husband and father, roles which Rubin claims he is equally unprepared to fill. He admits that he never really wanted to marry anyone.

Rubin's "freedom" in the 1920's constitutes not so much a liberation from the demands of the modern world as an imprisonment in an outmoded life-style. He resists all attempts at adaptation to the new, mechanized, routine "order" of civilization. He still dresses in western clothes. He habitually fights domestic order by messing up the towels in the bathroom; he wipes his dirty knife on a clean sock; he scoffs at Cora's desire to tighten the loose buttons on his jacket; and he hangs around the local pool hall when he has just told Cora he was in a hurry to leave town. In his own living room, there is a territory--a desk with a pint of whiskey in the drawer, a fireplace and a large comfortable leather chair--that is "considered Rubin's" (p. 7). Away from home, Rubin's sales route is his territory.
When Cora questions him, "You like being out on the road, don't you? You like to pretend you're still a young cowboy" (p. 10), Rubin answers, "It wasn't a bad life" (p. 10).

Rubin's problem in *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* is that his past life as a young cowboy, a man whose "family fought Indians and buffalo and settled this country when it was just a wilderness" (p. 21), is no longer a lifestyle that is applicable in a world that is no longer a wilderness. Raised on a ranch, Rubin is uncomfortable with the mechanized society of the 1920's. To an extent, his habitual problems with the family car, which is in the garage being fixed in both the first and third acts, reflect his inability to adapt to the complexities of his modern surroundings.

Rubin's strengths are largely physical, not cerebral. He does not understand a society where devious brains and sly machinations achieve success over dominant brawn and good honest work. Rubin disapproves of fellow townsmen like Harry Ralston, who collected on a fraudulent insurance claim to make his first investment in oil:

Rubin: ... By God, I'd die in the poor house fore I'd ever do what Harry Ralston done.
Cora: Now, Rubin. ...
Rubin: I mean it. He shot hisself in the foot to collect enough insurance money to make his first investment in oil. ... He oughta be in jail now. Instead he's a social leader, givin' parties out at the country club. (p. 12)
Rubin's basic simplicity and honesty make it impossible for him to cover successfully his own failings or solve any problem using anything but the most direct approach. When Cora accuses him of adultery with Mavis Pruitt, Rubin "has to think to call her by her full name, to keep Cora from presuming too much familiarity between them" (p. 26), but he is incapable of maintaining the deception for any length of time. When Cora asks Rubin to help Sonny against the neighborhood bullies, Rubin, after first telling one of his son's accosters, "Say hello to your pa for me" asks his son, "Want me to teach you how to put up a good fight" (p. 15)? When Cora criticizes Rubin for not being able to help Sonny, Rubin continues, "What else can I do? Buy him a shotgun?" (p. 14) and concludes in frustration: "Cora, if that boy wants me to help him, he's gotta come and tell me how. I never know what's on his mind" (p. 14).

Rubin's loss of his job selling harness prompts him to consider his earlier advice to Cora: "Everybody's gotta figure out his own way of handling things. Whether he fights or whether he runs" (p. 14). When Rubin returns home in the third act, he has already made the decision to neither fight nor run, but rather to join the civilization he has habitually resisted. Rubin's resistance to modernity has been a form of desertion from the present. His decision to join the modern world is akin to Cora's newly acquired view of life.
In their struggles against life, both characters, in their own ways, have run from it. In the last act husband and wife recognize that it is time to join the world as it "really" is.

After Rubin's admission that "Harness salesmen are... things of the past" (p. 71), Rubin continues to confess his anxieties about the present and the future:

The new job is work I've never done. I never even thought of doin'. Learnin' about all that God damn machinery and how to get out there and demonstrate it. Workin' with different kinds of men, that's smarter than I am, that think fast and talk sharp and mean all business. Men I can't sit around and chew tobacco with and joke with like I did m'old customers... I don't know how I'll make out. I... I'm scared... Times are changin', Cora, and I dunno where they're goin'... I'm a stranger in the very land I was born in... How can I feel I've got anything to give my children when the world's as strange to me as it is to them?... I'm doin' the best I can, Cora. Can't you understand that? I'm doin' the best I can. (pp. 72-73)

Rubin's plight is not so much the death of a salesman as it is the halting regeneration of a man into a new social order. While Rubin's diction (his Oklahoma dialect and "rough-natured" speech), his dress (Western attire) and demeanor harken back to his past, his transformation into the present order is reflected in other details of characterization. In the first act, Cora scolds Rubin for continually disturbing the order of her house. In the last act, Rubin
removes his muddy boots before entering because he "din wanta track up your nice clean house" (p. 70). Rubin's life style may be changing, but his rebellious spirit is left intact, directed now at human variables he can control, rather than at the inevitable progression of social change. While he compliments Cora, "You're clean and dainty. Give a man a feelin' of decency... and order... and respect" (p. 74), he also warns her against allowing her penchant for order to include the rearrangement of him.

This strong stance of Rubin's would seem to necessitate a re-evaluation of the Robert Brustein assertion that Rubin is representative of a breed of male characters that are "tamed by women."² Rubin does make an adjustment to living after having been a strong opponent to certain compromises for a very long time. He has refused to veer from what he recognized, understood, and accepted. But circumstances have forced him to a point where he absolutely must. He makes that adjustment with his personality intact. There is nothing about Rubin Flood that is tamed by his wife Cora. He is as much in control of their relationship as ever. In fact, with Cora's new realizations concerning her own errors, Rubin's position in the household has been strengthened. It

can not help but be so since he is now a man who has accepted the "real" world and is preparing to function in it. As a final indication that Rubin's strengths remain, Inge chooses to limn the couple in a manner that is descriptive of their relationship at its very beginning i.e. Cora climbs the stairs to Rubin "like a shy maiden" (p. 78).

Of Rubin Flood, actor Pat Hingle, the Rubin of Kazan's original 1957 production, wrote: "... very much of him is so familiar to me. I knew Rubin immediately. ... I never had a moment's trouble playing him." To "know" Rubin Flood is to know a character with a strong will to survive, with the mortal capacity to fear and err, with the moral conviction to demand honesty, and with the human physical and psychological need for love.

At the close of The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, Rubin Flood is still incapable of establishing any significant rapport with his son, but his human failing is balanced by the admirable stature gained by his declaration: "I'm doin' the best I can" (p. 73).

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Inge's introduction of Lottie Lacey, "a big fleshy woman a few years older than Cora" (p. 30), consists of Lottie singing the appropriate lyrics of "Smiles":

There are smiles that make us happy
There are smiles that make us blue
There are smiles that steal away the teardrops
As the sunshine steals away the dew
(p. 30)

For Lottie, "smiles" expressed in lewd jokes and lusty laughs conceal the sad admission that there is nothing in her life that actually makes her happy. In the context of The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, Lottie's problems are compared with Cora's. Lottie's raunchy mannerisms are presented in contrast to Cora's air of propriety. The impotent marriage of Lottie and Morris is contrasted to the Flood's marriage, and it is Lottie's revelation of the truth about her union that prompts Cora to a desired reconciliation with Rubin. Ostensibly, Morris seems to possess all of the qualities that Cora seems to believe she would like to see manifest in Rubin. After Rubin blows up over the purchase of a new dress for Reenie, Cora notes to Lottie:

Morris is nice to you. You've got no right to complain. . . . He gave you those red patent leather slippers, and that fox neck-piece. . . . you should be grateful. (p. 52)

Referring to their childless marriage and Cora's two children, however, Lottie replies: "I know, but. . . there's some
things he hasn't given me" (p. 52). When Cora complains of Rubin being away from her too much, Lottie says of Morris:

He's around the house all day long, now that he's got his dental office in the dining room. Day and night, day and night. Sometimes I get tired of looking at him. (p. 55)

With Rubin's Mavis Pruitt in the back of her mind, Cora asks Lottie, "Is there another woman?" and Lottie answers, "Not unless she visits him from the spirit world. . . . Oh, no, there isn't another woman. Sometimes I wish there was" (p. 5). When Cora complains that Rubin hit her, Lottie replies:

I wish to God someone loved me enough to hit me. You and Rubin fight. Oh, God I'd like a good fight. Anything'd be better than this nothing. Morris and I go around always being so sweet to each other, but sometimes I wonder maybe he'd like to kill me. (p. 56)

And when Cora says to Lottie, "I always envied you, having a husband you could boss" (p. 55), Lottie offers this surprising retort, "Yes, I can boss Morris because he isn't there any more to fight back. He doesn't care any more if I boss him or not" (p. 55). The play has numerous such contrasting descriptions of the two marital relationships. Inge's completed picture of the Lacey marriage is wrought so well that its utter desolation makes the problems of the Floods seem, in contrast, vital and ameliorative.

Contrast exits in the character of Lottie. Although
she tells lewd jokes and behaves shamefully according to Cora, she evidences close-mindedness and a fear of non-conforming. Although seemingly vital, beneath the exterior bombast lurks frustration and a lack of fulfillment.

By Lottie's own admission, her dirty talk is just

... talk. I talk all the time just to convince myself that I'm alive. And I stuff myself with victuals just to feel I've got something inside me. And I'm full of all kinds of crazy curiosity about... all the things in life I seem to have missed out on. (p. 57)

What Lottie has missed out on most is any semblance of love from Morris. When Cora asks her sister, "Doesn't Morris ever make love to you any more" (p. 54)? Lottie admits that it has been years since he has touched her in a sexual manner. About her early married years with Morris, Lottie further reveals her own frigidity:

Lottie: Now I'm telling you the truth, Cora. Nothing ever really happened to me while it was going on.
Cora: Lottie...
Lottie: That first night Morris and I were together, right after we were married, when we were in bed together for the first time, after it was all over, and he had fallen asleep, I lay there in bed wondering what in the world all the cautioning had been about. Nothing had happened to me at all, and I thought Mama and Papa musta been makin' things up. (p. 57)

Through his diction, Inge indicates further that "Mama and Papa's" influence on Lottie has made her so afraid of giving in to the act of sex that the strength of this fear has
deepened into psychological feelings of guilt about sex. It seems to permeate all her thoughts and her phraseology. To describe Rubin—who Lottie claims practically raped Cora, "getting her pregnant inside of two weeks" (p. 56)—Lottie uses phrases like "a picture of Sin" (p. 33) and "the wickedest man alive" (p. 56). Inge constructs Lottie's reaction to a picture of Rudolph Valentino in this manner:

(She studies the picture very intently.)
Ya know, it scares me a little to look at him. Those eyes that seem to be laughing at you, and those white teeth. I think it's a sin for a man to be as pretty as he is. Why, I'd be scared to death to let a man like that touch me. (p. 38)

When Morris says that she does not seem to like any of the movie stars, Lottie moralizes: "I guess I don't. I hear they're all a bunch of trollops" (p. 38). Behind the rough talk and loud manners, Inge exposes a frightened, frigid, guilt-ridden woman. Cora does not share Lottie's fear or guilt about sex. When Lottie implies that Cora's premarital pregnancy was the cause of their father's stroke, Cora answers:

I never blamed Rubin for that. I was crazy in love with him. He just swept me off my feet and made all my objections seem kinda silly. He even made Mama and Papa seem silly. (p. 56)

For Cora, love abolished all fear or guilt from sex—those emotions apparently inculcated by her parents. But that has not happened with Lottie. She evidently was firmly taught by her restrictive parents and suffers for having been so. The
interest sparked by the playwright's usage of Lottie comes, to a large degree, from the device of contrast. Nothing concerning Lottie is quite what it seems on the surface; and the more she talks, the more she inadvertently reveals a nature that she is aware of but that she most often intends to conceal. For instance, much is implied concerning the character's motivational traits when she makes such remarks as the attack on her husband with the bitingly cynical, "How do you know what a fancy woman smells like" (p. 35)? She wonders about him, "Morris is funny!!! Sometimes he just gets up like that and walks away. I never know why" (p. 52). About her attractive brother-in-law, she blurts out, "My God, a big, handsome buck like Rubin! Who cares if he's honorable" (p. 53).

From the work of William Inge--his plays, his novels, his film scripts--can be accumulated a list of characters who seem to lack any of the necessary strengths to cope with the vicissitudes of life. Their situations are so difficult that nothing will deter a downward slide. Among them, several appearing in this study, are Hal Carter of Picnic, Lila Green of A Loss of Roses, Ginny Stamper of Splender in the Grass, Donnie Barker of Natural Affection. Lottie Lacey is also one of these "unfortunates." Early conditioning and upbringing have instilled motivational and deliberative traits that cannot help resulting in behavior that precludes her functioning to her own best
advantage. It is behavior that harms, usually, no one but herself and the unhappy man who long ago committed himself to her. She means it when she says, "So don't come to me for sympathy, Cora. I'm not the person to give it to you" (p. 57).

THE CHARACTER OF SAMMY GOLDENBAUM

While Lottie Lacey's social mask consists of lewd jokes and raucous humor concealing a deep sense of personal failure, Sammy Goldenbaum's facade is a quality of social politeness unusual for a boy of his age and a conversational ease which, betrayed by a slight stammer in his voice, conceals a profound need for love and acceptance.

In writing of the action of Inge's play, critic Harold Clurman rightly observed Sammy's importance:

The play's main incident is simple. An eighteen-year-old boy, whose mother, a small part movie actress, has abandoned him to the solitude of military schools, takes the Flood girl out on a blind date. . . . 4

Sammy Goldenbaum was the only character Inge added to the original Farther Off From Heaven. Sammy's appearance should not be misread as an attempt on Inge's part to

comment socially about anti-Semitic sentiments in *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*. His character exists as a study in alienation, and serves as a catalyst, prompting Cora's recognition of the necessity to prepare her children for the evils of the world, leading Reenie to recognize the need for mutual dependency, and effecting a bond of love and compassion between Sonny and Reenie.

Sammy is first introduced as Reenie's blind date in a scene between Cora, Reenie, Sonny, and Flirt in the first act. From the outset, his image is mysterious and sensational. Sonny, a motion-picture fan, is immediately attracted by the fact that Sammy's mother is a movie actress, establishing the probability of a later link between the two boys. Reenie, Flirt, and Cora, having known very few Jews, wonder whether Sammy will "act different" (p. 19). Sammy's differences are partially confirmed by Inge's Act Two description of him:

He is a darkly beautiful young man of seventeen with lustrous black hair, black eyes and a captivating smile. Yet, there seems something a little foreign about him, at least in comparison with the Midwestern company in which he finds himself. He could be a Persian prince, strayed from his native kingdom. But he has become adept over the years in adapting himself, and he shows an eagerness to make friends and to be liked. (p. 41)
Sammy's "adaptation", as Inge calls it, is adept; but it is not entirely complete. In talking of his military school background, Sammy betrays some sensitivity about his race:

I bet I've been in almost every military academy in the whole country. Well, I take that back. There's some I couldn't go to. I mean... there's some that wouldn't take me. (p. 43)

When Sonny, "out of the innocent blue" (p. 44), reports, "My mother says you're a Jew" (p. 44), Sammy gives the hesitant response:

It doesn't bother me that I'm Jewish. Not any more. I guess it used to a little... Yes, it did used to a little. (p. 44)

While waiting for Reenie to arrive from upstairs, Sammy and Sonny entertain each other. At first, Sonny becomes intrigued with Sammy's dress sword, and the two engage in mock battles with the weapon:

Sammy: (Pulls the sword from its sheath like a bucceneer and goes charging about the room in search of imagined villains) I wear a sword to protect myself! See! to kill off all the villains in the world (He frightens Lottie) Oh, don't worry, Ma'am. It's not sharp. I couldn't hurt anyone with it even if I wanted to. We just wear them for show.

Sonny: (Jumping up and down) Can I have a sword?...

Sammy: I'll give you my sword, for all the good it'll do you... What do you want a sword for, Sonny?
Sonny: (With a lunge) To show people.
Sammy: And what do you want to show people, Sonny?
Sonny: I just want to show 'em. (He places the sword between his arm and his chest, then drops to the floor, the sword rising far above the body, giving the appearance that he is impaled.) (p. 45)

The sword play may be seen as significant as it metaphorically points up that Sammy's only defense against imagined villains is an ineffective weapon. Also Sammy's identification with Sonny's wish to "show" people and Sonny's mock death foreshadows Sammy's eventual suicide. Sonny also entertains Sammy by reciting Hamlet's soliloquy, a speech expressing sentiments directly related to persecution and suicide:

To be or not to be, that is the question
Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them.
To die: to sleep:
No more; and, by a sleep to say we end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. (pp. 46-47)

An acceptance of these incidents as foreshadowing, and a correct reading of Sammy as a very unhappy boy and not "a warm and glowing personality"[^5] are intended by Inge to establish a degree of uncertainty about what will happen to the young cadet and Reenie on their date. The soliloquy

[^5]: Shuman, p. 72.
is very aptly chosen. Not only is it the most popular and likely piece to be memorized, but it also reflects the situation of several characters on stage. Inge's stage directions describe Morris Lacey as looking "as though he might share some of Hamlet's woes" (p. 46). The boy's suicide is in no way extraneous, and it is firmly integrated by using an appealing character to bring Cora and her children to a new understanding of themselves.

After Sammy leaves, Morris, mistrusting Sammy's facade of social ease, claims, "Sometimes the people who act the happiest are really the saddest" (p. 52). Morris' diagnosis of Sammy's pain emerges as the correct interpretation of his behavior when Cora, Sonny, and Reenie later discover that Sammy, victimized by Mrs. Ralston's anti-Semitic comments, left the country club to commit suicide in Oklahoma City.

