AN OBJECTIVE STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
CERTAIN BASIC TECHNIQUES OF PLAYWRITING

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Master of Arts

by
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H. O. K.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Playwriting has long been considered as one of the most difficult forms of creative writing. To bring characters to life and to have them hold the multifarious interests of a typical audience while they unfold a story from a stage where every action executed and every word spoken must be carefully worked out in advance in order to give the appearance of reality to something that is highly artificial, is truly a challenging task—and a gratifying one when successfully executed. Just how is such execution to be accomplished? Or does anyone really know? Perhaps not, judging from the great number of unsuccessful plays produced on Broadway each season and the even greater number of dismal failures turned out in Hollywood year after year by men with a lifetime of experience at playwriting. It would almost seem that the art is largely a matter of hit and miss, that the success of a play hinges upon some great unknown or mystifying factors over which the playwright has no control. Such an assumption, justified as it may seem, is not well taken, however. There is a very definite body of knowledge concerning the correct way to construct a play, a knowledge that is as old as the earliest Greek
drama and as new as the Broadway hit show of next year. This body of accumulated knowledge teaches that there are certain basic techniques which are essential to the success of any play. It was the purpose of this study to determine what certain of these basic techniques are and to test out their effectiveness.

II. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The writer is fully aware of the dozens of excellent books which have been written setting forth the techniques of the craft to the would-be playwright, also of the countless empirical testings to which these techniques have been subjected. But he knows of no formal study available to the student of playwriting in which certain of these techniques have been objectively tested for proof of their soundness. In so far as this study attempts to do so, it is believed to be unique. It is believed to be important because intelligent people will have more confidence in any technique if formal proof that it is sound can be placed in their hands.

III. PROCEDURE USED IN THE STUDY

An original one-act play was written in conformity with the practices advocated by recognized authorities in the field, and an attempt was made to show the basic elements used in the play's construction. After the writing, the play was cast,
rehearsed, and then taken on a tour of a number of selected high schools in central Indiana, as well as presented before several adult groups. At each performance the audience reaction was carefully evaluated by the members of the cast, the author, and another competent observer. Parts of the play which failed to gain the desired response from an audience were revised and presented in the new form before the next audience. In this manner, the play underwent a great many revisions, some of them major changes and some of them slight. If audience reaction to a revised scene in the play consistently proved it to be superior to the original writing, as determined by the seven judges, then it was considered that the writing techniques employed in the revision had been proved to be sound.

The type of play written for this study was a farce-comedy because, evoking a clearly audible response, as it does, comedy is the easiest type of play to which an audience's reaction may be measured. This easily-measured reaction placed the entire process of revision upon as purely an objective basis as could be devised. As a matter of fact, the objectivity of the study was carried to the point of counting the number of laughs the play received when the varying versions of it were given. Thus, the final form of the play was thought to be as well constructed and as humorous as the inherent subject matter and the ability of the author
would permit, and, so, to demonstrate rather conclusively the
effectiveness of the playwriting techniques tested.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE THESIS

The play written for this experiment is reproduced in
chapter II. This reproduction is the final form of the play,
the final revision made in conformity with the findings re-
vealed in the sixteen performances in which it was presented.
Chapter III reviews the literature showing some elements nec-
essary to play construction and points out how an attempt was
made to include these elements in the first writing of the
play used in this study. Chapter IV reveals the experimenting
done and the revisions which were found desirable as a result
of that experimentation. The fifth chapter is a summary of
the experiment and a recounting of the conclusions reached.
CHAPTER II

THE INDISCREET GENERAL

THE SCENE: (The living room of the Haynes home. Down left is a sofa. Down right are an armchair and an end table. Up center is another armchair. There is an outside doorway down right and a doorway into the dining room up left. It is an evening in early fall.)

AT RISE: (Judson Haynes, fourteen, is alone on stage, sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of the armchair up center. His hands are clasped behind his head, and his head is tilted slightly back so that he stares fixedly up at a spot on the ceiling.)

Carol Haynes, a mature young woman, enters from left, carrying a large, brown, Manila envelope (approximately 9 X 12). She stops short at sight of Judson.)

CAROL
Oh, Judson, what in the world are you doing now? (Judson doesn't answer. She continues across stage toward the right exit.)

I don't know why you couldn't have gone to the movie with Mother and Father. (She disappears off right but only for a few seconds. She reenters almost immediately.)

You look like a cigar store Indian! Can't you sit in a chair like normal people?

JUDSON
(Rising to his feet in disgust.)

This position stimulates the brain cells by causing the blood to rush to the head. It's an old Yogi method of
concentration, and it works quite satisfactorily when every-
thing is quiet.

CAROL

Well, you're not a Yogi!

JUDSON

(Sitting in armchair up center.)
I'm not a rabbit either, but I eat carrots!

CAROL

Why don't you go over and visit Bobby Devers this eve-
ning?

JUDSON

(Suspiciously.)

Why?

CAROL

(Confused.)
Well, why shouldn't you? Bobby Devers and you are good
friends. You like each other. You have a good time to-
gether. Why shouldn't you go over and see him?

JUDSON

He's got mumps!

CAROL

Oh.

(She exits right again for a few seconds and is back almost immediately.)
Well, why don't you run down to the drug store and watch their television broadcast?

JUDSON

Why?

CAROL

(Sharply.)
Because tonight's that ball game you wanted to see!

JUDSON

(Patiently as though explaining to a child.)
That was last week. And it wasn't a ball game--it was a
wrestling match.

CAROL

Oh.

(A short pause.)
Well, you might go down to the library and read.
Are you trying to get rid of me?

Get rid of you?

Yes!

No! (She exits off right again and quickly reappears.)

Are you expecting someone?

Why, whatever made you think that?

(Pointing off right.)
You've gone in there and looked out the front door three times in the last five minutes--

(Quickly.)
I was seeing if it was dark yet.

(Continuing.)
--you talked Father and Mother into going to a movie when they didn't want to--

(Interrupting again.)
They did, too, want to!

--and now you're doing your best to get me out of the house! Why?

Oh, stop trying to act like a detective! If you really have to know everything, Andrew's going to be here to-night.

Why?
CAROL

(Shaking the envelope and speaking sharply.)
Because I saw Andrew's mother this afternoon and told her
about these old letters Uncle Martin gave me, and she told
Andrew about them.

(Realizing that she will get further with Judson
by being rational, she becomes abruptly agreeable.)

Andrew's writing a book about the Civil War, you know. He
thought he might find something interesting about General
Grant in these letters. He phoned over this afternoon and
said he'd like to stop in this evening and talk to me about
it.

JUDSON

Okay, then talk about it. What am I going to hurt?
Andrew wouldn't know what to do if the two of you were
alone, anyway. He's a dope!

CAROL

(Quickly.)
He is not a dope!

(She adds lamely.)
It's just that he gets so wrapped up in his books some-
times that he doesn't think of anything else.

JUDSON

If he's not a dope, then how come he doesn't know you're
punchy over him? Everyone else knows it!

CAROL

If you're implying that I care for Andrew, you're only
being ridiculous! He's just a friend of the family,
that's all.

JUDSON

Then why don't you want me around to hear what you say
to him?

CAROL

(Now definitely on the defensive.)
Well--Andrew's not the only one who's going to be here
tonight. Clint Lattigan's going to be here, too.

JUDSON

(Rising, dismayed.)
Not that drip from the newspaper?

CAROL

(Grimly.)
Yes, that drip from the newspaper!
JUDSON
That guy you went to the Summer Carnival with? The one who's always wanting to match people with that two-headed quarter?

CAROL
Yes, the one with the two-headed quarter! He's probably got a two-headed brother at home in the broom closet!

JUDSON
What's he coming here for?

CAROL
He wants to talk about Uncle Martin's old letters, too. He wants to publish them in his newspaper.

(Suspiciously.)
How does he know Uncle Martin gave you some old letters that used to belong to General Grant?

CAROL
Oh, Judson, please stop snooping around like a bloodhound! I've told you everything there is to tell about it. Two young men are coming here tonight to talk about some old letters that used to belong to General Grant. It's nothing but business, and business discussions should be carried on in private. Now you run along down to the drug store or someplace.

JUDSON
(Musing.)
Uuuhhh. Two men both show up on the same night to talk about some old letters Uncle Martin gave you. One of them you like. One of them you don't like.

CAROL
(Quickly.)
Two of them I don't like!

JUDSON
(Continuing with his musing.)
Yet they both show up at the same time after the same letters. Why?

CAROL
(Defiantly.)
Well--why?
JUDSON

(Accusingly.)
Because you know Andrew would do anything to get hold of some old letters that were written by General Grant, and if he sees you playing up to Clint Lattigan and about to give him those letters, Andrew might be willing to give you an engagement ring so he could get the letters himself.

CAROL
Oh, Judson! You're making me laugh! You're killing me!
(She forces herself to laugh, but it doesn't come off very well.)

Why would I want to be engaged to Andrew?

JUDSON
So you won't be an old maid!

CAROL
(Her forced merriment is cut off abruptly, and her whole manner is changed. She sits weakly on the sofa.)

You won't tell Andrew, will you, Judson?

JUDSON
Not if you buy me a hot fudge sundae.

CAROL
All right. My purse is on that table in the hall. Take fifteen cents out of it and buy yourself a hot fudge sundae.

JUDSON
How about taking twenty cents and getting one with whipped cream?

CAROL
All right. Take twenty cents and go.
(Judson turns toward right exit. Carol rises.)

On second thought, you'd better not leave until one of them gets here, Judson. Then if Clint Lattigan's first, you'd better wait around until Andrew comes.

JUDSON
What for?

CAROL
I don't want to be alone with Clint.

Why not?
CAROL
Never mind! You wouldn't understand!

JUDSON
But if Andrew gets here first, then it's okay for me to go, huh?

CAROL
Well, don't leave too soon. Wait around for a few minutes so Andrew won't think you're rushing off to avoid him.

JUDSON
How long do I have to wait?

CAROL
(Impatiently.) Oh, I don't know--three or four minutes!

JUDSON
(Moving toward right exit again.) Okay, but it'll be worth all I'm getting to listen to Andrew talk for three minutes.
(The doorbell sounds, and Judson turns to Carol.) There he is now! Or else it's that wolf in cheap clothing from the newspaper.

CAROL
It's Andrew. He's been coming here for twenty years, and he still rings the doorbell. Clint Lattigan's been here once, but I'll bet he just walks in. Go open the door, Judson.

(Judson exits right. Carol pats her hair into place and arranges herself carefully on the sofa, facing the right entrance. Andrew Courtney enters from the right, followed by Judson. Andrew is a studious looking young man with dark rimmed glasses. He carries two books. Judson sits in the armchair down right, takes a large, round pocket watch from his pocket and proceeds to time the scene. Andrew advances to the center. Carol rises and speaks brightly.)

CAROL
Well, Andrew! What a nice surprise! You don't usually come calling on Wednesday night. Is the library closed?

ANDREW
(Apologetically.) Surprise? But I thought I told you on the phone this
afternoon, Carol, that I'd stop in and see you this evening.

CAROL

Oh, yes! So you did! I guess I'd forgotten about it. Won't you sit down?

ANDREW

(Sitting on the sofa and placing the books beside him.)

Thank you. I thought we might talk a while, Carol. I hope you're not too tired out from your Uncle Martin's birthday party and your trip home.

