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SELECTIVE NATURALISM: A DIRECTOR'S  
APPROACH TO TOBACCO ROAD

By

Kenneth J. Ott

B.A., Indiana University, 1973

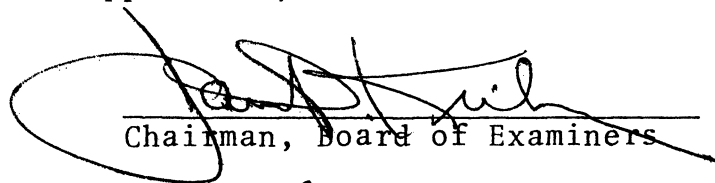
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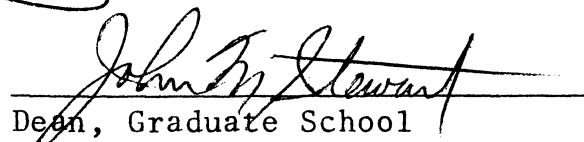
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1977

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ABSTRACT

Ott, Kenneth J., M.F.A., June 1977

Drama

Selective Naturalism: A Director's Approach to Tobacco Road (243 pp.)

Director: James D. Kriley

Tobacco Road, by Jack Kirkland, adapted from the novel by Erskine Caldwell, is a story of human deprivation, survival and desperation best depicted on stage through the method of selective naturalism. The thesis provides a biographical study of the author and the playwright and a historical review of the novel and the play, including records of previous productions.

The thesis also includes: an analysis of the script, a summary of the process used to arrive at the production concept, a review and analysis of several viewpoints of naturalism important in the conceptualization of the script, and a definition of selective naturalism. Included also are: a director's log, a set rendering, the production book, and an actor's journal, as well as some production photographs. The concluding chapter provides an evaluation of the production concept and a discussion based on the Department's oral critique of the production.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

"Tobacco Road" by Jack Kirkland, adapted from the novel by Erskine Caldwell, is a story of deprivation and desperation best depicted on the stage through the concept and methods of selective naturalism.

The source of the play is the novel, Tobacco Road (1932) which is, according to Erskine Caldwell, a social document. The novel documents, in an entertaining but naturalistic fashion, an environment of deprivation producing characters desperate in the act of survival. Naturalism is the distillation of reality; a focus on the sensual and textural details of the environment, based on objective and scientific observation of life. There is an emphasis on the sordid and ugly details and the characters are products of the environment. Selective naturalism uses this distillation but limits the focus to only the important details of the environment and character necessary to the story and within the limitations of the stage.

This thesis will examine, through a directorial approach, the play "Tobacco Road." This examination will include the following:

1. An analysis of the script.
2. An explanation and summary of the process used to arrive at the concept.
3. A biographical study of the author of the novel and the playwright.
4. A historical review of the novel and the play, including previous productions.
5. A review and analysis of several viewpoints of naturalism important to the development and definition of selective naturalism.
6. An evaluation of concept and final product.

#### Objectives for the Production

The main objective for the production of "Tobacco Road" was to interpret and retell the story of Jack Kirkland's very faithful adaptation of the Erskine Caldwell novel, Tobacco Road, on stage. This was to be done through a concept of selective naturalism.

Erskine Caldwell's story is a social documentary attempting to create an understanding and a sympathetic response to the characters within the environmental conditions of rural poverty and hopeless deprivation. This response can best be evoked and these conditions can best be depicted on stage through the method of selective naturalism.

The minor professional objectives include: a) an attempt to make the production a pleasurable learning experience; and b) an attempt to keep all channels of communication open



throughout the staff and company.

### Selection of the Script

The personal criteria for my selection of "Tobacco Road" for production were:

1. That it must be an American script. I am very interested in American drama and was not interested in directing a script that was a translation. A translation would limit research potential.
2. That it must be a script in which I have a personal interest or strong desire to direct. A thesis should develop from a personal interest or involvement. While living in Indiana I was exposed to rural poverty unlike any I had ever experienced. Though not exactly like the Georgia sharecropper poverty depicted in Tobacco Road, my personal experience was, nonetheless, very similar. I was a volunteer for a food commodity program, delivering food supplements to families living in deprived poverty conditions. I vividly remember these unfortunates and their environment. I felt a personal responsibility to express an awareness of their human condition.
3. That the script be a worthwhile piece of literature. Tobacco Road is an interesting social documentary written by a significant American author and one

which enjoyed success as both a novel and a script.

Additional criteria for selection of a script for a directing-thesis production are as follows: a) it should offer a challenge to the director's development and also offer the potential for substantial research; and b) it should offer both student actors / designers / technicians a vehicle for professional growth and an exposure to a variety of types of literature and styles.

A list of scripts was narrowed down to three titles to be submitted to the faculty. They included: Tobacco Road, A Streetcar Named Desire, and Billy Budd.

The specific appeal of Tobacco Road for a thesis production was that:

1. It was adapted from a novel, by a significant author, offering a large potential of research possibilities.
2. It was an equally balanced cast for men and women.
3. It was a commercially successful American classic.
4. It had not been previously produced by the University of Montana.

The faculty notified me that Tobacco Road had been selected and that it was to be the first production of the coming season. I started my initial research. I ordered a script from Samuel French, only to hear that "Tobacco Road" was "restricted" and that I could not buy a copy of the script

and could not produce the play in the immediate future. I wrote back requesting an answer as to "why" this was so. I also wrote to Mr. Erskine Caldwell, author of the novel, since Jack Kirkland was dead, asking him the same question. He personally contacted Samuel French and the restriction was lifted. I received this letter from Mr. Caldwell:

---

MEMORANDUM

31 August 76

Dear Kenneth Ott:

I hope I was able to come to the rescue and get Sam French to act as they should. I hear that you have the rights now and I'm glad.

I was in Missoula at the wrong time. My wife and I were there for a day & night last (this past) summer and we should have waited until you staged your production of TR.

Hope all goes well. Let me know what the critic say!

Best wishes,

*Erskine Caldwell*  
Erskine Caldwell

P.O.Box 820,  
Dunedin, Florida 33528

ERSKINE CALDWELL

Limitations

A director must be aware of and able to evaluate the limitations of a production. He also has the obligation to work within these limitations. The major limitations affect-

ing the production of "Tobacco Road" are: script, space and facility, budget, time, and talent.

### Script

The script of "Tobacco Road" offers two major limitations. First, the playing time of the script is approximately two and one-half hours. This is too long for an audience and unnecessarily long to tell the story. Many repetitive passages slow down the pace, especially for the character of Jeeter Lester. Lines, even passages, will need to be cut for the final production.

Second, it requires the use and control of a rural uneducated dialect. Good models for this type of regional speech are inaccessible and the cast, furthermore, will have little or no training with the use of dialects.

### Space and Facility

The production of "Tobacco Road" was assigned to be performed in the 90-seat Masquer Theatre with the stage dimensions of 20' x 20'. This factor was bound to compromise the directorial concept which intends to use an approach of selective naturalism. For example, the lack of physical space, the intimacy factor, the two walls, the post, the two existing limitations all must be recognized, considered, and either incorporated or compromised in the ground plan and other design elements.

### Budget

The budget, as set by the producer, the Department of Drama/Dance, will not be a major limitation. However, it will be an important consideration. The concept should be comfortable within the budget. The materials needed for the set, props and costumes (i.e., dirt, barnwood, old junk, wornout clothes) should be available and inexpensive.

### Time

A five-week rehearsal period for the production of "Tobacco Road" is scheduled. There will be conflicts within the cast regarding personal obligations and schedules, other productions and rehearsals. This will limit the time for individual attention and making scheduling difficult.

### Talent

The major limitation, in terms of talent, will be the availability of actors to play the age and maturity requirements of the script. Three roles in particular will demand maturity. Two major roles require characters over 50 years old and one minor role demands a character of 90. Maturity is often a difficult quality to find, a regrettable shortcoming in educational theatre productions.

### Definition of Terms

In order to establish a clear intention and consistency of the approach taken by the director in conceptualizing and

staging the production of "Tobacco Road", four key terms must be defined. These terms will be only briefly defined in this chapter, according to the working understanding of the director in terms of directing the production. They will be studied in perspective and defined in greater detail in chapter 3.

Realism. A skeletal view of the origins of realism can be traced by a very brief overview of human communication.

Man's development of communication began with symbols and these symbols became part of ritual. These symbols developed out of physical needs, religion or myths, and social organization. More sophisticated man developed higher forms of communication: drama, philosophy, and art. The symbols and myths still remained a basis for models. They became classical models and ideals. The slow process from the classical to the neo-classical to the romantic forms of communications still kept the symbols as the key. The Romantics were rooted in the classical but exaggerated the ideal.

It was not until the nineteenth century that a break with the ideal started. Instead of using the classical forms as the focus, nature and life became the focus. Duplication and imitation of the real, of nature and life was the goal.

Realism in theatre is the portrayal of people and things on a stage as they are in life and nature objectively observed

through the five senses.

Naturalistic. "Naturalistic" is a point of view, an approach, a style, and a manner reflecting the fact that life and reality are found in nature. The physical world and all its phenomenon are based also in nature and there is no supernatural reality. The Naturalistic manner also reflects that Truth is found only in nature.

Naturalism. Naturalism concerns itself with the effect or mood found by means of a naturalistic attempt at viewing life through examination of the environment. It is a distillation of realism with a focus on the sensual and frank elements of the environment that shape the characters. The focus is based on scientific observation of the environment and human behavior within the environment. There is no avoidance of the ugly and the grotesque. There is complete avoidance of the ideal or classical, the supernatural, and the structured. There is a search for the truth found only in life.

Selective naturalism. Selective naturalism uses principles of naturalism, the distillation of reality, but limits the focus and choices to only the important elements of the environment and character necessary to tell the story within the limitations of time, space, and resource.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND

The source of the play "Tobacco Road," by Jack Kirkland, is the novel by the same title written by Erskine Caldwell. The play is an adaptation of the novel written one year after the publication of the novel. In 1933, after the novel had been published for a year and had enjoyed only a small amount of success, Jack Kirkland applied to Erskine Caldwell for the rights to adapt the novel into a stage play. Caldwell had no interest in an adaptation himself, so a contract for adaptation was given to Kirkland. There was no collaboration between them on the play. Caldwell's first contact with the play was when he viewed it on Broadway. The novel was also adapted into a film in 1941 by Twentieth Century Fox, directed by John Ford.

#### Author

The author of the novel, Erskine Caldwell, was born in White Oak, Georgia, on December 17, 1902. His father was a Presbyterian minister known for his liberal views. His mother tutored him at home when he was young to supplement his grade school education. Later he attended Erskine College in South Carolina and the Universities of Virginia and



Pennsylvania. His main ambition throughout his education was to become a writer.

As a youth Caldwell acted as a chauffeur for a county physician, assisted the county tax collector on periodic trips and also accompanied his father on trips to visit the poor. He grew up in close proximity to the poor whites and Negroes of Georgia. The exposure provided a basis for subject matter written from observation and first-hand impression.

At fifteen he worked at the cottonseed mill on the all night shift, where he and older whites and Negroes discussed the numerous sexual activities of the local population.<sup>1</sup>

In his youth, he traveled and worked odd jobs in Mississippi, Florida, and Louisiana. This free-wheeling landed him a short jail term in Louisiana. After college he moved to the state of Maine to do some serious writing. It is interesting to note that Caldwell was employed at many jobs to support his writing. He worked as a cotton picker; this job exposed him to the types he later wrote about. He worked as a chauffeur, taxi driver, pro-football player, and book reviewer. He worked as a newspaper reporter and writer for the Atlanta Journal for a short time before he moved north. Having this previous newspaper experience he found work as a part-time writer for several newspapers in the north. His job as a book reviewer gave him

---

<sup>1</sup>Charles Taylor Pridogee, Jr., "Sex in the Novels and Short Stories of Erskine Caldwell" (Master's thesis, Duke University, 1962), p. 35.

special benefits. He was able to sell the free books he received and make money enough to buy food and firewood, which were important necessities for a poor writer in the woods of Maine. After he sold his first few articles and his first collection of stories, American Earth (1930), he moved to New York City where he wrote Tobacco Road. Although Caldwell started out under these hardships he became the best-selling novelist in publishing history.

Caldwell is a novelist of the old school, in that he does not earn his living by reporting on political conventions, does not teach creative writing at a university, does not have a special income from a medical practice nor hold a position at a bank or insurance company. Nor is he a writer in residence at a university who reside a lot but publish less and less. Erskine Caldwell is a professional novelist.<sup>2</sup>

Erskine Caldwell has written around thirty novels including: God's Little Acre (1937), We Are the Living (1933), Southways (1938), and Lady (1975). He has also written three anthologies of short stories. He is considered a great American novelist in the same vein of humor and social commentary as William Faulkner and John Steinbeck.

### Playwright

Jack Kirkland was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1902. He had a varied career as a writer including work as a staff writer for the New York Daily News. He also had a varied

---

<sup>2</sup>James Korges, Erskine Caldwell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 15.

married life. He was divorced five times; one wife, Nancy Carroll was an actress. He was known as a "garbage can" writer because he found his source material in existent works. He was an adapter and a good one.

His notable works of adaptation include the films: "Frankie & Johnny" (1928); "Tortilla Flat" (1930); "The Man With the Golden Arm" (1956); and "Mandingo" (1964). He became a theatrical producer, producing both stage plays and films.

Kirkland's adaptation of Tobacco Road is a very honest treatment of the Caldwell novel. There are few changes. Kirkland is the main reason for the success of the play. He and the producer, Anthony Brown, reinvested their earnings back into the production to keep it playing on Broadway. This was an uncommon practice for a playwright. But due to the reinvestment, the play lasted on Broadway for a record seven and one-half years. When the play became successful, the sales of the novel began to grow. The novel did not become a best seller, indeed sales barely covered Caldwell's advance, until the success of the dramatization.

#### The Novel

Erskine Caldwell began the novel while writing in Maine and completed it while in New York City in 1932. The novel met with mixed reviews, but mostly favorable. No one labeled Tobacco Road as a masterpiece but they admired Caldwell for his ability to tell a story. It was considered a good first

novel.

Jonathan Daniels, of the Saturday Review of Literature, wrote in a March 5, 1932 review:

TOBACCO ROAD is strong meat. Too ludicrous for any free piety, too pitiful for any whole laughter, in it people move from first to last like the still hungry but half rotten dead.<sup>3</sup>

The Springfield Republican reviewed the novel on April 4, 1932, by stating:

TOBACCO ROAD is not by any means a bad story, but nevertheless it is just another of those "studies" of agricultural poverty and deterioration.<sup>4</sup>

The New York Times Book Review of February 21, 1972 suggested Caldwell displayed a "unique" talent and rated him with the best of his southern contemporaries.

After the Broadway success of the play, the novel sold over ten million copies. The sale of Tobacco Road and God's Little Acre made Erskine Caldwell the best-selling novelist in publishing history for a short time. Both these novels also made him one of the most censored novelists as well. There were many court cases banning the sale and distribution of these novels. Many considered them "pornography." Indeed they were leading "drug store paperbacks" and were sold with hyped-up sex advertising. The cover of this paperback script published in 1958 is a good example of this sexually oriented advertising campaign. The same kind of campaign helped sell the Broadway production. (See page 16.)

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<sup>3</sup>Readers Guide, Book Review, 1932.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

# "Tobacco Road"

FEB. 21, 1932

TOBACCO ROAD. By Erskine Caldwell. 241 pp. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$2.50.

TO the list of new Southern writers, whose names are growing numerous enough to represent a veritable literary renaissance, we may add, with the publication of "Tobacco Road," the name of Erskine Caldwell. It would be idle, perhaps, on the strength of this one novel and his previous volume of short stories, "American Earth," to attempt to rank him according to his relative merit in a group which includes such distinguished talents as those of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe and Marjistan Chapman. But no one who reads this book will deny his right to be named with the best of his Southern contemporaries. Both as an interpreter of a local scene and as a creator of an original method of conveying that scene to his reader, Mr. Caldwell displays a talent which is, in some respects, unique.

The remote and forsaken corner of Georgia which Mr. Caldwell takes as his province is part of an incredibly down-at-heel world. Jeeter Lester, with his wife and his remaining two children, lived on the land which had once been his grandfather's prosperous tobacco plantation. No part of it now remained to him, not even the crumbling cabin which he occupied rent-free because it was not worth collecting rent for. Jeeter considered himself a cotton planter and for the past seven years, since his landlord had cut off his credit at the store, Jeeter had burned over his land each Spring and had attempted to borrow a mule and seed cotton and guano, in order to put in a crop. He had never succeeded, and in the meantime laziness and discouragement and a more or less constant starvation had been taking their toll of Jeeter's ambition. Still, he persistently refused to join his neighbors' thrifty exodus to the towns and cotton mills.

Them darn cotton mills is for the women folks to work in. They ain't no place for a man to be, fooling away with little wheels and strings all day long. I say, it's a hell of a job for a man to spend his time in winding strings on spools. No! We was put here on the land where cotton will grow, and it's my place to make it grow. I wouldn't fool with the mills if I could make as much as fifteen dollars a week in them. I'm staying on the land till my time comes to die.

With the theft of an occasional bag of turnips the remnants of Jeeter's family make what shift they can against imminent starvation. Dude has the good fortune to find favor in the eyes of Sister

Bessie, an evangelist of great local distinction, whose possession of a new Ford car is considered ample compensation for her lack of youth and pulchritude. Ellie May, in spite of her hare-lip, finally accomplishes the seduction of the only man in the vicinity who is drawing a salary. Mother and grandmother gather firewood, nag at Jeeter and steal snuff from each other.

The grotesque humor of "Tobacco Road"—which is as robust as that of the Elizabethans, although it differs from theirs by being entirely unornamented—is, for various reasons, unquotable. Yet it serves, as nothing else could serve, to point the pathos of Jeeter Lester's life. After the final tragedy of the book, in which Jeeter burns over his land once too often and a great deal too thoroughly, comes the magnificent irony of the conclusion. Irresponsible Dude, surveying the land which is now, by courtesy, his, reflects:

I reckon I'll get a mule somewhere and some seed cotton and guano, and grow me a crop of cotton this year. It feels to me like it's going to be a good year for cotton. Maybe I could grow me a bale to the acre, like Pa always talked about doing.

**"A HONEYMOON IS WHAT  
TWO PEOPLE DO  
AFTER THEY IS MARRIED."**

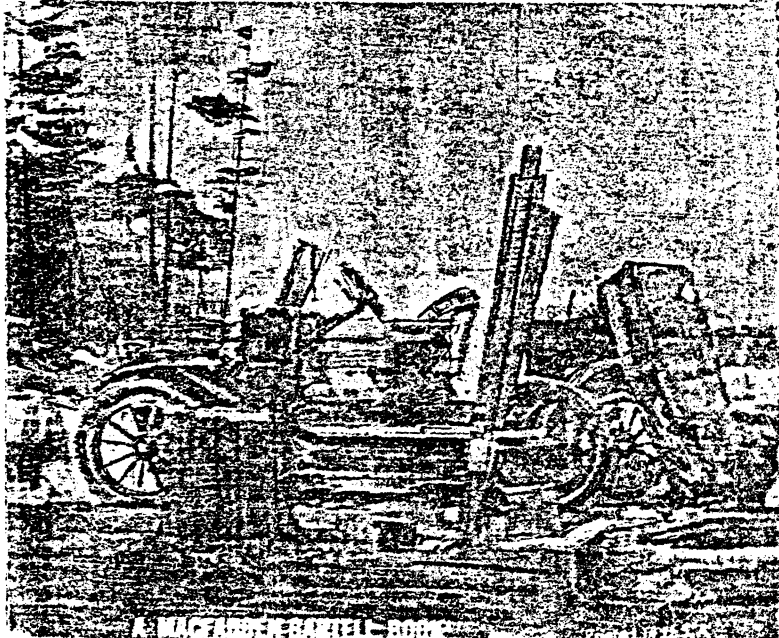
Sister Bessie edged toward Jeeter's shack, looking over her shoulder at Dude. Jeeter pushed him.

"Can't you see how bad Sister Bessie wants to go inside?"

"What for?" Dude grumbled. Sister Bessie took his arm.

"Just for now. Come on."

Dude let himself be pushed and pulled to the porch. After the door closed behind them, Jeeter went to the shack window and peered in. After a few minutes, he grinned. His male children had always married young, but this one had gotten himself a handful of real woman...



A. MACFADEN, BARTLETT

MACFADEN from the novel by 75c  
**ERSKINE  
CALDWELL**

## TOBACCO ROAD

Jack Kirkland

With a new introduction by Erskine Caldwell

A terrified bride, a shameless father, a brutal son and a passionate widow are caught in a trap of greed and tragedy



The complete unabridged text  
of the play which ran seven and a half years on Broadway

Erskine Caldwell is an internationally popular author, his books have been translated into 27 languages and have sold over 61,000,000 copies of all his editions in print around the world. An estimated 25,000,000 people have either read the novel or have seen the play "Tobacco Road."

### The Play

The play "Tobacco Road" opened at the Masque Theatre in New York on December 4, 1933. It was produced by both Anthony Brown and Jack Kirkland. Anthony Brown also directed the production. It was designed by Robert Redington Sharpe.

The production received mixed reviews, mostly critical of the play itself. However, most all the reviews praised the performance of Henry Hull as Jeeter Lester claiming this to be the "performance of his career." It was generally assumed that the production had a good cast and was well directed but the play was a "bit too honest and ugly." Some of the reviews of the Broadway production included the following examples (pages 18 to 23).

After receiving mixed reviews the play struggled on Broadway in the red for the first two years with the producers reinvesting their earnings to keep the show alive. Soon the play attained the reputation for being "filthy" and started to draw the curiosity that make for capacity houses. It lasted seven and one-half years with a total of 3,182 performances and is still the third longest running

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 5, 1933

## Henry Hull in "Tobacco Road," Based On the Novel by Erskine Caldwell

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE it is based on a novel, "Tobacco Road," which was acted at the Masque last evening, is not an organic play. Although Jack Kirkland has turned it into three acts, it is still Erskine Caldwell's novel at heart, which is to say that is more like a soliloquy with variations than a dramatic character sketch. Under Mr. Caldwell's influence it is also one of the grossest episodes ever put on the stage. Once the theatre used to be sinful. But now it is the novel that ferrets out the abominations of life and exposes them for sale in the marketplace. The men of letters have stolen the dramatists' crimson badge; and the theatre has never sheltered a fouler or more degenerate parcel of folks than the hardscrabble family of Lester that lives along the "Tobacco Road."

But that is not a full and disinterested report of the Masque Theatre's current tenant. For Mr. Caldwell is a demoniac genius—brutal, grimly comic and clairvoyant. No

one has chronicled the complete degeneracy of the Georgia cracker with such inhuman detachment. He writes with the fiery sword. Although "Tobacco Road" reels around the stage like a drunken stranger to the theatre, it has spasmodic moments of merciless power

when truth is flung into your face with all the slime that truth contains. That is why Mr. Caldwell's grossness cannot be dismissed as morbidity and gratuitous indecency. It is the blunt truth of the characters he is describing, and it leaves a malevolent glow of poetry above the rudeness of his statement.

"Tobacco Road" is the saga of Jeeter Lester, a good-for-nothing farmer who still lives on the land his father and grandfather farmed. But it is no longer his. Being lazy and dissolute, he has lost everything and now exists with his tatterdemalion family in the dirt and filth of a rickety shack. The Lesters are ragged, foul, starving and lazy. But still Jeeter preserves that fluency of talk and fecundity of crack-brained ideas and that animal sensuality which live in the lower darkness. Everything exists on the same plane of inhumanity. Even death leaves no impression upon life that is dead in everything save the body.

As Jeeter Lester, Henry Hull gives the performance of his career. For years Mr. Hull has been charming and trivial about many things and singularly obtuse about some others. But here is a character portrait as mordant and brilliant as you can imagine. Dressed in loathsome rags, untidily bearded and heavily wrinkled, Mr. Hull's Georgia cracker staggers through a whole gamut of emotions and passions — pungent, pathetic, horrible and gargantuanly comic.

The performance is shabbily directed. But it includes an excellent portrait of a headlong boy by Sam Byrd and a picturesque setting by Robert Redington Sharpe. Plays as clumsy and rudderless as "Tobacco Road" seldom include so many scattered items that leave such a vivid impression.



Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 5, 1933

# Tragedy Runs Deep In "Tobacco Road"

Play Dealing with Poor Whites of Georgia Too Dolorous To Be Viewed Seriously.

By ROBERT GARLAND

YOU'LL be glad you aren't in Dixie when you see the play Jack Kirkland has founded on Erskine Caldwell's "Tobacco Road," a novel highly spoken of by the novel-reading cognoscenti. Away down South in the land of cotton they're looking forward to the depression.

The Lesters are, at any rate. Or they would be if, in the back country of their native Georgia, they had ever heard of it.

They haven't heard of it, however, being all hemmed in by a superior depression of their own. In my theatre-going days I am yet to see a more feckless family than

these Lesters. Mr. Kirkland inherited from Mr. Caldwell. Outstanding members of the hangdog and hookworm set, they enjoy as superior miseries as the drama has so far known. They're in the lower lower depths.

Reading from left to right and back again, they're miserable Southerners, and there's no health in them. And no wealth, either.

Being as God, the civil war or Mr. Caldwell made them, they won't do anything about it. Not they! From Grandma Lester, who lives a life akin to that of the subterranean mole, to Grandson Dude Lester, who is partial to the bouncing of balls and the blowing of automobile horns, the Lesters prefer to be peculiar in their quaint back-country way. It is, you gather, an old Georgian custom.

Much Happens Between Dozing Spells

When the curtain rises at the Masque,

where "Tobacco Road" is playing, Jeeter Lester is dozing on the dilapidated front porch of his dilapidated house in the most dilapidated part of Georgia. When the curtain falls at the Masque, where "Tobacco Road" is still playing, Jeeter Lester is dozing on the dilapidated front porch of his dilapidated house in the most dilapidated part of Georgia.

In between these dozes almost everything has happened. Almost everything you can think of, and many a thing you can't.

Among the things you can think of is the old meanie who, in a derby and pretending not to be Jack Dalton, drops in from Augusta to take Jeeter Lester's farm from him. And the Dude Lester who, although a youngster, marries Sister Bessie Rice so as to come into possession of an automobile horn to play with. And the Sister Bessie Rice who marries in haste and repents immediately.

And the Pearl of great price—seven dollars her husband paid for her—who, as far as she's concerned, is married in name only.

And Ada Lester who, married to Jeeter, wants a stylish new dress to wear to her own funeral. (She gets the funeral without the dress, which shows how relentless a relentless play can be.) And Lov Bensey, the only comparatively sane person in the Caldwell-Kirkland undertaking, who is poison to his Pearl of seven-dollar price. And Ellie May, who belongs in one of those books the doctors are supposed to read.

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## Misery Beyond Old Russia's

The Russians—the misery-loving Russians of the good old Gorky-Dostoyevsky days—would be ashamed of the minor miseries of "The Lower Depths" and "The Brothers Karamazov." In the face of "Tobacco Road" they would. For the Georgians revealed last night are Gorky-Dostoyevsky Russians raised to the *nth* degree. Singly and collectively they suffer from the Stephen Foster blues.

What I mean is that they're so doggone discouraged that life is just a bowl of hookworms marching Sherman-like through Georgia.

This and its accompanying tribulations would be considerably more discouraging were it not for the histrionics of Henry Hull. As the man who came back with whiskers Mr. Hull gives one of the finest performances of a career that has not been free of fine performances. In all such serio-comic plays—"serio" when written by a novelist and "comic" when translated into make-believe—it is difficult to grasp your characterization and hold it intact to the end.

This Mr. Hull does.

In the surrounding cast I care for Sam Byrd, who goes in for automobile horns in a big way; for Margaret Wycherly, who bites the hand that wouldn't feed her, and for Ruth Hunter, who is called upon to do things Kraft-Ebbing never heard of. Reneice Rehan has several good reasons for being Pearl, and Dean Jagger had one good reason for being Lov Bensey. Mr. Jagger is underrated by Miss Rehan.

"Tobacco Road" is too tragic to be taken seriously. Like life, it is consistently incredible. And a trifle off key.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 5, 1933

## Anthony Brown Presents Henry Hull at the Masque in Mr. Caldwell's "Tobacco Road"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

**T**HOUGH I have not read Erskine Caldwell's "Tobacco Road" and think but little of the play which John Kirkland has made from it, I must confess there are several vital and earthy moments in the production which Anthony Brown has given it at the Masque that bear the unmistakable marks of Mr. Caldwell's writing as it revealed itself in such a novel as "God's Little Acre."

What I am getting at is that Mr. Kirkland's dramatization seems, on the face of it, to belong much more to Mr. Caldwell than it does to Mr. Kirkland, and for that very reason it fails as a play. It is another book-bound script, which is interesting enough

in all those brutally atmospheric moments at which Mr. Caldwell excels as a novelist but which proves ridiculously inept whenever it attempts to twist its slight plot into dramatic form.

It succeeds most when it sounds as if some one who was reading Mr. Caldwell's pages aloud to you had somehow managed to fill your eyes as well as your ears with pictures of the drab animals, known as human beings, who inhabit the back country of Mr. Caldwell's Georgia. But the theatre is a cruelly tricky place, and the same unrelieved brutality which can lend conviction to the chapters of a novel can prove absurdly overdrawn and laughable when acted out upon a stage.

### Insane Sex Living

It is this very thing which seems to have happened at the Masque to the lustful morons

of "Tobacco Road." Denied the protection of print, seen in the flesh rather than described in words, and spied upon by an audience rather than encountered alone, these men and women become incredible caricatures of themselves. Almost every third speech they utter tends to undo whatever may have been done by the two speeches they have just spoken. For what might pass in the library as an author's sincere notion of the primitiveness of the "poor whites" soon begins to sound in the theatre like a long-drawn parody of all the grim tales of the soil that have come out of the South.

Mr. Caldwell's story, as retold by Mr. Kirkland, is a resolutely squalid yarn which describes the unhappy home life of the "sinful Lesters." They are a weird lot of savages,

these Lesters; filthy, starved, light-fingered and lecherous. They are pigs who wallow in the dirt of the miserable sty they are willing to call home. They have the look of pigs, the smell of pigs, the habits of pigs, and the morals of guinea pigs. They are so close to the soil that it is hard to tell them from it.

Old Pa Lester loves the little strip of land upon which he and his forefathers have eked out an existence. He loves it so much that he tries to save it from the banks, which have taken it over, by means of all inhuman bargains that, for three loose-jointed and feeble acts, provide "Tobacco Road" with whatever plot it can boast.

He is a profane old codger who delights in recalling his promiscuous past; who thinks nothing of taunting one of his daughters about the split upper lip which disfigures her; who encourages his worthless son to marry an elderly lady preacher for the automobile she promises to buy him; who leaves his mute old mother-in-law unburied in the nearby fields, and who ignores the wishes of his wife even in her hour of death and is willing to sell her illegitimate daughter back to the young husband from whom she has run away.

### More Than Three Little Pigs

Though there are times when the loamy mortals in "Tobacco Road" have an authentic and an unconventional interest that cannot be denied, the play in which they find themselves is, on the whole, as feeble as it is unpleasant. It has been carefully produced at the Masque, includes a single setting by Mr. Sharpe which finds the stage floor heaped in dirt, and is well enough acted by Sam Byrd, Ruth Hunter, Dean Jagg and Reneice Rehan.

Maude Odell is hard to put up with in the entirely phony part of the lustful lady preacher. Margaret Wycherly is appropriately fagged and weary as the ill-used mother. And Henry Hull—sporting a fierce crop of red hair, a grizzly beard, a stained shirt, overalls and a great pair of dusty shoes—not only has a very good time of it as old Pa Lester but gives one of the best performances of his career. But he cannot save the play from itself or from the deadening weight of the live stock it chooses to parade as men and women.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 5, 1933

## 'Tobacco Road,' Dramatization of a Novel, Opens at the Masque Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ERSKINE CALDWELL'S burrowing among the facts of life in the Georgia backwoods was revealed to Broadway last evening in a play fashioned from his "Tobacco Road," by Jack Kirkland. At the Masque Theater it bears the same title and is concerned, in Mr. Caldwell's perhaps intentionally humorous way, with death, poverty, lust and deformity. These distressing misfortunes are rather loosely strung together in a lagging drama which quite frequently achieves the repulsive and seldom falls below the faintly sickening.

How closely it follows the novel I can only guess, Mr. Caldwell's "God's Little Acre" having forced me into a detour around the rest of his little stories. It seems, however, to have the flavor. It is a photograph and many insist an accurate enough photograph, of life among the Southern "poor whites." The scene is the exterior of the Lester farmhouse and the extremely dusty yard in front of it. The Lesters have, for several generations, been going into a sullen decline. Old Grandma Lester can now do no more than grovel wearily in the dust, until finally she summons the strength to totter out and die in the fields.

Jeeter Lester—who is painted full-length and excellently played by Henry Hull—is a hiftless no-count, who does a little stealing now and then. His wife wishes a stylish dress to die and be buried in. One of their daughters has a hare-lip and spends the first act in

squirming about in the dust, so expressing in her pretty way an avidness for the caresses of a neighbor boy who is married to her sister. The sister has beautiful yellow hair and a strong distaste for her husband. Another young Lester marries a buxom and amorous "lady preacher" because she promises to buy him a new car. Eventually he runs over his mother in the car and kills her. She, you may be sure, drags herself back to die in the dust in front of the house, giving up the ghost only after she has severely bitten her husband, thus forcing him to release the daughter with beautiful yellow hair, whom he had thought to return to her husband by force.

The casual indifference of the Lesters and their associates to all the horrors which sur-

### 'TOBACCO ROAD'

A play in three acts by Jack Kirkland; based on the novel by Erskine Caldwell; staged and presented at the Masque Theater by Anthony Brown.

The cast:

|                          |                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Jeeter Lester .....      | Henry Hull        |
| Dude Lester .....        | Sam Byrd          |
| Ada Lester .....         | Margaret Wycherly |
| Ellie May .....          | Ruth Hunter       |
| Grandma Lester .....     | Patricia Quinn    |
| Henry Peabody .....      | Ashley Cooper     |
| Sister Bessie Rice ..... | Maude Odell       |
| Lov Bensy .....          | Dean Jagger       |
| Pearl .....              | Reneice Renan     |
| Captain Tim .....        | Lamar King        |
| George Payne .....       | Edwin Walter      |

round them provides Mr. Caldwell's humor. Learning that his mother has disappeared, and only guessing that she may have wandered out into the brush fire, Jeeter remarks that he must go out and have a look for her one of these days. It has been suggested, in connection with the author's other works, that this casual attitude, and the excessive piling up of bizarre incidents in which he indulges, establish Mr. Caldwell as a satirist. Mr. Caldwell has already indignantly denied any such intention, assuring literary critics that they saw a good deal of humor in his books, which he didn't. If "Tobacco Road" is a fair sample, Mr. Caldwell does seem to have been unfairly dealt with. It is clear that his humor is almost entirely unintentional.

Mr. Hull is the only actor whose part is drawn as more than a "folkplay" type. Jeeter is, thanks both to the authors and the actor, a fine sturdy character, acutely understood and skillfully presented. Miss Margaret Wycherly intones her role; Miss Ruth Hunter's squirmings were rather distressing to watch, although she was doubtless doing precisely what she was told; Sam Byrd plays adequately in the role of the boy. Others do what they can for a callow and unpleasant play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 5, 1933

## Americana

By PERCY HAMMOND

IN A play sometimes terrifying, sometimes humorous, the authors of "Tobacco Road" escort us to the Georgia back-country, there to put us into intimate contact with the poor whites of that God-forsaken region. The expedition is thorough and well conducted, and I venture to say that it will be stimulating to experienced patrons of the Irish and Russian hut-drama. Also to those who get a naughty thrill from stark disclosures of the primitive human animal while writhing in the throes of gender. It may not be recommended to the squeamish, if any, since it is relentlessly ruttish and unclean. But to me, whose knowledge of such things has been gained from a casual reading of the more brutal fiction of the South, it is a vividly authentic, minor and squalid tragedy, lighted in the right spots with glowing and honest humor.

. . .

The scene is a forlorn Georgia farmstead, a tumble-down shack inhabited by Jeeter

Lester, his slattern wife and their brood. Jeeter (Mr. Henry Hull) is afflicted with all the ailments of his type, from indolence to sleeping sickness, but he has a Micawber sense of humorous hope. They have no money, and the only food they get is when Jeeter forages the cupboards of his neigh-

bors. One of his wife's daughters by another man is wedded, at the age of twelve, to a husband who revolts her. His youngest son is taken in marriage by an amorous female evangelist, an ex-prostitute from Augusta. All of this meets with his approval, but he is tragically disturbed when the bankers come along and threaten to evict him from the land that has belonged to the lazy Lesters since God knows when.

All of this, of course, is but a sparse approximation of the contents of "Tobacco Road." Its slight suggestions of incest and other eccentric emotions must, in the interest of newspaper delicacy, be hidden from print. It cannot be told here how the hare-lipped Ellie May goes into indecent, Egyptian convulsions, nor how Lov Bensey bares his passion for Pearl Lester's golden locks. It should be enough to hint that the love-life and economics of the characters of "Tobacco Road" are suitable subjects for study by those who are able to take it. In case I may be permitted a moment of enthusiasm, I shall use it in praising the characterization by Henry Hull of the moth-eaten old jungle Georgian, Jeeter Lester. If, in my many adventures into the Theater, I have ever seen a completer impersonation, I have forgotten it. He is that difficult character from tip to toe, never for an instant deviating from its honest delineation. I remove my brown derby to Mr. Hull for his achievement: as I do to Mr. Sam Byrd for his uncompromised acting as an insolent brat of Mr. Caldwell's miasmic back-lands.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 5, 1933

# Henry Hull Achieves Remarkable Stage Portrait of Southern Primitive

"Tobacco Road," drama by Jack Kirkland from a novel by Erskine Caldwell. Produced by Anthony Brown at the Masque Theatre, New York, Dec. 4, 1933.



By BURNS MANTLE

**A** TOBACCO road is a dirt road. It runs off from the civilized center of things into the depths of the plantation, where mostly primitives live and life is a shiftless, lazy, animal-like existence.

Jack Kirkland has taken a story from Erskine Caldwell's novel of a tobacco road in deep Georgia and put it into play form. Called it "Tobacco Road," reasonably enough. And it, too, is a shiftless, lazy, animal kingdom sort of play, though an honest job of writing.

A bit too honest in certain respects and some scenes. An ugly wallowing sort of drama that not only strengthens your disgust with specific examples of the so-called human race, but also gives you a certain feeling of verminous contact with it.

## The Hull Show

Shining through the ugliness and grime of the drama, however, is a fine exhibition of character portraiture by Henry Hull. Much the best exhibit of his art, it seems to me, the actor has given in a considerable spell.

He plays Jeeter Lester, farmer. A hard chewing, spitting, cursing son of the soil who sleeps in his clothes as long as they will stand the strain and approaches the responsibilities of husbandry and domestic service with the intelligence and enthusiasm of a Belgian hare.

Jeeter, his family in rags, his children scattered to the four corners of the State, his farm a waste because he has no credit with which to buy seed to plant. You a

glimpse of the Lester living routines through the better part of two days.

## Family Group

He quarrels with his beaten, starved, shiftless wife, whose consuming ambition it is, aside from the recurring hope of food, to get hold of a stylish dress to die in.

He prays with Sister Bessie, a self-appointed agent of the Lord, who lusts after the younger men and buys a Lester son with an automobile and a promise of a job as preacher as well as husband.

He steals a bag of turnips from his son-in-law come to demand his marital rights from a Lester daughter who prefers a bit of straw on the floor to his bed.

He cruelly upbraids a daughter defaced from birth with a split lip that discourages suitors but fails to depress her hope of eventual possession.

And finally, when the son runs over his mother with the amorous psalm sister's automobile and leaves her dying in the front yard, Jeeter goes to sleep on the porch while waiting for others to dig his wife's grave in the field.

Another case of art's labor lost, this "Tobacco Road," I fear. It isn't the sort of entertainment folks buy in the theatre. Nor ever have bought within my memory.

There is no emotional satisfaction to be had from sheer ugliness, however artfully displayed or expressed.

Therefore, though Mr. Hull's performance is a perfect study, amazingly detailed, tellingly pictured, believable even in its exaggerations, there is no more than the appeal of a cold art in it. And there are few art connoisseurs among paying playgoers.

Splendid performances, too, by Dean Jagger as the repulsed son-in-law; by Sam Byrd as the youthful bridegroom; by Maude O'Fall as the praying hussy; by Ruth Hunter as the unhappy split-lip; by Margaret Wycherly as the hopeless mother and by Renece Rehan as the man-hating daughter.

A real dirt road by Robert Redington Sharpe and direction by Anthony Brown, the producer.

show in Broadway history. Only "Hello, Dolly" and "Life With Father" have played longer.

The play opened again on Broadway September 5, 1942 for only 24 performances, then again on September 4, 1943 for 66 performances and then on March 5, 1950 for 7 performances. There have been several options of interest to revive the show in the 1970s but it has not been produced on Broadway since 1950. The play had three national touring companies that played across the United States receiving great public attention.

One of the touring companies eventually found its way to Missoula, Montana in 1938 and played on the campus of the University of Montana in the University Theatre. According to Missoula sources who saw the production, it was cause for great curiosity and adventure. It was stated that part of the fun was seeing who else would come to see this "vulgar" show.

During the seven and one-half years on Broadway there were four Jeeter Lesters. The originator of the role was Henry Hull, followed by James Barton and Will Geer, who played the role the longest.

The play was produced in several countries around the world. Some notable productions include those in London and Paris. In the London production the cast had British accents and wallowed in knee-deep sawdust used for the soil. The Paris production included expensive costumes for the actresses,

artistically tattered and torn.<sup>5</sup> There was even an all-Black cast in 1950 in the United States.

Parts of the original Broadway stage setting are stored in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

The play has become an American classic. The name "Tobacco road" has become a colloquial catchword for rural poverty. Erskine Caldwell's story has made an impact on the American social consciousness.

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<sup>5</sup>Erskine Caldwell, Introduction to Script TOBACCO ROAD (New York: Macfadden Books, 1966), p. 12.

## CHAPTER III

### NATURALISM AND CONCEPTUALIZATION

The major influence on the directorial conceptualization of the production of "Tobacco Road" was the literary style and theatrical methods of naturalism. In order to fully understand the definition and history of naturalism it is necessary to trace the meaning and development of naturalism in literature, art and theatre.

#### Naturalism in Literature

The best formulated definition of naturalism\* in literature has been formulated by the scholar V. L. Parrington. He begins with the definition of naturalism as "pessimistic realism," for which there are five criteria:

1. Scientific objectivity for the subject.
2. Frankness about the whole of man, hence emphasis on the strong instincts; hunger, sex, and fear.

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\*Naturalism. A literary movement related to something described as an extreme form of realism but which may be inappropriately considered as a parallel to philosophic naturalism. This doctrine holds that all existent phenomena are in nature and thus within the sphere of scientific knowledge; it maintains that no supernatural realities exist. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Comte applied the ideas of science to the study of society, and soon after, Taine applied them to literature maintaining that psychological states as well as human acts were the results of material causes.