Although Mrs. Ralston's slurs against Sammy's Jewish background were the immediate cause of his suicide, anti-Semitism is only one of the many forces which contributes to Sammy's alienation as he is depicted in the play. Sammy deludes himself into believing that his mother "feels awfully bad that she doesn't have more time for me" (p. 43), but a later speech reveals that Sammy's suffering due to their separation far outweighs his mother's
supposed pain:

See, I've spent almost my whole life in military academies. My mother doesn't have a place for me, where she lives. She... she just doesn't know what else to do with me. But you musn't misunderstand about my mother. She's really a very lovely person, I guess every boy thinks his mother is very beautiful, but my mother really is. She tells me in every letter she writes how sorry she is that we can't be together more, but she has to think of her work. One time we were together though. She met me in San Francisco once, and we were together for two whole days. Just like we were sweethearts. It was the most wonderful time I ever had. And then I had to go back to the old military school. Every time I walk into the barracks, I get kind of a depressed feeling. It's got hard stone walls. Pictures of generals hanging all over. . . oh, they're very fine gentlemen, but they all look so kind of hard-boiled and stern. . . you know what I mean. (p. 49)

Sammy's initial physical impression conveyed by his dark good looks and fine military bearing is immediately upset by the stammer in his speech and his over-eagerness to please. His yearning for some acknowledgement of his importance to his mother at the same time that he excuses her abandonment of him is the next trait we learn about him. The further (and what is designated as a constant) buffeting because he is Jewish and "looks" Jewish among people not used to people of different religious backgrounds, has instilled in him a weary tolerance of the
abuse. The sadness of Sammy becomes even more apparent as he compulsively talks to the sympathetic listeners that he has found. When he tells Sonny that "you have to be a good boy before people ask you to parties" (p. 50), we know that he is speaking of the extremes that he has gone to in order to win acceptance and "belong" somewhere. So totally alone, and at an age when the desire to identify with a group is very strong, Sammy is confronted by a loud-mouthed bigot at the party. He hears "the voice of the world" (p. 57). The character we had seen as being so achingly vulnerable and sensitive, we learn had made another futile attempt, via the inexperienced, woeful Reenie, to contact another human being. He lost yet another, final time.

Flirt's later report of Sammy's mother's reaction to her son's death emphasizes the scope of Sammy's delusions about his mother's love:

They called Sammy's mother way out in California, and told her, and I guess she was terribly upset and everything, but she told them to go ahead and have the funeral in Oklahoma City, that she'd pay all the expenses, but she wouldn't be able to come for it because she was working. And she cried over the telephone and asked them please to try to keep her name out of the papers, because she said it wasn't generally known that she had a son. (p. 68)
This is Inge's final touch to the complete picture drawn of Sammy's isolation.
CONCLUSION

In The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, Inge's nostalgic play, the character delineations, from first to last, evidence "dynamic interrelation."^6

It is formed from pretty nostalgic memories of childhood, without being very autobiographical. I suppose it represents my belated attempt to come to terms with the past, to rearrange its parts and make them balance, to bring a mature understanding to everyday phenomena that mystified me as a boy.7

As the participants of each episode are shown fearing or coping with the unknown, with which every human being at some time contends, the dramatic action of the play evolves. Although each major character has been carefully created by Inge to reveal eventually some aspect of that fear that prevails "cause... you can't see what's in front of you" (p. 59), it is Cora Flood that threads the play's pattern of comedy, farce, drama, and tragedy. Fear motivates and determines the action of the play as each character reveals his or her uncertainties and confusions. In the family unit, Rubin, Cora, Sonny, and Reenie all reach new conclusions about themselves and the human condition. Inge places Cora,

^6Smiley, p. 93.

^7Inge, Foreward to Four Plays, p. ix.
the wife and mother, at the center and interrelates all of the other learnings around her own. Although not described as to physical appearance, this character is not a woman of fading prettiness who stands by as passive witness to the others. Rather, the movement in Cora is the hub of dramatic action. The playwright uses Cora in the same manner that he was to use again as the mother figure in his novel, *My Son is a Splendid Driver*. That is, as a central figure who is greatly affected by those around her. In *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, Cora is hardly ever absent. In detailing his exposition, Inge uses Cora with Rubin, Cora with Sonny, Cora with Lottie, and so on. In her dealings with the other characters, Cora's traits and fears and hopes for herself and her family are most clearly expressed. The arrival of Sammy Goldenbaum and the succeeding action concerning him is utilized by Inge in Cora's development. Sammy is someone who can do for her children what she cannot do. He brings more of the world into their lives. He can bring Reenie out of her shyness. He can communicate with Sonny, e.g., he is the only one Cora has ever seen who can stop one of Sonny's tantrums. Sammy's death shows Cora that she cannot do everything for her children. She cannot be them. Her limited power is revealed and she consequently accepts "the way things are."

Inge uses language effectively to delineate character
difference in this play. Rubin's language indicates his limited education, which is referred to as being only to the sixth grade. It also indicates the locale, his environment, and his social milieu. The bluntness of his speech conveys the impression that he, in saying exactly what he thinks, would not know how to use language to deceive. In consistent fashion, Inge offers action that augments that impression. Cora's language shows that her upbringing was refined and sheltered. Her diction is colloquial, but it evidences control and breeding. Lottie's language is much like Rubin's although Cora notes that Lottie did not talk that way when they were girls. While Rubin's rough talk is honest, Lottie's speech is a shield to hide her vulnerability. She talks "dirty" by her own admission, to cover her emptiness. Inge uses the excessiveness of her speech to convey successfully that some problem exists for Lottie, and he conveys this long before the character is actually made to reveal the problems.

The most highly characterized creations within the dramatic structure are Cora, Rubin, and, surprisingly, Sammy Goldenbaum. Whereas the construction of the two offspring characters and of Mr. and Mrs. Lacey is left minus certain traits (though each fulfills its function in the play), there is a totality to the Sammy Goldenbaum creation. The completeness of the character, rather than taking over the
action of the play or forcing a digression, actually accomplishes something else. It is Sammy's end that is the catalyst that pushes Cora into new, and no less difficult, relationships with her family. The change occurs in the area of thought; as Sammy, a stranger to the family, brings her to new deliberation and examination. No solution is achieved, as has been mockingly suggested by several critics. Instead, all of the action (Sammy's included) has been structured to work dispositional and deliberative changes in Cora.

The six qualities of "character" (volition, stature, interrelation, attractiveness, credibility, and clarity) are totally evident in Cora Flood. She has been given strong volition, which, though misdirected, is corrected at the end of the play. Her stature comes from the strength and intensity that are evident in her arguments with Rubin and her manner with her children. Cora is involved with every other character in the play, and she is attractive in that she will do anything to create a "proper" family atmosphere. She tries very hard to create the environment she things is best for the people with whom she is concerned.

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9 See critics Gordon Weales, American Drama Since World War II, Henry Hewes, Saturday Review of Literature, December 21, 1957.
The credibility of her actions is well established by the exposition that reveals the earlier Cora, and by the behavior that is consistent with what we have learned of her character.

The fierce volition of Rubin is also misdirected. Loving freedom's feel, Rubin's determination to direct every aspect of his own life actually limits him. For instance, his determination to be "free" on the road limits his relationship with his family. His will to live a free, unencumbered, even uncivilized life is no longer the way of the world. He rejects all institutions—marriage, job, family—as potentially binding. His preconceptions about them limit his effectiveness to work with them. He does, however, possess a great deal of stature as a character. When he states, "I'm doin' the best I can" (p. 73), he epitomizes Arthur Miller's description of the "common man" who is unwilling "to remain passive in the fear of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status."10 Rubin is a character with rank and nobility that is recognizable and empathic. Although his presence is felt at every moment of the play, Rubin is never seen with Lottie, Morris, or Sammy. He never even knows of the Sammy incident. His

interrelation is with his "world." That is manifest in the set by the area delineated as "his." In a sense, Rubin's development is his assimilation into the world. Metaphorically, the assimilation of his "living area" into the living room of the entire family represents Rubin's assimilation. Rubin has energy and can be thought attractive for it. Also attractive is his honesty as it is evidenced strongly in his attitude toward his limitations in education and employability and his determination to overcome them. The desire to be free, already mentioned, is, in a broad sense, an attractive desire even if difficult or problem-laden.

Lottie, Morris, and Sammy Goldenbaum are outsiders to the family unit of the Floods, but they are important to Cora's growth in awareness and to the eventual effect that will have upon the others in the Flood household. The achievement of excellent characterization with these constructs has caused, some believe, The Dark at the Top of the Stairs to be "dramatically and structurally out of focus and somewhat out of control."\textsuperscript{11} Inge himself stated his basic idea was that the diversion of Sammy's suicide from the main action line of the Flood's family crisis afforded

\textsuperscript{11}Shuman, William Inge, p. 82.
an approach to the play's end with "renewed perspective."\textsuperscript{12}

It is here contended that all actions in the play, including Sammy's suicide and Lottie's revelations, are utilized as effects upon Cora. The end of the play has the family returning to its concern with other matters. Contrary to previous criticism, a "facile resolution"\textsuperscript{13} is not the play's final stance. Instead the play moves the characters forward into other areas. Those concerns will, perhaps, be just as problematic as those they have just dealt with. There is at the end of the play a suggestion but no confirmation of future happiness for the Flood family.

Despite its imperfections, \textit{The Dark at the Top of the Stairs} is one of the most sensitive and perceptive presentations of the quest of the little man to find identity in his society that has yet come to the American stage.\textsuperscript{14}

For future directors and actors to recreate this forthright and delicate work, it necessitates a view of the play as a whole with all the characters' individual fears affecting Cora and her awareness. All the seeming

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{14}Shuman, p. 83.
problems of order and emphasis concerning Sammy and Lottie, two memorable and irrepressible creations, can be made to serve that dramatic action and, therefore, not seem to distract or confuse.

The sense of period in the play is strong. The conveyance of the early 1920's was made clear to Walter Kerr by the work of the designer on the original production:

It's a curious fact that almost the first thing you notice about designer Ben Edwards' long, rambling old-fashioned Oklahoma living room is the alcoves: the dim recess where a swinging door opens and closes silently, the tiny back parlor where the player-piano lurks behind fringed drapes, the empty space that surrounds the front screen door and seems to lead off to nowhere. There is, too, a wildly steep staircase that shoots bolt upright to the dark at the top of it, but it's the small private nooks and crannies that count most. 15

But the recreation of the period is not only visual. It is ingrained in the play's astutely drawn characters, which are truly agents of the structured action. As such, they have been endowed with distinctive qualities, ethical decisions, and motivational attitudes that place "their" play specifically, but also make the inner "human" message transferable to other times and places. Perhaps the exactitude of character delineation makes the "realistic" setting for the play no longer indispensable. Just as Chekhov's plays have been

attempted successfully in new guises,\textsuperscript{16} the "stairs" and "Rubin's area" in this play could be conceived other than in the "realistic" style. A director collaborating with his set designer could conceive a production with a formalistic or impressionistic approach that might be effective theatrically and convey successfully the universality of plot and character that the craft of the playwright has formulated as true to human experience.

Scene from A Loss of Roses
Original New York Production, 1959
Betty Field as Helen Baird,
Warren Beatty as Kenny
In Louis Sheaffer's monumental biography of Eugene O'Neill, a fascinating chapter is entitled, "Misbegotten Production." Therein, the difficulties and tribulations concerning the original New York-bound production of O'Neill's Moon for the Misbegotten are considered. With dissension in the areas of casting, as well as director-actor relationships, actor-author differences of interpretation, and author's dissatisfaction with rehearsal progress, the production began its pre-Broadway tour and received a critical lambasting. Very few critics found merit in the play, and it closed without making its scheduled New York opening in 1947.¹

The first publication of Henrik Ibsen's Rosmersholm in 1886 got the worst notices of any of his mature plays except the controversial Ghosts. Critics complained that the play was

... distasteful. The characters are all artificial, and totally unwholesome. Many details of motivation are unintelligible. The sum impression is duller than that of Ibsen's earlier plays.²

Michael Meyer has reported that reviewers felt the play was feebly constructed, and that it relied too much on reported action and was thus deficient in true action. Rosmersholm too was originally a failure in print and on stage.³

Similarly, A Loss of Roses, not having achieved "Broadway success" (seemingly still the criterion of evaluation for the calibre of a play) met with a first and seemingly permanent set-back. The strained workpressures and personality conflicts during the rehearsal period coupled with the almost total adverse reaction to its ill-fated New York opening have buried the play. After an auspicious beginning, the play was described as skimpy, out-of-focus, and bad. In like manner to the experience of Rosmersholm when its characters had been termed totally unwholesome, Kenny Baird, his mother Helen, and Lila Green in A Loss of Roses were thought by Brooks

³Meyer, pp. 562-566.
Atkinson to be "characters of little significance with problems as dull as they are." As Moon for the Misbegotten had been cited as evidence of O'Neill's deterioration, Richard Watts felt that this play was a momentary lapse for Mr. Inge, that "... the inexorable law of averages was against him," now that he had the rank of one of an eminent trio of top American postwar dramatists. No element of the production was reviewed consistently. The acting, the script, the direction, and the set were all controversial. A few critics such as Kenneth Tynan and Robert Brustein even went to great lengths to manufacture scurrilous reviews that were clever journalistic flippancies but not constructive to theatre or mindful of the purpose of criticism.

In an interview following the failure of the production and the play's relegation to a limbo of unproduced plays, Inge freely acknowledged that the New York production was for him, "a complete failure", although he regarded the script as timely and "the best play I've

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Largely because of Shirley Booth's replacement by Betty Field in the mother's role, Helen Baird, and the script revisions and deletions, it had suffered an inadequate production.

I should have put a stop to it in New Haven, after Betty Field had joined the cast, shortly before the New York opening. Betty had been ill-sinus trouble, a slipped disk—and had to miss vital rehearsals. Time was her enemy and ours. She wasn't able to make the part hers in the time we had. Betty had given up a movie job in Hollywood to fly East for the part, as a personal favor to me. But with all due respect to her, I should have closed the show then and there. Postponed it, I mean.8

Unhappily, he did not stop the progress of the play toward its scheduled New York opening.

... chiefly I felt I owed Betty the mathematical chance to achieve her miracle. ... Everybody concerned conceded that if I wanted it, the show would be closed. I just couldn't say the word. It wasn't just my irrational dependence on a miracle; it was also that I couldn't face up to putting everybody out of work. "I could be wrong in my estimate that the play's in bad shape," I told myself. Then too, I was probably spoiled by not having had a failure.9

Re-thinking that period of his life, Mr. Inge considered that he had never gone into production with a play

8Ibid.
9Ibid.
in which I had such complete confidence. Perhaps I was too confident of the play, for I could never really believe that it would not succeed until the last few days of our out-of-town engagement, when suddenly I realized that the play I had thought I had written was not happening on the stage.\textsuperscript{10}

In getting the play ready for its publication Mr. Inge had the feeling, "Now I can make my play what I really want it."\textsuperscript{11} Owning his script again, he rethought the play without the confusing pressures of imminent theatrical production during which he cut or rearranged scenes, changed emphases of character, and made other critical emendations. His revisional work consisted of returning to his original text while incorporating the revisions that he found to be beneficial.

The action of the play takes place in the modest bungalow of Mrs. Helen Baird in a small town outside of Kansas City. It is 1933, late summer. . . The house itself, small and poor. . . is next door to a vacant lot where, during the summer, a variety of attractions appears. At present a roller-skating rink has moved in to attract the summer trade.\textsuperscript{12}

Lights reveal two characters—Helen Baird, a tired-looking woman in her forties, who works as a nurse in the town's hospital, and her son, twenty-one year old Kenny,


\textsuperscript{11}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12}William Inge, A Loss of Roses, (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1960), pp. 8-9. All other references to the play are from this edition, with page numbers noted parenthetically in the text.
whose job is a filling station attendant in town. They are eating supper. Kenny is in the soiled uniform of his job, a pair of greasy coveralls, and is a nice-looking young man "who wears a mysterious look of misgiving on his face, as though he bears some secret resentment that he has never divulged, that he has perhaps never adjusted to his consciousness" (p. 9). Helen can be seen to have a faded beauty and a present dignity to her face.

Mother and son are having a heated discussion about the fact that Helen has consented to board Lila Green, who has called and informed Helen that she is in need of somewhere to stay:

Helen: She called from Pennant Junction just before you got home from the filling station. She said the show had closed, and that she had no money and no place to go. She asked if she could work for us again, and do the housework and the cooking. Of course I said yes. (p. 10)

Kenny is angry about not having been consulted and about being forced to give up his room to the guest:

Kenny: Forget it. The only thing that makes me sore is ya din even ask me. No. This old dame calls you up on the phone and asks can she come here to camp awhile, and you say, "Sure, we'll just toss old Kenny out and give you his room, without even asking me." Helen: Here's what we'll do. When your Aunt Lila comes, I'll tell her that we can let her have your room for one week, and that if she stays longer, then she'll have to sleep on the davenport. Kenny: (Happy now.) OK. (p. 11)
They go on to discuss Lila as she was years before when they all lived in Oklahoma. Kenny cannot recall her too well, having been a very young child when Lila lived next door with a stepfather who made life very unhappy for her:

Helen: They were very poor, and her parents fought. . . . I advised her to go with a tent show when she had the chance. One of the men in the show, one of the two brothers who ran the show, fell in love with her and wanted to marry her. She always had a little talent at singing and acting, and she was thrilled by the offer, so I advised her to go. . . . any life would be better than the life she had at home. (p. 12)

It is noticeable also that relations between Kenny and Helen are strained at this time. He is short tempered when she evidences interest in certain aspects of his life:

Helen: If you want a car so much, you should have taken that job in the airplane factory over in Wichita. A splendid job like that in times like these, and you act as though you had such offers every day. (p. 13)

Helen: (Knowing she is treading on dangerous ground) So, the girls who hang out down at the drugstore and over at the skating rink get all your attentions, girls who don't expect anything from a boy but his physical attentions.
Kenny: (sounding off) I'm twenty-one years old. I don't need you to tell me what kinda girls to see.
Helen: (Hotly) Not one of the girls you see means anything to you. . . . (p. 15)

Helen is embarrassed when the boy attempts to physicalize his love for his mother:
(Playfully, he puts an arm around her
and tries to kiss her, but she withdraws
like a shy maiden.)