CAROL

(Sitting on sofa, she moves Andrew's books to downstage end of the sofa.)

Oh, no! I rested on the train all morning. And it wasn't much of a birthday party. Uncle Martin has to take things pretty easy now. He's one hundred years old, you know.

ANDREW

(Eagerly.)

Yes, I know! My mother was telling me about the old letters of General Grant's that he gave you.

CAROL

(Indicating the envelope.)

Yes, I have them right here.

ANDREW

(Staring at the envelope in awe.)

Did your uncle know General Grant?

CAROL

Uncle Martin was General Grant's orderly during the Civil War. He handled all of his personal correspondence. These letters are some he found in his old army trunk several years ago.

ANDREW

Are they letters General Grant received from people?

CAROL

Yes, some of them are, and some of them are duplicates of letters General Grant sent.

ANDREW

(Excited.)

They must be very interesting!
CAROL
Oh, I don't think you'd find them interesting, Andrew.

ANDREW
Why not?

CAROL
Most of them are just old love letters. You'd probably think they're foolish. I think they're cute, though.

ANDREW
But some of them must be on more--more--important matters. Politics, war strategy, the campaign--

CAROL
(Indifferently.)
Oh, yes, he wrote about all those things, too.

ANDREW
(Rising, quite excited.)
Why, Carol, those letters are priceless! They may change history's whole interpretation of General Grant and his part in the Civil War!

CAROL
If you mean some people might be surprised when they read them, you're right! General Grant certainly didn't make all his history on the battlefield!

ANDREW
(Sitting on the sofa again.)
It's quite a coincidence! I'm writing a book on the Civil War, you know.

CAROL
Yes, I know.

ANDREW
I'll bet I could use some of the information in those letters.

CAROL
(Pointedly.)
Oh, I'm sure you could, Andrew! Any boy could--you especially!

ANDREW
I mean I could include some of the political and military views expressed by the General in my book!
CLINT

(Standing quickly and putting the watch back in his pocket.)

Three minutes and ten seconds! You owe me a nickle for overtime, Carol.
(He has just taken a step toward the right exit when Clint Lattigan enters. He is a loudly dressed young man about the same age as Andrew. Both Carol and Andrew rise. Andrew stands at the up stage end of the sofa.)

CLINT

Hello, everybody. Your bell didn't ring, Carol. Does it work any better when you push the button?

CAROL

(Meeting him at center stage.)

Oh, hello, Clint.
(She catches hold of his arm in a show of affection.)

I guess you know my brother Judson, don't you?

CLINT

Sure, I know Judson. I had to give him a quarter to leave us alone that night I brought you home from the Summer Carnival.

JUDSON

It was a dime!
(Exit right.)

CAROL

(Turning Clint toward Andrew.)

And this is Andrew Courtney. Andrew, this is Clint Lattigan. Andrew is a teacher and a good friend of mine.

CLINT

Glad to know you, Professor. Been getting any wormy apples lately?

ANDREW

(Coolly.)

How do you do, Mr. Lattigan?

CAROL

(Sitting on the sofa and indicating the spot occupied by Andrew's books.)

Sit here on the sofa, Clint.
(Andrew leans over the back of the sofa and grabs
up his books just in time to keep Clint from sitting on them.)

Clint is a newspaper reporter, Andrew. He writes some of the cleverest little stories!

CLINT
Yes, it's only fair to tell you, Professor, that whatever you say may appear against you—in print tomorrow.

CAROL
Oh, I don't believe you'll want to write anything about Andrew, Clint. He's not very sensational.

ANDREW
(Crossing to place his books on the end table down right and sitting in the armchair there.) I was never aware that being sensational is a virtue!

CLINT
I'll bet you weren't even aware that being virtuous is sensational!
(He laughs at his joke.)

CAROL
(Laughing with him and putting one hand on his arm in admiration.) Oh, Clint, you're so clever! Maybe you could get Clint to help you with your book, Andrew.

CLINT
You writing a book, Professor?

ANDREW
(Proudly.) Yes, I am—a history text book!

CAROL
It's about the Civil War. Andrew was just suggesting when you came in, Clint, that he might be able to use these old letters that Uncle Martin gave me.
(She indicates the envelope in her hand.)

CLINT
(Quickly.) You haven't made any deals with him yet, have you?

CAROL
No. He had just mentioned it.
CLINT
Well, don't you make any deals with anyone until you let me see those letters. Why, I'll bet I could double the newspaper's circulation with them. Of course, they might need to be pepped up a little in places.

ANDREW
(Rising, aghast.)
You wouldn't change the wording of General Grant's letters?

CLINT
(Modestly.)
Oh, just give them a little of that old Lattigan touch here and there.

ANDREW
You wouldn't dare!

CLINT
Take it easy, Professor! It's no reflection on the General. His job was fighting. Mine's writing.

CAROL
Oh, yes, Andrew! Clint's such a wonderful writer! Why he can take the most commonplace little incident and make it--utterly amazing! You wouldn't recognize it as the same story.

ANDREW
(Crossing toward the sofa.)
Carol! Are you out of your mind? You wouldn't let him change General Grant's letters around and then exhibit them in a daily newspaper like a--like an advertisement for tooth paste!

CLINT
What's wrong with my newspaper? Say, are you a Republican?

ANDREW
It's perfectly all right, Mr. Lattigan, for a newspaper. But it seems to me that letters from a personality as important in American history as General Grant should be presented to the public through some other medium--something--well--something more scholarly.

CLINT
(Insinuatingly.)
Like your book, Professor?
ANDREW
I wish you'd stop calling me professor! I'm not a profes-
sor! I'm an acting instructor in American history.  
(He starts to pace, but turns abruptly back toward  
Clint, shaking his finger.)  
--and I won't stand by and see General Grant treated this 
way.

CAROL
(Helplessly.)
Well, what do you suggest I do with the letters, Andrew?

ANDREW
(Sternly.)
I suggest that you turn the letters over to me. I'll use  
the ones that seem appropriate in my book and then give  
the whole collection to the city library when I'm through  
with them.

CLINT
(Rising quickly and addressing Andrew.)
Wait a minute!  
(He turns to face Carol.)
My paper will pay you plenty for first crack at those let-
ters, Carol! We'll feature them in next Sunday's edition.

ANDREW
I'll give you as much as he will, Carol!

CAROL
(Rising and crossing to the end table, she speaks  
with her back turned to the two men.)
But I just couldn't take money for them! It would seem  
too--too mercenary--almost sacrilegious--considering how  
intimate the letters are. There's only one way I could  
show them to anyone--and that's if I were related to the  
person. If he were actually a member of the family, it  
wouldn't seem so bad--someway.

ANDREW
But that's ridiculous! You can't deny my seeing those  
letters just because we're not related! That makes it  
impossible for me to ever see them!

CAROL
We could be related, Andrew!

(Amazed.)
You mean--husband and wife?
CAROL

(Turning quickly to face him.)
Andrew! Are you proposing to me?

ANDREW

(Quickly.)
No! Just supposing! Why, I—I never had any idea, Carol, that you had ever thought seriously about getting married.

CAROL

(Defiantly.)
What's wrong with getting married?

ANDREW

Nothing! It's just that—it seems like only yesterday that you were still making mud pies.

CAROL

Well, now I want to make apple pie—in my own kitchen!

CLINT

(Crossing over to Carol.)
I don't blame you, Carol! I'll bet you make swell apple pie!

CAROL

(Taking him by the arm and leaning her head against his shoulder for Andrew to see.)
Do you, Clint? You're sweet.

CLINT

Let's set down, Carol.
(He leads her to the sofa, and they both sit down with Carol up stage.)
If you was to give those letters to me, Carol, I'd give you a personal mention in the story I write—even use your picture.

ANDREW

(Hurrying to the sofa and sitting on the other side of Carol.)
I'll dedicate my book to you, Carol!

CLINT

I'd do anything you asked me to!

ANDREW

I would, too!
I'd love and cherish you forever!

ANDREW

I'd love and cherish you forever, too!

CLINT

I'll marry you!

CLINT

(To Clint.)

Marry her?

CLINT

Yes, marry her!

CAROL

(Looking expectantly at Andrew.)

Well, Andrew?

ANDREW

(Rising.)

If this is an auction, Carol, I think you've just heard the top bid!

CAROL

Do you really want to marry me, Clint?

CLINT

You know I do, Carol! I'll eat your apple pies for the rest of my life!

ANDREW

(Triumphantly.)

Hah! I used to eat her mud pies!

CAROL

(Rising and crossing down right.)

I had no idea you would both think Uncle Martin's old papers are so valuable. Of course, I want to be fair, but we're not getting anything settled like this. (Turning to face the two men.) Suppose I talk to you one at a time while the other one waits out in the dining room?

ANDREW

(Moving rapidly toward Carol.)

That's fine! I'll talk to you first!
CLINT
(Rising and crossing toward her, too.)
You will not! I'll talk to her first!

ANDREW
You tell him, Carol! Tell him to wait in the dining room while I talk to you!

CAROL
If you two don't act just like little boys! You have that quarter of yours, don't you, Clint? Why don't you toss it to see who's first?

CLINT
(Quickly.)
Sure! I'll take heads!
(He reaches into a pocket.)
Okay?

ANDREW
(Gravely.)
Well—that would be gambling. But—well—all right!
You take heads?

CLINT
Yes.

ANDREW
Very well; I'll take tails!
(Clint tosses the coin into the air, catches it in one hand and places it on the back of the other. Andrew peers at it anxiously.)

CLINT
(Without looking at the coin.)
It's heads! You wait in the other room! I talk to Carol first.
(He puts one arm around her shoulders. Carol lays her head against him contentedly.)

ANDREW
(Heading toward the left exit slowly, glaring back.)
I'll give you five minutes.
(Exit left.)

CAROL
(Throwing Clint's arm from her shoulder and stepping back.)
Don't you dare touch me, Clint Lattigan! That was a con-
temptible little trick to play on Andrew! Cheating him
with that quarter that's heads on both sides!

But you told me to use it!

CLINT

What if I did? Haven't you got a mind of your own?

CLINT

(Moving close to her.)
Sure I have! And it told me to cheat him, too!
(In the scene that follows, each time that Clint
approaches Carol, she moves to avoid him.)

CAROL

(Crossing down left.)
Oh! You're impossible!

CLINT

(Following after her.)
Well, anyway we're rid of him now. We can plan our
wedding.

CAROL

(Turning on him furiously.)
Wedding? Do you think I'd marry a man who thinks more of
a newspaper's circulation than he does of mine?

CLINT

I don't think more of the newspaper than I do you!

CAROL

(Moving up right.)
You do, too! You're talking about marrying me, and you've
never said yet that you love me!

CLINT

(Following her and speaking in irritation.)
Why, you know I love you--Sweetheart!

Say it, then!

CAROL

I love you!

CLINT

(Crossing down right.)
You don't either! You love your newspaper!
CAROL.

You do, tool 334
(She crosses angrily to stand before the sofa.)

CLINT

What's the matter with you?

CAROL

Why don't you deny it when I say you think more of your newspaper than you do me?

(Moving close to her again.)

I do deny it!

CLINT

Say it, then!

CAROL

I don't think more of the newspaper than I do you!

CLINT

You do, too!

(She crosses angrily to stand before the sofa.)

CLINT

(Following after her.)