3. A deterministic philosophy about life and the future.
4. Pessimism.
5. Preference for three types of characters; physical brutes of strong will, neurotics, and strong characters of broken will.<sup>6</sup>

The development of naturalism in literature can be traced to Emile Zola, the major spokesman and often referred to as the "father of naturalism." Emile Zola (1840-1902) was a French novelist, dramatist, and critic. His major works include: Germinal (1885); Terese Raquin (1887); L'Assommoir (1877); Naturalism in the Theatre (1881); and The Experimental Novel (1880).

Zola created the "slice of life" theory, a view of life through scientific observation. His subjects were described as human infectious wounds and Zola saw himself as a doctor probing the wound to find the cause of the infection. He wrote about sordid low life and the struggles of the poor and common man. This choice of subject was a radical break with traditional literature. It cannot be said that Zola's subjects were inconsequential. His work explored universal social, moral, and political realms.

The characters, setting, and situation in Zola's novels are almost all meant to represent the larger whole of which they are a part.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Shields McIlwaine, The Southern Poor White From Lubberland to Tobacco Road (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), p. 218.

<sup>7</sup>Philip Walker, Profiles in Literature-Emile Zola (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), p. 63.

His concern with observation and detail, along with his choice of subject matter, gave his writings intensity and strength. The intensity was largely based in the uncovering of a new awareness of life, an awareness of the hopeless and desperate aspects found in life. This awareness was not appealing and was often criticized as "filth."

Zola loved animals, whom he thought of as "little brothers of man" and as if to stress the resemblances to us, he often gave them human traits. He stressed the bestial side of human nature.<sup>8</sup>

Zola wanted to see life in literature and life on stage, not imagination nor fabrication, but a slice of true life and all that which was part of it. He contended furthermore, that people were products of their environment and stated:

Exact [artistic] reproduction of the human environment will bring exact reproduction of human behavior.<sup>9</sup>

He also theorized that there should be no concern for technicalities such as plot, climax, or complication but only a detached viewpoint recreating observed life. He stated:

There should be no longer schools, no more formulas, no more standards; there is only life itself.<sup>10</sup>

Thus he concluded that literature should:

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<sup>8</sup>Walker, Profiles in Literature, p. 88.

<sup>9</sup>Kenneth Cameron, The Theatrical Response (London: Macmillan Co., 1969), p. 151.

<sup>10</sup>Philip Walker, Emile Zola: His Life and Works (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), p. 44.

. . . strive for the avoidance of concern for complication, crisis, resolution. Instead of imagining adventure, complicating it, and bringing it to a conclusion, one simply has to take from life the history of a being, or a group of beings, whose acts you have fully recorded.<sup>11</sup>

Zola's works do meet the criteria of V. L. Parrington. But it must be pointed out that Parrington's criteria are based on the theories of Zola himself, especially those set down as naturalistic principles in his preface to the play "Therese Raquin" (1887) and in his essay Naturalism in the Theatre (1881). Zola was a fanatic with his viewpoints, and therefore his theories and principles were often criticized. He believed, for example, that naturalism could achieve pathos and tragedy because of its basic simplicity.

I think we must go back as far as tragedy to a return to its simplicity of action and single-minded concentration on the psychological study of characters.<sup>12</sup>

Naturalism and tragedy are incompatible. Naturalism is inconsistent with the principles and essence of tragedy. Aristotle stated that tragedy is "an imitation of action," and that it included characters of magnitude and greatness. Furthermore, Aristotle stated that tragedy must be poetic and concern itself with unity and structure, everything that Zola suggests naturalism should have no concern with. Tragedy, by

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<sup>11</sup>Walker, Profiles in Literature, p. 69.

<sup>12</sup>Maurice Valency, The Flower and the Castle (New York: Universal Library, Grosset & Dunlap, 1963), p. 23.

its very nature, is optimistic; it concerns itself with man's activity to overcome his animal nature and become, in a sense, superhuman.

Tragedy is of the idealistic tradition.  
Viewed realistically a tragic action deflates.<sup>13</sup>

Naturalism must deal with the common and ordinary aspects of life. There can be no fall from greatness, because in naturalism there is no greatness in man: no "hamartia," because the flaw is in the environment. Man in naturalism is the victim, he is moved, affected, and made what he is by his environment. Fate does not operate in naturalism. Therefore, the characters are not tragic but pathetic. It should also be observed that Zola was not a true follower of his own percepts. His theories of naturalism were idealistic. He developed what was later called his "lie." This lie was his own distinctive mixture of realism and poetry.

Zola has a popular image as an anti-poetic realist through his naturalistic propaganda. But he does not exclusively remain faithful to his doctrine.<sup>14</sup>

Zola's poetic style is most evident in his Germinal and the Experimental Novel. He answered critics to his work and defended his style by saying:

You are surprised to discover the poet in me.  
We all lie more or less. But I do have an

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>14</sup>Walker, Emile Zola, p. 49.

obsession with true detail, the leap into the stars from the springboard of exact observation.<sup>15</sup>

Most of Zola's material--his plots, ideas, and even characters--developed out of poetic images rather than scientific observation. His description of characters and settings did, however, develop from observation. His definition of art suggests a mixture of form; he suggests that it is: "A corner of nature seen through a temperament."<sup>16</sup> But to Zola, the foundation of this art was truth.

Zola was not the only forerunner of the theories of naturalism. There were other influences on literature from various sources.

Darwin's On the Origins of the Species By Means of Natural Selection had appeared in 1859, and despite intense resistance from many quarters, had been broadly disseminated. "Natural selection" and the "survival of the fittest" may have been only partially developed and partially understood, but to people like Zola and many others Darwinism suggested at least an idea of gigantic importance: Environment conditions behavior.<sup>17</sup>

Karl Marx, in the late nineteenth century, developed his social and political principles using this same premise. He suggested that people were products of their environment and that manipulation of the environment would change behavior and social patterns. He heard Huxley's lectures, approved by Darwin, in the Workingman's Hall in Longon in 1860. It is no

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>16</sup>Walker, Profiles in Literature, p. 77.

<sup>17</sup>Cameron, Theatrical Response, p. 151.

wonder naturalism was used in terms of social reform and comment, especially by the social realists of the 1930s.

Friedrich Nietzsche was also a proponent of environmental influences and his philosophy was rooted in a pessimistic-deterministic attitude.

Although the philosophy of Marx or Nietzsche was not pertaining to literature, it was the widespread proliferation of their ideas that found avenues into literature. Naturalism can be aligned with the social unrest of the nineteenth century. It developed out of a break with tradition, it explored the struggles of common man in his environment, and it reflected the pain and needs of the changing social conditions. It continued into the twentieth century and became a vehicle for revealing the exploitation of the common man within the change from agrarianism to the advancing industrial society. This is certainly a theme in Tobacco Road.

Naturalism most assuredly found a home in American Literature, especially in the works of William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, and Erskine Caldwell. The majority of their works comes within the period from 1920 through 1950. Their works most always adhere to the Parrington criteria. Their themes show a great similarity; there is sometimes a focus on the poor man's struggle to survive in the changing society and the struggle to survive against the environment.

William Faulkner's work is full of strong, sensual environments and characters. It is also thoroughly romantic.

No Faulkner novel is complete without its compounded plot of horror, its ingredients of rape, seduction, prostitution, spiritually lost characters, incest, perversion, obscenity. . . . It is because such things exist.<sup>18</sup>

It can also be said:

Faulkner carries to the extreme the definition of naturalism as pessimistic realism and portrays man as the victim of his environment and conditioning.<sup>19</sup>

Caldwell and Steinbeck focus on the family environment when they attempt to show the

jungle passions rooted in all family life, no matter how civilized.<sup>20</sup>

It is interesting to note that Faulkner and Caldwell use the South as their environment and social background when examining the effects of poverty, sex, religion, philosophy, and physical survival on the poor and common folk. In all three writers there is also an important addition to naturalism that can be interpreted as uniquely American, that is, the use of humor. Humor is a part of life, often overlooked in primitive forms of naturalism as proposed by Zola, but that can make a double-edged statement on the character or situation. This is because humor often is on the borderline to the pathetic.

The developments of naturalism in literature paralleled

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<sup>18</sup> John Bassett, William Faulkner: The Critical Heritage (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 370-371.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

the same developments in sociology, political science, psychology, art, and theatre. No one area developed in isolation. The expansion and growth of ideas and theories within each area influenced the others. But it was literature that was the soundingboard which most precisely articulated what is called naturalism.

### Naturalism in Art

In the area of art there is a distinction between naturalistic and naturalism. Naturalistic art is that which has a basis in nature and truth. Naturalism in art concerns itself with the effect or mood represented through a naturalistic attempt at viewing life, i.e., observation and emphasis on details in the environment.

The naturalistic movement in art developed in the early nineteenth century and started the search for realism and the intention to represent what is real.

In the 19th Century, painting's time-honored ties to religion, to kings and their dynasties, to mythology of the ancients, have largely fallen away and we stand face to face with reality. For the first time painting has truly become a view of the world in the most literal sense. Reality itself has become a kind of subject matter. Delacroix claimed nature as his "dictionary."<sup>21</sup>

The nineteenth century represented for the first time the importance of reality in art and that of the artist's study and

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<sup>21</sup>Hans L. C. Jaffe, 19th & 20th Century Painting (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 7-8.



representation of life. Prior to the nineteenth century, painting and sculpture had a romantic and idealized view of life. Classical tradition demanded this ideal vision. Departure from this tradition into a realistic view of the world is a radical change and marks the beginning of modern art.

In the late 1860s Courbet wrote:

Painting is essentially a concrete art  
and can only consist in representation  
of things that are real and really  
exist.<sup>22</sup>

Eugene Delacroix, Gustave Courbet, Edouard Manet, and Edgar Degas, all trained in the classical methods, were the revolutionary pioneers of realism and the naturalistic school.

The next step in this process of the study of life was to be the subjection of reality to that which the eye can perceive. It was Manet who took that step. His conception of reality was more extreme than Courbet's, since he limited the apprehension of reality to those appearances that can be grasped by the senses.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to note that painting made this distinction. Reality, even on a two-dimensional canvas, can only be communicated by the appeal to all the senses. This premise is a key to naturalism. This movement toward the naturalistic was really the beginning of realism. However, mere duplication of realism and reality is not naturalism. It is only a

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

starting point. The concern for observation of the subject and life in general based on scientific investigation is also just a starting point. Naturalism must be a selective process eliminating all unnecessary elements, even though part of the reality, not part of the desired effect or statement. Therefore, there is an important difference between naturalistic realism and naturalism.

Edgar Degas (1834-1917), although considered an Impressionist, introduced a new "human reality" in painting.

In certain periods of Degas we see attention to the environmental conditions on the subjects and to human situations.<sup>24</sup>

Degas was able to catch glimpses of life in what appears to be stop action. Degas is important because he marks a new trend in the modern naturalistic movement. However, Degas's work would not be called naturalism.

It is based on observation of life and attention to detail, but his subjects are not sordid nor give the impression they are within a struggle. He avoids the ugly in the environment. It is interesting to note that Degas, like most of the early Impressionists, was highly influenced by the photograph.

While most of the movement toward naturalism was taking place in France in the late nineteenth century, there can be found examples of this trend in other countries. In Germany, Adolf Menzel (1815-1905) was working toward a new realistic vision. His paintings have attention to detail but he is

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<sup>24</sup>Kenneth Clark, Romantic Rebellion (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 313.

able to uncover the human feeling in the environments.

. . . empathy in his subjects and insistence on scientific accuracy was his personal conception. From this sympathetic identification with the subject arises the intimate quality enhanced by the subordination of all factors to his single-minded quest for authenticity. . . he opened the way to Realism in Germany.<sup>25</sup>

An example of his work in realism with an empathetic feeling toward the environment is Staircase with Night Lighting (1848).

George Breitner (1857-1923) was the master of Dutch realism.

Breitner created the modern Dutch city-view, in which the subject is not only the architecture of the houses but, above all, the lives and doings of the common man.<sup>26</sup>

The French Impressionists' and Post-Impressionists' painting in the 1860s through the 1890s were contemporaries and friends of Zola. Some of these artists include Claude Monet, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec and Vincent Van Gogh. Their work has a sensual appeal and a focus on the characters within an environment. There is even a sense of the sordid and a pre-occupation with the poor and low life for subject matter. Their work borders on naturalism, but falls short because of the concern for the technicalities of painting, i.e., light, texture, composition. But Claude Monet stated that, in his opinion, naturalism is an impressionism of the senses.

The most outstanding examples of naturalism in art can

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<sup>25</sup>Jaffe, 19th & 20th Century Painting, p. 50.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

be found ironically, not with the French, but in the American art of the 1930s and 1940s.

Edward Hopper is a painter in the naturalism vein. His "Nighthawks" (1940), "New York Movie" (1939), and "Early Sunday Morning" (1930) are examples of naturalism depicting stark lonely environments and characters that are not only part of the environment but victims of it.

Hopper came to maturity in a period whose prevailing styles were realistic or experimental. He developed his own distinctive style. Hopper's combination of bold literalism and dramatic heightening give a mood of impenetrable monotony . . . his sparse and famished realism contains a fresh sensation with a revival of anecdote. Dega's art was first to signal a change in feeling. It was Hopper--an artist who gave humanity significance only in terms of an oppressive environment.<sup>27</sup>

Other examples of naturalism can be found in artists like Isaac Soyer and his work "Employment Agency" (1939). The Ashcan School of Social Realists produced several works in the naturalism mode. Ben Shahn, George Bellows, William Glackens, Reginald Marsh, and John Sloan were part of the social realists' school. Their work fell into naturalism because it dealt with the effect of the environment on people or people struggling within the environment and conditions of the society. For example, Marsh's "The Park Bench," Sloan's "Sunday Girls Drying Their Hair," and several photographs of the WPA social

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<sup>27</sup>Sam Hunter, John Jacobs, American Art of the 20th Century (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 96.

documentary type, like those of Ben Shahn and Dorothea Lange all show a sensual treatment of man within the environment. Winslow Homer was an American naturalist but did not produce naturalism.

American photography, especially that of the WPA social documentary genre, can be placed in the mode of naturalism. The black and white photograph, a naturalistic tool, can produce the effect and appeal of naturalism.

Black and white photographs are less naturalistic than color . . . . but if done skillfully, color translated black and white can often surpass the actual impression of the subject itself. Reality can be transformed into art.<sup>28</sup>

This effect can only be achieved if there is a selective process limiting or exaggerating the focus or scope, subject matter, or mood. For example; take a photograph of a ghetto street and look at the reality of the environment. This would be the exact duplication of life. It is all true life. It is real. But if we focus only on the alley with the graffiti on the walls and the scattered garbage, and a man lying in the garbage heap, we get a much more intense, much more sensual picture of the reality. This would be naturalism.

American photographers Ben Shahn, Dorothea Lange, Paul Taylor, Walker Evan, Margaret Bourke-White photographed American scenes of poverty and human struggle of the 1930s. Although their intent was as documentary, their product was photographic

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<sup>28</sup>Andreas Feininger, The Creative Photographer (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 56.

naturalism. The American film was also a tool for photographic naturalism. Through the film, naturalism in literature found another means of expression. Steinbeck, Faulkner, and Caldwell all gained exposure through the film.

Art's movement to naturalism establishes some basic criteria of its own. They include:

1. A rejection of the ideal and classical tradition.
2. An emphasis on scientific accuracy through observation.
3. A concern for the environmental effects on the human aspect of life.
4. The objective in relating a story, incident, or a mood.

Art achieved a new level in history through its establishment of these criteria. It became a "modern art." No longer was the artist limited to the classical criteria of form and subject matter but a new realism opened the door for a new form of communication, the communication of life. Courbet concluded that:

The basis of realism is the negation of the ideal, and everything that follows. It is the only way one can arrive at the emancipation of reason.<sup>29</sup>

From the naturalistic tradition naturalism in art was allowed to freely follow.

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<sup>29</sup>Valency, Flower and the Castle, p. 97.

### Naturalism in the Theatre

Modern art's quest for the truth and Zola's propaganda on naturalism had a significant effect on dramatic literature as well, and the "slice of life" became a theatrical style. This style started in the nineteenth century but was largely ended by 1900. It was absorbed into the more successful and adaptable realism mode.

#### Dramatic Literature

One of the reasons that naturalism was short lived as a theatrical tradition was the lack of dramatic literature it inspired. There are very few playwrights that can be labeled exclusively as writers of naturalism. The playwrights that did choose the style of naturalism were unsuccessful.

Emile Zola, who wrote several plays including "Terese Raquin" and "The Heirs of Roubin," was not a successful playwright. Henri de Beque (1837-1899), another French playwright who wrote "The Vulture" (1885) and "La Parisienne" (1885), plays that embodied the elements of naturalism--no plot progression, no climaxes, pessimistic endings, use of low life and sordid action--as subject material. His plays were based strictly on scientific observation, and were likewise not well received. Plays that were structured with the ideals of Zolian naturalism as a model lacked the sense of personalization and gave a feeling of distance in terms of attitude.

The weakness of the theories of naturalism as they applied to the playwright lay in their implied denial of personal attitude and personal creation.<sup>30</sup>

The French playwrights of the nineteenth century, who were contemporaries of Zola and directly associated with his theories, were never successful when employing the theories. But it must be understood that there was no tradition of this style. Naturalism was a radical experiment in terms of style.

Environment had little, if any, significance to most playwrights before the last quarter of the nineteenth century, that is, before the application to playwrighting of the naturalistic idea of environment as a deterministic factor.<sup>31</sup>

Russian playwright Maxim Gorky's (1868-1936) work can be labeled naturalism; that is, some of it can. He attempts to explore the world of the social outcast and the sordid low life. His play, "The Lower Depths," is a good example of naturalism. In the play the environment, a cavern-like cellar, offers a justified lodging for the characters which include murderers, thieves, a decadent nobleman, and a drunken actor. It is a pessimistic story about the ugly side of human nature.

In the German theatre naturalism found expression in the plays of Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946). His play, "The Weavers," is another good example of naturalism. This play exposes the plight of the common wage earner and his struggle

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<sup>30</sup>Cameron, Theatrical Response, p. 160.

<sup>31</sup>John Gassner, Masters of the Drama, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 177.



to survive. Hauptmann later moved away from naturalism to other forms like many playwrights did. Naturalism seemed to only be a part of his development. It was said that Hauptmann

gave up naturalism and moved to symbolism, thus strictly speaking, naturalism barely survived its own success in the German theatre.<sup>32</sup>

Norwegian playwrights Henrik Ibsen and August Strinberg were leaders in realism and did at times use some techniques of naturalism but cannot be called writers of naturalism.

Ibsen's plays are directed at popular targets as to be satires and not scientific experiments. Elements of naturalism can be found in most of Stringberg's later plays, especially in the use of language and the unrelenting use of exact, often sordid detail.<sup>33</sup>

Surprisingly, American playwright Eugene O'Neil developed an early style very close to naturalism.

O'Neill brought to a head a belated naturalistic trend in American Drama. Desire Under the Elms marks the peak of O'Neill's naturalistic period.<sup>34</sup>

His great play, "Long Day's Journey Into Night," treats both environment and character as influential criteria in an autobiographical study. The confinement of the summer home in a fog-engulfed atmosphere has an effect on the characters as well as having an overly selfish and tightwadish father

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<sup>32</sup>Valency, Flower and the Castle, p. 115.

<sup>33</sup>Cameron, Theatrical Response, p. 156.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

and a morphine-addict mother has an effect on the two sons. One turns alcoholic, the other tries to escape by a near suicide. This play is a good example of environment producing behavior.

O'Neill's work covers a wide range from naturalism to expressionism. He states himself:

To be called a sordid realist one day, a grim pessimistic naturalist the next, a lying moral romanticist the next etc. . . is quite perplexing. I've tried to make my self a melting pot for all these methods.<sup>35</sup>

In the 1930s the social realists of the American theatre began writing plays that could be labeled as naturalism. Sidney Kingsley's "Dead End" (1935) is a good example, as is Elmer Rice's "Street Scene" (1929), which won a Pulitzer Prize. Also Clifford Odet's "Awake and Sing" (1932) and John Steinbeck's, "Of Mice and Men" (1937) fall into the classification of naturalism. Again, in these plays it is the environment that is part of the focus and is an integral part of the character development.

But as a whole, American dramatic literature has few examples of naturalism.

In America realism and naturalism were never given their ripening time when the new antirealistic ideas crossed the ocean.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Timo Tiusanen, O'Neill's Scenic Images (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 86.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

There is not a wealth of dramatic literature that used naturalism as its criteria. Plays that were written with the ideals of naturalism as a basis for structure were unsuccessful. Plays dealing with social realism and social reform and plays about the struggles of the common man were able to use naturalism because all these plays found the environment to be a central focus.

### Production of Plays

#### Acting

The writing of Sigmund Freud (1865-1935) in the early 1900s led to the development of scientific objectivity in terms of character and the attention to human behavior as a part of the actor's process in developing the role. Freud stressed that early environmental effects and relationships in the development of a child created certain predictable behavior patterns.

It was Constantin Stanislavsky (1835-1939), through his work with the Moscow Art Theatre, that established a "method" for acting. This method includes the reliance on sense memory and biographical and environmental effects on the development of the character, i.e., if one were to work twenty-five years in a coal mine, the posture of that person would show the effects of the occupation. The highest praise you could give an actor, in naturalistic terms, is that you believed him.

The Group Theatre, in the United States during the 1930s

and '40s, achieved remarkable honesty in their production. This was due to the attention paid to detail and that several of the founders of the Group Theatre were avid followers of the "method" formulated by Stanislavsky.

Stanislavsky was determined to prove, in his work, that the best acting is like living, or behaving naturally. Drama critic and founder of the Berlin "Freie Buhne" in 1889, Otto Brahm, stated that the actor should study nature.

The more purely and richly he develops his personality, the stronger his temperament through which, in Zola's magic formula, he observes nature, the more deeply too will he grasp life and reproduce it.<sup>37</sup>

However, it cannot be said that mere "living" is acting. Just to "behave" in a given situation cannot be interpreted as a style. Russian critic Alexander Baskshy (1855-1929) pointed out:

acting must be distinguished from other activities of life by something that is peculiar to itself, this is its form. Acting is human behavior "designed" in terms of theatre.<sup>38</sup>

### Directing

The first director with a concern for realistic treatment of a play was the Duke of Saxe-Meinagan (1813-1883). He believed in the integration of the actor and decor. He concerned himself with the details of the costumes, properties,

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<sup>37</sup>Edwin Duerr, The Length and Depth of Acting (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 375.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 447.

setting, and lighting of the production. He was the first director to actively try to control and coordinate the technical aspects of the production. His main concern was making the setting real, that is, to create an illusion of reality. The Duke was concerned with the overall effect.

In France, it was Andre Antoine who used the techniques of naturalism in his directing at the "Theatre Libre." He was known for his enthusiastic following of the principles of Zola. His concern was for making the environment of the play very real.

As a director, he had the example of a man who gave meticulous attention to the environment of the play. Antoine could go a step further and make that environment as real, as true to life as the very bodies of the actors themselves.<sup>39</sup>

In a 1902 production of Menessier's "The Earth," Antoine used live chickens in a setting of a barn scene.

The Moscow Art Theatre in the late nineteenth century stressed a concern for real and authentic settings. Their production of "The Lower Depths" in 1902 is an excellent example of naturalism. The production's use of atmosphere emphasizing the effects of environmental conditions on the characters was without question a directorial approach using naturalism.

American director David Belasco is a prime example of a director that often used the method of naturalism for effect.

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<sup>39</sup>Cameron, Theatrical Response, p. 155.

His 1912 production of "The Governor's Lady" used real food props, real slabs of meat, as part of the store setting. He was a meticulous "selector" of just the right detail to complete the environment. But Belasco was not a scientist for experimental reasons, as Zola would prescribe. Belasco was

neither obeying a Zola nor serving a Strindberg; he was seeking a commercial success from an audience with a taste for photographic accuracy.<sup>40</sup>

### Stage Design

Naturalism, in terms of scenic convention, really means uncompromising attention to real details, not just reliance on illusion or suggestion. It means duplication of life and environment on stage. The duplication of reality requires painstaking attention to detail.

If we attempt to duplicate reality on stage, then we must be solid and exact, we must be real. Let us have real food for Life With Father and tons of dirt for Tobacco Road.<sup>41</sup>

Naturalism in the theatre has incorporated dramatic literature, producing plays with concern for environment and pessimistic subject matter. It also uses the methods of acting, directing and stage design to create the reality of life needed to properly relate the story through the five senses.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>41</sup>Vera Mowry Roberts, On Stage History of the Theatre (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 340.

Conceptualization of the Play

Naturalism and realism are sometimes thought interchangeable. There is a departure from realism, an intensity and a narrowed focus that makes naturalism different.

Realism and naturalism are closely related because both demand a truthful depiction of life and are both based on the belief that ultimate reality is discoverable only through the five senses.<sup>42</sup>

Naturalism is much more limited and single-minded than realism.

A good distinction between realism and naturalism is:

Naturalism is the most extreme form of realism and differs from realism primarily by going further toward the slice of life and allowing little arrangement of life's material.<sup>43</sup>

If one were to follow the criteria set up by Zola for ideal naturalism one would find that the stage has limitations, some more than others. Film has no limitation, its stage is the world, but the theatre must realize its own limitations. Stage dimension, stage facility (thrust, proscenium, arena), production budgets, available resources are just some of the limitations. Naturalism is not a pure form if compromises are made. Life will not permit compromise, and naturalism, in attempting to duplicate life, cannot permit compromise. Therefore, naturalism must admit to its limitation and become selective in its intention. This

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<sup>42</sup>Oscar Brockett, Theatre: An Introduction (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 299.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

selection must adhere to the basic principles of naturalism, but allow for the limitations of the stage by incorporating only the details necessary to communicate the story through the five senses. This process can be called selective naturalism.

After the three initial readings of the script for "Tobacco Road," it was obvious that the focus of the script was on the environment. The characters were products of the environment. Kirkland describes the "Place" in the following manner:

The back country of Georgia-thirty miles or so from Augusta. It is a famished, desolate land, once given over to the profitable production of tobacco, then turned into small cotton plantations, which have been so intensively cultivated as to exhaust the soil. Poverty, want, squalor, degeneracy, pitiful hopelessness and grotesque, tragic lusts have stamped a lost, outpaced people with the mark of inevitable end.<sup>44</sup>

It is interesting to note that Kirkland chooses to describe the environment, the land and then the human condition, as if the first was responsible for the second. The phrase "inevitable end" has certain pessimistic connotations. The environment is so overwhelmingly pictured as the cause of behavior of the inhabitants that it is difficult not to use the definition of naturalism to categorize the script. Kirkland seems to be directing the reader to come to this

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<sup>44</sup>Jack Kirkland, Tobacco Road (New York: Samuel French Publications, 1933), p. 5.



conclusion.

The environment is based on the authentic observations by the novelist. We know that Erskine Caldwell lived in the rural south and had a first-hand familiarity with the poverty and people of this region. We also know that Caldwell's intention for the novel was that of documentary. His characters are based on observation and there is no avoidance of the ugly, but rather a concentration on the ugly and sensual. If V. L. Parrington's definition of naturalism were applied to the script, a good deal of compliance to the formula would be found.

1) "Scientific observation."

The play is based on a novel, that has an intention to document these social conditions, written by an author with a background and knowledge of the subject.

2) "Frankness and emphasis on strong human instincts."

Each character has the core motivation for survival. This need for survival is substantiated by the physical need of food, sex, and avoidance of pain. The deprivation of these basic physical needs versus the instinctual desire to fulfill these needs makes for dramatic action. The action of the grandmother scavenging for food, Lov "horsing" with Ellie May, Jeeter stealing the sack of turnips are all based on basic human needs.

## 3) "Deterministic philosophy about life"

Throughout the play, Jeeter's faith in the land and the Lord is a basic deterministic philosophy. He comments, "God made the land but you don't see him building no cotton mills," and "People that's born on the land should stay on the land." "God, He likes the poor folk." "What God made turnip worms for I can't figure out. It appears to me that He just naturally has it in for us poor folk." These comments are based on an agrarian deterministic philosophy. It is only the character of Jeeter, the protagonist, that has this philosophy.

## 4) "Pessimism."

The overall effect of the play is pessimistic. There is little hope for the characters from the beginning. Kirkland suggests there is "pitiful hopelessness." Jeeter, on the other hand, is constantly speaking optimistically. His rationalized optimism, based on the deterministic philosophy that the Lord will provide, is really a good disguise for his laziness. The escape of Pearl to the city for, what is hoped to be, a better life is a ray of optimism created by the sacrifice of Ada. But the ending is still pessimistic. Jeeter is alone, sifting the soil

through his hands, his life is as doomed as the soil.

- 5) "Preference for types of characters; neurotics, strong types of broken will, and physical brutes." Jeeter, Ada, and Lov are strong types of broken will. Pearl is neurotic in her unjustified fear of Lov, and Dude is an insensitive brute in his treatment of the parents and the grandmother.

The script of "Tobacco Road" fits the Parrington criterion for naturalism. It is naturalism in terms of dramatic literature.

The limitations dictated by the Masquer Theatre force the form or style, of production concept, to choose selective naturalism as its intention. Each detail selected for use as part of the environment had to be evaluated in terms of: its necessity to the story, its sensual strength over another detail choice (i.e., why one log of a certain shape and not another?) its potential utilization, its effect on the atmosphere. The major details of this production to be considered were: the soil, the shack, and the utilized properties. Each of these details were considered in terms of: color, form, and most importantly, texture.

The major symbol or physical element important to the story is the soil. The play is a story of man versus the soil. The soil is depleted, worn out, deprived of fertility. The soil is hopeless and offers a potential of plant growth

for food, income, and it takes away from the characters any hope of survival. The texture of the soil is sandy and "bleached." The characters kneel, kick, sleep, crawl, choke, and die on the soil. The soil must be the focus of the environment; it must invade the characters, the actors, and the audience. If all else were to be eliminated from the setting, it would be the soil that would be the most necessary element to help communicate the story.

The house and the props must also have the worn-out, faded, rotten, and useless color, form and texture as the soil. The house is described as "rotten and sagging in the middle." Most of the weather boards on the roof have fallen off, the house is naked and vulnerable waiting for the "inevitable end." The futility of the innertube that is patched fifty times and the shoes that have holes in the soles represent the external shell of the futile and incomplete lives of the characters. There is a sense of desertion in a leaking water bucket, there is a feeling of emptiness in a barren corn crib. The texture and constitution of spaces and objects define an environment that predicts behavior.

The Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White photo book titled, "You Have Seen Their Faces," is a major source for visualization. Caldwell describes and Bourke-White photographs the conditions of the rural southern poverty that Caldwell has documented in the novel Tobacco Road. Using this book as a source and personally viewing poverty in isolated

rural locations in Southern Indiana, the director had a well balanced basis for visualizing the script.

The story of "Tobacco Road" can best be told through the concept of selective naturalism. Naturalism demands creation of environment and selectivity demands careful definition of detail in that environment that will cause specific effects on the characters.

## CHAPTER IV

### SCRIPT ANALYSIS

Having surveyed the historical background of the play, novel, playwright, and author an examination of the script was then taken. This examination considered: the commanding image, the plot and structure, character information, setting requirements, the use of language and music, and the playwright's intentions.

#### The Plot'

##### Commanding Image

The commanding image of the play is the struggle for survival within the environment by the characters. The characters struggle to survive through attempting to fulfill their basic human needs, i.e., eating turnips, collecting firewood, having sex. They also attempt to survive by attaining a dream, i.e., an automobile with a horn, a beautiful woman, a stylish dress, a better life.

##### Story Line

Jeeter Lester has no food, no money, and no hope of attaining either. He is married to Ada and has had seventeen children. Dude and Ellie May are the only children

still at home. Dude, an insensitive kid with no respect for anyone, dreams of driving a new automobile with a horn. Ellie May, a harelip, wants to satisfy her sexual desires, but no man will have her. Pearl, the youngest, has just married Lov, who shovels coal at the coal chute. She fears him and will not sleep with him nor talk with him. Lov begs Jeeter to make Pearl sleep with him, but Jeeter is more interested in Lov's sack of turnips, which he steals. Sister Bessie, a widowed woman preacher searching for a new husband, becomes very interested in Dude.

Pearl returns home to hide from Lov, and Ada is happy to find her favorite daughter home again. Ada has plans for Pearl and hopes that she moves to the city to find work in the cotton mills and to find a better life. Bessie lures Dude into marriage by offering to buy them a new automobile. Lov is still upset over Pearl's behavior and demands her return. Captain Tim comes to the farm. He is the son of the landowner who is allowing Jeeter to farm and live on his land. Captain Tim reveals that he can no longer keep the land and that the bank will reclaim it and therefore Jeeter will have to move or pay rent on the land. Jeeter figures his oldest son, Tom, will pay the rent for him. Bessie and Dude go off to find Tom and the money and have a honeymoon on the way.

Lov offers to pay two dollars a week for the return of Pearl, but Ada strongly refuses. Jeeter suggests Lov take

the willing Ellie May. The grandmother goes off to collect some firewood and never returns, causing no concern to anyone. Bessie and Dude return in the now cracked up automobile and tell Jeeter that Tom refuses to send money.

Jeeter plans on using the automobile to transport firewood to town to sell, but Bessie denies him the use of the automobile. Finally, Jeeter captures Pearl in an attempt to sell her back to Lov but Ada is run over by the automobile. Ada bites Jeeter's arm in a desperate attempt at freeing Pearl. Pearl runs free to a life in the city. Jeeter is left sifting the soil through his hands, hopeless.

### Plot Structure

Since the script is an adaptation of a novel, there was an existing plot structure which Kirkland chose to follow fairly consistently. The deviations in the structure come only in terms of transposition, omission and revision. The one major omission was the sequence of the honeymoon night in Augusta. The major revision, due to the limitations of the stage, was the change of the ending. In the novel the burning broom sedge fire sweeps through the Lester shack, destroying Jeeter and Ada sleeping inside. The play transposes the grandmother being run over by the automobile to Ada being run over by the automobile and finally dying at the ending of the play. This change in ending does not



drastically change the story, but it does suggest a more pessimistic ending for the play.

The nineteen-chapter novel was adapted into a three-act script. "Tobacco Road" can be considered a well-made play according to the criteria of Eugene Scribe. It has clear exposition, logical reversals, preparation for future events, continuous and mounting suspense, a crisis and obligatory scene, and a logical resolution.<sup>45</sup>

The entire action of the play takes place on the Lester farm on the Tobacco road. The major complication involved in the struggle for survival is the conflict of characters wanting to escape the environment, i.e., Ada and the characters wanting to remain in the environment. In each case the environment is the center of the conflict. The production must consider the environment to be central to plot and concept.

The action of the play takes place in three days. Each act, beginning in the morning, is a new day. The plot is not concerned with the classical unity of time in terms of the twenty-four hour day. There is an early point of attack, as was the case in most of Shakespeare's plays. All actions follow in chronological order. The playwright suggests "time" to be "now." This "now" was interpreted as the 1930s, when the play was originally produced, rather than 1976. It was thought to be more effective placing the play in the 1930s because the play is an American classic that had great

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<sup>45</sup>Brockett, Theatre: An Introduction, p. 32.

success with its original production. Also, it was felt important to keep it in period with its literature.

The first act serves mainly for exposition establishing environmental conditions, family relationships and history, and initial complications. The exposition is handled in a very natural way, allowing the normal daily actions and behavior of the characters to communicate deprivation and desperation. There is an early focus on the dramatic question: will there be money to buy food, and to buy seed and fertilizer to plant a crop? There is an early focus on the theme of agrarian determinism, i.e., the idea that the Lord will provide and that Jeeter was meant to work the soil. "A man that's born on the land should stay on the land." There is an early focus on the conflict of Pearl returning to Lov.

The inciting incident of the first act is the stealing of Lov's turnip sack. The incident establishes the family's unity and desire to survive, Lov's sexual frustrations, and the forthcoming resistance of Ada to Pearl's return to Lov. This action also supports the commanding image. The first act reveals the interest of Bessie in Dude and establishes the coming of Captain Tim.

The second act continues the complications and reveals several reversals. The marriage of Bessie and Dude is a reversal of interest. Ada's violent protection of Pearl by beating away Lov and Captain Tim's news of his financial

situation, which means eviction of the Lesters, are the major complications focused on in the act. The minor complications are Bessie's desire to consummate the marriage, and Jeeter's plan to steal the corn meal. The major discovery is that Jeeter's son, Tom, earns enough money from hauling crossties to lend Jeeter the money to pay rent on the land.

The third act is a good example of how suspense builds and reversals build new complications. Tom refuses to help his family, but Lov is willing to pay two dollars a week to have Pearl back. These actions shift the focus and tension from one event to the possibility of the other.

The climax or turning point hinges on Jeeter's decision to sell Pearl back to Lov, thus helping him remain on the farm and survive. This decision is confronted by Ada's decision to free Pearl and send her to the city, thus providing survival for Ada and a better life for Pearl.

The denouement is the realization of Ada's death and the admission that her death provided a hope for a better life for Pearl. "It didn't do anybody much good except maybe Pearl."

If a graph of the plot line were made for Tobacco Road, it would look like the example on the following page:

SURVIVAL————— commanding image

The Environment

|   |       |                       |
|---|-------|-----------------------|
| Jeeter's determination to<br>stay on the land. (Survival) | ————— | conflict              |
| Ada's protection of Pearl.<br>(Pearl's survival)          | ————— | major<br>complication |
| The land in jeopardy - -<br>rent money is needed.         | ————— | climax                |
| Ada's death   | ————— | denouement            |
| Pearl's freedom   | ————— |                       |

Setting

Kirkland's script gives a condensed description of the environment that is carefully detailed in the Caldwell novel. The reading of the novel, as a supplemental source for full visualization of the environment, is essential to understand the author's intentions.

The script includes both "Place" and "Scene." The "Place" deals with the human environment and the effect of the physical conditions on the inhabitants of the environment.

Place: The back country, Georgia-thirty miles or so from Augusta. . . . Poverty, want, squalor, degeneracy, pitiful helplessness and grotesque, tragic lusts have stamped a lost, outpaced people. Grim humor pervades all, stalking side

by side with tragedy.<sup>46</sup>

This section established an immediate impression of the pessimistic conditions. Because Caldwell's objective in the writing of the novel was that of a documentary, that is, to document the conditions of the sharecropper plantations in the 1930s, Kirkland must prepare the reader of the script with the full hopeless vision of the environment. In a sense, the section titled "place" is an abridged sociological resume of the conditions of the sharecroppers observed by Caldwell in his south.

The section titled "Scene" listed the script requirements for the actual stage setting. The setting requires: a squalid shack cracked and bleeding, a small porch one step up from the yard, clumps of bushes, a chinaberry tree, the Tobacco road, a well structure, a broken corn crib, and a fence.

The "Scene" remains the same throughout the play.

### Characters

The reading of the novel is essential, as in the case of the setting, to understand the playwright's intention for the characters. Character can be determined by examination of the playwright's requirements suggested in the character description, the description of the character in the novel, the information given within the text of the novel and the

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<sup>46</sup>Kirkland, Tobacco Road, p. 5.

script, and personal interpretation based on visualization evoked by the other descriptions.

From the study of the commanding image of the play, we find the core image or spine of each character is centered on the need for survival. An examination of this core image together with the three levels of characterization--the physical, the social, and the psychological and moral--are necessary to fully understand the basis and motivation of each character.

### Jeeter Lester

Jeeter is the protagonist and central character of the story.

Physical--He is sixty years old, thin, and scrawny. He is quick and runs like a "rabbit." He is the father of seventeen children with Ada, and many more in the neighborhood. He is still sexually active.

Social--He has been a dirt farmer all his life, as was his father and his father's father. "The land has a powerful hold on me." He does not own the land on which he lives nor has any money. He is known as a "good for nothing."

Psychological-Moral--He believes the Lord will provide for him. "God is aiming to provide for me. I'm getting ready to receive His bounty." He believes that the Lord likes the poor and that his duty is to stay on the land and plant a crop. He refuses to think about going to the city and

working in the mills. "City ways ain't God given. It ain't right for a man with the smell of the land to live in a mill in Augusta." However, he feels no responsibility when it comes to most moral decisions like being faithful, or stealing.

Core--His main concern is to stay on the land and that God will provide. In the meantime, however, he will lie and steal to survive. He is selfish and concerned only with his own survival.

#### Ada Lester

Ada is the antagonist of the play.

Physical--She is about fifty-three years old, thin, gaunt, pellagra ridden and never was a beauty. She rambles when she walks and leans on anything that can support her weight. She has no teeth and craves snuff to help her forget her hunger. She is the mother of seventeen children.

Social--She has lived with Jeeter for about forty years. She is uneducated and is the silent type. She did not speak to Jeeter at all during the early years of her marriage. She speaks now only to voice her concerns.

Psychological-Moral--She is a God-fearing woman. However, she once had an affair with a man passing through from South Carolina to Texas; the result was her favorite daughter, Pearl. She also limits her morality to decisions that do not affect her survival. She helps Jeeter in his stealing

when it means food for her.

Core--She wants to get away from the land and move to the city where things would be more livable and comfortable. She wants to be buried in a stylish dress but her main concern is for a better life for her daughter Pearl. She can survive and enjoy the escape to a better life by projection through Pearl.

### Dude

Physical--He is sixteen, dirty, skinny, and not too bright. He is sexually immature.

Social--He is uneducated and never has been more than a few miles from the shack. He passes time by throwing his lop-sided ball against the house. He has complete disregard for anyone in his family, especially for his grandmother and father. He has, however, at one time, helped his father with the farming when there was seed and fertilizer. He sees the futility of farming at this point.

Psychological-Moral--He has a preoccupation with horns and whistles. He wants to drive a new automobile, "just a'raising hell." He recognizes his father's immorality and sees through Bessie's image of a religious woman. He knows she was "a two-bit whore." Yet he himself is immoral when it is a matter of his own survival. He helps Jeeter steal the sack of turnips. He also seems to have a basic loyalty to Jeeter. He obeys him without question when he is told



to get Lov so he can sell Pearl back to him.

Core--His main concern is to drive a new automobile with a horn. He is pre-conditioned by what he sees other people have and what he lacks. He knows he can survive by force. He does take the turnips away from Jeeter and the grandmother. He is like a parasite, living off what he can take with no concern or respect for anyone else.

#### Grandmother

Physical--She is about seventy years old, a bent hag. She does not speak.

Social--Her main job is the collecting of firewood for the fire. She represents the stability of the family. She is Jeeter's mother still living in the shack and sleeping in the same bed as Ellie May.

Psychological-Moral--She is a God-fearing woman. She suffers quietly, taking the abuse from everyone in the family.

Core--Her survival is on a physical level. She scavengers for food to live.

#### Ellie May

Physical--She is eighteen years old with an attractive figure. Her eyes are good, her hair is brown. Her outstanding feature, however, is a slit lip, red and fiery, running from the center of her mouth to the corner of her nose. Her speech is garbled because of this slit.