Helen: Now, Kenny.
Kenny: What's wrong with showing a little
affection?
Helen: You're too old to still be making
love to me like you did when you were a
baby.
Kenny: Judas Priest. It doesn't mean
anything. (p. 16)

As Helen goes into the kitchen to do chores, Kenny
wanders to the front porch and is visited by a neighbor-
hood crony, Jelly Beamis. In what is established as
habit, Jelly "bums" a cigarette and discusses his lack
of success with the girls in town:

Kenny: You crazy guy. That's all you ever
think about.
Jelly: That's just 'cause I don't get as
much as you do.
Kenny: Who says?
Jelly: I know your kind. You're the kind
that gets all he wants and never talks
about it.
Kenny: Well, if you'd quit talkin' so
so much about it, maybe you'd get some, too.
Jelly: But girls like you, Ken. I mean,
I do all right sometimes, but they really
go for you. You could have any girl you
wanted. . . (p. 19)

Jelly soon leaves to deliver his mother's laundry orders
and Helen joins her son on the porch. She is concerned
that she has found a woman's coin purse in one of Kenny's
pockets. She tries to believe him when he says he just
found it at the station and feigns unconcern when she
admonishes him to take it back. "Just the same Kenny,
take it back. Take it back" (p. 20).
The sound of a car signals the arrival of Lila Green. Voices are heard and Helen is excited as she runs to greet her:

Now Lila comes on. She is an extraordinarily beautiful woman of thirty-two, blond and voluptuous, still with the form and vitality of a girl. She wears now, rather unseasonably, a leopard-skin coat, but her hair and legs are bare. One feels immediately a sincerity about her and a generosity of spirit. (p. 21)

The two women embrace warmly as Helen welcomes Lila. With Lila are Madame Olga St. Valentine, a flamboyant actress of about fifty years of age, dressed in long, flowing garments and using very exaggerated, affected speech; Ronny Cavendish, an aging, juvenile actor with peroxided hair and an expansively effeminate personality; and Ricky Powers, a slick and handsome, darkly somber actor. Their extravagant behavior intimidates Helen and Kenny somewhat, but the unemployed thespians soon go off with hopes of finding sustenance of some sort in Kansas City. Lila asks for a few minutes alone with Ricky. Her dependence on him and the love she offers him is very callously rejected by him. He tells her strongly that he will try to find work for her, but no more:

Ricky: There ya go on that marriage line again. Can't ya lay off?
Lila: It's what I want, Rick. It's the only thing I want any more. It's the only thing that's any good.
Ricky: OK, but you can count me out, see? I don't want it. Can ya get that through your head? (She is silent.) Will you promise me never to mention it again? I don't have to get you a job, ya know. I don't have to come back for you. And I'm not gonna if you don't promise to lay off (p. 27)

Lila and Helen settle for a reacquaintance talk. Helen explains that her husband, Big Kenneth, Lila's young girl "crush," drowned in an attempt to help her son who was suffering cramps in the turbulent waters of a river. Lila has had unhappy romantic involvements, and she realizes that Rick is a problem also:

Lila: (Modestly.) Well, he's nothing like Mr. Baird. He's got a lotta faults, but... I have to have someone, Helen. I just die if I don't have someone to kinda lean on. And he shows me a good time.
Helen: He's very handsome.
Lila: Yeh, He is, isn't he? I always like handsome men.
Helen: That's understandable.
Lila: Maybe that's all you can say for Ricky. He's not very reliable, and he's got an awful temper. (p. 29)

Lila confesses that she has adjusted to her trouping existence and is accustomed to the "different" people of her theatre world. Her proudest possession is the leopard-skin coat she owns and wishes she could wear all year round. Her gratitude toward Helen is heartfelt and sincere:
Lila: Good night, Helen, I wants tell ya again how nice it is of you to let me stay. I really don't know where I coulda gone if it hadn't been for you. But I can still help you around the house, Helen, like I did when I was a girl. I can cook and clean for you whenever you want me to, and not be in the way.
Helen: You have a good rest first. . . (p. 30)

Alone, Lila studies the picture of Big Kenneth and seems extremely sad. It is when she goes to the window and listens to the gaiety of the skating rink music that she is able to smile.

In the play's second scene of the first act, "it is about two hours later. Lila has unpacked and is in bed, asleep" (p. 31). Kenny and Jelly return from their drinking spree. They are quite drunk. After Jelly leaves, Kenny stumbles to his room forgetting that Lila is sleeping there. Lila wakes when Kenny loses his balance and falls. She is first alarmed, then concerned for him, and finally amused:

Kenny: Lila, you're not gonna tell Mom, or anything, are ya?
Lila: Course not.
Kenny: On your Girl Scout honor?
Lila: (Laughing) On my Girl Scout honor.
Kenny: Lila, I hear actresses are all real wild.
Lila: Go to sleep, Kenny.
Kenny: Lila, when I was a kid, you used to kiss me good night. I remember.
Lila: Well. . . you're not a kid anymore. (p. 33)

Groaning, Kenny falls back on the sofa and is immediately off to sleep. Lila hurries back to the bedroom, closes the door between them. She is disturbed.
The last scene of the first act takes place the following morning. It is Sunday, and the church bells ring. Helen and Lila sit with second cups of breakfast coffee, on the porch of the house, while Kenny is still asleep. Lila tells of her marriage. She divulges the twisted relationships she had married into. The maltreatment of a depraved father-in-law, the fears of a weak husband were even worse than the horrible homelife the young girl had fled:

Helen: Oh Lila, I feel guilty now for ever having advised you to marry him.
Lila: You couldn't have known all that would happen. Living back there in that little Oklahoma town where everybody was so honest and friendly, we never guessed there were people like Vincent Comiskey in the world.
Lila: Well, no... I guess you're right...
Helen: What did you finally do, Lila?
Lila: I just ran away one day. I hardly knew what I was doing, I was so fearful and anxious; but I managed to get on a train somehow, and ended up in Bismarck, North Dakota, in the middle of winter. I just locked myself up in a hotel room and din see anyone, I felt so terrible. Then... some people found me.
Helen: (Puzzled) Found you?
Lila: Well, I... I guess I'd tried to kill myself, Helen. (p. 35)

After hospitalization and time in an institution receiving psychiatric help, Lila now feels she has learned to be less "immature" and can face "reality." "I don't fight things like I used to. I've learned to take things as they come and make the best of them" (p. 36). Helen then unbends enough to confide her fears concerning her son. He drinks; he
cavorts with the disreputable girls; and--most upsetting to her--he steals things. "... He never takes anything that's worth much, never takes money or jewelry. ... It worries me to death..." (p. 38). She senses but cannot articulate well that she feels Kenny is too close to her. She muses that perhaps she should have remarried and not given in to her son's desire to monopolize her attentions.

After Helen leaves for church, unable to convince either Lila or Kenny to accompany her, Kenny warms to Lila as she tells of her career and the tours she's made and the varied groups in which she performed. He persuades her to prepare an elaborate breakfast for him. The good-natured Lila, playing a servant's role, is eager to please and she complies with his wishes. Kenny settles back with a smile of gratification, "Ya wanta know something, Lila? I'm gonna like having you here" (p. 43).

In Act II it is a month later and summer is close to end. Lila sits on the front doorstep, sipping a cocktail out of a small cheese glass, waiting for Kenny. He arrives and shows her the receipt for a wrist watch that he has purchased for his mother's wedding anniversary, a watch he has been saving for all summer. "Well, I always wanted to do something nice for Mom. I mean... I've always felt like I owed her something," he confides (p. 45). Beginning a game of pretense, Lila acts a fantasy with the bemused Kenny:
Lila: Well, I happen to be a very socially prominent young lady in Kansas City. My father has been trying to persuade me for months to marry a man I don't like, but Father says I've got to marry him because his family is very prominent, too, and I am miserably unhappy. Because, actually, I love a young student who doesn't have any money at all. That's you.

Kenny: (A little amused) OK, I'm a poor student.

Lila: . . . And I have just run away from a big party out at the country club and come down to the Muehlbach to meet. And when we meet, you say, "Lila darling, it's divine to see you again." (p. 46)

Kenny takes the opportunity to take Lila in his arms and kiss her. As Lila tries to stop this advance, Kenny tells her how she attracts him:

It's been kinda hard, living here in the same house with you, Lila. Sleeping in the room right next to you, trying to keep myself from making love to you. Don't you like me a little, Lila? Just a little? (p. 48)

He becomes more and more aroused, saying more and more outlandish things to get the woman to agree to love him:

Kenny: I want you, Lila. I can talk with you and feel at home with you. (p. 48)

Mom's not gonna tell me who to marry. I could find us a nice little house, all our own, and if Mom din like it, she wouldn't have to. (p. 49)

I want a woman like you, Lila. I like it 'cause you're a little older. . . Love me. Lila. Love me. (p. 49)

Lila strengthens her resolve and is able to reject him.

When Helen comes home, she is disturbed to see that Kenny and Lila have been drinking; and she senses the
tension between them. Helen attempts to advise Lila about finding some other friends in town or finding a job of some sort since she has not heard from her touring friends. Lila confesses her pitiful lack of confidence and also tries to convince Mrs. Baird that nothing untoward has or will occur between her and Kenny. Kenny has cleaned up and is dressed in new clothing to offer his gift to his mother. Helen, upon seeing the watch is overcome with feeling and rushes from the room. She returns soon, with a look of deep misgiving on her face, the present in her hand:

Helen: I... can't take it, Kenny.
Kenny: (Thunderstruck) Huh?
Helen: I just can't take it. I appreciate your intentions, but it's too nice, Kenny. A watch like this must have cost you fifty dollars. I can't let you do it for me. I'll keep the watch your father gave me. I can have it fixed. (p. 50)

Kenny is furious about his mother's reaction. Lila attempts to appease him but he slams out of the house. Helen is convulsed in tears as she attempts an explanation:

Lila: Why didn't you take the present, Helen?
Helen: I couldn't.
Lila: But why?
Helen: Something just rose inside me and forced me to refuse.
Lila: He just wanted to make up for his father's being gone. He just wanted to do what Big Kenneth would have done.
Helen: I can't let him do the things his father did, Lila.
Lila: But every boy wants to be like his father.
Helen: There are some ways he can't be allowed. (p. 55)
The organ music from the revivalist tent that has replaced the skating rink is heard. Townspeople are making their way to the religious meeting and Helen decides she will stop there before going on to work. The telephone rings and Lila answers to learn that Ricky is in town and has found work for her. Lila is elated and can not accompany Helen to the revivalist meeting but will wait for Ricky instead. Helen gently makes it clear that she will understand if Ricky and Lila wish to go somewhere to spend the night together. Lila attempts an explanation:

Lila: Helen, I hope you don't think I'm too terrible, me and Rick.
Helen: I know I'm fond of you, Lila. I just don't think about these personal things... .
Lila: I've always wanted to be good, Helen. Deep in my heart, I've always felt I was good. And the things that've happened in the past, some of em, don't fit, and it makes me feel ugly and humiliated to remember them. (p. 57)

As the voice of an Evangelist leader can be heard preaching to the gathering, Lila waits for Rick. He arrives, eager to get Lila out for a drive and some drinks. But she is too anxious to hear about the work he has lined up. Forced to, he finally explains what the job entails.

Lila: (Screaming) Rick.
Ricky: Keep your voice down, Lila.
Lila: Rick, it's blue movies you're talking about, isn't it? Yah. And a sex act. That's what we do in the roadhouse, isn't it?
Ricky: Look, after you've done it a few times, you won't have any squeamish feelings about it at all. (p. 61)
Lila is outraged. When Rick threatens her with particular sexual photographs he has of her, they struggle. Kenny, returning home, intervenes. His presence frightens off Rick, leaving Lila in desperate need of consolation and warmth. Her fright and yearning allow her to succumb to the young man. He says, "I'll take care of you, Lila. I'll take care of you" (p. 63). All that can be heard from the woman is a long sign of relief.

The final scene of the play is early the next morning. Kenny lies in Lila's bed, still asleep. Lila is happily preparing breakfast. Lila's exuberance and happiness are dealt a blow when later it becomes obvious that the young man is reconsidering the proposals and dreams he offered this woman before:

Kenny: Lila, I din say for sure we'd get married, did I? (Lila freezes, without moving or speaking.) Look here, Lila, I wanna do the right thing, and all that, but. . . I din really promise anything, did I? (He waits for an answer) Did I? Lila: (Total defeat in her voice.) No, Kenny. Kenny: . . . And after all, Lila, you are little older'n me. . . just a little. That's bound to make a difference, Lila, when you come right down to it. Lila: (Lifeless.) Yah. (p. 66)

Devastated, Lila retreats to the bathroom. Helen returns from work and while reacting to Kenny's sarcasm, she hears Lila sobbing in the bathroom and evidences her concern:
Helen: (In full voice.) Did you and Lila spend the night here together? (No answer) Did you? (Lila now bursts out of the bathroom, making Kenny's answer unnecessary. She holds one wrist with her other hand, and blood covers her arm. She is screaming hysterically.)
Lila: Helen. Help me. I don't wanta die. I don't wanta die. Not really. Help me. Helen. (p. 67)

Helen, using her nursing prowess, soon stabilizes the situation. She dresses the wound which did not go deep enough to cut the vein, and gives Lila a mild sedative to calm her. Lila requests that she call Ricky, "He's out at the tourist camp. Tell him I'll be ready by the time he gets here" (p. 68). Kenny, overwhelmed by what has happened, attempts to make amends.

Kenny: I'm serious, Lila. If you really want to, I'll go tell Mom right now that that's what we're gonna do... Lila: I got no strings on you, Kenny. I got no strings on anyone. You can forget you ever knew me. Kenny: I never can, Lila. (p. 69)

Lila is made to rest. Kenny attempts to exonerate himself with his mother. He tells her that his proposal of marriage had been mistakenly believed by Lila. Helen sees the real reason for Kenny's abuse of Lila.

Helen: You did it to spite me, didn't you? Kenny: I tell you, I thought I loved her. Helen: You did it to spite me. Kenny: (Suddenly rising to meet her accusation.) Well, I don't mind letting you know that someone can love me... Helen: What have you expected of me all these years, Kenny? Tell me... Kenny: Yes, I did it to spite you, every crazy thing I ever did in my whole life, I did to spite you. (p. 70)
Helen runs to her room. Kenny goes softly to the
doors of the room where Lila is sleeping. He offers her
the gift he had purchased for his mother:

Kenny: I want you to have it, Lila.
Lila: All right, Kenny.
Kenny: And I hope you're going to
be very happy, Lila.
Lila: Thanks, Kenny.
Kenny: Well. . . so long.
Lila: It's awful nice of you to give
me the watch, Kenny.
Kenny: It's nice of you to take it, Lila. (p. 71)

Kenny reacts strongly to his friend Jelly's insinuations
concerning Lila and sends him off. He then tells his mother,
it would be best if he did decide to leave home and find
work elsewhere. Helen thinks the idea a good one. They
embrace warmly. Kenny then leaves for work.

Helen helps Lila pack and the two women wait for Ricky.
Helen tells Lila that she is not the only sinner. Others
have deep secret sins that are not out in the open but
where they can not be seen. The sight of a mother with her
young daughter on their way to the child's first day of
school makes Lila remember the specifics of her first day
at school. She recalls how she had wanted back the
bouquet of roses she had given to the teacher. Because
she had been unjustly punished for talking, she wanted
them back. The teacher said no, stressing that when pre­
sents are given away they cannot be expected to be given
back. Ricky arrives. Lila and Helen say goodbye. Helen
goes into the house. Lila is off with no one to protect
her, and carrying a further loss of illusions. "School bells still ring in the distance" (p. 75).
THE CHARACTER OF KENNY BAIRD

But it (the play) deals with individuals who, like people today seeking an inner peace in the midst of terrifying social change, must come to deal with evil in their lives, either to be destroyed or to find themselves strengthened.13

In the stage action of A Loss of Roses, twenty-one year old Kenny Baird takes a step forward in his development as a human being. "After his father died, Kenny was all I had, and he became too important to me, I fear," admits his mother (p. 39). This young man's relationship with his mother is to a casual observer an excellently comfortable one. But that is not the actual state of affairs. Such confusion about a young man such as Kenny--and this character creation--is caused by minimizing the extent of the psychological problem at the root of the boy's decisive activities or his choices. The character of Kenny is itself constructed as being only dimly aware of the existence of a problem. From the outset, however, Mr. Inge intends to establish the fact. His first description reads,

13Inge, Foreword to A Loss of Roses, p. 6.
"... a look of misgiving on his face, as though he bears some secret resentment..." (p. 9).

The physical attractiveness of the boy, made explicit by the reactions of others to him, can contribute to the disbelief in the troubled nature of his personality. Playwright Inge intends that physical appeal and charm be essential to any realization of the character of Kenny. For instance, his buddy tells him, "But girls like you, Ken... You could have any girl you wanted..." (p. 19). Lila Green further establishes his physical impressiveness by comparing him to his tall and handsome father. "You know when I first saw him standing there, I thought for a moment he was big Kenneth. They look so much alike" (p. 22). And later, in fighting off his advances, she argues, "Kenny, you're so young and good-looking. You could have any girl you wanted" (p. 48). Madame Olga sees him as a potentially splendid leading man for the theatre, and even Ronny Cavendish is impressed with his appearance and attempts to court him until stopped by Madame Olga.

It is typical, yet fascinating, that beneath Kenny's excellent physical externals there are serious problems of confusion and fear. Not all of the dispositional traits for this character are of a serious nature, however. With them are also the rather common moods and attitudes of a young person's dealings with parental authority and interference. Kenny's mother indicates some of these by the
following complaints:

I'm sorry but I still won't allow you to swear like that in my house. (p. 10)

But you still seem to want me to wait on you hand and foot, like you were a baby. (p. 14)

Is being yourself just being pig-headed and stubborn? Isn't being yourself ever being nice, too? (p. 15)

In these respects, Kenny is created as a typical young son living at home and dealing with a parent.