You're just excited, Carol. Here.

(He tries to take her into his arms. She gives him a shove, and he falls backward onto the sofa just as Andrew appears in the left doorway.)

ANDREW

(Calling from the doorway.)

Remember, Carol, if he offers you money, I'll give you as much as he will!

(Carol throws herself immediately onto the sofa with her arms around Clint's neck for Andrew to see. Andrew comes up to the sofa and looks anxiously down at them.)

I said, remember, Carol, that I'll give you as much money as he will for those letters!

CAROL

Oh, go away, Andrew! Can't you see we've got a lot of--

talking to do?

CLINT

(Recovering from his surprise and putting his arms around Carol.)

Yeah, Professor, scram!

(Andrew turns slowly and heads for the left exit.
Carol raises her head and watches him disappear.)
CAROL
(Disengaging herself furiously from Clint's embrace.)
Let me loose, Clint Lattigan! You're the most insulting man I ever knew!
(She breaks out of Clint's arms, stands, and crosses down right.)

(Rising angrily.)
I suppose I shoved you just now!

CAROL
A gentleman wouldn't even mention such a thing!

CLINT
Who cares what a gentleman'd do? I'm a newspaper man!

CAROL
Then I'll give you a news item! I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth!
(She turns away.)

CLINT
(Advancing toward her.)
Oh, playing hard to get, huh?
(He takes her by the arm and turns her around to face him.)

CAROL
(Slapping him at the side of the face.)
You keep your hands to yourself, Clint Lattigan!
(Andrew appears in the left exit again.)

ANDREW
(Calling from the doorway.)
And don't you sign anything, Carol!
(At sight of Andrew, Carol throws herself quickly against Clint and places his arms up about her waist. She raises her face to his. Andrew comes up close to them. Clint stands stupidly.)
You haven't signed anything, have you, Carol?

CAROL
Looking into Clint's face, enraptured.
No, Andrew.

ANDREW
Well, don't be!
(He turns back toward the left exit.)
CAROL
(Pushing Clint's hands aside and speaking sternly.)
Andrew, if you're going to keep breaking in here every few seconds, Clint and I aren't going to get anything settled. You might as well stay while you're here this time, and I'll talk with you now.

ANDREW
(Turning back toward her and indicating Clint.)
Make him leave!

CAROL
(Walking toward the left exit with Clint, her arm around his waist.)
You better wait in the dining room, Clint. It will only be for a few minutes.
(Completely bewildered, Clint allows himself to be pushed through the left exit. Andrew moves down right. Carol turns back into the room.)
Well, what do you want to say, Andrew?

ANDREW
(In the manner of making a speech.)
In the first place I'd like to remind you that you're an American citizen, and you should be proud of America's history.

CAROL
What does history have to do with it?

ANDREW
(Sharply.)
History has everything to do with it!

CAROL
Oh, there you go again! Can't you forget that you're a history teacher just once? Clint Lattigan loves me and wants to marry me. Is that anything to write a history book about?

ANDREW
I didn't have reference to your petty love affair with Clint Lattigan! I was talking about General Grant!
(His voice becomes pleading, and he moves close to her.)
Don't you see, Carol, that if you permit a newspaper to publish his old love letters indiscriminately, it might lower him in the eyes of future generations? One of the greatest heroes in American history?
CAROL
(Moving down left.)
General Grant should have thought of that when he wrote
the letters!
(Turning to face him again.)
And you should mind your own business!

ANDREW
(Moving down center.)
Now you're trying to change the subject! You sound just
like—like a nagging wife!

CAROL
(Anxiously.)
Are you proposing to me, Andrew?

ANDREW
No, I'm not proposing to you! How many proposals do you
want in one day?

CAROL
I certainly don't want any from you!
(She turns away from him.)
I just wanted to know if you'd proposed so I could say no
if you had. I've just had the most beautiful proposal
any girl ever had—from a man who loves me!

ANDREW
Love! I can quote from three different sources to prove
that love is nothing more nor less than certain chemical
changes in the blood stream! You can find all the in-
gredients of love in any drug store!

CAROL
(Defiantly.)
Maybe so, but I'll bet you can find it quicker around the
soda fountain than you can the prescription counter!

ANDREW
You don't know what love is! If you did, you wouldn't be
so cruel to a man who has fought for you—sacrificed for
you!

CAROL
(Her voice suddenly tender and filled with wonder.)
I didn't know you ever fought for me, Andrew, or sacri-
ficed.
I'm talking about General Grant!

General Grant! General Grant! I'll bet you'd stand still and let General Grant's horse bite you! You're the one who doesn't know anything about love! You're afraid of it!

That's downright ridiculous! What is there to be afraid of?

I dare you to put your arms around me!

Then, if you're not afraid, put your arms around me!

Why should I?

I don't know anything about love! You're afraid of it!

Put your head on my shoulder.

What are you thinking about now, Andrew?

I'm thinking that if a girl ever had any real regard for a man, that it could never die out completely.

Oh, no, Andrew! Never!

And that she would never permit personal gain or anything else to come between them.

Oh, no, Andrew! Nothing would ever separate us! We'd be together for always--just the way we used to be when we were kids playing house!
ANDREW

(aising his head.)
I'm not talking about us, Carol! I'm talking about you and General Grant!

CAROL

(Jerking loose from him.)
Oh, Andrew! You--you--you--

JUDSON

(Supplying the word for Carol.)
Dope?

CAROL

---you Dope!
(She rushes off left, crying loudly. Judson moves to right center. Clint enters immediately from left.)

CLINT

(Advancing rapidly down center.)
What'd you do to her?

ANDREW

I didn't do anything to her! She's just an emotional female--that's all!

CLINT

She didn't show you the letters, did she?

ANDREW

We didn't even talk about the letters!

CLINT

(Suspiciously.)
What'd you talk about?

ANDREW

Well, we talked about--
(He suddenly realizes that he doesn't know what they talked about.)
I don't know what we talked about! Love, I guess!

JUDSON

How come girls want to talk about love all the time?

CLINT

Don't ask him, Kid! He don't know!
JUDSON

You oughta write a column on advice to the love lorn!

ANDREW

Look here, Lattigan, are you insinuating something?

CLINT

Okay, then, Professor! Go ahead and tell the kid about love— if you know!

ANDREW

(To Judson.)
Well— it is a bit difficult to explain— logically. (He begins to pace as he talks, very uncomfortable.) It seems that there's a certain attraction between the male and the female of any species. This natural affection between the sexes is commonly known as love.

CLINT

You oughta write a column on advice to the love lorn!

JUDSON

(To Andrew.)
I suppose you're referring to an attraction like that between General Grant and the farmer's daughter.

CLINT

Don't tell me these stories about farmers' daughters go back that far!

JUDSON

I mean the farmer's daughter that General Grant wrote the letter to— the letter Uncle Martin gave to Carol.

ANDREW

(Incredulously.)
You mean you read the letter, Judson? (He hurries to Judson's right side.)

JUDSON

Sure! I read all of them!

CLINT

(Very excited, moving to Judson's left side.)
You read them? You read General Grant's letters? Well what is this about the farmer's daughter? What's the letter say?

JUDSON

Oh, I don't know. It sounded silly to me. I forget just how it did go.
CLINT
It might sound silly to you, Kid, but it might make plenty of sense to me! Come on! Think!

ANDREW
Yes, Judson! What did any of the letters say? You can surely think what one said if you read them all!

JUDSON
I can't think when you get me all excited like this!

ANDREW
(Pulling him to the armchair down right, Clint following.)
Well, here, Judson, sit down! Relax and see if you can't think of what's in one of the letters!

JUDSON
(Allowing himself to be pushed down into the chair.)
But I can't think when I'm sitting down like this. I have to get the blood to flow to my head before I can concentrate.

CLINT
(Impatiently.)
Okay! Get the blood to flow to your head! You want me to rub it for you?

JUDSON
No, I usually just sit cross-legged with my arms over my head.

CLINT
(Incredulously.)
Sit cross-legged with your arms over your head?

JUDSON
It's an old Yogi custom.

ANDREW
Then sit cross-legged with your arms over your head, Judson! Here! (He pulls Judson up from the chair and leads him up center in front of the armchair there. Both men help Judson to sit on the floor, assuming his Yogi position of concentration.)
Are you comfortable?
JUDSON

Yes.

CLINT

Has the blood gone to your head yet?

Yes.

CLINT

Are you thinking?

JUDSON

No! I can't think unless you're both quiet!

(CLint begins to pace back and forth from Judson to the right wall. Andrew sits on the upstage end of the sofa, watching Judson hopefully. There is a short silence.)

ANDREW

While you're at it, Judson, see if you can't think of a letter that has something about politics in it.

CLINT

(Stopping his pacing and pointing a finger commandingly at Judson.)

Politics nothing! You think about that farmer's daughter story!

(There is another short silence while Clint paces and Andrew waits impatiently. Then Clint kneels on Judson's left side.)

You're working on that letter to the farmer's daughter, aren't you?

JUDSON

Yes. I thought of what it said--but I don't believe it!

CLINT

Don't believe it? Why not?

JUDSON

Aw! General Grant wouldn't do that!

CLINT

Who says he wouldn't? He was a soldier, wasn't he?

(He helps Judson to his feet. Andrew hurries to Judson's right side to help.)

Well, come on, now! Let's have it! What happened?
(Grimly.)

Wait a minute! Come with me, Kid! Let's go out into the other room!
(He pulls Judson toward the left exit.)

ANDREW
(Pulling him in the other direction.)
No, you don't! Judson's staying with me!

CLINT
(Still pulling.)
Come on, Kid! I'll give you a dime!.

ANDREW
You stay with me, Judson! I'll give you my arrowhead collection!

CLINT
Wait! I'll tell you what we'll do! We'll toss a coin to see who Judson tells his story to!
(He releases Judson's arm and reaches into his pocket.)
I'll take heads. Okay?

ANDREW
(Grimly.)
I'll take tails.
(Clint tosses the coin up, catches it, and slaps it down on the back of his hand. Andrew peers at it.)

CLINT
(Without looking.)
Heads! I win!
(He puts the coin away and takes Judson by the arm again, leading him toward the left exit.)
Come on, Kid! Let's go!

JUDSON
(Pulling back.)
Wait a minute! Why don't we go down to the drug store? I could probably think better if you bought me a hot fudge sundae.

CLINT
Another old Yogi custom?

JUDSON
(Shaking his head.)
American!
CLINT

Okay! Let's go! And this better be good!
(Clint and Judson exit right. Andrew stands looking off stage after them. Carol enters from the left, still carrying the envelope.)

CAROL

Where is everybody?

ANDREW

(Turning slowly to face her and speaking reproachfully.)
Down at the drug store. Judson's going to tell Lattigan what's in the letters.

CAROL

How does Judson know what's in the letters?

ANDREW

He read them!

CAROL

Oh.

ANDREW

I must say, Carol, that I'm surprised at your attitude in regard to this whole thing.

CAROL

(Defiantly moving to center.)
Why?

ANDREW

(Moving toward her.)
I should think that if you had evidence that General Grant was rather--well--indiscreet at some time in his life, that you'd do whatever you could to protect him. But instead of that, you deliberately use his old love letters to bargain with!

CAROL

Bargain with?

ANDREW

Yes! You used them to wheedle Clint Lattigan into an offer of marriage!