Social--She is the last daughter at home, still unmarried. But she is sexually frustrated and wants a man. She had some education but left school because of harassment over her lip. Her job in the family is to do all the dirty work such as cleaning, cooking, and fetching.

Psychological-Moral--She is self-conscious due to her lip. She really has no religious beliefs and is not very concerned with anyone except her own sexual satisfaction. She is not moved by Ada's death but rather, more thrilled at Pearl's leaving. She can now have Lov.

Core--She wants sexual satisfaction and she has a strong desire to be loved. Her survival depends on her finding a man before the "niggers" come and get her.

### Pearl

Pearl is the character of influence.

Physical--She is a beautiful child of thirteen. She has hair of spun gold. She is the youngest of the Lester children.

Social--She is her mother's favorite child and a recent bride to Lov. She wants to stay with her mother.

Psychological-Moral--She is paranoid of sex. She is immature, really a child. She will not talk to Lov and refuses to sleep with him. She takes advantage of her favorite-child status. Her sister, Ellie May, ends up doing the work that needs to be done.

Core--She is frightened and wants her mother and the security

of her home. She depends on her mother for her escape from Lov.

Sister Bessie Rice

Physical--She is a portly woman, about forty years old. She is loud and sure-voiced. The novel suggests she has no septum in her nose, causing her to look pig-nosed.

Social--She is the widow of a preacher. She is a woman preacher and uses this status as a "woman of God" to her advantage. She is a sexually aggressive woman that is looking for a young husband.

Psychological-Moral--She has her own religion and owes allegiance to no other religion but her own. She conveniently uses this religion to her advantage. Her moral preachings to Jeeter about stealing do not apply to herself, she gladly accepts and rationalizes the turnips. She also has a reputation of being a "two-bit slut." She really is a phoney.

Core--Her survival depends on getting a new husband who can preach the religion in order to support them both. She also has a strong need for sexual satisfaction as part of her survival need.

Lov Bensey

Physical--He is about thirty years old, not unattractive in a slow, dull way. His body shows the results of hard work and a reasonable amount of food.

Social--He has a job shoveling coal at the coal chute. He

earns a small amount of money, five dollars a week. He has just married Pearl and cannot understand why she will not stay with him. He is self-conscious about his position in life, he does not want "any niggers laughing at him."

Psychological-Moral--Lov has a basic honesty rooted in the moral obligation that he pay for what he gets. He even offers to pay for Pearl's return. He has a commitment even to his job, "I gott'a get back to the chute . . . they raise hell if it ain't filled up." He wants the prettiness of Pearl to make him feel special, he idolizes her.

Core--His survival depends on working at the chute. He works for a living. But he desires Pearl to make his life complete.

### Henry Peabody

Physical--A man very much like Jeeter.

Social--He is a neighbor living near Jeeter and in the same financial situation. He does not own the land either, he is a sharecropper like Jeeter. He also has a "raft of children". Some of his children belong to Jeeter.

Psychological-Moral--The only indication of his moral nature is his response to Bessie's arrival by indicating that he was not sinning again, "praise God, no."

Core--He wants to keep his land to survive. He believes like Jeeter that his duty is to plant a crop. He is used as a messenger.

Captain Tim Harmon

Physical--He is about thirty years old. Well dressed.

Social--He is the son of the plantation owner, Captain John. He is in financial trouble and the bank is reclaiming the land. But he, no doubt, has an education and has an urban refinement.

Psychological-Moral--He has a sense of decency. He asks that Jeeter be given a chance to collect rent money. He understands the poor sharecroppers and sympathizes with them. He does not understand Jeeter's reluctance to move to the mills.

Core--His survival rests in the mortgage of the land to the bank.

Mr. Payne

Physical--He must be a physical contrast to the Lester family; clean, well-fed.

Social--He is a man from the bank.

Psychological-Moral--He is cold and mater-of-fact. He is doing his job and no doubt dislikes having to visit these farms. He really has no concern for the farmers.

Core--He survives by doing his job.

Language

Even though the setting takes place in the back country of Georgia, there is no indication in the text of the novel

nor the script of a southern dialect. There is an uneducated and colorful language.

All of the characters that speak, with the exception of Captain Tim and Mr. Payne, use poor grammar and incorrect word usage. For example, ". . . how is you?", "is they coming?", and "I ain't never."

Colorful images in the language are rooted in the land, in animals, and the environment (e.g., "green gutted worms," "she is horsing," "a little pig squeezing," shingles become "weather boards," the road is called a "tobacco road.") These words indicate the isolation of the people.

There is also a language of silence. The grandmother Lester has no lines. She is a silent character and her mere action of living communicates survival desperation. Ellie May seldom speaks and when she does her words are garbled by the slit in the lip. Ada and Pearl have used silence toward their husbands as a demonstration of resistance and rebellion to their situation. Silence is a powerful tool of stating a point, and it is used throughout the novel. This silence is counterpointed by the excess of speech that Bessie displays. Many times silence says more than excess talk. Jeeter talks constantly, but really says the same thing over and over again.

### Music

There are several indications of music and sound being

part of the script. The song, "Shall We Gather at the River" is suggested by Kirkland in the script for Bessie to sing as part of her preaching. Dude's chanting "You're gonna die and get laid in the corn crib" is another use of music.

The uses of "rhythms as part of the music is also part of the novel. Dude's chunking of the baseball against the house in monotonous fashion is an example of rhythms. This action is an example how this rhythm indicates boredom. Dude's preoccupation with the automobile horn is a use of sound and rhythm. His horn blowing is an indication of his simple-mindedness, and part of his desire to "raise some hell."

#### Theme and Playwright's Intentions

"Tobacco Road" is a play about the deprivation of environment and the desperation for survival of characters who are products of a deprived environment. The strongest symbol of this deprivation is the depleted soil. Survival is the central theme of the play. However, there is a good deal more being dealt with in the script.

The play and novel was written in the 1930s during the last part of the technological revolution in the United States. The trend from agriculture to technology had brought about strong divisions of life styles. The revolution had met with some resistance but was too powerful to contain. By the 1930s only in the isolated spots, where the world had

moved on without notice, were there still strong believers in the old agrarian ways. Jeeter Lester is a true agrarian.

If the word "Agrarianism" has any apt and substantial meaning, evidently it must be one of the following:

- (a) A doctrine of hostility toward the city, holding that it is corrupt and unfit for human habitation.
- (b) A doctrine that some things about the city, though by no means all, are good, and that the prudent and happy life is one which is divided between city and country.
- (c) A doctrine that the land, and only the land, is the home of man, and that he should remain on it at all costs.<sup>47</sup>

Jeeter combines with this philosophy of agrarianism a deterministic philosophy that makes him a die-hard holdout to the ways of the land. He states in Act I;

It's in my nature-burning broom sedge and plowing in the ground this time of year. I did it for fifty years, and my Pa and his Pa before him was the same kind of men. Us Lesters sure like to stir up the earth and make plants grow in it. The land has got a powerful hold on me. . . . God is aiming to provide for me.<sup>48</sup>

With Jeeter's struggle against going to the city and working in the mills and the breaking up of the plantation land by the bank, there develops a conflict. His survival depends on keeping the land which means being able to pay rent on it. Every other Lester has moved from the farm and some have gone

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<sup>47</sup>Pridgeon, "Sex in the Novels," p. 88.

<sup>48</sup>Kirkland, Tobacco Road, p. 25.



to the city except Ellie May who cannot get a husband, and Dude who is too lazy. Although Dude has been influenced by Jeeter and has the agrarian nature as well, he is aware of the impossible conditions. The depleted soil, the lack of money for seed, fertilizer and mules have created impossible conditions to ever be able to farm again. Hostility against the city is used as an undercurrent theme along with the determinism and agrarian themes. The city is equated with "rich folk." Jeeter states, "God, he ain't so liken of the rich folks," and "City ways ain't God given." It was even a city man that fathered Pearl, not Jeeter.

The play is a play of "in-action." The characters are always waiting. Jeeter waits for God to provide, for Tom to provide, and for Lov to take his eyes off the croker sack. Ada waits for a stylish dress. Ellie May waits for a husband and to have her lip sewn up. Dude waits for a chance to drive in an automobile. Lov waits for sexual fulfillment. The grandmother waits to die. James Korges suggests:

Tobacco Road takes its place in a body of modern literature which includes both Samuel Becket's Waiting for Godot and Simone Weil's Waiting for God.<sup>49</sup>

It is a story of silence with characters that never communicate. It is a story of desertions. The younger generation deserts the older: the grandmother is left to die. The family deserts the home, twelve children have left home.

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<sup>49</sup>Korges, Erskine Caldwell, p. 24.

Tom, the oldest son, refuses to help his parents when they ask for money. Pearl deserts Lov and her duty as a wife. The rats desert the barren corn crib. The fertility deserts the soil.

The play attempts to expose and make mockery of the deception of religion, sex, and the all-American boy model. Sister Bessie is a preacher of God, but has the reputation of being a slut. She creates her own religion to fit her own on-the-spot desires. She even performs the wedding ceremony. The "Lord" wants a young man to help her preach, she really wants to seduce a younger man into marrying her. Jeeter has questionable religious morals when it comes to stealing. The immediate honeymoon of Dude and Bessie in the shack right after the impromptu marriage ceremony is a mockery of sex, as is the "horsing" of Lov and Ellie May. The fact that the Lesters had seventeen children is a mockery of excess only exceeded by the suggestion that the Peabody children are half Jeeter's. Dude, like most American boys, loves automobiles and horns. It is the promise of the automobile that changes Dude's mind about getting married. Yet he manages to "raise Hell" enough to destroy the automobile in two days.

There is also a chauvinistic theme indicating the proper place for women in society. "Women ain't good for nothing but to marry and work for men." Jeeter states. But Jeeter is thwarted by Ada's conviction that Pearl will have a

better life, even though Ada herself has been "broken" by Jeeter. She has spent her life having seventeen children. Bessie certainly has a reversed chauvinism in that she makes the decisions, she even gives Dude, her husband, a belt in the head and choke around the throat when he smarts off. Therefore, there is a balance in chauvinism and liberation found in the novel and play, although Caldwell most likely did not intend this purposely.

Because Caldwell intended the novel to be a social documentary, to expose the conditions of the forgotten sharecropper, it must be assumed that an adaptation would have the same intention. With a mixture of stark naturalistic environment and pathetic humor, the play has the intention of shocking and making a permanent impression, through the five senses, on the audience. The play is not intended to motivate a social activism; it is too hopelessly pessimistic to create a feeling of outrage. The play is part melodrama, and part comedy. Although it is not a tragedy, it achieves character pathos and a cathartic effect. The play demands a sensual and emotional response, yet it also offers entertainment.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PRODUCTION

#### Planning

The first step in the planning process of the production was the initial reading of the script for "Tobacco Road." The script was read three times. First, for enjoyment and personal reaction. Second, for examination of plot sequence and character development. Third, with attention directed at detail and requirements for staging. Many notes were taken during this process.

The second step in the planning process was the reading of the novel Tobacco Road. The novel was the source of the script and contained detailed descriptions of environment and characters. Many more notes were taken during the reading of the novel, and these notes proved helpful later in the planning process. Background research on the life and work of Erskine Caldwell was the next major step in planning the production. It was helpful to realize Caldwell's southern background to understand that his Tobacco Road is based on his observations of rural Georgia. It was also interesting to scan the critical reaction to the novel and original Broadway production. This information

helped orient the literary value and historical scope of the play.

Conceptualization was the next major step in planning the production. Conceptualization is the intuitive and imaginative process by which the information found by the reading and analysis of the script can be organized into a unified approach or process to control the style, focus, and the intent of the script. This process uses the director's imagination, visualizations, and artistic judgment.

The novel had been elaborately descriptive, and the script had furnished a set of given requirements for staging. The directorial concept had to encompass not only the physical requirements but had to help make specific choices within the concept for environment, character interpretations, focus, and rehearsal time usage.

"Tobacco Road," as both novel and play, seemed to be based in the literary style of naturalism. The most influential factor in regards to the directorial conceptualization of "Tobacco Road" that was discovered by the preliminary research into naturalism was that the characters were in fact products of their environment. Naturalism, therefore, as a literary and theatrical style focused upon the environment, the atmosphere, the everyday slice-of-life reality that to some large degree makes us who and what we are.

Considering the limitations dictated by the script and the theatre, a concept of "selective naturalism" was chosen

and defined. The interpretation and choices of all future production elements was to therefore be limited to the concept of selective naturalism.

Several weeks past during which the script and concept was analysed and prepared. Auditions were held, casting was completed and the initial production meetings were arranged.

#### First Production Meeting

The intention of the first production meeting was to have the director make a formal presentation of his concept, goals, methods, and interpretations. There was to be no input from the production staff at this point, only questions. To insure complete and uniform understanding of the production's concept, it was necessary that the director establish this framework for the staff. It was also critical that the production staff understand the definition of naturalism and selective naturalism.

The assignments for the production staff included:

Scene Design and Technical Direction - Gordon Stabler

Costume Design - Candice Newcomb

Lighting Design - Sally Mills

Sound Design - William Strock

Scenic Artist - Julia Hollowell

Property Design - Joyce Hansen

Make-up Design - Lee Erpenbach

Stage Manager - Jodi Behrens

It is interesting to note that three of the major production staff positions were filled by cast members. The director was familiar with the work of all the design staff, especially that of Gordon Stabler. This would be the fourth production that Stabler would have designed for the director.

During this first production meeting, the director-designer relationship was defined. The director stated that each designer would have artistic freedom in regards to the design as long as the concept of selective naturalism was used as a guideline and that it was completely understood the director had final veto power.

Real, authentic, usable, and worn were key terms for the design concept. The set, costumes, and props were to be collected rather than constructed to emphasize authentic wear and utilization. The major question from the design staff was how far the production would attempt to go in terms of naturalism? The definition of selective naturalism was used to answer the question. Everything was to be real and scientifically accurate in terms of the environment, but within the limitations of the theatre space and resource, in order to tell the story. The director recommended that all designers read the novel.

#### Second Production Meeting

The second production meeting was an individual meeting with each designer. During each conference very specific

problems and questions were discussed. The meetings lasted until both the director and designer were satisfied and had gained a clear understanding with the direction they were proceeding.

The main consideration in the meeting with the scene designer, Gordon Stabler, was the ground plan. There was debate over the angle of the house and how much of the house should be visible according to the concept and script requirements. Stabler was given several photographs to use as a basis for structure. He was asked to sketch a number of possible ground plans before the next meeting. The decision to use real dirt was a mutual agreement that was considered necessary in compliance with the concept.

During the meeting with the costume designer, Candice Newcomb, visualization of each character was discussed. Candy took notes. An agreement was made that no costume plates would be necessary but that the costume selection would be incorporated into the character development process. Candy would pull all shop-stock costumes that she felt usable for each character, and then during a special improvisation, each character choosing their own costumes, the final decisions would be made. It was felt this process would aid in a personalization of costume to character. Additional costume parts would be selected by Candy to complete each design.

The prop designer, Joyce Hansen, was given a prop list.



She was told each prop had to be real and as authentic as possible. There seemed to be no problem with the list other than the automobile parts which she believed might be difficult to find.

The meeting with the lighting designer, Sally Mills, centered around the script requirements. The transitions between the times of day was figured to be the most critical lighting problem. The decision of sunrise and sunset would have to be delayed, it was thought, until a final ground plan was approved. During the discussion of color in the lighting, it was agreed that color choice depended greatly on the color and texture of the soil in terms of absorption and reflection.

There was a short meeting with the make-up designer, Lee Erpenbach. His major problem at this time was the hare-lip effect for Ellie May. He was told to check with dentists to find cost and procedure of a denture plate.

There was no meeting with the sound technician, Bill Strock. He had previously been told to try to organize a band or group of musicians to play for the show. The band would need a guitar, banjo, fiddle, and bass.

### Third Production Meeting

Prior to this meeting several decisions had been reached. Ground plan sketches had been received, and a final ground plan had been approved. The costume shop felt there would be

more than enough costume stock to pull from, and the improvisation idea had met with great enthusiasm.

The meeting itself was organized as a show and tell session. Each designer was asked to deliver a short presentation of their ideas initiated by the individual meeting. Questions were encouraged. Each designer also gave a progress report.

The major debate was over the technical process of collecting materials. John Bizzell, the staff technical director, questioned Stabler about materials and the planned method for drying out the soil before bringing it into the Masquer Theatre. No date was set for the next meeting.

### Construction

#### The Set

The problem concerning the concept of "collecting" rather than just constructing was in finding the material. Old barn wood or an existing structure that could be torn down and removed was the ideal consideration. Advertisements were placed on the radio station and in the newspaper. Finally, an old barn-like structure was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Delos Robbins with the stipulation that the structure be cleanly removed from the property. A large pile of junk and debris was also located for the collection of scraps and rusted junk. The director, set construction staff, and members of the stagecraft class helped in the

removal of the structure from the Robbins' property via a university truck to the rear of the Fine Arts Building on campus. The structure's size was cut down to fit the dimensions of the ground plan, but the majority of the structure was left intact. It was estimated that the structure was about fifty years old and certainly authentic. The wood was worn and weathered, most suitable for the concept. Many of the rusted nails were saved and used in the reconstruction process so that no new material would be visible.

The roof portion of the structure was saved and used, in cut-down proportion, over the porch. The removed structure had a door frame and window. Both were used for the set. No major construction had to be done, except the proportional reduction of the structure to fit the ground plan dimensions. No technical procedure could have created the illusion of a weathered, worn, and irregular construction that the real structure naturally provided.

The soil and rocks were gathered from a roadside quarry and transported by truck to the Masquer Theatre. Eight to ten truckloads of the soil and rock were needed to achieve the depth of soil proposed to create a variance in levels. The soil was built up to some two and one-half feet in certain places. It was estimated that three to four tons of soil was used. The soil consisted of mostly sand and small rocks. It had the texture of worthless soil. A top layer

of sand was spread to cushion the cast's bare feet from the rocks and glass in the soil. Many huge rocks were placed around the set to add a solidity to the environment.

The well and the shack foundation structures were constructed of cemented rocks. This was a compromise in terms of concept. The concept dictated that the well and house structure foundation piles should be made only of rocks and not cement. However, in terms of actor safety and length of the run of the production, the cement process was considered a necessity.

The finishing touches to the set, such as the scattering of the junk, logs, rocks, and wood scraps came slowly. The placement of these objects was done by the cast during rehearsals, therefore the placement was natural and justified. The set was completed a week prior to the deadline which enabled full utilization of the set for more than two weeks.

### The Costumes

The costume shop staff, organized by Candy Newcomb and Susan Gilmore, pulled a large selection of possible costume choices for each character.

The costume shop staff, in the spirit of the production, set up the shop as the Fuller General Store one evening. The staff prepared for this event by wearing costumes themselves, setting up a cash register along with a supply of penny candy and sundries available to complete the general

store environment. The improvisation was set up by telling the cast to go to the shop as if their character was going to the general store. They were asked to behave as the character would in this situation. The staff was asked to behave as store employees.

The improvisation proved enjoyable, comical and productive. The improvisation created an atmosphere of fun and participation for both staff and cast. The characters were able to explore behavior in new situations. For example, Dude ended up by stealing some of the candy. The result provided 75 percent of the costume selections. The remaining selections and adjustment were made by Candy. All costumes were completed and available for full utilization two weeks prior to the opening.

### The Props

Joyce Hansen and her crew quickly collected all the papers. The biggest surprise was the securing of the automobile parts; the headlight, fender, and wheel. They were from an authentic 1930s Oldsmobile borrowed from an antique car hobbyist.

Some of the props needed texturing and wear. Because the actors had full utilization of the props during several weeks of rehearsal, this use helped in the wearing process.

### The Lighting

The lighting was the last completed aspect of the tech-

nical part of the production. The lighting depended on the fully completed set for final choices of direction and color. The twelve foot ceiling height in the Masquer Theatre caused unavoidable limitations. A major problem in terms of the concept was the visibility of the instruments. This and the use of the walls for the sky effect was an example of compromise with the concept but within full consideration of the limitations.

### The Music

The search for musicians to play live during the production proved unsuccessful. Many were committed and some demanded pay. Several volunteers were gathered but no complete band combo was put together.

The alternative of recorded music was decided to be the next best solution. Bill Strock collected a good deal of music and a listening session was scheduled. The transition music was selected by both designer and director because of the nature of the selections. They had to be of certain mood, tempo and length. The pre-show and intermission music was selected by Strock. Most of the music seemed to come from one album, "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" recorded by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and several pioneers of country music. The music was exciting and interesting.

The automobile horn was solved by using a real auto horn to be operated by the actors offstage. The direct use of

this horn by Dude was important to his character.

The use of a speaker to be placed in the lobby was a decision of both director and designer. The lobby was a planned area that was part of the environment and the audience should never escape this environment. So the music was piped to the lobby as well.

### Makeup

Several alternative methods of making a harelip effect was experimented with by the designer. Wax and paraffin were used but proved ineffective because it melted. Cotton under the lip was also considered but it felt uncomfortable to the actress. Finally, a dentist took an impression of the actress's teeth and made an over-fitting denture that forced the lip up and created a very real harelip effect. The denture felt comfortable and even helped in the garbled speech pattern needed for the character.

### Casting

Cast list posted September 29, 1976.

|                            |                  |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| Jeeter Lester . . . . .    | Aubrey K. Dunkum |
| Dude Lester . . . . .      | Brian Massman    |
| Grandma Lester . . . . .   | Mary Tietz       |
| Ada Lester . . . . .       | Kimberly Waters  |
| Ellie May Lester . . . . . | Gerry McCrea     |
| Lov Bensey . . . . .       | John Mazariegos  |

|                              |                |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| Sister Bessie Rice . . . . . | Diana Powell   |
| Pearl . . . . .              | Donna Liggett  |
| Captain Tim . . . . .        | Lee Erpenbach  |
| George Payne . . . . .       | William Strock |
| Peabody . . . . .            | Terry Chung    |

The audition process took two evenings. The first evening consisted of readings only. The second consisted of reading, groupings with continued reading, improvisation and interview.

Each actor that auditioned was provided with a printed but brief analysis of the characters, and a page-long cutting for five of the characters. The selection of the cutting was left entirely up to each actor. After the initial reading the selection process began. Once an actor had read he was judged and either grouped under a possibility for a character or eliminated as unusable. The primary consideration for all choices were: a) can they be heard; b) what physical type were they; c) intuitive response to their stage personality; d) can they work with others; and e) can I work with them?

The private interview with each potential cast member created a situation where personality was evaluated and commitment to the production was questioned. Many times the interview provided good indications of workable personalities and potential character traits. For example, John Mazariegos was impressive because of his genuine honesty.



Character requirements and casting considerations:

Jeeter Lester

This character demanded a maturity and stage dominance to carry the burden of the dialogue. There was no doubt that Aubrey Dunkum had the experience and physical requirements for the role. He also worked very well in combination with Brian Massman.

Dude

The wiry stubbornness was found in Brian Massman needed for the character of Dude. Joseph Arnold was a possibility but did not have the imperfections of voice and movement that seemed natural to Massman.

Ada

In order to match the maturity and power of Aubrey as Jeeter, the casting of Ada had to find an equal strength potential. There was no question that Kimberly Waters was capable of this power. Edith Elliott would have been the next choice, but she lacked the roughness and internal strength Water's displayed.

Ellie May

Ellie May had to have dark hair to be a contrast to her sister Pearl. She also had to have a developed body and the ability to shed inhibitions. Leah Joki seemed to

be the best choice for the role. Gerry McCrea seemed to be the best second choice. Due to a compromise with the simultaneous casting of "Macbeth," McCrea was chosen.

### Sister Bessie

There was a certain rhythmic pattern and control of the rural sounding vocal qualities that Diana Powell possessed that made her unquestionably suitable for Sister Bessie. She had used a cutting from "Tobacco Road" as Sister Bessie for summer theatre auditions a year before. The impression of this audition and her desire to play the role made her the primary candidate.

### Lov

There were more potential actors for this character than any other. Elimination was difficult. The actor who played Lov had to represent a contrast to Pearl. The script calls for an actor with a body that "shows the effect of hard work." The selection was narrowed down to Jeff Franjeivoc and John Mazariegos. Both had the power, energy, stage personality, and commitment to the production. Both were dark haired and ethnic looking. Jeff had superior experience but John had the charisma for the role. John was selected on intuition.

### Pearl

Pearl had to have long blonde hair; it was essential.

Only two actresses had long blonde hair. Donna Liggett's reading had a much more fragile quality than anyone else. She also worked well with John. She was selected.

#### Grandmother

The grandmother has no lines, therefore movement and physical type was the only important consideration. Mary Tietz and Mary Thielan were the main possibilities. However, Tietz was much smaller and insignificant physically for the role. "Macbeth" casting eliminated Thielan, so Tietz was casted in the role.

#### Captain Tim and George Payne

Both of these characters needed to be opposite images from the Lester family. They were urban rather than rural types. Lee Erpenbach possessed a sophistication and Bill Strock's heavy stature indicated a permanency none of the Lester clan exhibited.

#### Peabody

The original casting of Terry Chung was based on an ethical decision to use an ethnic type in a role that did not call for it. Terry had a great desire to play Lov and did have a certain honesty that made him stand out. There was no reason he could not play Peabody even though he was Oriental. He did not accept the role, however.

Jodi Berhens, who had auditioned well for the role of

Ada, was asked to play the role of Peabody, or Sadie Peabody as it was rewritten, and be the stage manager as well. This femalization of the role of Peabody proved most effective in the final analysis.

### Rehearsal

Several rehearsal rules were established and agreed upon by the cast. The director promised full utilization of rehearsal time and advanced posting of all calls. The cast agreed to a five-minute-before-call arrival to the rehearsal and the understanding that all line deadlines were to be met.

The early stages of rehearsal were planned to involve only the Lester family in an attempt to establish family relationships. These family relationships were to be based on a consistent historical background formulated by both the cast and the director. Information such as ages, family member names, personal background information, area visualizations had to be established by using the information given in the script and novel. Each cast member was asked to keep a journal. This journal was to contain the preliminary information of the history of the family, specific character information, a personalized character biography, a chart of interfamily relationships, notes for the rehearsal period and performances, and a final evaluation of the role and production. (See Appendix "Actors Journal"--Ellie May.)

Blocking of each scene went rapidly. Only eight days were used to block the entire show. After blocking was completed there was a review of the act and then lines were called in two days. Most of the time spent in rehearsal was used for working rehearsal. This meant running scenes and working specific moments. Several special rehearsal sessions were called to deal with individual problems such as the Ellie May and Lov "horsing" scene had to be timed and choreographed, the grandmother needed help on her movements, Bessie needed help on her prayer sequence.

There was a specific intention not to rehearse the Captain Tim Payne scene so as to keep the unfamiliar tentative quality fresh. These men should be strangers to the family and their presence should be an out-of-the-ordinary event.

It was felt that the production needed at least ten full run-throughs on the completed set with full utilization of props and costumes. Due to the early completion of the set, props, and costumes, the production was able to have the complete ten run-throughs which certainly helped support the concept.

A rehearsal log is provided (see appendix, Director's Log).

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## CHAPTER VI

### EVALUATION

This chapter of evaluation and discussion of the production uses the Department of Drama's oral critique session on November 17, 1976 as a basis for reaction and response. The discussion has been limited to seven topics. They include: the concept--Naturalism; the script of "Tobacco Road;" character interpretations; the ground plan and blocking; the technical aspects of the production; the audience response to the production; and the director's evaluation.

#### Concept--Naturalism

Was the production's concept successful in the Masquer Theatre?

There was mixed reaction as to the possible success of naturalism within the limitations of a 90-seat intimate theatre. Naturalism does not seek illusion, but rather attempts to represent and duplicate life. Naturalism, within an intimate environment, must be more limited, more selective, and more uncompromising with its acute concern for the real. However, selective naturalism limits choices of detail to only what is necessary to the dramatic action and to what would be believable within the space limitations.

Therefore the choices of the physical objects as part of the environment had to be unmistakably real due to the intimacy and proximity of the audience. The dirt, rocks, branches, wood, logs, rusted junk, water, auto parts, and turnips had to be authentic. But the house structure, corn crib, and well had to be limited to only what was necessary and functional. That decision was the selective part of the naturalism concept.

The effect of the authentic details, especially the dirt and the sensual textures, were considered, by and large, very successful. It was also stated that the compromised portion of the set did not really detract, but was accepted as necessary convention.

What were the major design problems of the concept?

The major failure of the concept was considered to be the treatment of the walls on stage as the sky. The Masquer Theatre has two walls, a post, and a 12-foot ceiling. It was believed that the walls were used unsuccessfully only as part of the concept, but because the script required an exterior setting. Producing an exterior effect in a theatre is essentially theatrical. It can best be done on a proscenium stage using a cyclorama. When you produce a sky you are really producing the effect of infinity. In an intimate theatre this is almost impossible except through theatrical convention (such as color projections or allowing

the imagination to compensate). It was considered that painting the walls a neutral black with white spattering did not work, although it was a safe solution and did not pull focus.

What were the positive factors in terms of the process of the concept?

There had never been, at least in the last four years, a production that attempted to use naturalism as a production concept at the University of Montana. Therefore, the work on this production was an exceptional educational experience. The scenery and properties were "collected" not manufactured. The costumes were "chosen" not designed. This enabled a greater sense of participation and community.

The length of rehearsal time with full utilization of set, props, and costumes was maximum so that the actors had a sense of property and personalization for the entire environment. This factor aided a sense of freedom on stage and encouraged a development of exploration and honesty in characterization. The actors, most of whom had not worked within the concept of naturalism in any depth, responded very favorably to this aspect of the rehearsal process. The props, costumes, and set became an organic part of their performance. Kimberly Waters, as Ada, was able to respond to an accident on stage (a nosebleed by the actress, Donna Liggett) by ripping the pocket off her apron and using it to stop the bleeding. Such a natural and spontaneous response might not have been possible had the costumes been new and unfamiliar.



Was the statement and impact of the play effective in 1976  
in Missoula, Montana?

Although the play was written in 1933 and deals with the conditions and poverty of southern Georgia sharecroppers, it was just as effective in terms of interest and impact. The review in the Missoulian, November 5, 1976 (see appendix) states:

Tobacco Road is not a happy story. But it has a message that's as telling today as it was in the 1930s when Kirkland wrote it.

The core statement of "survival" has a universal human appeal. The key images of desperation, deprivation, and hopelessness are also universal in nature.

Character Interpretation

Why was the character of Ellie May and her overt sexual actions allowed to be played so grotesquely expansive and at times allowed to steal focus?

This was a directorial blind spot in which full responsibility must lie with the director and not the actress. The history of this goes back to rehearsal when there was an attempt to make the actress, Gerry McCrea, more uninhibited and to experiment with the sexual energy center that must energize the character. (Energy center, a term used by Maxine Klein in Time Space and Design for Actors, determines the physical focal point from which a character's energy originates.) The actress was told to "let go," to "do more."

She developed nicely. Her actions became normal and justified in terms of her objectives. Watching these actions on a daily basis they became common and not especially over-played. But viewed for the first time they had an overwhelming effect. They did steal focus. This was wrong.

The justification of her overt sexuality can be explained and rooted in the fact that Ellie May is a virgin, past puberty, with no other sexual models other than those of animals. Her actions were not, admittedly, based on scientific observation, but rather on speculation within a set of given conditions. Her actions were justified in terms of physical response and certainly acceptable within the concept, although they were a disturbing factor in terms of stage focus.

Was Ada a sympathetic character and how did this affect the death scene?

There is no sympathy for Ada's situation: she is as much a victim of the conditions and environment as the rest of the family. Nor is there any sympathy for her condition of hunger or the fact she had endured forty years of marriage to Jeeter and seventeen children. The revelation of the illegitimacy of Pearl makes Ada even more unsympathetic. But Ada is the only character that makes a decision. She dies in order to save Pearl from the life that she had wanted to escape. This action allows us to see Ada on a different level. Her unselfish action allows us to empathize and feel some concern or care for her. This sacrifice is a central shift and change in

the show which also gives us a moment of hope and permits us then to feel some sympathy for her and question what she might have been. The death scene and the insensitivity to her death by Jeeter, Dude and Ellie May supports this sympathy for the audience. Therefore, she becomes a sympathetic character by her death.

Was Brian Massman's characterization of Dude shallow and cartoonish?

Within the limitations of talent resource the casting of Brian Massman as Dude was an excellent choice. He has the imagination and ability to play the role. His characterization was, however, somewhat insincere. He has vocal and movement problems which he will outgrow with experience. The character of Dude demands a blatant insensitivity and a boyish stubbornness. This is a very difficult combination to develop without appearing shallow or phoney.

Was the intention for the characterization of Jeeter Lester comic or serious?

The initial interpretation intended for the character of Jeeter Lester was both a mixture of the serious and the comic; a characterization based on honest motivation and attitude. This mixture was achieved in the final analysis. Aubrey Dunkun's performance as Jeeter succeeded in this mixture and honesty. However, he tended to overplay moments, acting at the character and not through it. He played the emotions

rather than justifiably creating them. His boisterous vocal moments became a shouting match with other actors. During the run of the production he toned down the volume and a greater honesty and balance was achieved.

Why was Lov's superobjective unclear?

Lov's superobjective was to receive love from Pearl. Lov wanted love, not just sex or the fulfillment of a physical desire. It is difficult to distinguish between the want of sex and the want of love. Perhaps this is a part of the reason for the lack of clarity. The youthfulness and the lack of stage experience of the actor, himself, is also a factor. The tendency of a young beginning actor is always to play the physical rather than the emotional.

Ground Plan - Blocking

Why was there a problem of lack of depth in the acting planes?

First of all, the Masquer Theatre presents a limited stage area and this factor was a major cause for the selection of selective naturalism as a concept.

There were five major acting planes: 1) inside the house and behind the house; 2) the porch; 3) the steps; 4) the center area and the well; and 5) the post or gate area.

The major problems with the usage of the areas came when there were more than five characters on stage at once. Many times characters had to share planes and blockage occurred. But there was an attempt to keep a constant movement so as to

not allow static blockage. The use of levels within the planes was also employed, i.e., under the porch, or standing atop of the log. Many times a static condition did occur and the lack of depth in the acting area became a problem. Given the number of characters on stage at a given moment in the production and the basic diagonal ground plan, static conditions, consequently, were unavoidable.

Did the lack of motivation to certain areas of the ground plan cause problems?

The well, the house, the path behind the house, the log, the corn crib, and the gate or post provided excellent areas of logical motivation within the environment. The area that was the weakest was the stage left or axile area. The rusty old axile was interesting visually, but provided little action motivation for that area. It should have been replaced with a more action-oriented object.

What was the problem in the staging of the death scene in the final act?

The decision to have the Tobacco road located offstage beyond the post caused several difficulties in staging the death scene. The Tobacco road, on a proscenium stage, could have been designed to be upstage in a raised position or even upstage behind the house. The Masquer Theatre space limitations dictated that the road be offstage.

The death scene requires Ada to be run over by the

automobile on the road and then to stagger onstage to eventually bite Jeeter's arm in a desperate attempt to free Pearl. If the road were located upstage, this maneuver could have full visibility for a dramatic and shocking effect. But with the production's ground plan, Ada had to be run over offstage and stagger a good distance in limited lighting and visibility to return to the stage. Once onstage, Ada had to find a motivation to turn so as to be open for the bite on Jeeter's arm. This problem was the source of the criticism. The final manipulation of the blocking did produce a contrived and awkward-looking series of actions. The bite on the arm ended up with poor focus. The problem was never resolved.

Were all the areas of the set used adequately?

During the rehearsal period movement and area usage patterns were established by the characters. Certain areas were used more than others because certain areas became territories. Once a character claimed an area, that character tended to dominate the area; for example, Jeeter dominated the porch steps as his favorite napping spot, Ada claimed the porch area, Dude controlled the log and window side of the house, Ellie May the backyard and well side of the house, and the grandmother carved out the sub-porch area. In terms of naturalism, this procedure is justified and scientific. Human habits create patterns, paths, and humans are territorial animals. If one were to study the rug in a room there would be signs

of wear that indicate travel patterns. There would also be areas of no wear. This should apply to stage usage as well, especially in light of the conceptual approach of naturalism.

### Technical Aspects

What was the justification in using dirt on the set and what problems did it cause?

The soil was a key image in the script. The wornout soil symbolized a deprivation and loss of fertility also missing in the Lester family. The characters belonged to the soil. The concept of naturalism made it essential that the dirt be real. The soil dried out producing a dust that was difficult to control and uncomfortable for the audience. Perhaps the use of a different type of soil was the answer. The soil was sprayed with water after each act. But the water spraying was only a temporary solution.

How was the music chosen and was there a conflict in authenticity?

The recorded music selected to be used as pre-show, transitional, intermission, and ending was actually a replacement of the original intention to have a live band play (banjo, guitar, fiddle). The music was needed to support the environment of the play, to help create a mood, and to help establish or continue a rhythm.

A good deal of music was considered for possible selection

once it was clear that a live band could not be arranged. The problem with adhering to an authentic music style was that the authentic rural Georgia music available was mostly vocal and distractingly unpleasant. A mixture of bluegrass, country, and folk was thought ideal. Most of the selections were chosen from the album, "Will the Circle be Unbroken," recorded by some of the originators of country music. There was an authenticity to the music, even though the music tended to be more honky tonk-roadhouse than rural. For example, Mother Maybelle Carter was singing with the Carter Family on the radio even before Caldwell had written the novel. The music was authentic to the period and aided the environment and mood.

What was the problem in achieving a realistic age effect in the grandmother's makeup?

The script requires a ninety-year-old grandmother. The actress cast for the role was eighteen. There was a specific intention to create the character's movement to cause the head to be in a down focus and the costume of rags was also intended to help cover the head and hide the face, but there were times the face was visible. Old age makeup is difficult and, in the Masquer Theatre, impossible to achieve. Naturalism suggests that a ninety-year-old woman be used as the character. However, within the limitations of talent resource and space limitation the problem could not be avoided. The best solution was to limit facial exposure and this was not entirely successful.



How much concern was placed on the authenticity of the props?

The instructions given to the property designer was that all items be real. Special care and scrutiny was taken in the selection of each prop. Each utility prop was functional and part of the environment; for example, the teapot even leaked. The automobile parts were from a 1930s automobile. The most unsuccessful prop was the sack of salt pork. The object in the sack was not real salt pork nor did it appear in texture or shape to be the real item. This was a breakdown in naturalism.

Audience

The production was extremely successful at the box office. Out of a possible 850 available seats in the ten nights of performances, a total of 822 were sold. Eight out of the ten nights were completely sold out and there were many standing-room-only audiences. This favorable attendance may have been aided by the two favorable reviews which the production received. (See appendix reviews.)

It should be noted that several audience complaints came concerning the uncomfortable conditions produced by the dust and the heat regulation problem of the Masquer Theatre. It was gratifying and encouraging to see a relatively large number of non-students in the audience who were interested and who enjoyed the production.

Personal Evaluation

The production was a superior learning experience and categorically a successful achievement. The achievements included a personal growth in confidence in the ability to articulate, define, and execute a concept as a director and a growth in the ability to organize personnel, material, and time in an artistically productive and efficient manner.

The achievements included the ability to establish a rapport with relationships (cast, staff, crew) that instilled a confidence in the project and created an ensemble excitement and positive attitude that gave me the feeling that the company was working for me and with me. This rapport also created a feeling of group pride in the final product. This rapport was indicated by the staff concern for the pre-deadline completion of all technical elements of the production. It was also proven by the willingness of the entire cast to spend extra time working special rehearsals.

There were several personal shortcomings discovered during the process of directing the production. The major self-discovery was that I am not a perfectionist. Evidence lies in the inconsistencies of the production and the careless treatment of the minor problems. The minor characters-- Captain Tim, Payne, and Sadie Peabody--did not receive adequate rehearsal time nor personal attention. This resulted in weaker performances than could have been developed. The lack of control that Aubrey, as Jeeter, displayed could have been

corrected if attention was given the problem. But it was not.

Another notable self-discovery was the fact of my heavy reliance on intuition rather than on a learned skill. This must be recognized as a possible weakness in future directing projects. Although intuition produces positive results at times, complete reliance on intuition or instinct will prove inadequate in some instances. I must recognize this tendency in my directing and try to experiment with various approaches, until I can rely on a proven approach and skill. I must increase my knowledge of directing through exposure to other directors and models and additional directing experience.

A P P E N D I X E S

THE SCRIPT  
PRODUCTION BOOK

# Tobacco Road

## ACT ONE

TIME: *The present.*

PLACE: *The back country, Georgia—thirty miles or so from Augusta. It is a famished, desolate land, once given over to the profitable raising of tobacco, then turned into small cotton plantations, which have been so intensively and stupidly cultivated as to exhaust the soil. Poverty, want, squalor, degeneracy, pitiful helplessness and grotesque, tragic lusts have stamped a lost, outpaced people with the mark of inevitable end. Unequipped to face a changing economic program, bound up in tradition, ties, and prejudices, they unknowingly face extinction. It is a passing scene, contemporary and fast fading, hurling the lie at nature's mercy and challenging a God who reputedly looks after his own. Grim humor pervades all, stalking side by side with tragedy on the last short mile which leads to complete, eventual elimination. The pride and hope of a once aggressive group, pioneers in a great new world, thus meet ironic conclusion. The world moves on, unmindful of their ghosts.*

SCENE: *The squalid shack of JEETER LESTER, where live his wife, his mother, and two children, last of a multiple brood and last of many generations of deep Georgia crackers. L., angled to curtain line, is the front of the cracked and bleeding house. A small porch, one step up from the yard, projects beyond the building front. Rear, running parallel with the curtain line and disappearing—L., behind the house, and, R.,*

SCENE 1



MUSIC  
CUE

THROWS THE BALL  
3 TIMES

J- SITTING ON THE STEP

D- (L) THROWING BALL  
AGAINST THE HOUSE

6

TOBACCO ROAD

ACT I

behind a clump of bushes—is the immediate section of the Tobacco Road. C., from road rear to foot, is a sandy yard. R. C. stage is a leafless chinaberry tree, under which is a broken, weatherworn bench. D. from this, to within two feet of the curtain line, is a well structure, behind which, masking R. stage to curtain, is a broken corn crib. A sprawling, broken log fence separates the yard from the road, beyond which fields of sedge brush stretch away in the distance.

AT RISE: JEETER, dressed in dirty, torn overalls and dark shirt, an old, battered hat on his head, and heavy, worn boots on his feet, is sitting on the edge of the porch, trying vainly to patch a rotted inner tube. He is really concentrating on his work, but that does not hinder an almost constant run of chatter, most of it a complaining monotone. Standing in the yard and hurling a ball, which he retrieves on the rebound, against the side of the house, U. beyond the porch, is DUDE, last son of JEETER to remain at home. DUDE is just sixteen, dirty, skinny, and not too bright. He is dressed like his father in dirty overalls and a shirt. Underfeeding has had its effect on both JEETER and DUDE. They are scrawny and emaciated. DUDE continues thumping the ball against the house and catching it on the rebound in spite of the fact that the old boards aren't capable of much resistance. The ball hits the house several times before JEETER complains.