The chief trouble in the household derives from the boy's attitude concerning his work and life-style. It is upsetting to his mother that he has chosen not to accept a better paying job away from home. Mrs. Baird thinks the job with its opportunities for learning and advancement would give her son the good things she would like him to have. He is adamant in his refusal to leave:

Kenny: I've got a good job here, don't I? Helen: This little town doesn't offer any future for a young man. You know that, Kenny. You just don't want to admit it. (There is a brief silence as she looks at him, waiting for a response that doesn't come.) You just don't want to leave home do you? (p. 13).

Kenny behaves toward his mother in an erratic manner. At one moment, he is tyrannical and belligerent. "I don't like store food... Ya bring home a lousy pie. So what" (p. 14). He also becomes suddenly affectionate and loving.
(Playfully, he puts an arm around her and tries to kiss her, but she withdraws like a shy maiden.) (p. 16)

Think of it, Mom, I could take you riding and take you to the movies in it. (p. 13)

His mother stops any such display. She recoils emotionally from his displays of affection, though she formerly behaved toward him in just such a way. Kenny, however, pursues her in every way. In purchasing his mother an anniversary gift, he brings about a family crisis, as Mrs. Baird chooses not to accept the gift. She knows that its value is out of proportion with what Kenny can afford, and also she fears its significance as a replacement for that watch given her by her husband. That substitution for his father is something she will not allow the boy to experience. Why is the boy so fixed on his mother? There are several reasons suggested by the playwright's script:

1) the loss and idealization of the father--big Kenneth.

2) the lack of confidence hidden beneath the young man's bravado.

3) his pampered, important status (reaching "spoiled" proportions) with his mother.

4) his need for the kind of attention he can or will interpret as love.

Pertaining to the first cause, the dialogue of A Loss of Roses contains enough references to Helen Baird's deceased husband to make quite clear the esteem in which
the man is held. Among them are:

Lila: . . . There's the same picture of big Kenneth you kept on the mantel down there (in Oklahoma). (Lila takes the picture off the mantel and studies it.)
Helen: Yes, I wouldn't part with it. I've still got the watch he gave me for our fifth anniversary, too. Remember? (p. 29)

Lila: . . . Do you always celebrate your anniversaries this way?
Helen: Yes. Ever since the dinner you attended back in Oklahoma. It's still the anniversary of my marriage, even though Kenneth is gone. It's one of the few things in the world I have to celebrate, so I go right on . . . (p. 51)

Lila confesses her girlhood crush on the man and makes it obvious by her reaction to young Kenny and to the dead man's picture that she will always harbor some kind of erotic fantasy concerning him. Also important is the fact that Kenneth Baird lost his life in an heroic attempt to save his son. This young Kenny knows even if his mother states, "I never remind Kenny of it" (p. 29).

Although Kenny talks sarcastically and brazenly and is told often by others how effective he can be with girls and at any new job, he himself evidences worried lapses in self-confidence. His condemnation of the "stuck-up, respectable" girls and his preference for those who ask nothing in return is an easy out. His callous treatment of the "easy" girls is evidently not his preferred mode
of behavior. Rather, it is shown to be an angry alternative, due to feelings of inadequacy. Kenny shares, surprisingly, his crony's lack of confidence in this area.

Jelly: I'm allus afraid I'm gonna hurt a girl like that, or get her dirty, or something. Know what I mean?
Kenny: (who knows only too well) Yah, I know.
Jelly: It takes real guts to make out with a girl like her.
Kenny: I just don't think about girls like her. I just don't think about 'em. (He spits through his teeth as though punctuating his statement.) (p. 19)

His attraction to Lila comes after he finds how easy-going she is. He wants her because, "I can talk with you and feel at home with you" (p. 48). The desire for her becomes a kind of test with which later he will confront his mother as having passed. "I don't mind letting you know that someone can love me" (p. 70), he shouts. As he pursues Lila, however, the rush of words to convince her, the pleading in him as he seizes her arms to beg, "Love me, Lila, love me" (p. 49), designates a need that goes beyond a physical attraction to the woman. When he is rebuffed, it is for him not just a thwarted attempt at lovemaking but something that affects his whole psychology.

A good portion of the young man's deliberation deals with his need for attention which he can interpret as love. His mother's solicitude and fussing seem not to be enough. He demands a kind of love that is not admissible even to
himself. Hence, anger is generated by the fact that something unacceptable is there. This anger then causes him to do the very things that will antagonize and alienate the mother he needs too much. The process Inge demonstrates specifically with the young man's tendency toward thievery.

Helen: . . . (continues in a very confidential voice.) He doesn't steal, Lila, but . . . sometimes he takes things.

Lila: (Quite shocked but trying not to show it.) Honest?

Helen: I can't get him to talk about it, or even admit it . . . He never takes anything that's worth very much, never takes money, or jewelry. . . (p. 38)

A very strong motivational trait in the young man is the treatment he demands from his mother. He is critical and demanding. He affords himself lordly manners around the house, still insisting upon the doting treatment his mother obviously lavished upon him as her only child after the death of her husband. "Kenny just wouldn't stand for another man being in the house" (p. 39). Kenny was not then or now able to allow a change in their one-to-one relationship. Helen, fearing secret, sinful drives, realizes their closeness has gone on too long and is attempting to stretch it. Perhaps Kenny is right in thinking she is over-reacting, as he obviously does when he states that his attentions do not mean anything. Of course, when he starts comparing her reactions to him against those to his father, Helen's concerns seem
legitimate. The boy is also willing to take advantage of others. Certainly it is his intense need coupled with hers that pushes Kenny and Lila together for a night of love-making. But does he ever think of her as anything but a release for him from his personal problems? An easy ability to use someone is evident in the character's make-up. From his very first drunken encounter with her to his sated rejection of her, Inge creates in him an attitude of condescension and mockery. His friend Jelly "mooches" cigarettes, Kenny "mooches" much more seriously. His misuse of Lila, however, carries him further along in compassion and humaneness. His clumsy attempts to make amends, his gift to her of the watch, his realization that he should leave his mother are evidence that he has been taught by the upsetting circumstances.

Kenny: It's a serious business, making love. I can't kid around about it any more. I... I don't want to. (p. 72)

Kenny: There's times when a man has to give something, Mom. (p. 72)

There has been no white-washing of the boy; neither does Inge propound a cure, as has been mistakenly recorded often. (e.g. "In a month the Oedipal affection of Kenny Baird in A Loss of Roses calms to reasonable, filial love.")\textsuperscript{14} This is not so, no healing process has occurred. The disturbing situation has stabilized. An adjustment had been called

\textsuperscript{14}Malcolm Goldstein, "Body & Soul on Broadway," Modern Drama, February 1965, p. 420.
for. An adjustment has been made. The characters are left to go on from here. Can Kenny grow to be the ideal man his mother hopes he will be? More than likely not. Could anyone? More likely with what Inge has represented so consistently, namely, Kenny's selfishness, his lack of confidence, his compassion, and his earnest acceptance of new understanding, it is intended that he become an adult whose faults and virtues reflect those of a recognizable human being.

Another interpretation concerning Kenny's relationship with his mother can be viewed as follows. The Oedipal complex as identified in Freud's system of psychology stipulates that a mother-figure has been the prime identification for a boy, and that she embodies all his needs. In Freud's theory, that feeling for a mother co-exists with an infant's feelings for a father-figure. They are the stirrings that co-exist, usually in the ages three to five, when an individual is developing his conceptual system. Following that stage, a strong fear of the father and a desire for the mother develops. His fear comes from the possible discovery of this craving for attention from the mother as well as the competitive aspect of winning it away from the father. Because of that competition, the child fears castration by the father. If the father figure is then taken away literally or even in some figurative
manner, the boy remains fixed at that stage of mother-love and an Oedipal complex may formulate. If, however, the child senses the need to identify with the father in order to win him rather than continuing in the resentment of him, the child resolves the feelings for his mother and develops a strong super-ego and is able to move on in his psycho-sexual development. But if the father has been taken away, the boy has no one with whom to identify and a problem exists. Although Helen Baird evidences fears concerning her feelings toward her son, the character of Kenny is not totally embroiled in this complex. In psychoanalytical theory, it is feasible that the Oedipal complex conflict would have been resolved for him, given the father's charisma and his presence at the crucial time. What seems to be present in stronger fashion is Inge's usage of a problem of social learning. Kenny, without anyone to supply a model for independence and with Helen wanting to keep him close for her needs, was offered no training for independence and self-sustainment. Kenny's need would be the one to have occurred and have gone unanswered later when the father was gone. It is a problem of a lesser degree than the Oedipal complex; the extremity of that problem need not necessarily exist in Kenny. Kenny, shown to be promiscuous with flippant girls, shown to be a thief of inconsequentials, shown to be an ambitionless but conscientious worker, faces his
major challenge in dealing with the view he has of himself. Having found it easy to cling to his mother and not to deal with the challenge of his father's pronounced popularity, the boy evidences an inordinate need for support and affection. His need for Lila as something other than a mother substitution is then feasible. His attraction to this older woman rather than the girls he has been used to offers him change in the way he views himself. The use of the older woman breaks him out of a perception he has had of himself. A "role fixedness" occurs when a person conceives of himself in a certain way. For instance, in a religious conversion, a person who has previously seen himself as unlovely, may then convince himself of God's love for him, which consequently makes him lovely. Such a new perception of self is a result of a psycho-sexual shock and moves one out of habituated patterns of existence. In A Loss of Roses, the new relationship teaches Kenny a lesson, offers social learning that enables him to begin the process of reevaluating himself, and advances him beyond the impasse that was stifling his growth.

THE CHARACTER OF HELEN BAIRD

There is one last ironical note to this post-mortem. Miss Booth was Inge's personal choice for the role of the incest-haunted mother.15

15Balch, p. 11.
It was just three weeks before the New York opening that Shirley Booth—who, years before had argued sensibly about her role of Lola in *Come Back, Little Sheba*—resigned from the role of Helen Baird for which she had been receiving sole star billing. She said that playwright Inge had promised to build up the part and eliminate objections she held concerning it. He had not done that to her satisfaction. Betty Field, an estimable actress, was summoned and began rehearsing the role. Daniel Mann, the director, was explicit in his criticism saying that Miss Booth had insisted on cuts of word, lines, whole scenes. It was that that had contributed to the diminution of her part.  

Evidently, the partnership of the three that had worked so successfully in *Come Back, Little Sheba* was not functioning similarly now. Miss Booth's lack of trust in the script, Mr. Inge's bafflement concerning Mr. Mann's modus operandi—having never seen the play in a full run-through during rehearsal—could not have been an advantage to the production. The all-important New York opening (at least to some people, Inge among them) was a disaster as far as critical reaction was concerned.

It was unfortunate that there was not more time for Miss Field to make the role hers, for emphases to be re-established.

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or for a rearrangement of scenes as the author originally intended. Helen Baird's quality is more in line with the previous work of Miss Field than that of Miss Booth. The work accomplished and the personas established by those two well-known personalities confirms that. Perhaps the nostalgia of having worked together so successfully on *Come Back, Little Sheba* conditioned the reasoning of author, director, and actress, but Helen Baird is a character creation that holds no kinship whatsoever to Lola Delaney. She is a totally different kind of female.

Helen Baird trained as a nurse, gave up her job when she married a man for whom she felt a great love, lost him in a drowning accident and returned to her profession in order to raise her young son. Working at the city hospital back in the town where she and her husband first met, she has managed to raise the boy to young manhood. She has done that by sacrificing any semblance of a personal life in order to meet his needs and demands.

Helen: . . . But I was afraid. I made my choice. I told Swede not to come back any more. Maybe I was wrong.
Lila: Kenny woulda accepted it in time.
Helen: But he made me feel so guilty, like I was deserting him. I couldn't stand the accusing look in his eyes when Swede came to call. It's the only time in my life I felt weak. (p. 39)
Now that Kenny is almost identical in appearance to his father and displays a great dependence and warmth for his mother, Helen is concerned with urges so terrible to her mind that she does not allow herself to linger on them; but she has fears, nevertheless, knowing they are there.

Helen: ... Last night you told me of your sins, Lila, and I regretted them. But you're fortunate in one way. Your sins have always been out in the open where you can see them. Some people hide their sins so deeply in their hearts, they never know they're there... Other people have lots of sins you never hear about. (73)

A widow, accustomed by now to hard work, Helen has always had rules and convictions by which she has lived. How difficult for her then to acknowledge anything of an "evil" nature in herself. To compensate, she has now begun to grow even more religiously fervent.

Lila: That organ music's pretty, isn't it? And the choir sounds so sweet and holy.
Helen: Yes. This is the first year I've gone to the revival meetings, and I'm getting a lot out of them. (p. 57)

The sinful, incestuous thoughts are embedded within her, but she will never articulate or ever clearly admit them. It is not, however, Mr. Inge's intention that they be considered ambiguous. Every one of Helen's actions are motivated by those thoughts. The script makes it quite clear by means of Helen's disposition and deliberative behavior that the dilemma rules her. The problem in Kenny
is beyond his understanding. He can only behave confusedly because of it. Helen's problem is to get him away from home, away from her, so that he can widen the scope of his life and prevent the furtherance of the problem:

Lila: It isn't your fault, Helen.
Helen: I so wish I could afford to send him away to college, to prepare him for a respectable place in life. . . . And just a couple of months ago, he was offered a very good job at one of the air plants over in Wichita. They'd put him to work and teach him at the same time, at a very good salary for these times. I did my best to pursue him to take it. . . . A young man's life seems to me such a precious thing. Oh, I have the feeling now that Kenny is at a turning point where he could grow into a strong, honest man like his father, or. . . . an evil man, either one. . . . (p. 38)

The depiction of Helen does not minimize the degree of her incestuous fears. They are there, and she also fears them in Kenny. She must help him. She is trying to find a way to do it. Consistent with her leanings, she will take the brunt of suffering in a silent, selfless manner.

Lila: But a present. . . . that he wanted to give you.
Helen: I couldn't take it.
Lila: You can be hard, Helen.
Helen: Yes, When I have to be.
Lila: I could never be hard that way.
Helen: We pay for our weaknesses. (p. 56)

The closest Helen comes to admitting her sin to Kenny is when he admits he has done things all his life to spite her because she has only loved his father and not him.
Helen then says as much as she ever will.

Helen: I've loved you as much as I dared, Son.
Kenny: Oh, sure.
Helen: If I'd loved you any more, I'd have destroyed you. (Stifling her tears, Helen runs back to her room, leaving Kenny with a feeling of shock and despair.) (p. 71)

Once she has spoken that way, Helen is actually relieved when Kenny tells her he will leave home. She has prepared herself for solitude; and it is very fitting that at the end of the difficulties and departures, she goes inside her house, closing the door behind her in rehearsal of what will prevail when Kenny leaves for good. She can call him, "Kenneth" not because the incestuous longings have been eliminated, but because he, Kenny, has helped her by taking the step toward the alleviation of the problem that has haunted her.

The relationship—other than that with her son and that to her dead husband—with which the character of Helen is concerned most is that between her and her house guest, Lila Green. It is, of course, ironic that Kenny's involvement with Lila, which climaxed Helen's problem with Kenny, should be of the sort that would upset this former acquaintance. Helen's unhappy predicament late in Act II is that Lila's particular problems are strongly aggravated by having been used by Kenny in that manner. Helen genuinely cares for the girl and knows the harm such treatment has done to the unstable, incomplete Lila. Helen is
genuinely concerned but is limited as to what she can offer to do. She can only commiserate.

Helen: Lila. How could you have done it?
Lila: I dunno. Mosta the time I do a pretty good job of keeping my spirits up, but there's other times when I feel I just don't wanta live.
Helen: Lila. Pretty little Lila Green... I was glad to have... I hope you'll like the new job... And I hope you'll be happy. (p. 73)

THE CHARACTER OF LILA GREEN

Lila's final "loss of roses" as she returns to Ricky Powers, her tent-show lover, ends the play. Wanted by him as a model for pornographic photography, the beautiful but hopelessly dependent Lila begins another sordid experience:

Ricky: This all ya got?
Lila: All my worldly possessions. (They start off together, Helen watching.)
Ricky: (Out of Helen's hearing range.) Where's the kid? I thought he'd be out here on a white horse to protect ya.
Lila: No. No one's gonna protect me...
(p. 75)

In A Loss of Roses, Lila's traits—physical, dispositional, motivational, deliberative—are constructed by Inge to evidence themselves via the several relationships in which she is catalytic. To be discussed are her attitudes toward herself and her on-again, off-again career as well as the importance she finds in her relationship with Helen
and the further disillusionment she suffers because of Kenny.