CAROL

You call Clint Lattigan a bargain?
ANDREW
You do!

CAROL
(Moving down right.)
I do not! I wouldn't take Clint Lattigan home from a two-for-one sale! I detest him!

ANDREW
It didn't look like it! Every time I came into the room, you were in his arms!

CAROL
Oh, I didn't think you noticed!

ANDREW
You don't think I'm an idiot, do you?

CAROL
(Vehemently.)
Yes!

ANDREW
(Moving toward Carol, who is standing beside the armchair down right.)
I find your attitude completely unintelligible, Carol--after the life-long friendship between our families!

CAROL
What good did our life-long friendship ever do me?

ANDREW
Didn't I use to fix your bicycle for you?

CAROL
Yes! But you never did think of taking me riding on your bicycle, did you? You certainly did not! All you could think of was to fix mine! Didn't you ever think it was strange that my bicycle needed fixing so often?

ANDREW
(Defensively.)
Didn't I use to help you with your history lessons?

CAROL
Yes, I'll never forget going over to your house night after night pretending I couldn't remember dates--just to get you to talk to me about something! We didn't have any dates of our own to talk about!
ANDREW
I never knew you wanted a date with me, Carol.

CAROL
(Carol advances on each of the next lines, forcing Andrew to step backward before her.)
Of course, you never! You were too busy reading history. No wonder you never noticed me! I'm just a girl! How could I compete with Bunker Hill? And Old Ironsides? (This line brings the back of Andrew's legs into contact with the sofa, and he sits down unexpectedly. Carol stands over him.)

ANDREW
(Squirming toward the downstage end of the sofa to get away from Carol, he stands quickly and retreats down right.)
Well—that was when we were children. Now we're grown up and it's too late.

CAROL
(Following him down right.)
Look me in the eye and say that!

ANDREW
Now let's not be melodramatic, Carol!

CAROL
(Taking him by the arm and turning him to face her.)
Look me in the eye and say that it's too late!

ANDREW
(Looking into her face.)
We're past that stage now, Carol!

CAROL
(Commandingly.)
Kiss me!
(She lifts her lips. Andrew kisses her on the forehead.)
On the lips! (He kisses her lightly on the lips. She releases his arm.)

ANDREW
(Crossing slowly down left, unaware that Carol is hopefully following at his heels.)
Your feeling for me is nothing more than a childhood infatuation. Why, you seem more like a sister to me than—
(He halts and turns slowly around to face her as though unable to comprehend his delayed reaction to the kiss. Like a man in a trance, he stands staring into her face. Carol returns the stare breathlessly. Clint and Judson enter from the right. Judson stops behind the armchair down right and leans his elbows on the back of it.)

**CLINT**

(Advancing down center.)

Some run around! I never in my life saw such a--

(Stopping short at sight of Andrew and Carol.)

Hey! What's goin' on here? You're not marryin' this guy, are you? I asked you before he did!

(Carol half turns toward Clint. Andrew stands wordlessly still staring into Carol's face.)

**CAROL**

Andrew's been leading up to it for twenty years. It just took him a long time, that's all.

And what does that leave me? This kid puts the bite on me for a hot fudge sundae and then forgets what those letters said.

**CAROL**

Judson never read these letters. He was just pretending he had so you'd buy him a sundae.

**CLINT**

(Turning accusingly toward Judson.)

Well, how do you like that? A juvenile delinquent!

**JUDSON**

What'd you expect for fifteen cents? Jesse James?

**CLINT**

Say, you're pretty clever, too, Professor! You marry the girl and get the letters yourself now, don't you?

**CAROL**

(Startled at Clint's abrupt accusation.)

You weren't making love to me just to get these letters, were you, Andrew?

**ANDREW**

(Coming out of his trance slowly.)

Making love to you?
CAROL
Answer my question! Were you making love to me just to get General Grant's letters?

ANDREW
Of course not!

CLINT
Oh, no! Not at all! After twenty years of seeing you every day, he just suddenly realizes that he's in love with you!

CAROL
Andrew Courtney! You're just marrying me to get these letters!

Marrying you?

CLINT
I know how you can find out whether it's you or the letters he wants, Carol. Give the letters to me.

ANDREW
(Completely shaken from his trance now, he steps between Clint and Carol, elbowing Clint back.) Don't you do it, Carol! Remember you owe a debt of gratitude to General Grant--as an American!

CAROL
It would be a good test of your love, Andrew. Clint would get the letters, and you'd get the girl--or would you rather have it the other way around?

ANDREW
Of course not! But those letters are valuable! Why should you give them to him?

CAROL
(Gallantly.) I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you both an equal chance to win the letters.

CLINT
(Suspiciously.) Whatta we do to win?

CAROL
We'll toss your quarter again, Clint! Do you both agree?
CLINT

Sure, I agree!
(He plunges his hand into his pocket.)
I'll take heads! Okay?

ANDREW

Carol, how can you even suggest such a thing? How can you possibly bandy General Grant's letters around like--like prizes at a bingo game?

CAROL

It's a test of your love, Andrew. If you really love me, you should be glad of a chance to show it.

Sure, you should!

CLINT

Oh, all right!
(He turns toward Clint.)
But I'm taking heads this time; you've had heads every time.

ANDREW

Then you take tails this time!

CLINT

I'll tell you what. We'll toss to see who takes heads and who takes tails. If it's tails, you take heads when we toss for the letters. If it's heads, I'll take heads when we toss for the letters. Okay?

ANDREW

(Repeating very slowly.)
Let's see. If it's tails this time, I get to take heads next time when we toss for the letters?

Sure!

ANDREW

Very well! Throw it!
(Clint tosses the coin into the air, catches it, and places it on the back of his hand as before. Andrew peers anxiously as Clint reveals the coin.)
CLINT

(Without looking at the coin.)
It's heads! That means I get to take heads again this time when we toss for the letters. Okay?

ANDREW

Okay!

(Clint tosses the coin again. Andrew peers at it.)

CLINT

(Without looking.)
It's heads!

(Andrew turns slowly away toward the right exit. Clint returns the coin to his pocket and extends one hand toward Carol for the envelope.)

Give me the letters, Carol!

(But Carol is oblivious to Clint's presence. She watches Andrew fearfully.)

CAROL

Andrew! Where are you going?

ANDREW

(Halting at center, speaking without turning.)
Home, I guess.

CAROL

(Running to place herself before him, she blocks his path to the door.)
Home? Home? Then it was the letters you wanted all the time!

ANDREW

I don't know, Carol. I'm all confused. Everything's happened so fast!

CAROL

Say you weren't making love to me just to get the letters, Andrew!

ANDREW

(Miserably.)
But I don't know, Carol! I never felt this way before--not even when I got my Master's Degree! I don't know whether it's you or the letters I want.

CAROL

(Her firmness returning.)
You knew a little while ago when you kissed me, didn't you?
ANDREW
Carol, you're making a scene!

CAROL
(Commandingly.)
Kiss me again!

ANDREW
(With concern for her.)
Carol, don't you realize what a fool you're making of yourself?

CAROL
(Raising the envelope to the level of Andrew's eyes.)
Kiss me, or I'll tear General Grant's letters up!

ANDREW.
Carol, you don't know what you're saying!

CAROL
(Tearing the envelope into half but keeping hold of the two pieces. The torn envelope reveals a half dozen sheets of paper inside.)
Kiss me!

ANDREW

CLINT
(Desperately.)
No, Carol! Don't do that!

CAROL
(Tearing one of the halves of the envelope through the middle, she permits the two pieces to fall but keeps hold of the other half. Clint grabs the two sheets of fallen envelope, takes out the torn papers, and begins frantically to fit the pieces together. Judson drops to the floor to help so that Clint and he are arranged at the feet of Carol and Andrew in a tableau effect to close the curtain.)
Kiss me, Andrew! If you love General Grant, kiss me!
(She lifts her lips. Andrew kisses her lightly on the forehead.)

On the lips!
(He leans forward to kiss her lightly on the lips, his arms at his sides. As their lips meet, his arms gradually come up to encircle her. At long
last Andrew is in love. He releases his hold, and
she takes a step back.)
You do think more of me than you do the letters, don't 651
you, Andrew? 652
(For answer Andrew takes the remaining half of the
envelope and tears it across the middle. He throws
the two halves over his shoulder and takes her into
his arms again.)

CLINT
(Sitting cross-legged on the floor, holding to­
together the two halves of a torn sheet of paper
and reading from it.)
See us for friendly, confidential loan service! A loan 653
plan to fit every budget! Hey, what is this? 654

JUDSON
(Reading from the two torn halves of a sheet of
paper he has salvaged.)
Learn to rumba in ten easy lessons! Say, these aren't 655
letters from General Grant! They're just a bunch of old 656
advertisements!

ANDREW
Advertisements? Where are General Grant's letters? 658

CAROL
(Meekly.)
There aren't any General Grant's letters, Andrew. 659

ANDREW
(Dazed.)
You mean-- 660

CAROL
Uncle Martin wasn't even in the Civil War--Aunt Harriet
wouldn't let him go. I just made the whole thing up--
about the letters--on the train this morning. 661

CLINT
(Still sitting cross-legged on the floor.)
You mean this whole thing has just been so--so-- 662

CAROL
So that Andrew would be interested in me. 663

CLINT
(To himself.)
And you called me in to have someone for him to be
jealous of!
CAROL
Are you angry with me, Andrew?

CLINT
(He has torn the sheet of paper into small pieces. Now he throws the pieces over his head, and they fall around him like snow.)
Is Andrew angry?
(He rests his chin on one clenched fist.)

(CURTAIN)
CHAPTER III

THE FIRST WRITING

In constructing a play, the playwright attempts to include certain elements recognized as being desirable. It is true that the inclusion of these elements does not automatically assure one of a successful play, but it is equally true that a successful play will have most of the elements. It will be the purpose of this chapter to review the literature revealing what these elements of good play construction are and to point out how an attempt was made to include them in the first writing of The Indiscreet General. Experimentation made necessary several changes in the form of certain of these elements, but in one form or another, they were present in the first writing just as they were in the final revision.

I. CONCEIVING THE PLAY

Germinal idea. Of course, in creative writing, as in all other kinds of writing, there must be an idea to begin with. There must be some kind of a starting point from which everything else evolves. A quotation from George Pierce Baker's Dramatic Technique illustrates this point very well:

A play may start from almost anything; a detached thought that flashes through the mind; a theory of conduct or of art which one firmly believes or wishes only to examine; a bit of dialogue overheard or imagined; a setting, real or imagined, which creates emotion in
the observer; a perfectly detached scene, the antecedents and consequences of which are as yet unknown; a figure glimpsed in a crowd which for some reason arrests the attention of the dramatist, or a figure closely studied; a contrast or similarity between two people or conditions of life; a mere incident—note in a newspaper or book, heard in idle talk, or observed; or a story, told only in the barest outlines or with the utmost detail.1

William Archer, in his book Play-Making, says substantially the same thing and then adds, "... Often, too, the original germ, whatever it may be, is transformed beyond recognition before a play is done."2

Both these quotations are applicable in the case of The Indiscreet General. The original germ came from an anecdote reprinted in Coronet magazine from the New York Sun:

Although a couple we know have been married for years, they never seem to sink into that glum silence at restaurants and public places that so many long-married couples fall into. Finally someone asked the wife how they found so much to say to each other after all these years.