JEETER. Stop chunkin' that ball against that there old house, Dude. You've clear about got all the weatherboards knocked off already. (DUDE, ignoring him, throws the ball three more times.) Don't you never do what I tell you? Quit chunkin' that ball at them there weatherboards. The durned old house is going to pitch over and fall on the ground one of these days if you don't stop doing that.

DUDE. (Casually.) Aw, go to hell, you dried-up old clod. Nobody asked you nothin'. (Throws ball again.)

JEETER. (*An edge of supplication in his voice.*) Now, Dude, is that a way to treat your old Pa? You ought to sort of help me out instead of always doing something contrary. You ought to be helping me fix up this old inner tube instead of chunking that ball at that old house all the time.

DUDE. That there old inner tube ain't going to stay fixed noway. You might just as well quit tryin'.

JEETER. Maybe you're right. Maybe I ought to try filling the tires with cotton hulls and drivin' on them that way. A man told me that was the way to do it.

DUDE. (*Between throwing the ball.*) That old automobile ain't no good. It ain't got no horn on it no more and there ain't no sense drivin' an automobile unless you got a horn.

JEETER. It had one of the prettiest horns in the country when it was new.

DUDE. Well, it ain't got no horn now, and it don't hardly run neither.

JEETER. It used to be one of the prettiest runnin' and prettiest soundin' automobiles you ever saw. I used to put you children in it and let you blow the horn all you liked.

DUDE. That was so long ago it ain't doing me no good now.

JEETER. That old automobile is just about the last of my goods. It looks like a man can't have any goods no more.

DUDE. (*Suddenly—fierce.*) Some day I'm going to have me a new automobile. I'm going to have me a new automobile and a new horn on it and I'm going to ride through the country just a raisin' of hell. (*GRANDMA LESTER, an old, bent hag in ragged, black clothes, comes around the far corner of the house just as DUDE throws his ball with particular viciousness, almost striking her. In fright, she drops to her knees and begins crawling D. toward the porch. DUDE catches the ball on the rebound and prepares to hurl it again.*) Look out of the way, old woman, or I'll knock your head off. (*DUDE hurls the ball against the*

STOPS. X TO J

UP - X TO WELL

AT THE WELL - SITS  
DRAW WATER

D - STILL THROWING TH'  
BALL

G - ENTER FROM BEHIND  
HOUSE

D - X TO POST-LOOKING

G - X IN FRONT OF STE'

D - KICKS AT HER

G - HIDES UNDER PORCH



house just above the old woman as she crawls, whimpering, along the ground in the direction of the porch steps. He takes savage delight in her fears. She moves painfully and slowly and he has time for two throws before she reaches the comparative safety of the steps, under which she crawls.)

JEETER. Now, Dude, is that a way to act toward your old grandma? You got her scared half to death.

DUDE. Aw, shut up. You wish she was dead just as much as anybody, even if she is your own ma.

JEETER. Now, Dude . . . I never wished no harm to nobody.

DUDE. You're a dirty old liar. You don't even give her nothing to eat.

JEETER. I don't give her nothing because there ain't nothing.

DUDE. Even when there is you don't give it to her. You needn't go telling me you don't want her dead.

JEETER. Now, Dude, is that a way to talk? It don't seem to me like that's a way a son should talk to his father.

DUDE. Then keep your mouth out of it when nobody's asked you nothing. (DUDE throws the ball against the house, beginning his game again. JEETER resumes work on the inner tube, sitting on the patch. GRANDMA comes slowly from under the edge of the porch, rises and starts cautiously to move around DUDE in the direction of the Tobacco Road. She is carrying an old gunny sack. DUDE, seeing the old woman and stopping.) Where you going now? There ain't no use you picking up firewood today. There ain't going to be anything to eat. (The OLD WOMAN shuffles on toward U. R. hole in the log fence. DUDE looks after her, the spirit of hurt in his heart and mind.) You better run, old woman, I'm going to chuck this ball at you. (Holds ball to throw. She sees his gesture, moves more quickly, stumbles, falls, gets up.) Look out now, I'm going to hit you in the head—I'm going to hit you in the head. (GRANDMA stumbles again in her hurry, but

J - STANDS - X TO PORCH

D & J - CENTER



J - X BACK TO WELL  
GET HAT - THE X TO  
STEPS - SIT -  
FX INNER TUBE  
D - THROWS BALL AGAIN

G - STARTS OUT FROM  
UNDER PORCH -  
D - CHASE (G) TO  
WELL THE OFF  
BEHIND HOUSE

*this time doesn't rise, continuing her exit on hands and knees. DUDE is on the point of throwing the ball at her, when his eye catches the torn cover and checks him. He looks at the ball more closely.*) Goddam, just look at that ball. Just look at what that old house done to that ball.

JEETER. (*Wiggling on tube to make the patch stick.*) Let me see it here. (*DUDE hands him the ball. He looks at it and shakes his head.*) Yes, sir, it's plumb wore out.

DUDE. (*Taking back the ball, holding it up, and looking at it.*) It ain't even round no more. That old house just about ruined it for good. (*Sits on ground, inspecting ball.*)

JEETER. Looks like about everything around here is wore out. Seems like the Lord just ain't with us no more at all.

DUDE. I'm going down to Fuller tomorrow and steal me a new ball. That's what I'm going to do.

JEETER. Stealing is powerful sinful, Dude. I wouldn't want you doing that. I guess stealing is about the most sinful thing a man can do.

DUDE. Go on, you old liar. You're always stealing something if you can find it.

JEETER. Now, Dude! Maybe I have been a powerful sinner in my time, but ain't nobody never been sorer than me when he's done something against the Lord.

DUDE. You're always praying and shouting after you been stealing something, but that ain't never stopped you from doing it. I'd like to hear you tell me of one time when it stopped you. Just tell me. (*Pauses while JEETER fiddles with inner tube.*) You just won't tell me—that's what.

JEETER. (*Avoiding the issue, pulls at the patch, which comes off in his hand.*) Just look at that old inner tube. . . . (*Inspects it for an instant, tosses it aside.*) Well, I guess there ain't no use trying to fix that no more. Looks to me like I got to figure some other way of getting a load of wood down to Augusta. (*Yawns, stretches.*) I got to do some thinking about that. (*Lies back on porch,*

AT(R) OF HOUSE

D - X(R) SITS ON  
GROUND (C)

D - POUNDING BALL  
WITH ROCK -

J - ON STEPS -  
GIVES UP ON  
THE INNER TUBE  
LAYS BACK TO  
SLEEP.

J - THROWS INNER TU  
OFF TOWARD WEL

*tilting his hat over his eyes. DUDE continues to pound ball on rock.*) I know what I'm going to do. I'm going down to Fuller one of these days and borrow me a mule. I expect I could take a load of wood to Augusta almost every day that way.

DUDE. *(Laughs.)* Ho! Ho! Ain't nobody going to loan you a mule. You can't even get seed-cotton and ~~(cuan)~~ <sup>FEETTER</sup> to plant a crop with.

JEETER. Never you mind now. That way I could do about everything I wanted. When I wasn't hauling wood I could cultivate the fields. That's what a man ought to be doing anyway. When February comes like this and the ground gets right for plowing a man ought to be planting in the ground and growing things. That's what the Lord intended a man should do. But he can't do much without a mule to plow with. *(Nods his head, sits up.)* Yes, sir, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going down to Fuller or maybe even McCoy one of these days and borrow me a mule. *(Lies down on his back again, tilting hat over his eyes.)* I got to do some thinking about that.

DUDE. *(Makes no comment, concentrating on pounding the ball back into shape. Hits it twice on the ground.)* Goddam that old house. This ball never will get round no more.

*(Enter ADA through doorway on to the porch and taking in JEETER's recumbent form with a quick, irritated glance. ADA is a thin, gaunt, pellagra-ridden woman. Her shapeless dress is dirty and ragged. She was never a beauty, and pellagra and forty years of living with JEETER have not helped to improve her appearance. Her hair is a stringy, colorless gray-brown. She shambles rather than walks, and leans against anything strong enough to bear her weight. An inevitable snuff stick protrudes from her lips. She speaks when DUDE stops pounding the ball to inspect it again.)*

ADA. What are you doing laying down there on the



D- CRAWLS (R)  
TO FIND ANOTHER  
ROCK.

A- ENTER FROM  
HOUSE - STANDS  
LEARNING ON  
PORCH POST

porch, Jeeter Lester? Ain't you going to haul no wood to Augusta?

JEETER. (*Pushing back hat and sitting up. Even in that short time he has fallen asleep. He regards his wife vaguely.*) What's that?

ADA. When you going to haul some wood to Augusta?

JEETER. (*Sinking back.*) I'm aiming to take a load over there tomorrow or the next day.

DUDE. The hell he is, Ma. He's just trying to lie out of it.

JEETER. Now, Dude. (*PEEKING OUT FROM UNDER HAT*)

ADA. You're just lazy, that's what's wrong with you. If you wasn't lazy you could haul a load every day, and I'd have me some snuff when I wanted it most.

JEETER. I ain't no durn wood-chopper. I'm a farmer.

The wood-choppers hauling wood to Augusta ain't got no farming to take up their time like I has. Why, I expect I'm going to grow near about fifty bales of cotton this year. **CUT**

ADA. That's the way you talk every year about this time, but you don't never get started.

JEETER. This year I'm going to get at it. Dude and me'll burn the broom sedge off the fields one of these days and it won't take long then to put in a crop.

ADA. I been listening to you talk like that so long I don't believe nothing you say now. It's a big old whopping lie.

JEETER. Now leave me be, Ada. I'm going to start in the morning. Soon as I get all the fields burned off I'll go borrow me some mules. I wouldn't be surprised if me and Dude growed more than fifty bales of cotton this year, if I can get me some seed-cotton and quand peppers. **CUT**

DUDE. Who's going to give you seed-cotton and quand this year any more than they did last year or the year before, or the year before that?

JEETER. God is aiming to provide for me. I'm getting ready right now to receive His bounty.

ADA. You just lay there and see! Even the children has

A - SPITTING HER  
SNUFF



Ada - ATTEMPTS TO SWAT HIM  
KICKS AT HIM

got more sense than you has. Didn't they go on and work in the mills as soon as they was big enough? If I wasn't so old I'd go up there right now and make me some money, myself, just like you ought to be doing.

JEETER. (*Intensely—sitting bolt upright.*) It's wicked, you saying that, Ada. City ways ain't God-given. It wasn't intended for a man with the smell of the land in him to live in a mill in Augusta.

ADA. It's a whole lot better to live in the mills than it is to stay out here on the Tobacco Road and starve to death.

DUDE. Cuss the hell out of him, Ma.

JEETER. (*Sadly. Again lying down.*) The Lord sends me every misery He can think of just to try my soul. He must be aiming to do something powerful big for me because He sure tests me hard. I reckon He figures if I can put up with my own people I can stand to fight back at the devil.

ADA. Humph! If He don't hurry up and do something about it, it will be too late. My poor stomach gives me a powerful pain all day long when I ain't got the snuff to calm it.

JEETER. (*Without moving.*) Yes, I reckon you women folks is about near as hungry as I is. I sure feel right sorry for you women folks. (*Pulls hat over his eyes and dozes off again.*)

(*Enter ELLIE MAY R. on Tobacco Road. ELLIE MAY is eighteen, and not unattractive as to figure. Her eyes are good; her hair is brown. The outstanding feature, however, is a slit lip, red and fiery, the opening running from about the center of the lip to the left side of her nose. When she speaks, which is seldom, she has the garbled pronunciation and nasal emphasis of those afflicted with a harelip. She is barefoot and hatless, and her light cotton dress is old, rumpled, and streaked with dirt. She comes forward shyly, like a frightened doe, her eyes watching the three other*)



CUT

- ELLIE MAY  
ENTER FROM ROAD

SCENE 2

E - COLLECTING TWIGS

people. She only comes in as far as the chinaberry tree, half edging behind it.)

ADA. You talk like an old fool. . . . Where you been there, Ellie May?

ELLIE MAY. No place, Ma.

ADA. (Eagerly.) You didn't maybe go to see Pearl, did you?

ELLIE MAY. No, Ma.

ADA. (More to herself than to anyone.) I declare I don't know what's got into that girl. I ain't seen hide nor hair of her since she and Lov got married.

DUDE. (With deliberate cruelty.) Why should Pearl want to see you?

ADA. She loves her old Ma, that's why.

DUDE. Well, she ain't been back, has she?

ADA. Pearl is different. There ain't one of the whole seventeen she's like.

DUDE. (Pointedly—leering.) She sure ain't like the rest of us, all right. . . . What was you doing, Ma, horsing around some man besides that old fool over there?

ADA. You ain't no right talking like that to your old Ma, Dude Lester. The Lord will strike you dead one of these days.

DUDE. I ain't afraid of the Lord. He ain't never done nothing for me one way or the other.

ADA. If you was a good son, you wouldn't be saying things like that. You'd be helping to get rations and snuff for your old Ma. I declare to goodness I don't know when I've had enough to eat. It's getting so if I had a stylish dress to be buried in I'd like to lie down right now and die.

DUDE. (With vicious humor.) You ain't never going to get a new dress to die in. You're going to die and be buried in just what you got on. They're going to bury you in that some old dress.

ADA. Now, Dude, don't start fooling with your old Ma like that.



STARTS TO X-ON PORCH

ELLIE X IN UP TO PORCH (R) OF STEPS

X BACK TO STEPS

(JESTER PIZINU)

X-D STEPS TO DUDE

KNEELING UP

X-TO POST-

STANDING

-TURN FAST BACK

(ELLIE FROM KITCHEN UNDER IN HOUSE)

DUDE. Aw, go to hell. What do I care about you?  
 (*Turns—starts to chant.*) You're going to die and get laid in the corn crib—you're going to die and get laid in the corn crib.

JEETER. (*Threateningly.*) You shut up, Dude Lester. You shut up your mouth.

DUDE. (*Continuing chant, walking toward gate.*) You're going to die and get laid in the corn crib—you're going to die, etc. (*JEETER rushes at DUDE.*)

JEETER. (*Striking weakly at DUDE's back.*) Shut up. You hear me—shut up!

DUDE. (*Turning—blocking blows easily.*) What you trying to do, you old fool? Get away from me. (*Pushes JEETER, who stumbles back, falling.*) You keep away from me when I tell you. (*Turns—breaks again into chant.*) You're going to die and get laid in the corn crib etc. (*Exits.*)

ADA. (*Plaintively.*) Dude, you come back here. You can't go off like that without making a promise to your old Ma. (*ADA is answered only by DUDE's grim chant, diminishing in the distance. JEETER gets up, goes back to the porch and sits, abstractedly picking up the inner tube and working on it. ADA at bench.*)

JEETER. (*After a pause.*) I reckon Dude is about the worst child of the whole lot. Seems like a boy would have the proper respect for his old Pa.

ADA. I know Lizzie Belle'd help me get a stylish dress if I could find out where she is at. She used to love her old Ma a heap. Clara might help some, too. She used to tell me how pretty I looked when I combed my hair mornings and put on a clean apron. I don't know if the others would want to help none or not. It's been such a long time since I saw the rest of them I've just about forgot what they was like. Seems like I can't recall their names even.

JEETER. Lizzie Belle might be making a lot of money over in the mills. Maybe if I was to find her and ask her about it, she might come sometime and bring us a little



AT DUDE

ADA ON PORCH

J-SWATING AT DUDE DUDE'S

ALI SHUFFLE - JEETER AFTER DUDE

DUDE PUSHING

J.

OFF OVER ON ROAD

FROM PORCH

UP - PUSTING OFF

A SITTING ON ROCKER

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AT DUDE

ADA  
F

J-SWATING AT DUDE  
DUDE'S  
ALI SHUFFLE - JEETER AFTER D

DUDE PUSHING J.

OFF OVER ON ROAD

FROM PORCH

UP - DUSTING OFF

A SITTING ON ROCKER



SECTION - Slow Paced  
NATURAL - (SNUFF)

J - ON STEPS

A - STANDS ON  
STEPS

A - SITS

16

TOBACCO ROAD

ACT I

money. I know Bailey would. Bailey was just about the best of all the boys.

ADA. Reckon any of the children is dead?

JEETER. Some, I reckon. . . . But Tom ain't dead. I know that for sure. I ain't got around to doing it yet, but one of these days I'm going over to Burke County and see him. Everybody in Fuller tells me he's hauling cross ties out of the camp by the wagon load day and night. From what people say about him he's a powerful rich man now. He sure ought to give me some money.

ADA. When you see Tom tell him that his old Ma would like to see him. You tell him that I said he was near about the best of the whole seventeen. Clara and Lizzie Belle was about the best, I reckon, but Tom and Bailey led the boys when it came to being good children. You tell Tom I said he was the best and maybe he'll send me some money for a stylish dress.

JEETER. Pearl is the prettiest. Ain't none of the other gals got pretty yellow hair like she has. Nor them pale blue eyes, neither.

ADA. Pearl is my real favorite. But I wish she'd come to see me sometime. What do you think makes her stay away since she got married, Jeeter?

JEETER. There never was no telling what Pearl was going to do. You was much like her yourself in that respect when you was twelve or thirteen.

ADA. Do you think she's happy married to Lov?

JEETER. Happy? I don't know anything about that. When a gal is mated to a man that's all there is to it.

ADA. Maybe she should've gone off to Augusta like the others done, even if she was scared. That's where a pretty girl ought to be. She ought to be where there's pretty clothes and shoes to wear and windows to look at.

JEETER. I don't agree to that. People that's born on the land should stay on the land. The Lord intended such. I made her go to live with Lov because that was the best thing for her to do.

ADA. Humph! Well, it might be she's satisfied. Maybe

she don't care about seeing her old Ma right now. When girls is satisfied they sometimes don't like to talk about their husbands any more than they do when they ain't satisfied.

JEETER. Pearl don't talk none anyway. Reckon she talks to Lov, Ada?

ADA. When girls sleep in the bed with their husbands they usually talk to them, I've discovered.

JEETER. By God and by Jesus you was certainly in no hurry to talk to me even then.

ADA. I'll go down to see her one of these days if she don't come to see me. You go see Lov, too. It's time you done that.

JEETER. Don't bother me about that now. I got to figure out some way to plant me a crop this year. *(Leans against upright.)* I got to do some thinking about that right away. *(Pulls hat over his eyes and promptly goes to sleep. ADA shakes her head. ELLIE MAY starts out gate, but ADA sees her.)*

ADA. Ellie May! Hey you, Ellie May! You come inside and fix up the beds. They ain't been made all day and somebody's got to do something around here. *(ELLIE MAY turns and reluctantly starts toward house, when DUDE enters excitedly from r. and comes to right of porch.)*

DUDE. Hey, Lov's coming! Lov's coming down the road. *(ELLIE MAY crosses to right end of fence; looks down road.)*

JEETER. *(Drowsily.)* What?

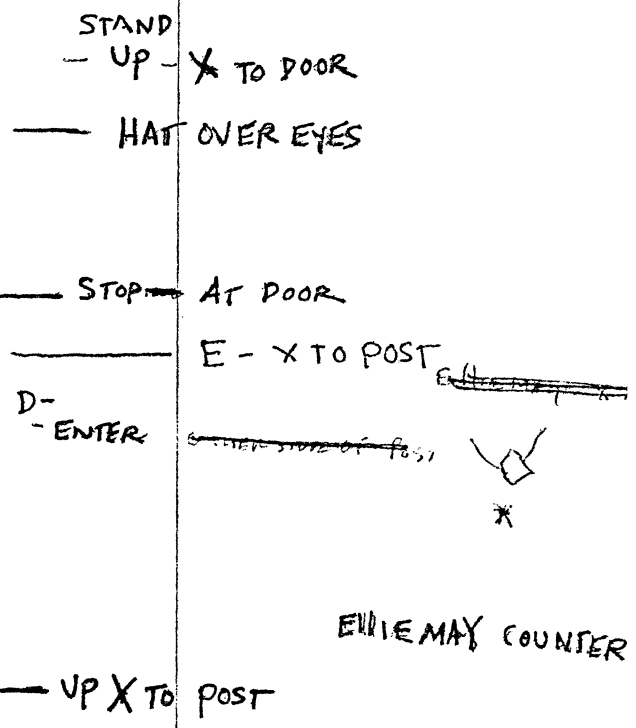
ADA. *(Kicks JEETER.)* Wake up, you old fool—Lov's coming. Maybe he wants to talk about Pearl.

JEETER. What do I care about that now? By God, woman, can't you see I'm thinking?

DUDE. He's toting a croker sack that's got something in it.

JEETER. *(Suddenly wide awake.)* A croker sack! *(Rises.)* What does it look like is in that croker sack, Dude?

DUDE. He's just coming over the ridge now and I



G - ENTER

BEGINNING OF  
THIS LINE

GRANDMA ENTER  
W/ TWIGS UNDER  
PORCH -

A - ON STEPS

PERFORM  
STEPS

E - X TO CRIB

~~Ellie May to crib~~  
move crib

couldn't make out. But nobody carries a sack that ain't got nothing good in it.

(JEETER runs to the fence and looks over it down the road. ELLIE MAY also goes to the fence, but as far r. from the others as possible. Enter GRANDMA LESTER with a sackful of twigs which she drags along the ground. She does not even glance at the others, who are gazing in the opposite direction down the road, but crosses to the porch, releases the sack, and sits, pressing her hands to her side in pain and swaying back and forth.)

JEETER. (Peering over fence.) By God and by Jesus, that's Lov all right. Do you think them's turnips he's toting, Dude? Do you think them's turnips in that croker sack?

DUDE. It's something all right.

JEETER. (Delighted.) By God and by Jesus, I just been waiting to have me some turnips.

ADA. If them's turnips do you reckon he'll let me have some?

JEETER. I'll mention it when I talk to him, but I don't know how he'll take it. He must have paid a good stiff price if they's winter turnips.

DUDE. Lov ain't giving away nothing he paid a good stiff price for.

JEETER. I ain't concerning myself about that. Lov and me think a heap of each other.

DUDE. If he don't give you none, is you going to try and steal some?

JEETER. (Admonishingly.) Now, Dude! Stealing is about the most sinful thing a man can do. The Lord don't have no truck with stealing. (ELLIE MAY giggles foolishly. JEETER turns to her.) Get away from that fence, Ellie May. Lov ain't likely to come in here at all if he sees that face of yours.

(ELLIE MAY giggles foolishly again and moves behind

chinaberry tree, from where she peeks. GRANDMA LESTER shuffles D. and flattens herself against the corner of the porch nearest the curtain line. JEETER and DUDE stretch far over the fence to watch Lov's approach.)

ADA. Is he near about here, Jeeter?

JEETER. Near about. He's just about here now.

ADA. Is them turnips?

JEETER. By God, if they ain't, he sure is doing a hell of <sup>CUT</sup> a lot of stretching for nothing. (Gives his full attention to the approaching man for a second, then turns and motions to the others.) Get away from that fence—all of you. Come on, sit down. Act ~~unconcerned~~. (Goes to side of house; ADA to the well; DUDE sits on fence. Enter Lov BENSEY. Lov is a man about thirty, dressed in coal-grimed overalls and wearing a dirty, floppy hat. When he removes the hat to wipe the sweat from his face a shock of unruly hair is seen rising above a sunburned face. He is not unattractive in his dull, slow way, and his body shows the result of hard work and a reasonable amount of food. He is not a big man, but he is stronger and better nourished than either DUDE or JEETER. He carries a partly filled gunny sack over his shoulder. Caution and suspicion mark his every move in dealing with the LESTERS, and this is in evidence now as he comes into the scene. JEETER, hiding his eagerness by trying to be casual.) Hi there, Lov.

Lov. Hi. (Moves on beyond them toward c.)

JEETER. Ain't seen you in a long time.

Lov. No. (Stops near the gate, and shifts bag.)

JEETER. You must be plumb wore out toting that croker sack. Come in off the Tobacco Road and rest yourself.

Lov. I ain't tired.

JEETER. You must of come a far piece off if you come from down Fuller way.

Lov. Umm.

JEETER. Come inside and get yourself a drink.

FITS UNDER PORCH

~~NOTE~~

Jeeter SIT ON well

SCEN

(PAUSE) AWKWARD

III

LOV STOPS BY POST

JEETER  
PACING

AT WELL

ELLIE -  
GLANCING OVER  
SHOULDER

Lov. I ain't thirsty.  
 JEETER. (*With calculated amiability.*) We was just talking about you, Lov. We ain't seen you since a way long the first of the winter. How is you and Pearl getting on down there at the coal chute?

ADA. (*A trace of anxiety.*) Pearl—is she all right?  
 Lov. Humph! (*He glances suspiciously at all of them.*) I want to talk to you, Jeeter.

JEETER. Sure. Come inside the yard and sit down. No use toting that croker sack while you're talking. (*Lov repeats his glance of suspicion, but comes hesitatingly inside and drops the sack against fence near gate. He stands in front of it, guarding it. JEETER tries to make his voice casual, but every eye on the stage is on that sack, giving the lie to their pretended indifference.*) What you got in that croker sack, Lov? (*Innocently, as Lov doesn't answer.*) I heard it said that some people has got turnips this year. (*Lov's eyes narrow with suspicion and he backs even more protectively against the sack.*)

Lov. (*Shrewdly.*) It's Pearl I want to talk to you about.

ADA. She ain't sick, is she?

Lov. (*Suddenly angry.*) By God, she's something! (*Lets himself to ground, sitting beside turnips and gripping neck of sack.*)

JEETER. (*Archly.*) Why don't you go over on the porch? That ain't no place to sit.

Lov. I'll sit right where I is.

JEETER. (*Agreeably.*) What you got to say to me, Lov? You must have a heap to say, toting that sack all this way to do it.

Lov. I sure has. You got to go talk to Pearl. That's what I got to say.

JEETER. What's that gal up to? I never could understand her. What's she done now?

Lov. It's just like she done ever since she went down to live with me at the chute, only I'm getting pretty dum

X TO PORCH R-OF STEPS

X UP TO LOV

MAKE ATTEMPT TO TAKE SACK - LOV X IN (L) THROWS SACK OVER SHOULDER

LOV - X NEAR ELIS CIRCLE'S TURN

JEETER - CIRCLE NEAR POST.



JEETER i LOV CIRCLE

LOV X R TO FENCE

JEETER - UP BY DUPE

CUT

tired of it by this time. All the niggers make fun of me because of the way she treats me.

JEETER. Pearl is just like her Ma. Her Ma used to do the queerest things in her time.

ADA. (*Sharply.*) Is you treating her right?

Lov. That ain't got a goddam thing to do with it. She's married to me, ain't she?

JEETER. You got leave of the county. I remember that all right.

Lov. Then why the hell don't she act like she ought to? Every time I want to have her around, she runs off in the broom sedge. She won't talk to me, neither, and she won't cook nothing I want to eat.

JEETER. Great day in the morning, now what do you think makes her do that?

Lov. I don't know and I don't care. But I call it a hell of a business.

JEETER. About the cooking you is just about right. But when it comes to not talking I don't see no harm in that. Ada, there, didn't used to talk neither, but, by God and by Jesus, now you can't make her shut up.

Lov. (*Stubbornly.*) I want Pearl to talk to me. I want her to ask me if my back is sore when I come home from the chute, or if it's going to rain, or when I is going to get a haircut. There's a hell of a lot of things she could ask me about, but she don't talk at all.

JEETER. Maybe you don't try the right way to make her.

Lov. I tried kicking her and I tried pouring water on her and chunking rocks and sticks at her, but it don't do no good. She cries a lot when she's hurt, but, by God, I don't call that talking.

ADA. Don't you dare hurt her, Lov Bensey.

Lov. You keep out of this. I guess I know my rights. (*Pauses, looking belligerently from ADA to JEETER.*) And they is something else she don't do neither.

JEETER. For one little gal they sure is a heap of things she don't do. What else don't she do, Lov?

- TURN

LOV  
MOVE AWAY

-

TO ADA

LOV  
TURNED FACING OUT (R)

MOTION TO DUDE BOTH DU  
JEETER CREEPING  
FOR SACK -

DUDE S  
ON W

ELLIE ON  
LOG - WIGCI

LOV -  
OVER  
TO  
(CORN CRIB)

WATCHING ELLIE

Jeeter EDGING Closer To  
HOUSE BY WINDOW

LOV -  
INTEREST IN  
ELLIE STARTS

SIT  
ON GROUND  
UP OF  
LOV.

LOV. She don't sleep in the bed with me, that's what. (*Viciously to ADA.*) And what you got to say about that?

JEETER. (*Much more interested.*) Now that's something. By God and by Jesus, that's something.

LOV. (*Turning back to JEETER.*) She ain't never slept in the bed. It's a durn pallet on the floor she sleeps on every night. Now what I say is, what the hell is the sense in me marrying a wife if I don't get none of the benefits?

ADA. If you don't like what she's doing, you send her right home and get yourself another girl. Her old Ma will look after her.

LOV. No. I ain't going to do that either. I want Pearl. She's about the prettiest piece in the whole country and I want her.

JEETER. You give her time and she'll get in the bed.

LOV. By God. I already give her enough time. Right now I feel like I got to have me a woman. (*Looks at ELLIE MAY. ELLIE MAY catches his glance and giggles. She begins the wriggling movement, which at the right time brings her near LOV.*)

JEETER. I know how you feel, Lov. When the time to plow and put seed in the ground comes along a man feels just like that. Even at this day and age I could do a little of that myself.

LOV. Well, then, you go down and talk to her. You tell her to stop sleeping on that durn pallet and get in the bed—and tell her to talk to me, too, by God.

JEETER. I might do that if I felt you was ready and willing to do something for me in return.

LOV. (*Suspiciously.*) What do you mean by that, Jeeter?

JEETER. (*Unable longer to restrain himself.*) By God and by Jesus, Lov, what you got in that croker sack? I been looking at it ever since you been here and I sure got to know.

LOV. I don't see what that's got to do with it?

JEETER. What is they, I tell you!

LOV. (*After a short pause for emphasis and a hard,*

*proud glance around.) Turnips, by God. (His announcement causes a noticeable reaction on everyone. Their bodies stiffen and lean forward—a look of greed appears in their faces. But wisely they refrain from taking any actual steps forward. Instinctively they wait for JEETER to see it through. Only ELLIE MAY forgets her hunger in the sharpening force of passion brought on by proximity to Lov, and continues her sex-conscious wriggling.)*

JEETER. (Keyed up, but holding himself in.) Turnips! Where'd you get turnips, Lov?

Lov. Wouldn't you like to know?

JEETER. Turnips is about the thing I want most of all right now. I could just about eat me a whole croker sackful between now and sundown.

Lov. Well, don't look to me to give you none because I ain't.

JEETER. That's a mean thing to say, Lov. It's a whopping mean thing to say to Pearl's old Pa.

Lov. To hell with that. I had to pay fifty cents for this many in a sack and I had to walk clear to the other side of Fuller to fetch them.

JEETER. I was thinking maybe you and me could fix up some sort of trade. I could go down to your house and tell Pearl she's got to sleep in the bed, and you could give me some of them—

Lov. No, by God. You're Pearl's Daddy and you ought to make her behave for nothing.

JEETER. By God and by Jesus, Lov, you oughtn't to talk to me like that. I just got to have me some turnips. I ain't had a good turnip since a year ago this spring. All the turnips I raised this year has got them damn-blasted green-gutted worms in them.

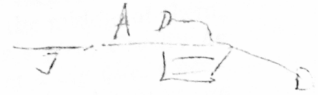
Lov. I don't see what that's got to do with Pearl one way or another. I gave you seven dollars when she came to live with me and that's enough.

JEETER. Maybe it was then, but it ain't now. We is about starved around here. What God made turnip-worms for I can't make out. It appears to me like He just nat-

OPENS SACK



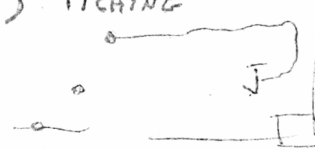
DUDE  
UP TO  
PORCH



GRANDMA  
CRAWL CLOSE

— TAKES ONE OUT  
TOSSING IT.

— X — (R) ITCHING





{ DUDE SITS ON STEPS }

ELLIE MAY  
RUBBING  
BACKS -  
- closer & closer

HEAR JEETER  
TRIES TO TAKE  
THE SACK -  
LOV PULLS IT AWAY



MA  
- L -  
CORNER OF  
HOUSE NEAR  
CORN CRIB

usually has got it in good and heavy for a poor man. I worked all the fall last year digging up a patch of ground to grow turnips in, and when they're getting about big enough to pull up and eat, along come them damn-blasted green-gutted worms and bore clear to the middle of them. (LOV is entirely indifferent to JEETER's plea. Cruelly he takes a turnip from the sack and takes a big bite. Chewing the bite to the agony of the starving LESTERS, he points the stub of the turnip at the wriggling ELLIE MAY, sitting on the ground near the bench and looking at him with avid eyes. She giggles.)

LOV. Now if Pearl was anything like Ellie May there, she wouldn't act like she does. You go down and tell her to act like Ellie May.

JEETER. Is you in mind then to make a trade with them turnips?

LOV. (Eating.) I ain't trading turnips with nobody.

JEETER. That's a hell of a thing to say, Lov. I'm wanting turnips God Himself knows how bad.

LOV. Go over to Fuller and buy yourself some, then. I went over to get mine.

JEETER. Now, Lov, you know I ain't got a penny to my name. You got a good job down there at the chute and it pays you a heap of money.

LOV. I don't make but a dollar a day. House rent takes up near about all that and eating the rest of it.

JEETER. Makes no difference. You don't want to sit there and let me starve, do you?

LOV. I can't help it if you do. The Lord looks at us with equal favor, they say. He gives me mine and if you don't get yours you better go talk to Him about it.

DUDE. You give him hell, Lov. If he wasn't so durn lazy he'd do something instead of cussing about it all the time. He's the laziest son-of-a-bitch I ever seen.

CUT [ JEETER. My children all blame me because God sees fit to make me poverty-stricken, Lov. They and their Ma is all the time cussing me because we ain't got nothing to

eat. It ain't my fault that Captain John shut down on giving us rations and snuff, and then went away and died.

Lov. (*Indifferently.*) It ain't my fault neither.

JEETER. I worked all my life for Captain John, Lov. I worked harder than any four of his niggers in the field; then the first thing I knowed he came down here one morning and says he can't be letting me get no more rations and snuff at the store. After that he sells all the mules and goes up to Augusta to live. He said there wasn't no use trying to run a farm no more—fifty plows or one plow. He told me I could stay on the land as long as I liked, but that ain't doing me no good. Ain't no work I can find to do for hire and I can't raise a crop of my own because I ain't got no mule and I ain't got no credit. (*Lov's attention turns from JEETER to ELLIE MAY, whose wriggling movement is bringing her inch by inch closer to him.*) That's what I'm wanting to do powerful strong right now—raise me a crop. When the winter goes and when it gets time to burn off the broom sedge in the fields, I sort of want to cry. I reckon it is the smell of that sedge smoke this time of year near about drives me crazy. Then pretty soon all the other farmers start plowing. That's what's the worst. When the smell of that new earth turning over behind the plows strikes me, I get all weak and shaky. It's in my nature—burning broom sedge and plowing in the ground this time of year. I did it for near about fifty years, and my Pa and his Pa before him was the same kind of men. Us Lesters sure like to stir up the earth and make plants grow in it. The land has got a powerful hold on me, Lov.

(*Lov is giving his full attention to ELLIE MAY now, a half-eaten turnip arrested on its way to his mouth. ELLIE MAY leans back until she rests on the ground and continues her wriggling and squealing. Lov begins to edge toward her. DUDE watches them closely.*)

DUDE. Hey, Pa.

CUT

AT WELL

ELLIE &amp;

LOV

HORSE

DUDE - WATCHES  
ELLIE & LOV

CUT

DUDE STANDS

JEETER. Shut up, Dude. It didn't always used to be like it is now, neither, Lov. I can remember a short time back when all the merchants in Fuller was tickled to give me credit. Then all of a sudden Captain John went away and pretty soon the sheriff comes and takes away near about every durn piece of goods I possessed. He took every durn thing I had, excepting that old automobile and the cow. He said the cow wasn't no good because she wouldn't take no freshening, and the automobile wasn't no good neither. I reckon he was right, too, because the automobile won't run no more and the cow died.

DUDE. (*Throwing a broken piece of weatherboarding at JEETER.*) Hey, you.

JEETER. (*Angrily.*) What you want, Dude? What's the matter with you—chunking weatherboarding at me like that?

DUDE. Ellie May's horsing. That's horsing from way back yonder, Pa?

JEETER. (*Giving the action conscious attention for the first time.*) By God and by Jesus, Lov, has you been paying attention to what I was saying? You ain't answered me about them turnips yet.

DUDE. Lov ain't thinking about no turnips. He's wanting to hang up with Ellie May. Look at her straining for him. She's liable to bust a gut if she don't look out. (*It's JEETER's turn now to be indifferent to conversation. He watches while LOV creeps several yards from the turnip sack up to ELLIE MAY and awkwardly begins to fondle her. Their backs meet and rub together in a primitive love gesture. Slowly and silently, JEETER puts aside the inner tube which he has been holding and vaguely trying to fix, and gets to his feet. Inch by inch he begins edging toward the sack. LOV has worked his way around in back of ELLIE MAY and his hands are around her, stroking her arms and legs. JEETER moves closer and closer to the sack, unseen by LOV. Only ADA and GRANDMA LESTER notice him. DUDE is too occupied watching LOV and ELLIE MAY.*) By God, Lov ain't never got that close before. He

DUDE STANDING  
RIGHT OVER  
LOV & ELLIE

JEETER UP —

GRANDMA  
GETS STICK

said he wouldn't never get close enough to Ellie May to touch her with a stick. But he ain't paying no mind to that now. I bet he don't even know she's got a slit-lip on her. If he does know it, he don't give a good goddam.

(And now JEETER makes his play. In one swift lunge he crosses the intervening distance and grabs up the sack. LOV sees him, turns swiftly, and reaches for him, but misses. He starts to rise as JEETER backs a step away, but ELLIE MAY grabs his leg, tripping him up. Before he can shake her off, ADA hurries from the well, picking up a stick on the way. GRANDMA LESTER totters from her place, also brandishing a stick. The two OLD WOMEN move down on LOV to help ELLIE MAY.)

Cut - LOV. Drop them turnips, Jeeter! Drop them turnips.  
(ELLIE MAY, quicker than LOV, practically leaps on top of him, holding him down. They roll and struggle. To ELLIE MAY.) Get off me, you. Get off me. (Struggles to rise. ADA and GRANDMA slap and jab at him with their sticks.)

JEETER. (At the gate.) You tell Pearl I said be good to you, Lov. I'll be down to see about that first thing in the morning. (Exits, running.)

LOV. Goddam you! (Lov, by dint of great effort, throws off the women, literally hurling ELLIE MAY to the ground, and dashes to the gate. He stops there, looking down the road, trying to spy JEETER.)

DUDE. Ain't no use trying to catch Pa. He's run off in the brush and there ain't nobody can catch Pa when he runs off in the brush. (LOV realizes the truth of DUDE's statement, and, winded and panting, leans against the fence, making no effort to run. ELLIE MAY lies on the ground, also breathing hard, but her eyes still are on Lov.)

ADA. Go on back to Ellie May, Lov. Don't be scared of her. You might even get to like her and let Pearl come

Ellie & LOV  
Roll (L) TOWARD  
CORN CRIB

JEETER - TO SACK

ADA - DOWN FOR STICK  
ELLIE HOLD LEG -  
GRANDMA ~~W~~ UP/STICK.

STRUGGLE -

Jeeter on Road by Post

DUDE (R) - OVER BY POST &  
clump.

LOV GET FREE START AFTER  
JEETER UNTIL POST

SPY

SEE

ELLIE MAY STILL ON GROUND.

X - UP TO PORCH AGAIN

GRANDMA OVER BY PORCH THIS TIME  
(R)

back here to me. (Lov doesn't answer, pulling a huge colored handkerchief from his pocket and wiping his streaming face. DUDE moves to the fence, c.)

DUDE. How many scoops-full does that No. 17 freight engine empty at the chute every morning, Lov? Looks to me like them freight engines takes on twice as much coal as the passenger ones does. (Lov pays no attention. ADA goes back to the porch. GRANDMA LESTER picks up her sack of twigs, and, groaning, goes into the house.) Why don't the firemen blow the whistles more than they do, Lov? If I was a fireman I'd pull the whistle cord near about all the time. (DUDE makes noise like locomotive whistle. Lov turns from the fence, goes back into the yard, recovers his hat, glances at ELLIE MAY, who lies sprawled on the ground. Then he turns and starts off. DUDE follows Lov to the gate. Lov finishes adjusting his overalls and crosses to the gate, DUDE following.) When is you going to buy yourself an automobile, Lov? You make a heap of money at the chute. You ought to get one that has got a great big horn on it. (Repeats locomotive sound. Ecstatically.) Whistles and horns sure make a pretty sound. (Ignoring DUDE, Lov exits through the gate and down the road.) I reckon Lov don't feel much like talking today.

ADA. Dude, you run right in the brush and find your Pa before he eats up all them turnips. (DUDE starts.) See you bring some of them back to your old Ma, too. (Exit DUDE. ADA watches him through the gate, then calls.) Ellie May . . . Ellie May!

ELLIE MAY. (Looking up—blinking.) Yes, Ma.

ADA. You get inside the house and fix up them beds like I told you a long time ago. (ELLIE MAY stretches and yawns, showing no disposition to move.) I declare to goodness there ain't nobody around here got gumption enough to do anything. Now you get inside the house and do like I tell you. Do you hear me? Come on.

ELLIE MAY. (Slowly getting to her feet.) All right—I'm a-coming.

Lov  
DUSTING OFF  
PICKING UP HAT.  
Ellie still wiggling  
Lov - Exits

DUDE ON  
MOUND BY  
CLUMP  
DUDE OFF

Ellie  
Still on  
GRANDMA.

UP X

UP TO  
PORCH

ADA GOES  
INSIDE

TRY N  
TEASE HERE  
PEABODY SEES  
ELLIE - School Girl  
WHO LAUGHS.

(Enter HENRY PEABODY, a man who, except for his voice and slight differences in his dress, might well be JEETER. HENRY is very excited. He doesn't come into the yard, but hangs over the fence. ELLIE MAY promptly sits again.)

Hey Ellie May is your PA

HENRY. Hey you, Ada. Is Jeeter home?

ELLIE - MA

COMING BACK

ADA. (Shaking her head negatively.) He went out in the brush a little while back. I'm expecting him pretty soon, but I ain't certain.

Repeat line

HENRY. You tell him I was here.

ADA. What's got you so excited, Henry Peabody? I ain't never seen you hurry like that in such a hurry.

HENRY. I ain't got time to tell you about it now, but you tell Jeeter I been here and I'll stop again on my way home.

\* ADD LINES ABOUT SCHOOL

(Enter SISTER BESSIE RICE, a rather portly woman of about forty. She is dressed in a faded apron and wears a sunbonnet over her large, round face. BESSIE is one of the brood of itinerant women preachers peculiar to certain sections of the deep South. She owes allegiance to no church, and her creed and method of divine teaching are entirely her own. She is loud and sure of voice, and is generally accepted at her own value by the God-fearing innocents among whom she moves. She enters by way of the gate, coming inside the yard, and takes off her sunbonnet, fanning herself, as she gives her greeting.)