The experiences she recounts concerning her life so far coupled with the present disappointments and the strong self-pity she manifests indicate that Lila gains little strength or direction for herself. The sure strokes of Inge's ability with character have here limned a "loser." The negativism of her attitude is apparent when she says "I've lived my whole life thinking some wonderful man'd fall in love with me. . . . Maybe I'll be happier now that I don't expect it any more" (p. 73). Almost everything we learn of Lila's life, from the teacher's slap on her first day of school to her current liaison with Ricky Powers brings agreement with her statement, "I guess I never learned that lesson very well. There's so many things I still want back" (p. 74). Lila, as conceived, is an unfortunate woman. She is a woman whose conditioning does not allow her to consider herself an entity. Her last line in the play, "No one's gonna protect me" (p. 75), does not mean that she now has learned to protect herself. Not at all. She has fewer illusions about life but is still, and seemingly always will be, dependent upon others--namely the men in her life. As she walks off with Ricky, it is clear that no lesson will ever teach her otherwise. Her life will be determined by the
men who direct it. Docilely, she gives these views, "Sometimes, I wish I could crawl inside a man's big roomy chest and just live there, warm and protected" (p. 63). Her need is frighteningly strong and she knows it:

When I'm afraid, I want somebody close to me, Helen. I don't care who it is, but I've gotta have someone close. Sometimes men take advantage of this. And that's when I do the things I regret. That's when I hate myself. (p. 58)

I have to have someone, Helen. I just die if I don't have someone to kinda lean on. . . (p. 29)

Female independence is not an attitude Lila can understand or admire:

Ricky: There ya go on that marriage line again. Can't ya lay off?
Lila: It's what I want, Rick. It's the only thing I want any more. It's the only thing that's any good. (p. 27)

Lila: But you can't refuse it, Helen. You can't refuse a man's gift. (p. 53)

The inability to function by herself causes a desperation in Lila that is easily exploitable by other needy people. The idealization of the marital state and the dependence of a soft pliant woman on a strong, protective man were ideals, the script suggests, that Lila conceived because of the Kenneth-Helen marriage. As their young friend and household servant, Lila found models by which she would always judge men and women:
Lila: . . . He was my model. I told myself that I was gonna have a husband like him some day. And I measured every man I met by your Kenneth. (p. 28)

Lila: Anyway, you had a nice husband, once, Helen. You can be thankful for that. (p. 29)

Lila: Oh, it's so good to see you after all these years. It's awful nice of you to take me in. It seems like you're always helping me out some way, ever since I was a little girl. (p. 21)

So much has gone wrong for Lila. Trouble began for her at a very early age. Helen says of her, "They were very poor, and her parents fought. It was a stepfather she had and a stepbrother older than she. It wasn't a very happy life for her" (p. 12). Lila's subsequent descriptions of her marriage situation, career circumstances and hospitalization all contribute to the effect of Lila as a character unable to control her own destiny in any way. 17

Lila's physical attributes made her desirable to men when a very young girl. Inge describes her as still very beautiful and voluptuous. She has been constructed as a female character with the softness, the seeming availability, the reliance upon men that are ingredients of the female sex symbol as created and immortalized by the

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17 A duplication of Lola Delaney from Come Back, Little Sheba has been argued, but aside from the dependence upon a male partner for a sense of identity, the two characters have strong dissimilarities.
Hollywood film industry. Whereas that appeal can be manufactured, as has been known to happen, in Lila it is legitimate. Her conditioning and experience have actually made her the possessor of a personality of tremendous appeal to the erotic, possessive nature in another human being. She is a definite attraction as a testing ground for the male ego. The misfortune for Lila has been that the softness within her has been exploited by weak men, in need of a weaker woman on whom to wield supremacy. In speaking of the depravity of her early marriage, she confides this concerning her husband and his father:

Lila: Ed was very sweet to me. But he was weak... and then when Ed was gone old Vincent started coming to my room, trying to force himself on me... (Ed) didn't wanta believe me. He was scared of his father and he wouldn't have known how to protect me. It... almost made me sorry for Ed. (pp. 34-35)

Lila's description of Ricky, her present lover, and his subsequent actions prove that once more she is involved in a relationship where the usage of her is total and she is once more a "victim." Inge succeeds in arousing great sympathy for the woman by contrasting what is done to her and what she deserves.
Lila: I always wanted to be good, Helen. Deep in my heart, I've always felt I was good. And the things that've happened in the past, some of 'em don't fit, and it makes me feel ugly and humiliated to remember them. (p. 57)

Lila is made to describe herself often in order for us to understand the choices she makes in her relationships.

About herself, she says:

People aren't really sinful, Helen, they're just weak and soft... like me. (p. 56)

Please don't be mad, Kenny. I just can't stand for anyone to be made at me. (p. 49)

She is also described that way by Kenny who, divulging his problems to her, explains why he can do so. "I just felt I could, you never criticise people" (p. 46).

Lila's love for her work is evident. Her checkered career has proven to be the one area of her life where she has attained some sense of fulfillment. She has functioned as a dancer, singer, and actress. It is implied that if her personal life could be controlled, the progress she has made as a performer, could offer further fulfillment. Her penchant for fantasizing, the imagination she enjoys using, and the dream world for which she pines, all contribute to making various aspects of theatrical performance very attractive to her.
Lila: Oh, I could never give up show business. It's in my very blood. . . . Besides, I'm a very good actress. You should have seen me in Smilin' Through. That was my best part. Oh that play had such a sad ending. You see, I played an old fashioned kind of girl in it, and wore a great hoopskirt made of white lace. And the villain in the play. . . (p. 43)

The easy acceptability of the permissive life style of show folk, Lila also accepts easily.

Lila: Once you get used to being with show people, you feel outa place with anyone else. (p. 26)

Lila: But if you knew them better, Helen, I'm sure you'd like them. (p. 30)

The question of how Lila will fare in the world of "show biz" is not resolved within the action of the play. What has been established, however, is a degree of talent, beauty, and a lack of confidence in areas other than theatrics.

Lila: Helen, I'd be just scared to death to take a job in one of those stores downtown. I just don't have confidence in myself to do things like that. I couldn't even wrap up a paper of pins without trembling. . . .

Helen: But you've enough confidence to get out on stage and perform for people.
Lila: That's different, Helen. I can't tell you why, but it's different. (p. 52)

On the basis of what happens, Lila's future will be deter-
Totally damaging to any kind of hard progress for Lila is the self-pity she feels because of the difference between what she has and what she thinks she wants. Also damaging to her is the total acceptance of the conventional man/woman life roles. The result of our socio-psychological attitudes concerning this convention has been this: woman is viewed as passive and male is viewed as active. Cultural restraints have made female synonymous with passivity, intuition, sensitivity and has made male synonymous with aggression, decision-making and problem-solving. The homeostatic result affects the interaction and decrees the ideal relationship to be that in which a strong, masculine figure conjoins with the weak, emotional figure and together they bring a oneness and wholeness. The orientation of both Lila and Helen to Big Kenneth is an early admission of their acceptance of the passive role and this is Lila's problem. Life is demanding that she play a role she cannot perceive for herself, and that utilizes aspects of her personality she will never allow to develop. The idealization of marriage and motherhood (in fact, a worship of

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18 The Paddy Chayefsky film script, "The Goddess", related the rise and fall of a similar woman. Supposedly modeled on Marilyn Monroe and played by Kim Stanley, the film drew a portrait that both those women recognized well. Comparisons between the Inge creation and the factual stories of such stage and screen performers can be made.
them) are strong in her and her defensiveness for not having attained such goals colors her disposition and her deliberations. Lila's description of Mrs. Mulvaney—"... nice married woman like her, who have kids and go to church and seem so happy" (p. 51)—is also Lila's assessment of Helen Baird. Helen is a surrogate mother for Lila; and she is also the "ideal" woman whose home, husband, and child were the ingredients of Lila's girlhood dreams. She wants Helen's respect very much. She is embarrassed by her personal predicament but is sure that Helen will understand. She can relax with Helen to only a certain extent, fearing her disapproval of anything. "I just don't want her to get mad at me," she says like a worried child. "I don't want her to think I'm a bad influence" (p. 45). The sordid aspects she describes are all put into little-girl language and not fully stated, not because playwright Inge means to lessen the impact of the seaminess, but because Lila finds words that will perhaps make a story less terrible to Helen than it really is. Hence, she describes Madame Olga's sexual usage of Ricky as "a kind of crush on him" (p. 29). Her own catalogue of perversions with Vincent Comiskey, she describes in this manner: "He tried to force me to make love to him... in all sorts of ways..." (p. 34). When she is made tense by Helen's sense of correctness, Lila is immediately contrite and overeager to compensate for any bad thoughts Helen may
have concerning her. She says:

I'll go with you, Helen. I'll go with you to the revival. (p. 50)

I hope I haven't disgraced you, Helen. (p. 50)

I hope you don't think I'm too terrible, me and Rick. (p. 57)

Finally, it is essential to consider the woman's relationship with Kenny. He is the physical embodiment of her dream man—a dream she has had since the years she worked for the Bairds and idolized big Kenneth. She displays her only strength when she is able, realizing his youth and headstrong ways, to resist his advances.

Lila: OK. Maybe you do love me. Maybe I love you, too. Maybe I loved you from the first night I arrived, and saw you standing on the porch, just like I used to see your wonderful daddy. (p. 49)

Her softness, her generosity are suppressed because she has girded herself against loving the boy since it is not the right thing for them to do. "Kenny, I'm not turning you down. Oh, don't feel that way. I'm just tryin' to do the right thing" (p. 49). Even so, she fears rejection for having held herself in reserve. "Please don't be mad, Kenny. I just can't stand for anyone to be mad at me" (p. 49). When she needs him later, he is there. He is not without concern for her as he comforts and embraces her, but the next morning he wishes to extricate himself
from the involvement. His inexperience, his selfishness predominate but Lila's easy susceptibility to dreams and to men have caused her heartache again. A pattern in Lila's life repeats itself. Hers is the character in \textit{A Loss of Roses} whose exit with fewer illusions is the most depressing. Both Kenny and Helen have reserves of strength and that will sustain them. Lila will be buffeted by circumstances. Applicable to her are the sentiments Mr. Inge wrote as his farewell to Miss Wyckoff in his 1970 novel:

\begin{quote}
For what else could anyone reasonably wish her but good luck? Good luck constituted her only hope for the future. Wherever she went, whatever she did, she would need lots of it.\footnote{William Inge, \textit{Good Luck, Miss Wyckoff}, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), p. 179.}
\end{quote}
CONCLUSION

Within the barrage of adverse criticism that was heaped upon the ill-fated New York production of *A Loss of Roses* was a question that seemed to capsulate the bewilderment of many of those who wrote of their initial reactions. "Did the actors fail the play or did the play fail them?" wondered Henry Hewes. The answer to that question is now only a stimulant of conjecture and historical argument regarding the 1959 debacle. It remains vital, however, to those who are concerned with the future of the play.

The play is Inge's most introspective attempt at characterization. In order to focus on this mother-son dilemma that is about to reach a wrenching adjustment, Inge abandoned the "restless texture of action" he had utilized previously. In all of his other full-length scripts, Inge filled the stage with movement and contrast. He skilfully opposed one character with an opposite, or

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21Lockwood, p. 147.
devised one stage event as counterbalance to another. Lockwood's analysis of *A Loss of Roses* did not find such devices:

The scenes for the most part were between two characters, and these scenes were long and often filled with a great deal of exposition. The movement and drive that Inge had achieved by rapidly juxtaposing a number of short episodes was not generated by these long scenes.\(^{22}\)

Lockwood believed the play to have been an experiment in structure—and one that failed.\(^{23}\)

From its unfortunate beginning, riddled with demanded revisions and the withdrawal of an important player, through subsequent analyses, the play has proven controversial. The script, published after Inge's re-revisions, reads extremely well. Inge's own evaluation in 1959 that *A Loss of Roses* was the best play he had ever written cannot be so readily interpreted as stubborn defense. The play's strength is character; its emphasis is equally divided among three major creations—Helen, Kenny, and Lila. The mother-son relationship is the basic conflict that forms the dramatic action. The arrival of the house guest is the catalyst that affects the status quo and, by her involvement, causes a crisis to occur in all their lives. Each of the three is a character drawn

\(^{22}\)Ibid.

\(^{23}\)Ibid.
as an unique, individual personage, and is allotted different kinds of traits to determine the plot action. Certain major qualities such as volition, stature, and clarity are evident in the characterizations, but in varying degrees. Interrelation, the involvement of each character with the others, is firmly established and clear. Their attractiveness is undeniable. They are earnest in what they do. Their desires are strong; their feelings, intense. Inge leaves nothing to chance in the area of credibility. An establishment of causal sequence is present from the very beginning. The characters behave consistently along one path of development until forced by a reversal or discovery to do otherwise. The action flows credibly from the characterization. These actions come from the well-conceived causality that allows happenings and events of years before to be directly responsible for motivational, deliberative, and decisive actions within the play.

This depth of character is prevalent in Inge's "failure." Its complexity obstructs simple clarity. All that is implied in suggestion and innuendo is not always clear in stage action. It can be so, however, with the additional work of a director. Seemingly, in reaction to its complexity, critics tended to categorize the character's problems. The oversimplification does
not appear in the revised script and apparently occurred only in the bowdlerized version that served the first production. Subsequent critical fallacies have been noted: to insist that A Loss of Roses is a sequel to The Dark at the Top of the Stairs and to describe Kenny Baird as "Sonny come of age"\(^{24}\) is not to give the play its due consideration; the desire to allot Lila single importance when the major thrust of the play is the mother-son relationship is to desire a play other than the one written; and to think that the problem between Helen and Kenny is "solved" at the play's denouement is simply not what is intended.\(^{25}\)

It is, however, a specialized play—a play of seemingly limited appeal. Its long scenes of conversation, its concern with a singular problem that exists but is not openly discussed, and its picture of a depression in the human spirit limits its appeal for many theatre devotees. But not since Come Back, Little Sheba had the playwright used so fully his ability to arouse a feeling of compassion for his characters. One of the original reviewers, John Chapman, wrote:

\(^{24}\)Shuman, p. 89.

Inge has become more interested in character than in event, and he has probed gently and with sympathy into the characters of three people. Since he writes with skill and clarity, Inge has transferred his sympathy to me. These three want something they haven't got, and it isn't material; they have the simple and universal yearning for understanding and love.26

Walter Kerr, however, disagreed with him, "due to the fact that highly specialized case histories, complete with symbolic dreams, generally lack the faculty of touching us."27 In the face of such diversity of critical opinion, additional productions of the play would seem to be merited.28 A Loss or Roses is a "director's play." The complexity of characterization affords a director and his actors a substantial number of possibilities and choices in developing their production. The complaints of previous critics seem to concern problems that a well-conceived, fully-realized mounting of the play could surmount.

As in Chekhov's plays, every speech and stage direction of this piece contributes to the construction that Inge had in mind. Also, like a Chekhov play, it

26John Chapman, NYTCR, December 7, 1959, p. 211.
28See Exhibit C in Appendix for listing of past productions according to Dramatists Play Service, Inc.
reaches full expression in the theatre. To assist that end, a director's analysis of the script should include intense consideration of the principles of psychological findings. *A Loss of Roses* is not an "unmovable" play, lacking in forward progress or devoid of action, if it is approached psychologically. Its importance is "character," and Gordon Allport's theory of "becoming" is pertinent here:

> Personality is less a finished product than a transitive process. While it has some stable features, it is at the same time undergoing change. It is this course of "becoming" of individuation that is now our special concern.  

The changes in the three pivotal figures and how they will affect the play's outcome constitute the plot development in the play. Those changes consist of a downward slide for Lila, a distressing loneliness for Helen, and a maturing for Kenny. The director and actors must establish the characters initially and allow the changes to brew and occur. They are in the script and must be afforded a full comprehension and projection on the part of the performers in order to engross an audience. The degree of incestuous longing in Helen must be established. The amount of self-awareness concerning his

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mother-fixation in Kenny cannot go unresolved. The decision must be made to interpret it either as an Oedipal complex or, as suggested earlier, a difficulty with self-image in the boy and incest only on the mother's part. The contradiction of Lila's wants and her ways must be investigated and understood. The psychological problems and the personality questions woven into the fabric of each character, if considered thoroughly, will only benefit a production. The depth, intensity, and even the frightening aspects of their psyches must not go unplumbed. At the final moments, the "loss of roses" speech--epitomizing human sorrow--is spoken by Lila. Presented effectively, it should be regretfully acknowledged by audience members as applicable to all of the stage characters and to themselves as well.
Natural Affection
New York Production, 1963
Art work for Playbill cover
CHAPTER FIVE

NATURAL AFFECTION

A mistake that many people make when reading a novel or seeing a play that reflects some of the uglinesses of contemporary life, is in thinking that the author intends the work to represent all of life. . . . All I ever wanted or expected the play to show is an area of ugliness in our life today, that, although we don't all live in it, is never far away.1

The negative reactions that greeted the first production of Natural Affection, William Inge's play set in contemporary Chicago and peopled with characters of an urban, "common" sort, would not be so virulent today (1974). The ugliness, violence, and despair in the decade, 1960-1970, have been more universally acknowledged as having reached a substantial level. Natural Affection reflected honestly the shortcomings in modern society in a way many Americans were not willing to acknowledge then. Opening night critics found the play, "sordid and ugly,"2 "in bad taste,"3 "reveling


in degradation. Critics seemed to resent that William Inge, whose previous character delineation had not been without isolated instances of disreputable unattractiveness, would people an entire play with offensive and crude figures. Playwright Inge acknowledged the difficulty in writing a play of that type. But in desiring to expose some of the atmosphere in people's lives that creates violence, he stated that it was necessary for him to create as he did.

The time of the play is designated as December, 1962. It is set in a Chicago apartment--small but comfortably furnished "with moderate cost and considerable pretension." The living room includes space for dining, a bedroom, a kitchen, the door to the bathroom and a portion of the hallway with the door to the apartment across the hall visible also. When the curtain rises on Act I, Sue Barker and her lover Bernie Slovenk are in bed asleep. When she wakes she wanders the apartment, obviously concerned about something, then murmurs while standing at the window, "the world looks awful ugly at times" (p. 10). Bernie is


6Inge, Preface to Natural Affection, p. 6.

7William Inge, Natural Affection, (New York: Dramatist's Play Service, Inc., 1963), p. 9. All other references to the play are from this edition, with page numbers noted parenthetically in the text.
impatient with her restlessness; and they argue about breakfast, their job problems, and the irritation Bernie feels toward Sue's more lucrative position. For Sue has worked herself up to head lingerie buyer at the Carlson Department Store. Bernie, after having left bartending, is selling expensive cars but not doing very well at it.