"The truth is," she replied, "that we decided long ago that we'd look and act animated when we're out. So, if I feel one of those silences coming, I say to my husband, with an interested expression: '1, 2, 3, 4, 5,' and he answers, '6, 7, 8, 9, 10.' That at least starts us laughing, and soon we find something real to talk about."3

Expanding the idea. The idea of a man and woman sit-


ting on stage and simply repeating numbers to each other but doing it in so animated a fashion that other characters would wonder what they could be talking about, seemed to be the basis of a very funny scene. As it stood, though, there didn't seem to be enough of a reason for two people to engage in their number-repeating activity. In life, the fact that they wanted to appear socially poised might be reason enough, but in a play the reason for such unusual behavior would have to be better motivated. What reason, then, could there be? And who would be the other characters looking on?

Suppose that the other characters looking on would simply be one character, a young man whom a girl was trying to impress. Suppose she were trying to impress a young man whom she loved by pretending to find another young man extremely attractive. But suppose that she and the second young man had so little in common to talk about, that she simply had to repeat numbers to him and make it appear to the first young man, standing out of earshot, as though it were an animated conversation.

That start seemed to be good; there was only one thing wrong. If the girl had to repeat her numbers to the second young man loudly enough for the audience to hear them, then what was to keep the first young man right there on the stage with her from hearing them, too? No logical answer to this question presented itself; so, it seemed advisable to have the
first young man leave the stage while the girl talked to the second young man. But, of course, if the first young man left the stage and was out of earshot, there would be no point in having her to repeat the numbers at all. So, why not have the one who left the stage come back on it unexpectedly, and when he did, why not have the girl throw herself into the arms of the second one? Her whole purpose was to make the first young man jealous anyway. She could do it as well in this way as any other—maybe better.

By such a process of reasoning in constructing this scene which occurs near the middle of the play the plot for the entire act gradually evolved, but the offspring, by that time, had been so altered that it bore little resemblance to the original germ responsible for the impregnation.

II. PLOT CONSTRUCTION

Preparation. The preparation is the background material which must go into the play. It is simply a body of information concerning antecedent facts which must be made clear to the audience so that it will understand the play. Very rarely is there a play in which this background material is unnecessary. The preparation is one of the most difficult

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parts of the play to write because the material covered is largely factual, and the audience is more interested in action than it is in facts. Considerable experimenting was done with the preparation in The Indiscreet General. This experimenting is explained under The Opening in the succeeding chapter. In the final version of the play, as reproduced in chapter II, the preparation might be said to conclude with Judson's speech on page 10, line 99. The material up to the conclusion of this speech has informed the audience of the situation which has been developing in a general way for several years. In a more specific way, it acquaints the audience with what has happened in the ten or twelve hours just before the play's opening.

**Attack.** The attack is that point at which the action of the play connects with the antecedent facts and the forward movement is begun. It might be called the point at which the play actually starts. The attack in The Indiscreet General begins with Andrew's entrance on page 11. The intervening material between the conclusion of the preparation and the beginning of the attack may be considered simply as a connective, although in this connective passage, use is made of a technique known as "planting." Recognition of the need for

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5 Ibid., pp. 51-52.
this "planting" came about as a result of experimentation, however, and will be discussed in the succeeding chapter.

**Struggle.** The struggle, called conflict by most critics, is the most important element in construction. Selden calls it the "guts" of the play. It is this struggle which the whole play is about. It is the play's very excuse for being. The basic plot in any play is a story of how one force struggles against another. Usually the contending parties are two or more characters, one of them being a sympathetic protagonist with whom the audience can identify itself. Sometimes the struggle is not between characters. The struggle may be between a character and nature, or it may be a struggle which goes on within the character himself. But whatever the nature of the struggle, it must be included. It is the chief ingredient from which the play is built.

The main struggle in *The Indiscreet General* is the struggle which Carol faces in winning Andrew. Closely allied, is the struggle between Andrew and Clint for possession of General Grant's letters. The play has some minor struggles also--Carol's attempt to get Judson away from the house and the struggle between Andrew and Clint to have Judson tell his story to them might be cited as examples. These struggles

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have all resolved themselves by page 40 when Andrew takes the torn half of the envelope from Carol's hands and tears it into smaller pieces. This action signifies that the main struggle is over, and Carol has been victorious. The other struggles are either resolved by this action or have been resolved before that time.

**Turn.** The turn is that part of the play's construction which most critics term the crisis. Selden states that the turn, "is that point at which one or the other party in the conflict gets the telling grip on his opponent and swings him under." In *The Indiscreet General* the main parties in conflict are Carol and Andrew, and the turn comes at exactly the same point as the close of the struggle; that is, it occurs on page 40 when Andrew tears the torn piece of envelope into smaller bits. With that action, there can be no doubt but that Carol has "got a telling grip on her opponent and swung him under."

**Outcome.** The outcome is simply that section of a play which shows how everything comes out. It is the ending in which all loose ends are tied up and the audience is satisfied that the conflict is over. The outcome must be kept short in

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7 Selden, *loc. cit.*
the well constructed play in order to avoid anti-climax. The outcome in *The Indiscreet General* begins with line 653 immediately after the turn and continues to the end.

**Suffering.** Hubert C. Heffner writes, "By suffering is meant what the characters experience, feel, or undergo, ranging the whole gamut from emotional experience to actual physical suffering."\(^9\) It is the attempt to show the reaction which the various twists and turns of the plot have on the characters that gives significance to the incidents related. The happenings in a play are not important except for the emotional effect they have on the characters. In *The Indiscreet General* an attempt is made throughout to reveal how the characters feel about the things that happen in the play. Carol's main emotion is love for Andrew. Andrew's main emotion is concern for General Grant's reputation. Clint's main feeling is one of cupidity or selfishness. These emotions are responsible for most of the suffering or discomfiture which these three characters feel as the play progresses. Judson does not suffer in the play as the other characters do, but he does reveal emotion, which helps to express his feelings. His emotion is one of disapproval for Carol's boy friends—contempt for Andrew and dislike for Clint.

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Discovery. Discovery is the findings which the characters make as a result of the suffering and its consequent actions. It is the hitherto unknown facts which are revealed to the characters as a result of the things that happen in the play. The main points of discovery in The Indiscreet General are Andrew's discovery that Carol loves him and, later, his discovery that he loves her. The play contains several minor discoveries.

Reversal. Reversal is a change occurring in the relationships between the characters or between their reactions to each other. It is the point at which the chain of events reverses itself and proceeds in a new direction. Reversal is a most important part of any plot because it is largely from reversal that the play achieves interest and maintenance of suspense. Reversal is apparent in The Indiscreet General when Andrew and Clint learn that Judson has read the letters. Immediately their interest is centered in Judson rather than in Carol, who has been the object of all their attention up to that point. Reversal is also apparent when Carol changes her attitude toward Andrew and decides that instead of being subtle with him she will let

10 Ibid., pp. 48-49.
11 Ibid., pp. 49-50.
him know just what her feelings are for both him and Clint. This is a complete reversal of her former tactics, which had been to make Andrew think that she cared more for Clint.

III. CHARACTERIZATION

Appropriateness. One of the main considerations in creating character should be a determination of "whether the actions assigned to each character are really appropriate to him in terms of his basic and fundamental nature."\(^\text{12}\) In life, one seldom sees a meek, henpecked little man who works as a truck driver. He is more likely to be a bookkeeper or a clerk of some kind, and if he makes his living by driving a truck, such an occupation will appear inappropriate. This situation is equally true in a play. The characters must be appropriate in their occupations, their personalities, their social and cultural standings, and in their intellectual and educational backgrounds. The playwright must use every opportunity to reveal that the characters are appropriate to the station and personality assigned them. This revelation of character is accomplished by the things the characters do and say, as well as by what other characters say about them.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 55.

\(^{13}\) Baker, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 276-286.
Likeness. "The second criterion of character is likeness."\textsuperscript{14} This statement is the same as to say that the character must be convincing and believable. He must so conduct himself that the audience will immediately accept him as the personality whom he portrays. When the character performs some action, the audience must realize that such an action is just what such a character might be expected to perform. When the character speaks, he must speak in the way that will be like the personality represented. One would hardly expect a truck driver to use perfectly correct English at all times. If he does, he will not seem like a truck driver.

Consistency. The qualities given to a character must be harmonious with one another.\textsuperscript{15} The individuality given to a character must not be laid on without discrimination. To make a man who is kind and considerate to be also dishonest and scheming would not be consistent. This mixture of human qualities would bring about a creation of character which most of the audience would find difficult to understand or to believe. The character's actions must supplement each other so as to give a clear-cut picture of certain of his outstanding...

\textsuperscript{14} Heffner, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 55-56.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 56-57.
ing personal qualities. These qualities must not appear to be opposed to each other. A man who has proved himself charitable by donating a check to some relief organization and who then slaps a crying child's face is being inconsistent in his actions. Such inconsistency is likely to prove confusing to the audience.

Creating character in "The Indiscreet General." A great many attempts to reveal character might be pointed out in the final version of the script as it is reproduced in chapter II. Most of these characterizing attempts were included in the first writing and remained unchanged throughout the period of experimentation.

Carol is intended to be presented as a practical, resourceful, energetic, modern-day young woman. She is not scheming by nature, but she is not one to stand timidly back and see something she wants very much escape from her. Her actions throughout the play are intended to enforce these impressions. Her plan to bring Andrew and Clint to the house after some non-existent letters, her attempts to have Andrew kiss her, her effort to get Judson out of the house, her attempts to arouse Andrew's jealousy by her attentions to Clint, her suggestion that Clint match Andrew with the two-headed coin—all these actions aid the audience in an understanding of Carol's character. Individual speeches which help to characterize Carol are those beginning with lines 57, 115,
Andrew is characterized as a studious, bookish, high-principled young man. He is definitely not stupid although his painful social deficiencies make him appear so. His character is set in the preparation, even before he appears, by Judson's charge that Andrew is a dope. Andrew's inability to recognize Carol's obvious love, his concern for the welfare of General Grant's reputation, the ease with which Clint dupes him with the two-headed coin, and his conscientious attempt to separate his desire for the letters from his feeling for Carol are all parts of the plot action which help the audience to understand what kind of person Andrew is. Individual speeches helping to characterize Andrew are those beginning with lines 54, 57, 62, 95, 124, 128, 157, 161, 175, 201, 202, 207, 217, 232, 303, 306, 375, 391, 434, 438, 480, 495, 518, 535, 551, 565, 590, 603, 636, and 642.

Clint is characterized as an aggressive, superficial, selfish, conceited, rather loud young man. But with all his bad qualities, there is an attempt to make him not too unsympathetic. This effect is achieved by his redeeming sense of humor, which is rather corny at times, as might be expected from anyone like Clint, but not objectionably so. The audience is prepared for an understanding of Clint before he appears by Judson's statement that he's a drip and by the knowledge that Clint possesses a two-headed coin, which he
uses to gamble with. Plot action furthering the characterization of Clint is his continual cheating of Andrew with the false coin and his willingness to offer marriage to Carol in order to obtain the letters. Speeches helping to characterize Clint begin with lines 69, 70, 71, 74, 115, 126, 128, 181, 188, 213, 218, 223, 248, 315, 347, 456, 482, and 489.