~~Bessie. Good evening, Brother Henry. Good evening, Sister Ada. The Lord's blessing be with you.~~

HENRY. Good evening, Sister Bessie. . . . Well, I got to be rushing off. (Starts off.)

BESSIE. What's hurrying you, Brother Henry? You been sinning against the Lord?

HENRY. No, praise God, but I got to hurry. (Exits.)

BESSIE. (Calling after him.) I'm coming down to your house for preaching and praying one of these days, Brother

Change Peabody



SCENE II

PEABODY - BEFORE  
EXITING - LAUGHING AT  
ELLIE -  
ELLIE - MAD CHASES -  
ELLIE COMES BACK

Bessie - X to Ellie  
Looks at bare lip

Ellie - X up into house

Ada - on porch

Bessie - pause at step  
then X over to well  
Clean handkerchief -  
flying hair. Sitting

~~Henry~~ (There is no answer and she turns to ADA.) Now what do you suppose that ~~Peabody~~ Peabody's been up to? ~~But he's been a powerful wicked man here of late to hurry off like that.~~ Looks like the devil's got into ~~him~~ her sure.

ADA. Come inside, Bessie. I reckon Jeeter will be right glad to see you.

BESSIE. I'll be right pleased to, Sister. I reckon I walked near about three miles getting here. (Walks to the porch, stands for a second.)

ADA. Set down.

BESSIE. ~~Has you got a chair~~ Sister? My poor back's so weary it feels like it's mighty near breaking in half.

ADA. H'mm. (Exits into house. BESSIE, looking around and fanning herself, sees ELLIE MAY. ELLIE MAY giggles.)

(CUT)

BESSIE. How is you, child? God be with you. (Goes onto the porch singing the hymn "Shall We Gather at the River." Midway in the song ADA returns from the house dragging an old rocking chair which she thumps down. BESSIE abruptly stops singing. To ADA.) Bless you, Sister. (Sits, rocking back and forth, fanning herself. ADA stands on the ground, leaning against the porch upright, chewing on her snuff stick.) Where is Jeeter at this time of day, Sister Ada? Has that man been up to something sinful again?

ADA. He's out in the broom sedge, eating up turnips he stole from Lov a while back.

BESSIE. Lord, O Lord, he's been stealing again. Jeeter's a powerful sinful man. Ain't no sin like stealing. . . . Was they good eating winter turnips, Sister?

ADA. I reckon.

BESSIE. Lord forgive us our sins, and particularly forgive Jeeter. . . . Is he coming back with any of them turnips, Ada?

ADA. I told Dude to fetch him before he eats them all up. Maybe he will and maybe he won't.

BESSIE. Dude will do right by the Lord. Dude's a mighty fine boy, Sister.

ADA. Humph.

BESSIE. We got to be careful against delivering him to the Hardshell Baptists, though. They're sinful people. They don't know the working of the Lord like I does.

ADA. What do you call your religion, Sister Bessie? You ain't never said what name you called it.

BESSIE. It ain't got a name. I generally just call it "Holy." It's just me and God. God talks to me in prayer and I answer him back. I get most things done that way.

ADA. I want you to say a prayer for Pearl before you go away, Bessie. I reckon Lov's mad about Jeeter stealing his turnips and he might beat Pearl more than he ought to.

BESSIE. I'll be right happy to say a prayer for Pearl. But she ought to pray for herself, too. That sometimes helps a lot with the Lord.

ADA. Pearl don't talk to nobody except me—not even the Lord. I reckon what praying's done for her has got to be done by somebody else.

BESSIE. I'll mention that to the Lord and see if He'll let loose her tongue. There's sin someplace in her or she'd talk like everybody else. The Lord didn't intend for a woman not to talk.

ADA. Ellie May don't talk much, either. But that's because of her lip. It sounds funny when she talks.

BESSIE. There's been a powerful lot of sinning among you Lesters, or Ellie May wouldn't have that lip. One way or another I reckon you Lesters is about the most sinful people in the country. *(They are interrupted by the off-stage sound of JEETER and DUDE quarreling.)*

DUDE. *(Offstage.)* You ain't the only one that likes turnips. I ain't had no more to eat this week than you has.

JEETER. *(Offstage.)* You had five already.

DUDE. Give me some more. Do you hear me?

JEETER. You don't need no more.

DUDE. I'll wham you.

*(At this point JEETER comes running to the gate. He has his pockets filled with turnips. DUDE is right on his*

ENTER - D & J  
FROM ROAD.



D & J  
WRESTLE OVER SACK  
D - THROWS J ON  
GROUND (R) OF POST

G - ENTERS FROM HOUSE  
J - KNEELING  
— A FEET

A - X TO J TO GET  
— TURNIP

G - TRIES TO GET TURNIP  
FROM SACK

heels and catches him in the gate, throws one arm around him from behind and holds him as he extracts turnips from his pockets with his right hand.)

JEETER. (Trying to free himself.) Stop that, Dude, you stop that!

DUDE. (Laughing at him.) Ho! Ho! You can't hurt nobody. You're as weak as an old cat. (Pushes JEETER, who falls on the ground near the corner of the house. DUDE crosses to right of gate, eating a turnip.)

JEETER. (Lying on ground.) Now that's all you're going to git. (Picks himself up.)

BESSIE. (Oracularly.) You been sinning again, Jeeter Lester.

JEETER. (Seeing BESSIE for the first time.) Sister Bessie! The good Lord be praised. (Rushes to the porch.) I knowed God would send His angel to take away my sins. You come just at the right time.

BESSIE. The Lord always knows the right time. I was at home sweeping out the kitchen when He came to me and said, "Sister Bessie, Jeeter Lester is doing something evil. You go to his house and pray for him right now before it's too late." I looked right back at the Lord and said, "Lord, Jeeter Lester is a powerful sinful man, but I'll pray for him until the devil goes clear back to hell." That's what I told Him and here I is.

JEETER. (Dancing ecstatically in front of BESSIE's chair on the porch.) I knowed the good Lord wouldn't let me slip and fall in the devil's hands. I knowed it! I knowed it!

BESSIE. Ain't you going to give me a turnip, Jeeter? I ain't had so much to eat lately. Times is hard for the good and bad alike.

JEETER. Sure, Bessie. (JEETER selects several of the largest, gives them to BESSIE. Turns to ADA.) Here you is, Ada. (Gives her some. As others get theirs, GRANDMA enters, comes to JEETER, and starts pulling at his coat. To BESSIE.) I wish I had something to give you to take

home, Sister. When I had plenty, I used to give Brother Rice a whole armful of chickens and potatoes at a time. Now I ain't got nothing but a handful of turnips, but I ain't ashamed of them. The Lord growed them and His doings is good enough for me.

BESSIE. (*With full mouth.*) Praise be the Lord.

JEETER and ADA. Amen, Sister! Amen.

BESSIE. (*Finishing her turnip with a sigh.*) I feel the call of the Lord. Let's have a little prayer. (*BESSIE gets up and crosses to the center of the yard, JEETER following, as do ADA and GRANDMA LESTER, who groans as she moves. ELLIE MAY and DUDE sit on the porch, eating the turnips and watching.*) Some people make an objection to kneeling down and having prayer out of doors. They say, "Sister Bessie, can't we go in the house and pray just as good?" And do you know what I do? I say, "Brothers and Sisters, I ain't ashamed to pray out here in the open. I want folks passing along the road to know that I'm on God's side. It's the old devil that's always whispering about going in the house out of sight." That's what I tell them. That's the way I stick up for the Lord.

JEETER. Praise the Lord.

BESSIE. Let's get ready to pray. (*They all kneel.*) Sister Ada, is you still suffering from pleurisy?

ADA. All the time.

(*JEETER and ADA bow their heads and close their eyes, but GRANDMA LESTER stares straight ahead, her eyes open, her head raised a bit. BESSIE nods to ADA, then prays.*)

BESSIE. Dear God, here I is again to offer a little prayer for sinful people. Jeeter Lester and his family want me to pray for them again. The last time helped a whole lot, but Jeeter let the devil get hold of him today and he went and done a powerful sinful thing. He stole all of Lov's turnips. They're just about all et up now, so it's too late to take them back. That's why we want to pray for Jeeter.

Ellie - comes out on porch  
sits (R) on porch



Bessie - up on steps  
Jeeter, Ada, Grandma - kneel  
(Eating turnips & praying)



Pushing and shoving

Bessie - X down from steps and  
X to each individual



Jeeter steals some of Dude's  
pile of turnips

You ought to make him stop stealing like he does. I never seen a more stealing man in all my days. Jeeter wants to quit, but it seems like the devil gets hold of him almost as soon as we get through praying for him. You ain't going to let the old devil tell You what to do, is You? The Lord ought to tell the devil what he should do. . . . And Sister Ada has got the pleurisy again. You ought to do something for her this time sure enough. The last time didn't help none too much. If You'll make her well of it she'll quit the devil for all time. Won't you, Sister Ada?

ADA. Yes, Lord.

BESSIE. And old Mother Lester has got a misery in her sides. She's in pain all the time with it. She's kneeling down right now, but she can't do it many more times. You ought to bless Ellie May, too. Ellie May has got that slit in her lip that makes her an awful sight to look at.

(*ELLIE MAY buries her face in her hands. DUDE looks at her and grins.*)

E.M. - up. X over to well  
embarrassed

JEETER. Don't forget to pray for Pearl, Sister Bessie. Pearl needs praying for something awful.

BESSIE. I was just going to do that. Sister Ada told me to pray Lov wouldn't beat her too hard because of them turnips you stole.

JEETER. It ain't that. It's what Pearl's done herself.

BESSIE. What has Pearl done sinful, Brother Jeeter?

JEETER. That was what Lov spoke to me about today. He says Pearl won't talk to him and she won't let him touch her. When night comes she gets down and sleeps on a durn pallet on the floor, and Lov has got to sleep in the bed by himself. That's a pretty bad thing for a wife to do, and God ought to make her quit it.

BESSIE. Brother Jeeter, little girls like Pearl don't know how to live married lives like we grown-up women do. So maybe if I was to talk to her myself instead of getting

Bessie - X up to steps again

God to do it, she would change her ways. I expect I know more about what to tell her than He does, because I been a married woman up to the past summer when my former husband died. I expect I know all about it. God wouldn't know what to tell her.

JEETER. Well, you can talk to her, but maybe if you asked God about it He might help some, too. Maybe He's run across gals like that before, though I don't believe there's another durn girl in the whole country who's as contrary-minded about sleeping in the bed as Pearl is. *(DUDE stands up and takes his ball from his pocket.)*

BESSIE. Maybe it wouldn't hurt none if I was to mention it.

JEETER. That's right. You speak to the Lord about it, too. Both of you together ought to get something done. *(DUDE hurls the ball against the house and catches it. JEETER speaks angrily.)* Quit chunking that there ball against that old house, Dude. Don't you see Sister Bessie's praying? I declare I wish you had more sense.

DUDE. Aw, go to hell.

BESSIE. Now, Dude. . . . *(Waits until he stops.)*

\* Now, Lord, I've got something special to pray about. I don't ask favors unless they is things I want pretty bad, so this time I'm asking for a favor for Pearl. I want You to make her stop sleeping on a pallet on the floor while Brother Lov has to sleep by himself in the bed. I was a good wife to my former husband. I never slept on no pallet on the floor. Sister Ada here don't do nothing like that. And when I marry another man, I ain't going to do that neither. I'm going to get in bed just as big as my new husband does. So You tell Pearl to quit doing that.

JEETER. What was that you was saying, Sister Bessie? Didn't I hear you say you was going to marry yourself a new husband?

BESSIE. Well, I ain't made up my mind yet. I been looking around some, though.

JEETER. Now if it wasn't for Ada there . . .

BESSIE. *(Giggling.)* You hush up, Brother Jeeter.

Dude sits on log again

Bessie - X over to Ada

How'd you know I'd take you anyway? You're pretty old, ain't you?

JEETER. Maybe I is and maybe I ain't, but if I is I ain't too old for that.

ADA. (*Stiffly.*) I reckon you'd better finish up the prayer. You ain't done like I asked you about Pearl yet.

BESSIE. So I ain't. . . . Please, Lord, Sister Ada wants me to ask You not to let Lov beat up Pearl too much. And I guess that's about all. . . . Save us from the devil and—

JEETER. Hey, wait a minute. You clear forgot to say a little prayer for Dude. You left Dude out all around.

DUDE. No, sir, not me, you don't. I don't want no praying. (*BESSIE jumps up and runs to DUDE. Clutching him by the arm she starts dragging him back to the praying circle.*)

BESSIE. Come on, Dude. Come and kneel with me.

DUDE. (*Angrily.*) I don't want to do that. I don't want no praying for me. (*BESSIE puts one arm around his waist, holding him very close, and with her free hand strokes his shoulder.*)

BESSIE. (*Tenderly.*) I got to pray for you, Dude. The Lord didn't leave you out no more than He did Ellie May. (*She kneels, but keeps his legs encircled in her arms.*) Come on now. All of us has got to have prayer some time or another. (*DUDE finds the pressure of her arms on his legs quite stimulating and exciting, and he begins giggling and squirming.*)

JEETER. Quit that jumping up and down, Dude. What ails you?

(*DUDE puts his arm around her neck and begins rubbing her as she is rubbing him.*)

BESSIE. You kneel down beside me and let me pray for you. You'll do that, won't you, Dude?

DUDE. (*Snickering.*) Hell, I don't give a damn if I do. (*Kneels, continuing to keep his arms about her, and she keeps her arms around him.*)

Bessie - taking Dude back up  
to the circle

Bessie - pulling Dude down  
He fights - embarrassed

BESSIE. I knowed you would want me to pray for you, Dude. It will help you get shed of your sins like Jeeter did. (*Closes her eyes, lifts her head.*) Dear God, I'm asking You to save Brother Dude from the devil and make a place for him in heaven. That's all. Amen.

JEETER. Praise the Lord, but that was a darn short prayer for a sinner like Dude. (*Gets to his feet.* BESSIE and DUDE *continue to hold each other.*)

BESSIE. (*Smiling fondly at DUDE.*) Dude don't need no more praying for. He's just a boy, and he's not sinful like us grown-ups is.

JEETER. Well, maybe you're right. But I sort of recollect the Bible says a son shouldn't cuss his Ma and Pa like he does other people.

BESSIE. (*Stroking DUDE's hair.*) Dude won't do that again. He's a fine boy, Dude is. He would make a handsome preacher, too. He's mighty like my former husband in his younger days. (*She and DUDE stop kneeling, but sit on the ground and continue to hold each other.*)

JEETER. Dude's about sixteen years old now. That makes him two years younger than Ellie May. He'll be getting a wife pretty soon, I reckon. All my other male children married early in life, just like the gals done. If it wasn't for Ellie May's lip she'd been married as quick as any. Men here around Fuller all want to marry gals about eleven or twelve years old, like Pearl was. Ada, there, was just turning twelve when I married her.

BESSIE. The Lord intended all of us should be mated. He made us that way. My former husband was just like the Lord in that respect. They both believed in the same thing when it came to mating.

JEETER. I reckon the Lord did intend for us all to get mated, but He didn't take into account a woman with a slit in her mouth like Ellie May's got.

BESSIE. The Lord's ways is wise, Jeeter.

JEETER. Well, maybe, but I don't believe He done the right thing by her when He opened up her lip. That's the only contrary thing I ever said about the Lord, but it's the truth. What use is a slit like that for? You can't spit

Grandma - X up the step into the house

Jeeter - collects the turnips

Ada - moves to rocker on porch



Jeeter - X over to Ellie  
(R at porch)

(Dude & Bessie)  
Foolin'

Jeeter - X up  
to post

X back to Ada  
at porch

through it, and you can't whistle through it, now can you? It was just meanness on His part when He done that—just durn meanness.

BESSIE. You shouldn't talk about the Lord like that. He knows what He done it for. He had the best reason in the world for doing it.

JEETER. What reason?

BESSIE. Maybe I ought not to say it, Jeeter.

JEETER. You sure ought to tell me if you tell anybody. I'm her Pa.

BESSIE. He done that to save her pure body from you, Brother Jeeter.

JEETER. From me?

BESSIE. (*Nodding.*) He knowed she would be safe in this house when He made her like that. He knowed that you was once a powerful sinner, and that you might be again.

JEETER. That's the truth. I used to be a powerful sinful man in my time. I reckon at one time I was the most powerful sinful man in the whole country. Now you take them Peabody children over across the field. I reckon near about all of them is half mine, one way or another.

BESSIE. You wait till I finish accusing you, Jeeter, before you start lying out of it.

JEETER. Praise God, I ain't lying out of it. I just now told you how powerful sinful I once was.

BESSIE. Don't think the Lord didn't know about it.

JEETER. (*Chuckles; crossing to well.*) Henry Peabody didn't know nothing about it, though.

ADA. Humph.

JEETER. (*Turns L., really noticing BESSIE's and DUDE's goings on.*) Say, Sister Bessie, what in hell is you and Dude doing? You and him has been squatting there, hugging and rubbing of the other, for near about half an hour. (*BESSIE manages as much of a blush as she is capable of.*)

BESSIE. (*Removing DUDE's arm from around her waist, trying to rise.*) The Lord was speaking to me. (*DUDE replaces his arm about her waist.*) He was telling me I ought to marry a new husband.

JEETER. He didn't tell you to marry Dude, did he?

BESSIE. Dude would make a fine preacher. He would be just about as good as my former husband was, maybe better. He is just suitable for preaching and living with me. Ain't you, Dude?

DUDE. (*Quickly.*) You want me to go home with you now? (*Takes a step toward her.*)

BESSIE. Not now, Dude. I'll have to ask the Lord if you'll do. (*Crosses L. of DUDE.*) He's sometimes particular about his male preachers, especially if they is going to marry women preachers. I got to pray over it first— (*With a knowing glance at DUDE.*) and, Dude, you pray over it too.

DUDE. (*Giggles in embarrassment.*) Aw, like hell I will. (*Crosses to L. of gate.*)

JEETER. (*Crossing to DUDE.*) What's the matter with you, Dude? Didn't you hear Sister Bessie tell you to pray over that? You is the luckiest man alive. What's the matter with you, anyway? Great day in the morning, if you ain't the goddamest boy I ever heard tell of. (*Starts D. L.; DUDE crosses to R. of gate. Enter HENRY PEABODY. He comes running to the gate.*)

PEABODY. (*Coming to gate.*) Hey, you, Jeeter—Jeeter.

JEETER. (*Crosses to PEABODY.*) What's the matter, Henry?

PEABODY. Didn't Ada tell you nothing?

JEETER. She didn't tell me nothing.

PEABODY. Didn't she tell you I was here before?

JEETER. (*Impatiently.*) No. What is it you've got to say?

PEABODY. It's big news, Jeeter.

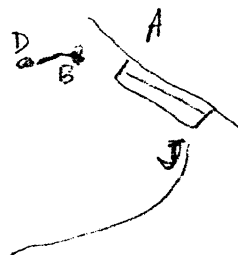
JEETER. Well, start telling it. It ain't going to do me no good keeping it to yourself.

PEABODY. (*Impressively.*) Captain John's coming back.

JEETER. (*Shocked.*) Captain John! Captain John's dead.

PEABODY. Well, not Captain John, but his boy is.

JEETER. He is! (*Turning on ADA.*) Do you hear that, Ada? Captain John's coming back!



Bessie - getting up

→ Dude + Bessie move R  
to corner

cut

Peabody enters - runs C  
Jeeter X's to her -  
grabs her



ADA. ~~She~~ didn't say Captain John. ~~She~~ said Captain John's boy.

JEETER. That don't make no difference. Captain Tim is Captain John's boy, ain't he? (*To PEABODY.*) He figures on giving credit to the farmers again, don't he?

PEABODY. I reckon so. That's what ~~Swaggy~~ <sup>Daddy</sup> thinks. He's down in Fuller now, but he'll be around about here tomorrow.

JEETER. God be praised. I knowed the Lord was aiming to provide. (*To ADA.*) Well, what has you got to say now, woman? Didn't I tell you I was going to plant me a crop this year? (*To DUDE, as ADA shrugs and doesn't answer.*) Hey, you, Dude. Get out in the fields and start burning off that broom sedge. You go to the far side and I'll go to the near. We're going to burn off all the fields this year. We're going to grow us the biggest crop you ever seen.

PEABODY. Well, I got to be going, Jeeter. ~~I reckon I'll help burn off my own fields now myself.~~

JEETER. (*Nods and he exits.*) Good-by, Henry! . . . Now you go in that house, Ada, and fix us something to eat. We're going to be hungry when we come back.

ADA. There ain't nothing to fix.

JEETER. You're the contrariest woman I ever seen. By God and by Jesus, if you ain't. You do like I tell you and quit saying all them damn fool things. . . . Come on, Dude, Captain John's boy has got to see we is all ready when he comes around tomorrow. Hurry up now . . . come on. (*Climbs over fence, L., in his hurry, exiting down the Tobacco Road. DUDE gives a hungry glance at BESSIE, then hurries to the gate and exits. BESSIE runs to fence and calls after DUDE.*)

BESSIE. Hey, you, Dude. Don't forget. You pray like I told you and I'll be back here in the morning and let you know. (*Turns to ADA with a benevolent smile.*) Something tells me the Lord is going to like Dude a whole lot.

CURTAIN

Peabody teasing  
Ellie. E. tries  
to catch Peabody

ACT TWO

SCENE: *Same as Act One.*

TIME: *The following day.*

AT RISE: *It is still early morning and the amber glow of dawning day haunts the scene. Slowly, as time passes, the light comes on fuller and brighter until full day has arrived. As the CURTAIN RISES, no one is seen, the rotting house enjoying the dawn in solitude. In a moment, however, BESSIE enters swiftly through the gate, crosses to the porch, and hammers loudly on the door with her fists.*

BESSIE. Dude. . . . Hey, you, Dude. . . . Dude! (*She waits impatiently a few seconds, glancing first to the upstage corner of the house, then to the window downstage of the porch. Then she flings open the door and yells inside*) Where is you, Dude?

(JEETER, *yawning and scratching, sticks his head out of the window and rubs his mouth with the back of his hand before speaking. He is still sleepy but is wearing, already, his tattered hat, although the rest of his body is, apparently, as naked as a blue jay.*)

JEETER. What you want with Dude this time of day, Bessie?

BESSIE. Never you mind. I want Dude. . . . Hey, you, Dude. (*She exits through the door, calling.*) Dude. . . . You, Dude. (*JEETER draws back from the window, looking inside, as BESSIE'S voice continues, off.*) Where is you, Dude? . . .

Enters, the X's to side of house

At window

X into house

*(For an instant the stage is empty. Then DUDE enters L. down Tobacco Road and crosses yard to the well, where he draws up water and drinks. He pays no attention to BESSIE'S occasionally repeated cry for him. Enter JEETER through the house door. He is getting into his overalls, and is carrying his shirt, also socks and shoes in his hands; he sees DUDE.)*

Dude enters

X to well  
draws up bucket

At door

— JEETER. Hey, you, Dude, where you been? Bessie's been looking all over for you. *(DUDE doesn't answer, continuing to drink water. JEETER drops shoes and socks and slips into overalls.)* She just about tore up every bed in the house. Why don't you tell her where you is?

DUDE. Aw, to hell with her. *(Drinks.)*

JEETER. *(Dressing.)* By God and by Jesus, I never seen a woman so anxious to see anybody. I reckon she wants to get married to you after all. *(Glances up as DUDE doesn't answer.)* Is you thinking about getting yourself married to her if that's what she wants?

DUDE. Aw, what do I want to do that for?

JEETER. You sure looked like you was set on doing that yesterday—all that hugging and rubbing of the other. What do you think about that now, Dude?

DUDE. Aw, hell, it don't always look the same to a man in the morning.

BESSIE. *(Off.)* Dude! . . . Hey, you, Dude.

JEETER. Listen to her yelling. She must of gone clear through to the backyard by this time. Why don't you answer her, Dude? Where was you when she went looking in the bed for you? Where was you anyway?

DUDE. Out in the fields.

JEETER. *(Excitedly.)* What about them fields? Is they finished burning?

DUDE. *(Nodding.)* Most. Them to the north is still burning some.

JEETER. I is sure glad to hear that. We want to be ready to start the plowing and planting when Captain John's boy comes around today.

BESSIE. *(Off.)* Dude. . . . Where is you, Dude? *(Enters*

Jeeter—throwing down  
bucket, sits on steps  
in overalls, pulls on  
shoes

around v. corner of house, sees DUDE.) There you is! (Crosses swiftly to him. He glances at her, but keeps his back to her as she comes up.) Didn't you hear me call you? (Affectionately—putting her arms around his waist from the rear.) Don't you know I been looking for you, Dude boy? (Her arms tighten in a sudden and sharp squeeze that causes the water to slosh from the bucket he is holding.)

DUDE. Hey, now look what you made me go and do.

BESSIE. Now that ain't nothing, Dude. Ain't you glad to see me? (She presses him closer.) Don't that make you feel good?

DUDE. (Grinning.) H'mm. (Puts down the bucket, turns and embraces her. Their posture is awkward and amusing. On the steps, JEETER continues to pick his feet and slowly put on shoes and socks, the while he watches the amorous couple.)

JEETER. You must be figuring on getting married after all, Bessie.

(BESSIE starts to smooth down DUDE's wet hair. ADA enters appears in doorway, ELLIE MAY at window.) appears for a moment

BESSIE. (Confidentially—nodding affirmatively.) The Lord told me to do it. I asked Him about it last night and He said, "Sister Bessie, Dude Lester is the man I want you to wed. Get up early in the morning and go to the Lester place and marry Dude the first thing." That's what He said, so I got out of bed and ran up here as fast as I could, because the Lord don't like to be kept waiting. (Affectionately regards DUDE who grins self-consciously.)

JEETER. You hear what the Lord told Sister Bessie. What do you think of doing that now, Dude?

DUDE. Shucks! I don't know. — up move D

JEETER. What's ailing you? Ain't you man enough? — stand

DUDE. Maybe I is, and maybe I ain't.

BESSIE. There ain't nothing to be scared of, Dude. — Bessie move down to Duc

Bessie enters from  
around side of  
house

To Dude at well

spills water

Finishing putting on boots and d

Ada on porc

You'll like being married to me because I know how to treat men fine.

(DUDE hesitates. ADA moves forward from doorway and rests against the porch upright. ~~GRANDMA LESTER~~ appears around the U. corner of the house but keeps crouched and hidden so as not to attract attention.)

JEETER. Well, is you going to do it, Dude?

DUDE. (Self-consciously.) Aw, hell, what do I want to go marry her for? (Pulls ball out of his pocket and throws it against house. BESSIE glances swiftly at DUDE's averted face, then plays her trump card. She turns to JEETER.)

— BESSIE. (Wisely to JEETER.) Do you know what I is going to do, Jeeter?

JEETER. What?

BESSIE. I is going to buy me a new automobile. (The effect of this on all of them is electric. JEETER comes quickly to his feet, and DUDE stops throwing ball with sudden awed interest.)

JEETER. A new automobile? A sure enough brand-new automobile?

BESSIE. (Nodding.) A brand-new one. (Shakes her head emphatically. DUDE looks at her wide-eyed and unbelieving.)

JEETER. Is you got money?

BESSIE. (Proudly.) Eight hundred dollars.

JEETER. Eight hundred dollars! Where did you get all that money, Bessie?

BESSIE. (Nodding.) My former husband had that in insurance and when he died I got it and put it in the bank.

JEETER. That sure is a heap of money. I didn't think there was that much real money in the whole country.

ADA. You ain't going to spend all that on a new automobile, is you?

BESSIE. (Nodding.) Dude and me wants the best there is. Don't we, Dude? (DUDE can only look at her wide-eyed.)

Dude - move  
to corn  
crib  
back to Jeeter

Dude  
up

Grandma - enter from  
around corner of  
house with  
firewood

ADA. It don't seem right to me. It seems to me like if you wanted to do right you'd give some of that money to Dude's old Ma and Pa. We could sure use it for snuff and food.

BESSIE. No, Sister Ada, the Lord didn't intend for it to be used like that. He intended I should use it to carry on the preaching and the praying. That's what I'm buying the new automobile for, so Dude and me can drive around when we take a notion to go somewhere in the Lord's work.

JEETER. Sister Bessie's right, Ada. There ain't nothing like working for the Lord. It don't make no difference to us about that money noway. Captain John's boy, Captain Tim, is back now and I'll get all the credit I need.

ADA. Humph. You is sure mighty high-handed with something you ain't got yet.

JEETER. Never you mind about her, Bessie. When you going to buy that new automobile?

BESSIE. I'm going over to Fuller and get it right now. *(Glances at DUDE eagerly.)* That is, if Dude and me gets married.

JEETER. What do you say to that now, Dude? Will you be wanting to marry Sister Bessie and ride around the country preaching and praying in a new automobile?

DUDE. Will it have a horn on it?

BESSIE. I reckon it will. Don't all new automobiles have horns?

DUDE. Can I drive it?

BESSIE. That's what I'm buying it for.

DUDE. Can I drive it all the time?

BESSIE. Sure, Dude. I don't know how to drive an automobile.

DUDE. Then why the hell not?

BESSIE. *(Joyfully hugging him and trying to kiss him.)* Oh, Dude! *(DUDE escapes from her embrace and begins to put on his shoes.)*

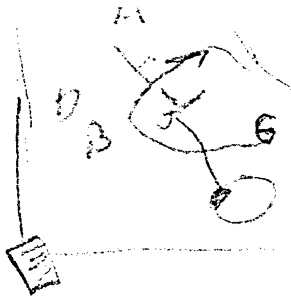
ADA. When is you and Dude going to do all this riding

Grandma - pause at well

Bessie - move L to Dude

Jeeter at well for morning drier

Grandma - X up steps and into house with sticks



around and preaching and praying? Is you going to get married before or after?

BESSIE. Before. We'll walk over to Fuller right now and buy the new automobile and then get married.

JEETER. Is you going to get leave of the county, or is you just going to live along without it?

BESSIE. I'm going to get the license for marrying.

JEETER. That costs about two dollars. Is you got two dollars? Dude ain't—Dude ain't got nothing.

BESSIE. I ain't asking Dude for one penny of money. I'll attend to that part myself. I've got eight hundred dollars in the bank and a few more besides. Dude and me won't have nothing to worry about. Will we, Dude?

DUDE. (*Impatiently.*) Naw. Come on. We ain't got no time to lose. (*Starts to walk away, while BESSIE is delayed arranging her hair, walking more slowly to the gate.*)

ADA. You'll have to make Dude wash his feet every once in a while, Bessie, because if you don't he'll dirty up the quilts. Sometimes he don't wash himself all winter long, and the quilts get that dirty you don't know how to go about the cleaning of them.

BESSIE. (*Pleasantly to DUDE, who is waiting at gate.*) Is you like that, Dude?

DUDE. (*Impatiently.*) If we is going to buy that new automobile, let's buy it.

ADA. Dude is just careless like his Pa. I had the hardest time learning him to wear his socks in the bed, because it was the only way I could keep the quilts clean. Dude is just going on the way his Pa done, so maybe you'd better make him wear his socks, too.

BESSIE. That's all right. Me and Dude'll know how to get along fine. (*Exit DUDE. Exit BESSIE.*)

ADA. (*Calling after BESSIE and DUDE.*) If you get down around where Pearl lives, I wish you'd tell her that her Ma sure would like to see her again.

(JEETER, ADA, and ELLIE MAY move to fence to look after

Ellie -  
come out  
as Grandma  
goes in

still  
sitting at well

Both (D & B)  
X to post

up on  
road

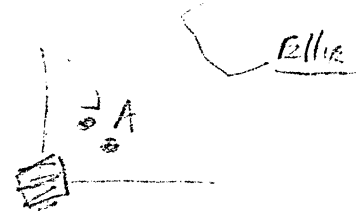
Jeeter up  
Ellie on porch  
Ada moves down steps

DUDE and BESSIE. *Even GRANDMA LESTER looks from behind the trunk of the chinaberry tree.*

JEETER. *(Shakes his head emphatically.)* That Dude is the luckiest man alive. *(Directly to others.)* Now, ain't he? . . . He's going to get a brand-new car to ride around in and he's going to get married all at the same time. There's not many men get all that in the same day, I tell you. There ain't nobody else that I know of between here and the river who has got a brand-new automobile. And there ain't many men who has a wife as fine-looking as Sister Bessie is, neither. Bessie makes a fine woman for a man—any man, I don't care where you find him. She might be just a little bit more than Dude can take care of, though. Now if it was me, there wouldn't be no question of it. I'd please Sister Bessie coming and going right from the start, and keep it up clear to the end.

ADA. *(In disgust.)* Huh!

JEETER. *(Speaks now to ELLIE MAY.)* Now you, Ellie May, it's time you was finding yourself a man. All my other children has got married. It's your time next. It was your time a long while ago, but I make allowances for you on account of your face. I know it's harder for you to mate up than it is for anybody else, but you ought to get out and find yourself a man to marry right away. It ain't going to get you nowhere fooling around with Lov like you was doing, because he's married already. He might have married you if it wasn't for the way you looked, but don't show your face too much and it won't stop the boys from getting after you. *(Pauses, and to his amazement ELLIE MAY bursts into heartbroken sobs, hiding her face in her hands.)* What's the matter? What's the matter with you, Ellie May? *(Still sobbing, ELLIE MAY runs to the gate and exits down the road. JEETER turns helplessly to ADA.)* Now I never seen the likes of that before. I wonder what I said to make her carry on like that? *(Sits on porch.)* I declare to goodness I don't know what gets into women folks sometimes. There ain't never no way to



- cut
- Ellie X down to log
- move to well for drink
- X to Ellie (L)
- Ellie X out on road
- Ada- X to step at same time as Jeeter sits on step



Scene on steps

Jeeter in usual spot  
Ada stands on porch

SCENE II

figure them out. (*Starts to lie down, but ADA is in the way.*) By God and by Jesus, woman, can't you move over when a man wants to lay down?

ADA. Ain't you going to take no wood to Augusta today?

JEETER. Are you going to start that talk again? Ain't I told you Captain Tim is coming and I'm going to plant me a crop. I've got to save my strength for that.

ADA. Humph! There ain't a bite in the house, and nobody never saved their strength by not eating.

JEETER. Never mind that now. Captain Tim will fix that. Anyhow, I couldn't make that old automobile go even if I wanted to.

ADA. Do you reckon Dude and Bessie will let you take a load in their new car?

JEETER. I ain't aiming to carry no more wood to Augusta. But I sure is going to take a ride in that new car. I reckon I'll be riding clear over into Burke County one of these days to see Tom.

ADA. If you see him you might mention that his old Ma sure would like a stylish dress to die in. I know he won't stand back with his money for a little thing like that.

JEETER. I'll mention it, but I don't know how he'll take it. I expect he's got a raft of children to provide for.

ADA. Reckon he has got some children?

JEETER. Maybe some.

ADA. I sure would like to see them. I know I must have a whole heap of grandchildren somewhere. I'm bound to have, with all them boys and girls off from home.—

JEETER. Clara has got a raft of children, I bet. She was always talking about having them. And they say over in Fuller that Lizzie Belle has got a lot of them, too. I don't know how other folks know more about such things than I do. Looks like I ought to be the one who knows most about my own children. (*Enter LOV, who stands just inside gate, panting heavily and looking at ADA and JEETER. JEETER glances up and sees LOV, whose heaving chest and haunted eyes make him believe LOV has come for revenge*)

cut

cut

for stealing the turnips.) Lov, by God! (*Springs to his feet and darts for the D. corner of the well.*)

LOV. (*Through quick breathing.*) Never mind running, Jeeter. I ain't going to hurt you.

JEETER. (*At corner of house, still ready to run.*) Ain't you peev'd about me stealing them turnips yesterday?

LOV. (*Wearily.*) I don't care about that no more.

JEETER. What's the matter with you, Lov? You look like you run all the way here. What's wrong with you, anyway? (*Lov doesn't answer and sits.*) Is you sick? (*Lov nods negatively.*)

ADA. (*Higher note—stepping forward.*) It's Pearl! That's what it is—it's Pearl! (*Lov looks at her and nods. She comes forward hysterically.*)

JEETER. What's the matter with her, Lov?

LOV. She run off.

ADA. No! She didn't! She wouldn't have done that without seeing her Ma first.

LOV. (*Coming forward—shaking head.*) She just run off.

JEETER. How do you know, Lov? Maybe she's just hiding in the woods someplace.

LOV. (*Shakes his head.*) Jones Peabody saw her walking along the road to Augusta this morning.

ADA. Augusta!

LOV. He said he stopped and asked her where she was going, but she wouldn't talk to him. She just kept on going.

ADA. (*Fiercely to Lov.*) You done something to her. Don't tell me you didn't.

LOV. No, I didn't, Ada. I woke up early this morning and looked at her down on that pallet on the floor and I just couldn't stand it no longer. I got down and hugged her in my arms. I wasn't going to hurt her. I just wanted to hold her for a minute. But she got loose from me and I ain't seen her since.

(*ADA rocks, heartbroken, on the porch.*)

Lov - enter at post

— Jeeter up on post  
ready to go in

— Lov - X to well and  
sit  
— J. X down

— Ada stands

Jeeter at steps

Ada - X slowly down  
to post

JEETER. Well, I figured that she was going to run off to Augusta one of these days, only she was always afraid before.

LOV. Jones Peabody said she acted like she was about scared to death this morning. (*Desperately.*) I got to get her back, Jeeter. I just got to get her back.

JEETER. Ain't much use you figuring on that. All them girls went off all of a sudden. Lizzie Belle up and went to Augusta just like that. (*Snaps his fingers.*)

LOV. Ain't there something I can do, Jeeter?

JEETER. About the best thing you can do, Lov, is let her be.

LOV. If I was to go up to Augusta and find her, do you reckon she'd let me bring her back home to stay? . . . Reckon she would, Jeeter?

JEETER. I wouldn't recommend that. You'll lose your time down there at the chute while you was looking for her, and if you was to bring her back she'd run off again twice as quick.

LOV. She might get hurt up there.

JEETER. Lizzie Belle and Clara took care of themselves all right, didn't they?

LOV. Pearl ain't like them.

JEETER. In many ways she ain't, but in many ways she is, too. She wasn't never satisfied living down here on the Tobacco Road. She's just like Lizzie Belle and Clara and the other gals in that respect. I can't call all their names right now, but it was every durn one of them, anyhow. They all wanted stylish clothes.

LOV. Pearl never said nothing to me about wanting stylish clothes. She never said anything to me at all.

JEETER. It's just like I said. They're like their Ma. Ada there ain't satisfied neither, but she can't do nothing about it. I broke her of wanting to run off, but them gals was more than I could take care of. There was too durn many of them for one man to break. They just up and went.

LOV. (*Thinking aloud.*) I sort of hate to lose her, for some reason or another. All them long yellow curls hang-

X - over to  
well

sits next to  
Lov

ing down her back always made me hate the time when she would grow up and be old.

JEETER. That sure ain't no lie. Pearl had the prettiest yellow hair of any gal I ever saw. I wish Ada had been that pretty. Even when Ada was a young gal she was that durn ugly it was a sin. I reckon I ain't never seen an uglier woman in the whole country.

Lov. I been the lonesomest man in the whole country for the longest time, Jeeter. Ain't there something you can do to get her back again?

JEETER. I might try something, but it wouldn't do no good. One way or another I've said about everything I can to that girl, but she won't even answer me. She won't talk to nobody but her Ma. It wouldn't do no good for me to do anything, even if you could find her.

Lov. Ada, will you? . . . (*Sees hopelessness of help from ADA. Abjectedly.*) Well, I've got to get back to the chute. That morning freight will be coming along pretty soon now and it always empties all the scoops. They raise hell if they ain't filled up again. (*Turns; crosses to gate; leans against post.*)

JEETER. I sure am glad you wasn't riled about the turnips, Lov. I meant to go down first thing this morning and talk to you about that, but Dude and Bessie went off to get married and I forgot all about it. Did you hear about that, Lov? Dude and Bessie went off to Fuller to get married and buy them a new automobile all at the same time. Now ain't that something!

Lov. (*Nods.*) If you happen to see or hear anything about Pearl, you let me know. (*Exits down road L.*)

JEETER. (*Turning back to ADA, who still sits on the porch, staring blankly into space.*) Lov sure is a funny one. He just can't think about anything but Pearl. It looks to me like he wouldn't want a gal that won't stay in the bed with him. I don't understand him at all. I don't understand Pearl, for that matter, neither. I'd of bet almost anything she would have come up here and told us good-by before running off. But it's like I always said.

— Both sitting on well.

— Stand UP

— ~~X~~ OVER TO ADA

— X TO POST

— TURN BY POST  
EXIT

UP X - TO POST TO ADA

SCENE III

ADA X BACK TO  
PORCH STEPS

JEETER

FROM OFF  
W/ PEARL

RUN TO  
ADA



HOLDING  
PEARL  
(C)

X-  
AROUND PEARL  
AND ADA -

Coming or going, you can't never tell about women. (*Looks at ADA, hoping she'll talk to him. Crosses closer to her, but her eyes stare straight ahead. Finally he hits her gently with the back of his hand.*) That's all right, Ada. (*He crosses to fence, L., climbs it, glances back at her.*) If Captain John's boy comes along, you tell him I'll be back soon. I'm going out to look at them fields. (*JEETER exits. ADA sits staring ahead, her eyes holding a depth of suffering. Suddenly there is an offstage cry from JEETER and she turns to look toward the gate. JEETER off—calling.*) Ada—Ada! (*Lower, but still off.*) Come on, child—come on. (*He appears at the edge of the gate, pulling someone after him. ADA, eyes wide with wonder, stands up.*) Come on—there ain't nothing to be afraid of. Your old Pa ain't going to hurt you. (*Pulls PEARL through the gate.*) Look, Ada—look what I found hiding in the broom sedge.

ADA. (*Lifts her hands, palms turned up, toward her daughter.*) Pearl!

PEARL. Ma!!

(*Pulling away from JEETER, PEARL rushes across stage and flings herself, sobbing, into her mother's arms. JEETER, eager and alive with excitement and admiration, comes up to the two women. PEARL is a beautiful child. She looks at least sixteen, in spite of the fact that she is much less than that, and is almost as tall as ADA. She is barefoot, and wears only a shabby, dark gray calico dress. Her hair hangs down over her shoulders like a cloud of spun gold. ADA soothes her.*)

ADA. There, now—there, now don't cry. You got your old Ma again.

JEETER. (*Prancing around PEARL.*) Now ain't that somethin'! I was just turning to go across the fields when I saw that yellow head of hers moving in the broom sedge and there she was. If she hadn't stumbled I never would of caught her. Ain't she pretty! She's about the prettiest piece in the whole country. . . .

ADA. Go away, Jeeter.

JEETER. (*Who hasn't the slightest intention of going away.*) Ain't she growed some in the past year, though? She's most a grown woman by now. (*Moves PEARL's dress the better to see her figure.*) By God and by Jesus if she ain't.