Bernie: It's not every guy who can start out bein' a bartender and work his way up to sellin' Cadillacs.
Sue: I know it, honey. I wasn't tryin' to run ya down.
Bernie: Ya gotta remember I'm not quite as old as you are, either. No man hits his stride until he's thirty-six, read that in a magazine. By the time I'm thirty-six, I'll be makin' better dough than you. Wanta bet? (p. 11)

Vince Brinkman, their neighbor across the hall, shouts goodbye to his wife at their door and rings Sue's bell. Bernie begs to be excused as he's not ready to leave and Vince leaves having asked Sue to look in on his wife Claire and include her in some activity. Bernie reminds Sue that she is to meet her son, Donnie, this morning. The boy is returning from a work farm where he has been confined for stealing a car and beating a woman. Sue wants to make up for the boy's unhappiness, to show him a good time and give him a pleasant vacation. Sue returns to an argument Bernie has heard often enough--her desire to legalize their relationship.
Sue: I'll be forty in a few more years, Bernie.
Bernie: I don't care how old you are. If I wanted a school girl I'd get one.
Sue: At my age, a woman gets to feeling kind of desperate.
Bernie: Sue, I'm in no position to get married. I told you that before I moved in.
Sue: (Showing some of her desperation) You'll never feel you're in a position to. You never will. The truth is you just don't want the responsibility of being married. (p. 16)

Bernie taunts Sue about her past responsibility to her son and Sue tries hard to convince him and herself that she has done her best for the boy.

Sue: What choice did I have in the matter? I couldn't keep the kid and go to work, too. You know damn well I couldn't. But I took him back as soon as I was able, didn't I? As soon as I was making enough money, I took him out of that orphan home and brought him here to live with me and did everything I could to help him. It wasn't my fault that he got into trouble. I did everything I... . (p. 16)

In leaving the apartment, Bernie is stopped by Claire Brinkman, a pretty, sensual woman, who is eager to resume a sexual affair with him. Bernie instead promises to send her a divorced buddy he things she will like. Claire then joins Sue in her apartment and evidences her boredom with her life and an incapacity to relieve it at the same time. She complains and whines incessantly and seems totally ill-equipped to do anything about changing herself.
She is even too frightened to handle a fanatic old zealot in the hall who is attempting to peddle magazines.

Sue: Just tell her you're not interested.
Claire: She scares me.
Sue: (Forbearing). All right Claire. (She goes to her door and the woman turns to her.)
Woman: (Prophetically.) God is love. . . . I'm selling the truth and the truth shall make you free. . . .
Sue: (Politely.) I don't believe we're interested this morning. (Closes her door firmly.)
Claire: Oh, I think it's just wonderful, Sue, the way you handle things. I never know what to say to people like that.
Sue: I don't know where that dumb superintendent is that he doesn't keep those people out. (p. 20)

Act I, Scene 2, occurs an hour or so later. The superintendent is letting in two boys, both poorly dressed and carrying battered suitcases. The one is Donnie, Sue's son. He is "a handsome, appealing boy of seventeen" (p. 21). His companion is Gil, a somewhat older boy. Donnie feels ill-at-ease in his mother's apartment and wanders about. While Gil makes his way to the refrigerator and food, Donnie wanders to his mother's bedroom. He lingers over the articles on her dressing table--powder puff, hair brush, perfume bottle. He fondles them with sensitive care. Gil reminds Donny that now that he has gotten the offer from the reform school for permanent dismissal, he had better find out if his mother will let him stay with
her. Young Donnie, his hatred for a sadistic reform school guard erupting, is able to turn down his companion's offers for easy money, not appreciating the means of achieving it.

Gil: Okay, then. Maybe y'expect Western Union to bring ya money.
Donnie: I'm gonna get a job.
Gil: What doin?
Donnie: I can make things. I can make things with my hands. And I'm good at it, see? I'm not like the rest of you apes. I can do something.
Gil: You gonna try to make it straight?
Donnie: I just don't wanna do anything to get sent back to the cage. (p. 24)

Gil runs out as soon as Sue and Claire return. Claire is immediately eager to relate to the young attractive boy, but his mother soon packs her off to have some time alone with her long-absent son.

Sue: How do ya like my new apartment?
Donnie: Swell.
Sue: Aren't you proud of your mom now?
Head buyer in lingerie. I get to take trips to New York all the time, and next year I may get to go to Paris. Won't that be something? How do ya like my new hairdo, Donnie?
Donnie: Swell.
Sue: Do ya still think ya got a good-lookin' mom?
Sue: Well, I sure think I got a good-lookin' son. (She hugs him affectionately.) Remember the times I used to visit you at the orphanage?
Donnie: Sure. I was allus proud of ya' cause ya looked so pretty. The other fellas' old ladies all looked like dogs. (p. 26)

Sue attempts to explain Bernie's presence in the apartment.
Donnie says he understands. Sue tries to reach the boy and finally succeeds to a degree with the offer of a hot bath and some new clothes from the store. She is alarmed when she sees the long, red scars on Donnie's exposed back. Donnie will explain only enough to implicate a sadistic guard at "the cage."

Donnie: That's all right. I'll get even some day.
Sue: Donnie, don't talk about getting even. You just have to forget these things, somehow.
Donnie: (Finally he has found courage again.) Mom?
Sue: What, Donnie?
Donnie: Well, I... Oh, I dunno.
Sue: Tell me, Donnie. You been trying to tell me something all morning. What is it?
Donnie: I can stay... if you keep me. If you keep me, I don't have to go back.

(p. 30)

Having been given this information, Sue is suddenly presented with the dilemma of doing right by her son and appeasing Bernie, who is not going to like sharing the apartment or woman with the boy.

As Scene Three opens, it is that evening and Sue is in the apartment alone, singing and fixing dinner. Bernie enters. He has been roughed up and is looking glum. In an agency car, he has rammed into another car. Because of that he is due to be fired, his boss not caring about whose fault it was or was not. This job irritation makes Bernie a veritable bear around the apartment, complaining about the expensive clothing of his that Donnie
has used and the dirty bathtub he has left. He can muster no sympathy for the boy's beatings at reform school; what he wants now is to have sex with Sue to obliterate the awful experiences of his day. Arousing Sue, he is overcoming her initial opposition, when Vince appears at the door concerned about Bernie. Having heard of the accident, he went to the drugstore and purchased a present for him. What he also wants is to complain of his financial troubles. Sue registers surprise that Vince is so thoughtful of another man as he is of Bernie. Bernie resents the implication, and he leaves for the bedroom as Donnie returns with his new wardrobe and phonograph-record purchases. The boy worries about the older man's acceptance of him. When they meet, it is very difficult for Donnie to accept Bernie's fumbling attempts to be a buddy to the lad.

Bernie: You can talk to me, kid. Hell, it's a wonder, I di'n' end up in one of those places, myself. Matter of fact, I was in trouble two or three times when I was a kid. They threatened to send me there, but I finally got a job and settled down. (Donnie keeps turned away from Bernie, as though distrustful.) Whata' matter, kid? Don't ya wanna talk with me? (No answer) Look, Donnie, I'm your buddy. You can be a pal with me. . . . (p. 40)

The trio sit to dinner. They overhear guests arriving at the Brinkman's apartment and Sue wonders just what kind
of raucous friends her neighbors enjoy. She finds that both Donnie and Bernie like the same kind of meat. She is optimistic about what is to happen to all of them.

(Laughs at Bernie.) Well, here's an end piece for Bernie. . . (Passes it to him on a plate.) And another for you Donnie. (Gives it to Donnie.) Everyone's gonna be satisfied. (p. 42)

Act II, Scene I occurs on Christmas Eve, about seven o'clock. Donnie is getting into his new suit. . . . The phonograph playing at full volume, and he dances about the room while getting into his clothes. . . . In the bedroom, Bernie is getting into his tuxedo; Sue is dressed and is putting the finishing touches on her make up. (p. 43) Donnie is admonished to keep the volume of his record-playing down. The tensions of the apartment confinement are beginning to wear on the household:

Bernie: What time are Claire and Vince coming?
Sue: They're due now. Donnie honey, why don't you run downstairs to the drugstore and get us a quart of that eggnog mix.
Donnie: Won't they deliver it?
Sue: Honey, it's Christmas Eve. They're so busy, it'll take them hours. Run along like a good boy.
(She hands him the money.)
Donnie: Doesn't Bernie ever pay for anything?
Sue: (Hoping Bernie hasn't overheard.) Shh. (Donnie exits)
Bernie: "Doesn't Bernie ever pay for anything."
Sue: Honey, he di'n' mean anything.
Bernie: Oh no. Course not.
Sue: You're too sensitive, Bernie. Bernie: Jesus, Sue, what's it gonna be like, three of us living here in this tiny apartment, with only one can?
Sue: I can get a bigger place if we have to. (p. 44)

Sue cannot get herself to admit that she will abandon Donnie once more. Bernie, made more insistent by his job loss, argues the impossibility of their crowded and tension-riddled situation. Sue circumvents the argument by discussing the Christmas presents. Bernie delights her with a large bottle of her favorite expensive perfume. He is much less enthused about the electric shoe polisher she has bought him. Sue pleads with him to forget his grandiose money-making schemes and to settle for happiness of another sort

... I just want yah to be happy. I've seen too many people knock themselves out tryin' to get ahead, and then go crazy or die of ulcers after they got there. Ya don't have to be a big shot to be happy.

Bernie: Ever since I was a kid, I been tellin' myself I'd be in the chips some day, with influence and...

(p. 47)

Donnie comes forth with a present for his mother. Fitfully embarrassed and anxious about Sue's reaction to his hand-crafted hors d'oeuvre tray, the boy experiences anguish. The giving of the gift to his mother wracks his entire being:

Sue: And all those little pieces of different colored wood inlaid and polished and... Why, it's a beautiful piece of work. Won't you believe it?

Donnie: Well... I never gave anyone a present before. Makes me feel kinda funny...
Donnie: Lemme go, Mom. (He is too tense with emotion to face her. He runs suddenly to the door.)
Sue: (Puzzled by his behavior) What's the matter, Donnie? . . . (. . . In the hallway, he leans his back against the wall and begins to choke with strangling sobs, his whole body heaving). . . . (p. 48)

Now Vince and Claire enter the apartment. Vince is already extremely drunk. He gives them all expensive and well-received gifts. Conversation moves from drinking to partying to a discussion of contemporary plays. Their talk concerning Tennessee Williams' play **Sweet Bird of Youth** reveals their own self-unawareness:

Vince: (Cringes at his memory of the play.) Oh, that play hurt me. I been wearing cast-iron drawers ever since. You know what they did to the guy? They cut em off. Yah. They cut off his paraphernalia. Ouch.
Claire: You know, Sue, I don't see how they let shows like that get by. I think something should be done about it. All the characters in it were sick, if you ask me. I don't see why we can't have plays about people who are respectable. I don't know where that Tennessee Williams finds the characters he writes about, do you?
Vince: A man writes a play like that. . . . he's got a diseased mind.
Claire: Oh well, you were so drunk you slept thru most of it. (p. 50)

Donnie's rock-and-roll record blares as Vince grows more and more inebriated and out of control. Claire entices Bernie into the kitchen and they are discovered in an embrace by Donnie. Vince is now totally drunk and recites a gross litany of songs and dances.
Vince: ... I'm gonna get inlaid, I'm gonna get outlaid, I'm gonna get laid in and out, out and in. . .

Sue: You got a li'l load on, haven't ya, Vince?
Vince: I correck you. I got a big load on. . .
Come get a li'l a my load-on. (p. 53)

Nothing can stop Vince's drunken behavior now. He begins verbally to abuse his wife and then attempts to tear her dress. He arouses the group to anger and vituperation before passing out cold. The others stretch him out on the bed and decide to take off for their night-on-the-town at the Playboy Club. In less than jovial spirits, they exit; Vince, left behind.

Returning home after midnight, the partying group wake Vince and inform him that he has slept off his drunk and missed the dinner party at the restaurant. Eager for him to leave, Donnie and Sue doze lightly. Vince complains bitterly to Bernie about the injustices and uglinesses of modern living. He cannot refrain from cataloguing all the things that alienate man from his surroundings, from a sense of participation. He embarrassingly admits how fond of Bernie he is—and how aware he is of the difficulty for two men to show a mutual affection. Rather than return home with his wife, Vince takes off for a night of carousing:
Claire: It's perfectly okay with me where he goes.
Vince: I don't care if I never go home again. There's nothin' there but empty rooms. Empty rooms and a lotta plumbing. Why don't someone invent a house that makes ya feel glad you're in it. A built-in gadget that makes ya feel at home? I haven't felt at home in a house since I was a kid. I just been livin' in empty rooms. (p. 59)

After Vince rushes off, Donnie escorts Claire back to the apartment and Sue confronts Bernie with the knowledge that people have been insinuating all evening—that Bernie has had sexual encounters with Claire. Bernie confronts Sue with the unbridled attraction between her and her son.

Bernie: Why don't ya let him stay there and have a li'l fun?
Sue: Because he's just a boy and I don't happen to approve of...
Bernie: Approve my ass. He's shacked up with broads before. It looks to me like you had the hots for him yourself. (She slaps him hard.)
Sue: I won't stand for talk like that in this house. (Bernie slaps her back, just as hard. She cries out in pain.) Bernie. (p. 61)

The terrible recriminatory fight continues until Bernie leaves to join Claire across the hall:

Sue: If you go over there, you'll never set foot in this apartment again.
Bernie: Yes, I will. I'll be back in the morning and pack my things. (p. 62)

Donnie is at last to be alone with his mother.

The final scene is at six o'clock the next morning.
Donnie appears to be sleeping on the sofa. Sue is on the edge of her bed, smoking a cigarette. Vince comes staggering down the hall with three pick-ups in tow--two women and a man. They are all slovenly drunk. Vince lets them into his apartment. Donnie awakens and Sue suggests to him that perhaps going back to "the farm" for one more year might not be a bad idea. Donnie, frightened at the prospect, flees into the bathroom. Bernie returns to the apartment and Sue pleads with him to smooth their differences, but Bernie's personal disappointments are troubling him. His unemployment and his lack of status and money prevent him from accepting Sue's offer to become husband and wife.

Bernie: Do ya know how a man feels, Sue, when he finally wakes up and realizes he's not gonna make it?  
Sue: What are you talking about?  
Bernie: After he's been taking it for granted all his life that he's gonna be a big success some day, that he was gonna. . . I dunno how to say it . . . make his life count. (p. 65)

As he is leaving, Sue stands paralyzed with loss until the door closes. Then she falls into a chair, dissolved in tears. Donnie comes out of the bathroom and is aware of the situation:
Donnie: Don't cry, Mom. Bernie's no good. I told ya, he double-crosses ya, and....

Sue: Be quiet, Donnie.

Donnie: He prob'ly wouldn't look twice at ya if you di'n' have all the money.

Sue: (defensively.) Donnie, that's not so.

Donnie: ... I'll take care of ya, Mom. I'll buy you all the beautiful things in the world. You'll never have to work again. .... (p. 67)

Donnie's persistent yammerings concerning their need for no one else brings Sue to her decision. She breaks away from her son in order to pursue her lover. The boy will not let her go and she is forced to extricate herself violently. Her true feelings burst out of her, "Let go, I'm not going to give up the rest of my life to keep a worthless kid I never wanted in the first place" (p. 68). Pretending sorrow for having said something she did not mean, she runs from the apartment, leaving the door ajar. Donnie throws himself down on the sofa; his body shakes with traumatic rejection.

From out of Vince's apartment, a drunken woman staggers into the hallway and apartment calling for Bernie. Seeing Donnie, she is upon him in a drunken, sensual manner. Donnie hits her and knocks her to the floor. With unleashed rage, he grabs a kitchen knife and stabs her numerous times. As his body slowly calms, he plays some
loud, raucous music and drinks from a container of milk. He then slowly puts on a topcoat and walks out of the apartment.
THE CHARACTER OF SUE BARKER

A friend and fellow playwright of Mr. Inge wrote these words concerning a theme implied by the element of character in *Natural Affection*:

... it's not what we've got that gives us our emptiness and pain, it's what we haven't got... our tragedy is that we have no sense of tragedy because we live without philosophy, without values.8

Sue Barker's struggles are not diminished by her seeming worthlessness. "William Inge makes it seem presumption to regard any character as totally without worth or any person as completely uninteresting."9 Inge's powers of creativity have composed with the character of Sue a representation genuinely reflective of its time and society. There is importance in the character's common nature. The device used by novelist, Willard Motley, to emphasize the prevailingness of one of his creations can be applied to her. "Go to any city, walk down any street, knock on any door..."10 Mr. Inge is evidencing a similar commentary. By focusing on the

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9 Ibid., p. 201.

specifics of this single situation and its participants--Sue, among them--he calls attention to a brutal fact of modern living. It is designed to gratify man's greed instead of his happiness, and people end up feeling rejected as people because of that. Mr. Inge has written, "The terror of rejection seemed to me to be the cause of all violence everywhere."11

The ruthless honesty about Sue Barker is that the seeming conflict between her maternal loyalty to her son and her desire to live a life of her own is no longer her real problem. That decision was made many years before, and it was a decision in favor of her self-needs. What Inge presents in his characterization are deliberative and motivational traits that depict the behavior that a character believes that society demands of her in order to consider her a good mother and normal woman. These are contrary to the choices she has really made and actually prefers. It is implied by the playwright that that was not always the case. Sue's pregnancy as a very young, inexperienced girl and the subsequent abandonment by the boy involved wrought strong changes upon her. Evidencing girlish dreams and trust in a protective male, she found herself alone and burdened.

11 Inge, Preface to Natural Affection, p. 6.
Sue: . . . But I couldn't run away the way he did. Maybe I was scared, too, but I had the kid inside me, and he went wherever I did. Bernie: You coulda had an abortion. Sue: No I couldn't. That kid was inside me, and I knew he was meant to live. I faced my responsibility, and it was the making of me. I've been strong ever since. (p. 16)

The strength she evidenced, the will power and the determination to win out over unfair odds, cultivated in the woman a new sense of self-determination and a regard for her own achievement. The character relates how she resolved to reach a position where, if ever abandoned again, she would not be beaten. Her early maternal love, her early concern for the child, she dealt with in ways she felt would eventually do well by the boy. Her regret for what she might have done differently and her still-existent maternal concerns break through, even at this point of her evolvement and add complexity to the characterization.