Judson, being a minor character, is not characterized to the extent that the others are. Too much characterizing of a minor character is difficult and also undesirable. For comedy purposes, it seemed adequate to present Judson simply as an adolescent opportunist. This characterization is done in the plot through Judson's artifice in obtaining hot fudge sundaes.

16 Baker, loc. cit.
When the play had been written, cast, and rehearsed, a two-day tour of high schools in central Indiana was arranged. At each performance, audience reaction was carefully noted. Major script changes which the reaction suggested were written in by the author at the conclusion of the tour and tested out before subsequent audiences. Minor changes in the lines were usually made in the car, often at the suggestion of some member of the cast, and rehearsed while travelling from one performance to the next. There was hardly a single audience that did not cause the play to be altered, at least slightly, so that hardly any two of them saw the play in exactly the same form or under the same conditions, the facilities for presentation varying from well constructed, nicely set stages in auditoriums to a few folding chairs placed upon a bare gymnasium floor. Following this two-day tour of high schools, several other performances were given before many different types of audiences. The experiment covered about three months from March 10 to June 7, 1950, during which time sixteen performances were given. The schedule of performances is shown on the next page. It will be the purpose of this chapter to show the changes made in the script during the experimentation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>1950 date</th>
<th>Estimated number in audience</th>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom presentation</td>
<td>Indiana State Teachers College</td>
<td>March 10</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school assembly</td>
<td>Rockville Ind.</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td>375</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school assembly</td>
<td>Cayuga, Ind.</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td>400</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school assembly</td>
<td>Veedersburg, Ind.</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school assembly</td>
<td>Covington, Ind.</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td>500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alumni meeting (I. S. T. C.)</td>
<td>Crawfordsville, Indiana</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school assembly</td>
<td>Danville, Ind.</td>
<td>March 24</td>
<td>450</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school assembly</td>
<td>Bainbridge, Ind.</td>
<td>March 24</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school assembly</td>
<td>Greencastle, Ind.</td>
<td>March 24</td>
<td>650</td>
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<tr>
<td>P.T.A. meeting</td>
<td>Dana, Indiana</td>
<td>April 3</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Future Teachers Of America</td>
<td>Indiana State Teachers College</td>
<td>April 14</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College dedication Day program (Two performances)</td>
<td>Indiana State Teachers College</td>
<td>April 14</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theta Alpha Phi National convention</td>
<td>Indiana State Teachers College</td>
<td>May 5</td>
<td>175</td>
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<td>High school English classes</td>
<td>Gerstmeyer H.S. Terre Haute</td>
<td>May 26</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Optimists Club</td>
<td>Deming Hotel Terre Haute</td>
<td>June 7</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total estimated number at 16 performances. . . . . . 3,840
I. THE OPENING

The opening as first written. In the course of the experimentation, the opening underwent a complete transformation. In order to make clear just what changes were made in the opening, the first opening used is reproduced here:

The Indiscreet General

AT RISE: (Judson Haynes, a boy of twelve, is alone on stage. He is standing on his head with his body supported in that position against the wall at center rear.

Peggy Courtney, fourteen years old, enters from the right. She is in a hurry and excited.

PEGGY
(Stopping short at sight of Judson's strange position.)
Judson! What are you doing?
(Judson makes no answer, and she moves closer.)
Where's Carol?
(Judson still makes no sound but points off stage left just as Carol Haynes enters. She is a nice looking, mature young woman.)

CAROL
Here I am, Peggy. I've been looking for you ever since your call. I couldn't make heads or tails out of what you said on the phone.

PEGGY
Did you send your father and mother to the movie like I told you to?

CAROL
Yes, I understood that much of what you were talking about. I felt like a fool packing them off to a movie when they wanted to stay home and hear about my trip to Uncle Martin's. I just got home this afternoon, you know. Now suppose you tell me what it's all about. Why did you want me to get the
firms out of the house?

PEGGY

(Indicating Judson.)
Why didn't you send him, too?

CAROL
Judson had to stay home and study. He's going to be a contest-
ant on a quiz show next week.

PEGGY
Does he call that studying?

CAROL
He says he can concentrate better when he stands on his head. He read in a book that Hindus or Yogis or something do it that way.

JUDSON
(Bringing his feet down and standing up.)
Yes, the position stimulates the brain cells by causing the blood to rush to the head. It works quite satisfactorily when everything is quiet.

CAROL
Peggy, what is this all about? Why do you want everyone out of the house?

PEGGY
(Hesitantly.)
Well, I hope you won't think I'm meddling when I tell you. Everything I've done, I've done for your good--yours and Andrew's.

CAROL
(Suspiciously.)
Maybe you'd better tell me what you've done; then we can de-
cide whether you've been meddling or not!

PEGGY
Well, first I think we might as well be grown up and face the situation as it really is, don't you?

CAROL
Of course, Peggy! What is the situation?
PEGGY

I mean about you and Andrew being in love.

CAROL

Peggy!

PEGGY

We might as well admit it. Everyone knows it anyway. That is everyone knows it except Andrew. He'd know it, too, if he weren't such a dope—even if he is my brother. I guess it's because he's a school teacher, though.

CAROL (Sternly.)

Peggy, I hope you haven't done something else crazy to bring your brother and me into each other's arms—like those letters you sent Andrew with my name signed to them.

PEGGY

Well, it's time someone did something. Andrew's going to leave next week to teach in that college he's been writing to.

CAROL

Then you did do something to bring us together again?

PEGGY

(Nodding her head.)

I would have talked it over with you first, but I never had a chance. It all came up so suddenly.

CAROL (In resignation.)

Well—what is it this time?

PEGGY

You know the article that's in the paper this evening? About you just getting back from the trip to your great uncle's one hundredth birthday party? And about those letters and papers he gave you? Those things of General Grant's?

CAROL

Yes. They're in that envelope on the table.

PEGGY

Well, Andrew saw that article in the paper this evening and, right away, he said he was coming over here to get you to let him publish the papers. He's writing a history book on the Civil War, you know.
I know he is.

PEGGY

(Excitedly.)
Oh, Carol, you don't know how much Andrew would like to have those papers! He'd do anything you say to get them--anything! Even get married!

CAROL
Are you suggesting that I trade those old papers of Uncle Martin's to Andrew for an engagement ring?

PEGGY
No, not that exactly. But you could use them to make Andrew jealous.

CAROL
Now how could I make Andrew jealous with some old letters that General Grant wrote clear back in the Civil War?

PEGGY
Well, if some other man were here for the papers this evening at the same time as Andrew is, and if you were to act like you're in love with the other man and are about to give him the papers, then maybe Andrew would wake up. He would connect the shock of losing the papers with losing you, and it might make him realize how much he loves you.

CAROL
Assuming, of course, that he does love me.

PEGGY
(Quickly.)
Oh, he does, Carol! I know he does! It's just that he gets so wrapped up in his books some times that he doesn't think of anything else.

CAROL
Well, it doesn't matter. There won't be any other man here this evening for Andrew to be jealous of anyway.

PEGGY
Yes, there will. That's what I wanted to tell you.

CAROL
Peggy! You've asked some man to come here tonight? (Peggy looks at the floor and nods her head.) Who?
PEGGY
That newspaper reporter you used to go with.

CAROL
Clint Lattigan? Oh, Peggy! I can't stand that man!

(Accusingly.)
You went with him to the Spring Festival!

CAROL
Yes, but only the one time—and only because Andrew forgot to
ask me. Clint's impossible! He's nothing but a big show-off!

PEGGY
Well, we had to have someone who would be interested in those
letters of General Grant, and I thought Clint Lattigan might
like to write a story about them for the newspaper. So when
I heard Andrew say he was coming over here, I called Clint
Lattigan on the phone and asked him to come over, too.

What did you say to him?

PEGGY
(Weakly.)
I changed my voice a little and told him I was you, and I
told him about the letters. He seemed surprised, but he
said he'd be right over.

CAROL
I imagine he was surprised all right. That time we went to
the Spring Festival I said I'd never go out with him again.

PEGGY
Are you angry with me, Carol?

CAROL
No, of course not, Dear. You thought you were helping.
(She pauses thoughtfully and then smiles at Peggy.)
Besides, it might work.

PEGGY
You mean you'll do it? You'll make Andrew jealous of you
and Clint?

CAROL
If it can be done. As you said, Dear, your big brother is
something of a dope. I've been trying to get him to notice
that I'm a girl for fifteen years now, but he always passes me up for a good book. Guess I should have foot notes. With only a week left before he goes away, maybe something drastic like this is what's needed.

PEGGY
I know it is!
(Doorbell sounds off right.)
There he is now! Or else it's Clint Lattigan!

CAROL
It's Andrew. He's been coming here for twenty-five years, and he still rings the doorbell. Clint Lattigan's been here once, but I'll bet he just walks in.
(To Judson.)
Will you go to the door, Judson, please?

JUDSON
(Rising grumblingly from his chair.)
A lot of studying I'm going to get done around here! I'll be lucky to win a yacht and ten thousand dollars on that quiz show.
(Exit right.)

CAROL
(Crossing over to take large, brown, Manila envelope from the table.)
I'll just carry Uncle Martin's old papers around with me this evening.

PEGGY
What for?

CAROL
You don't catch fish, Honey, without letting them see the bait on your hook.
(Enter Andrew Courtney.)

Establishing the mood. The author sweated through this opening in fourteen performances, making various minor changes before the revision shown in chapter II suggested itself. Audience reaction revealed early that the opening was weak. Good playwriting practice dictates that if a play is to be
comical, the audience must be made aware of that fact within the first few minutes. The mood must be set as early as possible in the play, and there was nothing in this opening that was humorous. The first real laugh received usually came with Judson's, "It was a dime!" speech. The audience had to be convinced much sooner that the play was going to be funny so they could start putting themselves into the mood.

The solution seemed to lie with Judson. The audience usually appeared to be interested in Judson, but as he sat motionless in the background throughout the long opening scene between Carol and Peggy, their interest in him gradually waned. This could have been corrected by permitting Judson to enter into the conversation, too, and many unfruitful hours were spent in trying to devise some clever cracks with which Judson could intrude himself into the conversation. The clever cracks failed to materialize, however; Judson continued to remain in the background; and the opening continued to drag out interminably, during which time the audience continued to sit soberly or to snicker politely, usually at the wrong times. The big trouble was that there was just too much explanatory material which had to be revealed to the audience in order to prepare it for what followed. This prep-

aration had to be given with more animation. As it was, the opening was too passive. Nothing much happened except some talk between Carol and Peggy. This condition would be remedied if some kind of conflict could be introduced, preferably something involving Judson. Suppose that Carol were trying to get Judson out of the house in preparation for her two callers. And suppose that Judson didn't want to go. That would be the basis for some kind of conflict. The author spent some time trying to write the scene that way, but the conflict never assumed much force; it was completely subordinated to the long expositional conversation between Carol and Peggy.

Then the author found this statement by George Pierce Baker:

Don't use unneeded people. You must provide them with dialogue, and as the play goes on, some justification for existence. . . . It is these unnecessary figures who are largely responsible for the scenes. . . which clog the movement of a play.18

What justification was there for Judson's existence in the play, anyway? He just sat in the background with nothing to say throughout the opening scene. But then he was indispensable in the later scene when Andrew and Clint attempted to get him to recall what was in the letters. Audience reaction proved that this scene was one of the funniest in the whole play. No, there was no chance to dispose of Judson.