ADA. (*Sharply—slapping JEETER's hand away.*) Stop that, Jeeter.

JEETER. What for? She is, ain't she? Look how white and gold she looks with that yellow hair hanging down her back. . . . What are you standing there crying for, Pearl? Why didn't you go on to Augusta like you started to anyway? Was you scared? Was that it, Pearl?

ADA. She wanted to see her old Ma first. (*To PEARL.*) That was it, wasn't it, child? (*PEARL nods, her head still on her mother's shoulder, and ADA speaks to JEETER.*) There, you see that, Jeeter. Now you go on away like I tell you. She ain't going to talk none while you're here.

JEETER. I got to speak to her about Lov first. Now that she ain't run away she'll have to begin treating him right.

ADA. Hush up, Jeeter. Maybe she ain't going to go back and live with Lov at all. Just because she didn't go all the way to Augusta, don't mean she's going to stay with Lov again.

JEETER. What's that? Now you wait a minute. That ain't right. When a gal is mated up with a man she's got to live with him.

ADA. Mind your own business, Jeeter.

JEETER. I is minding my own business. I'm minding my business and Lov's business, too. A gal's not no right to act like Pearl's been acting. No, sir. I say Pearl has got to go back and live in the house with Lov and let him have his rights with her.

ADA. (*Angrily.*) Now you listen to me, Jeeter Lester. You keep out of this. If I says so Pearl can do just like she wants. You ain't got the right to tell her what she's got to do.

JEETER - FROM  
BEHIND GRAB  
PEARL'S ASS

A - PUTTING PEARL  
BEHIND HER.

BACK JEETER UP  
TO CRIB.

PEARL ON  
STEPS

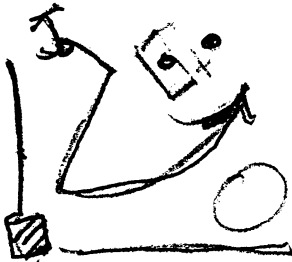
X BACK TO  
PEARL

X- TO ADA

JEETER X  
TO POST

TURN TO ADA

X TO  
(R) OF STEP



JEETER. What! Who you talking to, anyway? I'm her Pa, ain't I?

ADA. No, you ain't.

JEETER. What?

ADA. That's what.

(PAUSE)

JEETER. By God and by Jesus! Do you know what you're saying, woman?

ADA. I sure do. You ain't her Pa. You never was and never will be.

JEETER. (*Lightly amazed.*) Well, by damn—now what do you think of that?

ADA. Whatever made you think you was, anyway? Do you think a lazy old fool like you could be the Daddy of a gal like Pearl?

JEETER. (*Without rancor.*) Well, I thought about that now and then. She didn't look to me like none of the Lesters I ever heard of.

ADA. There ain't no Lester in her. Her real Pa wouldn't have no truck with any of you.

JEETER. It wasn't that Henry Peabody down the road, was it?

ADA. (*With disgust.*) No.

JEETER. I didn't think it was. He couldn't have a pretty piece like Pearl for a child any more than I could. Who was it, Ada?

ADA. Nobody you ever knew. He came from South Carolina and was on his way to Texas.

JEETER. H'mm. I don't remember nobody like that. I must of been in Fuller, or even maybe in Augusta at the time.

ADA. You was down seeing Captain John about a mule to plow with.

JEETER. By God and by Jesus, I remember now. I remember that old mule just like I remember that old cow I used to have. Remember that old mule, Ada?

ADA. I reckon.

JEETER. It was the last one I ever got off Captain John. Pretty soon after that he moved up to Augusta and I ain't

heard a word from him since, until just now when his boy is coming back. (To PEARL.) Did you hear about that, Pearl? Captain John's boy is coming back this morning and I'm going to plant me a crop this year sure.

ADA. Pearl ain't interested in that now.

JEETER. (*Indignantly.*) Well, she ought to be. Everybody ought to be when they's been born and raised on the land like I was. Captain John was and Captain John's boy that comes after him is interested just as much, you'll find out. You can't keep nobody like Captain John or me away from the land forever.

ADA. Shut up, Jeeter. Can't you see Pearl is all wore out? If Jones Peabody saw her on the road to Augusta she must of walked about ten miles this morning to get here. (To PEARL.) Is you hungry, Pearl? (PEARL *shakes her head affirmatively.*)

JEETER. (*Watching the girl with disapproval.*) Now what's the sense to all that shaking of your head? (*Mimics her.*) What's the meaning of all that? It's plain to see you ain't no child of mine all right. Coming and going us Lesters has always talked about as much as anybody in the whole country. Can't you speak up?

ADA. Quit your nagging. Jeeter. You know what she means all right. She's hungry. You get busy and find her something to eat.

JEETER. Ain't you got no sense at all, Ada? How can I get her something to eat when there ain't even nothing for myself?

ADA. You got something yesterday from Lov when you was hungry.

JEETER. Is you aiming to make me steal again, woman? (ADA *shrugs.*) Well, if you is I ain't. The Lord's a wise old somebody. He's watching around the corner every minute for just such as that. You can't fool Him about stealing. . . . Besides there ain't nothing between here and Fuller to steal noway.

ADA. I heard tell Morgan Prior bought hisself a sack of corn meal down to McCoy the other day.

CUT

A - STANDS

X TO WELL

A - OFF PORCH  
TO J.



X DOWN TO  
POST

X TO ADA  
THEN AWAY

ADA - MOVE  
TO JEETER

X - TO POST

JEETER INTO  
HOUSE

ADA MOVE PEARL  
TO WELL

JEETER. Corn meal! I ain't et corn meal since—  
(Checks himself.) No, sir! Maybe he did and maybe he didn't, but I ain't going near Morgan Prior's house no matter what the circumstance. I promised the Lord—

ADA. (Shrewdly.) They say he's got some bacon and fat back, too.

JEETER. Woman, you is a sinner in the eyes of God! . . . (Whistles.) Morgan Prior must be a powerful rich man to have all that to eat. Maybe if I went down there and asked him he might let me borrow some for a little while.

ADA. Humph! I don't build no hopes on that. Morgan Prior ain't going to let you borrow nothing.

JEETER. I don't see why he oughtn't. The Lord says the rich should share their bounty with the poor. You come along with me, Ada, and we'll see if Morgan Prior is ready to do like the Lord says.

ADA. Me? What do you want me for?

JEETER. Don't you know nothing, woman? If I want to borrow me something from Morgan Prior somebody's got to talk to him at the front door, while I go around to the back, don't they? (A full, belligerent pause.) Now hurry up. Morgan Prior might be out early plowing the fields and it would be an almighty temptation and a sin if we borrowed something when he wasn't at home. — cut

ADA. You go get my old hairbrush first. Pearl ain't brushed her hair this morning.

JEETER. (Eagerly.) Is she going to do that?

ADA. (With an abrupt nod.) While I'm gone off. (JEETER exits quickly into house.)

PEARL. (Gripping ADA.) Oh, Ma, don't go off from me.

ADA. (Comforting her.) There now. You don't need to worry no more. Your old Ma's looking out for you from now on. You don't have to go back and live with Lov no matter what Jeeter says.

PEARL. I don't never want to go back!

ADA. You don't have to. But one of these days you got

to go down to Augusta to live. I've made up my mind to that.

PEARL. I'm scared, Ma.

JEETER. (*Enters with hairbrush. Eagerly.*) Here you is, Ada. Great day, we ought to see something now! Lov says there ain't a prettier piece in the whole country than Pearl when she's brushing her hair and I'm inclined to agree with him.

ADA. (*Snatching brush.*) Go along, Jeeter. Don't think you're going to stay around here all day watching Pearl.

JEETER. Lord, Ada, don't get so peeved. I ain't doing nothing.

ADA. No, and you never would if I didn't make you. Hurry up now. You go along. I'll catch up with you down the road.

JEETER. Well— (*Reluctantly crossing to gate.*) Pearl, if Captain John's boy comes here, you tell him I won't be gone long. You tell him I got a little business down the way and to wait right here for me. (*Exits.*)

ADA. Now you listen to me, honey. There ain't no sense you being scared about going off to Augusta. All my other gals went there or someplace else to live and they don't regret it.

PEARL. (*Fervently.*) I want to stay here with you.

ADA. Never you mind that. I ain't going to be here long. One of these days I'm going to die.

PEARL. No—no, you ain't!

ADA. That's all right, honey. It don't matter—only sometimes I do wish I had me a stylish dress to be buried in.

PEARL. I'll get you a stylish dress, Ma. Honest I will.

ADA. Don't you care about me. You got to look out for yourself. You got to have a hat to put on and shoes and dresses to wear like the gals in Augusta.

PEARL. I don't want none.

ADA. Sure you do. You don't want to stay here like your old Ma, raising a raft of children and no snuff to calm you when there ain't nothing to eat. None of my

ADA & PEARL SIT ON  
WELL

GRANDMA ENTER  
FROM HOUSE

PUSHING JEETER OFF

EXITS OUT ROAD



Grandma on porch  
Down steps  
under porch

other children was as pretty as you, or as smart, neither, when you want to talk, and if they can do it you can do it. (JEETER appears on Tobacco Road.)

JEETER. Hey, you, Ada. Is you coming or ain't you?

ADA. I heard you, I'm coming. (Gets up. Speaks to PEARL.) Now, honey, you just think about that while I'm gone. And don't fret none. I won't be off long. (Enter GRANDMA LESTER from around house, as ADA crosses to gate.) Hey, you, old woman. You go out in the broom sedge and pick up some sticks for the fire. We might be wanting to cook around here pretty soon now. (To PEARL.) Fix up your hair now, honey.

(ADA exits and GRANDMA LESTER hurries to the porch and pulls her old croker sack from beneath it. PEARL watches her. Straightening up, the old woman looks at PEARL. Hobbling forward she tries to touch the girl's hair, but PEARL backs away from her. GRANDMA LESTER stops, her eyes reflecting her deep hurt and disappointment. For a moment more she gazes at the girl, then turns and shuffles off. PEARL stands looking after her, and when the OLD WOMAN has quite gone, she goes to the well and dips her brush in the bucket. She has taken a stroke or two with the brush when she suddenly stops and listens. The audience hears nothing, but she does. Moving quickly in back of the well, she drops to her knees, listening and waiting. Presently HENRY PEABODY enters down the road, running. He glances inside the yard, sees nothing, and then comes through the gate to the porch. Pushing open the door he calls inside.)

[CUT]

PEABODY. Jeeter—hey, you, Jeeter—Ada. . . . Aw, to hell with them.

(No answer and he comes down from the porch and goes to U. corner of the house; he glances around. Seeing nothing, then, he moves quickly to the gate and exits.)

CUT

Grandma to  
Sack, then  
to Pearl

Pearl Pulls Away

Grandma exits out  
road

Pearl wets brush in  
~~bucket~~ bucket, then  
combs hair

X slowly over log  
sit back to post

*Slowly and cautiously PEARL now comes around from behind the well, runs to the road to see if PEABODY has gone, then comes back to the porch and sits, her back to the gate, brushing her hair. She is so pre-occupied she does not hear Lov enter quietly on the Tobacco Road. He sees her. He pauses. He moves silently through the gate across the yard on the balls of his feet and stands in back of her, watching. Suddenly he reaches down and takes her hand firmly as it makes a stroke with the brush. She leaps to her feet, panic-stricken, to run off, but his hold is too strong and he pulls her back.)*

Lov. (*Pleadingly.*) Don't run off, Pearl. I ain't going to hurt you. (*She won't answer or look at him.*) If you only wouldn't run away, I'd leave hold of you now and just watch you brush your hair again. I'd rather see you do that than anything I can think of. There ain't nobody got pretty hair like you. I used to sit on the porch and watch through the window when you was combing and brushing it and I just couldn't keep my eyes off it. Will you promise you won't run off again if I leave you go?

(*Pause as he waits for her to answer.*) Won't you talk to me? Won't you say nothing to me at all? You don't know how I been missing you since you run off. I didn't mean nothing by what I done this morning. It's just that you won't stay in the bed with me or talk to me. Sometimes I just shake all over, for wanting to squeeze you so hard. I keep on thinking how pretty your eyes is early in the morning. They's pretty any time of the day, but early in the morning they's the prettiest things a man could ever want to look at. Won't you come back again sometime? You won't even have to stay in the bed with me. Will you come back if I do that, Pearl?

(*He waits, but still there is no answer.*) Remember that last pretty I got for you? I can remember like it was yesterday. They was green beads on a long string and when you put them around your neck I swear to God if

LOV ENTERS  
R of Post

Long Pause

He watches her

Then X slowly up to her

She finally sees him

#### SCENE IV

Pearl dash R to well

Lov falls over to well

They run around well

Pearl dashes for road

Lov grabs her; forces her d

LETS  
HER  
GO

Pearl crawls away to  
post



it didn't make you about the prettiest girl I ever heard tell about. (*Pitiful enthusiasm.*) I tell you what . . . one of these days we'll ride up to Augusta and buy you a hat—and a stylish dress, too. Would you like to do that? Maybe Dude and Bessie will take us in the new automobile they're buying today. Did you know about that, Pearl? Dude and Bessie is getting married and is buying a new automobile.

(*Not a flicker of interest shows in PEARL's impressive expression. Lov has a dream.*) A new automobile! That's what we'll get one of these days, and we'll ride all over the whole country faster than that old No. 7 passenger ever thought of going— (*In the excitement stimulated by imagination, Lov has released his hold on PEARL's wrist and she has sprung clear of him. His pleading, broken cry falls on unhearing ears. Swiftly—much more swiftly than his clumsiness will permit him to follow—she steps away from the porch, whirls, and dashes to the gate.*) Pearl! (*Just as PEARL reaches the gate, ADA appears and the girl throws herself into her mother's arms.*)

PEARL. Ma! Ma!

(*ADA says nothing, but over PEARL's shoulder her eyes fasten malevolently on the innocent Lov. Appearances are against him, he knows it, and he is so emotionally upset his sense of guilt gains upper hand. For a full pause they regard each other.*)

Lov. (*Pitifully apologetic.*) I didn't do nothing, Ada. We was just talking. I didn't hurt her none. (*ADA pushes PEARL behind her, picks up stick, and advances grimly and silently on him. He takes an involuntary step back.*) I just wanted her to come back and live in the house with me. (*ADA comes up to him, her fury blazing in her eyes. The stick falls across Lov's hunched shoulders. He stands his ground, but lowers his head and raises his arms to protect himself. PEARL is thrilled.*) Don't do that, Ada—don't do that. (*Her answer is to strike him again.*)

Lov  
sitting up

Pearl crawls up  
Dashes for  
road

Ada comes in, pushes Pearl  
behind her. Glares at  
Lov

Picks up stick and backs  
Lov up to porch

Over to crib  
Pearl upon porch



Enter JEETER, carrying a couple of small packages. His eyes light up as he sees the action.)

JEETER. Great day in the morning, will you look at that! What you beating Lov for, Ada? What's he done to make you beat him like that?

Lov. I ain't done nothing, Jeeter— (Is stopped by a whack.)

JEETER. By God and by Jesus, maybe you ain't, but you sure is getting a beating for it just the same. I don't remember when I ever seen such a good, round beating as you is getting right this minute. (Lov gives ground slowly, so that ADA misses now and again.)

Lov. I tell you I ain't done nothing!

JEETER. That don't stand to reason to me. In my experience I found that people usually get what's coming to them in this world or the next and it looks to me like right now you is getting yours in this.

Lov. I swear to God I ain't, Jeeter.

JEETER. Do you hear that, Ada? Lov says he ain't done nothing. What have you got to say about that?

ADA. Shut up.

JEETER. By God, woman, don't talk like that. Put down that stick, do you hear me? You has already done one whopping big sin today. You ought to be mighty sorry to do another. (Lov manages to grab ADA's stick and stop the attack. JEETER nods approval.) I'm glad to see you do that, Lov. That was no way for Ada to treat you. But what did you do to her anyway to make her keep hitting you with that old stick all the time?

Lov. I only wanted Pearl to come back and live with me.

ADA. (Holding PEARL.) Pearl ain't never going back and live with you. There ain't no use you trying to make her, either. She's going to Augusta just like she set out to do this morning and nothing you do can stop her.

Lov. I'm her husband, ain't I? I can stop her and by God I will!

ADA. (Belligerently.) You just try it.

Jeeter - X to well to examine pkg.

CUT



CUT

ADA - X back to porch to Pearl

X over to porch

E - ENTER HIDE  
NEAR POST

L - X TO  
WELL



A - X TO BOTTOM  
OF STEP. J - GIVES  
PACKAGES TO A

P - GETS PACKAGE  
ENTER HOUSE

P - PEEKS HEAD  
OUT OF WINDOW

JEETER. There ain't no sense you trying to carry your point, Lov. Ada's made up her mind Pearl's going to Augusta and there ain't nothing I know can change it.

LOV. You can't be letting Pearl do that. It ain't right.

JEETER. Right or wrong ain't got nothing to do with it where Ada is concerned. ~~Just a little while ago she made me borrow something when Morgan Prior was'n at the house. That's about the biggest sin a working man make a man do, but she don't care a rap. There ain't no use talking to her about right or wrong.~~

CUT

~~Lov. Augusta ain't no place for a girl as pretty as she is.~~

JEETER. I sure would like to stand in her way, but I ain't got no more right than that. *(Snaps his fingers)* Ada's the one you got to talk to, about that.

LOV. Ada's her Ma, but you're her Pa, ain't you?

JEETER. By God and by Jesus, no! Ada there was horsing around big as you please with some man while I was down borrowing me a mule one time. That don't make me her Pa no more than you is.

LOV. You took care of her until she was married to me. That's the same thing.

CUT

JEETER. No, it ain't ~~the~~ The Lord don't take no recognition of that. The Lord is a wise old somebody. He said His nest is His nest. That don't make no provision for a mule horsing around while I'm down borrowing me a mule.

*(Enter ELLIE MAY, who hides bashfully behind tree when she sees Lov.)*

ADA. You might just as well go away, Lov. I ain't lettin' Pearl go back with you no matter how much you talk, less'n she wants to. . . . And I don't reckon she wants to.

LOV. Pearl—won't you come back? *(PEARL shrinks farther back. Lov glances pleadingly at ADA.)* Ada—*(Glances helplessly from ADA to PEARL, then lowers his*

head and reaches down to pick up his hat, which has fallen off. He dusts it off on his knee and is starting away when JEETER stops him.)

JEETER. Hold on there, Lov. No sense you going off without a gal just because Pearl don't want to go with you. Why don't you take Ellie May there? (ELLIE MAY, behind her chinaberry tree, giggles and puts her arm over her mouth to hide the torn lip. Lov glances from JEETER to ELLIE MAY, then back to JEETER again. Without a word he pulls his hat tighter and again starts off. JEETER takes a step forward as he sees Lov's indifference. Lov takes another step and JEETER follows.) Ellie May's got to get a man somewhere. When me and Ada's dead and gone there won't be nobody to watch after her. The niggers would haul off and come here by the dozen. The niggers would get her in no time if she was here by herself. (ELLIE MAY sets up her giggling and wriggling again and Lov once more regards her objectively and solemnly.)

Lov. (Looking away from ELLIE MAY. He speaks stubbornly.) I want Pearl.

JEETER. (Exasperated.) By God and by Jesus, you know you ain't going to get Pearl, so what's the sense going on talking about that? Now Ellie May there's got a lot of—

Lov. Ellie May's got that ugly looking face. (ELLIE MAY, standing in Lov's path, giggles and squirms. Lov looks at her hard as JEETER continues.)

JEETER. You and her was hugging and rubbing of each other to beat all hell just yesterday. Wouldn't you like to do that some more?

Lov. (Still looking hard at ELLIE MAY.) No, by God! I want Pearl or nothing. (Moves past her and exits. JEETER shakes his head as he watches Lov disappear down the road.)

JEETER. (Chiefly to ADA.) Now that's something I can't understand at all. It looks to me when a man loses one gal he'd be thankful to get another—hey, stop that! What you doing there, Ellie May?

L - X TO POST

L - TURNS BACK

E - X CLOSE TO LOV

J - X TO L

E - WIGGLES IN FRONT OF L.

L - PUSHES HER AWAY

L EXITS OUT 7 ROAD

E - RUNS TO POST

P - COMES OUT FROM THE HOUSE - TO LOG.

E - THROWS P TO GROUND. THEY WRESTL  
J - TRIES TO BREAK UP THE FIGHT.





Ada & Pearl  
C

Jeeter - X to mound

Ada & Pearl X to  
 fence

(~~THIS~~ sentence has been broken by ELLIE MAY'S attack on PEARL. She pushes PEARL to the ground, picks up the stick ADA dropped after beating LOV, and belabors her pretty sister furiously. JEETER steps forward to stop her, but he is slower than the injuriated ADA, who grabs the stick away from ELLIE MAY and starts beating her in turn. ELLIE MAY fights back for a moment. GRANDMA LESTER enters furtively and goes behind the chinaberry tree where she observes scene.)

ADA. (Swinging stick sharply.) I'll show you—I'll show you. (ELLIE MAY gives up the unequal fight and flees through the gate and L. down road. PEARL gets up and seeks protection behind her mother.) Don't you worry none, Pearl. She won't do that no more. (Starts dusting off PEARL'S dress.)

JEETER. (Shaking his head.) Great day in the morning! I never seen such beating one of the other as I seen here today. What do you suppose Ellie May done that for, Ada? (ADA shoots him a baleful glance, but the disdainful reply she is forming is checked by the sudden muffled blast of a MOTOR CAR HORN. All of them look up. The HORN, louder, sounds again. JEETER'S face lights up.) That's Dude! That's Dude and Bessie in that new automobile. (JEETER goes through gate, works to c., and looks down the road. ADA crosses to fence and looks. Even PEARL is moved by sudden interest and goes to the fence. Only GRANDMA LESTER comes further in, taking her place D. of the well, where she huddles, listening and waiting.) Here they come! Just look at them! It's a brand-new automobile, all right—just look at that shiny black paint! Great day in the morning! Just look at them coming yonder! (The HORN sounds again—closer. JEETER speaks with pride.) Listen to Dude blow that horn. Don't he blow it pretty, though?

(~~ELLIE MAY~~ enters L. and flashes down the Tobacco Road on a dead run, exiting R. to meet the car.)

ADA. Ain't that the prettiest sight to see, Pearl? Look at that dust flying up behind. It makes it look like a big black chariot, running away from a cyclone. (*The HORN sounds again, to the same rhythm of an engineer blowing a locomotive whistle.*)

JEETER. That's Dude driving it and blowing the horn, too. (*Mounting excitement.*) Hi, there, Dude! Hi, Bessie. (*Swinging down from the fence, he runs through gate and exits down road toward car. The HORN continues to sound. ADA, PEARL, and GRANDMA LESTER wait, watching. We hear JEETER returning before we see him.*) By God, Bessie, I been seeing you come a far piece off in that new automobile. (*BESSIE and JEETER enter.*) In all my days I never seen a finer looking machine. Is it real brand new?

BESSIE. (*Vigorously and proudly.*) I paid the whole eight hundred dollars for it. (*The HORN sounds.*)

JEETER. (*Listens to DUDE, then speaks.*) By God and by Jesus, it sure does make me feel happy again to know there's such a handsome automobile around. Don't you reckon you could take me for a little trip, Bessie? I sure would like to go off in it for a piece.

BESSIE. (*Looking pretentiously at marriage license she carries.*) I reckon when Dude and me gets back you can go riding.

JEETER. Where is you and Dude going to, Bessie?

BESSIE. (*Proudly.*) We're going to ride around like married folks.

ADA. Did you and Dude get married in Fuller?

BESSIE. Not all the way. I got leave of the county, however. It cost two dollars to do that little bit. (*Waves license at them.*) There's the paper to show it.

ADA. Ain't you going to get a preacher?

BESSIE. I is not! Ain't I a preacher of the gospel? I'm going to do it myself. Ain't no Hardshell Baptist going to fool with us.

JEETER. I knowed you would do it the right way. You sure is a fine woman preacher, Sister Bessie. (*DUDE blows*

Bessie in  
Jeeter off

Jeeter in

Scene IV

Jeeter up on moun

Jeeter up to mound

Ada - back to porch

Ellie enters w/ Dude

Dude - X over L to log

Ellie - Xing over towel

Pearl Xing to porch -  
Ellie's she eye each other

Ellie's Pearl on porch floor

Ada on steps → X into house

*HORN again. JEETER smiles complacently.*) That there old Dude sure does like fooling around with that there old horn.

BESSIE. (*A bit peeved.*) He's been doing that about every minute all the way up from Fuller. Looks to me like he'd want to stop now that we is about to do the rest of the marrying.

ADA. Did you and Dude have any trouble getting leave from the county?

BESSIE. None to speak of. At first the man said Dude was too young and that I'd have to get the consent of his Ma and Pa. I told him the Lord said for me to marry Dude, but he told me that didn't make no difference. So I started praying right then and there, and pretty soon the man said if I would just stop he'd do anything I wanted.

JEETER. You sure is a powerful pray-er, all right, Sister Bessie. You is about the best pray-er and Dude is about the best automobile driver in the country. Coming and going that makes you just about equal. (*Enter DUDE lugging, with quite some noise, a torn off, dented fender. JEETER whirls to look at him.*) Great day, Dude, what you got there? Ain't that a fender off your new car?

DUDE. (*Dropping fender without concern.*) Uh-huh.

JEETER. Now how did that happen? Did you run into something?

DUDE. We was coming back from Fuller and I was looking out at a big turpentine still, and then the first thing I knowed we was smashed smack bang into the back of a two-horse wagon.

JEETER. Didn't hurt the running of the automobile, though, did it?

DUDE. Naw. It runs like it was brand new yet. The horn wasn't hurt none at all. It blows just as pretty as it did at the start.

JEETER. (*Nodding in agreement.*) Don't pay no attention to it, Bessie. Just leave it be and you'll never know that machine was any different than when you got it.

Dude examining the fender

Jeeter leaning against  
corn crib

ACT II

TOBACCO ROAD

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BESSIE. That's right. I ain't letting it worry me none, because it wasn't Dude's fault. He was looking at the big turpentine still alongside the road, when the wagon got in our way. The nigger driving it ought to have had enough sense to move over.

JEETER. Was you blowing the horn then, Dude?

DUDE. Not right then I wasn't. I was busy looking at that big still. I never saw one that big nowhere. It was most as big as a corn-liquor still, only it wasn't so shiny-looking.

BESSIE. (*Bending down and wiping dust from fender with her skirt.*) It's a shame to get the new car smashed up so soon, however. It was brand new not more than an hour ago.

DUDE. It was that damn nigger. If he hadn't been asleep on the wagon it wouldn't have happened at all. He was plumb asleep till it woke him up and threw him out in the ditch.

JEETER. He didn't get hurt much, did he?

DUDE. I don't know about that. The wagon turned over on him and mashed him some. His eyes was wide open all the time, but I couldn't make him say nothing. He looked like he was dead.

JEETER. Niggers will get killed. Looks like there just ain't no way to stop it.

(~~DUDE takes out ball and hurls it against house.~~) Dude  
throwing ball  
against  
house

ADA. When is you and Dude going to go on with the marrying?

BESSIE. (*Turning from fender and resuming her aggressive manner.*) Right this minute. (*Smooths her skirt. Unrolls license again.*) Come on, Dude.

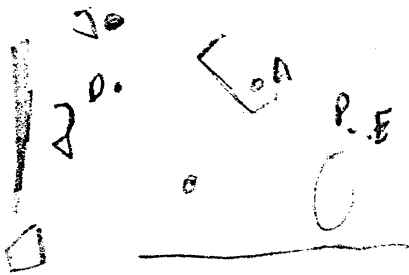
DUDE. (*Turning impatiently with ball in hand.*) What you want to do now?

BESSIE. Marry us.

DUDE. Didn't you get that all done at the courthouse in Fuller?

Ada - comes out of house  
w/ blanket to shake & fold

Bessie (c)



Dude move  
to Bessie



Dude starts to exit

Pearl & Ellie  
kneel

Ada kneel by  
steps

Jeeter Sit on log

BESSIE. (*Still extending his end of license.*) That wasn't all. We got to get married in the sight of the Lord.

DUDE. Humph! (*Throws ball again.*)

JEETER. By God and by Jesus, Dude, stop chunking that ball against that old house and do what Bessie tells you.

DUDE. I want to take a ride.

BESSIE. We got plenty of time to ride around after we is married.

DUDE. Will we go then?

BESSIE. Yes, Dude.

DUDE. Is you sure?

BESSIE. Sure, Dude.

DUDE. What the hell, then. Then what do I do?

BESSIE. (*Extending license.*) You hold your end of the license while I pray. (*DUDE gingerly takes one end of license, and BESSIE the other. BESSIE lowers her head and closes her eyes for several seconds of silent prayer, while DUDE looks down on her with a slight, rather perplexed frown. Presently BESSIE lifts her head, but her eyes are still closed as she intones.*) I marry us man and wife. So be it. That's all, God. Amen. (*She opens her eyes and smiles gently up at DUDE.*)

DUDE. (*Pulling away.*) Come on.

BESSIE. I got to pray now. You kneel down on the ground while I make a little prayer. (*BESSIE and others all kneel and DUDE reluctantly follows, still watching her with his expression of bored annoyance. Praying.*) Dear God, Dude and me is married now. We is wife and husband. Dude, he is an innocent young boy, unused to the sinful ways of the country, and I am a woman preacher of the gospel. You ought to make Dude a preacher too, and let us use our new automobile in taking trips to pray for sinners. You ought to learn him how to be a fine preacher so we can make all the goats into sheep. That's all this time. We're in a hurry now. Save us from the devil and make a place for us in heaven. Amen. (*Opens her eyes and smiles brightly at DUDE.*)

JEETER. (*Jumping up.*) Bless the Lord, that was one of the prettiest marriages I ever seen. Dude sure got hisself good and wed, didn't he, Ada?

ADA. Humph!

JEETER. (*Goes to BESSIE and kisses her.*) Praise God, Sister Bessie, that Dude is a lucky man. I'd sure like to be in his place right now.

BESSIE. (*Laughing coyly.*) Be still, you old sinner.

JEETER. (*To DUDE.*) Yes, sir, Dude, boy. You sure is lucky to get a fine woman like Bessie.

DUDE. (*Shaking him off.*) Aw, shut up, you old fool.

(*BESSIE raps on the porch and JEETER turns to look at her.*)

JEETER. What you knocking on the porch for, Bessie? (*She raps again and JEETER's face clears.*) Great day! Now, why didn't I think of that? . . . You, Dude—can't you see how bad Sister Bessie wants to go into the house?

DUDE. What for?

JEETER. Never you mind what for. (*He starts pushing DUDE.*)

BESSIE. (*Taking DUDE's arm.*) Just for now. Come on, Dude.

DUDE. You said we was going for a ride.

BESSIE. We can go after a little while.

JEETER. (*Pushing him harder.*) What's the matter with you, Dude? Go on in with Sister Bessie. (*Slowly and grudgingly DUDE allows himself to be shoved and pulled on to the porch. At the door he pauses.*)

DUDE. This is a hell of a time to be going indoors.

(*BESSIE and DUDE exit into the house, the door closing.*)

JEETER stands almost c. stage, his eyes shining with excitement. ELLIE MAY crosses quickly to the window and draws herself up on her toes, her fingers on the sill, as she tries to look into the house. JEETER crosses to window and pulls ELLIE MAY away.)

Pearl & Ellie  
start folding  
the blanket

X - BACK TO ELLIE & PEAR

X TO BESSIE & KISSE  
HER.

X TO  
JEETER &  
DUDE — BESSIE X —  
VPTO DOOR

JEETER PUSHES  
DUDE INTO HOUSE

DUDE & BESSIE INTO  
HOUSE

JEETER SIT ON STEPS

ELLIE - STAND ON LOG  
& THEN UP TO WINDOW  
TRYING TO LOOK IN.

JEETER - PULL ELLIE AWAY &  
LOOKS IN HIMSELF

ELLIE &  
PEARL - EXIT TO  
BACKYARD

JEETER AT WINDOW  
DUDE & BESSIE LOOKING  
OUT.



SCENE IV

ENTER TIM & PAYNE

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TOBACCO ROAD

ACT II

JEETER. You got no business trying to see inside. Sister Bessie and Dude is married. (*Shoving ELLIE MAY aside, he promptly pulls himself up on the sill to see. ELLIE MAY suddenly turns and crosses swiftly toward porch, where ADA leans against an upright. PEARL stands on the ground at the edge of the porch near her mother.*)

ELLIE MAY. (*Passing PEARL.*) Come on around to the back. (*PEARL hesitates for an instant, then joins her, and the two girls exit around U. corner of house. JEETER hasn't much success seeing into the window, and he suddenly stops trying and scampers around the U. corner of the house. He returns almost immediately with a chopping block on which he climbs to see into the room. A smile of approval beams on his weathered face.*)

JEETER. Sister Bessie sure is a fine-looking woman, ain't she, Dude?

BESSIE. (*Appearing at window.*) Get away from there, Jeeter Lester.

JEETER. What's the matter, Bessie? I ain't done nothing.

BESSIE. Never you mind. You get away from there.

JEETER. Now don't get peeved, Bessie. This time of year puts a queer feeling into a man. I feel that way every late February and early March. No matter how many children a man's got, he always wants to get more.

BESSIE. That don't matter. I don't want to have nothing to do with you. You is an old sinner.

CUT [ JEETER. (*Complacently.*) Yes, I reckon I is. I reckon I is one of the biggest sinners in the whole country. (*Suddenly changes and roars.*) But, by God and by Jesus, woman—what's a man going to do!

(*DUDE comes up to window and starts pushing at JEETER as enter CAPTAIN TIM and GEORGE PAYNE.*)

DUDE. Get away from there, you old fool, or I'll wham you one.

TIM. (*Amused.*) Well, Jeeter, what's all the excitement?

JEETER. (*Turning on block.*) Captain John's boy!— Captain Tim! (*Steps from the box and runs swiftly to meet TIM at the gate, almost frantic with excitement. ADA stands on the porch, eying the strangers impassively and sucking on her snuff brush. The old GRANDMOTHER peers out from behind the protecting well. TIM extends his hand as JEETER comes running up.*)

TIM. How are you, Jeeter, how are you?

JEETER. (*Eagerly.*) Captain Tim, I sure is glad to see you!

TIM. Jeeter, this is Mr. Payne, from Augusta.

PAYNE. How do you do, Mr. Lester?

JEETER. Morning, sir.

TIM. (*Seeing ADA on porch.*) That's Ada, isn't it? Good morning, Ada.

ADA. (*Coldly.*) Morning.

TIM. (*Indicating DUDE.*) I don't recognize the boy, Jeeter. Which one is he?

JEETER. That's Dude.

TIM. Oh, yes. I remember Dude now. (*To DUDE.*) Hello there, Dude. Do you remember me?

DUDE. (*Impudently.*) Naw! (*Giggles self-consciously.*)

JEETER. That there next to Dude is Sister Bessie. They just married themselves before you come.

PAYNE. Married *themselves*?

JEETER. Sister Bessie is a woman preacher and she done it.

PAYNE. (*Dubiously.*) I see.

TIM. (*To DUDE.*) Well, congratulations, Dude. Congratulations, Sister Bessie. (*To JEETER.*) Is Dude the only one of your children left, Jeeter? — **TURN TO JEETER**

JEETER. Ellie May and Pearl is around someplace.

TIM. (*Looking about.*) Well, the place hasn't changed much. What keeps it from falling down, Jeeter?

JEETER. Praise God, Captain Tim, I don't know. I expect it will one of these days. . . . Now you come on the porch and sit down. . . . Dude, you bring some chairs out here.

— X TO TIM

PAYNE X INTO HO

X IN TO WELL  
THEN TO WIND

PAYNE X-FROM HOUSE  
TO CORN CRIB.



X- TO POST

PAYNE. Don't bother. I'm afraid we won't be able to stay very long.

JEETER. Ain't no bother at all. Could you do with a drink of water, Captain Tim?

TIM. Thanks, Jeeter. (PAYNE crosses U. L., glancing about the property and inspecting the house.)

JEETER. (Crossing to well for water.) Dude, you go do what I told you. (While JEETER is getting the water, PAYNE glances around curiously. His eyes meet TIM's and he shakes his head to suggest his reaction to the surroundings. DUDE pulls a chair on to the porch.) Here you is. (Crossing to TIM with dipper of water.)

TIM. Much obliged. (Drinks.)

JEETER. I sure is glad to see you back, Captain. I knowed you couldn't stay away from the land any more than your Daddy could. Maybe city ways is all right for a short time, but when they start cleaning off the fields and burning the broom sedge, a man ain't happy unless he can be seeing it and be doing it, too.

TIM. You must be getting pretty old, Jeeter. I'd think you'd be tired of it by this time.

JEETER. No, sir. I is ready to do just as big a day's work as the next one. Ada there is always saying I is lazy, but there ain't no truth in that when it comes to planting a crop.

TIM. (Going to well and putting cup down.) How have crops been lately?

JEETER. Praise God there ain't been none in seven years. We just ain't been able to get credit down here on the Tobacco Road. Ain't nobody got no money. By God and by Jesus, I is glad you came back to provide that again.

TIM. (Turning—surprised.) What?

JEETER. Yes, sir, Captain Tim. I was just telling Ada a short time back that the Lord was aiming to take care of me out of His bounty. I wasn't thinking about you at the time, but soon as I heard you was here again Dude and me set to burning off the fields. Them north fields is burning some right this minute.

JEETER GETS  
WATER

CUT

PAYNE X TO CORN CRIP

TURN

JEETER TO TIM

TIM. (After a glance at PAYNE.) Well, I don't know how that idea got around. I'm sure sorry, but I'm—well, Jeeter, I'm afraid I can't help you. I'm in pretty much the same fix you are.

JEETER. (Unbelieving.) What's that, Captain Tim?

TIM. (Turning to PAYNE.) You'd better tell him, Payne.

PAYNE. Well, you see, Mr. Lester, I'm from the bank in Augusta. We're down here to collect money, not lend it.

JEETER. You mean I can't have no credit to grow me a crop this year?

PAYNE. I'm afraid not.

JEETER. But I just got to have credit. Me and my folks is starving out here on the Tobacco Road.

PAYNE. Well, then you ought to be glad we came. We're ready to help you get away from here to where you have a chance of making a living.

JEETER. I don't want to get away from here. If you mean go off and work in the mills, I say, by God and by Jesus, no!—I ain't going to do it.

PAYNE. But if you're really starving—

JEETER. That ain't got nothing to do with it, Captain John said I could live here as long as I wanted. He said he couldn't give me credit at the stores in Fuller no more, but he told me I could stay here and live until I died. You know that, Captain Tim.

CUT

TIM. Yes, Jeeter, I remember, and that was all right as long as the land was ours. But it's not any more. I had to borrow money on every farm we owned around here and now I can't pay it back. Like your granddaddy used to own the land and Captain John took it over, the bank's doing it with me.

JEETER. (Heatedly.) I don't understand that. This was my daddy's place and his daddy's before him, and I don't know how many Lesters before that. There wasn't nothing here in the whole country before they came. They made that road out there hauling tobacco kegs fifteen miles down the ridge to the river. Now I don't own it and you

PAYNE X TO PORCH

X - D TO LOG

ON PORCH

PAYNE give coke to Dude  
Dude disappears in  
house

JEETER TO (C)

TIM X ON LINE  
TO POST



don't own it and it belongs to a durn bank that ain't never had nothing to do with it even.

TIM. That's the way things just seem to happen, Jeeter.

CUT  
 JEETER. Praise God, it ain't the way things just happen. It's the rich folks in Augusta that's doing it. They don't work none, but they get all the money us farmers make. One time I borrowed me three hundred dollars from a loan company there to grow a crop and when I gave them interest and payments and every other durn thing they could think of I didn't make but seven dollars the whole year working every day. By God, that ain't right, I tell you. God won't stand for such cheating much longer. He ain't so liking of the rich people as they think He is. God, He likes the poor.

PAYNE. Now, Mr. Lester. We don't want to be hard on you old farmers, but we're going to try putting this whole section under scientific cultivation and there wouldn't be any use for you.

JEETER. Why not? If you is going to grow things on the land, why can't I stay right here and do it, too? I'd work for you just like I did for Captain John and no nigger ever worked harder than that.

PAYNE. I'm afraid that's impossible.

DUDE. What did I tell you, you old fool? Nobody ain't going to give you nothing.

JEETER. You shut up, Dude Lester. You shut up and get away from here. Captain Tim ain't going to let them send me away. Is you, Captain Tim?

CUT  
 PAYNE. Be reasonable, Mr. Lester. You've proved you can't get along here. Why don't you move your family up to Augusta or across the river in South Carolina where the mills are?

JEETER. No! By God and by Jesus, no! That's one thing I ain't never going to do. Them durn cotton mills is for the women folks to work in. I say it's a hell of a job for a man to spend his time winding strings on spools.

PAYNE. It shouldn't be any harder than trying to grow

ADA X INTO HOUSE

a crop here. Even if you do get one, you can't make enough out of it to live on.

JEETER. I don't care. God made the land, but you don't see Him building no durn cotton mills.

PAYNE. That hasn't anything to do with it. You old farmers are all the same. You don't realize that times have changed.

JEETER. That's no concern of mine. I is ready to look after my own like the Bible says, but that don't include no goddam mill! (*Turning to TIM.*) Please, Captain Tim, don't let them make me do that. I'm like to die pretty soon now, anyway, but up there I'd go before my time. You ain't going to let them do that to me, is you?

TIM. Lord, Jeeter, what can I do? That's up to Mr. Payne now. (*Turning to PAYNE.*) How about it, Payne? Couldn't you do something for this man?

PAYNE. I'm sorry, Mr. Harmon, but if we made an exception for one we'd have to for all of them. Of course, if he could pay rent—

JEETER. Rent! No use asking that. I couldn't pay no rent. Praise God, I hasn't even got money to buy food with.

TIM. What about your children? Couldn't one of them help you?

JEETER. I don't know where none of them is except Tom— (*A sudden idea.*)

TIM. I remember Tom. What's Tom doing?

JEETER. They say down in Fuller he's a powerful rich man now. They tell me he hauls all the ties for the railroad. (*Turns to PAYNE.*) How much money would you be wanting for rent, mister?

PAYNE. Well—this place ought to be worth a hundred dollars a year.

JEETER. That's a heap of money, but Tom ought to be ready to help out his old Pa at a time like this. When would you be wanting that hundred dollars?

PAYNE. We ought to be starting back early tomorrow.

JEETER. I got time for that. Tom's only over in Burke

PAYNE EXITS  
TO ROAD

TIM & JEETER (C)



JEETER TO WINDOW  
DUDE & BESSIE ON  
PORCH

DUDE & BESSIE X  
TO ROAD

JEETER & TIM (C)

[HORN]

EXIT TIM TO ROAD  
JEETER INTO HOUSE

County. (*Turns and calls.*) Hey, you, Dude. You and Bessie get in that new automobile and ride over and see Tom. You tell him his old Pa has got to have a hundred dollars. Don't lose no time about doing it neither.