Sue: If I had to do over again, you can believe me now, I'd keep the kid beside me if I had to go out and sell pencils. I'd never give him away. (She is sobbing uncontrollably.) (p. 17)

Sue: That was the happiest time in my whole life, when I had Donnie. Even though I was so poor I couldn't buy him diapers, I was happy with him. And I felt proud. (p. 17)
Sue's sense of accomplishment gives her pride whether it is the birth of a son or winning a trip to Paris as head lingerie buyer at her place of employment. Bernie, at various times, says, "I've seen you at the store, you're hard as nails" (p. 34), and "I'm just admitting you got pretty far for a woman" (p. 12). In so doing, he encapsulates the competitive spirit and status-seeking that have made her the "Mama Lion" she describes:

Did you see that movie about the lions down in Africa? Well, Mama Lion goes out and bags the supper while the Papa Lion sits back on his haunches looking handsome and regal. That's me. Mama Lion. . . That's one reason I always felt he was kinda good for me. I've always worked hard like someone was driving me, cause I allus' felt I had to get somewhere. (p. 28)

There is nothing said or done in the play to substantiate an evil nature in Sue. Neither does Inge allow her duality to impede this "Mama Lion" strength. Her sensuality and moral doubts, her fervor for achievement and need for dependence comprise a totality. The character can live with these fluctuations. The difficulty for her occurs as a result of her relationships—with whom they exist and when they occur. The deception she has practiced during all of her son's life is one whose ramifications are much more serious than she could ever conceive. The boy's loss of her and his desperation have
produced a maladjustment in him of which she has no comprehension. It is easy to be deceived by Sue's pretended concern—as the boy has been—but Inge has placed contradictions in the character's motivations and deliberations. These contradictions cause behavior to ensue that evidences cracks in the yearnings for admirable motherhood that the character pretends to possess.

Bernie: So that's what got you up at the crack of dawn? Last night you were pretending you'd be so happy to see him. Ya know what? You fake a lot. Sue: I will be happy. . . (p. 13)

Sue: Donnie, it's just that. . . Well, this is an awful small apartment, ya see. We'd have to move if you were to stay here permanently. . . Donnie: (Feeling his case is already lost.) Yah. Sue: (Lying.) And Bernie pays the rent, ya know. Oh, sure, I just don't have the right to tell ya you can stay without talkin' to Bernie. (p. 31)

Sue's reaction to the fact that the boy can stay out of reform school if she consents to keep him is a very tame reaction from a mother who has been claiming all kinds of good intentions toward her boy's welfare. When her son divulges the fact that he can be her full-time responsibility, the inconvenience, the adjustments cause her perturbation. She promises the boy to do her best to keep him, not because of the terror he has experienced there and will continue to, but because "I don't like to think of my boy in a place called "the cage" (p. 31). Unfortunately, her later efforts on behalf of the boy are
complicated by her involvement with Bernie Slovenk. It seems quite feasible that a tolerable living situation could be arranged if her lover was not even more unwilling than she to accept change and revision. But he is being honest in his reaction to the situation, whereas a great deal of Sue's deliberation is determined by what she feels should be said or done by an "admirable" individual and not by what she truthfully feels. When she tries to impress Bernie with the importance of things other than his pipe dreams (in which head-waiters jump at the command of a wealthy patron) or the need to "be in the chips" (p. 47), she is attempting to argue by using examples that stem from the basic urges that have motivated her throughout her adult years. Therefore, her sincerity is questionable. It is conceivable that Inge intends for every one of the character's reactions to come from an awareness of what should be felt by worthwhile people or what should be done by admirable people. That becomes, eventually, decisive action in her hypocritical or pretentious behavior. Inge inaugurates an emptiness in Sue with her very first line of dialogue, "Standin' here looking out at the world. God, it looks ugly at times" (p. 10). We learn, also, that a troubled feeling awakens her every morning, and intense dissatisfaction permeates every aspect of her life. She herself never admits that, as she insists upon remaining busy, aggressive, and
forward-moving. But at the core of her activity and her involvements is an apathy. It is not the kind of apathy that limits activity, but instead aggravates it, goads it on to do more, have more, and, hopefully, be more.

The character creation is not a monstrous one, however. There is such strong emphasis given to the changes in Sue--indications of what she once was capable of feeling--that no one-sided monster is created. This other side of the character is most evident when she is the recipient of her son's Christmas gift. As the great amount of effort and love her son has expended on her present becomes apparent to her, an image of the vulnerable girl she once was registers very closely:

Sue: He gave me something. (She shows the present) A present. My boy... gave me a present.
Bernie: Yah?
Sue: Oh God, Bernie, I never thought I could feel this way. (p. 49)

Other happenings in the play manifest Sue's insecurities and vulnerability. Her mistrust of her own appearance can cause her great pain, particularly when it is exacerbated by others. Bernie's reminders of the aging process cruelly but effectively diminish Sue's power. Also, her need of Bernie as something to hang on to is another indication that human cracks exist in this female tower of strength.

Sue Barker has been wrought by Inge in a manner that
dramatized the dilemma of the mid-Twentieth Century liberated woman. The struggle of women, in the early 1960's, had reached just the point of open rebellion. That vigorous reawakening was riddled with hypocrises and moral doubts, moods of aggression and complacency, preachments of ruthlessness and sentimentality. Sue Barker is a single character, but she also well represents many women of that time. The contrasting features that Inge has included in the creation of Sue cause her contradictory behavior; the confinements of the period and its mores contribute as well. For instance, she has a high-paying executive position and feels she deserves it. But as a female behaving as a passive, dependent woman, she should not be paying Bernie's bills. As to other people's concerns, she thinks Vince and Claire have a marriage that is a sham but is acceptably legal. She and Bernie care for each other but are not married and that is not something admirable as marriage is the only proper living arrangement she can accept fully. Sue's thoughts are very representative of the period of time before a new and strong burst in women's re-evaluation of their own truths and styles occurred. Too much abused not to have strengthened herself, Sue Barker has altered herself. She has made herself strong. But she remains too initially conditioned by society to accept easily the changes in her, and she suffers guilt for her
differences.

The guilt and pretense in Sue are brought to a head by the pressures from her son and lover. Both men are demanding her, and it is inevitable that the situation must be faced. When it is time for a decision, Sue's need of Bernie wins out over the demands of her child. There had never been an actual contest. All that was wanting was Sue's break-through to her realization. It is tragic for Donnie that she lets him know in so ugly a fashion that she does not want him. It is unintentional that in struggling to free herself from his hold, she calls him worthless and unwanted. Inge's creation of Sue is thorough and convincing. It can be assumed that after the killing that ends the play, she would have never understood the extent of her indirect involvement, but would have stood by her sick son through the embarrassment and the pain. That would be caused by her belief in doing the correct thing. The "Mama Lion" would never be done in.

THE CHARACTER OF BERNIE SLOVENK

With Shakespeare or Racine, what is said is the most important consideration. With a Dumas or Sardou what is done is most important and with an Ibsen or Chekhov, what
is thought and felt is most important. It is with the latter that William Inge belongs. Language and action in an Inge play are impelled by the character constructs he has arrived at based on a sensitive, studious observance of human behavior and a serious deduction of its causes. Converted to and adept at using the Freudian concepts concerning man's subconscious urges, Inge has an impressive roster of character constructions that manifest so well the very things they want least to evidence or cannot even acknowledge that they possess.

Bernie Slovenk, in _Natural Affection_, is designated as a burly, roughly attractive, virile-looking man who can attract other human beings by this external appearance. His personality contains elements of dissatisfaction, bitterness, rigidity, limited intellect and a strong strain of "machismo," that belief in excessive masculinity. He is lacking in self-confidence and is worshipful of the bitch-goddess, success. The former he does not acknowledge except in moments of off-guard behavior with Sue, and the latter is at the very core of his existence. The disposition of Bernie Slovenk as ordered by playwright Inge is vital to the play's predicament. Had the character been prepared with other motivations and deliberation, the outcome of the action for Sue Barker would have altered. But Bernie as Bernie
is very clearly drawn. His self-image is the conditioning factor that affects his relationship with Sue Barker and her son.

In the very first scene, Inge establishes immediately Bernie's self-absorption. Told by Sue that she is having difficulties, Bernie cannot muster any kind of concern for her; it is his well-being and comfort that side-track him. His almost absolute inability to consider the needs of another before his own becomes a kind of mental cruelty and emotional assault upon any intimate. From the description, however, of his family and social background, it is clear that Inge intends also that Bernie be considered a victim of society's treatment. But because of his having been victimized, he will seek to victimize wherever he can. At this point, the only person on whom he can vent his frustration and anger is the woman he (in his way) loves:

No dame slaps me without getting the same thing in return. Ya di' n' think I'd do it, did ya? You dames think you can run right over a man, don't ya? Kick him, insult him, and he's not gonna do anything in return. Yah. You think you got all the right, don't ya? You can walk right into the business world and take a high-paying job away from some man and still expect him to open the door for ya and tip his hat. (p. 61)

Inge creates a peacock kind of man who pretends to love himself, but whose every self-compliment is suspect.
By the time I'm thirty-six, I'm gonna have me a li'l agency, all my own. Classy li'l foreign cars, maybe Alfa Romeos. Smart li'l showroom out in Evanston, maybe. (p. 11)

Then Christmas Eve, we're all goin' to the Playboy Club. I may have to use a little influence to get a table, but I can prob'ly manage. (p. 41)

A few times when conditions get unbearable and he is unable to keep up the front that he thinks is vital to his existence, he becomes honest and his true feelings surface:

Bernie: Me? A father? That can't even hold down a decent job?
Sue: (With pity.) Bernie.
Bernie: I couldn't look the kid in the face if he called me Father.
Sue: Just because you're not driving a Cadillac any more, you lose all your confidence.
Bernie: Sue, don't you see? There's nothin' I can do for the kid. I got nothin' he wants. I'd like to see the look on his face if I started callin' him son and tellin' him what to do. (p. 65)

Bernie is most often insensitive to other people's pain because he refuses to think about anything in a philosophic or abstract manner. The practical, material world of comfort, prestige, and financial success are his matrices and he finds them to be heavy burdens. He voices complaints that his problems are not other's concerns; theirs should not be his. He is as problem-ridden as the other characters in the play. His physical strength
and healthy appearance disguise a fumbling, lost man whose life-long dreams of the "big-time" are at variance with his abilities and energies. He personally feels worthless and a failure. He has no money, no job, no education. So he pretends with a "silk dinner jacket and gold watch chain and Italian shoes..." (p. 33). Prestige is his main objective. As far as he is concerned, if he, like Vince, could be given the best table at a restaurant he could bear all the futility he feels in his private life. But since he does not have the money or position to buy such attention, he substitutes a little personal power in the home. He is the "man of the house", and in his house reality must be his reality. So Sue cannot even state a simple fact if he finds it at all degrading to him. For instance, she mentions that she has to work to pay the bills, and he threatens to beat her up for it. His not providing is further evidence of his being unsuccessful, and he feels demeaned by it.

Why would a man like Bernie not go all the way and find someone with whom to share his life who would be safely inferior to him and comparatively harmless to his ego? Inge has been selective in his depiction of the male/female situation in Natural Affection. He depicts his character of Bernie, who so obviously views all of life in terms of ownership, as being logically attracted
to a woman who brings to him a piece of her success. The playwright establishes the pride Bernie feels for his woman's success and then complicates it with the jealousy he must also feel. Bernie has made her love him, and if she loves him she owes part of herself to him as well as part of everything she achieves. The admiration in telling her that she has gone pretty far for a woman causes a need for self-bolstering, and he is not going to let that go unrecorded. "Remember a man don't like his own li'l contribution to be overlooked" (p. 17). Her achievement can also remind him of his inadequancy. "I'm not gonna marry a broad who can brag she makes more money'n I do" (p. 15). That easily causes a rift in their relationship when Sue is not careful enough to disguise certain facts and to behave toward Bernie in a manner that will palliate the situation.

Bernie's established moral and social code is, however, more simple than Sue's. Possessing insouciance as far as the behavior of others is concerned, he is not shockable and accepts others' peccadilloes without condemnation. He can even supply a sex partner for his friend's wife or cheat on Sue without considering the actions immoral. But the thought of being considered a "gigolo" he will not accept. He has decided that the advantages of living off Sue is a temporary state and
therefore tenable. He is keeping up his end of a temporary bargain by loving her. It is when he realizes that it is not temporary and that he is in real trouble that Bernie's fabrications shatter. When Vince's words concerning life's fears apply to him, Bernie must run from reality, i.e., Sue:

I can't seem to hold onto anything. 
Life's slipping away and I never learned what it's all about. I dunno how to live. I oughta have someone teach me. I dunno how to live. (p. 58)

With the tensions caused by Donnie's visit and a heightening of his particular problems, Bernie realizes that the "big success" he has waited for is not ever going to happen. It is necessary, therefore, that he walk out on Sue, and in so doing, he forces her to take a decisive action affecting herself, the boy, and himself.

**THE CHARACTER OF DONNIE BARKER**

The verbal introduction of the character of Sue's son sets up the decisive dilemma for the action within the play. After his mother's initial announcement that he is returning, Bernie's further questioning concerning the boy's past experiences allows for further description of Donnie:
Sue: All this time, I been tellin' ya that Donnie was away at a private school, but the truth is...
Bernie: Go on.
Sue: ...a work farm.
Bernie: A reform school.

Sue: He just got in with the wrong bunch of boys, Bernie.
Bernie: What'd he do?
Sue: He...stole a car. He and some other boys...He...beat up some woman...Some woman he met in Lincoln Park. I don't know how it all happened.
Bernie: (Repelled) Jesus, (p. 13)

Bernie's shocked reaction to this first reference to the hostile violence that can erupt from the boy compels Sue to attempt an explanation that will expiate the boy from guilt or, at least, allow Bernie to understand the societal influences that wielded force in afflicting him:

Sue: ...Donnie just never had a chance. Ya gotta remember, he was raised in an orphanage. I tried to keep him after he was born, but I couldn't. His father ran off like a goat, and I di'n' have the money to hire someone to stay with him after I got a job. ...I di'n' know what those orphanages were like. I s'posed they took good care of the kids.
Bernie: That's a laugh.
Sue: I know that now. They just learn more meanness than they know when they get there. I di'n' know my Donnie when he got out three years ago. He was like an animal, and I worried about him night and day. He wouldn't stay in school, and he couldn't keep a job, and he was out running around the city all the time, getting into trouble. (p. 14)
Discussed in that manner, before he appears, the character is quite thoroughly described. Bernie learns of his aggressive, worldly wise behavior, and Inge has succeeded in apprising the audience of a character that is potentially dangerous to others and to himself as well. His mother's extravagant happiness with him as her first belonging—a time she describes as "the happiest time in my whole life" (p. 17)—is revelatory of Sue's attitude, but in a clear way it is also preparing the audience for the young man who is to become the third member of a love triangle. Bernie's reaction to Sue's intense reminiscences concerning her happiness with the child is that of a jealous lover. "Zat so. Seems to me, I can remember a few times when I made ya pretty happy" (p. 17). Hence, in Donnie Barker's case, a substantial amount about the character is already known and others' attitudes toward him have also been established before his appearance in the play.

In the second scene, when Donnie and his friend are let into the apartment by the superintendent, the visual introduction to the character both enhances and contrasts with that which we already have been led to assume. He is different from his crony, Gil, and the point is essential. We are led to recognize a code of honor, a striving on the boy's part to overcome, even at this late
stage, the deprivations we generally associate with orphanages and reformatories. As Gil accosts the apartment and rummages the refrigerator for food and beer, Donnie "wanders around the apartment strangely as though in some forbidden haven. Slowly he is drawn to his mother's bedroom, cluttered with her personal belongings . . ." (p. 22). In a private moment of great intimacy, the boy fondles and cherishes the objects belonging to his mother. The young tough described earlier in the play has been revealed by Inge to possess contradictory complexities as well. The confusion in the boy is almost uncontrollable as he, at one moment, proclaims all the things he desires and yet cannot be coerced by his friend into admitting that he will do anything illegal or harmful to achieve these ends. He has learned one thing of value for himself while incarcerated. He can make things with his hands. Inge shows through his claims and also with the later dramatic action of his mother's Christmas gift that the boy has capabilities that the right circumstances could enhance.

Sue's return to the apartment and her reunion with Donnie strongly suggests the ambivalent bond the boy is fighting concerning his distant yet revered mother:
Sue: And then one time, I left you one of my handkerchiefs with some of the perfume soaked in the corner, and you kept it with you all the time. You said it made you feel like you had me with you. Remember?