18 Baker, op. cit., pp. 294-295
But what about Peggy? It was true that Peggy did most of the talking in the opening scene, but she didn’t have anything to do with the play at any time after that. When she was on stage after the first ten minutes, she stood speechless with nothing to do but shift around in the background to keep from being blocked by the others. Then why not eliminate Peggy? Her whole purpose in the play was simply to help get across the explanatory material. That could be done just as effectively by a conversation between Carol and Judson, and it would give more opportunity to develop the conflict between the two.

When the play was tried out in this form with only four characters, audience response was much more gratifying than it had been before. The laughs now began with Judson’s line, "I’m not a rabbit, either, but I eat carrots," and the audience’s mood was set much earlier.

"Planting." Continued repetition of the opening scene as it was first written and occasional talks with auditors revealed another fault. The opening seemed to arouse certain expectations in the audience which remained unsatisfied when the play ended. Some members of the audience expected the fact that Judson was studying for a quiz show to enter into the play in some manner. Others wanted to know more about the letters which Peggy had written and sent to Andrew with Carol’s name signed to them. When the play failed to make any further
mention of these two elements, it was a disappointment to those of the audience who had seized upon these facts as important to the outcome. The remedy was quite simple—eliminate all mention of these two factors in the revision. The idea that Andrew was leaving the next day to begin teaching in a college was omitted for the same reason. The trouble in these cases was that the audience was prepared for things that never happened. Mark Swan, veteran playwright, states:

Don't plant anything you don't utilize later. If you plant in the first act that a man is going to burn a house then later change your mind and "cut" the burning of the house, go back to the plant and cut out all reference to it.19

At other places, things happened which the audience was not prepared for. In the first version, the first mention of Clint's two-headed quarter came from Clint himself when he suggested that a coin be tossed to decide whether he or Andrew would remain in the room alone with Carol. It was in a bit of later dialogue between Carol and Clint that the information that the coin was heads on both sides was made known. This delayed information, however, deprived the audience of its enjoyment of the first coin-tossing episode. Early "planting" of the idea that Clint has a two-headed coin, as it is done in lines 72 and 73 of the final revision, gives enough advance

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information so that the audience is in on the deception. Response to the revision proved it much superior to the original at this point.

There was another point in the play which the author had thought of as being humorous. That point was at the close of the scene where Andrew, Clint, and Judson are on stage alone, and Judson suggests to Clint that he will be more likely to remember what's in the letters if Clint will buy him a hot fudge sundae. Yet, despite any number of devices used to "point up" this line, it persistently failed to evoke the desired response. In the final revision the "plant" is made in line 104 that Judson likes hot fudge sundaes. Then when he asks Clint for one in line 504 the audience invariably laughs, proving rather conclusively the soundness of "planting" as a playwriting technique.

II. THE ENDING

The ending as first written. The ending underwent as complete a metamorphosis as the opening. The first-used ending was the following:

(Clint tosses the coin as before.
Andrew peers anxiously at it.)

CLINT

(Without looking.)
It's heads!
(He puts the coin into his pocket.)
Give me the letter, Carol!
(Carol hands the envelope containing the letters to
Clint. Clint speaks to Andrew.)
   So long, Sucker! You can start reading General Grant's letters next week—in my column.
   (Exit right.)

   JUDSON
   You didn't have any right to give him those letters, Carol! You know that quarter he's got is heads on both sides!

   (Dismayed.)
   Heads on both sides!
   (To Carol.)
   Did you know it's heads on both sides?

   CAROL
   Yes, Dear.

   ANDREW
   Then why did you let him do that to me?

   CAROL
   (Angelically.)
   To see if you love me. Clint got the papers, and you got the girl, Andrew. Are you sorry of your bargain?

   ANDREW
   (Taking her into his arms.)
   No, of course not! I'd rather have you than—than anything in the world!

   CAROL
   Even a new set of encyclopedias?

   ANDREW
   Anything!

   CAROL
   Then I'll confess something, Andrew.

   Confess?

   CAROL
   My Uncle Martin was in the Confederate army.

   ANDREW
   (Incredulously.)
   Confederate army? Then how did he get to be General Grant's personal secretary?
He didn't? Then how did he get those letters of General Grant's that he gave to you?

CAROL

He didn't give me any letters, Andrew. That envelope Clint took was stuffed with paper out of a catalogue book.

(Andrew's hands drop to his sides in amazement.)

I knew all the time you loved me, but I had to make you know it somehow. When I heard that you were working on a book about the Civil War, I thought that if you believed I had some letters from General Grant that it would be the best way to get you interested in me. It was Peggy's idea to call Clint Lattigan in to make you jealous.

(There is a short pause while Andrew, Judson, and Peggy slowly absorb what Carol has said.)

Clint's going to be awfully surprised when he opens that envelope!

(Suddenly Andrew breaks into a wild spasm of laughter. He falls weakly onto the sofa, doubled over with mirth. Judson joins in with him, then Peggy. Carol sinks into the armchair down right and laughs, too. All four laugh uncontrollably.

(CURTAIN)

Playing the action on the stage. The first indication that this ending wasn't all that it might be came at the close of one of the high school performances, when the author overheard one teen-age boy say to another, "Boy! I'd liked to have seen that reporter's face when he opened that envelope!" This statement is the same point Mark Swan makes, when he writes:

If there is an important event in your play, make every effort to bring it on stage, instead of having it played...
off and told about. Let the audience see it, done by the actors. 20

The problem then was how to get the envelope opened on stage so the audience could observe the reactions of the characters when they saw that there were only useless papers inside. It also seemed advisable to draw the episode out so there would be more of a climax. The climax, as originally written, was rather indeterminate. It should have come right at the moment when Andrew made it known definitely that he loved Carol. The question of whether or not he did love her was the big problem all through the play. The answer to that question should have come at the play's climax. But the way it was written, one couldn't be quite sure just when Andrew did realize that he was in love with Carol. This vagueness made the climax indefinite and, so, not forceful. It gave some of the same effect as though that important part of the play had transpired someplace off stage. Andrew must make his complete surrender to Carol unmistakable. Also the letters must be opened on stage. Why not have both these accomplishments realized at the same time by having Andrew to tear the letters up in order to demonstrate that he considers Carol's love as being more important. This device would have additional value in that it should create an unexpected turn of events for the

20 Ibid., p. 175
audience when it saw the valuable letters being destroyed. How the desired action was worked into the revised ending may be seen in chapter II. Response to the new ending was appreciably greater and appeared to afford the audience more satisfaction. It was thought that the new ending was also superior in that it avoided the necessity for Carol's long concluding explanation. When lengthy explanations are required to clear everything up in the end of a play, there is a possibility of running into anti-climax and a probability of becoming wearying to the audience.21

III. DIALOGUE REVISION

Laugh lines. Every line of dialogue must either characterize, advance the plot, or provide humor—preferably do all three.22 Much of the humor of a play such as The Indiscreet General depends upon the dialogue. Quite a bit of this dialogue does nothing to advance the plot or to characterize but is intended solely for humor similar to that produced by radio "gag" shows. Rewriting these laugh lines was a continual process engaged in by the whole cast from the first performance to the last.

21 Ibid., p. 178.
22 Ibid., p. 133.
One discovery revealed by the study of audience reaction was that a laugh line had to be written so that the laugh came at the very end of the line. If the laugh came in the center, the audience appeared to want to respond but was forced to restrain itself in order to hear the last part of the line being delivered by the actor. For some time this situation killed several of the laughs completely or turned them from full laughs into almost inaudible chuckles; either this, or else the audience laughed at length and, thereby, lost the meaning of the remainder of the actor's speech. Several examples of how this type of line had to be changed might be cited, but illustrative of all of them are the speeches beginning with lines 539 and 548. In the first writing, Carol's speech beginning with line 539 read as follows:

CAROL

Yes! You certainly did! Week after week my bicycle would be out of order, and you never once thought it was strange that a bicycle should break so often! No! All you could think of was to fix it, but you never did think of taking me riding on your bicycle, did you?

Audiences invariably started to laugh on the statement, "... and you never once thought it was strange that a bicycle should break so often!" The laugh would no sooner start, however, than the audience would be forced to become quiet in order to hear the rest of the speech. The problem
then was to move the laugh to the end of the line so the audience could laugh as long as it would, while the next actor to speak simply waited until it was quiet enough for him to be heard. A similar situation came with line 548, as follows:

CAROL

Of course, you never! You were forever reading history books, and how could I compete with Bunker Hill and Old Ironsides? I'm just a girl! No wonder you never noticed me!

The tendency here seemed to be to laugh on the words, "... and how could I compete with Bunker Hill and Old Ironsides?" Once again it was simply a matter of moving the laugh to the end of the speech so there would be no subsequent words to kill it. How these two speeches were rewritten, in accordance with these findings, is shown in the revision of the script, as reproduced in chapter II.

Sometimes, in order that a laugh might fall at the end of a line, it was necessary to delete parts of a speech altogether. Line 489 was originally written:

CLINT

Who says he wouldn't? He was a soldier, wasn't he? You just stick to the facts, Kid; I'll write the story.

The audience wanted to laugh on, "... He was a soldier, wasn't he?" but was prevented from laughing in order to hear what followed. The rest of the speech was simply cut, and this line proved to be one of the best laugh-getters in
In one version of the newer ending, where the envelope is opened on stage, the speech beginning with line 655 was:

JUDSON

For that good-all-over feeling, try Doctor Dill's pills!

It wasn't funny. The line was tried that way time after time with Judson standing up, sitting down, and crouching on one knee. He said the line looking first at Clint, then at Andrew, then at Carol—but with no results. Then it was rewritten so that Judson said, "Learn to rumba in ten easy lessons!" The new writing wrought an almost magical change, and from that time on, the line never failed to bring a laugh. It was thought that the revision was funny because of the humorous connotations contained in the word rumba.

At one time line 435, in answer to Clint's charge that Andrew didn't know why girls want to talk about love all the time, went as follows:

ANDREW

Oh, yes, I do, Lattigan! I've read thirty-two books on the subject!

This line usually brought a light laugh. But it was intended to produce a bigger laugh. Something seemed to be holding the audience back. Could it be that this line made Andrew look like a pedantic fool? If so, it wasn't consistent with his character. Andrew was supposed to be scholarly and
erudite but not pedantic and certainly not a fool. The line
was changed to that shown in the final revision and received
a much more satisfactory audience response, seeming to bear
out the often-repeated advice that it is poor playwriting
technique to have a character do or say anything not consist­
tent with his established personality.23

Humor that was not funny. Of course, some of the at­
tempts to get laughs were never successful. Originally, the
speech beginning with line 544 read as follows:

CAROL
Yes, I'll never forget going over to your house night after
night pretending I couldn't remember dates--just to get you
to talk to me about something! We didn't have any dates of
our own to talk about! We had to talk about Napoleon's--and
Abraham Lincoln's!"

When delivered, it was apparent that the line was in­
tended to bring a laugh, but there was no response. Abraham
Lincoln's name was replaced with that of Josephine, but still
there was no response. Then both Napoleon's name and that of
Josephine were deleted to be replaced with those of Sampson
and Delilah. But still there was no response. It seemed that
the line just wasn't funny and there was nothing to do about

23 Harold Newcomb Hillebrand, Writing the One-Act Play
it; so, the speech was cut immediately after the line, "... We didn't have any dates of our own to talk about." Of course, there was still no laugh, but now there was no attempt being made for one. There is nothing more pathetic than a savage, murderous-looking pistol that shoots water.