DUDE. (*Jumping off porch—eager for a ride.*) Come on, Bessie. We is going for a ride. (*BESSIE hesitates, glancing back into the house.*)

JEETER. You hurry up there, Bessie. Ain't no time to be thinking about going in the house now.

(*With a last disappointed glance, BESSIE comes down off the porch. DUDE moves ahead of her to the gate.*)

TIM. Don't you think you ought to go and speak to Tom yourself, Jeeter?

JEETER. He might not like that so much. He might have changed some since he was a boy. He'll talk to Dude and Bessie, though. (*BESSIE and DUDE disappear down the road, and JEETER runs to the gate to call after them.*) Hey, you, Dude. You tell Tom his old Pa needs that money powerful bad. You tell him we ain't got anything to eat here, either, and his Ma needs snuff to calm her stomach with. (*Turns back to TIM.*) Tom was just about the best of all the boys. I reckon Bailey was the best, but Tom was good, too. He always said he was going to make a heap of money. (*The HORN sounds off in DUDE's inimitable manner. JEETER speaks proudly.*) That's Dude doing that. Don't he blow the horn pretty, though? Just listen to it. (*The HORN sounds again, somewhat fainter, and JEETER again smiles with pride at TIM.*) That's Dude. (*He is listening again as the CURTAIN falls.*)

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE: *The same.*

TIME: *Dawn the following morning.*

AT RISE: JEETER, shoeless, is discovered asleep on the porch, his back against one of the uprights, head slumped forward on his chest. Again the early sun spreads its soft golden glow, soon to become a fierce white glare as the morning advances. JEETER awakens abruptly, as one does who all night has tried to fight off sleep, and crosses swiftly to the gate, where he gazes off R. stage down the empty, silent road. Disappointed, he comes back into the yard to the well, where he performs his casual morning ablutions, using, as always, his shirt for a towel. Fingers through his hair serve as a comb for his scraggly hair; his hat goes back on his head. He is ready for the day. Again he crosses to the road, where his anxious gaze once more sweeps the horizon R. for a glimpse of DUDE and BESSIE. ADA appears on the porch, pressing her sides to ease the early morning pains of a body that sleep can no longer refresh.

ADA. Is they coming yet?

JEETER. No. (Comes inside to porch where he sits and starts putting on shoes.) By God and by Jesus, I don't understand that. They been gone long enough to go to Burke County and back three times over.

ADA. It's that Bessie. She ain't going to hurry none just because you want her to.

JEETER. They must of seen Tom all right if they been gone this long. Maybe he made them stay all night. Do you think he done that, Ada?

JEETER ASLEEP  
— WAKES  
RUNS TO POST

\* WASHING SEQUENCE  
AT WELL

ON PORCH

[AT WELL]

ADA. Maybe he did and maybe he didn't. But if he asked them, you can bet that Bessie stayed all right. She ain't going to come home as long as there is any other place to go.

CUT [ JEETER. What is you so peeved at Bessie for? She's a fine woman preacher.

ADA. She's a old hussy, that's what she is.

JEETER. Now what makes you say that? Sister Bessie is—

ADA. Don't tell me what she is. I know. Walking around here so uppity because she bought herself that new automobile. Why didn't she buy us some rations and snuff instead of spending all that money? That's what a good woman preacher would have done.

CUT [ JEETER. She wants that new automobile to carry on the preaching and the praying. Women preachers ain't like the rest of us. They is got the Lord's work to do.

ADA. Humph. Looks to me like the Lord's work would be done better if she bought Dude's Ma a stylish dress. The Lord would understand that.

JEETER. (*Suddenly and impatiently.*) Say, when is we going to eat this morning, anyway? Ain't there none of that meal left we borrowed from Morgan Prior yesterday?

ADA. (*Crossly.*) There's some meal all right, but there ain't no kindling wood. Ellie May's ready to cook it as soon as she gets some.

JEETER. You tell Ma Lester to go get it then.

ADA. Ma Lester ain't here.

JEETER. Where is she?

ADA. I don't know. She didn't sleep in the bed last night.

JEETER. H'mm. Maybe she went out in the broom sedge yesterday and couldn't get back. Maybe she even died out there.

ADA. Maybe. She ain't never stayed away before.

JEETER. I'll go out and look around one of these days. . . . Well, you tell Ellie May to go out and get some wood. I sure got to have my chicory before long. . . .

X DOWN  
TO (C)

ADA X TO  
WELL

JEETER SITS  
ON STEPS

ADA. (*Calling inside house.*) Ellie May—Ellie May!

ELLIE MAY. (*Off—in house.*) What you want, Ma?

ADA. You go out in the fields and get some sticks for the fire.

ELLIE MAY. (*Off.*) Oh, make that old woman go.

ADA. She ain't here.

ELLIE MAY. (*Complaining.*) Well, where is she?

ADA. She's likely dead. You go on do like I tell you.

ELLIE MAY. (*Enters, yawning and scratching her head.*) Why don't you make Pearl go? She don't never do nothing.

ADA. Never you mind now. I got other things for Pearl to do.

ELLIE MAY. Aw, gee!

JEETER. You hurry up. I is near about dying for my chicory.

ELLIE MAY. (*Complaining.*) Can't I even get me a drink of water?

JEETER. All right, you get you some water, then get along. But keep away from them north fields. They might be burning some yet. That's probably what happened to your old Grandma. ~~The fire come up on her and she couldn't get away from it. (*He is filled with sudden energy, gets up, crosses to the road, and looks down it, shakes his head.*)~~ ELLIE MAY *drinks leisurely from the water dipper.* By God and by Jesus, they ought to be back with that money before this. First thing you know Captain Tim and that man will be along here looking for it. ~~CUT~~

ADA. (*Calling into house—ignoring JEETER.*) Pearl—Pearl, git up, honey. Come out here and freshen up. We'll be having something to eat pretty soon now. Bring that old brush with you, too. I want to pretty up your hair.

(*ELLIE MAY hears ADA and takes the dipper slowly down from her mouth. She looks at ADA, her face livid with unspoken rage. Suddenly she slings the dipper*

ELLIE FROM INSIDE

ENTERS

ELLIE X TO

WELL JEETER SLAPS  
HER ASS.

FUNGS DIPPER



at ADA, the water spilling. JEETER, coming through the gate, regards ELLIE MAY with anger.)

STAND

ELLIE RUN OFF  
TO ROAD —  
THEN ENTERS!  
RUN BEHIND HOUSE

JEETER. Great day in the morning, what's the meaning of all that! (ELLIE MAY, disregarding JEETER, looks at her mother with blazing eyes, her breath coming hard. ADA returns the look with level coldness. ELLIE MAY'S throat contracts with half-stifled sobs and she turns and rushes to the gate. She starts down the Tobacco Road L. when something she sees offstage stops her. For an instant she is rigid, then, with the first pronounced sob, she turns, and exits R., running down the road. JEETER follows ELLIE MAY with a puzzled glance, then turns to ADA.) Now if that ain't the durndest gal. What do you suppose made her turn around like that for? (Answers his own curiosity by crossing to the road and looking off L. He turns back with some surprise.) It's Lov coming down the road.

ADA. Don't let him come in here.

JEETER. What the hell, woman. He ain't going to do no harm. He looks too durned tired.

ADA. He ain't going to have Pearl.

JEETER. Who said he was? I just said he was coming down the road.

ADA. (Calling inside.) Pearl, Lov's coming. Stay where you is and get ready to run case he starts trying to get at you. (ADA shuts the door and stands with her back to it.)

JEETER. Great day, he's toting something again. Now whatever could that be in that anyway? I bet you one thing, by God—it ain't turnips! (Twitching with eagerness he comes inside the yard and takes his familiar place, hanging over the fence, his back to the audience, straining to see down the road.) Whatever he's got, I sure could use some, even if I can't see it. I certainly is happy Lov and me is friends about this time.

ADA. Humph! The only way you'll ever get anything from him is stealing it.

ADA AT PORCH  
STEPS

JEETER. No, sir! The Lord forgave me for that before and I ain't going to risk His wrath again.

CUT

ADA. Humph.

JEETER. (*Again stretching over fence to peer down the road.*) Now, Ada, don't be too hard on Lov and I might be able to prevail on him to give us a little something.

ADA. Then he better keep away from Pearl. (*JEETER waves her quiet and turns back to the fence, but he restrains his eagerness, as he did in the First Act, so that Lov will not be frightened off. Lov enters disconsolately, carrying a small flour sack, the bottom of which bulges somewhat from an object the size of a brick.*)

JEETER. (*Casually.*) Hi, there, Lov. (*Lov stops.*)

LOV. (*After a pause.*) I want to talk to you, Jeeter.

JEETER. Sure, Lov. Come inside and rest yourself. (*Lov slowly comes through the gate.*) What you got in that sack, Lov? What you got there anyway?

LOV. (*After a significant pause and a glance from JEETER to ADA and back to JEETER. Knowing the bombshell effect of his words.*) Salt pork.

JEETER. (*Electrified.*) Salt pork! Lord a'mighty! I ain't had salt pork since the Lord Himself knows how long. Is you going to give me some of that, Lov? I sure could do with a small piece about this time.

LOV. Take it. (*He holds sack to the astounded JEETER.*)

JEETER. (*Unbelieving.*) Take it? You mean take it all?

LOV. I bought it for that.

JEETER. (*Taking sack.*) Great day in the morning, I never heard of such bounty! (*Turns.*) Did you hear that, Ada? Lov has give me all this salt pork.

ADA. (*Coldly.*) What does he want for it?

JEETER. He don't want nothing for it. Lov just give it to me, that's all.

ADA. Ask him.

JEETER. (*Doubtfully.*) Well now . . . What have you got to say about that, Lov? Is you after something from me in return for this salt pork?

LOV. I want to talk to you about Pearl.

SCENE II

LOV - (C)

JEETER TO LOV

TAKES SACK

PEARL AT WINDOW

ADA ON STEPS

ADA. That's just what I thought. Well, you ain't going to have her back. No use you trying to talk Jeeter into it, neither. He ain't got nothing to say about it. You give him back that salt pork, Jeeter.

JEETER. Now, Ada, there ain't no sense in being hasty about this matter. What you say is right, but there can't be no harm in talking about it.

ADA. You just want to hold on to that salt pork.

JEETER. Now, Ada—

LOV. (*With sudden desperation.*) I got to have Pearl back, Jeeter, no matter what you said yesterday. I just got to have her back.

JEETER. Now, Lov, we talked all about that before. I told you—

LOV. I don't care what you told me. Maybe you ain't Pearl's real Pa, but you got the right of her.

JEETER. I wish I could agree with you on that matter, Lov, but it ain't right in the eyes of God.

LOV. I'll pay you, Jeeter. I'll give you a dollar every week out of the money I make at the chute.

JEETER. (*Whistles.*) That's a heap of money, Lov, and coming and going I might have considered it a short time back. But I ain't going to need money bad enough now to make me fly against the wrath of the Lord. Dude and Bessie is over with Tom right this minute and he'll be sending me all the money I want for my needs.

LOV. I'll give you two dollars.

JEETER. Two dollars a week! Now, Lov Bensey, you quit tempting me.

LOV. (*With sudden fury.*) By God, I want my wife.

ADA. (*Plants her back more firmly against the door and the movement tells LOV where PEARL is. He takes a few steps to the edge of the porch. ADA's arms rise to cover the door.*) You come any closer, and I'll call to her to run off. (*Lov, checked by the threat, stops, his sudden anger cooling.*)

LOV. (*Defeated.*) No, don't do that. (*JEETER takes this opportunity to hide the sack behind the well. Lov slowly*

LOV - TO  
POST

JEETER x(L)

LOV TO WINDOW

LOV - BEHIND

JEETER

JEETER HIDE  
SACK OF PORK.

ADA - BACKS UP

LOV TO POST

turns to JEETER.) Jeeter, I don't see how I can make it more than two dollars every week. But that's a heap of money.

JEETER. Praise-God, I know it, Lov.

ADA. Get out of here, Lov Bensey—get out.

(LOV slowly turns and crosses to the gate; JEETER keeps himself in front of the well to lessen any chance of LOV seeing and remembering the salt pork. Lov exits L. JEETER waits until Lov has gone, then runs to the fence and looks after him.)

JEETER. He's gone all right. He's gone and forgot that salt pork, too. (Running back to the well, he picks up the sack and takes out the pork.) Now ain't that something! That must be near about two pounds. Lov sure is a generous provider. (Crosses to ADA.) There you is, Ada. You fix up some of this with the corn meal when Ellie May comes back with the kindling. (ADA takes the sack. She has moved away from the door on LOV's exit and is in her usual position, leaning against an upright.) Now what do you think's happened to Ellie May, anyway? What's happened to Dude and Bessie for that matter? By God and by Jesus, they ought to be back with that money before this.

ADA. What is you going to do with that money, Jeeter?

JEETER. (Pausing with foot half raised to put on other shoe. He is outraged.) What is I going to do? Is you crazy, woman! I got to give it to that man with Captain Tim.

ADA. Humph! That don't make no sense to me.

JEETER. Great day in the morning, you is crazy! That money's going to keep me my land, ain't it? That money's going to let me stay here and raise a crop. By God and by Jesus, what do you mean there ain't no sense in that?

ADA. You give the money to that man and what has you got left? Nothing! You ain't got no seed cotton to plant in the fields, you ain't got nothing to eat and you ain't no better off than you was before.

LOV → EXITS OUT TO  
ROAD

ADA ON PORCH

ADA x FROM  
PORCH TO (C)  
BEHIND JEETER

THEY MOVE TO POST

JEETER TURNS TO  
ADA & SHAKES HER  
TAKES OFF BOOT TO  
BEAT HER —

ADA FALLS —

(HORN)

JEETER AT POST —

ELLIE-AT WINDOW

PEARL ON PORCH

ADA- STAND AND MOVES  
TO PORCH

CUT [ JEETER. I ain't aiming to be better off. I'm aiming to keep my land.

ADA. You're an old fool, Jeeter Lester. With that money we could get us a place to live up in Augusta. Maybe we could even buy us an automobile like Bessie's. (*Wisely.*) You wouldn't have to worry none about being laid in the corn crib when you die neither. Ain't no telling what's going to happen if you stay here.

JEETER. Shut up! You just say that to scare me into doing what you want. Well, I ain't going to be laid in no corn crib, and I ain't going to work in no cotton mill neither.

ADA. Maybe you wouldn't have to work none up there. (*Glances toward door.*) Maybe Ellie May and Pearl could do that. Pearl would like that a lot. She wouldn't be scared of going if her old Ma went.

JEETER. Yon ain't thinking about my wants when you talk like that. It's Pearl you is thinking about. Well, you can take her if that's what you want, and leave me here alone. I was born here on the land, and by God and by Jesus that's where I'll die.

ADA. (*Fiercely.*) I hope you do. I hope you die and they lay you in the corn crib and the rats eat off your face just like they done your Pa.

JEETER. (*Rising—threatening and furious, raising his shoe to strike her.*) Goddam you, woman! (*The HORN, sounded in DUDE's inimitable style, checks JEETER's descending blow. Radiancance replaces black fury in his face as he hears it again.*) Here they is. That's them, all right. That's Dude blowing that old horn. (*PEARL and ELLIE MAY enter on to porch. Hobbling because of the one shoe, JEETER crosses to the gate, where he stops and starts to pull on his shoe, while the horn continues its bleat. JEETER's shoe goes on with difficulty. Once or twice he starts off with it half on, but is so impeded that he stops and works on it again. The HORN STOPS. JEETER, giving up the job of putting on the shoe while standing, plumps to the ground, puts it on, and gets through the*

gate, starting down the road r., when BESSIE enters.) Here you is, Bessie. I been waiting all night and day for you and Dude to come back. Where you been anyway?

BESSIE. (*Proudly.*) In Augusta.

JEETER. Augusta! Didn't you go to see Tom?

BESSIE. We saw Tom first. Then we rode up to Augusta and had us a honeymoon.

JEETER. Honeymoon? What the hell is that?

BESSIE. A honeymoon is when two people is married and they get in the bed together.

JEETER. Where did you do that?

BESSIE. (*Proudly.*) At a hotel. — *SIT*

JEETER. Great day in the morning! Didn't that take a heap of money?

BESSIE. It took two bits.

JEETER. Hear that, Ada? Dude and Bessie stayed at a hotel in Augusta.

ADA. (*Dourly.*) Did they bring us anything back?

BESSIE. I didn't have no money left to do that. That two bits was the last piece of money I had.

ADA. Humph! Looks to me like you might have brought some snuff back to Dude's old Ma instead of wasting money like that.

(*Enter DUDE carrying broken headlight.*)

JEETER. Now, Ada, you let Bessie alone. (*Sees DUDE.*) Here you is, Dude. Bessie just told us about staying all night in Augusta— (*Sees headlight.*) Great day, just look at that old headlight. What done that?

DUDE. A goddam old pine tree. That's what.

JEETER. (*Inspecting light.*) H'mm. Was you looking where you was going?

DUDE. I just looked back once and there it was— smack in front of me.

JEETER. Well, it don't look like it's going to be much good no more.

DUDE. If I had me an ax, I'd have chopped that tree down right then and there.

BESSIE WALKS IN  
& SITS ON PORCH  
STEPS.

JEETER FOLLOWS H

BESSIE FIXES  
HER HAIR

DUDE (WITH SHOES)  
& TO LOG. (HEADLIGHT)

JEETER TO DUDE.

DUDE EXITS  
TO ROAD AGAIN

JEETER X BACK TO  
BESSIE

ADA- SITS ON ROCKER  
PEARL SITS ON PORCH

DUDE ENTERS -  
[W/TIRE]  
JEETER X TO DUDE  
DUDE THROWS HIM  
DOWN

JEETER. I wouldn't concern myself much about it. One headlight is plenty to drive with.

DUDE. Oh, to hell with it. (*He drops light on ground, crosses to gate.*) It's just the way that pine tree got in front of me, that's all.

JEETER. Looks like they will do that sometimes. Hey, Dude. Where is the money Tom sent me?

DUDE. Tom didn't send you no money. Why the hell did you think he would anyway? (*Exits.*)

JEETER. Hey, Dude— (*Turning back to BESSIE.*) Dude's lying, ain't he, Bessie?

BESSIE. (*Nodding.*) Tom ain't at all like he used to be, Jeeter.

JEETER. (*Desperately.*) Now, Bessie—don't fool with me. Give me the money.

BESSIE. There ain't no money, Jeeter. Tom just didn't send any—that's all.

JEETER. You is crazy, woman. He did send it. Tom wouldn't do that to me.

BESSIE. Yes, he did, Jeeter. He's a wicked man, Tom is.

JEETER. No, sir, I don't believe it. You is got the money and I want it. Give it to me, hear me—give it to me.

BESSIE. I ain't got it, Jeeter.

JEETER. You is a liar. That's what you is—an old liar. Tom did send it. (*Enter DUDE rolling an auto wheel. JEETER rushes over to him inside the gate and grabs him.*)

Dude, give me that money—hear me, give me that money.

DUDE. (*Shaking him off.*) Didn't I tell you once! There ain't no money. Now get away from me and shut up. (*Bends over wheel, his back half to BESSIE.*)

JEETER. No. Tom wouldn't do that. He was my special boy. You just didn't go see him.

DUDE. We saw him all right. We saw him and he said to tell you to go to hell. (*BESSIE grabs him by the neck and shakes him so that the wheel falls to the ground. DUDE is furious.*) Damn you, turn loose of me. (*Shakes free.*) What the hell you doing?

BESSIE. You shouldn't have told Jeeter that. That's a wicked thing to say.

DUDE. I didn't say it—Tom said it. And you keep off me. I didn't do nothing to you.

BESSIE. Praise the Lord, you won't be fit to preach a sermon next Sunday if you cuss like that. Good folks don't want to have God send them sermons by cussing preachers.

DUDE. All right, I won't cuss no more. But don't you go jumping on my neck no more neither. *(He picks up wheel and rolls it against fence near the other broken pieces of the automobile, and sits. JEETER sits on fence, staring blankly ahead. PEARL and ELLIE MAY exit into the house.)*

ADA. What does Tom look like now? Has he changed much?

BESSIE. He looks a lot like Jeeter. There ain't much resemblance in him and you.

ADA. Humph! There was a time when I'd have declared it was the other way around.

BESSIE. Maybe one time, but now he looks more like Jeeter than Jeeter does hisself.

ADA. What did he say when you told him you and Dude was married?

BESSIE. He didn't say nothing much. Looked to me like he didn't care one way or the other.

DUDE. *(Over his shoulder from where he sits, back to audience, appraising the damaged parts.)* Tom said she used to be a two-bit slut when he knowed her. *(With a bound BESSIE is on his neck again, choking him. He jerks away from her quickly and pushes his hand at her face, getting up, threatening.)* Goddam you! You keep off me.

BESSIE. *(Tenderly as she backs off.)* Now, Dude, you promised me you wasn't going to cuss no more.

DUDE. Then, by God, quit choking me. I'm getting damned sick and tired of you doing that.

BESSIE. You shouldn't talk like that about the woman you is mated to.

ELLIE ENTERS  
W/ KITTEN  
SITS (L) ON PORCH

DUDE FIXES  
WHEEL NEAR LOG

ADA ROCKING ON  
PORCH

BESSIE X TO  
DUDE CHOKES HIM  
AROUND NECK



BESSIE SITS  
ON LOG

DUDE. Well, that's what Tom said. He told it right to you and you didn't do nothing. Why didn't you do something to him if he was telling a lie?

BESSIE. Tom is a wicked man. The Lord punishes wicked men like that.

DUDE. Well, then, you let the Lord punish me and keep your hands off my neck. *(Pulls wheel down and begins trying to straighten spokes by pulling on them with his hands and pounding them with a hand-sized rock.)*

ADA. Did Tom say he had any children?

BESSIE. He didn't mention it if he had. He didn't seem to want to talk very much, not even when I told him you and Jeeter didn't have meal nor meat in the house.

DUDE. *(Looking up from his work.)* He just said he didn't give a damn and went on driving his team of ox.

ADA. *(Briskly—pleased.)* Well, I reckon we better be getting ready to go off, Jeeter.

JEETER. What?— *(Snapped back from his stunned silence.)* No, I ain't going, I tell you.

ADA. *(Exasperated.)* Tom didn't send you no money. How you going to stay here?

JEETER. By God, I'm going to stay, that's all. *(ADA, realizing the uselessness of arguing with him, turns and exits into the house. BESSIE turns to DUDE and watches him work.)*

BESSIE. Do you reckon you'll ever get that wheel straight again, Dude?

DUDE. *(Crossly.)* I'm trying, ain't I?

JEETER. *(Abstractedly, pointing to wheel.)* What done that?

DUDE. Remember that old pine tree that busted the headlight?

JEETER. Um.

DUDE. Well, I was backing away from that and some durn fool left a pile of cross ties right where I'd run smack into them.

JEETER. *(Easily.)* Well, now what do you think?

DUDE. It busted the back of the car in, too.

ADA STANDS

ADA X INTO  
HOUSE

JEETER X TO  
(LOG)

CUT

BESSIE. It looks like everything's trying to ruin my new automobile. Ain't nothing like it was when I paid eight hundred dollars for it in Fuller just yesterday.

JEETER. It ain't hurt the running of it none, though, has it? It runs good yet.

BESSIE. I reckon so, but it makes a powerful lot of noise when it's running up hill—and down hill, too.

DUDE. That's because we was running it without oil. The man at the gasoline station said something was burned out inside.

JEETER. That's a pity.

DUDE. It runs pretty good, though, even if it does make all that racket.

JEETER. Some automobiles is like that. (*Jumps down from fence, suddenly his old self again.*) By God and by Jesus, now why didn't I think of that before? Quit poundin' on that old wheel, Dude. You come with me.

DUDE. (*Still sitting.*) What you want to do now? I done enough running around for one morning.

JEETER. You get up from there and do like I say. You and me is going to start hauling wood to Augusta right this minute.

DUDE. You're just an old fool. That old machine of yours can't carry no wood to Augusta.

JEETER. No, but that there new one can. You come on.

DUDE. What do I want to haul wood to Augusta for?

JEETER. So I can get some money for the bank—that's what for.

DUDE. You ain't going to get no hundred dollars for no load of wood, or nothing else like it.

JEETER. I can get a couple of dollars maybe, and every day doing that I can get me more than a hundred.

BESSIE. You stop right where you is, Jeeter. You ain't going to use my new automobile for no such purpose.

JEETER. Now, Bessie, ain't I always shared what I had with you and your former husband? You ain't going to see me lose my land, is you?

BESSIE. That ain't no concern of mine. Hauling wood in

JEETER SEES THE  
INNER TUBE WHICH  
GIVES HIM THE IDEA  
ABOUT THE AUTOMOBILE

JEETER X  
TO MOUND.

BESSIE X TO  
JEETER (C)

PEARL AT WELL  
GETTING WATER  
SHE X TO HOUSE

ELLIE X BEHIND HOUSE

PEARL X INTO HOUSE

JEETER X SIT ON  
PORCH - THE UP  
X TO BESSIE  
(C)

BESSIE X TO WELL

PEARL X FROM HOUSE  
TO WELL WITH TEA POT

TOBACCO ROAD

ACT III

my new machine would punch holes in the seat and the top just like it done to your old one.

JEETER. I won't let it hurt it none.

BESSIE. It's already broke up enough. I ain't going to let you do it.

JEETER. Now, Bessie—

BESSIE. You can't have it and that's all.

JEETER. (*With heat.*) That's a hell of a way to act toward me. You ain't got the mercy of the Lord in you. I say you is a hell of a woman preacher.

BESSIE. (*Angrily.*) You shut up cussing at me, Jeeter Lester.

JEETER. I won't. You is an old bitch, that's what you is. You is an old bitch.

BESSIE. (*With equal fury.*) You is an old bitch, too. You is an old son-of-a-bitch. All you Lesters is sons-of-bitches. (*DUDE looks up amused.*)

JEETER. (*Coming up to her threateningly.*) Get off my land. If I can't borrow me that automobile, you get off my land.

BESSIE. It ain't your land. It's the bank's land and you got to get off it.

JEETER. It's the old Lester place, and I ain't going to get off it while I'm alive. But durned if I can't run you off— (*Enter PEARL from house with small, blackened pot.*) Now git!—You hear me, gi—

(*JEETER sees PEARL, who has hesitated on the porch at sight of the quarrel, and suddenly stops his tirade, the hand raised to strike BESSIE halted in midair. PEARL comes down from the porch and crosses to the well, JEETER's eyes following her and his hand slowly lowering to his side. The fury in his eyes dies to a strange, puzzled, contemplative expression. DUDE, who has been amused by the quarrel, a smile wreathing his face, follows his father's glance curiously, but without enlightenment. BESSIE glances from JEETER*)

to PEARL and back to JEETER again, a frown wrinkling her forehead.)

BESSIE. What's the matter with you, you old fool? Has you lost your mind?

JEETER. (Suddenly turning away from regarding PEARL at the well, smiling at BESSIE, and moving away a few feet.) Ain't no sense you and me fighting, Bessie. You and me always thought a heap of each other. You can stay here just as long as you has a mind to.

BESSIE. H'mm. (Suspicious and uncompromising.) You ain't going to have the use of my new automobile to haul wood to Augusta.

JEETER. I gave up thinking about that a long time back. Don't concern yourself about that no more. However, I might be wanting you and Dude to take a little trip for me pretty soon now. Will you do that?

BESSIE. (Suspiciously.) Maybe. What you want us to do?

JEETER. Never you mind. It won't be far.

BESSIE. Well, if it ain't far.

JEETER. It won't hardly take no time. (Crosses to DUDE.) How is you getting on there, Dude?

DUDE. (Back trying to straighten spokes.) Maybe it will be all right. It don't much matter if all the spokes ain't straight.

JEETER. Umm. (Out of the corner of his eye JEETER watches PEARL, who, having filled the kettle, crosses back from well to house and exits. JEETER leaves his place at the fence and nonchalantly ambles to the porch and leans, taking out his knife and whittling on a piece of broken weatherboarding. Although he tries to appear at ease, his tenseness is apparent, and occasional swift glances at the door reveal his real interest.)

DUDE. (Hitting at spokes with a stone harder than before.) This is a hell of a job.

JEETER. Don't worry too much about that. The wheels

BESSIE X TO CRIB  
DUDE - STILL AT  
LOG.

ELIEX BEHIND  
HOUSE

BESSIE X TO  
LOG LOOKS AT  
LAMP.

JEETER AT STEE  
(SITTING)  
(WATCHING PEARL)

of my old machine wasn't straight much after the first few days and it didn't hurt the running of it hardly any.

BESSIE. I don't like my new car busted up like that though. (*Indicating headlight.*) Look there, Dude. There ain't hardly a piece of glass left in that headlight.

DUDE. Don't I know it. Goddam it, can't you let me be? Can't you see I'm trying to fix this old wheel?

BESSIE. Now, Dude, is that a way to talk? Good folks don't want to go and hear a Sunday sermon by a cussing preacher. I thought you wasn't going to swear no more.

DUDE. Then don't be always poking around. Go sit down someplace.

(*Enter PEARL with pan. JEETER watches her sharply as she crosses to well.*)

JEETER. (*Pretending interest.*) When's Dude going to start being a preacher, Bessie? (*Follows PEARL slowly to well.*)

BESSIE. He's going to preach a little short sermon next Sunday. I is already telling him what to say when he preaches.

JEETER. Dude might make a fine man preacher at that under your direction, although I never thought he had right good sense. I used to think he was going to stay on the land like I always done, but I reckon he'll be better off riding around the country preaching and praying with you. (*Edges forward a bit as PEARL fills her bucket and starts back to door. With a spring, JEETER is at PEARL's side and grabs her firmly by the wrist. The bucket falls—the girl's cry rings out, as she makes a desperate effort to pull away and run.*)

PEARL. Ma! (*BESSIE and DUDE whirl around to look.*)

JEETER. Hey, Dude—you and Bessie ride down to the chute and get Lov. Tell him I got Pearl for him.

(*The door flies open and an infuriated ADA takes in the scene. She rushes down on JEETER and begins hitting him furiously.*)

PEARL AT  
WELL X  
TO HOUSE

JEETER GRABS HER

ADA - X TO  
JEETER  
BEATING ON HIM

ADA. You let her be—you let her be!

JEETER. (*Pushing off ADA with his free hand.*) Hurry up there, Dude. You tell Lov if he's still ready to pay that two dollars a week I'll make Pearl go back and live with him.

BESSIE. Jeeter, that ain't the right thing to do.

JEETER. (*Fighting off ADA.*) Maybe it wasn't right before, but it sure is now. You get the hell out of here!

DUDE. (*Grabbing BESSIE.*) Come on. (*Half pulls BESSIE through gate.*)

ADA. (*Clawing at JEETER and yelling at DUDE.*) Don't you go, Dude—don't you go.

JEETER. Go on, Dude. You do like I tell you.

(*DUDE and BESSIE exit R. ADA strikes at JEETER, but when she sees DUDE and BESSIE exit, she suddenly stops her attack and runs after them.*)

ADA. Don't go, Dude. Wait! Wait!

(*ADA exits. PEARL continues to scratch and fight against JEETER, her gasping sobs the only sound she utters. JEETER holds her, but looks off in direction the others have gone. For an instant there is silence, broken only by PEARL's sobs. Then the sound of an ENGINE STARTING up and the blare of a HORN come from the road below, and hard on this rings out the high shriek of a woman in agony. Again the scream cuts the silence, and even PEARL's sobs are hushed, as she and JEETER listen. Suddenly she again struggles to free herself in a frenzy of effort to be with her mother, but JEETER's hold does not relax. Nothing is spoken, no voice is heard, for a full pause. Then, on hands and knees, crawling along the Tobacco Road and whimpering like a hurt puppy, comes ADA. PEARL's struggles cease and she stands horrified, still in JEETER's grasp, as ADA continues forward. At the gate her strength deserts her, and she sinks to her*

ADA - IS THROWN  
TO GROUND

DUDE X TO POST  
EXITS TO ROAD

BESSIE FOLLOWS  
EXITS

ADA X OUT AFTER  
THEM.

JEETER & PEARL  
STRUGGLE / SHE  
ESCAPES BUT L  
RECAPTURED

ADA CRIES OUT

CRAWLS ON TO C

*side, now dragging herself along by her arms alone, until she is in the yard.)*

PEARL. Ma! . . . Let me go, goddam you—let me go. *(But JEETER holds fast, DUDE and BESSIE come running up to fence outside, followed by ELLIE MAY. DUDE leans over the fence, looking at his mother. There is no grief in his voice, only calm explanation. JEETER holds PEARL, who stands transfixed.)*

DUDE. We was backing on to the road and she got in the way. I guess the wheels ran over her. *(ADA makes a last movement forward and a stifled groan comes from her crushed, wracked body as she props herself on her arm. A sob escapes PEARL and she tries to pull away from JEETER.)*

ADA. Let her go, Jeeter. Let her come to me.

JEETER. Praise God, I'd like to do that for you, Ada, but she'll run away.

ADA. Just let her come close to me, that's all.

*(JEETER yields several steps, so that PEARL, kneeling, can reach out her hand to touch ADA. ELLIE MAY enters and stands outside the fence.)*

PEARL. *(Kneeling—touching her mother—sobbing.)* Ma! Ma! Don't die. You can't, Ma—you can't!

ADA. That's all right, Pearl. I was going pretty soon now anyway. *(Glances around as best she can.)* I wish I had that stylish dress to be buried in, though. Reckon you can get me one, Jeeter?

JEETER. I sure would like to promise you that, Ada, but it ain't likely.

PEARL. I'll get you one, Ma. I'll get you one.

ADA. *(Matter-of-factly, without either self-pity or bitterness.)* Never mind, honey. I never really thought I'd get it. It would have sort of pleased me, though. *(Pauses, looks at PEARL, then JEETER.)* Let her go, Jeeter? I never asked for nothing before, but now I'm going to die.

BESSIE & DUDE X  
IN TO WELL

ADA - TRIES TO  
CLIMB UP JEETER (C)

JEETER HOLD ON TO  
PEARL -

PEARL REACHES OUT -  
TO ADA -



JEETER. I sure would like to, Ada, but I'm going to die pretty soon myself now. I feel it inside me. But I got to die on the land. Don't you understand? If I don't hold on to her for Lov I won't be able to do that.

ADA. Please, Jeeter, don't make her go back.

JEETER. Praise God, Ada, I got to.

ADA. All my life I been working for you. I picked cotton in the fields and turned over the furrows. I took care of your house and raised your children, and now when I'm going to die you won't even do what I want you to.

JEETER. My concern is with the living. The dead has to look out for themselves.

ADA. You're a sinful man, Jeeter Lester. You're a sinful man, and you're going to hell. *(Holds out arm to PEARL.)* Come here, child. Just put your arm around me so I can sit up.

*(JEETER allows PEARL to come close enough to ADA, so that her free arm goes around her mother, and JEETER'S hand works close to ADA'S mouth. Suddenly ADA leans forward the few necessary inches and her teeth sink into JEETER'S hand. With a smothered exclamation JEETER jerks back his hand, releasing PEARL. With flashing quickness the girl is on her feet. A dash carries her through the gate before JEETER recovers from the shock of his pain. Pausing, PEARL looks back at her mother, propped on her arm in the yard.)*

PEARL. Good-by, Ma. *(JEETER springs forward toward her, but with a last wave of her hand, PEARL flashes down the road and is gone. JEETER reaches the fence, makes to run after her, then stops, realizing the hopelessness of overtaking the girl. ADA, holding herself up with her last strength, sees his defeat. A low laugh escapes her and she rolls forward on her face and is dead. JEETER slowly turns and comes back inside. He stops to look down at ADA for a moment and then crosses to the porch where he*

Pearl on knees &  
reaching for Ada

Jeeter lets her go  
holding onto  
her hair

Ada sits up,  
the lunges for  
Jeeter's arm & b  
him

Jeeter falls backward  
in pain, letting  
of Pearl, who runs  
away. Ada dies  
*(Flat on ground, f  
down)*

*(Long Pause)*

Jeeter up to mou  
then slowly bac  
to steps - leans  
post

Dude inspects Ada  
Bessie goes to him



Lov enters

Looks at Ada



Lov exits  
Dude follows

Bessie - pause -  
then follows

Ellie slow x to Ma  
Runs off - stops -  
x to back of house  
get kitten, then  
exits

*sits. His hand doesn't hurt much now, but he continues to hold it. Lov enters.)*

DUDE. Hi there, Lov. Jeeter was looking for you, but I guess it's too late now. Pearl's done gone.

LOV. *(After a pause, indicating ADA.)* What's the matter with her?

DUDE. Me and Bessie run over her in the new automobile a while back.

LOV. Is she hurt bad?

DUDE. Looks like she's dead.

LOV. *(Comes inside, kneels down, looks at ADA. Then goes up to JEETER.)* Ada's dead, Jeeter.

JEETER. *(Nods, half dazed. Crossing to ADA, he stands over her for a long pause. At last he speaks.)* Lov, you and Dude go out in the fields and find the best place to bury her. Make a deep hole—Ada would like that. . . . Bessie, you do some praying, too. It would please Ada a whole lot.

BESSIE. Praise the Lord, I'll be glad to, Brother Jeeter.

*(LOV, DUDE, and BESSIE exit. ELLIE MAY moves forward tentatively and JEETER notices her.)*

JEETER. Ellie May, you better go down to Lov's house and fix it up for him. He'll be coming home to supper tonight and you cook him what he wants. Be nice to him and maybe he'll let you stay. He'll be wanting a woman pretty bad now.

ELLIE MAY. *(Frantic with delight, drops her sticks and crosses on a run down the road. Just before she exits, she stops and looks back.)* Good-by, Pa.

JEETER. *(Nods. ELLIE MAY exits, running. JEETER looks down at ADA.)* You shouldn't have done that, Ada. One way and another it didn't do anybody much good except maybe Pearl.

*(For a brief second JEETER looks down at ADA, then he crosses to the porch and sits. He bends down slowly,*

ACT III

TOBACCO ROAD

97

*takes a pinch of the earth between his fingers and rubs it into dust. He sits back, leaning against the upright, and tilts his hat forward over his eyes. It is the same posture he has assumed so many times when he has suddenly and unexpectedly fallen asleep. For a moment he continues abstractedly to rub the dirt between his fingers. Then all movement ceases. Seconds of somber silence pass. A rotten shingle falls from the sagging porch, and the CURTAIN falls slowly.)*

**CURTAIN**

JEETER SITS (C)  
SIFTING SOIL)

[BLACKOUT]

DIRECTOR'S JOURNAL

## DIRECTOR'S JOURNAL

This is the director's journal that was kept on a daily basis throughout the rehearsal period. For this section the author will rely on the first person.

OCTOBER 1 - FRIDAY

The first meeting of the cast. Everyone introduced themselves telling a little about their backgrounds. I explained my concept and plans for the production. I set up rehearsal rules and stressed unity within the cast. I opened discussion up for questions and general reaction. We concluded and all went for a drink to talk on a more social level.

I realized that this group of people had not worked together in any combination prior to this show. I had a virgin group, which I thought, under proper organization and control, should develop into an ensemble unit of hard workers and friends. I noticed an immediate respect for Dunkum. He has a warm and open attitude toward the group. I sense the cast will use him as a point of focus which is exactly what the character, Jeeter, must command. The person I cast as Peabody did not show for the meeting and I suggested that he didn't accept the role. I will have to replace him. He was an oriental and didn't really fit the character but I had made an ethical decision to cast him feeling race should not be a factor. Actually, I am not concerned over his loss. I am, however, pleased with myself and my decision.

I tried to assert my authority. I was able to do this by having in mind exactly what I wanted to accomplish with the show. I feel the cast realized this and the director-actor relationship within the cast was firmly established. My rehearsal rules included: five-minute arrival time before the call, 100% concentration during rehearsals, adherence to all deadlines, and a positive attitude about the production.

Overall, I was pleased and sensed an excitement to get started within the entire cast.

OCTOBER 2 - SATURDAY

Today I had individual meetings with each cast member. I spent about an hour with each character explaining what I felt about the character, what I expected, and answering questions. I stressed reading the novel to get the full character in perspective.

I felt I was able to instill confidence and understanding with each cast member.

## OCTOBER 3 - SUNDAY

I met with Stabler and Newcombe over the design concept. I seem to have explained my concept a million times already. But in a way this strengthens my ability to communicate what I want and test it in my own mind.

This was about my third meeting with Stabler and my first with Newcombe. I am very pleased to have them as my designers. I trust them.

## OCTOBER 4 - MONDAY

Tonight was called "Lester family night" involving only the family members. I asked each to develop a biography for their characters and a history for the Lester family. I asked them to use both the script and the novel to find the "givers" for each character. The whole group had to collaborate on the biographies because each depended on one another for the details. We spent about an hour and a half talking it all out and came up with enough factors to help each character start writing their own biography.

I started with an exercise where each character started physicalizing and establishing attitudes within the family. They would physicalize the character and then use only the names of the others to show attitude relationships. Very interesting exercise and it proved to be successful in this early stage.

I was pleased with the early progress on the biographies and the amount of understanding each had even at this point.

## OCTOBER 5 - TUESDAY

Tonight was a continuation of the biography session and the reading of each biography. I left the cast alone to discuss the details of their biography. When I returned they were still arguing but enjoying the whole procedure. I feel that if they can have a firm basis of who they are and how they fit together, the attitudes and actions will come about easily. Attitude is a big part of acting. In the play many times characters are on stage without dialogue or action for a long period of time. Each must have a constant attitude of: who I am, how I feel, etc.

I also continued with the physicalization and attitude exercise of the previous night. Things started happening in terms of attitude with the exercise. After a discussion we all agreed that a good framework of family attitude was underway and this gave them a good starting point.

OCTOBER 6 - WEDNESDAY

Read-through of the script. I still had not received the scripts from French and had to xerox what I needed to have a read-through.

I felt that the script was long and I know now that cutting is necessary. I am also concerned about the load Jeeter has with about 60% of the language. I pointed out to the cast that each had to support Dunkum in this load by offering to run lines, and having their lines early.

I felt confident in the casting. I was especially pleased with Dunkum and his natural vocal instincts. I feel he will be able to handle the language load. I am confident in his ability.

OCTOBER 7 - THURSDAY

Blocking of the first act. We worked about a third of the act and then reviewed. I realized a problem in the early section of the first act. The script limits actions. These people are lazy and starving. No action is really necessary. Then there are surges of action, i.e., Lov's entrance. I hope to use this action and focus on it and use the non-action as a counterpoint.

I felt good about the work accomplished. Massman and Dunkum work well together. With so much kneeling and crawling and dirt contact the rehearsal conditions on the hard Masquer floor is a problem, especially for Dunkum who has a bad knee. We really need the dirt.

I also feel I need a large log, stage right for an area. I will add this to the ground plan.

I now understood that my instinct for very early set completion was justified. This play needs the reality of the environment to make things work. I better keep on Stabler's back to see that it is completed early.

OCTOBER 8 - FRIDAY

Continued blocking Act I. I opened rehearsal with a review of last night's blocking. Tonight I had difficulties moving people around and getting the blocking done in rapid fashion. I had six on the set at once and just the explaining to each one took a good deal of time.