Donnie: (Squirming out of her embrace.) Mom, you're suffocating me. (p. 26)

Because the woman has been away from him for such periods after the intense early bondage agrees exactly with the Freudian concept of the Oedipal bond established at the breast. The subsequent loss of her and his inordinate pride in her, Inge postulates as vital causes for the boy's illness. Those who do not accept orthodox psychological precepts may disagree with Inge's usage of such psychological formulas. But the consistency of Inge's view as applied to his character delineation cannot be denied. His ability to combine the traits of character into the construction of Donnie Barker, who as drawn would plausibly impel the action, is a tribute to the playwright. The Inge-held view is that before behaviorism or environmentalism began its work on the boy, subconscious urges between the boy and his mother were established. The tragedy of the situation is that unlike the dilemma in *A Loss of Roses* (where the overdeveloped yearnings lodge also in the concerned, astute mother), here the boy is left to fend totally for himself without knowing the basic drive that is disrupting
so much of his behavior. He woos his mother as a suitor as he divulges information concerning his rival, Bernie, and he attempts to denigrate him in her estimation. Needing her acceptance, he also wishes to impress her. "Mom, I can sing, too. I'm just as good as Fabian or any a those guys. I bet I could make a lotta money, Mom. I bet I could be famous" (p. 39). There are motivational, deliberative traits in the character used by Inge to have him attempt to get what he wants. However, his hostility toward women, his beating up of the woman for which he was jailed, his need for depressant pills, and his final ugly rage that ends the play in horrifying violence are not meant by Inge to be conscious acts. They are the decisive actions of a character whose deliberation ends somewhere before their enactment. Donnie is motivated to woo his mother and denigrate Bernie. For that, he chooses his tactics well and tries with all the usable traits that Inge had melded into the character. The erratic actions are those that Donnie performs without the logic and equilibrium demanded of a playwright's creations. The talent of this playwright consists in having instilled enough traits, and in having his creations manifest them sufficiently so as to make the senseless actions—if not incontestable—at least acceptable. The critical
controversy concerning Donnie's final murderous act was never based on the charge that it would not happen. The critical reaction was basically concerned with whether the audience should have seen it happen. The play as constructed by Inge is peopled with individual character creations that will show the extent to which such problems in such people could result in such action. Natural Affection contains character work by Inge in a compassionate play that is "unremittingly human, powerfully honest, mercilessly candid."\(^\text{12}\)

CONCLUSION

Every play arouses emotions, and nearly all plays attempt to develop emotions both in the characters and in the members of the audience. Usually, a play also attempts to complete its development of emotion by rounding out action and drawing an acceptable resolution to the conflict generated by the script. Catharsis, following the arousal and development of certain emotions, completes them. It is then an element of dramatic structure; a playwriting device that exists in a well-prepared script. The conflict in Inge's *Natural Affection* contains catharsis. The individual peculiarities of Sue Barker, Donnie, and Bernie Slovenk are made to rub against each other to produce the action within the apartment that culminates in the climactic statement, "I'm not going to give up the rest of my life to keep a worthless kid I never wanted in the first place" (p. 68). All the friction of the previous weeks and the societal forces of alienation of the years before have brought those characters to that statement and to the boy's murder of a strange woman. Inge's usage of this specific story as commentary is evident from his Foreword
to the play:

I guess I could say that in my play, I wanted to expose some of the atmosphere in our lives that created violence. . . . I ignored world news to read the stories of teen-age violence in the newspapers. I read them avidly, for they seemed to show something very significant about our times.13

**Natural Affection** is a very tightly structured play. Its form results from the tightness of the situation caused by the tense characters in their small world of the crowded apartment in which they find themselves. The confrontation of the three major characters changes all three of them. Sue is forced to admit a truth she has hidden and disguised for years. Bernie confronts and buries a "pipe-dream," while Donnie is carried to an out-of-control emotional peak and to an act of crazed murder. They share an equal importance to the action. The resolution could not have occurred without the specific participation of each of them. The arrangement in the play is very clear; incident after incident is coherently related by causality of some sort, until the seemingly wild action by Donnie is almost inevitable. The critical reaction to the on-stage murder, as discussed earlier, can also be analyzed on the basis of structure. For Inge, in **Natural Affection**, builds his

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13 William Inge, Foreword to **Natural Affection**, p. 6.
events to the point of their most intense crisis and leaves them there. There is, therefore, no built-in purgation of any feelings he has aroused. There is no attempt to resolve with an ultimate catharsis. What has been generated remains, and the indication is that circumstances will get worse before they get any better or can in anyway be resolved.

All three of the major characters are developed to a comparable level. Each represents a human being with an unique complex of physiological and psychological elements. They are, to use Professor Smiley's definition, "effective characters. . . (that) are partially types; they are in some degree universal, recognizable to many people. . . (and) render action appropriately". All six kinds of traits (biological, physical, dispositional, motivational, deliberative, and decisive) have been incorporated in their creation by Inge. All of the traits from biological thru decisive are very evident in the play's action. A possible confusion in their analyses could occur with the reversal reached at the play's end. Sue's cry about the boy's worthlessness and Donnie's subsequent act of crime are propounded by Inge as actions that are not under the control of

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_{14}Smiley, p. 91.
the decision-making apparatus of either of the characters. Rather, they are actions that happen as a consequence of social pressure and subconscious conditioning.

The supporting characters, Claire and Vince Brinkman, are also well realized to the extent demanded by the script. They are complicating factors in the major thrust of the play, and they are also further personifications of the dispossessed, alienated society about which the author is writing. Smiley advises, "Not every character needs every kind of trait. Any one of the six levels may be enough to characterize the personage depending upon the function of that personage in the play."\(^1\)

The level of attractiveness in any of the play's characters has been and remains a source of controversy. Upon viewing the New York production, Robert Coleman wrote, "Its people are not the sort we would like to know, but rather to avoid at all costs,"\(^2\) while Walter Kerr saw "a total preoccupation with the aberrant."\(^3\) Inge explained, "All I ever wanted or expected the play

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 89.
\(^2\)Robert Coleman, _NYTCR_, December 12, 1957.
to show is an area of ugliness in our life today that, although we don't all live in it, is never far away." The cast of characters is rife with personifications of less than admirable people, but they do prove Inge's contention that something very important is lacking in the progress that has been made by the modern world. These imperfections may be distasteful in human beings, but as character creations, they are distinctive traits and qualities that give Sue, Donnie, Bernie, and their fellows consistency and credibility. The play is upsetting because the playwriting evidences a shrewd observation of existing reality. Inge's depiction of the social scene and his specifics of place (the descriptions of the city and the style of the apartment, for instance) and time (the Tennessee Williams play-run, the Playboy Club, the prestige of an Alfa Romeo automobile) are correct and pertinent.

All of the characters expend an enormous amount of energy attempting to attain what they think they want or need. Donnie, for instance, uses all that he can devise to replace Bernie in his mother's affections. What he has to use is limited, to be sure. But as a character, he is sympathetic in his sickness as, perhaps,

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18Inge, Foreword to *Natural Affection*, p. 5.
the hunchback of Notre Dame is sympathetic in his deformity.

The diction of *Natural Affection*’s characters is meant by Inge to be the language of the minimally educated, urban, working-class. Bernie and Donnie are clearly indicative of that. Sue has been given enough pretension in her diction to substantiate the social-climbing character as drawn. The language of them all is vulgar, topical, and utilitarian. It is astutely devised to be tape-recorder clear.

*Natural Affection* will become a more producible play as it moves farther away in time from the period in which and for which it was originally conceived. Its social commentary is clearly tied to the 1955-1965 decade and is well done. The basic conflict between its characters, however, while occurring in a particular milieu, can be pertinent and recognizable in other times and places. Future productions of the piece, while maintaining this sense of time and place as it is ingrained in the script, may utilize filmic techniques, film footage itself, or an "impressionistic" set to convey its intent. Whatever scenic design approach is used, the characters must reveal the psychological interrelation that Inge has supplied. It is necessary to

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19See Exhibit D in Appendix for listing of past productions according to Dramatists Play Service, Inc.
reach that level of intensity that will unleash the conflict and involve the audience.
This dissertation has investigated four selected plays of William Inge to examine his usage of character. To that end, a detailed scenario was traced for each play in a manner that apprised the reader of the dramatic action and the direct contribution of character to its formation. Secondly, several pivotal characters from each play were analyzed in order to determine the extent of psychological awareness at the command of the playwright. To treat the creations as theatrical constructs, the Aristotelian theory of characterization as it has been most recently delineated and extended by Sam Smiley in Playwriting: The Structure of Action was utilized as a model. Character relationships and the action/reaction form of character development which Inge selected for each script were also examined. That ability was found to have accomplished a consistency of behavior that in turn caused an inevitability of action that is convincing to an audience. Lastly, there is an intention outside of the study itself that directors and actors will find here an inducement to attempt to re-create effectively these
theatre pieces—both the well-known and the abandoned. That done, these works of an important American playwright will be kept alive to illuminate the interpretation of human nature that Inge perceptively rendered in so much of his work.

Previous studies have considered, to a limited degree, the playwright's biography and his varied, early career. The influences upon his work (such as his colleagues, family, and life-style) have only been suggested in those previous studies and remains an area for possible further investigation. At various points of his career, the body of Inge's work has been generally evaluated by writers. That has occurred several times in dissertation and thesis form, and more often in journals and magazines. However, the study of particular ingredients of his writing talent and further examination of his plays are in order and have been begun here.

From the study of these four plays has come firm evidence of Inge's playwriting talent. Each play is effectively realized because Inge has constructed characters who—through their relations with others—are led from a state of confusion or unhappiness to a greater acceptance of life or a deeper dissatisfaction with it. In the course of action of each play, the characters "become" something other than they originally were, and they experience change.
Inge's "philosophy of resignation" and his unhappy, yet hopeful, view of humanity are well represented by Come Back, Little Sheba, The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, A Loss of Roses, and Natural Affection. The playwright acknowledges the fear, the loneliness, and the urges of real people in the characters he has created to represent them. He is particularly adept at controlling the balance between what characters feel and the degree to which they can understand or articulate what they feel (e.g., Donnie Barker in Natural Affection behaves erratically with no idea as to why, whereas Helen Baird in A Loss of Roses understands that her inclinations are sinful but is not capable of articulating the precise nature of her problem). An excessive influence of Freudian precepts or what Lockwood has referred to as "Freudiology" has been shown throughout the study to be a possible interpretation of Inge's character work but not necessarily to be its single domination. Inge's character constructs may be better understood in general human terms. They are not simply standard Freudian personality configurations.

Rejecting play structure contrived specifically for plot action, Inge prefers to progress to dramatic action

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\(^1\)Lockwood, p. 188.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 193.
from characterization—the realization of characters' thoughts, dialogue, and needs. His plays are not actionless. The action of each play stems from character and achieves a distinctive style. In allowing a stronger control of character on action than of action on character, Inge achieves dissimilar results in the plays examined in this study. John Gassner has discussed his work as being representative of a "poetic realism" that can be observed in some playwrights of the Twentieth Century. They all achieved that style in that they attempted to use theatre's resources poetically "even when the life they have represented is externally commonplace and its milieu is prosaic." But such blanketing of the works of various playwrights does not preclude the individualism of each. The Inge plays, for instance, are true to themselves; each accomplishing its specific intention and achieving its distinctive style.

Another determination from this study concerns Inge's strict control of the degree to which a secondary character is developed. That is often determined by the amount of involvement each character has with the others in the play. For instance, Sammy Goldenbaum in The Dark at the Top of the Stairs functions as a catalyst for the Flood

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4Ibid.
household and is fully realized as a character. Turk, however, in *Come Back, Little Sheba*, is primarily involved with Marie, who in turn is the catalyst for the action in the Delaney household, so the development of Turk is accomplished to a lesser degree than is that of Sammy in *Dark/Stairs*.

Inge realizes the milieu of each play by means of the attitudes of his characters. What they believe and feel effectively conditions their behavior and reflects the attitudes and viewpoints of similar people of that social scene. For instance, it is an existence of basic survival, a concern with a needs system that swirls around materialism that gives *Natural Affection* its sordid look. Unlike characters and people who are looking to adapt themselves to life and who evidence concern for the future, the characters of *Natural Affection* work to adjust to a situation by knocking the edges off adversity. Adjustment is enough for them. It is that attitude that gives the play its lower class, "common" look, for Sue and Bernie give no careful analysis to their dilemmas. Rather, they move mindlessly from one situation to another. In that play, as in the others, Inge captured correctly the "pieces of life," those recognizable instances of real life, that particularize the social stratum of each play.

It has also been suggested that each play is a
favorable vehicle for directorial and acting achievement. The numerous qualities in these characters, their universalness combined with an uniqueness, and the still significant view of human nature that is to be found in all of them—Rubin, Lila, Kenny, Sue, Cora, Lola, Doc, Bernie, Marie, Lottie, Turk, Helen, Sammy, and Donnie—afford excellent opportunities for theatre craftsmen.

Further investigations may proceed in several directions. The playwright's use of diction, true in its vernacular and astute in its articulation, is a subject for further analysis. This precise usage cannot be labeled as only colloquial and utilitarian. The fact is that due to Inge's abilities, his dialogue effectively substantiates thought, reveals character, and coincides with behavior. It has been demonstrated, for instance, that Rubin, Lottie, and Cora in The Dark at the Top of the Stairs have each been given diction that is particular to that and only that character. It has also been shown that Inge has the ability to conceive and render dialogue for characters who experience feelings and emotions but are unable to voice them well. Such characters are kept to a degree of volubility that is correct for the character's perception of him or herself. Lola Delaney's dreams in Come Back, Little Sheba or Lila Green's neuroses in A Loss of Roses are not overstated but are accomplished
in a fashion that is correct for each. Word choices by Inge are cleverly controlled. The error in grammar by Doc Delaney at the close of Sheba is revealing. It is interesting that Lottie's language is laden with sexual allusions such as "stud," and "buck," and "big, long billy club." In reference to Sonny's recitation, Morris calls him "Edwin Booth," whereas Lottie and Rubin call him "Jackie Coogan." Their lack of understanding is evident by the description Inge has created for them to use. The usage of diction, both fundamental and casual is very much Inge's forte.

Another study might examine Inge's work in the light of Henry Stack Sullivan's "interpersonal theory of psychiatry," which views humans not as individual models but as variations of interpersonal relationships." It has been said of Sullivan's theory that

its major tenet as it relates to a theory of personality is that personality is the relatively enduring pattern of recurrent interpersonal situations which characterize a human life. Personality is a hypothetical entity which cannot be isolated from interpersonal situations, and interpersonal behavior is all that can be observed as personality.6

5 Calvin S. Hall & Gardner Lindzey, Theories of Personality, p. 134.
6 Ibid.
That theory was advocated strongly by Sullivan and others throughout the 1940's and 1950's. Inge's belief that an individual does not and cannot exist apart from his relations with other people conveys the "zeitgeist" and the thrust of the period's prevailing philosophic and psychological approaches, and could be further analyzed.

Long considered derivative and not innovative, Inge continued in the area of what might be termed "people drama." He shares this classification with other American playwrights such as O'Neill, Williams, Hellman, Miller, Odets, and Saroyan. The expression "people drama" may be defined as those plays that are impelled by a concern for "human nature" as opposed to "the human condition." Although such plays were in opposition to the trend of the 1960's in which experimental theatre and theatre of the absurd gained the greatest respect, Inge's people dramas will continue to be potent, long lasting theatre. Inge's influences on other American playwrights can be discerned. Paul Zindel is a direct disciple with his extremely popular The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds and And Miss Reardon Drinks A Little. John Guare and Terence McNally continue this genre, also. Other plays of the Inge style have been I Never Sang for My Father, The Hot L Baltimore, The Subject Was Roses, Boys in the Band and the Pulitzer Prize winning, That Championship Season,
among others.

Playwrights continue to write drama of character, and it remains the least faddish, the most universal, and the most satisfying of the theatre's myriad forms.
APPENDIX

Exhibit A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Play</th>
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</table>

I. What did you feel, when working on this role, would be the major qualities of character that would be communicated to an audience?

II. Was Mr. Inge's playwrighting style an advantage in realizing your role to some personal satisfaction. . . and if so, how?

III. In what way(s) were the difficult areas of characterization interesting to solve?

IV. In what way(s) were the Inge character you portrayed constructed by the playwright and interpreted by you so as to be universal yet unique, ordinary yet interesting?

V. Do you feel that Inge's view of life as designated in the play in which you performed was and continues to be significant?
Exhibit B

Acting Score for Marie Buckholder in *Come Back, Little Sheba*

I want attention, in my way, from people I select.

It's a beautiful day. I want to soak it all in, draw it all to me, it compliments me, it makes me feel so good, I step outside in my robe for anyone to see.

Doc: I want him to like me, I never had a father, I don't really know how to relate to a man except as a lover, so I tease him, flirt with him for his attentions, and I know he loves it.

Lola: She likes me, kind of envies me, makes a fuss over me and my life, she loves to talk about my boyfriends, and has a fascination for Turk, she amuses me, is a nice lady and I like her.

I want to flirt with Doc. I go in to see him in my nightgown, smile at him, laugh with him, lean back in chair, against sink, my arms out letting my robe shift open, fondle my hair, my glass, touch his hand, his face, dance around him, ask him for a kiss.

I want to involve Lola in my affairs. I talk to her about Bruce and Turk, tell her about contest, flatter her, listen to her, try and cheer her up, ask her to brush my hair, bring Turk home to pose, let her have a party for Bruce and I.

I want to enjoy the morning. I skip to the front door, step outside and stretch in the sunlight.
Turk: He's an athlete, "the best male model," Lola likes him, Doc doesn't, is jealous, he wants me, belongs to me and the other girls envy me, the boys know me, he satisfies me sexually without commitment so I can still marry Bruce.

I haven't seen Bruce for four months so I must be more beautiful than he remembers, and since the dinner and setting will reflect me and set the atmosphere, it must be perfect.

Bruce: He's rich, handsome, ambitious, high society, charming, can offer me security that I've never had, a family, everything I want. But I'm not sure why he's here so I must reinforce his desire and get him to propose to me. I want to marry now.

I want to entice Turk.

I want to make everything perfect for Bruce.

I want to convince Bruce to marry me.

I want to keep him waiting, I bring him home to pose, let him change in my bedroom, put him off when he tries to kiss me, I kiss him, I dance with him, I sit on his lap, I caress him, I invite him to spend the night.

I set the table, fix the lilacs, primp and fix myself, my hair, my dress set low off my shoulders, straighten my stockings.

I greet him, not very forwardly at first, then I kiss him, take him into my room, lean over to him on sofa, make a fuss over the necklace, light the candles and kiss him again.

I want to marry now.
I fought for this, risked, played both ends against each other and won. Now I've got everything just how I planned.

They've been very nice to me but I don't need them anymore so I want to tie off any loose ends without hurting anyone. I must leave them happy so that nothing spoils my happiness, and I really liked them, too.

I want to revel in my triumph.

I want to pay a debt to Delaneys.

I come rushing in at 6:00 in the morning, calling to Lola before I get to the door, bubbling we're getting married, show my ring running back and forth to each of them telling them of my plans, reaffirming them for myself.

I stop in my flurry of excitement, and my hurry to get out, I say good-bye, thank her and Doc, hug her and run off.
Exhibit C

Leasings for *A Loss of Roses* as supplied by Dramatists Play Service, Inc. listing nonprofessional productions of the play.

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Exhibit D

Leasings for *Natural Affection* as supplied by Dramatists Play Service, Inc. listing nonprofessional productions of the play.

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