A second unsuccessful attempt to produce laughter occurred in the first version of the play when Andrew stated that he would rather have Carol than anything in the world, and Carol asked, "Even a new set of encyclopedias?" This line should have been funny--but the audience never laughed. Perhaps it came during too tense a moment in the play, or perhaps such a catty remark was not consistent with Carol's personality. At any rate, it was necessary to omit this line in the final revision.

Sustaining interest. One of the most important considerations of the playwright is that of holding the audience interest throughout. An important means for achieving this objective is through the use of unexpected turns in the action, which make the audience uncertain of the outcome, and, so, create suspense. Marian Gallaway writes that, "Suspense is uncertainty toward an eventuality one cares about..."24

Dialogue must also contain unexpected turns if it is to achieve its maximum effect. The episode beginning with line 275 originally was written as follows:

ANDREW
I'll dedicate my book to you, Carol!

CLINT
I'd do anything you asked me to!

ANDREW
I would, too!

CLINT
I'd love and cherish you forever!

ANDREW
I'd love and cherish you forever, too!

CLINT
I'll marry you!

ANDREW
(To Clint.)
Marry her?

CLINT
Yes, marry her!

CAROL
(Expectantly.)
Well, Andrew?

ANDREW
(Lamely.)
I'll--love and cherish you--forever.

This writing is a conventional comedy device that has
been worn threadbare by repeated use. The speaker simply repeats the thing he said last when he has been led into a situation where he finds it difficult to express himself, and the audience is expected to laugh. The audience will laugh, too, if the situation is humorous, even though the laugh line itself is something anticipated. The audience seemed to anticipate Andrew's repetition of the line, "I'd--love and cherish you--forever." There was a response, but it was unsatisfactory. It would be an excellent place to spring a surprise on the audience by having it expect Andrew to say one thing and then having him to say something else. So Andrew was made to say, "If this is an auction, Carol, I think you've just heard the top bid!" The response to this line indicated that it was much superior to the first one, largely, it was thought, because Andrew's answer is completely unexpected.

Line 610 opens up an entire episode which at first was not included in the script. When the time came for Andrew and Clint to toss a coin to decide whom Carol was to give the letters to, the coin was tossed and came up heads, Clint won and left with the letters. This outcome was just what the audience expected. It would add interest to insert a little dialogue to leave the audience rather uncertain about the outcome; so, Andrew was made to object to taking tails again. This objection made it appear that he suspected Clint's deception, and the outcome of the coin-tossing was in doubt.
Audience reaction to this little added twist appeared to heighten interest, as had been hoped.

IV. OTHER REVISIONS

Revision caused by human limitations. In comparing the revision with the original script of the play, one can hardly fail to note the change made in Judson's position of concentration. The original script called for Judson to be standing on his head when the curtain opened, and later it called for him to stand on his head to try and remember what General Grant's letters said. The chief purpose of this unusual posture was to seize upon the audience's curiosity and interest at the very beginning of the play. It was soon found, during rehearsal, that it was impractical to have Judson stand on his head, however. The up-side-down position made it too difficult for the youthful performer to deliver his lines clearly, and the awkward position seemed too precarious to maintain for the required length of time. So, the standing-on-head routine was replaced by his sitting cross-legged on the floor with arms overhead in the position of concentration commonly thought of as being typical of the Yogis. It was thought that this position did not have quite the startling effect upon the audience that the head stand would have had, but it proved necessary to compromise with reality; so the Yogi position was adopted and written into the script.
Character experimentation. Considerable unintentional experimenting was done with character changes during the course of the study. There were three changes in casting even before the play had gone past the rehearsal stage. It was necessary for the girl cast as Carol to be absent from the college for two weeks. She was replaced with another girl, who played in all sixteen performances. The girl cast as Peggy withdrew from school to be married and was replaced with another girl, who played in fourteen performances. Then the part of Peggy was written out in the final revision of the script, and the last two performances were given without her.

The role of Judson was filled by four boys. The first Judson, thirteen years old, contracted some kind of adolescent affliction which made it necessary that both his legs be placed in casts for six weeks. The second Judson, thirteen years old, appeared in so many performances and was absent from school so often that it seemed inadvisable to have him miss any more of his classes. So, that Judson was replaced by another boy, ten years old. In the final revision of the play, however, it seemed that Judson emerged as a somewhat more mature person than he had been in any of the earlier versions; so it became necessary, for the last two performances, to replace the ten-year-old Judson with one fifteen years old. It was difficult to determine what effect, if any,
the ages of the different Judsons had upon the play as a whole, but it was interesting to note what effect these differences in the age of Judson had upon the significance of certain individual lines in the play. For instance, the declaration, "Aw! General Grant wouldn't do that!" seemed to vary in meaning from "cute" to "risque" according to the age of the Judson delivering the line.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It was never the purpose of this study to determine all the principles of successful playwriting. The objective was simply to determine what some of the more commonly used techniques of successful playwrights are and to test out the effectiveness of those techniques in as objective a manner as could be devised. The present chapter is to summarize the experiment and to list certain conclusions reached.

I. SUMMARY

Sixteen performances of an original one-act farce-comedy were given under widely varying conditions and before types of audiences which differed greatly in their compositions. Guided by audience response, certain parts of the play were judged to be deficient. Techniques used by experienced playwrights were followed in overcoming these deficiencies. The play was then re-presented, and reaction of the second audience was compared with that of the first for proof of the efficacy of the devices used. Playwriting techniques could be isolated and checked at random simply by presenting the play at one time without resorting to the technique in question and then presenting it the next time with the technique included. In such a manner, it was found
that certain basic techniques of playwriting could definitely be pointed to as sound.

II. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this experiment indicate that the following techniques of playwriting are sound, inasmuch as they add to audience understanding and enjoyment of a play:

1. Technique of establishing the mood early.
2. Of using only those characters absolutely necessary.
3. Of preparing the audience for important events by antecedent "planting" of necessary facts, but refraining from all mention of unnecessary facts.
4. Of building the play so that certain scenes desired by the audience will be presented.
5. Of having a climax that is definite and clear cut.
6. Of writing laugh lines so that the laugh comes at the end of the line.
7. Of making all dialogue consistent with the personality of the character speaking.
8. Of using unexpected turns in both action and dialogue.

Certain other conclusions were made, also, as a result of this experimentation. It was found that an audience's sense of humor is very difficult to pre-determine. The
typical audience sometimes laughs for no apparent reason and sometimes withholds laughs which are sought. It was found, too, that the personality of the actor can completely alter the significance of a written line.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
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A. BOOKS


B. PERIODICAL ARTICLES

SUPPLEMENTARY BIBLIOGRAPHY


FOR THE

DEDICATION

OF THE

"NEW-CLASS-ROOM-BLDG"

THE

SYCAMORE

PLAYERS

PERFORM

APRIL 14, 1950

INDIANA

STATE

TEACHERS

COLLEGE
THE INDISCREET GENERAL
by
HAL KESLER*

Judson Haynes. . . . . . . . . . Richard Hahn
Peggy Courtney. . . . . . . . . . Virginia Sims
Carol Haynes . . . . . . . . . . Mary Alice Bayh
Andrew Courtney. . . . . . . . . Jack Preston
Clent Lattigan . . . . . . . . . . Robert Loy

Setting
The entire action of the play takes place in the living room of the Haynes home.

Time
Evening in early Fall.

CHILDREN'S THEATRE

During the intermission, Harriet Watkins, Business Manager of the Children's Theatre, will present David Canine, juvenile player, and his accompanist, Carole Barnett, who will be featured in the INTERNATIONAL REVUE to be given Saturday and Sunday, April 15 and 16, in the Student Union Building Auditorium at 2:30 P. M.
THE FATHER TAKES A WIFE
by
HAL KESLER

Rodney Barlowe ........... Cliff Simpson
Bradley Barlowe ........... Hal Kesler
Cathy Barlowe ........... Harriet Tyree
Gertrude Dunne ........... Vera Laughlin
Ferry Dunne ................. Don Cline

Setting
The living room of the Barlowe home.

Time
7:30 one evening.

* These two plays written by Hal Kesler, graduate student at Indiana State Teachers College, will be published this Fall by the Northwestern Press of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The author will introduce the plays.
THETA ALPHA PHI
NATIONAL CONVENTION

Friday, Saturday, May 5, 6, 1950
Indiana State Teachers College
Terre Haute, Indiana

NATIONAL OFFICERS
Dr. Lee Norvelle, Indiana Alpha, President
Professor A.C. Cloetingh, Pennsylvania Gamma, Secretary-Treasurer
Mabel Clare Allen, Illinois Delta, Vice-pres.

CONVENTION COMMITTEE
Dr. R. W. Masters, Indiana Delta, Chairman
Don Buell, Michigan Delta
Mabel Clare Allen, Illinois Delta
Althea Hunt, Virginia Alpha

APPENDIX B
THETA ALPHA PHI CONVENTION PROGRAM
THETA ALPHA PHI
NATIONAL CONVENTION
Friday, May 5

11:00 a.m. - REGISTRATION - Sycamore Playhouse
12:00 LUNCHEON Student Union Cafeteria
    Introduction of delegates and advisors
1:00 p.m. BUSINESS MEETING Sycamore Playhouse
    Chapter Reports, Officer's Reports
    Dr. Lee Norvelle, Presiding
2:00 PRESENTATION OF ORIGINAL PLAY
    THE INDISCREET GENERAL-Sycamore Playhouse
2:30 PRODUCING THE NEW PLAY Mr. David Itkin

6:30 BANQUET - Student Union Ballroom
    Program by Children's Theatre
    "Hansel and Gretel" Kirby Smith, Judy Watkins, Betty Briggs, Accompanist
    "Anatole of Paris" David Canine
    "Out Too Late" Nancy Fisher
    "On Ze Toes" Trudy Davis
    "Ching Ching China Girl" Mary Jo Brown
    Donna Kord, Karen Dill, Catherine Berkowitz, Jerri Patrick, Joanne Gray
    Dance numbers by the Ernestine Myers School of the Dance, Florann Buzash, Assistant

THE GOOSEBERRY MANDARIN
    Prologue Woodrow and Susan Woodworth
    Fling Loo Nancy Woodworth
    Willow Tree James Griffith
    Mandarin Bill Sorrells

8:00 OUT OF THE FRYING PAN Studio Theatre
    Presented by Michigan Delta
    Don Buell, advisor
THETA ALPHA PHI
NATIONAL CONVENTION
Saturday, May 6

10:00 a.m. ROUND TABLE Sycamore Playhouse
OUR PLACE IN THE AMERICAN THEATRE SCENE

12:00 LUNCHEON Student Union Cafeteria
CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL THEATRE
Professor A.C. Cloetingh, Penn. State

2:00 BUSINESS MEETING Sycamore Playhouse
Dr. Lee Norvelle, Presiding

3:00 GREEN ROOM TEA Indiana Delta Alumni
Margaret Mitchell Beecher, chairman

Presentation of awards

Indiana Delta is most happy to be
host to the 1950 National Convention of Theta Alpha Phi. We hope the convention is of
value to all of you, and we thank all of you
for your cooperation.

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THETA ALPHA PHI CONVENTION PROGRAM