I am finding a big gap of experience in the cast. I have to spend more time with some than others. John doesn't know how to write down blocking nor read and move at the same time. It was a slow process. Perhaps Friday nights are bad for concentration?

OCTOBER 9 - SATURDAY

I called Lov and Ellie May early today to work on the "horsing" scene. I wanted to let them explore the possibilities of rolling and squirming. I wanted to work with Ellie May and make her become the aggressor in the scene. She has the problem of inhibition, and Gerry knows this and I feel that she is willing to work to overcome it. We tried timing out the sequence of the scene. We still have a lot of work to do on this section.

We finished blocking Act I. Things went much better. I am using a freshman girl, Jodi Behrens, who did very well in auditions, as my stage manager and she will play the character Peabody. We decided she would be Peabody's daughter, and Jodi picked the name Sadie. Now we have Sadie Peabody replacing Peabody. I feel, however, it adds a good deal of possibilities for relationship between Ellie May and Sadie. Peabody is really only a messenger character. I feel I have found a better way to handle it. We will see.

I felt Dunkum is uptight over the realization of line load. I stressed work on lines immediately.

OCTOBER 11 - MONDAY

Monday morning I worked again with Lov and Ellie May on the "horsing" scene. I feel my idea for a huge log, stage right, is working well in this scene in particular. I want Ellie to use the log in an erotic fashion. I had Ellie May and Lov work out several ways of "horsing" and then I started to choreograph it so it would time out with Jeeter's long line. Gerry is working much better. John is having fun with it and that makes everything work well.

I also spent time with the grandmother on her physical movement. We talked and decided on a particular image that she would work on. She has a very good idea of what she wants and has obviously done some good thinking about the character.

We blocked twelve pages of the second act. Then we reviewed the day's blocking. Good work for the most part.

After rehearsal I talked with Dude and Bessie. I stressed that she is the aggressor and her hands play a big part in the action and relationship. I told her "faith healing" is a key image.

OCTOBER 12 - TUESDAY

Continued blocking Act II and I find patterns beginning to be established. Blocking is much easier. Characters are finding attitudes. It seems each character has its own area. I feel that is a part of the concept of naturalism. In life we all have our "territories," and patterns of movement.

Problems have struck. Gerry could not come today and will not be able to come till Sunday because of her UT Tech position running the dance concert. This will cause problems and delay with a good deal of the work. The concert has also taken away Strock and the rest of the blocking in Act II will have to wait. This annoys me but I realize I must work within the framework of the school.

The dirt arrived today. And it arrived about three times during rehearsal causing a break of twenty minutes each time. I plan to move rehearsals to another location. This annoys me, but I want the set early and I am happy I see progress.

Tonight was the Fuller General Store night. The cast went to the costume shop in character as if going to the country store. Candi and Sue did a great job setting up the shop as the Fuller General Store. They even had their own costumes and a cash register and some penny candy. I had spoken with Candi about what I wanted in terms of costumes and she pulled several "possibles" and the idea was to let each character select their own costume as they would in life, but with the watchful suggestion of the store salespeople. It was really something to watch the "e'tude" or improvisation go on in the shop. I felt the shop staff really had a fun time and the cast felt they played a part in the selection of their own costume which will pay off later in terms of comfort and naturalness.

#### OCTOBER 13 - WEDNESDAY

We held rehearsal in the Venture Centure basement. Much better concentration was the result. We finished blocking Act II and started blocking Act III. I stressed that Act I lines were due on Friday and the cast arranged a line run in Dunkum's office.

#### OCTOBER 14 - THURSDAY

We reviewed the blocking of Act III and then continued. Dude and Bessie are playing very well together. Jeeter is slow at blocking but retains a good deal and I feel no problems with anyone at this point. Even John is working much better and seems more relaxed as a member of the cast.

I find I have a good deal of confidence in my blocking and my ability to work impromptu changing and readjusting the movement. I find I need to have some blocking written down.

#### OCTOBER 15 - FRIDAY

Continued and completed blocking of Act III. I am pleased to finish the blocking this soon. However, I do have holes to fill when Strock and Gerry return. The cast had a line run of Act I in the



afternoon and things went well. I was upset over how the blocking wasn't there after just a few days. But the Act did run complete without stops. We will work on it tomorrow.

OCTOBER 16 - SATURDAY

We ran Act I through and we had Gerry for this run-through. Much better than last night in terms of blocking and making things work. The problem now is not working on the set and the dirt. Dunkum's knees are bad and he has a rough time kneeling and stooping down on the hard floor. I really feel sorry for him. I hope he doesn't "breakdown" before the show.

Brian is working very well with Dunkum. Kimberly is also doing nice work. It is still too early to note problems in characterizations.

The only major blocking problem in Act I was the turnip fight. We worked on that for a little bit and then talked about the run-through. I was pleased because the lines were just about all there, even Dunkum had the lines down. I noted that without a set structure, it was difficult to work on special actions and to set business. For example, without a porch it is hard to find out how to play the steps scene with Jeeter and Ada or how far the grandmother can go under the house. But I see good work being done on the set so I am not too concerned.

We ran through the act again and I took notes. This second run was with a little less energy but we needed to start setting things.

OCTOBER 17 - SUNDAY

We ran Act I again and then started to work on Act II. Dunkum had thought about several problems he had during the first act and wanted to clear them up. We did and changed a few blocking patterns. I feel Dunkum is right. I believe if an actor is not comfortable with the blocking, it won't work. There were a few suggestions of his that I decided not to change and suggested that he try to make them work.

There still is a problem with the Dude-Bessie relationship. They just are not working together. I think it is Bessie's problem because she won't or rather she hesitates to take the initiative to manipulate Dude. I talked with both Brian and Diana after rehearsal and we worked on some business that might help. I told her to play with his hair and to be constantly touching him. If she does that Dude will naturally play off it. The other problem I have is with Lov. John tends to get emotional by shouting and overplaying. I have to get him to find intensity.

OCTOBER 18 - MONDAY

I blocked Strock into the scene. I have not and will not work with Strock and Erpenbach that much and therefore the scene is a little shallow. However, I feel there must be a strangeness and unfamiliar quality about Captain Tim and Payne when they enter. I don't want to work the scene to a point of losing that quality.

We ran Act II with lines. Lines were not bad and the blocking was working fairly well. Having missed last week, Gerry was a little lost.

OCTOBER 19 - TUESDAY

Tonight we ran both Act I and II. Things started to happen. There was energy and life to the characters and the humor finally started coming to the surface. I felt the cast felt good about the work. I gave some particular notes and we all talked about the results of the run-through.

I am especially pleased with the grandmother and Ada. Both are finding new things to play and I see a large growth of control in their characters. I need to work with Ellie May, I can see she is behind. Dunkum is doing well but he still is under pressure learning lines. The cast is helping the situation by running lines in his office in the afternoons. The problem is that most often the entire cast can't make it since John works and the others have other conflicts. But lines are coming for him.

After rehearsal I had Dr. Martin Richards, from the Business School, who is from southern Georgia (with a heavy accent), talk to the cast about Georgia. He was very helpful and supported the characterizations of Caldwell. He said there are still people like these in Georgia. He was a help in verbalizing the social complexities of these people.

OCTOBER 20 - WEDNESDAY

We ran Act III with lines. Kind of shabby work all around. The lines were a problem and the end death scene did not work at all.

We worked on the death scene and screamed about the lines.

I let the rehearsal run short. Concentration was bad. I have to get back to the Masquer.

## OCTOBER 21 - THURSDAY

Tonight we ran Act III again. It ran much smoother and the lines were there. We were able to work some problems. Dunkum is upset because he feels it is hard to have lines because many times a prop will be the cue. I agreed and calmed him down by saying we will get them soon.

Dude and Bessie are working very well. Also Pearl and Lov have a nice relationship going. I think John works with Donna well and they are having fun with what they are doing. John has come a long way. He really has some nice moments.

## OCTOBER 22 - FRIDAY

We were on the set in the Masquer. The set was about 80% complete. I am very happy with Stabler's work and it is great to have the set so soon, perhaps a UM Drama Department record. We also are using the costumes. I feel this is essential for naturalism.

We ran the whole show. Some things worked excellent, while other things did not because of the new location. I took notes. Most of the scenes with a good deal of action need attention and time to adjust to the actual set. Really good work from Dunkum and Kimberly. I need more erotic action from Gerry, but she uses her costume well. I feel the costumes are going to work really well. They won't be washed from here on.

## OCTOBER 23 - SATURDAY

I wanted to work individual scenes today that have problems. I worked first with John and Dona. I stressed intensity to John and we did some improvisations to help him find the needed emotion. Dona is picking up things very well. She works on her own and brings new ideas each rehearsal. I am pleased.

I then worked with Gerry alone. We talked about her sexuality and tried to add particular to several moments. I worked Ellie May and the Sadie scene. I want to get Sadie to relax and to open up. Jodi is inexperienced and needs confidence. We worked improvisation and changed the script and added lines to help the scene.

I worked with Bessie and Dude on the praying scene and we worked out some new blocking and actions.

We then ran the Captain Tim scene and worked on particulars for Tim and Payne. This scene still is the weakest.

At this point, I feel we are on schedule and the show is coming along as I expected. I need more time to run the show and by running we will find the flow and pace. Right now there is no

pace. I am very proud of my technical staff for their work and this support will help the final product greatly.

OCTOBER 24 - SUNDAY

We had a run-through tonight. The show ran pretty dull. I took notes and we had a group meeting to talk over problems. Dunkum is still uptight over his lines. The characters with less language need more individual work to fill the movement patterns and support the intentions. I feel the cast is having doubts about how the show will run. We have had no audience and no feedback so they are insecure. I trust that we are on the right track.

I asked for continued line runs with Dunkum in his office for this coming week. Slowly but surely the set is finishing up and all the props are coming in and the costumes are working out very well. The dirt is a big factor in the show. Right now it is too rocky and bare feet slow the action down. I need more sand.

OCTOBER 25 - MONDAY

I worked the entire cast through our attitude exercise. Attitudes are important to fill off line actions. I stressed that each character find new uses for the props, to use the set and props to find attitude. In naturalism the environment is the most important factor.

I worked individual scenes -- especially the fight and action scenes. We also changed Dude's ball-throwing actions. We worked the Grandmother kicking and the prayer. I suggested to Diana that she listen to a spiritual song off a tape and learn the words to use in the prayer sequence.

Ellie May is doing new and exciting things now and I stressed she find even more. Pearl has come together nicely and I want her to work on the childish qualities and maybe add a hummed song or something.

OCTOBER 26 - TUESDAY

We had a run-through of the entire show again. The show ran very well. I was able to take notes on pacing and builds. The first act ran very well and the second act ran the worst. The show takes a lot of energy from Dunkum and I feel he gives too much in the first act and then he loses energy and so the show slows down.

The Captain Tim and Payne scene is playing much better. Strock is a little slow with cues and the lines in that scene are off but the scene works well. Also the Sadie and Ellie May scene is playing nicely. I am pleased that I used Jodi and changed the

Peabody character. I need to strengthen Bessie's entrance. Right now it is too weak. Dude is playing very well and Ada is very strong.

The lights were hung and we had light tonight. This added some punch and sparkle to the cast. They are playing well now and I have to hope we don't peak or get stale. Dannebaum and Kriley were present tonight.

#### OCTOBER 27 - WEDNESDAY

We ran through the show and things went pretty good. A better second act than last night. We worked on the new song Bessie would sing during the prayer and the rest of the cast picked up the song. We will see how that plays tomorrow.

I also restaged the death scene. It just was not working. Perhaps it is the most difficult of all the scenes. I can't seem to open it up and still get the intensity. Perhaps the ground plan of having the road offstage and out front is the problem?

Good work. And I am even more confident things will play. I worked with the notes Kriley and Dannebaum gave me from last night and found many things working better. Dude came alive and really found a new set of actions.

#### OCTOBER 28 - THURSDAY

Another run-through. The song was a little mixed up but I feel it will play. The third act was the problem again. No energy.

The set and costumes are really becoming "home" and are part of the characters now. I feel this cast is comfortable about their environment and are aware of it more than any cast I've seen even after a run of a show. I have even thought about sleeping on the set as a group. I am really enjoying working with naturalism. The dirt in the Masquer has really raised a controversy and an excitement. I feel this is good and will make the show an attraction.

#### OCTOBER 29 - FRIDAY

This afternoon was dry tech. It lasted about an hour and we were all very relaxed. The set was done and the lights were ready. We set the sound and light levels. I listened to the sound tape last night and really enjoy the selections Strock has chosen. He also has a very perfect sounding car horn. The most time spent during the dry tech was setting the sunrise cues for each act. It is a difficult task to achieve this in the Masquer but Sally has done a good job and all we had to do was decide on the color of the sunrise and time out the cue. The cue music for each act is especially good and exactly what I wanted.

That evening we ran a cue to cue with lights and sound so that the actors could get a sense of the cues and see what was happening. We also set a curtain call.

The cue to cue took 45 minutes. I can't understand why technical rehearsals have to take so long if you know what you want. This was the smoothest technical rehearsal I have ever been through. It helps when things are completed on time.

The show is running two hours and 15 minutes. Pretty good running time. I am sure we have cut the script of about twenty minutes of dialogue. That would be too long.

Tonight we had an audience of technical staff and others and I watched their reaction. Their interest was held throughout and they reacted well. I am sure this encouraged the cast. The show was playing! The song and prayer scene went excellently, the song is just what was needed to boost that scene and help the humor. I suggested to Bessie she carry on a suitcase in her entrance with Bibles and stuff in it. She did and it worked very well. It gave the needed motivation to make the scene work. Act II lost energy again. They must conserve. I noted that the audience present really shook John up. But it made him concentrate much more. He looked scared. I'm glad we had an audience tonight. The technical aspects went well, no problems; just some adjustment with the trees on the set.

#### OCTOBER 30 - SATURDAY

We worked individually again in the afternoon working on particulars. I worked with Captain Tim and Payne to find some new actions to play. I also worked with Sadie and Ellie May.

Before I started the evening run-through, I gave special notes privately so that no one would know what each would be playing new tonight. Some example of notes I gave are:

Jeeter - Grab ass of Pearl any chance you get. Try to actually rape her in the Act III section.

Ada - More physical contact with Dude, Bessie, Pearl and Ellie May.

Ellie May - Relate to every object on the set sexually. Go to different parts of the set you have never been before.

Dude - Whistle and honk noises every chance you get. Also stand on your tip toes to be "superior" to Jeeter.

Bessie - Stare at the crotches of Jeeter and Dude; make them feel uncomfortable. Touch Dude and Jeeter on every line you can.

Pearl - Hold onto Ada's apron. Follow her.

Love - Hold up the turnips and tease Jeeter with them.

Grandmother - Pick up twigs on the ground. A scavenger.

The run-through was the best ever. The increased physical contact of the cast in general made everything more interesting to watch. Ellie May was very erotic, perhaps too much. But she really has come a long way. I see no inhibitions now. I think last night's audience reaction and pressure made the show run very well tonight because the cast had a growing confidence. The show was playing and my notes are now more concerned with overall pace and builds. We are really ready to perform now. The cast is comfortable and there are no major blocking problems. I will give the cast the day off tomorrow. I wonder if that is justified and I wonder if it will ruin the momentum? I'd rather risk it. I feel a night off will make the show refreshed. We have worked hard. There is mixed reaction to the day off: Dunkum wants to work and so do some others. But I feel a day off is what we need. I will accept the consequences.

#### NOVEMBER 1 - MONDAY

Tonight was a full run with makeup. I stressed this was like a performance. I wanted at least two full performances before opening.

Things were spotty. Poor concentration. Some scenes played well but overall things were slow. Perhaps the day off? We added new shoes for Dude in Act III. I think they will work find. Payne was very good tonight, he had some new ideas of his own that he worked out. The show will work. The audience tonight was reacting well even if the pace was off. I must stress confidence. We have a good show; we have to keep the energy high.

#### NOVEMBER 2 - TUESDAY

The final run-through. Performance situation. The show ran well. The third act was especially powerful. The first act needed more energy but that act has run well before. Jeeter is perhaps too exaggerated at this point but I feel he must hold the show together and the others must feed off his energy. Ada is most powerful. Kimberly really steals the focus and ends up with the sympathy in the end. She does an excellent job. Ellie May is too much now, she can cut down a bit. Lov and Pearl are working well. John is really holding his own and is a big source of energy and he has found the emotional intensity. He, too, is powerful.

I talked with the cast after the run. I feel they are confident; perhaps a little nervous but that is good. We have really been in performance for about a week now and the cast is confident of things technically and they sense the energy and pacing when it is lacking. The show is ready.

#### NOVEMBER 3 - WEDNESDAY

Opening Night. It seems we have been on the Tobacco Road for a year. The set is worn and the costumes smell. The cast really behave like an ensemble. I sense the show is less of a performance than an everyday ritual. It is life on stage. The show ran well. No problems. The second act was slow but the third act really came alive and the show ended with extreme power. I was proud and the cast was pleased.

MASTER PLAN SCHEDULE



MASTER PLAN SCHEDULE

| Sun  | MON                           | TUE                      | WED   | THUR                        | FRI                           | SAT                               |
|--|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|  | SEPTEMBER                     |                          |   |                             | OCTOBER                       |                                   |
|  |                               | AUDITIONS                | AUDITIONS   | CAST<br>CONCEPT<br>MEETING  | INDIVIDUAL<br>MEETINGS        | INDIVIDUAL<br>MEETINGS            |
|  |                               | 28                       | 29  | 30                          | 1                             | 2                                 |
| INDIVIDUAL<br>MEETINGS<br>3                      | TALK<br>SESSION<br>4          | TALK<br>SESSION<br>5     | READ<br>THROUGH<br>6                                    | BLOCKING<br>ACT I<br>7      | BLOCKING ACT I<br>8           | BLOCKING<br>REVIEW ACT I<br>9     |
| OFF<br>10  | BLOCKING ACT<br>II<br>11      | BLOCKING ACT<br>II<br>12 | BLOCKING & REVIEW<br>ACT II - START<br>BLOCKING ACT III | BLOCKING<br>ACT III<br>14   | RUN & REVIEW<br>ACT I<br>15   | RUN ACT I<br>LINES DUE<br>1       |
| RUN ACT I &<br>WORK ACT II<br>17                 | RUN ACT II<br>LINES DUE<br>18 | RUN ACT I&II<br>19       | RUN ACT III<br>LINES DUE<br>20                          | WORK ACT III<br>21          | RUN SHOW<br>22                | INDIVIDUAL<br>WORK<br>2           |
| RUN SHOW &<br>WORK PROBLEMS<br>24                | WORK PROBLEMS<br>25           | RUN THROUGH<br>26        | RUN THROUGH<br>27                                       | RUN THROUGH<br>& WORK<br>28 | DRY TECH<br>RUN THROUGH<br>29 | TECH & DRESS<br>RUN THROUGH<br>30 |
| <del>WORK PROBLEMS<br/>&amp; RUN</del><br>OFF 31 | RUN SHOW<br>1                 | RUN SHOW<br>2            | OPEN<br>3   |                             |                               |                                   |

ACTOR'S JOURNAL - ELLIE MAY

by Gerry McCrea

## Biography of Ellie May.

I am Ellie May Lester. I was born May 3, 1914. My mother named me Ellie May partly because I was born in May and partly because she couldn't think of anything better at the time. I guess a new kid in the family was an inconvenience since they were so poor and crowded anyway. I've never seen my oldest brother and sisters.

If anyone wonders who I am, just ask anybody around and they'll tell you that I'm the ugly girl of the Lesters who couldn't get herself married because of her split lip. Sister Bessie says that I got it because my daddy is a powerful sinful man and the Lord done to save my pure body from him. He told me to pray about it, but I pray every day and every night, but it just doesn't go away. Grandma taught me to pray when I was little. We used to say our night prayers together before we fell asleep because we slept in the same bed.

Grandma was always good to me when the kids at <sup>8-</sup> grade school made fun of me. I would be trying so hard to understand the words in reading and when I looked up from my book, the other kids would be laughing and pointing at me saying "hair lip," "hair lip." I didn't know what hair lip meant but I knew they were talking about my split lip. I usually just closed my book and ran out. One day I decided I wasn't going back to school, and I ain't been there since. I wish I'd of taken that book with me though, because when I was reading,

that  
book  
was  
with  
me

I forget about my face. I didn't like to read out loud because my voice sounds funny.

Ma didn't care about me quittin' school because she just had me do Grandma's chores since Grandma was getting too old. I have to make the beds, sweep, gather firewood and cook. If I don't do the work, Ma yells at me.

When Pearl was here, Ma used to pay all the attention to her. Sometimes Pearl and I played together, but Ma wouldn't let me touch her and Pearl never talked to me. So I just went off in the broom sedge to think by myself. I also have a little kitten that understands me and cares.

Sometimes in the broom sedge, I think about bein' a wife to some man. I'd be good cause I can do all the chores and I'd just love him and squeeze him to pieces. I get so lonely and want to be touched that I, well it's a secret, but I think I know ~~what~~ what it feels like to be loved. I love too Pearl's husband because he's such a man and he has a good job. If I did have this ~~split~~ split lip, he might let me live with him since Pearl won't sleep with him. I'd sleep with him in the same bed and it ~~would~~ would feel so good. I'd feel purty for a little while cause in the dark he can't see my face.

Maybe someday I'll meet a blind man, or a man with a split lip who wants to marry me. Nobody's perfect, except maybe Pearl, and she don't talk much. Some people is fat, or short or they walk funny or have bad teeth or they're bald

so I don't know why a split lip is such a big deal. If I had Pearl's hair, no one would notice my face and everyone would love to watch Ma brush it. Sometimes I just hate Pearl because she has everything and I don't have anything.

I don't love Pa because it's his fault that I'm ugly. He said he'd get it fixed but he never does and I know he never will. He just wants me to get married so the niggers don't get me. Dude wouldn't even help if the niggers did get me. He'd just watch or walk away.

If I ever have babies of my own, I hope they aren't like Dude. I helped take care of Dude and Pearl when they were little, and now look at how they treat me. I might not ever have babies since no man will look at me, but that's not as bad as having babies who would make fun of their Ma because she has a split lip. I just wish someone would take me to the city and sleep with me in a big warm bed.

If I die, I don't care about going to heaven or not. In heaven there's just as many people who would laugh at me for having a ~~to~~ split lip. But Grandma says if I'm good I'll get my reward. I hope it is a new face. Then I could get a man to love me.

Part II - Notes on my feelings about  
Tobacco Road and the character of  
 Ellie May.

Ken, I hope you have the time to read this. Much of it may be discarded as personal muddling that has little to do with the show in its success or effect on the audience, but I feel that it is valid in our approach to Ellie May.

I have never played a role like this before. I had never imagined myself seriously capable of it and under other circumstances I would have probably refused to play it. I am convinced that the director and his ability to encourage a character from an actor or actress is the major determining factor in such a person's ability to create the role. I suppose what I mean is that I trusted your judgement in the development of my character, and was able to avoid hassles that would have inhibited my development of it. I am really grateful for the freedom you gave us in our interpretations of the character and the action as seen in "stage business", blocking, intentions etc.

If Ellie May was satisfactory or to a better degree successful, I hope it was because the audience was able to love her as much as we did, overlooking her primitive crudeness at sometimes. You gave me one note that "I am not better than Ellie" which really made me think. In a way it disturbed me. Perhaps it disturbed the audience in the same way. They should have felt a responsibility to sympathize with her, since she was the only letter to accept himself

as she was. She didn't want a stylish dress or a successful crop, an automobile or a chance to escape from the land; she just wanted to be accepted and loved as she was. She tried to obtain this by "horsing" with Lou. She also tried to obtain it by doing the housekeeping and caring for her bitter.

How did Ellie May effect me throughout the rehearsal and performance? In several ways. First of all, there were times when I didn't want to be Ellie; she demanded too much of me. She demanded my attention, she demanded constant energy on stage. As an audience member, I didn't always want to look at her; I wanted to focus elsewhere, I didn't want to be constantly reminded that this person was trying to get my sympathy. I didn't want to be responsible for her ugliness. But most of all, I didn't want to take her home with me; I didn't want to be alone with Ellie May Lester because when I looked in the mirror I saw her in the eyes and clothes and bruised, scratched skin of Gerry McCrea. I had to love her because once I got to know her, I couldn't reject Ellie and still love Gerry. I think the reason behind this is because Ellie May possessed the "very basic human element that I possess (or anyone else who wants "lov", attent and acceptance). In a way, she possessed me.

Now I'd be quite pretentious to assume that my characterization even began to express this. It is too complex for me to understand, let alone artisticly project it and I hope that I didn't disappoint you

a lot by falling short in this aspect. I can only hope that by "playing it in the eyes" that the audience recognized a glimpse of it.

It might be interesting to note how my hair affected Ellie also. You told us that we should use these journals to write about anything personal, so I'm going to take that liberty. Pearl depended upon her golden hair for attention, protection and security in much the same way that I depended on mine in everyday life. My hair helped me to get some roles that other actresses might have done just as well if they had long, dark hair, I think. I guess, subconsciously, that I've grown to feel that my hair was my only physical attribute. It represented an image of myself, to a certain extent, that I feel I have outgrown now. When I realized that I would have to abuse it for Ellie May Cabane in the sense that it was one part of me that I had to let go of in terms of security on stage, I wanted to cut it off immediately. I am glad I didn't cut before the show, because each night it forced me into the reality of the character when I greased and ratted it. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to wash Ellie May out of my hair after the show. It wasn't that easy. But now I don't think I need the security of my hair to be Gerry McCrea, and I am going to wear it short for a while. When it grows back, it will represent another few years of growing in my life, and hopefully I will not feel the need to cut it off.

How did the environment of the show affect me? It affected me in two ways, the family off stage and the family on stage. I think that this show



was cast exceptionally well physically and temperamentally. In the make-up room before the show, we felt like an actual family in our conversation and friendships. Kindly used to remind us that you felt left out once the show opened and I can see how that would be. We had all developed a sense of resignation to our roles and relationships and to the soil (the conditions of performance on that set) and we all felt a family bond <sup>with</sup> it. There were personality clashes once in awhile, but nothing that seriously affected our blood relationships. (I say blood literally because of the cuts and bruises!)

Often as I put on my make-up, I would go through feelings of depression. I think they were caused by the fact that I was going to have to be ugly again, and I was going to be rejected. When Duke would say "Gee Ellie May, get away from me, you're ugly!" I should laugh and say "thank you" but sometimes I think he must have really meant it. The same when you would say "smile and show me those ugly teeth" and you laughed. I know you didn't really mean it, but it still depressed me, especially that I could laugh about it too and be so sensitive at other times.

By the middle of the run of Tobacco Road I dreaded the set and really knew what it felt like to not be able to escape the poverty that the Lesters lived in. I kept saying - "only 4 more nights, only 3 more to go."

All of this internal feeling is wonderful, but I don't think it amounts to much if it can't be projected on stage. Polly tells me that I'm unnatural

on stage, and from the film I can sort of see what he means. Sometimes my movement is too crisp, I anticipate; I can't get that hair's difference between looking like I'm acting and looking natural. Also, I feel that I'm not consistent in my energy and endurance. I really doubt there is any future for me as an actress unless I can overcome these problems successfully. It disappoints me, because I so much love the world of make-believe and illusion, and I fall in love with characters less defensively than I do with real people since they don't have the ability to hurt people.

I'm writing this during the time that I should be studying for my Make-up class final. It just goes to show that even after the run of Tobacco Road, Ellie May is making demands on me and my time. She wants the attention; she wants to say one thing more. Many people told Gerry McCreath that she did a good job with the role and Gerry's ego suffers the compliments with pleasure. But Ellie May said that some of these people couldn't look her in the eyes, even after the show without betraying their love for words. Some people were thinking, "can't believe Gerry pulled off that role, not the Gerry that I know." Others thought - "she doesn't look the same off stage" and still others ~~said~~ remarked "you have to feel more sympathy than disgust for her" or "she certainly was promiscuous." I expect that I offended some people. If I did, I take the blame for it in my unskillfulness.

an actress. The character of Ellie May should not have offended anyone who can go home and shower affection on a dog in heat even though it may embarrass them in front of company and deserve a scolding. As an actress I am equally offended by the human condition that allows the same dog a more nutritious diet and a warmer bed than <sup>two</sup> thirds of the world's human beings are ~~also~~ <sup>that which</sup> deprived of every day.

Tobacco Road 1930

1976

## PHOTOGRAPHS



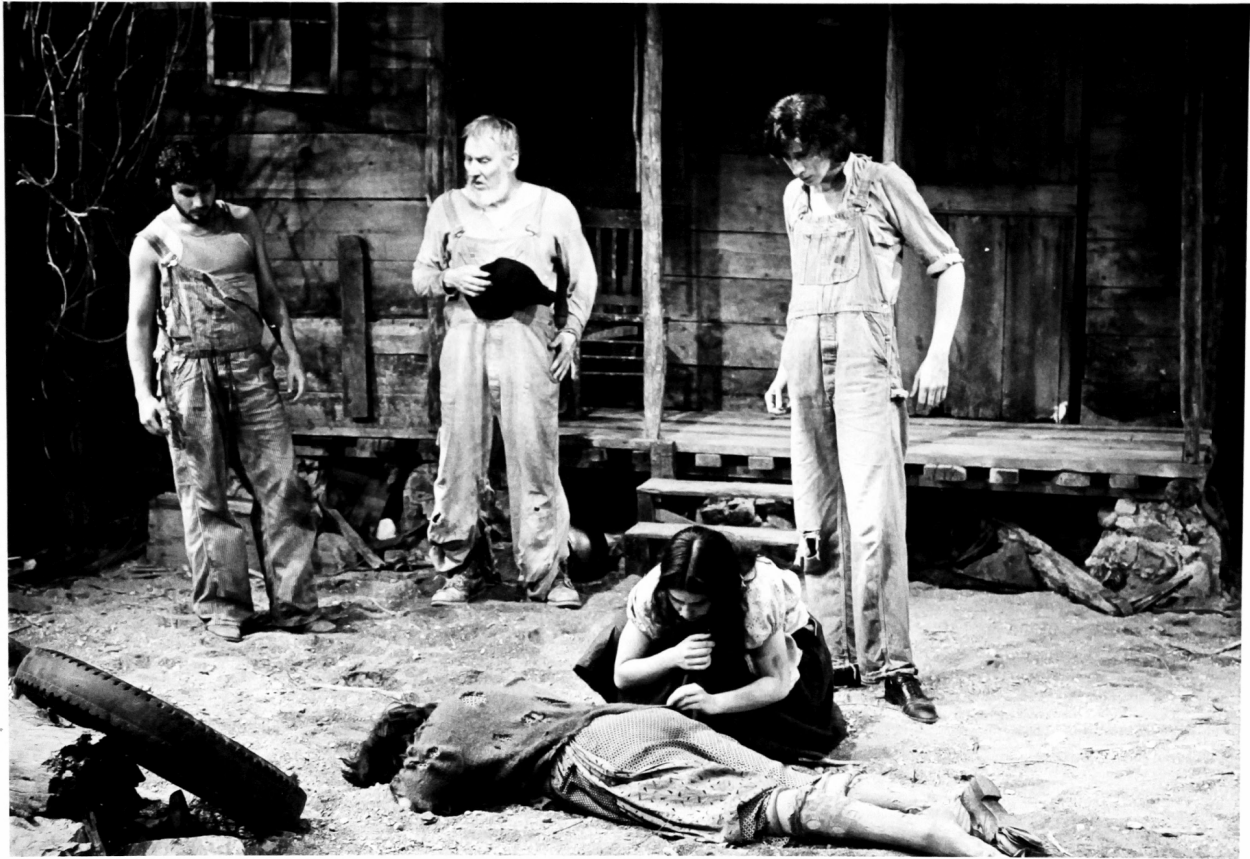
Act I The preaching scene.

" Dear God, here I is again to offer a little prayer  
for sinful people." SISTER BESSIE RICE



Act II Pearl's return.

" There, now-there, now don't cry. You got your  
old Ma again." ADA LESTER



Act III The death scene.

" Lov, you and Dude go out in the fields and find the best place to bury her. Make a deep hole- Ada would Like that....." JEETER LESTER

PROGRAM



UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA/DANCE



# TOBACCO ROAD

by

**JACK KIRKLAND**

**MASQUER THEATRE**

**NOV. 3-13**

**8.00 P.M**

University of Montana, School of Fine Arts  
Department of Drama/Dance

# THE MONTANA MASQUERS

*in their seventy-third season*

present

JACK KIRKLAND'S

# TOBACCO ROAD

based on the novel by Erskine Caldwell

November 3-7, 9-13, 1976

Masquer Theatre, 8:00 p.m.

**DIRECTED BY KENNETH OTT\***  
**SCENE DESIGN BY GORDON STABLER**  
**COSTUME DESIGN BY CANDICE NEWCOMB**  
**LIGHTING DESIGN BY SALLY MILLS**  
**SOUND DESIGN BY WILLIAM C. STROCK**  
**TECHNICAL DIRECTION BY GORDON STABLER**

## CAST

(in order of appearance)

|                         |                    |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Jeeter Lester.....      | Aubrey K. Dunkum   |
| Dude Lester.....        | Brian Massman      |
| Grandma Lester.....     | Mary J. Tietz      |
| Ada Lester.....         | Kimberly Waters    |
| Ellie May Lester.....   | Gerry McCrea       |
| Lov Bensey.....         | John A. Mazariegos |
| Sister Bessie Rice..... | Diana Powell       |
| Sadie Peabody.....      | Jodi Behrens       |
| Pearl.....              | Dona Liggett       |
| Captain Tim.....        | Lee Alan Erpenbach |
| George Payne.....       | William C. Strock  |

Time and Place: rural Georgia during the Great Depression

\*In partial fulfillment of requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree.

Please refrain from smoking in the theatre.

The taking of photographs or the operation of any recording device is not permitted.

††††††††††

Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.

**notes**

“People that’s born on the land should stay on the land.  
The Lord intended such.  
God won’t stand for such cheating much longer.  
He ain’t so liking of the rich folk as they think He is.  
God, He likes the poor.”

-Jeeter Lester

“My land—the soil!  
Good soil—used.  
Dirt.  
Dead dirt.  
Survival?”

-Brian Massman, Kenneth Ott

TOBACCO ROAD opened at the Masque Theatre in New York on December 4, 1933. It ran for nearly eight years. It is the third longest running show in the history of Broadway.

-Kenneth Ott

With the passing of our agrarian society will come the degradation and decay of the human condition; and all mankind must bear the burden of this entire human condition.

-Kimberly Waters

There will be two 10-minute intermissions, after Acts I and II.

†††

**Special Thanks To**

Scott D. Erler, D.D.S., for make-up prosthesis.  
Mr. & Mrs. Delos Robbins, for barn wood.  
Medicine Bow Motors, for antique auto parts.  
University of Montana Information Services  
The Missoulian, The Entertainer and the Montana Kaimin  
The Associated Students of the University of Montana (ASUM).

**.watch for these coming events**

William Shakespeare’s MACBETH, Nov. 30-Dec. 5, University Theatre  
Montana Dance Company, WORKS IN PROGRESS, Dec. 7, Women’s  
Center Gymnasium (FREE)  
Dept. of Drama/Dance, DRAMA WORKSHOPS, Dec. 8-11, Masquer  
Theatre and Venture Center (FREE)

Tickets go on sale one week before opening at the Box Office (Fine Arts Bldg.), Student Bookstore (University Center), Missoula Mercantile Record Dept., The Magic Mushroom, and Eli’s Records & Tapes.

## PRODUCTION STAFF

Stage Manager.....Jodi Behrens  
Scenery Construction..... Class members of Drama 131  
Scenic Artist ..... Julia Hollowell  
Sound Crew.....Sarah Fitzgerald  
Lighting Crew..... Howard Gammett, Jack Gauer,  
June Siple, John Stroeder  
Properties Design.....Joyce Anna Hanson  
Costume Construction .....Bobbie Adamo, Marcia D'Orazio,  
Joyce Anna Hanson, Sharon Rodrique,  
Coleen Sanders and Class Members  
of Drama 131  
Make-up Design .....Lee Alan Erpenbach  
Publicity..... Dick Nagle  
Graphic Artist.....Samoya Migid  
Photographer.....Gordon Lemon  
Box Office.....Leslie Ann Pryne (Head),  
Karyn Ottolino  
House Managers.....Jean Crupper, Rich Wulff

††††

Dean, School of Fine Arts.....Robert Kiley  
Chairman, Department of Drama/Dance..... James D. Kriley  
Head, Dance Division..... Juliette Crump  
President, Montana Masquers..... James E. Lortz  
Faculty..... Nancy Jean Brooks, Deborah D. Capen, David  
Cohen, David Dannenbaum, Rolland R. Meinholtz  
Adel Migid, R. Naidia Mosher  
Staff..... John J. Bizzell (Technical Director), Susan J.  
Gilmore (Costume Shop Manager)  
Secretary ..... Helen Leimbach

## REVIEWS

# UM's 'Tobacco Road': A Story of Desperation

By SUZANNE LAGONI  
Missoulian Arts Reviewer

Escape from the inescapable is the story being dramatized by the University of Montana Masquers in Jack Kirkland's "Tobacco Road" that opened Wednesday evening.

It's a desperate story that still maintains light moments for the audience. The players are depicting the lives of the Lester family, Georgia dirt farmers during the depression who haven't planted a crop for seven years.

The Lesters have fallen into a desolate existence after generations of living on their homestead partly because of

## A Review

economic problems of the time and partly because of their own inability to handle the simplest conflicts with one another.

Aubrey K. Dunkum portrays Jecster Lester, father of the group, with a combination of optimism and lethargy that tells the audience know there is little hope of escape for him. Jecster is continually saying, "God is going to provide out of His bounty," but he can never make the first move that would release his family from its downward spiral.

Dunkum is sensitive in his portrayal of Jecster. He lets the audience feel the same frustration Jecster is experiencing through his dialogue and subtle stage movement.

The Lesters are starving to death, both physically and spiritually. Kimberly Waters as mother Ada most strongly conveys this deprivation. The only light of hope that Ada has is that Pearl, one of her 17 children, will be able to escape from the country poverty of Tobacco Road to a good life in Montana.

Waters' vacant expressions for Ada, except when she is combing Pearl's hair, tell us that Ma has no future or pride remaining in her soul. She still prays when the minister, Sister Bessie Rice, comes around. But her prayers only reinforce our awareness of her desperation. They give no clue as to what Ada even wants out of her trap.

The theme of "Tobacco Road" is bold and stark. The barren life of the Lesters creates a tension and hostility among them. Love has little room in their environment. The Masquers pass along this animosity that is seething below the surface and erupts violently in confrontations between the characters.

The crude, unrefined Lesters are like animals in a constant search for sustenance. Jecster, Ada and their two children, Dude and Ellie May, have the craving look of half-starved dogs when Lov Bensey comes to their home with a bag of turnips. He wants to trade Jecster the vegetables for Pearl, who became his wife when she was 12 but has now run away from him. Ma won't allow the barter and Jecster cries, in contradiction to his earlier optimism, that "God is it in good and heavy for us poor folks."

Brian Massman's Dude, although not a complicated

character, reveals much of the destitution in Ma and Pa. Dude feels a certain degree of antagonism toward his parents which is exhibited when he taunts them about their deaths.

All Ma wants in her life is a promise from Dude that she will be buried in a "stylish dress." And Pa doesn't want to be thrown into the corn crib for the rats to "eat his face half off" the way his father had been. But Dude refuses to make these simple commitments to his parents.

Two other characters, despite their limited verbalization, added dimension to the play. Gerry McCrea, as the hate-lipped Ellie May, made the most convincing statement of cultural deprivation. McCrea's Ellie desires satisfaction of only her most basic needs. An expert job of cosmetic prosthesis and Ellie's preoccupation with her own body along with an overwhelming interest in Lov's body gave authenticity to McCrea's role.

And then there was Mary J. Tietz as Grandma Lester. This part required no dialogue and yet Tietz was able to recapitulate all the emptiness of the old lady's life with just her haggard and bent movements around the set. Grandma's costume had her mummified even before she crawled into the fields to die, an event that drew little attention from the family.

Gordon Stabler's set was the most effective and ambi-

tious one I've seen in the Masquer Theater. The loads of dirt that were imported to create the Lester's front yard brought Georgia right to the audience — too much so for some viewers with dust allergies. But its use is valid because the family is literally groveling in the ground as its members are reduced to a subhuman existence.

Needless to say, "Tobacco Road" is not a happy story. But it has a message that's as telling today as it was in the 1930s when Kirkland wrote it. Kenneth Ott's production is worth seeing. The play runs through Nov. 13 in the Masquer Theater. Tickets can be reserved by calling 243-4581.

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# — review — Tobacco Road: violent

By ROGER HOPKINS  
Montana Kalmin Reviewer

The surprise of the play *Tobacco Road* and its performance by the Masquer players is how such a ghastly crew of despicable, vulgar, disgusting, irascible and insensitive characters could arouse any compassion from an audience witnessing tirades of indecency and licentiousness. But, "by God and by Jesus," this is exactly what the play and players accomplished and with graceless and unholy finesse.

Though the 90 or so members of the opening night audience were well dressed and groomed, in sharp contrast to the stage players, and speaking good and proper Montana English, the basic problem of survival for the Lesters was understood by everyone. Jeeter Lester and his family, living in their rural rat trap (ratless only because there is nothing to eat) are the immediate and most unfortunate victims of a mindless society that forced people like Jeeter into the stubborn

squalor in which they lived. At some point during the play the pointing finger of the Marxist is felt, along with the collective guilt of its presence.

The performances by the players were sharp and painfully accurate, most notably the ugliness (both in aspect and character) of Ada Lester (Kimberly Waters), and of the downright unholiness of Sister Bessie Rice (Diana Powell). The only problem with Ada was that some of her lines were lost in the dust and excitement of the more violent scenes.

Aubrey Dunkum offered an energetic portrayal of Jeeter Lester, but seemed at times to have problems maintaining character. It didn't feel like Jeeter would be as old and lazy as Dunkum would have us believe, or possess such an exaggerated limp, especially as he was always successful in his most favorite "powerful sin," stealing. Well — perhaps his second-most favorite.

Dude (Brian Massman) seemed too sharp. His lines were delivered as an act of conscious thought rather than of pure, spiteful ignorance

which he projected later in the play.

Gerry McCrea was not unappealing as Ellie May. Indeed, she was almost too attractive and sensuous to be undesirable. She triumphs as the least disgusting character by the end of the play.

Dona Leggett (though hardly convincing as a 12-year-old Pearl) and Mary Tientz as grandma evoked the most moving scene of the evening. The tragedy and insensitivity of all the characters was brought to a climax in the final rejection that grandma received.

Lee Erpenbach was precise and accurate, but maybe a bit too formal and refined to be the son of the Georgia landowner and former resident of the area. But William Strock, as the banker George Payne, was as precisely cold and impersonal as a bank vault.

Special mention should be given of the set design. Much effort and creativity obviously went into its construction, giving the realistic appearance that the homestead hadn't seen a crop planted in seven years.

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